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## **Regression psychotherapies**

*(This article is the second in a series of three articles on New Age psychotherapies. The first is **The devastating New Age turn within psychotherapy** – the third is **Cathartic psychotherapies**).*

The cause of suffering is in philosophical counseling (true spiritual counseling) due to a separation of the observer and the observed (see my article **Philosophical Counseling as an alternative to psychotherapy**). The investigation is directed towards the observer (the form of consciousness: the one who evaluates, who says yes and no, who accepts and denies, who compares with earlier and hopes/fears something else), and *not* the observed (the contents of consciousness: feelings, thoughts, experiences, sense impressions, memories, wishes, hopes, fears, lusts) as in psychotherapy. The main question is therefore in its essence philosophical: *Who am I?*

Regression psychotherapies are based on the notion that if you discover the cause of your troubles you will be cured. These psychotherapies are (like other New Age psychotherapies) partially attached to science (they often use a lot of pseudoscientific technical jargon without any meaning at all – most extremely this is seen in Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP)), partially to spirituality (the therapists often call themselves spiritual counselors). In this confusion they are oblivious to the observer, and are lost in the observed. Therefore they are ignorant about the one who creates the causes. The causes become built into the psychotherapy itself, and are therefore ideological worldviews, or just pure prejudice. It is causes such as inadequate parents, sexual abuse, satanic rituals, cannibalistic orgies, past lives, alien abduction, possession by entities, etc. Take your pick. Often they use a one-size-fits-all explanation of every emotional disorder.

These therapists are, in the best Sophist way, planting such causes in their patients' minds. They give their patients books to read or videos to watch. They plant them during hypnosis, group sessions, etc., and then these planted causes are “recovered” and offered as validation of their therapeutic techniques and theories. Patient after patient is paraded forth by the therapists as evidence of their good work, yet none of the patients seem better for the therapy and many seem hopelessly ill. The reason is, that it is not that to feel better, which is the cure, but that to have “discovered” the cause (see my article **Hypnosis, hypnotherapy and the art of self-deception** and the

thought distortions *Communal reinforcement, Confabulation and Priming effect* in my book **A dictionary of thought distortions**).

Rather than helping clients to become stronger and more independent, most regression psychotherapies, and in particular the rebirthing-reparenting sort, induce in the client an abdication of responsibility and a state of sickly dependence on the therapists.

Contrary to what they claim, then regression psychotherapies create a philosophical hindrance for the opening into the spiritual source, namely an existence-philosophical, where you in your opinion formation and identity formation strive towards being something else than what you are, where you imitate others, are a slave of others ideas and ideals, and where your actions are characterized by irresoluteness and doubt (also seen in **Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) and Large Group Awareness Training (LGAT)**). About philosophical hindrances for the opening in towards the source: see my article **The four philosophical hindrances and openings**.

Past life regression is considered “pure quackery” by the American Psychiatric Association.

My articles **A critique of Stanislav Grof and Holotropic Breathwork** and **James Arthur Ray and the sweat lodge tragedy** are showing the dangers involved when using Regression psychotherapies in a spiritual context.

In the following I will, with Margeret Thaler Singer’s and Janja Lalich’s book *Crazy Therapies*, as a frame of reference, go into a closer examination of different kinds of Regression psychotherapy.

The article consists of four parts:

- 1) Regression, Reparenting, and Rebirthing
- 2) Past-Life/Future-Life Therapy
- 3) Entities Therapists and the Channeling Connection
- 4) You Were Abducted by ETs – That’s What the Matter Is

### 1) **Regression, Reparenting, and Rebirthing**

Various forms of regression therapy combined with the use of mind-altering techniques are rampant in the United States and abroad. As of 1992, one “corrective parenting association” formed in the mid-1980s reportedly had 350 member therapists. This figure represents but a handful of the therapists and counselors who believe in these unfounded theories and use potentially harmful methods.

Proponents of regression therapies often refer to their work by a variety of names, sometimes making them hard to detect at first glance, especially for the uninformed potential client. In general, these therapists combine suggestion, guided imagery, and hypnosis to reinforce their encouragement of marked regression – a method that can be psychologically disastrous to many persons.

Because objective research on regression techniques is limited, the assumptions about regression remain merely myths based on anecdotal reports from enthusiastic proponents. In fact, Sondra Ray states several times in one of her books that there is no research and there are no accurate records or statistics; she even claims that it isn't her job: “Rebirthers consider themselves to be spiritual guides, not scientists.” So much for reality checking or scientific verification.

As mentioned in the beginning: rather than helping clients to become stronger and more independent, most regression therapies, and in particular the rebirthing-reparenting sort, induce in the client an abdication of responsibility and a state of sickly dependence on the therapist. This is a blatant abuse and misuse of the power relationship inherent in the therapeutic process; it is in effect the exploitation of the client's emotional vulnerability. The “Mommy” or “Daddy” therapist who is supposed to parent the client correctly is in fact playing with fire, potentially entrapping and crippling their “children,” and causing undue suffering and in some cases long-lasting damage.

### **Where Do These Ideas Come From?**

Most schools of psychotherapy believe that childhood and the early years of life have formative influences on the adult personality. But some therapies – regression, direct analysis, reparenting, corrective parenting, and rebirthing – are based on the untested assumption that a therapist can regress patients to infancy in order to reparent them, even rebirth them, and then bring them up correctly. Believers claim that these therapies are able to alter, repair, and even reverse the alleged negative impact of someone's early life experiences, simply by making babies out of clients and having them relive the experiences – only this time, supposedly, the therapist is going to carry out the parenting in the right way.

The underlying assumption is that an adult first needs to be regressed in order to act like and be treated as a small infant; then, through “corrective parenting” by the therapist, the patient will emerge as a more ideal person. Some therapists who engage in rebirthing and reparenting techniques feed adult patients from baby bottles; have patients suck on therapists’ breasts, thumbs, and penises; instruct patients to wear diapers and to engage in such behaviors as being cuddled as an infant, being made to stand in the corner, and even being physically restrained and beaten, sometimes brutally, by the reparenting therapist. This type of therapy may go on for varying lengths of time. Singer and Lalich have heard of some that lasted as long as seven to ten years.

This unfortunate and dangerous theory is grounded in a widespread tendency in our society toward “parent bashing,” in which parents are blamed for not producing totally happy, satisfied, creative, wonderful offspring. For several decades, some professionals have ignored the fact that there are other significant influences on human personality – namely, genes, illnesses, physical conditions, and social and political conditions such as wars, poverty, crime, and natural disasters. Parents have been blamed for every misery their offspring have suffered: being fat, thin, sickly, depressed or schizophrenic, or just plain dissatisfied with their lot in life.

So, my point is - when we are talking about spiritual practice and spiritual counselors (which these New Age psychotherapists, as we have seen, call their practices and themselves) - that in order to understand what a human being is, what suffering and happiness are, it is, in the end, necessary to take a *philosophical* starting point, and *not* a psychological. I have tried to explain this in all my books. In **A Portrait of a Lifeartist**, I, for example, explain it by investigating the human being as respectively a historical being, a rational being, a desirous being, a natural being, and a communicative being. The whole thing as a kind of diamond, where traditional philosophical problems are put into a concrete spiritual practice.

The tendency of “parent bashing” can be traced back to Freud. Who readily blamed parents for his patients’ supposed problems. The belief reached its zenith in the 1940s and 1950s within the ranks of traditional psychoanalysts. A primary wave of attack was on mothers. Some were labeled “schizophrenic” and accused of causing schizophrenia in their children, while other mothers were called “homosexual-inducing.” By the late 1940s some therapists were proclaiming that their patients’ parents were unloving, mean, intrusive, and controlling, and had in effect harmed, if not ruined, their offspring. From there, some therapists deduced the solution that the all-loving therapist would restore the patients by bringing them up properly.

## **Pioneers in Regression and Reparenting**

Two therapists in particular, Marguerite Sechehaye and John Rosen, received considerable attention as forerunners in the use of regression and reparenting therapy in their work with schizophrenic patients. Colleagues in the field readily praised Sechehaye and Rosen for their innovative methods.

Sechehaye and Rosen began by claiming that their massive regression techniques, coupled with authoritarian control, would cure schizophrenia. Fortunately for them, the post-World War II period was an era when people were willing to justify extreme forms of therapy in an effort to “cure” schizophrenia. Because it was also a time when parents, especially mothers, were being vilified in the world of therapy, the severing of family ties and the regression techniques were tolerated, even lauded, by other thereapists. They accepted the “logic” of thinking that perhaps rough treatment and separation from families would cure a major mental illness. But soon not only schizophrenics (who also never have a constituency looking out for their welfare) were subjected to this treatment; almost anyone who went into certain therapists’ offices was open game for being regressed and reparented to cure *any* ill.

Sechehaye was an academic psychologist and psychoanalyst in Geneva, Switzerland. She developed a method called “symbolic realization,” with which she treated a twenty-one-year-old schizophrenic woman for more than ten years. Sechehaye had the woman live with her; she fed her and in general parented her in a warm way. For about seven of those years, the patient was acutely psychotic and cared for as a baby would be. Sechehaye had concluded that the woman’s problems grew from a lack of maternal love.

Renee, the patient, referred to Sechehaye as “Mama.” Holding an apple against her breast, Mama would then feed the girl by cutting a piece of the apple and having the girl lie against Mama’s breast to eat. The raw apple was to be “breast milk” for Renee. Sechehaye’s treatment was far more symbolic than the reparenting therapies developed by others, which became more and more overt, and sometimes even sinister, in their “mothering” practices.

John Rosen, a physician who had been analyzed but never trained as a psychoanalyst, originally professed in 1947 that his new method, which he called “direct analysis,” led to schizophrenic patients “recovering” and having their “psychosis resolved.” Claiming that his patients had not been loved during childhood, Rosen reported spending sometimes as much as ten hours a day with one patient. What was eventually revealed about what went on in those sessions is almost too horrific to imagine. Some of the techniques were tantamount to extreme violence and torture.

An article by Rosen in a 1947 *Psychiatric Quarterly* reported on thirty-seven of his cases. Rosen claimed that all thirty-seven individuals recovered. Six years later in his book *Direct Analysis*, Rosen reported that thirty-seven of the original sample were no longer psychotic and were doing well. Yet, in a follow-up study in 1958, nineteen of the former patients from Rosen's report were located by researchers at the New York Psychiatric Institute. They found that seven of the nineteen were not schizophrenic at that time, nor had they ever been; instead, six were evaluated as neurotic and one as manic-depressive. These independent researchers concluded that "the claim that direct analytic therapy results in a high degree of recovery remains unproven."

Finally, in March of 1983, thanks to the courage of a number of Rosen's former patients who came forward to speak out and expose the abuses they suffered, Rosen surrendered his medical license. He had been charged with "sixty-seven violations of the Pennsylvania Medical Practices Act and thirty-five violations of the rules and regulations of the Medical Board, [which included] the commission of acts involving moral turpitude, dishonesty, or corruption, as well as misconduct in the practice of medicine, practicing medicine fraudulently, beyond its authorized scope, with incompetence, or with negligence."

In fact, unbeknownst to many, as far back as 1960 Rosen had lost a case in New York in which he had been accused of beating a female patient. From investigation, depositions, and testimonies given regarding the various charges against Rosen, information came forth about the kind of care patients were given at Rosen's facilities. Striking, stripping, and beating patients were a regular occurrence. Patients were kept locked in security rooms without toilets, and at least two patients died. Both male and female patients were sexually abused by Rosen and forced to engage in the most atrocious acts with him and sometimes with other patients.

Rosen may have lost his license, and you might think that his case is an exception due to his personality, but this is not so. His therapy is called *Direct Analysis*, and the confrontational techniques that he professed live on today. The reason why patients not are exposing all this is either because of fear or embarrassment, but it can also be due to the thought distortion called *Subjective Validation*. Subjective validation is active when people will validate a set of statements allegedly about themselves as highly accurate even if these statements *not* are accurate (read more about subjective validation in my book **A Dictionary of Thought Distortions**).

### **Baby Bottles, Berating, and Beatings**

As mentioned, many of Rosen's methods have filtered into the profession and are alive and well today in various therapies that regress and infantilize clients to the point of having them drink from baby bottles and be humiliated and punished in other ways. When asked by author and researcher Jeffrey Masson in an interview in 1986 if he still used the methods he learned from Rosen, a doctor replied that he used "physical methods that included shaking patients, sitting on them, and wrestling with them."

Because there is more awareness and concern today about abuse and patients' rights, the doctor qualified his comments by saying that "he would use something like the cattle prod only experimentally."

Some regression therapists like to call what they do "little work." You know, making patients little again.

### *Jacqui Schiff and Cathexis*

In 1967 the social worker Jacqui Schiff turned her home into a care facility for severely disturbed young adults. A few years later she wrote a bestselling book – *All My Children*.

Schiff's establishment grew as she took in more young adults to be reparented in this way, incorporating regression techniques into the setting. She referred to these young adults as "our babies." She wrote, "Now we put all our babies in diapers and feed them from bottles and let them sleep as much as they like."

Virginia authorities closed the place in 1971 because the home was unlicensed and "endangered the health, safety, welfare, and lives of the patients."

The Schiff facility moved to Alamo, California, where in 1972 an eighteen-year-old schizophrenic resident died after being placed in a bathtub of scalding water. He had been stripped naked, bound hand and foot, lowered into a very hot bath, and fatally burned.

Schiff's adopted son Aaron, who had become a therapist at the facility, pleaded guilty to a reduced charge of manslaughter, which was reduced even further to misdemeanor child abuse.

Another resident testified that she had been kept tied to a chair for six days and five nights. She eventually managed to escape. When authorities refused to renew the

licence on the Alamo facility, Schiff moved to Oakland and set up the Cathexis institute.

Jacqui Schiff was a member of the International Transactional Analysis Association (ITAA); to the dismay of some, within a few years her reparenting ideas had become accepted by the ITAA. In fact, in 1974, only two years after the scalding death just described, Jacqui and her son Aaron were given the Eric Berne Scientific Memorial Award. Before long, Schiff's reparenting theories became extremely popular among those who practice Transactional Analysis (TA), and study of the techniques was incorporated into TA training.

### *Matrix in Missouri*

Matrix (also known as the Mid-America Training and Reparenting Institute, Inc.), a Kansas City psychotherapy Institute, took up the reparenting-regression techniques popularized by Schiff. During lawsuits against the clinic, it was revealed that the clinic had a supply closet with stacks of adult diapers, a kitchen with baskets of bottle nipples, and a pantry full of baby food and Zwieback toast. Wherever one turned there were bottle warmers, buckets of baby wipes, baby silverware, even a changing table! Much of the therapy was done by unlicensed psychotherapists. Not only schizophrenic patients were treated here.

Handcuffs, ropes, and other physical restraints are also not uncommon sights in reparenting centers in US and around the world.

Between 1988 and 1994 at least four legal cases were settled by the organization – all in favor of the former patients who were mistreated and abused.

### *The Case of Paul Lozano*

Harvard medical student Paul Lozano committed suicide in April 1991 after being subjected to the regression-reparenting treatment of a Harvard psychiatrist, Dr. Margaret Bean-Bayog. At the end of his second year of medical school Lozano sought treatment for depression and was seen by Bean-Bayog almost daily for the next four years.

Bean-Bayog had never before used regression therapy with any patient, but she set about regressing Lozano to the age of three: "We invented a baby version of him." At Bean-Bayog's suggestion, she and Lozano role-played during his therapy sessions: she would be the mother, he the three-year-old baby. With no proof, but latching onto

another popular trend, Bean-Bayog concluded that Lozano must have been sexually abused by his mother as a child.

According to the records, Lozano had no history of abuse or mental illness before he entered Harvard Medical School. He said at one point that his so-called memories were brought forth by him “as a means of retaining Dr. Bean-Bayog’s interest and affection.”

After his death, two books and numerous articles on the case appeared. The dead student’s family sued the psychiatrist and accused her of seducing Paul and driving him to suicide.

Bean-Bayog relinquished her medical license. Additionally, fifty-five pages “describing the most graphic sexual fantasies in Bean-Bayog’s own handwriting,” was introduced as evidence.

### **Born-again Therapy**

A variation – some might consider it an offshoot – of reparenting is the idea of rebirthing. The therapeutic schemes are organized around the birth process itself. Rebirthing therapists offer clients the idea that in ordinary human birth there is trauma, especially trauma around breathing. Some of these therapists have concocted rebirthing, which is a method of teaching patients to imagine going through the birth process in order to learn “proper breathing.” Patients are told that the traumas of ordinary birth, suffered by us all, can be cured in this manner.

#### *The Origins of Rebirthing*

Leonard Orr, generally regarded as the founder of modern-day rebirthing, developed his theories by spending considerable time in a bathtub having “revelations.” In 1974 he began to suspend friends in a redwood hot tub with snorkels and nose plugs. During these immersions, many of them began to get in touch with (as they said back then) certain of their own destructive behavioral patterns. A number of them said they experienced their own birth during the process. As Orr and his friends introduced it to others, rebirthing as a therapy began to spread.

After a time, Orr apparently came to realize that his very presence was an important part of the rebirthing event. He attributed this to the belief that he had released enough of his own birth trauma that other people felt safe to experience theirs with him in the hot tub. About a year later, Orr began working with the breathing pattern he felt happened at birth, but this time without using a hot tub. It then became

apparent to him that it was the “rebirther” (that is, the person leading the session) and the method of breathing that were important, not so much the warm water.

In later versions of rebirthing people have been rebirthed in ordinary home tubs in blue bubblebath solutions, and in outdoor redwood hot tubs under starry skies. Others have succumbed to “dry rebirths,” being tolled into a carpet on the floor and made to struggle to free themselves in order to “reexperience the birth process.” Some have been wrapped in a series of blankets and rebirthed on an office couch.

One certified hypnotherapist who advertises on the Internet describes rebirthing as a form of hypnotherapy and as a “patterned breathing process which allows you to access and resolve blocks that are held in the body.” Without qualifiers, she asserts that hypnotherapy is safe, and a trance state is a natural and familiar state, and that it can benefit you. She states that the technique of rebirthing combined with hypnotherapy will work for dealing with compulsive behavior, weight problems, anxiety, and phobias; that it will heal the child within related to abuse, abandonment, self-esteem, and improved relationships; that it will reduce stress and improve concentration; that it will improve health, pain, cancer, and chronic illnesses; that it will elevate performance in selling, communication skills, sports, dance, and art.

As far as Singer and Lalich can tell, rebirthing is magic.

### *Major Leaders in Rebirthing*

Sondra Ray and Bob Mandel are two big names in the rebirthing field. Their organization, previously called Loving Relationships Training, has recently taken on the new name Association of Rebirth Trainings *International*. Weekend sessions described as “educational and experiential” cost between \$275 and \$300. Participants are told that not only will they experience two rebirths during the weekend, but also “you will be helped to locate and release any negative decisions you may have made at your birth and which are still affecting your current life.”

In Ray’s and Mandel’s book, a chapter is devoted to every imaginable type of birth: premature or late, unwanted, fast or held back, cesarean, wrong sex, induced, breech, forceps – you get the picture. The authors enumerate what they view as typical traits of those who were birthed in a particular way.

Stereotyping people and giving them all the same simple solutions seems to be a major characteristic of many of the odd New Age psychotherapies that have emerged over the years (see the thought distortion *Representativeness bias* in my book **A dictionary of Thought Distortions**). Regression, reparenting, and rebirthing

therapies fall on a narrow path, like most other New Age inventions. The innovators found themselves doing something: sitting in a hot tub, berating patients, or feeding them out of baby bottles. It felt good or worked for the therapists, so they made some assumptions in order to create an ideology that would support practicing the method on others. Without much thought, and little or no proof, the technique was expanded to become a “cure-all” for all people (see my article **The difference between philosophical education and ideological education**).

An additional factor that tends to make a risky situation worse is that some forms of therapy – which initially might gain support as “a breakthrough,” “creative,” “innovative,” or “a paradigm shift” – are not inspected critically by the professional community. Instead, these therapies are allowed to harm a number of patients until the courts are asked to evaluate the conduct of the therapists, the rationality of the therapy, and the extent of the damage done. Sometimes public inspection or legal redress never occurs, and the therapies continue to be promoted for decades, with the on-going potential for outlandish or disastrous consequences.

Age regression, reparenting, and rebirthing are not proven helpful techniques, no matter what the therapists themselves might be writing on their websites. There is *no* scientifically established or objective clinical evidence showing them to be beneficial.

## **2) Past-Life/Future-Life Therapy**

If going back to birth isn't enough, there's another group of therapists willing to take you even further back. They practice what's known as past-life regression therapy. When asked during an interview how far back he's taken people, one past-life therapist said, “To the stone age.”

How popular is this therapy? From perusing advertisements in New Age journals and alternative publications, we can surmise that in that milieu past-life work is offered more than almost any other proclaimed method of treatment (and also supported by the entertainment industry of the Mass Media).

A national professional association devoted to past-life research and therapies has close to one thousand members. One recent report claims that today there are thousands of practitioners of past-life therapy, most of them trained at seminars around the country. The more popular ones are said to charge as much as three hundred dollars per session. Responding to a question about whether people come to him not only for help but out of curiosity, past-life therapist Glenn Williston said,

“Sure. I respect that people are curious. I don’t reject anyone. After all, it is their own money they are spending, so why not have some fun? I don’t mind having fun!”

Between 1977 and 1990, past-life therapist and psychic researcher Dick Sutphen has had “almost one hundred thousand people” attend his seminars throughout the United States, where he conducts past-life regressions en masse with the seminar participants. He claims to have established a “nationwide metaphysical network that communicates with millions of people a year via books, audio/video tapes, seminars, and *Master of Life* magazine.” He expresses pride in often being criticized as “commercial.” His book *Earthly Purpose* is the story of a mass reincarnation. By reading it you can discover “whether you are one of the 25,000 souls who pledged to reincarnate in a bright new age.”

Dr. Bruce Goldberg, a Baltimore dentist who began practicing hypnotherapy that evolved into past- and future-life work, has also attained national popularity. He has conducted past-life regressions on *Donahue*, *Oprah*, *Joan Rivers*, *Montel Williams*, and *Kathie Lee*, as well as on CNN and other television and radio stations. With more than thirty thousand client regressions into the past and progressions into the future since 1975, Goldberg claims that no patient of his has ever been harmed. Goldberg lectures, gives seminars, and is consultant to corporations, the media, and attorneys.

Brian Weiss, a psychiatrist trained at Yale Medical School and well-known in this field, is said to have a client waiting list of two thousand, with more than one hundred new referrals a week. Weiss’s first book, *Many Lives, Many Masters*, which has sold more than a million copies in various translations, describes his past-life therapy with one client. The book jacket includes endorsements from the chair of the Department of Psychiatry and Mental Health Sciences at the Medical College of Wisconsin, as well as from former instructor of psychiatry at the Harvard Medical School.

Entertainer Shirley Maclaine also deserves enormous credit for generating public interest in past-life experiences. Maclaine’s best-seller *Out on a Limb*, first published in 1983, sold millions of copies and continues to sell well. In this book, the celebrated actress goes on the journey of all New Age journeys in the hopes of determining whether or not she had known her current lover in a past life. Maclaine describes having out-of-body experiences and past-life recall; going to various trance channelers to communicate with entities and disembodied spirit guides; learning about the “cosmic connections” between UFOs, extraterrestrials, and spiritual intelligence; and experiencing astral projection.

Not only was there a five-hour television movie about the book, but Maclaine also took her show on the road, with a lecture tour and large group seminars. One

financial writer for *Money* magazine estimated at the time that Maclaine would gross four million dollars for putting on seventeen weekend seminars.

There's no denying the influence that Hollywood box-office personalities have on the general public. If Shirley Maclaine is promoting New Age and occult philosophy, from belief in the power of crystals to channeling, astral projection, and spirit guides, it must be okay. Right?

Wrong.

Besides my own experiences with a spiritual crisis, as well as having had many people in philosophical counseling who were harmed (sometimes in spiritual crises) by all kind of misleading New Age psychotherapies, Singer and Lalich describe some examples in their book.

One unhappy gentleman called into *Larry King Live* when Shirley Maclaine was a guest on the show to denounce the ideas being put out, saying that such ideas had completely "blown apart" his family.

"My wife...in a time of depression went to a psychic healer and was told that in a past life I had murdered her and run off with her teen-aged daughter. I've not seen her in two years. I think she was looking for a crutch to avoid dealing with the realities of life – thinking things would be better the next time around. I think there's a certain group of people that can be damaged irreparably by this type of thought."

In numerous cases of which Singer and Lalich are aware, clients have been harmed in a variety of ways. When the therapy ends. Often because the client runs out of money or the client's insurance coverage runs out, the client is left stranded with a sense of victimization and unreality.

The past lives conjured up during therapy are rarely happy ones, and the fiddling with memory that goes on in these sessions tends to leave some clients confused and dysfunctional. Victims of this kind of therapy often have complaints such as, "Every day I have problems with almost everything I do because I keep wondering if something is real or not," or "I just can't get anything done anymore. I feel sort of paralyzed by the godawful scenes running through my head." Such negative aftereffects tend to occur because the type of vivid imagery invariably produced in hypnotic sessions of past-life recall are not easily forgotten: mass murder, rape, strangulation, burning at the stake, vicious physical assault. Scenes that would be X-rated in the movies become unforgettable repeat performances during so-called past-life work.

Linking such horrendous past events to something in the present prolongs and reinforces the detrimental effect. If even for a moment a person really believes, for example, that she was a prostitute in a past life, a victim of gang rape by Viking warriors, or murdered by her current best friend, certainly the aftereffects of such thinking are not so easily erased.

Singer and Lalich have never heard of a happy past-life account, the excuse being that clients are dealing with today's problems, so naturally they'd be rooted in past-life unpleasantness. Yet how "reliving" such nastiness can be touted as healthful, spiritual, and refreshing goes far beyond the scope of Singer's and Lalich's imaginations.

### **The Concept of Reincarnation**

Past-life therapy is based on the concept that we have lived many other lives before this one – essentially a belief in reincarnation. Past-life therapists tell us that identities and events experienced in our past lives are causing us hagnups in this life and that we need to revisit our past lives and reexperience the trauma in order to get rid of the ghost, so to speak (the theory of the need of revisiting and reexperiencing traumas in order to get rid of them, origins in modern-day experiential psychotherapy, and has nothing to do with the spiritual traditions, and their philosophies of reincarnation and karma – I explain the dangerous misunderstanding in detail in my article **A critique of Stanislav Grof and Holotropic Breathwork**).

Although past-life therapy technique has become particular trendy in recent years, few realize that first Colavida in Spain and then Albert de Rochas in Paris were using age regression during trance work as the late 1800s. De Rochas is said to have written the first book on the subject, published in 1911. Past-life work has always generated controversy and skepticism, and in 1921 one critic complained about de Rochas: "Subjects are so open to suggestion during trance that their ostensible memories of past lives would be merely responses to de Rochas' dominant and suggestive presence." Could this also be what's happening today?

What past-life therapists not are aware of is the thought distortion called *Confabulation*. A confabulation is a fantasy that has unconsciously replaced events in memory. A confabulation may be based partly on fact or be a complete construction of the imagination. The term is often used to describe the "memories" of mentally ill persons, memories of alien abduction, and false memories induced by careless therapists or interviewers (read more in my book **A Dictionary of Thought**

**distortions.** Also read my article **Hypnosis, hypnotherapy and the art of self-deception**, where other thought distortions active in hypnosis are described).

I do not intend to challenge or offend the belief in reincarnation held by many as part of their belief system. It's also a part of my own philosophy of life. I merely hope to call attention to those practitioners who are wont to use hypnosis and suggestion to induce a supposed past-life experience in their clients. I draw a distinction between religious or spiritual beliefs held by individuals and those therapy techniques that promote the acceptance of certain concepts because of the influence of a predisposed practitioner.

Past-life therapists seem to disregard or summarily dismiss the fact that the notion of reincarnation is a religious belief, not an accepted scientific tenet of psychology or psychiatry. Looked at in the cold light of day, past-life therapy is a form of spiritual or religious conversion intertwined with mental health counseling – although that's rarely how it's described by the practitioners. Rather, they would have you adopt an interpretation of reincarnation that tells you that we've all had past lives, that they effect our current lives, and that by remembering those awful things that supposedly happened to us centuries and eons ago, we're going to feel better today. It's a pseudopsychological approach to karma, a spiritual belief.

The paradox is that the problem with past-life therapy not only is a problem with pseudoscience. If you go to the traditional spiritual traditions (especially Tibetan Buddhism and Indian schools of philosophy), you will, again and again, hear the true masters tell you that nobody, and nothing, can help you with your karma, your past or future lives, etc. Only *yourself* can discover your karma through *spiritual practice*. Everything else is cognitional and ethical delusional and deceptive (read my article *A Map of The Spiritual Journey* in my book **Dream Yoga**. Also read my articles **What is Karma?** and **Paranormal Phenomena seen in relation with Clairvoyance**).

As with other odd New Age psychotherapies, past-life therapy involves leading a client to accept a belief system and the language that goes with the belief system. This practice shows no respect for either the scientific validation of mental health approaches or human individuality and freedom of choice.

### **Shaping Responses Through Hypnosis**

One of the problems with past-life, future-life, and a lot of other New Age psychotherapies – and ideologies – is the misuse of and overreliance on hypnosis as a therapeutic tool. The problem is not, that hypnosis can help some people loose weight, quit smoking, or overcome their fear of flying (though I don't recommend

hypnosis at all). The problem is, as with any procedure, in the wrong hands it can be misrepresented at best and harmful at worst. It is not magic, nor does it bring about instant recovery from troubling symptoms. Unfortunately, at present, the practice of hypnotherapy is not monitored sufficiently.

In the United States today there is anywhere from ten to fifteen thousand lay hypnotherapists, many of whom became certified by taking perhaps a weekend seminar or a brief series of courses. There are no licensing requirements, no prerequisites for training, and no professional organization to which those who hypnotize others are accountable. You can be a real estate agent, a graphic artist, an English teacher, or a hairdresser and also call yourself a hypnotherapist by hanging a certificate on your wall that states you took as few as eighteen hours of courses in hypnosis (in my article **Hypnosis, hypnotherapy, and the art of self-deception** I have included a description from a former hypnotherapist, who today regrets his business).

This lack of oversight leads to all sorts of abuses and malpractice. Inadequately trained people using hypnosis may find themselves practicing psychotherapy without a license. They are unable to diagnose serious psychological difficulties their clients might have; should they sense that they are in over their heads, many tend not to refer clients to more qualified professionals, and many are generally not aware of the common pitfalls of using hypnosis. They are also often the same people who tend to latch onto whatever “personal development” trend may be in the wind.

### **You Have Been Here Before Already Tomorrow**

Meanwhile, some therapists are supporting the idea of future-life progressions. Glenn Williston states that “our future selves affect us as much *now* as our past selves...You can influence your past and future personality aspects by knowing the truth *now*, and all are affected *now*.”

Bruce Goldberg, the dentist from Baltimore, claimed in 1982 that he knew of “no other therapist in the country who does progressions” – that is, who takes clients forward in time. Progressions require more conditioning, Goldberg unabashedly tells us, because humans are programmed to think of the future as mysterious and inaccessible. “Yet,” he writes, “if we weren’t supposed to know the future, progression simply wouldn’t work.” And it has worked big time for him: he claims to have done thousands of progressions as well as regressions with his clients.

Having heard so many of his clients talk about the future, Goldberg makes sweeping but rather benign predictions for the future, which include the following:

- Twenty-first century: Earth will undergo major geographical changes; scientific progress will be most evident.
- Twenty-second century: much advancement in medical science will be evident.
- Twenty-third century: sophisticated computers and video equipment are household appliances.
- Twenty-fourth century: a small-scale nuclear war results in a reduction of the world's population.
- Twenty-fifth century: androids perform all menial tasks.

He describes the twenty-sixth century what could be regarded as absolute bliss.

Goldberg assures clients that they never have to worry about getting stuck in the future. As with regressions, he says no one has ever been harmed. As a safeguard, though, Goldberg uses a special protective shield. He has the client “imagine a pure white light entering the top of the head and filling the entire body...That is all there is to it,” writes Goldberg, who states that his white light wards off any harm or negativity.

Well, again, if we take the true spiritual traditions, then they say that a good philosophical principle is to examine, whether the karmacially talk and experiences of the “experts” and clients remove their energy-investments in the actual reality. If focus is displaced backwards or forwards in time, then the collective time has taken over and spiritual seen there therefore happens an escape.

None of these people and theories can therefore be said to work spiritual. If you namely use the karma idea in that way (the idea of a person's spiritual destiny), it is no longer a spiritual help, it is a collective displacement of the focus backwards or forwards in time and therewith out of reality and into the unreality of the collective time.

The genuine karmacially structures do not lie in the collective time, but in the universal time, which work in synchronism with the Now. If the karma idea is used spiritual seen correctly, then the focus, instead of being projected out in something afar (past lifes, a guru, birth, the future), will be present in something very near, namely only in the most intensive experiences of this actual life, and after that: in this actual Now with its possibility of realizing your innermost. It is your awareness in the

now that will find the progressive karma, and this awareness you can of course only practise yourself.

And, as mentioned, the spiritual traditions again and again emphasize that only Man himself can find the progressive karma (his *spiritual* destiny; the dreamtracks and songlines in his spiritual journey; the map that shows his way to enlightenment). The consciousness has the key in its life. It helps nothing, what people through a system may be able to think about the collective time, or fantasize about karmacially experiences and spiritual evolution. Nobody can tell you about your karmacially structures, or your spiritual evolution (or the world's spiritual evolution), or what will happen if you use their techniques. All people, models or techniques - clairvoyants, regression therapists, astrologers, shamans, channelers, Ken Wilber's integral method, Holotropic Breathwork, Human Design system, Law of attraction etc., etc., etc. - who are claiming they can help you karmacial - that is: with your spiritual growth - are, according to the spiritual traditions, cognitional and ethical delusional and deceptive.

Only your own realization opens. Whether another person even was able to read the whole of the karmacially course (a person's life-history, destiny) and tell the seeker about it, it would not help. On the contrary it would harm. Only your own inner experience and realization can open the spiritual dimension. Karma in other ways is nonsense. And by the way, that's the same with all spiritual.

### **3) Entities Therapists and the Channeling Connection**

Entities therapists teach their clients that certain beings did not at the point of death "pass over" or fully transition from life on earth to another plane or afterlife. Instead, they took up residence as spirits, or entities, living in the clients' bodies. Depending on the situation, these therapists may wait a few sessions before introducing this idea and claiming that they will help rid the client of the spirits and the trouble they are causing.

The terms *entities*, *spirits*, *discarnates*, *earthbounds*, *walk-ins*, and *possessors* are used interchangeably by the practitioners of this trade. A few therapists advertise that they also deal with ghosts - spirits outside the client - as well as those inside a person.

These therapists assert that cure rests on the use of hypnosis and regression therapy to recall the spirits that have invaded the person, and that the spirits are the origin of the

client's conflict, pain, or other symptoms. Some entities therapists also tell clients that the clients' descriptions of their parents indicate that they too may have been invaded by entities. At some later point, the therapist and client begin the exorcism ritual, by which the entities are dispatched, freed, and sent out of limbo into eternity. In most cases these exorcisms are emotional and quite violent proceedings.

Some entities therapists work alone, incorporating the entities idea into their therapy techniques after having attended one or more weekend seminars on channeling. Therapy may entail months of getting clients to locate, name, "experience," and release (or get rid of) what sometimes turns out to be a multitude of inner entities.

Other therapists work collaboratively with a "channeler," a special person who claims to have the ability to communicate with and speak for entities and long-gone beings. The entities supposedly exist on a reachable plane, from which they can be contacted by a tranced-out channeler. In such cases, the therapist, client, and channeler meet together. While the client is in a hypnotic trance, the therapist is told by the channeler, who also goes into a trance state, which entities are present within the client. Occasionally clients are told that helpful entities reside within the channeler or that the channeler can be useful in convincing some of the client's entities to assist in the process of getting rid of the other bad or troublesome entities.

Simply put, entities therapists combine ages-old trance mediumship with a form of modern-day exorcism. They seem to have little trouble finding a vulnerable population on which to foist their theories, for surveys show that 23 percent of Americans believe in reincarnation. 14 percent believe in mediums, and 42 percent believe they have been in contact with someone who died. That's anywhere from 3.5 million to 10.5 million people who might make the leap to accept communication with the dead as a therapeutic practice.

In connection with terms like *entities*, *spirits*, *discarnates*, *earthbounds*, *walk-ins*, *possessors*, *ghosts*, *entities therapy*, *exorcism* and *channeling* read my articles **Spiritual crises as the cause of paranormal phenomena**, **The awakening of kundalini**, **Paranormal phenomena seen in connection with channeling**, **Paranormal phenomena seen in connection with clairvoyance**, **Paranormal phenomena seen in connection with spiritual practice**, and **Paranormal phenomena seen in connection with mystical experiences**.

### **Misuse of Hypnosis, and Other Ethical Issues**

What seems astonishing is that some past-life and entities therapists, as well as others who use hypnotic regression techniques, have no grasp of the fact that through trance

visualizations they are causing their patients to feel as though they had killed or destroyed living beings during the so-called releasing process. Much of this stems from the misuse of hypnosis. If therapists using trance induction fail to recognize how the patient is responding or being affected, it is likely that things will go awry.

For some reasons, entities therapy almost always tends to include violence and harsh imagery. The images visualized during trance can be so scary and vivid that often the hypnotherapist's later explanations to bring the client back to reality simply don't penetrate the client's mind. The client tends to remain stuck in the very concrete and vivid early portion of the session and therefore continues to be troubled by the destructive images.

Besides the misuse of hypnosis, the behavior of certain therapists raises other ethical issues. For one, they are offering a quasi-religious/spiritual schema under the guise of scientific psychology. They are in fact teaching their own brand of life-after-death philosophy. By introducing this belief system as a necessary part of therapy, entities therapists, like past-life therapists, may be encroaching on the religious beliefs and rights of their clients.

Second, there is no scientific basis on which they can rest their therapy scheme, and they generally fail to warn clients that it's an untested therapy. In fact they often, like New Age theorists as a whole, use the thought distortion *Research has shown that...*(see my book **A Dictionary of Thought Distortions**).

Third, they rarely alert the client to the likelihood that the process of dispensing the entities will be extremely emotional.

Fourth, these therapists bypass working on getting to the root of the actual symptoms that brought the client to therapy in the first place.

Most entities therapists appear to have little or no concern for these ethical issues or for patient rights. All told, entities therapy seems to be yet another potentially hazardous route for the consumer on the New Age market.

#### **4) You Were Abducted by ETs – That's What the Matter Is**

Certain therapists have become entranced with the idea that UFOs and alien life exist. In so doing, their interests appear to have overridden their role as unbiased and objective therapists and have turned them into hunters for "experiences," or those

individuals who are not only believed to have been abducted by extraterrestrials but also to have been experimented on like lab animals. Believing as they do in this phenomenon, these alien-abduction buffs, like other Johnny-one-note therapists, tend to project their beliefs onto their clients, conveying to clients that their personality problems are due to the trauma of having met up with alien creatures, or extraterrestrials (ETs).

As with other fad therapies, more and more practitioners – both lay and professional – have jumped on the bandwagon, or spaceship, as the case may be. Most recently, Harvard psychiatrist John Mack's book *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens* hit the bestseller list. In 1992, a conference held at the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T) brought together several hundred mental health professionals, scientists, and experiencers. This meeting garnered even greater publicity for the subject of alien encounters and resulted in a 683-page publication of the conference proceedings and a 478-page book by C.D.B. Bryan, a respected journalist.

The conference was cochaired by John Mack and M.I.T. physicist Dave Pritchard. According to Bryan, Pritchard told him: "It's not that M.I.T. endorses the conference. It's that they endorse the principle that the faculty should be given enough rope to make fools of themselves." Although many other professionals might be looking on with a great deal of skepticism, books by professionals with respectable credentials nevertheless lend a certain credibility to this phenomenon.

Edith Fiore's 1989 book on her experiences as an alien-abduction therapist includes a list of twenty-six hypnotherapists working with abductees. In his 1994 book, Richard Boylan, a prominent name in this field, listed forty knowledgeable counselors who work with experiences of close ET encounters. Boylan, whose name appears first, will have to remove himself from the list, however, because in August 1995 his California psychologist license was revoked on seven counts of gross negligence with three patients. "Space alien shrink loses his license," announced the news headline. According to the State Board of Psychology, quoted in the article, Boylan "abused his role as a therapist when he imposed his personal views on the existence of extraterrestrials into the dreams and memories of two patients."

Still, the number of people doing alien-abduction therapy is growing by leaps and bounds, as is obvious with even a cursory review of ads in *New Age* and alternative newspapers, magazines, and circulars, or Internet postings such as the following: "I have a MA in Transpersonal Psychology and I specialize in working with clients who have had UFO abductions and/or UFO experiences. My practice is limited to the Boulder/Denver area, but I am willing to consider doing some therapy over telephone

with clients in other states. I am also in the process of starting a local support group...Serious Inquiries Only Please.”

Here is another: “Abduction Experience? Explore safely with regressive hypnosis by professional hypnotist David Bolton, using techniques developed by Dr. David Jacobs. This offer is only available in the United Kingdom and a small fee of £ 20 will be charged. If you are interested, email...for further details.”

Most ET therapists tend to believe that alien abductions of humans are a widespread occurrence. “We can estimate that an average of more than 3,000 close encounters (CE-IVs) occur in the United States every 24 hours,” writes Boylan, explaining that this is a very conservative estimate. At that rate, Boylan and others in his camp are suggesting that more than one million U.S. inhabitants are being contacted by ETs each year. Possible the gentleman featured in the following headline from the *Arizona Republic* was one of them: “Confessed killer says UFOs made him do it, will defend self at trial.”

### **ETs Are the Cause of Your Trauma**

A therapist who has an overriding special interest in a single source for personal distress can soon, if not immediately, jump off the path of paying attention to the patient’s presenting problems and instead focus on those special interests. As a result of such single-mindedness, the diagnosis tends to be shaped by the therapist’s favored theory of causality – in this case, trauma based on a supposed encounter with a UFO or an ET.

Similarly, the patient’s own recounting of his or her past history is molded and reinterpreted by the UFO-fascinated therapist as one indication after another that ETs were involved in long-forgotten episodes in the patient’s life. The patient’s personal history and family experiences are reframed to fit the therapist’s notion that alien creatures are the source of the patient’s current symptoms or personal discomfort.

### **Alien Probes and Therapist Prods**

In alien-abduction therapy, as in other enhanced-memory therapies, the therapist sets the context for the patient by indicating that she regards ETs and the so-called close encounters as central to the patient’s problems. The therapy generally involves repeated use of hypnotic techniques, putting the patient into a trance state. Sometimes patients are primed (see the thought distortion *Priming effect*) by being given UFO literature to read prior to the hypnotic sessions. Could anybody doubt that this would have an influence on the “memories” later “retrieved” during hypnosis?

## **Context as Influence**

In alien-abduction therapy, the client is usually told that hypnosis will be used in the attempt to uncover forgotten ET experiences. And as we have seen, clients often are given literature on ETs and UFOs to read before the next session. In the field of psychotherapy, such preconditioning and expectations are called the “demand characteristics” of the situation.

Demand characteristics are those features of the therapy that will be experienced by the patient as cues or subtle incentives to act or respond in certain ways. Certain therapists remain blissfully unaware of, fail to consider, or deny the impact of the following:

1. The powerful influence of the setting
2. The therapist’s power position
3. The nature of hypnotic imagery
4. The patient’s fantasies about each of the above

When we go to a dentist, podiatrist, or accountant, we expect the professional to be interested in teeth, feet, or finances, respectively. How can ET specialists not be aware that their reputations and interests precede them?

Social psychologists and hypnosis researchers have for some time studied the demand characteristics of professional interactions. Psychiatrist Martin Orne writes: “The cues as to what is expected may be unwittingly communicated before or during the hypnotic procedure, either by the hypnotist or by someone else, for example, a previous subject, a story, a movie, a stage show, etc. Further, the nature of these cues may be quite obscure, to the hypnotist, to the subject, and even to the trained observer.”

As Orne noted, the patient responds to cues of all kinds. These actual and imagined properties determine and color both what is revealed and the participant’s demeanor in the situation.

When a person goes to a therapist known and spoken of in the community as an expert on ET abductions, the client is already influenced, or primed, by such ideas. She may feel, for example, that the therapist will only like her or work with her if she

reports ET abductions, and that her pain and distress no matter what their origin will be treated only if she presents ideas the therapist is interested in, and she knows he is interested in ETs. Similarly, a lonely patient who feels insecure and unworthy may be fantasizing that she will become part of new, emerging “special group” – that is, those allegedly abducted and experimented on by space aliens. Being a “contactee” will allow her to be a “special person.”

Practitioners of this type of therapy, as well as those evaluating what is transpiring in the field, must acknowledge the very real possibility of this priming and influencing of patients through the therapist’s reputation (as mentioned earlier: see for example Brian Weiss’s purported thousand-person waiting list. Surely those people have an expectation of what might occur when they finally see Dr. Weiss.) And aside from the influence of ads, articles, and direct contact with others, we must not forget that this is the electronic age.

Television talk shows, twenty-four-hour radio call-in programs, and Internet newsgroups continuously update and comment on what is new and trendy. Abductees report on their experiences with ETs in all those venues. Therapists appear on talk shows supporting the “experiences.” Viewers learn which therapists provide such therapy, and pick up on the general scripts.

Many of these therapists disregard how clients who present themselves as having had such experiences could have gotten their material from all the myriad sources operating in our society. Some therapists, however, don’t seem to bother at all with reality. Fiore said, “I have no desire to prove that the experiences really happened, any more than I do with my patients who ‘discover’ they’ve been sexually abused.”

### **How Did UFOs Get Mixed Up with Therapy?**

Throughout history people have claimed to have had contact with otherworldly creatures: spirits and ghosts; beings from the sea, the sky, and the lower world; gods, witches, werewolves, and dwarves; flying machines, monsters, and devils; angels, fairies, demons, and leprechauns. Occasionally, people have claimed that beings of one kind or another transported them to other spheres, or that they observed or were subjects of strange and improbable acts done by these beings.

The historical background that contributes to the current combining of UFOs, ETs, and psychotherapy began after World War II. The first publication reporting a person being taken by a UFO was published in 1957; it described an alleged abduction in Brazil. In 1966, John Fuller reported on an American case, which is considered to be the real introduction of this phenomenon to the American public: on September 19,

1961, Barney and Betty Hill, a couple returning from Montreal to their home in New Hampshire, reported that their car was “flagged down by small gray humanoid beings with unusual eyes” who were in a strange craft. The Hills felt they could not account for two hours during this journey.

For two years afterward, Barney had trouble sleeping and Betty had frequent nightmares. They reported after considerable hypnosis that they had been taken from their car onto a craft where sexual examinations were performed on them. They declared that the beings communicated telepathically in English and instructed the Hills to forget what happened.

Because of Fuller’s book and a made-for-TV movie about the Hills’ experience, the alleged encounter was big news, in spite of the conclusion by the psychiatrist who saw the Hills; that Betty and Barney Hills had experienced a shared dream of fantasy, or folie à deux. There was growing interest in “experiencers” and close encounters, or CE-IVs, as they came to be called in the world of people fascinated with UFOs. A close encounter of the fourth kind is supposed to be “a physical visit to the immediate location of a human being by one or more extraterrestrial, three-dimensional, intelligent beings (ETs), usually for purposes of communication, education or removal to a UFO craft for special procedures.”

Claims of abductions multiplied during the 1970s and 1980s. UFOlogist Budd Hopkins (also a painter and sculptor) and historian David Jacobs are said to have interviewed “nearly five hundred people reporting such encounters” during a seventeen-year-period (from 1975 to 1992). Jacobs, a professor of history, performed more than 325 hypnotic sessions with abductees.

One of the climactic moments at the 1992 M.I.T. conference was the presentation of the results of a 1991 Roper national survey, used by many abduction proponents as the source of their figures to show the supposed prevalence of alien activity, contact, and abductions. Richard Boylan, for example, who we quoted as saying that there are three thousand ET contacts every day in the United States, based his estimates on the poll, during which the Roper organization carried out a wide-ranging survey of 5,937 adult Americans. Seeded with the survey were eleven questions on UFO-related and other “unusual” experiences. Hopkins and Jacobs made calculations of the number of yes responses to the seeded questions and presented their conclusions at the M.I.T. conference: that at least 2 percents of adults (one out of every fifty) in the United States may have had UFO abduction experiences.

Arriving at their own base estimate of 185 million people after certain demographic exclusions, Hopkins and Jacobs announced in effect that nearly four million

Americans have had ET encounters! The idea for the poll and the publication of the results in a sixty-four-page booklet was backed by Las Vegas entrepreneur Robert Bigelow.

When abduction proponents present these figures today, rarely do they mention the reception of the data at their very own conference. Journalist Bryan, who was there, described the audience reaction: “Following Hopkin’s Roper Poll presentation, the M.I.T. lecture hall is in uproar. Scientists in all corners of the large room protest that the survey is ‘full of holes!’” Criticism centered on the faulty assumptions, lack of scientific basis, and lack of systematic pretests. One psychology professor asked why anyone “should pay attention to unvalidated poll data.” Indeed.

Unfortunately, many in the counseling field are being influenced by the alien-abduction fad, which is reinforced by media publicity; without thinking twice, many practitioners are foisting it onto their clients.

### **Fact, Fiction, or Urban Legend?**

Therapists who support the idea that ETs abduct and experiment on humans on a regular basis and that the “remembering” of these incidents by clients will cure a variety of ills display some gross errors in reasoning. Let’s look at John Mack’s writings and statements about the subject. Remember, Mack is a medical doctor, a renowned professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, supposedly trained in scientific reasoning. He not only disregards the contextual settings in which he meets these patients, but he also posits logically indefensible explanations for why he accepts their tales without question.

Mack’s explanation for his acceptance of what he heard from alleged abductees can be summarized as follows: (1) the stories, told by individuals who had not communicated with each other, were consistent; (2) they had some forth reluctantly, fearing that their stories would be discredited or that they would be ridiculed; and (3) they did not seem psychiatrically disturbed. “There was nothing to suggest that their stories were delusional, a misinterpretation of dreams, or the product of fantasy,” he wrote. Mack relies on these features to justify his acceptance of abductees’ reports. At the same time, he also carefully states: “I am not presuming the physical reality of the person’s experience.”

Like other alien-abduction therapists, Mack gives us a variety of catch-all symptoms and indicators. These include, among others:

- The memory of a “presence” or “little men” in the bedroom

- Vivid dreams of being taken into a strange room where intrusive procedures were done.
- Awakening paralyzed with a sense of dread.
- Intergenerational abduction experiences.
- Fear of night, hospitals, flying, elevators, animals, insects, sexual contact, of being alone, of the dark, of exposed windows at night.
- Odd rashes, nosebleeds, cuts, lesions, rectal bleeding, sinus pain.
- Difficult pregnancy, gynecological complaints, gastrointestinal complaints.

Is everyone covered? Do we all know somebody, including ourselves, who can now explain away something, if not everything, by having been abducted by ETs?

Mack says that in order for him to take an abductee seriously, the person has to show sufficient sincerity and appropriate emotion in telling the abduction story. Of those included in Mack's sample for his book, two are two-year-olds! What exactly is appropriate emotion for a two-year-old recounting his or hers abduction by ETs?

Various researchers have cited numerous refutations and alternate explanations for the kind of thinking Mack now represents (the thought distortion *Ignoring Alternative Explanations*). For example, because many experiencers report that their encounters with UFOs or ETs were sleep related, it's likely that these so-called experiences are simply night dreams and hypnagogic imagery. Those who describe frightening experiences accompanied by full-body paralysis possibly went through the rather common experience known as sleep paralysis, which occurs in 15 to 25 percent of the population. Sleep paralysis is typically accompanied by feelings of suffocation, the sense of a presence, and hallucinations.

As for alleged encounters that are not sleep related, the person's suggestibility and interests must be considered. In one study of people who claimed to have seen UFOs and of other people who claimed actual encounters it was learned that "subjects in both groups believed strongly in the reality of UFOs than did comparison subjects." Those who described more elaborate experiences also held other esoteric beliefs.

Another important factor is that there are no corroborating witnesses to abductees' tales, except for experiencers who are married or closely related and vouch for one another.

The total lack of any physical evidence also bears some weight in any kind of objective evaluation. Even Mack says that "the experiential data, *which, in the absence of more robust physical evidence*, is the most important information we have" (emphasis mine).

In trying to make sense out of this phenomenon – that is, what some might consider a rather widespread belief among primarily U.S. and British citizens that they've been abducted – there are several factors to consider. If so many people in the United States claim to have had a UFO abduction experience or an encounter with an extraterrestrial being, what's going on? There are plenty of theories, aside from those put out by people who simply believe it's all true.

Some say that those who put forth such stories are akin to people who engage in sadomasochist activities: that they are looking to experience a loss of self, a loss of control, including pain and humiliation. What could be more humiliating than a bug-eyed creature sticking a pipe up your behind?

Some say that those who believe they've been abducted were actually sexually or physically abused. Rather than face the real perpetrator, they blame poor old ET. Still others say that those who believe they were abducted by aliens have also fabricated that they were sexually or physically abused by a human. Lots of vivid imaginations out there.

Singer and Lalich's assessment of the widespread nature of this belief in alien visits and abductions is a little more down-to-earth. As they have presented in their book *Crazy Therapies*, they believe that much of it comes from therapist prompting, only this time the Procrustean bed is a spaceship.

Some of it also comes from the fact that information and ideas travel so rapidly today, thanks to television and computers. In the San Francisco Bay Area, for example, there are eleven hours of talk shows every day on regular TV (not including cable stations). People are very much influenced by what they see and hear on those shows, which love to cover such juicy topics as ordinary citizens having been whisked off in souped-up space vehicles and felt up by an alien or two. Later, people tend to forget where they heard about the incident; this is called "source amnesia" and is a very common occurrence (clairvoyants and psychics are very dependent of source amnesia in their clients, who forget that they themselves are the source of

information, which the psychic then later miraculously reveals – see the thought distortion *Cold Reading* in my book **A Dictionary of Thought Distortions**).

Still others take up the belief because of its popularity. The idea of UFOs and “things” from outer space has been with us for centuries. In the past few decades, the belief has become something of an urban legend – that is, it’s become part of our cultural makeup (also see the thought distortion *Confabulation*). Certainly the monumental success of Steven Spielberg’s films on the subject – *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *E.T.* – has added to the acceptance of the idea by many millions.

Another alternate explanation could, in some cases, be that the experiencers are in a spiritual crisis (see my article **Spiritual crises as the cause of paranormal phenomena**).

Finally: we should not forget that the closest star (besides our Sun) is so far away from Earth that travel between the two would take more than a human lifetime. The fact that it takes our Sun about 200 million years to revolve once around the Milky Way gives one a glimpse of the perspective we have to take of interstellar travel. We are 500 light-seconds from the sun. The next nearest star to Earth's sun (Alpha Centauri) is about 4 light-years away. That might sound close, but it is actually something like 24 trillion miles away. Even traveling at one million miles an hour, it would take more than 2,500 years to get there. To get there in twenty-five years would require traveling at more than 100 million miles an hour for the entire trip. Our fastest spacecraft, Voyager, travels at about 40,000 miles an hour and would take 70,000 years to get to Alpha Centauri.

Despite the fact of the improbability of interplanetary travel, it is not impossible. Perhaps there are beings who can travel at very fast speeds and have the technology and the raw materials to build vessels that can travel at near the speed of light or greater. Such beings must be on a very high level of intelligence, both scientific and philosophical (that is, among others: ethical). Have such beings (who by believers often are described as a kind of reptiles or bugs) come here to abduct people, rape and experiment on them – and thereafter leaving them in existential unreality? I doubt it. Therefore the whole thing sounds much more like the low level of intelligence humans are on.

## **Doing Harm**

Whichever side of the fence one wishes to be on in this discussion, one nevertheless must not ignore the potential for damages and the real damages being done to clients who end up in this kind of therapy.

Alien-abduction therapists are spreading fears, encouraging magical thinking, and instilling paranoia in their patients. Some of these therapists adopt sinister theories such as those Hopkins puts forth: that aliens are among us in order to carry out genetic study, and we humans are merely a part of a massive breeding experiment. They get clients to believe they've been experimented on or impregnated, or that they have given birth to starchildren. Clients are led to believe that they've had probes shoved up their noses, rectums, and penises, or that implants were put inside their heads and various internal organs and under their skin.

Others, like Boylan, profess that the U.S. government is engaged in psychological warfare against its own citizens. Part of these "PSY-WAR operations," as he calls them, are to dress short humans in alien costumes and have these "aliens" abduct people in order to confuse them and make them think they were abducted by real ETs. Clients are frightened into believing that they have been or might be subjected to electroshock, torture, drug injections, and cultic ritual sexual abuse. That is an example of what I call a conspiracy within a conspiracy; that is: a conspiracy theory which creates an illusion rather than an attempt to uncover the truth (read more in my article **The Matrix Conspiracy**).

Alien-abduction therapists are misdiagnosing and in many cases ignoring serious psychological problems that should be attended to. In some cases, they are actually causing psychological difficulties in their previously normal and stable clients.

*Further reading:*

**A critique of Stanislav Grof and Holotropic Breathwork**

**A critique of Byron Katie and her therapeutic technique The Work**

**Hypnosis, hypnotherapy, and the art of self-deception**

**James Arthur Ray and the sweat lodge tragedy**

*Related videos on my YouTube Channel:*

**[Ofra Bikel "Divided Memories"](#)**

*All articles and books referred to are available in free PDF Versions. Links can be found on my blog: [www.MortenTolboll.blogspot.com](http://www.MortenTolboll.blogspot.com)*

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