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A REPORT ON THE DEMOGRAPHICS AND BELIEFS OF ALIEN ABDUCTION EXPERIENCERS

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ABSTRACT: One hundred thirty alien abduction experiencers were queried to determine basic demographic characteristics and beliefs. Respondents were classified into one of four categories according to the type of experience they reported—possible abductees, visitees, abductees, or psychic abductees. Chi-square tests were used to discover relationships between common characteristics and experience type. Respondents who reported being taken on board a UFO or to a clearly alien environment are more likely to report using hypnosis to aid in recall and also to report repeat abductions. Furthermore, the use of hypnosis by experiencers to retrieve memories increases the likelihood of reporting both physical exams and repeat abductions. Results suggest further investigation as to the role of hypnosis in the articulation of alien abduction experiences. Beliefs common to the general pool of abduction experiencers indicate most report believing they encounter extraterrestrials in early childhood, have repeat encounters, believe other members of their families are also involved, possess psychic abilities, evidence healing powers, have lived a past life, and generally describe their experiences as primarily “positive.”

The number of individuals who claim to have been kidnapped by extraterrestrials (i.e., “alien abduction experiencers” [AAEs]) is unknown. Anecdotal or indirect attempts at projecting the number of AAEs have been controversial. The 1992 Bigelow Poll, for example, claimed that at “least 2% of the population” were probable abductees. Yet this poll, based on several “indicator items,” has been criticized as seriously flawed and cannot be considered accurate (Hall, Rodeghier, & Johnson, 1992).¹ In 1998, a Roper poll asked individuals if they had “been abducted by the occupants of a UFO,” and 0.3% answered affirmatively (Rodeghier, 2000, p. 23). Extrapolated to the larger U.S. population, this would equal 600,000 AAEs. Attempts to pin down the number of AAEs are problematic because of social biases against people who report abduction, which may make experiencers reluctant to come forward. In any case, accurately counting AAEs has proven difficult. Regardless of the actual numbers, the basic fact remains that hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people believe they have been abducted by aliens.

In the last several years researchers have started to systematize their analyses of UFO and abduction percipients. Researchers in all fields have begun the important move toward an interdisciplinary and inclusive study of the UFO/abduction phenomenon. The abduction conference held at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in

1992 was a step in that direction (Pritchard et al., 1994). By allowing researchers and clinicians to share information, many new hypotheses about the abduction phenomenon were generated, and some potential standards and techniques for investigation were discussed.

There is still a paucity of studies that report on basic demographic characteristics of AAEs. In fact, Rodeghier, Goodpaster, and Blatterbauer (1991, p. 62) note that until their study, only Bullard's (1987) work had "systematically documented some simple demographic characteristics." And, as they note, the portrait of the alien abduction experiencer that emerged from Bullard's work may be inaccurate because his findings were based on already published abduction accounts. Although certainly a good beginning, clearly what is needed is more direct questioning of the AAEs themselves. This article reviews several studies that have reported on AAE demographics and, more importantly, reports the demographic characteristics of 130 individuals who claim various experiences with extraterrestrials.

Surprisingly, there have been few studies that have collected data directly from AAEs. Bloecher, Clamar, and Hopkins (1985, p. 7) sent nine AAEs to psychologist Dr. Elizabeth Slater to "determine similarities and difference in personality structure, as well as psychological strengths and weaknesses." Parnell (1988, p. 161; see also Parnell & Sprinkle, 1990) tested 225 "UFO experiencers" who ranged from those who saw lights in the sky to those who claimed "to have been taken on board a spacecraft." Ring and Rosing (1990) included 265 UFO experiencers in their sample. Rodeghier, Goodpaster, and Blatterbauer (1991), using a narrow definition of abduction and rigorous selection criteria, selected 27 individuals to participate in their study. Bader² (2003), in a comparison of AAEs to ritual-abuse survivors, reported on an AAE sample of 55 who were selected through abduction support groups. It is fair to say each of these studies, while discounting the assertion that AAEs are severely psychopathological, found peculiarities among AAEs that distinguish them from the general population.

This article describes the demographic characteristics of respondents in the survey sample and compares those characteristics with other studies of UFO percipients as well as to the demographics of the general population. Furthermore, the sample is segmented on experience type to further refine reporting of demographic information and to examine additional psychosocial characteristics. In addition to basic demographic information, several beliefs potentially common to AAEs are described. The general purpose is not to determine if people are being stolen from their beds by an intelligence unknown to humankind, but to discern if by knowing their shared characteristics we can learn something about this phenomenon or learn something about those making abduction-related reports.

METHODOLOGY

Beginning in 1998, narratives were collected from individuals who claimed to have been contacted by extraterrestrials. The primary means of data collection was a

webpage that requested basic demographic information and asked individuals to describe their earliest and most vivid abduction experience.³ Most individuals learned of the webpage through links on other abduction related sites—the site was also registered on Yahoo and Google to increase the number of potential hits. Additionally, some individuals were solicited after posting their experiences on public internet bulletin boards or after meeting them at a UFO conference. Respondents could complete this brief questionnaire anonymously; most however, chose to include contact information and expressed interest in further participation.

As the complexity of the abduction experience became more evident, additional questions were asked of respondents and added to the survey instrument. Those who had already completed an earlier version of the survey were contacted and asked to answer these additional questions. Eventually, telephone interviews and personal interviews were conducted with a limited number of respondents. As of late 2004, almost 200 surveys have been received.

To confirm the narrative and demographic detail of each respondent's report, and the respondent's commitment to the accuracy of their report, in the majority of cases, they participated in an ongoing correspondence and were queried several times.⁴ A total of 130 individuals who responded fully to queries were included in the current data set.⁵

Although part of this report categorizes all 130 respondents together as AAEs, Rodeghier, Goodpaster, and Blatterbauer (1991, p. 64) have proposed a much more limited definition of who should be so categorized, based on an AAE's belief about his/her experience:

1. A witness must be *taken* against his or her will from normal, terrestrial surroundings by nonhuman beings.
2. These beings must take the witness to another enclosed place that is not terrestrial in appearance and is assumed or known by the witness to be a spacecraft.
3. In this place, the witness must either be subjected to various procedures that appear to be examinations of some type, engage in communication (verbal or telepathic) with the beings, or both.
4. These experiences may be remembered consciously or through various means of focused concentration, such as hypnosis, or by a combination of the two.

Although the Rodeghier, Goodpaster, and Blatterbauer (1991) criteria include the requirement that AAEs believe they have undergone either a physical exam or some sort of communication with extraterrestrials, for this study respondents were categorized only according to the location of their experience. The presence of a physical examination was then observed within each of the four larger categories.

Because individuals claim to have different types of experiences with extraterrestrials, respondents were assigned to one of four categories: "possible AAE," "visitee," "AAE," or "psychic AAE." Individuals assigned to the possible AAE category usu-

ally reported feeling as though they had been abducted, but were only able to report experiencing missing time. Some claimed waking up with feelings of paralysis or that something was in the room with them. They often reported having dreams of encounters with extraterrestrials, but did not report any conscious memories of interactions with extraterrestrials. They may have sensed a presence in the room, but had no actual memory of a being in the room, nor could they recall ever actually seeing any type of human or extraterrestrial being during these experiences.

Visitees included those respondents who reported visits by extraterrestrial beings, most often in their bedrooms or homes, but sometimes in their cars, or outdoors. During these experiences, beings sometimes communicated with, performed experiments on, or simply observed the visitee.

To be assigned to the AAE category the individual had to report being taken on board a UFO or to a clearly alien environment. Respondents who claimed to “volunteer”—as opposed to being taken—were included in this category if they were indeed taken to a nonterrestrial/UFO location. Both AAEs and visitees had conscious memories of the events—these memories may, or may not, have been enhanced through hypnosis or alternative consciousness work.

Finally, individuals in the category of psychic AAEs⁶ reported being abducted during their dreams, in a past life, or in other altered-consciousness states. A clear distinction was made between those people who claimed to have extraterrestrial interactions during alternative/dream states of consciousness (psychic AAEs) and those who only reported dreaming about being abducted (possible AAEs). There was a qualitative difference between the two types of reported encounters that helped support this distinction. For example, psychic AAEs wrote of having control over themselves in the “dream,” whereas possible AAEs included linguistic qualifiers to describe their “maybe” “possible” experiences that “seemed real.”

Of the 130 respondents, 26 (20%) individuals were categorized as possible AAEs. Twenty-four (18.5%) could be categorized as visitees in that they reported being visited in their bedrooms or some other location, but were never taken to a nonterrestrial location. Seventy-four (56.9%) were categorized as AAEs as they described being taken aboard a UFO or to an alien location. Six (4.6%) were categorized as a psychic AAE.

Demographic Characteristics

Gender. Early abduction data suggested women are more likely than men to report abduction. Rodeghier (1994, p. 296), reporting on the CUFOS data, noted that 75% of his participants were female. He also remarked that this ratio was consistent with what he knew of the samples of other researchers.

More recent data, however, indicates the disparity between men and women may be disappearing. Bullard (1994, p. 45), in a continuation of his earlier comparative study, found his cases after 1985 had nearly equal numbers of men and women. In Bader’s (2003) sample of 55 abductees, 63% were female. Data in the current sample also supports the claim that the differences between the sexes concerning abduction

frequencies may be negligible. Of the 130 participants, 59 (45.4%) were male and 70 (53.8%) were female.⁷ Classification among the four encounter types yielded similar results.⁸

One likely reason for this gender difference is that it is more socially acceptable for women to talk about emotional and non-rational subjects including alien abduction experiences. For example, Bader (2003) reports that participants in “new age activities and memberships in new religious movements” are disproportionately female. Hopefully, the disappearing gender gap indicates an increasing social space for description of anomalous experiences by all people regardless of gender.

Race. One of the most interesting—and underreported—demographics is race. AAEs are overwhelmingly white. The CUFOS sample was 94% Caucasian (Rodeghier, 1994). In Bader’s (2003) sample of 55 AAEs, 48 (88.9%) identified themselves as white. Similarly, in the current study, 85.4% of the respondents reported they were Caucasian.

Native Americans are also represented within AAE samples in higher than expected numbers. Only 0.9% of the population surveyed in the Census 2000 data claimed Native American heritage, yet Bader (2003) reported six survey respondents (11.1%) who identified themselves as Native American. The current study likewise included five respondents (3.8%) who reported themselves as Native American.

While Caucasians and Native Americans are over represented in AAE populations, African Americans are noticeably underrepresented. Census 2000 data indicates 12.3% of the general population is black. Despite that, Bader (2003) had no respondents who claimed to be African American, and the current study had only three individuals (2.3%) who reported being African American.

Hispanic Americans seem to be only slightly less present in AAE populations as compared with the general population. Although Census 2000 data suggests approximately 5.5% of the general population is Hispanic, in Bader’s (2003) sample, only 2 (3.7%) reported themselves as Hispanic. Similarly, in the current data set, only 3 (2.3%) claimed Hispanic heritage. When broken down according to encounter type, results remained similar.

Explanations for the racial homogeneity present within AAE populations have not been discussed in the published literature. Data suggests Caucasians are more likely to report their abduction experiences or that experiencers are more likely to self-report themselves as white. Whatever the reason, the prevalence of white AAEs warrants further attention. In terms of race, at least, it is evident that AAEs are not a representative cross section of the population.

Education. There is evidence that AAEs are more educated than the general public, or at least more likely to attend higher education. Bloecher, Clamar, and Hopkins’s (1985) initial testing of 9 AAEs included 6 individuals who had gone to college, and 3 who had done at least some graduate work. Suggestions that these AAEs were chosen for psychological testing based on their socially admirable demographics seem compelling. Despite this potentially skewed sample, other studies have provided evidence for the claim to higher educational levels among AAEs.

According to the Census 2000, 27.3% of the population has attended some college and 15.5% have received a degree. AAEs are much more likely to begin an academic career. In Rodeghier's (1994) sample of 32 experiencers, the average educational level was 14.4 years (297). On average, 50 individuals responded to queries concerning their education in Bader's (2003) study. Of those, 34 (68%) reported they had attended at least some college. In the current study (N=129), 49.2% reported they had attended at least some college and 15.4% reported they had graduated. Additionally, graduate degrees are as common among AAEs as in the general population. In the general population 8.9% report earning a graduate degree; similarly, in the current sample 8.7% reported earning a graduate degree. No differences were found by experience type.

Further inquiry is certainly warranted to find out why AAEs seem to attend college in higher numbers, yet complete four-year degrees at the same rate. Because of general interactions and conversations with individuals in the sample, it is my impression that many AAEs may attend continuing education courses with no intention of earning a degree, but rather attend for personal edification and growth. Obviously, this impression needs to be supported with actual evidence of what types of education AAEs seek out, and why.

Clearly, the method and means of data collection in the current study could skew results concerning level of educational attainment. Individuals who have access to computers and who have the leisure time to attend UFO conferences are more likely generally to be more educated. Additionally, as Rodeghier notes, better-educated people are better able to complete questionnaires and arguably, are more confident in their perceptions of their experience, and so more likely to report anomalous events.⁹

Marital status. Marital status does not seem to be a defining characteristic of the AAE population. For the most part, the studies of Rodeghier and Bader (2003) and the current study have distributions of marital status similar to the general population. Census 2000 data reports 54.5% of the population is married. Similarly, 64.7% of Rodeghier's sample,¹⁰ 54.7% of Bader's (2003), and 48.1% of the current data set reported being married.¹¹ Likewise, when broken down according to experiencer type, no apparent trends emerge regarding marital status.

Occupation. Occupation seems also not to be a distinguishing factor of individuals who think they have interacted with extraterrestrials. Fifty-one of Bader's (2003) 55 AAEs identified their current occupational status. Twenty-nine (56.9%) described their positions as white collar. Only 4 (7.8%) described themselves as blue collar and 18 (35.3%) were not in the labor force.¹² In the current study, 19.2% of the respondents reported they were professionals. Interestingly, 9.2% of the respondents reported their occupation as "artist." Again, when divided according to experience type, no specific trends were apparent concerning occupation.

Other Characteristics

Many UFO/abduction researchers have pointed to the fact that psychopathology among AAEs is no higher than among the general population as evidence of the

normalcy of AAEs (Spanos et. al., 1993; Parnell & Sprinkle, 1990; Rodeghier, Goodpaster, & Blatterbauer, 1991; Bartholomew, Basterfield, & Howard, 1991). Although this may be true, it is also true that AAEs are “not psychologically representative” of the general population (French, 2001, p. 107).

The differences among AAEs have been well documented. Rodeghier, Goodpaster, and Blatterbauer (1991) reported higher levels of loneliness and unhappiness and greater likelihood to suffer from sleep disturbances. Parnell and Sprinkle (1990, p. 45) noted AAEs tend to “endorse unusual feelings, thoughts and attitudes; to be suspicious or distrustful; and to be creative imaginative, or possibly have schizoid tendencies.” Parnell (1988) reports a similar finding. Ring and Rosing (1990) found significantly high levels of childhood trauma among AAEs. And, perhaps most disturbing, Stone-Carmen (1994) related that 57% of her sample reported suicide attempts.

In addition to the above-mentioned characteristics, there are several variables that have been discussed in the literature as possible defining traits of the AAE population or characteristics common to alien abduction experiences. The next sections describes and explores some of these traits.

Childhood abductions. Since the mid-1980s it has become fairly well known and documented that AAEs generally believe they were first abducted/visited at an early age (Hopkins, 1981; Randle, Estes, & Cone, 1999). The current study is consistent with this observation. Of those who answered the questions, 82 (66.1%) claimed to have their first experience between birth and age 10. Half—64 respondents (51.6%)—reported being abducted at age 5 or earlier. Only 15 (12.4%) reported their first experience occurred at age 30 or later.

The current sample suggests that, for the most part, individuals report that these experiences begin in childhood. However, many AAEs do not report their experiences, or for that matter even remember their experiences, until much later in life. To understand exactly what these individuals remember, and when, could certainly be the subject of further questioning. An initial examination of reported age at first experienced abduction according to experience type does not indicate any relationship between those two factors.

Repeat abductions. Another characteristic that has become more evident with the systematic exploration of the abduction phenomenon is the “repeat abduction” of the experiencer (Hopkins, 1981). Bullard (1987, p. 9) notes that Sandra Larson was the first reported repeat abduction to be investigated. Beginning then, AAEs have increasingly reported that their experiences are not isolated events. Bullard (1994) reports that in his initial study only 12 of the 270 catalogued cases referenced repeat experiences. In the second catalogue of 451 cases, however, that number increased to 114. The current study includes an overwhelming number of individuals who claim to have multiple experiences (87.7%).

Interestingly, the likelihood of a respondent reporting repeat abductions depends on the type of experience ($p = .061$)¹³ (see Table 1). Those who fell into the “possible abductee” category were more likely to report only one experience compared to the other AAEs. One possible explanation for this is the consistency of the remembered

Table 1. Repeat Abductions by Encounter Type

Encounter Type	Repeat Abduction		Total
	No	Yes	
Possible AAE	7 (26.9%)	19 (73.1%)	26 (100.0%)
Visitee	3 (12.5%)	21 (87.5%)	24 (100.0%)
AAE	5 (6.8%)	69 (93.2%)	74 (100.0%)
Psychic AAE	1 (16.7%)	5 (83.3%)	6 (100.0%)
Total	16 (12.3%)	114 (87.7%)	130 (100.0%)

experience with a “classic” abduction scenario. It could be that as an individual becomes more committed to the idea that he/she may have had an encounter with an extraterrestrial intelligence, then he/she may begin to adhere to conceptions of traditional ET encounters.

In terms of the overall alien abduction experience, repeat abductions may seem like a definite trend; however, researchers should be careful about assigning too much importance to the repeating nature of the experience. It is quite possible, and even plausible, that many people who have only one experience do not report the event. Additionally, if an individual experiences something strange only once—waking paralyzed, unexplained bruises, mysterious nosebleeds, or any number of anomalous experiences—it may be easier for them to shrug it off and forget about it. When someone experiences several of these things over time, however, they may be more likely to explore the possibility of having had an abduction experience. Likewise, once an individual has committed to the belief that s/he has an experience with extraterrestrials, it is understandable that s/he would then interpret various strange events via the abduction paradigm. Therefore, the incidences of “one-time” abduction experiences may be underreported.

Genetic link. Another reported characteristic of abduction accounts is an apparent “genetic link” among AAEs. This genetic link manifests itself in two important ways within the alien abduction phenomenon. First, many AAEs claim that other members of their families are also experiencing similar events (Hopkins, 1987; Randle, Estes, & Cone, 1999). A majority of alien abduction experiencers in this sample (64.6%) report that they believe or know other members of their family are also experiencing abductions. In the current sample, there are at least three instances with multiple members of the same family. This is certainly one area that warrants further investigation.

A second way the genetic link manifests itself is through the biological connection some AAEs claim to have with their extraterrestrial visitors. In the current sample, 53.1% report that they have had the momentary feeling they might not be human. Furthermore, 25 respondents explicitly indicated they believe they are part extraterrestrial. No significant patterns emerge to suggest the genetic link is more likely to be present in experiencers who have particular types of encounters.

Abuse. One of the more controversial characteristics that has been linked to the

abduction phenomenon is that AAEs have a higher than average incidence of experiencing physical or sexual abuse as a child. In the current study, 40.2% of those providing a response indicated that they had “been the victim of physical or sexual abuse.”¹⁴ Although this question did not discriminate between physical or sexual abuse, or between that experienced as a child versus as an adult, the high prevalence of abuse certainly deserves more attention. Rodeghier (1994, p. 340) claims that relevant abuse research suggests a lifetime prevalence of about 30 to 32% for some type of sexual abuse experienced by women. For men, that figure decreases to 15%. The numbers represented in this survey are higher than those generally reported. However, as noted, these numbers were collected with broad questions and simply point to a potential useful area of future research. No significant relationships emerge between encounter type and likelihood of abuse.

Hypnosis. Another controversial issue within the study of AAEs is the use of hypnosis. Although the effectiveness of hypnosis in retrieving memories is beyond the scope of this paper, the current survey instrument does address the number of AAEs who use hypnosis to aid in memory retrieval. Generally, in the literature, many of the cases reported have involved hypnosis. Newman and Baumeister (1996, p. 105) report that as many as 80% to 90% of alleged alien abduction accounts are recovered with the aid of hypnosis. In his review of abduction, Rodeghier (2000, p. 20) reports that investigators claim that most abductions are “immediately forgotten after the experience” and although “many abductions are recalled consciously,” most are not.

Considering that much of the reporting has been done by clinicians to date, those figures are not terribly surprising. What is interesting is that in the current study, only 40% claimed to have used hypnosis to help recall a possible extraterrestrial event. And, of those 52 individuals, many underwent hypnosis only after recognizing they had experienced something strange. Similarly, in Bullard’s (1987) sample of 97 cases, 31% used hypnosis. Lower still, in Bader’s (2003) study, only 20% report using hypnosis to retrieve abduction memories.

The dissimilarity of these numbers can be explained in a variety of ways. First, as the controversial nature of hypnosis becomes more widely known within the UFO/AAE community, AAEs may be either less likely to use hypnosis to remember events or they may be less likely to report using alternative consciousness techniques. Among those who present to clinicians, hypnosis may be used more often to retrieve memories; however, among those who do not seek therapy to explore their experience, hypnosis may be less prevalent.

When broken down according to type of experience, those respondents who report using hypnosis were more likely to be included in the AAE category, ($p = .006$) (see Table 2). Seventy-five percent of respondents reporting using hypnosis to aid in the recall of an abduction event described experiences consistent with abduction. Obviously, without further questioning the causality cannot be discerned, i.e., did hypnosis lead to the abduction memory? However, it is not unrealistic to suggest that individuals who undergo hypnosis are then more likely to conform to traditional, and well-known, descriptions of the typical abduction experience.

Table 2. Encounter Type by Hypnosis

Encounter Type	Hypnosis Used		Total
	No	Yes	
Possible AAE	21 (26.9%)	5 (9.6%)	26 (20.0%)
Visitee	18 (23.1%)	6 (11.5%)	24 (18.5%)
AAE	35 (44.9%)	39 (75.0%)	74 (56.9%)
Psychic AAE	4 (5.1%)	2 (3.8%)	6 (4.6%)
Total	78 (100.0%)	52 (100.0%)	130 (100.0%)

This hypothesis is supported by the fact that in the current data the statistical relationship between hypnosis and the likelihood a person has experienced repeat abductions nears significance ($p = .064$) (see Table 3). Although most AAEs report repeat experiences regardless of whether they have been hypnotized, those who are hypnotized are even more likely to report multiple experiences. Thus, 94.2% who were hypnotized reported being abducted more than one time, whereas only 83.3% who were not hypnotized claimed more than one experience. Only 3 respondents (5.8%) who reported using hypnosis did not claim multiple experiences.

Furthermore, there is a relationship between whether a respondent underwent hypnosis and whether they claimed to experience a physical exam ($p = .002$) (see Table 4). About 64% of those hypnotized reported a physical exam versus only 36% of those who were not hypnotized.

Researchers need to clearly differentiate whether hypnosis was used to initially recall an abduction experience, or whether it was used to further explore an already discovered abduction experience. In addition, researchers should discern whether participants are working with a support group or therapist and using alternate forms

Table 3. Multiple Abductions by Hypnosis

	Hypnosis Used		Total
	No	Yes	
Single	13 (16.7%)	3 (5.8%)	16 (12.3%)
Multiple	65 (83.3%)	49 (94.2%)	114 (87.7%)
Total	78 (100.0%)	52 (100.0%)	130 (100.0%)

Table 4. Physical Exam by Hypnosis

	Hypnosis Used		Total
	No	Yes	
No physical exam	50 (64.1%)	19 (36.5%)	69 (53.1%)
Physical exam	28 (35.9%)	33 (63.5%)	61 (46.9%)
Total	78 (100.0%)	52 (100.0%)	130 (100.0%)

of consciousness to explore memories of their experiences. The fact that commonly known characteristics are more often reported by those who undergo hypnosis must serve as a warning flag to researchers and clinicians alike of the dangers of confabulation and memory implantation. Additionally, since hypnosis is positively associated with inclusion in the AAE category, repeat abductions, and the reporting of physical exams, the relationship among these elements should be further examined.

PHYSICAL EXAM AND ENCOUNTER TYPE

Finally, as an individual's reports more closely conform to the standard abduction narrative, so too is that individual more likely to report experiencing a physical exam, ($p < .005$) (Table 5). Thus, 68.9% in the AAE category report having an exam.

While not discounting the importance of Rodeghier, et al.'s (1991) characterization scheme, the current findings encourage researchers to continue to think about the defining characteristics of an abduction experience. Is it an "abduction" only if a physical exam is experienced? Is it no longer a "visitation" if the experience is negative or if a physical examination provided? What is it when an individual reports going willingly to a nonterrestrial location and undergoing reproductive examinations? Further research could help operationalize each of these categories and determine what, if any, are the significant corollaries.

Positive vs. negative experience. Despite the prevalence of evil, baby-stealing aliens in the mass media, the experiences of people who report alien abductions are frequently positive, which is consistent with the expectations of the general public. According to a CNN poll conducted in 1997, 44% of respondents said they believed that extraterrestrials would be friendly, while only 26% expected aliens to be hostile. In the current study 50% of the respondents indicated that their experiences were predominately positive. Similarly, Bader's (2003) survey recorded that 47.1% describe their experience as positive. In the current study, 28.5% reported that their experiences had both positive and negative aspects, and only 20.8% described their experiences to be primarily negative. No trends were evident when quality of experience was broken down according to encounter type.

Harder (1994) reported that in a sample of 29 individuals who had a conscious memory of physical contact, 25 of them reported having a "good feeling" about their experience. In addition, 22 reported having continuing interactions with extraterres-

Table 5. Physical Exam by Encounter Type

Encounter Type	Physical Exam		Total
	No	Yes	
Possible AAE	21 (80.8%)	5 (19.2%)	26 (100.0%)
Visitee	21 (87.5%)	3 (12.5%)	24 (100.0%)
AAE	23 (31.1%)	51 (68.9%)	74 (100.0%)
Psychic AAE	4 (66.7%)	2 (33.3%)	6 (100.0%)
Total	69 (53.1%)	61 (46.9%)	130 (100.0%)

trials. Harder (1994, p. 28) noted this was consistent with other researchers who have posited that initial fear reactions are soon replaced by positive feelings.

One thing to note about the quality of the experience as described by AAEs is the seeming inconsistency between experience and attribution. Many individuals talk of painful medical examinations and frightening situations, yet simultaneously describe their experience as a positive thing. Twenty-five (43.1%) respondents in the current study who report physical exams also report having a positive experience. The fact that these people have attributed a larger purpose or meaning to their experience is important. Some AAEs claim that those individuals who think the aliens are acting in the best interest of humans are really simply deluded. Likewise, experiencers who report a positive experience explain that those individuals who are having negative experiences simply have not yet come to recognize the larger purpose of abductions. The ways these people explain the motives and intent of the aliens certainly warrants further exploration, as do the argumentative and justificatory positions they assume.

Message for humanity. An additional noteworthy result is that as individuals report an increasingly definite experience, the likelihood that they will report receiving a message for humanity increases ($p = .043$) (see Table 6). This finding may not be particularly surprising considering the way the various types of accounts are defined. For example, within possible AAEs, experiencers do not remember any beings and only have hazy, general feelings about any type of interactions which may have gone on. It is not surprising then that they would not report having received a message from extraterrestrials. Those experiencers in the AAE category, on the other hand, often report both physical and mental interactions with extraterrestrials, so the likelihood of them receiving a message obviously increases.

PSI abilities. One of the most striking relationships is between AAEs and psychic abilities. Although a full 50% of the general population generally report they believe in E.S.P, an overwhelming 93.8% of those in the current study claim to actually possess some sort of psychic ability—ESP, clairvoyance, precognition, or psychokinesis.¹⁵ The likelihood of an individual reporting paranormal abilities is not related to the type of experience they claim to have had.

Abduction literature has noted that paranormal abilities are often cited by experiencers to be a result of their abduction (Appelle, Lynn, & Newman, 2000; Bullard, 1994; Ring, 1992). Some AAEs also cite their purported paranormal abili-

Table 6. Message by Encounter Type

Encounter Type	Message		Total
	No	Yes	
Possible AAE	19 (73.1%)	7 (26.9%)	26 (100.0%)
Visitee	9 (37.5%)	15 (62.5%)	24 (100.0%)
AAE	33 (44.6%)	41 (55.4%)	74 (100.0%)
Psychic AAE	2 (40.0%)	3 (60.0%)	5 (100.0%)
Total	63 (48.8%)	66 (51.2%)	129 (100.0%)

ties as the reason why they were chosen for abduction. They claim that because they are more open to alternative realities, or because they possess paranormal abilities, the extraterrestrials chose to contact them.

Unfortunately, many times, the connection between belief in their paranormal abilities and alien abduction works to portray the AAE as abnormal. Auton, Pope, and Seeger (2003, p. 718) reported that “paranormal belief is not indicative of psychopathology.” Their study actually found that high believers in the paranormal function “just as normally as low believers.” There were, however, environmental factors that were consistent within level of belief for participants. For example, high believers had more friends with similar beliefs and watched more paranormally oriented television programming.

Healing powers. One characteristic common to AAEs that has not yet been widely reported concerns the belief that they can psychically heal themselves or others. Although this belief is not related to the type of encounter experienced, 61.7% of the respondents reported that they could heal themselves or others.

Again, as with paranormal abilities, this is a higher percentage than those in the general population who even believe such a thing is possible. According to a 2001 Gallup poll, 54% of those asked believed that psychic healing was possible. This same poll reported that the number of people who believe in “psychic or spiritual healing” has increased 8% since 1990. A similar increase was reported in a 1997 Yankelovich Partners poll that compared belief levels measured in 1976 to those of 1997. In 1976, only 10% of respondents reported they believed in “faith healing,” whereas in 1997 that number had increased to 45% (Nisbet, 1997).

Past lives. Another significant difference between the AAE population and the general population concerns the belief that they have lived a past life. Gallup Polls since 1990 have indicated a general belief in the possibility of reincarnation. In 2001, for example, 25% of those asked believed in the possibility of reincarnation.

Although many people believe in the possibility, not many report actually believing they have lived a past life. In 1990 and 1996, the Gallup Poll asked people if they “felt that you were here on Earth in a previous life or existence in another body.” In 1990, 8%, and in 1996, only 9%, believed that they had. Many of the AAEs (88, or 68.8%) in the current study report they have lived a past life. Some of the respondents report that in those past lives they were then too in contact with extraterrestrials. Those respondents in the possible AAE group were less likely to report belief in a past life ($p = .005$).

Vivid dreams. One of the more terrestrial explanations of what is happening to these people concerns sleep disturbances. Hypnagogic and hypnopompic imagery—particularly vivid dreams or sensations experienced just as one falls asleep or awakens—may be able to account for some of the reported extraterrestrial encounters. However, Rodeghier (1994, p. 298) asked 24 AAEs “Have you ever experienced particularly vivid dreams while falling asleep or just before waking?” Twenty percent reported hypnagogic imagery and “about the same proportion” had the experience of hypnopompic imagery upon awakening. Neither of these figures, according

to Rodeghier, is “excessively high.” In the current study, 89.1% reported that they had experienced vivid dreams in their lifetime. Several respondents made marginal notes when answering “yes” to this question that indicated they “had also had an abduction” or that “it was nothing like an abduction.” It is interesting that these respondents distinguished between the two experiences, most likely because they too are aware of attempts to explain alien abduction experiences as incidences of sleep disturbances. Again, the experiencing of vivid dreams was not related to a particular encounter type.

LIMITATIONS/CONCLUSIONS

Any study which purports to describe the population of alien abduction experiencers is invariably limited in its generalizability for a number of reasons. First, many individuals who claim contact with extraterrestrials are reluctant to come forward and report their experiences. Currently, all data on AAEs is based on individuals who self-selected and chose to share their experiences. The differences between those who come forward with their experiences and those unwilling to share their experiences would certainly be interesting, but is currently impossible to discover. Additionally, this sample may be biased since these respondents had access to the internet and/or the ability to attend UFO conferences, both of which require at least some amount of disposable income.¹⁶ Finally, the small number of respondents who reported psychic abductions limits conclusions about that group.

A further limitation applicable to all of these measures concerns the context in which the data is gathered. Psychological research has shown that people are more likely to express belief in paranormal abilities when the researcher has a personal belief in paranormal abilities (see Smith, Foster, & Stovin, 1998, for a summary of relevant research). That is not to say that the attitude of the researcher changes the belief of the percipient, but it can change the willingness of the experiencer to express that belief. In terms of this sample, participants were assured of their anonymity. In addition, some remarked they had worked with an abduction researcher, were part of a support group, or were actually interviewed at an experiencer conference: Each of these variables would make subjects more comfortable expressing nontraditional beliefs. Furthermore, many AAEs made several credibility claims when writing to the author. “I know this sounds crazy but . . .” or “I’m really a highly functional person by society’s measures. . . .” Comments like these were often included in the materials returned by the respondent. It is not unreasonable to think that some of this is due to the unknown nature and perspective of the author. Similarly sympathetic situations should be created to measure the extent to which the general population would express belief or possession of paranormal abilities.

In summary, this study cannot claim to have fully explored all possible characteristics or potential contributors to the alien abduction experience. However, it does begin to examine the main source of evidence and testimony regarding the nature of these events—the AAEs themselves.

FOOTNOTES

1. A second survey, conducted by the Roper Organization in 1998, used the same “indicators.” Results seem to indicate the number of potential AAEs dropped significantly—from over 3.7 million in 1991 to 2.2 million in 1998. Rodeghier (2000, pp. 22–23) discusses some of the biases or sampling errors that may account for this decline.
2. A complete data set was received from Professor Bader after personal correspondence.
3. This survey can be found under the author’s research links at www.bates.edu/~skelley/.
4. The author wishes to thank the many experiencers who continue to respond as new issues are raised.
5. Not all subjects chose to respond to all follow-up questions. For example, several individuals were unwilling to answer questions about their psychic abilities or questions they perceived as judging their mental state. Footnotes indicate where $N < 130$ for the remainder of the essay.
6. Bullard (1987) introduced this term to describe alien “contact” without bodily transportation.
7. Percentages do not equal 100%, as there was one subject who indicated “other” as his/her sex.
8. Tables including raw numbers according to encounter type are included in Appendix A; only when results warranted further discussion or were significant were they included in the text.
9. Personal correspondence.
10. Personal correspondence.
11. Concerning marital status, $N=106$. Twenty-four participants did not provide a response regarding marital status.
12. Not in labor force included: retired, homemaker, unemployed, and student.
13. Although this relationship only *approaches* significance, the fact that only 6 psychic AAEs were included in the sample warrants its inclusion for discussion.
14. For this query, $N=87$. Although general data collection began in 1996, this specific question was not added until 1998. Whenever possible, respondents were re-contacted to gather this information. In other instances, they were unwilling to provide this information.
15. Of those who claimed to have paranormal abilities, 86% reported having ESP, 78.3% clairvoyance, 82.2% precognition, and 48.8% psychokinesis.
16. Although some people contacted the author via regular mail after her name appeared in the *Idiot’s Guide to Extraterrestrial Intelligence*, the majority of participants responded via email.

APPENDIX A

Encounter Type by Gender

Encounter Type	Male	Female	Other	Total
Possible AAE	13	13	0	26
Visitee	12	12	0	24
AAE	32	41	1	74
Psychic AAE	2	4	0	6
Total	59	70	1	130

Encounter Type by Race

Encounter Type	Caucasian	African-American	Hispanic	Native American	Other	Total
Possible AAE	24	0	0	0	2	26
Visitee	19	2	0	1	2	24
AAE	63	1	3	4	3	74
Psychic AAE	5	0	0	0	1	6
Total	111	3	3	5	8	130

Encounter Type by Education

Encounter Type	<9th	9-12	H.S. Grad	Some College	College Grad	Some Grad	Grad Degree	Total
Possible AAE	0	1	7	12	5	1	0	26
Visitee	1	1	2	12	4	0	4	24
AAE	0	1	11	36	11	5	9	73
Psychic AAE	1	0	1	4	0	0	0	6
Total	2	3	21	64	20	6	13	129

Encounter Type by Marital Status

Encounter Type	Single	Married	Divorced	Widowed	Other	Total
Possible AAE	9	9	5	0	0	23
Visitee	6	8	2	0	0	16
AAE	17	34	8	2	1	62
Psychic AAE	3	0	1	1	0	5
Total	35	51	16	3	1	106

Encounter Type by Occupation

Encounter Type	Retired/ Unempl. Student Labor Sales Mgmt. Profess. Comp. Artist At Home Self-Empl.									Total	
	Unempl.	Student	Labor	Sales	Mgmt.	Profess.	Comp.	Artist	At Home		Self-Empl.
Possible AAE	0	6	5	5	2	2	1	3	2	0	26
Visitee	0	2	2	5	1	4	2	2	1	5	24
AAE	2	8	10	6	9	19	5	6	5	4	74
Psychic AAE	3	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	6
Total	5	17	17	17	12	25	8	12	8	9	130

Age of First Abduction by Encounter Type

Encounter Type	Reported Age at First Abduction				Total
	0-5	6-10	11-30	31+	
Possible AAE	13	2	8	2	25
Visitee	11	3	5	5	24
AAE	39	12	12	6	69
Psychic AAE	1	1	2	2	6
Total	64	18	27	15	124

Genetic Link to Aliens by Encounter Type

Encounter Type	Genetic Link		Total
	No	Yes	
Possible AAE	15	11	26
Visitee	13	11	24
AAE	31	43	74
Psychic AAE	2	4	6
Total	61	69	130

Encounter Type by Abuse

Encounter Type	Abuse		Total
	No	Yes	
Possible AAE	10	8	18
Visitee	8	3	11
AAE	32	23	55
Psychic AAE	2	1	3
Total	52	35	87

Quality of Experience by Encounter Type

Encounter Type	Negative	Positive	Neither/Both	Total
Possible AAE	6	9	11	26
Visitee	2	13	9	24
AAE	19	39	16	74
Psychic AAE	0	4	1	5
Total	27	65	37	129

Psychic Abilities by Encounter Type

Encounter Type	Psi		Total
	No	Yes	
Possible AAE	2	24	26
Visitee	2	22	24
AAE	4	69	73
Psychic AAE	0	6	6
Total	8	121	129

Healing Abilities by Encounter Type

Encounter Type	Healing		Total
	No	Yes	
Possible AAE	12	14	26
Visitee	7	16	23
AAE	29	44	73
Psychic AAE	1	5	6
Total	49	79	128

Past Lives by Encounter Type

Encounter Type	Past Life		Total
	No	Yes	
Possible AAE	14	11	25
Visitee	9	15	24
AAE	17	56	73
Psychic AAE	0	6	6
Total	40	88	128

Vivid Dreams by Encounter Type

Encounter Type	Vivid Dreams		Total
	No	Yes	
Possible AAE	3	23	26
Visitee	1	23	24
AAE	9	64	73
Psychic AAE	1	5	6
Total	14	115	129

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