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Shamanism and alien abductions: a comparative study

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Shamanism and Alien Abductions
A Comparative Study.

by

Simon Brian Harvey-Wilson, B.A. (ANU)

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the award
of
Master of Arts (Religious Studies)

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and
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Abstract

Some UFO researchers (ufologists) claim that being abducted by aliens can be compared with shamanic initiation experiences in traditional societies in that both types of experience may be similarly transformative, leading to a more spiritual or animistic world-view, a deep concern for the environment and the development of paranormal abilities such as healing. This qualitative study is designed to investigate the validity of such claims. The research aim is to see whether the experiences and subsequent world-view of eleven alien abductees (eight women and three men) from a local abduction support group are similar to those of the typical shaman and, if so, what those similarities are. To do this, material gathered from in-depth interviews with the abductees is compared with the anthropological literature on shamanism, especially shamanic initiation experiences, from all parts of the world.
Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

1. incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;

2. contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or

3. contain any defamatory material.

Signed: ________________________________

Date: 20/12/2001
Acknowledgments

I wish to thank Mary Rodwell and those members of the abduction support group without whose co-operation this research would not have been possible. Thank you also to my supervisor Anne Harris for her patience, support and encouragement.
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Chapter 1  Introduction

1.1 Background

The physicist Paul Davies, who won the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion in May 1995, writes that:

The discovery of life beyond Earth would transform not only our science but also our religions, our belief systems and our entire world view. For in a sense, the search for extraterrestrial life is really a search for ourselves — who we are and what our place is in the grand sweep of the cosmos. (1996, p.66)

In his book Are We Alone? Implications of the Discovery of Extraterrestrial Life (1995), Davies also notes the spiritual component of some UFO beliefs. “What we see in the UFO culture seems to be an expression in the quasi-technological language appropriate to our space age of ancient supernatural beliefs, many of which are an integral part of the folk memory of all cultures” (p.87).

Reports of UFOs, alien abductions and paranormal phenomena, whether factual, fictitious or a mix of the two, are becoming increasingly popular in the Western media. Television programs such as The X Files and Roswell, films such as Independence Day and Men In Black, numerous books, and a proliferation of Internet sites, attest to the public’s fascination with these subjects.

A cover story in LIFE Magazine (Fox, 2000, p.46) discusses the paradoxical situation whereby the relatively new science of astrobiology, sponsored largely by the Unites States space agency NASA, believes that life almost certainly exists elsewhere in the universe but has not yet visited Earth, while on the other hand a January 2000 LIFE Magazine poll of 1,564 over-eighteen-year-olds revealed that 30% of them believed that extraterrestrial beings had already visited Earth (Fox, 2000, p.56). Furthermore, 43% of those polled believed that UFOs were real; 49% of them believed that the US government was withholding information about the existence of UFOs; while 1% claimed to have “had an encounter with beings from another planet,” and 6% knew someone who had had such an encounter (p.56).
The article also suggests a religious component to the belief in extraterrestrial beings. "Mainstream religion once protected most of us from that dark, frightening sky: God lived there. But the more our probes reach into it — and come up empty — the more we flail about, fashioning our own explanations" (Fox, 2000, p.56).

If those poll results were applied to the entire population of the United States, it would suggest that about 2.5 million American citizens (1% of 250 million) believe they have encountered beings from other planets. There would obviously be those who would dispute such figures, and it is not the purpose of this research to debate them. Nevertheless, as a result of the number of people claiming to have been abducted by aliens, UFO abduction support groups have sprung up in many American and Australian cities in the last few years (Rodwell, 1998, p.30). For example, in 1993, the Harvard psychiatrist Dr John E. Mack founded the Program for Extraordinary Experience Research (PEER) under the auspices of the Center for Psychology and Social Change in Cambridge, Massachusetts. PEER's role is to foster "a deeper understanding of experienced encounters with intelligent nonhuman beings, the phenomenon commonly called 'alien abductions' " (Mack, 1994, p.433).

In June 1992, Mack co-chaired an Abduction Study Conference at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the United States. Papers presented there discussed the nature of evidence for abduction reports; the psychology of abductees and the ethical considerations involved in studying and assisting them; various hypotheses to explain abductions; and where abduction researchers should look next (Pritchard, Pritchard, Mack, Kasey & Yapp, 1994).

A conference paper presented by Alexander (1994) made some astute observations about the difficulty in studying alien abductions. "The needs of participants [abductees] frequently are at odds with those of researchers" (p.343). Abductees generally want help, while researchers want hard data. Numerous possibly competing priorities further confused the issue. If UFOs and abductions are to be taken seriously, then the media might want more sensational stories about aliens;
the military might want classified access to propulsion and energy details; religious leaders might insist on demonising aliens until reassured that their religious beliefs would not undermine current doctrine; exobiologists might want the specifics of extraterrestrial anatomy; and politicians might be worried about financial chaos, social disruption, and a possible loss of authority. Alexander also claims that:

It is my contention that we may be faced with a meta-phenomenon. That is NDEs [near-death experiences], abductions, and other phenomena may be part of something far more complex than initially thought. To arbitrarily isolate one phenomenon based on precipitating stimuli may mean that we fail to recognise the true magnitude of the issues involved. It further appears that human, or other, consciousness plays some significant role in all of the phenomena we are discussing. (1994, p.347)

This suggests that an understanding of alien abductions may not be easy to find. It is now possible to obtain well documented ufology magazines such as the monthly MUFON UFO Journal, edited by the USA based Mutual UFO Network (MU FON), and the less frequently published International UFO Reporter and the Journal of UFO Studies, produced by the J. Allen Hynek Centre for UFO Studies in Chicago. There are also a larger number of less scholarly popular magazines, videos, television programs and books being published in this field. However, given the shortage of systematic scholarly research into ufology, as well as the difficulties mentioned above, trying to sort out fact from fiction and genuine research from rumour is very difficult for the average consumer. Any research that might shed light on the subject could therefore be of significant assistance.

Shamanism, too, is making a popular resurgence in Western societies, especially among New Age enthusiasts. For example, the September 1999 issue of the Western Australian magazine NOVA (circulation over thirty-three thousand) contains several advertisements for courses in shamanic healing and vision quests (NOVA, pp.4,7,25,32). Popular books such as Michael Harner's The Way of the Shaman (1990) and various Internet sites have helped lead a modern shamanic renaissance, so that with — and often without — appropriate training, city-based Westerners can now claim to have become 'urban shamans'.
Shamanism is thought to have originated in Siberia and Central Asia (Gulley, 1991, p.540), but the term is now used to refer to similar practices in many parts of the world, such as the Amazon basin, North America, Oceania, and Africa. It is believed that shamanism is the oldest form of religious activity, with evidence dating back thousands of years, such as cave paintings and carvings of people dressed in animal skins, resembling outfits still used by some shamans today. Joan Halifax (1982) writes that, “a common thread seems to connect all shamans across the planet. An awakening to other orders of reality, the experience of ecstasy, and an opening up of visionary realms, form the essence of the shamanic mission” (p.5).

The traditional shaman may simultaneously be the local healer, social worker, clairvoyant and magician, as well as guardian (and to a certain extent creator) of a tribe’s mythology. Most of these skills derive from shamans’ ability to enter what they believe is the spirit world via trance or altered state of consciousness, often induced by drumming (Harner, 1990, p.50). The cultural beliefs in shamanistic societies all over the world that support this behaviour are that a spirit world does exist; that shamans can liaise between it and normal reality; and that it is inhabited by spirits who will help heal various sicknesses at the shaman’s bidding. That these beliefs do exist is not disputed by most anthropologists who study shamanism (Vitebsky, 1995, p.98). It is important to emphasise that, having documented the similarities in shamanistic behaviour around the world, most anthropologists now believe that all shamans are following the same set of core beliefs with local cultural variations. As Narby points out, it was Mircea Eliade in his classic book *Shamanism. Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (1951/1989) who:

identified astonishing similarities in the practices and concepts of shamans the world over. Wherever these ‘technicians of ecstasy’ operate, they specialise in a trance during which their ‘soul is believed to leave the body and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld.’ They all speak a ‘secret language’ which they learn directly from the spirits, by imitation…. They consider these spirits to have come from the sky and to have created life on earth. (Narby, 1998, p.17)
Likewise in his book *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (1949/1993), the mythologist Joseph Campbell notes the similarities in accounts of shamanic journeys the world over:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man. (p.30)

Shamanic initiation experiences can sometimes be unexpected and frightening in that they involve the apparent 'selection' by various spirits of a particular person who up till then may have had no desire to become a shaman (Eliade, 1951/1989). In 1989, the American folklorist Thomas E. Bullard published an article about UFO abduction reports entitled “The Supernatural Kidnap Narrative Returns in Technological Guise” which claimed that, “These accounts share many motifs with legends of supernatural encounters and otherworldly journeys” (p.147).

Echoing this theme, in 1990 Australian UFO researcher Bill Chalker published an article noting the similarities between alien abductions reports and descriptions of shamanic initiations from around the world, including the Australian Aboriginal tradition. Put simply, both involve capture by strange beings or sky spirits, followed by transportation to an otherworldly location where the person may be medically examined or interfered with in some manner, sometimes even being implanted with strange objects such as crystals. This may be followed by a conference of sorts with the abductors or sky spirits and a guided tour of a seemingly spiritual realm or craft. Upon return the person may be confused, marked by recent scars, and may later claim to have developed various paranormal abilities (Chalker, 1990, p.20).

In shamanistic societies, initiates have a cultural background that supports their belief that they have visited a spirit realm, while abductees from non-shamanistic societies may have little relevant context in which to place their experiences. If they have previously rejected the existence of UFOs and paranormal abilities, they may be reluctant to embrace an explanation for their experiences in those terms, and so
may repress the memories of their close encounter, or tell themselves that they have had an extraordinary nightmare or nervous breakdown.

In tribal societies initiate shamans are expected to undergo appropriate training to become otherworld travellers or living connections between the spirit realm and normal reality. Although sometimes dangerous, their role is a valued one and shamans with powerful healing abilities are highly prized. In social terms, their work has a recognised and productive function. On the other hand, in Western societies people who think they have been abducted by aliens have been regarded as suffering from some form of personality defect or mental illness, although that may now be changing slightly as the subject becomes more widely publicised. Many abductees nevertheless prefer to remain anonymous, although a small number integrate their experiences in a positive fashion and are able to publicise them with few ill effects (Robinson, 1998).

As revealed by the March 1997 ‘Heavens Gate’ incident in San Diego, California, when thirty-nine people from a religious group killed themselves because they believed that an alien spaceship was awaiting the arrival of their souls, a mix of New Age spirituality and UFO beliefs can be extremely potent, and sometimes fatal. As Rodwell (1998) points out, an increasing number of health care professionals in Australia and in the USA are finding bewildered or traumatised patients presenting with symptoms of what appears to be the abductee version of Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome — called Post Abduction Syndrome by some abduction counsellors — only to realise that they have little relevant information or experience in dealing with such matters.

Whether or not one chooses to believe in the veracity of paranormal events, UFO sightings or alien abductions, any research that helps reveal whether there does exist a connection between the experiences of alien abductees and shamanic initiations in at least one Western city may be of significant scientific, social, religious and therapeutic value as more and more people are either having these
baffling experiences themselves, or are hearing about others who claim to have had them.

1.2 Research question

The research question for this study is whether any of the alien abductees that are interviewed have had experiences similar to shamanic experiences, especially initiation experiences, and if so, what are those similarities, and what are the differences? It is not the purpose of this project to attempt to prove that UFOs, abductions by extraterrestrials, paranormal abilities, or a shamanic spirit realm actually exist. However there is evidence that there are those who firmly believe they do exist and who act accordingly. Before ufologists or anthropologists can attempt to explain the claimed similarities between shamanic experiences and alien abduction experiences it needs to be reliably established whether such similarities do actually exist and, if so, what they are. This may be difficult given that, despite their core similarities, shamanic initiation experiences do vary from place to place and may occur over varying lengths of time.

In traditional societies it is generally only the shaman who undergoes initiatory experiences into the realm of the spirits, although mythological descriptions of such celestial journeys and an acceptance of the eventual social benefits of them are widespread (Campbell, 1993; Nicholson, 1987). Of the abduction phenomenon we could ask whether abductees are all undergoing shamanic-like experiences or just some of them? The previous spiritual beliefs of abductees may also be relevant to their interpretation of their experiences. Some people may occasionally have spiritual or shamanic-like experiences that are in no way connected to abductions, but which get misinterpreted as such.

The investigation of alien abduction experiences can at times be complex because many abductees claim to have been abducted more than once. The UFO literature reports that such experiences may begin in childhood although at the time they may not have been interpreted as having anything to do with UFOs or aliens (Mack, 2000, p.247). It is therefore impractical to limit this research to a comparison
between only shamanic initiation experiences and the first time someone was abducted by aliens, because this excludes both subsequent shamanic and abduction experiences. This study will therefore concentrate on the similarity between abduction experiences and shamanic experiences in general while noting that, whether it was during childhood or later life, the manner and context in which they started may be of particular significance to both shamans and abductees.

Some ufologists feel that investigating the religious, spiritual, or paranormal dimensions of the abduction phenomenon is an unwarranted, pseudo-scientific endeavour that does little more than bring ufology, and perhaps science, into disrepute. For example, Jerome Clark, the influential editor of the *International UFO Reporter*, writes disapprovingly of ufologists concentrating on the bizarre or ‘high strangeness’ aspects of close encounters:

> Of such things we can say only that experiences of them are possible, but the question of whether these experiences are events is another matter altogether.... We would be better advised to learn to differentiate between the experience anomaly and the anomalous event. (1994, p.23)

However, defining anomalous experiences as beyond the reach of scientific investigation could be seen as an obstructionist and somewhat irrational restriction which contradicts the basic ideals of science. For the purpose of this research such comments are noted but judged irrelevant.

One cannot dispute the assertion that science can only investigate the unknown by methodically applying the basic principles of empirical research, for example, by proposing falsifiable hypotheses and then rigorously testing and retesting them to see if they are valid or not. However, in researching shamanism or alien abductions it is difficult to produce testable theories to explain what is happening until there is at least some basic agreement about what it is that is happening. The main purpose of this research, therefore, is to discover whether the experiences of one group of alien abductees bears any significant relationship to the experiences of the typical shaman, because that might help give direction to further research into these apparently baffling reports.
In any discussion of the similarities between two phenomenon it is also important to pay attention to any significant differences between them. As a result of his research into alien abductions, Bullard (1991) points out that, “The UFO phenomenon complicates rather than simplifies with further inquiries. If nothing else, it is a parable in the sky to teach that alleged or real-world phenomena need investigation from many perspectives” (p.49). Even if this research does find numerous similarities between shamanic initiations and alien abductions, considerably more research will undoubtedly be needed before a clear understanding of these experiences will emerge.

1.3 Organisation of the thesis
The introductory chapter sets the scene and provides the background, the cultural and scientific context and justification for this qualitative research, leading to the research question. The literature review falls into two main sections because, as a cross-disciplinary project, this research involves the seemingly unrelated fields of shamanism (which is normally studied by anthropologists) and ufology. The two sections are dealt with differently. The anthropological section notes that there are sufficient books that document and discuss shamanic (initiation) experiences in a variety of countries to provide material with which to compare the results of the interviews with the alien abductees. The ufology section reviews in more detail those books that are considered relevant to a comparison between alien abductions and shamanism and discusses their significance within the wider UFO literature.

The methodology section has several subsections. It starts by describing the target population from which the group of interview subjects was obtained. It explains the qualitative research design; the research procedure; the type of questions asked; the ethical considerations required given that human subjects are involved; and the interview analysis method used. It then ends with a validity and reliability section.

The main body of the thesis consists of four interview analysis chapters which document the shamanistic themes found in the eleven alien abductee interview
transcripts and notes to what extent they match or differ from shamanistic experiences. Lastly, the summary and discussion chapter summarises the findings and provides an opportunity to discuss various hypotheses that might help to explain the similarities and differences between shamanism and alien abductions, and which might be the basis for further research.

1.4 Definition of terms
This section provides brief definitions of several frequently used expressions. **Ufology** is the study of the UFO phenomenon which is generally also taken to include alien abductions. In most of the UFO literature today, the terms **alien abduction** and **UFO abduction** have evolved to mean essentially the same thing, so they will be used interchangeably in this thesis. While alien abductions are generally considered to fall under the umbrella of ufology, not all books about UFO phenomena discuss alien abductions, while on the other hand, some ufologists specialise in the abduction phenomenon. It also needs to be made clear that in many instances the term alien abduction is rather misleading. Strictly speaking, the word abduction implies that some sort of crime has been committed against the person involved — similar to being kidnapped — whereas some alien **abductees** would prefer to be described by the less emotive term **experiencer** because they did not object to being 'abducted'. Others are not convinced that the **aliens** that they encounter are genuine **extraterrestrials** or **ETs**, so prefer to refer to them as **visitors** or even as **spiritual beings**. Furthermore, not all abductees are certain that they are actually taken to a physical location during their abductions. For example, some believe that they are moved into another realm or altered state of consciousness, while others report that their abductions occur during realistic dreams or nightmares. Nevertheless, while acknowledging these differing perspectives, for clarity and consistency and because they look likely to remain in common usage, the terms 'alien' and 'abduction' will be used throughout this thesis (except when quoting interview subjects who use other terms) on the understanding that this is not an assertion that some sort of kidnapping by extraterrestrials has occurred, although this possibility is not ruled out. The term **flying saucer** is frequently used to describe those UFOs that look saucer-shaped. However, as UFOs
today are reported in a large variety of shapes, the term is used less frequently now, but, when it is used, it is generally understood to apply to a craft or anomalous flying object of any shape.

Another phrase that will often be used in this thesis is close encounter. The public first came across this phrase in Steven Spielberg’s 1977 UFO film Close Encounters of the Third Kind. It was first defined by astronomer J. Allen Hynek, in his book The UFO Experience (1974), as a UFO sighting or encounter in which “the presence of animated creatures is reported” (p.177). Hynek explained that he had used the word “‘animated’ rather than ‘animate’ to keep open the possibility of robots or something other than ‘flesh and blood’ ” (p.177). Hynek’s UFO encounter categories were adopted by most ufologists because they were useful and because he was regarded by many as the founder of ufology. As professor of astronomy at Northwest University in the USA, Hynek served for more than twenty years as astronomical consultant to the US Air Force’s Projects Sign and Bluebook which investigated UFO sightings of behalf of the US government.

In recent years, largely as a result of the increasing complexity of UFO reports and alien abductions, Hynek’s close encounter categories have been expanded to include encounters of the fourth and fifth kind. This was done at the suggestion of the veteran ufologist Jacques Vallee, who had previously worked with Hynek. Close encounters of the fourth kind, which are the ones most relevant to this research, are defined as ‘Reality Transformation’ experiences “in which the witness has not only seen the occupants [of the UFO] but claims to have extensively interacted with them inside their craft” (Vallee, 1991, p.216). Despite this development, the term close encounter (without reference to any particular ‘kind’) has now evolved to become a general term in the UFO literature to describe any type of alien abduction, alien encounter, or close-up UFO experience, and will be used in this sense throughout this thesis.
CHAPTER 2  Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

A literature review is designed to put a research project into a meaningful context. This project, which is a qualitative comparison between shamanic (initiation) experiences and alien abductions, is by necessity a cross-disciplinary project between aspects of anthropology and ufology. This literature review therefore falls into two sections. The first section reviews that part of the UFO literature that is relevant to the research question. The second section discusses a selection of the anthropological literature that provides examples of shamanic experiences (especially initiation experiences) from various parts of the world, to demonstrate that there exists plenty of available material that can be compared to alien abduction experiences, although little of it actually makes such a comparison.

Which part of the UFO literature is relevant to a comparison between shamanism and alien abductions? The modern study of UFOs is generally considered to have started shortly after World War II, although during the war there were reports of anomalous flying objects that were referred to as ‘foo fighters’ (Story, 1980, p.135). Alien abductions are believed to have begun about ten to fifteen years later with the October, 1957, Villas Boas case in Brazil (ibid., p.382) and the abduction of Barney and Betty Hill from their car on the night of 19-20 September, 1961, in New Hampshire, USA (ibid., p.172).

Before these famous cases, there were a number of people in the United States who claimed to have spoken to aliens from landed flying saucers. Generally referred to as ‘contactees’ (Story, 1980, p.89), they did not claim to have been abducted in a manner similar to modern UFO abduction reports. Contactees are not therefore the subject of this research, and as such will not be discussed as a separate group in this review. However, the existence of contactees and UFO sightings in the years prior to the advent of alien abductions, meant that the early ufology literature had already discussed in general terms the possible origins, motives and nature of UFOs and alien beings before any books about abductions
became available. Many of the theories about aliens in the UFO literature, subsequent to the advent of alien abductions, vary little from those that existed before they were first reported. For this reason, this literature review does not distinguish — except by publication date — between earlier theories about UFOs and the later ones about alien abductions unless they are clearly different.

As no undisputed explanation for UFO sightings and alien abductions currently exists, it is to be expected that the available literature on these subjects discusses a variety of possible explanations. These range from claims that all abductees are deluded, to the assertion that they are the vanguard of a new generation of spiritually advanced beings whose task is to lead humanity through some sort of spiritual transformation away from its headlong rush towards self-destruction and/or environmental catastrophe. Other authors suggest that aliens have no interest in human welfare and are using abductees in a clandestine breeding program for their own purposes (Jacobs, 1998). Some researchers even assert that there exists no proven connection between UFO sightings and abduction experiences (Spencer, 1994, p.338). Very few UFO books compare shamanism with alien abductions in any detail. Some devote a chapter or two to the subject, while several only mention the similarity in passing. This may be because ufology is a relatively new and somewhat controversial subject, or because few ufologists know much about shamanism and few anthropologists know anything about ufology.

I propose therefore, in addition to the literature that does specifically make the shamanism-abduction connection, to review those ufology books that discuss matters that I consider to be closely related to shamanism. For example, in their search for explanations, some ufologists link close encounters to some or all of the following: religion, spirituality, the paranormal, near-death experiences, folklore, mythology, and Jung’s collective unconscious. As these subjects could be said to be related to shamanism it is essential to include such literature in the review.
Most books about alien abductions are written either by ufologists or by abductees, while a few authors claim to be both. Because of the fleeting, paradoxical and unpredictable nature of reported abduction events, researchers often resort to studying the abductees themselves, because at least they are accessible and may themselves be looking for meaningful explanations for their experiences. This often means that books on abductions contain speculation about such matters as the fundamental nature of reality and unknown powers of human consciousness.

Hypotheses about the origins of UFOs and aliens fall roughly into three categories:

1) Firstly, there is the Extraterrestrial Hypothesis (ETH) which states that, whatever their motives, UFOs are some form of extraterrestrial spacecraft from elsewhere within the physical universe. Some researchers object to this theory because of the prohibitive distances from Earth to any possibly inhabited planets, while others assert that any sufficiently advanced civilisation would have surmounted such problems. Other critics of the theory claim that the overall frequency and bizarre paranormal nature or 'strangeness' of close encounters requires a more complex explanation than visiting spaceships.

2) The second hypothesis, called variously the Psychosocial Stress, Psychic Projection, or Cosmic Poltergeist hypothesis, states that UFOs and aliens are some type of paranormal, archetypal, or psychic projection from within either the troubled unconscious minds of individual witnesses, or, on a larger scale, from something like the collective unconscious of an entire society that has got itself out of psychological balance — hence the term psychosocial stress. Proponents may refer to Carl Jung's 1959 book *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Sky* in support of this hypothesis. However, as Jung noted, in suggesting that UFOs are at best only quasi-physical, this hypothesis fails to explain how they could be tracked by radar and leave marks on the ground.

3) The third hypothesis, which I shall call the Otherworld Hypothesis, suggests that UFOs may well be real or solid in some sense, but that they originate from other
dimensions, a parallel universe, or an invisible otherworld inhabited by various spiritual or paranormal entities that can manifest in this world at will to abduct or interact with witnesses. The hypothesis often includes the suggestion that this otherworld is accessible to humans via altered states of consciousness. One difficulty with this hypothesis is that an explanation for close encounters that appeals to a magical, invisible realm and altered states of consciousness simply replaces one mystery with another and provides little clear direction for further empirical research.

There are several variations and permutations to these three basic hypotheses with some researchers discussing all of them impartially, while others strongly advocate one or another. One might observe that hypothesis three — the otherworld hypothesis — is in one sense merely an extension of hypothesis two — the psychosocial stress hypothesis — in that, to varying degrees, both involve largely unproven speculation about the depths of the human psyche and altered states of consciousness. One could also say that both hypotheses result from uncertainty as to whether there really does exist something akin to Jung's collective unconscious and if so, what its parameters are. For example, if such a realm does exist, is it merely each person's private repository of archetypal information, or are all minds somehow telepathically connected by a communal but largely unconscious realm — possibly inhabited by entities with their own independent existence — that holds the key to all sorts of paranormal anomalies, including shamanism and perhaps also alien abductions?

Adding to the confusion is the fact that any speculation about paranormal events and otherworld beings that interact with humans immediately introduces to the discussion religion, spirituality and the notion of good and evil, much to the irritation of those researchers who believe that such matters are unscientific. Concerns as to whether aliens are here to help or harm humanity are quite understandable, but the UFO literature appears to indicate that in discussing such matters some writers have religious preconceptions that at times seriously cloud their judgement. Nevertheless, the fact that such topics are relevant to any discussion of shamanism
— which could also be seen as a form of spiritual interaction with otherworld beings — is one of the justifications for researching any similarities that exist between these two fields.

The shortage of academic research into this subject means that the UFO literature reviewed here ranges from a few well-referenced, scholarly works through to largely unreferenced, popular magazines and books. For example, at the onset of this research I discovered that my university library had very few books on alien abductions, yet the state public library system had numerous popular books on the subject distributed through its suburban libraries, some actually written by academics.

It would seem appropriate therefore to start the review of the relevant ufology literature with those few researchers who have specifically discussed the abduction-shamanism connection, to be followed by those who merely note the connection in passing and those who discuss the seemingly related topics mentioned above but who do not actually mention the word shamanism.

2.2 Review of UFO literature

One of the best known academic researchers in this field and a professor of psychiatry at the Harvard Medical School, Mack (1994), asserts that the alien abductees he has studied are not suffering from any known form of mental illness and are therefore probably reporting authentic experiences. Harvard University’s negative reaction to Mack’s work with abductees perhaps illustrates why there is so little academic research in this field. After the publication of his 1994 book on abductions, amid rumours of his imminent dismissal, the university convened a committee of investigation which resulted in “a letter from the Dean saying that I should do my work meeting the standards of the Harvard Medical School” (Casteel, 2000, p.41). While discussing the meaning of the abduction experiences described in his 1994 book, Mack mentions various spiritual and shamanistic similarities and, in reviewing the UFO literature available up to its publication, he writes:
None of this work, in my view, has come to terms with the profound implications of the abduction phenomenon for the expansion of human consciousness, the opening of perception to realities beyond the manifest physical world and the necessity of changing our place in the cosmic order if the earth's living systems are to survive the human onslaught. (p.15)

Mack's second book on the abduction phenomenon, *Passport to the Cosmos* (2000a), appears to be the most relevant to this research written so far. It pays particular attention to the transformative effects of abduction experiences and goes into more detail about the shamanic connection. In his chapter "Shamans, Symbols, and Archetypes" (p.135) Mack notes the comparison with shamanic journeys and how many of the images described in abductees' narratives seem to be of archetypal significance. It has long been claimed by ufologists that on occasions aliens disguise themselves in a variety of ways, perhaps to lessen the trauma to abductees and/or perhaps to illustrate the richness and depth of their capacity to communicate. This tendency to indulge in 'screen imagery', as it is called, could also be seen as a deceptive tactic or as an illustration of the extent to which some abductees are merely projecting their inner concerns onto the situation. Whatever the reason, it certainly makes it difficult to suggest explanations for these events. It may therefore be of assistance to note the apparent similarity between those images reported in shamanism and those seen during abductions as Mack (2000a) has done. Specifically, he discusses the symbolism of various types of animals or animal spirits (p.139) and "symbols of birth, rebirth, death, and transcendence" (p.151).

In the book Mack also interviews some shamans who themselves claim to have been abducted by aliens. They point out that something akin to the alien abduction experience has been an integral part of their spiritual traditions for generations and that they tend to regard alien beings as yet another manifestation of the spirit realm (Mack, 2000a, p.170). While Mack does not appear to have set out primarily to demonstrate the abduction/shamanism connection, his most recent work shows that such similarities do exist in the experiences of those abductees whom he has interviewed.
Another academic who has worked in this field is Ring (1992), a professor of psychology at the University of Connecticut, who discusses the results of his study into the similarities between UFO close encounters and near-death experiences, but also notes their similarity to shamanic experiences. Ring's survey did not specifically set out to investigate the shamanic connection, but does discuss it in some detail. He notes that alien abduction experiences are often recalled as being dreamlike (p.65), that they can be frightening (p.42), and that they frequently have childhood antecedents which may result in abductees developing "an extended range of human perception beyond normally recognised limits" (p.146). He also discovered that, after their experiences, abductees reported significant psychophysical changes such as increased sensitivity to electromagnetic fields, mood fluctuations, increased information processing capacity and the development of various paranormal abilities (pp.153 & 277). Ring devotes a chapter to "Beliefs and value shifts following extraordinary encounters" (p.173), noting that his subjects reported significant increases in their appreciation for life, as well as social and ecological matters (p.174). They also reported an increased interest in spiritual issues accompanied by a belief that what had happened to them was part of a general expansion or development of human consciousness (p.191). In discussing the meaning of these experiences, Ring notes that, "abductions may represent a particularly contemporary form of shamanic journey — one that fits and is phrased in terms of a highly technological society that has already turned its imaginative attention to star flight (1992, p.218). Ring concludes with the suggestion that, "the increasing fascination with and immersion in the domain of extraordinary encounters may well presage the shamanizing of modern humanity" (p.239, his italics). Like many other researchers, Ring favours the otherworld theory to explain close encounters and adopts the term 'the imaginal realm' which was "originally proposed by a renowned French Islamic scholar Henry Corbin in 1972" (p.219). Accessible by altered states of consciousness, Ring writes that, "Not only is the imaginal realm ontologically real, it is also a world that has form, dimension, and most important for us, persons or entities" (1992, p.221, his italics). Ring's otherworld conclusions are of relevance to this research because they closely mirror shamanistic beliefs. However, it must be recalled that his research goal was only to
compare alien abductions and near-death experiences. His subject questionnaire, while comprehensive in that it contained questions designed to elicit subjects' religious and spiritual beliefs, did not specifically set out to compare abduction experiences with shamanic ones.

As mentioned in the introduction, Bullard, a folklorist from the University of Indiana, has produced a comparative study of alien abductions covering seventeen different countries (1987). This is considered by many ufologists to be the most comprehensive survey of the abduction phenomenon to date. In a later article he states that the structure of typical abduction reports closely mirrors that of traditional otherworldly journeys. He writes that abduction narratives "concern extranormal events, notably a meeting with 'otherworldly' and usually nonhuman beings possessed of extraordinary powers much like the traditional supernatural beings of belief legends" (1989, p.152). This was perhaps the first piece of scholarly research on abductions to outline such a similarity. Bullard's conclusion after reviewing several hundred abduction reports was that:

The abduction story consists of a maximum of eight episodes in the following order:

1. Capture. Strange beings seize and take the witness aboard a UFO.
2. Examination. These beings subject the witness to a physical and mental examination.
3. Conference. A conversation with the beings follows.
4. Tour. The beings show their captive around the ship.
5. Otherworldly Journey. The ship flies the witness to some strange and unearthly place.
6. Theophany. An encounter with a divine being occurs.
7. Return. At last the witness comes back to Earth, leaves the ship, and re-enters normal life.

Although not all these episodes occur to all abductees, it is clear that their overall pattern mirrors in several ways the heroic journey of the shaman as described, for example, by Campbell (1949/1993). Bullard also notes that apart from their belief "that something real and strange happened to them, a great deal of puzzlement often besets the abductees. They only occasionally share the ufologists' certitude about the nature of the experience and may be reticent to settle on any
explanation" (1989, p.151). If true, this may explain why there exist many different explanations for alien abductions. Bullard, however, warns that seeking meaningful comparisons between abductions, near-death experiences, shamanic initiations, and various other New Age phenomena, “may be overrated, depending too much on superficial analogies and too little on verifiable homologies. Similarities between abductions and cultural phenomena such as shamanic initiations are easy to find but are they meaningful?” (1991, p.36).

Jacobs, who is Director of the Centre for Abduction Research in the USA, is another of the few mainstream academics who has studied this phenomenon. He is currently Associate Professor of History at Temple University in Philadelphia, and claims to teach the only regularly scheduled undergraduate university course on ufology in the United States. His doctoral dissertation, “focussed on the controversy over unidentified flying objects in America from the perspective of intellectual, social, and military history” (Jacobs, 1998, p.12), and an expanded version was later published as *The UFO Controversy in America* (1975). Since then he has written two books about abductions. As an historian, Jacobs’ attitude towards abductions differs from that of, for example, Mack (1994, 1999) who, as a psychiatrist, emphasises the transformative and spiritual dimensions of the experience.

Jacobs believes that abduction reports should be taken literally and are the result of real aliens carrying out a breeding program for their own unspecified purposes, using unwitting and often traumatised human subjects. Speaking of aliens he asserts that, “They are not here to help us. They have their own agenda, and we are not allowed to know its full parameters” (1992, p.305). He dismisses the similarities between modern abduction narratives and traditional folklore, noted by some other ufologists, saying that for them, “facile resemblances become complex modern duplicates” (p.298). He is equally dismissive of theories that invoke Jung’s collective unconscious or alternative realities, claiming that such theories suggest that it is the abductees themselves who are generating such realities and the abducting aliens within them. He points out that if this were possible, people would
“instead create physical realities wherein their deepest fantasies could be played out” (1992, p.301). Jacobs does not mention shamanism in either of his abduction books, and seems to be ignoring the possibility that alternative realities, other dimension or parallel universes might exist apart from within the creative imagination of some abductees.

As is illustrated by the title of his book, The Threat (1998), Jacobs again rejects interpretations of abduction experiences by either researchers or abductees that, “aliens are benevolent beings who have come to Earth to help humans on both a personal and a societal level” (p.208). He labels such people “positive proponents” (p.209) and claims that, “at this time the evidence of benevolent intentions is, at best, ambiguous” (p.225). Jacobs has recently published UFOs & Abductions: Challenging the Borders of Knowledge (2000), which is a collection of scholarly articles by many of the leading American researchers in this field such as Clark, Bullard, Hopkins, and Mack. None of the articles is devoted to the abduction-shamanism connection. Both Bullard and Mack mention the subject, but without taking the matter any further than they do in works already cited in this review. In what could been interpreted as an indication of science’s somewhat limited attitude to this subject, it is interesting to note that there are no parapsychologists or anthropologists among the book’s ten contributors. In discussing directions for further research, Jacobs writes that, “Philosophers, folklorists, and religious scholars will all find in UFO and abduction lore a field ripe for investigation. They certainly could help expand our knowledge of how belief, religion, and spirituality influence human confrontations with this phenomenon” (2000, p.308).

Hopkins, one of the best-known American abduction researchers, has written several books on the subject (1981; 1987; 1996), but does not mention shamanism in them. Hopkins acknowledges the paranormal components of many close encounter reports, such as telepathic communications and descriptions of aliens transporting abductees through walls or closed windows. However, while admitting that some abductees develop a deep concern for environmental matters after being shown frightening images of “both man-made and natural disasters”
(1996, p.473), Hopkins claims that he has “seen no sign that abductees as a group are more ecologically concerned than the population as a whole” (p.446). Instead he writes that, rather than warnings of future catastrophes, the visions, “may be a kind of projective test of human emotionality, since aliens usually stare intently at the abductees while they observe these scenes, presumably reading their thoughts and feelings” (1996, p.473). Like Jacobs, Hopkins believes abductions to be part of an alien breeding program being carried out without the informed consent of most of the abductees involved.

As mentioned earlier, Jung’s book *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Sky* — although written in 1959, well before alien abductions had entered public awareness — is often quoted as a definitive reference by ufologists and sceptics alike. By selectively quoting from it, one can show that Jung appeared to believe that UFOs are either archetypal psychic projections symbolising wholeness, divinity or the soul, or that they are genuine, solid craft. A careful reading of the book, however, reveals that Jung freely admits that he does not know what UFOs are, but that he decided to write about them to demonstrate how they could be interpreted from a psychological, mythic or symbolic perspective. The book has chapters that discuss UFOs as rumours and as images in dreams and modern paintings. In a later chapter, Jung considers UFOs “in a non-psychological light” and concludes that, given that some UFOs have been tracked by radar, an analysis of them “boils down to nothing less than this: that either psychic projections throw back a radar echo, or else the appearance of real objects affords an opportunity for mythological projections” (1959/1987, p.147). He then points out that in the absence of further evidence he is unable to vote either way on the subject, except to note that, if UFOs are solid there may be something synchronistic in their appearance today just as humanity appears psychologically ready to project deep symbolic meaning onto them (p.152). While Jung’s book was written too early to discuss abductions from a shamanistic perspective, it is nevertheless significant that he sees such a strong link between UFOs and the symbolism inherent in myths, dream images and art, all of which are integral to shamanism.
Consciousness researchers Christina & Stanislav Grof (1991) mention both shamanic crises and UFO close encounters as examples of what they term 'spiritual emergency' experiences, and claim that, if handled wisely, both types of experience may produce positive transformative results. They suggest that post-abduction adjustment problems may result from the fact that, unlike shamanic initiates "who receive a warm welcome by a society that honours their new belief system," those who have undergone close encounters, "cannot return to the culturally shared illusion of reality, which has been shattered by their experience" (p.97). Stanislav Grof, who is a psychiatrist, later provides a shamanistic-like analysis of close encounters which theorises that, if somewhere there does exist a highly advanced extraterrestrial civilisation:

We might also assume that they would have the technology to use both individual and transpersonal consciousness in ways completely unknown to us. If this were true, it is quite possible that their visits to our own dimension of reality would very likely appear to us as fantasies, archetypical occurrences, or visionary experiences. (1993, p.188)

In further comments linking close encounter and shamanistic experiences, Grof suggests that aliens “may be using our consciousness as doorways into our everyday level of reality” (1993, p.188), thus somehow combining space travel, which our society regards as the ultimate in technology, together with:

The world of the magical and mythical — the prerational thought process of primitive cultures.... It would seem that in these experiences a circle is closing where consciousness, having reached the ultimate frontier of material evolution, is returning to its primal source. (p.189)

Such comments illustrate that those researchers who look at close encounters in a wider cultural and historical context tend to produce the most comprehensive theories to explain them and also seem most likely to note the similarities between these experiences and shamanism. Unfortunately, this does not necessarily mean that such theories are correct.

Respected French-American ufologist Jacques Vallee's classic book, Passport to Magonia (1969/1993), notes that European folklore has for centuries spoken of strange, anomalous, otherworld beings that interact with humans. Whether called
gnomes, leprechauns, elves, fairies or by numerous other names, they all act in ways reminiscent of many of today's aliens. The Celtic fairy-faith was a form of shamanism according to Tom Cowan (1993), but Vallee makes no specific comparison between abductions and shamanism although many of his ideas about close encounters are strongly reminiscent of it. In a position statement on UFOs, Vallee (in Story, 1980, p.377) splits the problem into three parts: the physical objects themselves, the phenomenon as seen by the witnesses, and the social phenomenon, which refers to the effects such reports have within, what he terms, "the cultural arena" (p.378). Vallee explains this in more detail in Dimensions (1990) where he claims that there exists, "a spiritual control system for human consciousness and that paranormal phenomena like UFOs are one of its manifestations" (p.272). He believes that the purpose and dynamics of such a system would be hard for us to understand. "Human life is ruled by imagination and myth.... If UFOs are acting at the mythic and spiritual level it will be almost impossible to detect it by conventional methods" (1990, p.274). We can see that Vallee is acutely aware of the spiritual, mythological, paranormal and religious aspects of UFO close encounters, but is cautious about drawing any concrete conclusions without further scientific research. Nevertheless, he is prepared to write:

I believe that the UFO phenomenon represents evidence for other dimensions beyond spacetime; the UFOs may not come from ordinary space, but from a multiverse which is all around us, and of which we have stubbornly refused to consider the disturbing reality in spite of the evidence available to us for centuries. (1990, p.284, his italics)

There is little doubt that the continued, worldwide existence of shamanic beliefs in traditional societies and to a lesser extent among New Age enthusiasts in the West, provides strong anecdotal evidence for the existence of a spirit realm or otherworld similar to Vallee's multiverse. However, proving the existence of such a realm is quite another matter.

Like Vallee, Aspinal, an English researcher, believes that comparisons, "between fairy lore and contemporary UFO literature are worthy of consideration" and may be "essential to a fuller understanding of the whole" (1995, p.11). He reminds us that,
“Over four hundred years ago there was speculation as to how the ‘Little People’ — spirits that dwelt in a realm between Heaven and Earth — could pass through closed doors and windows” (ibid., p.9) in a manner similar to today’s aliens. A comprehensive comparison between descriptions of aliens and fairies may be interesting, but is beyond the scope of this research project, except to note that such magical beings could perhaps be regarded as European versions of the various entities described in shamanic cultures in other parts of the world. Any significant similarities between aliens and fairies might strengthen the case for claiming a link between alien abductions and shamanism. For example, in describing how to distinguish between the two types of fairies called boggarts and brownies, Briggs (1979), an authority on English folklore, writes that:

Sometimes it is said that a boggart has a long, sharp nose and a brownie has no nose at all, only two little nostrils, but it seems that when a brownie is teased or misused he turns into a boggart and plays all sorts of mischievous tricks on the household, and it is very difficult to get rid of him. (p.32)

It is often claimed by abductees that, like brownies, the small grey aliens only have small slit-like nostrils. However, I am not aware that any abductee has yet had the temerity to tease one of them to see if his or her nose gets longer.

Druffel also notes the similarity between abductions and the Celtic fairy faith and in her book How to Defend Yourself Against Alien Abduction (1988, p.168), she advocates the use of traditional protection charms such as iron and the herb St John’s Wort to help ward off unwanted abductions.

Keel’s influential book UFOs: Operation Trojan Horse (1973) takes an otherworld approach to close encounters. He notes their paranormal and spiritual components and their similarity to European fairy lore, but, as his title implies, he believes initial impressions of UFOs and the behaviour of aliens may be deceptive:

The flying saucers do not come from some Buck Rogers-type civilisation on some distant planet. They are our next-door neighbours, part of another space-time continuum where life, matter, and energy are radically different from ours. Ancient man knew this and recognised it. (p.291)
McKenna (1991), while acknowledging that UFOs may be extraterrestrial, makes a case for a return to a shamanic view of reality to help heal the deep-seated psychic discontinuity that he believes has plagued Western culture for the last several hundred years. McKenna, who is a popular New Age speaker, is here advocating the psychosocial stress theory. However, in a later discussion of "discarnate intelligences and nonhuman entities," he notes that they:

- seem to occupy a kind of undefined ontological limbo. Whatever their status in the world, their persistence in human experience and folklore is striking.... In all times and all places, with the possible exception of Western Europe for the past two hundred years, a social commerce between human beings and various types of discarnate entities, or nonhuman intelligences, was taken for granted. (in Abraham, McKenna & Sheldrake, 1992, p.93)

McKenna, has three explanations for such entities. Firstly, they are either, "rare, but physical" beings. Secondly, he quotes Jung, that they may be, "autonomous fragments of psychic energy that have temporarily escaped from the controlling power of the ego". Thirdly and most interestingly in his opinion, he suggests that such entities are nonphysical but:

- autonomous in their existence in some sense. In other words, they actually carry on an existence independent of their being perceived by human beings. This is the classical position of those who have had the largest amount of experience dealing with these entities: the shamans, ecstastics, and so-called sensitive types. (in Abraham, McKenna & Sheldrake, 1992, p.94).

Science writer Talbot mentions the abduction-shamanism connection while discussing a holographic or nonlocal theory about the fundamental nature of reality, which might help explain the apparent connection between altered states of consciousness and paranormal events. Dissatisfied but intrigued with both the psychosocial stress and the otherworld theories, Talbot (1991) suggests that a better theory would result if they were amalgamated:

- UFOs and related phenomena are further evidence of this ultimate lack of division between the psychological and physical worlds. They are indeed a product of the collective human psyche, but they are also quite real. Put another way, they are something the human race has not yet learned to comprehend properly, a phenomenon that is neither subjective nor objective but 'omnijective'. (p.279, his italics)
Talbot believes that both shamanism and close encounters illustrate his assertion that the subjective and objective worlds form part of a continuum. Consciousness and matter he asserts are intimately entwined. Much of what Talbot says supports the abduction-shamanism connection in general terms, but he does not discuss the subject in any particular detail, except to warn that we may have a distance to go before we can fully grasp the subtlety and complexity of the purpose behind these phenomena (p.283).

In *Angels and Aliens*, Keith Thompson (1993) takes an otherworld approach to close encounters and devotes most of a chapter to a discussion of their similarity to shamanic experiences such as rites of passage and initiation experiences. He sees the tension inherent in the ongoing lack of an explanation for close encounters as, “conditioning us — initiating us if you will — to entertain extraordinary possibilities about who we are at our depths, and what the defining conditions of the game we call Reality might be” (p.182). He notes the similarities between “ceremonies of dismemberment undergone by shamanic initiates ... and the invasive ‘medical’ procedures experienced by UFO initiates” (p.189). Once returned from their experiences, abductees, Thompson claims, become, like shamans, adepts of two vastly differing realms (p.192). Thompson claims to have interviewed numerous abductees before reaching his conclusions which are nevertheless open ended.

Harpur (1995) claims that alien entities originate in a spiritual realm or otherworld which he suggests is an extension of normal reality and is inhabited by entities which he calls daimons (after the ancient Greeks). He suggests that all sorts of spirits, shamanic entities, guardian angels and aliens from throughout history are in fact daimons adopting various guises. Harpur's book covers a wider perspective than that taken by most abduction researchers and again reveals that when one does look further afield there is a wealth of material about anomalous otherworld beings that could be compared with the modern abduction phenomenon. Unfortunately it is hard to say whether this is a help or hindrance in seeking meaningful explanations for such experiences. Harpur provides one of the most extensive comparisons between abductions and shamanism of any source in this
literature review. But, while his book is thoughtful, provocative and well referenced, Harpur's research — as with so many other commentators in this field — takes us no further in demonstrating how such a realm can be investigated other than by accumulating reports from those who claim to have had otherworld experiences.

Strieber is an American author who, perhaps more than anyone else, has popularised the alien abduction phenomenon in a series of best sellers describing his own abduction experiences. The first two (1987; 1988) are intensely personal and do not come to any concrete conclusion as to who or what is responsible for his terrifying experiences, other than to call them 'the visitors'. His opinions of them sound fairly shamanistic. He claims that the visitors are physically real but also function on a nonphysical level that might be their primary reality; that they can somehow enter the human mind and affect people's thoughts; that they have shown him that he has a soul that can separate from his body; and that they often communicate with him in a symbolic manner (1988, p.240). He also suggests that we may be in a "process of evolving past the level of superstition and confusion that has in the past blocked us from perceiving the visitors correctly" (p.241). Later, in a more comprehensive analysis of close encounters, Strieber describes some of the changes that abductees undergo:

What basically happens is that the witness's whole sense of reality explodes. People become psychic, they begin to believe that they can see into the future, they take spontaneous journeys through time, they begin to see vivid images in the region of the brain known in folklore as the 'third eye', they levitate, they believe that they take on the appearance of alien forms for periods of time, they acquire wisdom and new compassion, their children become preternaturally brilliant, they take journeys out of the body, they become healers, they acquire relationships with the dead, they become deeply concerned with the welfare of the environment. (1998, p.151)

It is not the purpose of this review to ask what empirical evidence exists to confirm these claims, but it is hard to read Strieber's list without noting how it mirrors the abilities and beliefs of a typical shaman.
As a parapsychologist seeking explanations for all sorts of miraculous phenomena, Rago suggests two possible reasons why many of those who have close encounters develop psychic abilities. Firstly, he proposes that UFO events “are produced by some ‘X’ intelligence that exists in the universe but which is symbiotically linked to our minds and to our planet” (1991, p.311). This “supermind or intelligence” he believes might link everyone at “some cosmic level” and “may be sending us ‘signs and wonders’ — such as the UFO mystery — that are reflections of our cultural and technological concerns” (p.312). As an alternative theory he suggests that, rather than directly creating miraculous events, this supermind “generates some sort of spiritual realm that can be tapped into on rare occasions and that possesses the power to produce wonders and signs” (p.312). Rago’s theories vary only slightly from the psychosocial stress and the otherworld theories, yet, although he admits that one or another of the theories might simultaneously explain close encounters and religious miracles, he does not actually mention shamanism, which likewise proposes the existence of a spiritual realm that facilitates paranormal events.

Cassirer, an English parapsychologist, has produced a booklet called *Parapsychology and the UFO* (1988). Cassirer proposes that UFOs are either of a terrestrial, extraterrestrial or paranormal origin (p.2) and provides a comprehensive review of paranormal UFO-related events. He acknowledges that the extensive similarities between UFO and paranormal reports do not necessarily provide a deeper understanding of either subject and writes that more open-minded research is needed. In a subsequent book Cassirer (1994) expands only slightly on his previous observations, noting, for example, the similarities between abductions and a variety of paranormal events such as those traditionally associated with witchcraft. He concludes that, while many abductions, “are attributed to ghost-like semi-physical entities that often cause terror and dismay,” he is not convinced that “we shall ever be able to unravel these mysteries ... seeing that the phenomenon seems to hail from impenetrable dimensions of enchantment” (p.205). Given that the literature on shamanism refers to a spirit realm and a significant number of paranormal ingredients, Cassirer’s work strengthens the argument for a comparison between shamanism and alien abductions.
Basterfield (1994), a leading Australian ufologist, writes that the paranormal components of close encounters should be systematically researched and not ignored. Attempting to lead the way, he then poses two questions. Firstly, “Do abductees experience paranormal events only after their abduction experiences?” and secondly, “If the paranormal experiences have occurred over the whole of their lifetime, are they occurring at a higher frequency than to non-abductees?” (p.5). He then reports that those abductees he has questioned appear to experience paranormal events more than the general population. Basterfield’s observations, though not unique, are relevant to this research because in traditional societies a person who starts to demonstrate paranormal abilities or becomes the subject of repeated anomalous events such as visions, trances or strange dreams is generally considered to be undergoing some sort of initiation and may be apprenticed to a master shaman for further instruction (Eliade, 1951/1989).

Evans, another English parapsychologist, believes that close encounters with all sorts of anomalous beings, including aliens, can be explained by the psychic projection theory, and claims that valid information can be obtained by paranormal means during such altered states of consciousness. “Visions and encounters occur on the frontiers of reality, but this particular frontier is one of the mind” (1991, p.140).

English ufologist Randles writes that, “alien contact witnesses are in many ways rather like the shamans found in less technocratic cultures” (1994, p.177). She, like many other researchers, claims that abductions have something to do with altered states and that many abductees “have a track record of other psychic experiences” (p.176). In the early days of abduction research, Randles coined the term the ‘Oz Factor’ to describe “a set of symptoms very commonly reported by a witness to an abduction, which creates the impression of temporarily having left our material world and entered another dream-like place with magical rules” (1988, p.22). She also points out the rapid onset of this state and how it includes a sense of timelessness and a feeling of disassociation, all of which suggest “that the percipient has changed their state of consciousness” (p.23). Such altered states of
consciousness or 'dimensions of enchantment' (to use Cassirer's phrase) sound very much like the spirit realm or otherworld typically reported in shamanistic experiences. In the same book Randles (1988) makes the interesting suggestion that "there really are aliens, but they are not literally coming here in spaceships. Instead they are using individuals in 'UFO consciousness' as instruments for the transmission of a message and to conduct an investigation or analysis" (p.221). To put that another way, she believes that, "These beings are far more advanced and have harnessed the power of consciousness to cross the gulfs of space and seek out new life forms" (p.222).

English UFO researcher Dodd reveals a dual perspective in Alien Investigator (1999). Dodd, a former police officer, presents himself as both a hard-headed, experienced, UFO field investigator and as someone who claims personal contact with alien intelligence. When discussing both his own and other people's close encounters, he describes numerous shamanic-like ingredients. For example, in a brief interview with a disembodied alien speaking through an abductee in a trance, Dodd (1999) asks "Are you what we call gods?" The reply is, "This is how some of you perceive us, but you do not understand the nature of things." So Dodd asks, "If this is the case, do you require us to worship you?" only to be told, "No, this is not necessary" (p.120). Dodd claims to receive telepathic messages of a spiritual nature from aliens and has been told that he is a "teacher" (p.123), despite not having a prior interest in spiritual matters. He says that he now realises that "everything on this planet — soil, trees, grass, as well as insects and animals — is alive, and that the earth is a living organism, a whole of which we are only very small parts" (p.127). He points out the transformative effects felt by many abductees who, "report an enhanced spiritual dimension to their lives. They become more psychic, more artistic, with a deeper understanding of the environment" (p.124). Dodd's comments raise the question as to whether these changes are deliberately caused by aliens or whether they are just side effects of the abduction phenomena.

Pope (1997, p.xiii) claims to have investigated UFO reports for the British Ministry of Defence between 1991 and 1994. While his first book (1996) was about ufology in
general, his second, published in 1997, concentrates on abductions. In it he cites several English abduction reports, noting their paranormal components and summarises fifteen possible explanations for abduction experiences (p.243), several of which are reminiscent of shamanism. For example, he points out the similarities between abduction experiences, near-death and out-of-body experiences (p.245) which are an integral part of some shamanic initiation experiences. In discussing the psychic projection theory he acknowledges that many UFO abduction narratives are rich in mythological themes (p.255), but he takes the discussion no further than to acknowledge that “there are certainly some compelling reasons to suppose that abductions do not take place entirely in our reality” (1997, p.261). Echoing the otherworld theory, Pope writes that “the idea of abductions being explained in terms of our ‘reality’ interacting with other ‘realities’ must be considered. If abductions are taking place, then it is possible that those responsible might come from another dimension or a parallel universe” (1997, p.261). Shamanism also posits an invisible spirit realm inhabited by beings that can interact with humans at will, but Pope clearly favours the extraterrestrial hypothesis to explain most abductions (p.263).

Spencer (1990) is another English ufologist who suggests a shamanistic-like explanation for abductions. Spencer does not like the extraterrestrial hypothesis (ETH) — which suggests that UFOs are some sort of alien spacecraft. Instead he asks whether UFO sightings could “be a manifestation of a culture with which we share the Earth and yet don’t understand? Could alien abductions be our quite wrong interpretation of some activity of theirs that doesn’t even involve us?” (p.239). While not being more specific as to what this other culture may be like, Spencer suggests that all sorts of paranormal activity may, “be forms of their activity, even perhaps an attempt at communication with us that we have not understood” (p.239). While Spencer could be commended for seeking a viable alternative to the ETH, the suggestion that there might be other intelligent, though largely invisible, beings sharing the planet with us is hardly a “radical” idea, as the cover of his book claims. Such a belief has been at the heart of shamanism since
the dawn of civilisation. What is relatively new is the suggestion that such beings may have something to do with alien abductions.

Spencer's next book (1994) asks whether UFOs are alien visitors or psychic phenomena and concludes that close encounters are a combination of "natural non-intelligent energies we have yet to understand and ... human consciousness" (p.338). He claims that by interacting with paranormal forces, some abductees gain access to sub- or super-conscious parts of themselves, thus gaining access to their creativity and thereby becoming more complete people. While he makes no attempt to explain such events, it is to Spencer's credit that he admits to being baffled by abduction reports although he does claim that their important ingredients are paranormal events, natural earth energies, and unusual levels of human consciousness, which are also important ingredients in shamanism.

The American writer C.D.B. Bryan (1996) attended the June 13-17, 1992, Abduction Study Conference at MIT as an observer, and then wrote a book on the subject. Although not a ufologist, he gives a balanced and comprehensive overview of the proceedings. In discussing the possible explanations for abduction experiences put forward by various conference speakers, Bryan agrees with the suggestion that we may need, "to consider that there might exist simultaneous other realities; further, that it is during, or within, some sort of overlapping of these realities that alien abductions occur" (p.571, his italics).

O'Leary (1989), who trained as a NASA scientist-astronaut, also has an otherworld perspective, claiming that UFO close encounters could be seen as, "a manifestation of symbols from another spiritual realm teaching us a lesson, symbols that appear as mirrors for our evolution into an expanded awareness" (p.94). He reports that many abductees are transformed by their experiences, becoming more attuned to nature and the paranormal (p.96). Shamanic initiation experiences have similar transformative effects.
Boylan is one of the abduction researchers that Jacobs (1998, p.209) refers to as a positive proponent. In his book Close Extraterrestrial Encounters: Positive Experiences With Mysterious Visitors (1994) Boylan lists twenty indicators that a person may have had a close encounter, among which he includes the subtle experience of a new cosmic awareness, which includes becoming active in the environmental movement (p.36); believing one has received telepathic messages or intuitions (p.38); noticing the beginning or enhancement of psychic abilities (p.39); and feeling attracted to a pantheistic spiritual perspective (p.40). Admittedly these are only four out of twenty indicators, but all four could be seen as indicators of a shamanic initiation experience. While acknowledging that an abduction experience may initially produce anxiety in the abductee, Boylan firmly believes that the aliens are intelligent, friendly and are here to help humanity (p.159).

Carpenter (1994) is another American abduction researcher who has published a list of symptoms that he believes are associated with close encounters and which are also present in shamanism. These include vivid, unusual dreams; 'screen memories' of unusual animals in unlikely places; apparent psychic abilities; strange buzzing or mechanical sounds in one's head prior to an abduction; and finding oneself surrounded by poltergeist-like or electromagnetic effects (p.16).

Well known English writer Colin Wilson entered the fray in 1998 with his book Alien Dawn: An Investigation into the Contact Experience, which includes a comprehensive review of past and present theories about UFO close encounters. Wilson considers that any coherent explanation for alien abductions requires a discussion of various alternative theories about the nature of reality, because, on the assumption that close encounters are in some sense genuine events, at present science appears unable to explain how and why they are happening. He therefore discusses the paranormal components of such events; theories about other dimensions; Jung's concept of synchronicity; out-of-body experiences; psychical research and a host of related ideas, many of which are also reminiscent of shamanism. Although Wilson notes that "a UFO encounter can cause a basic change in awareness" (1998, p.304), as well as seeming to expand a person's
paranormal and mental abilities, he does not actually make the shamanism-abduction connection, although like Mack (2000a) he quotes the South African shaman Credo Mutwa who reports that Africans have, “had contact with these things [UFOs] and the creatures inside them” but that they are not supposed “to talk in any detail about these sacred things. Our people fear that should we do that, then the star-ships would stop visiting us” (in Wilson, 1998, p.91).

Wilson concludes three things from his analysis of what he terms ‘the contact experience’. Firstly, that “our normal down-to-earth way of viewing reality — which is also the way of science — is somehow mistaken” (1998, p.117). Secondly, that alien consciousness is an expanded version of our own consciousness, thus showing us what we may be able to achieve in the future (p.303). And thirdly, he agrees with several other researchers that aliens are involved in a long term program to “create a new kind of human being” possessing what we would currently regard as supernormal abilities (p.309). Wilson’s conclusions closely mirror what could be described as a shamanistic view of alien abduction experiences. Shamanism appears to illustrate firstly, that there is more to reality than meets the eye and secondly, that there are humans — the shamans themselves — with enhanced or expanded abilities, which implies that many more people could develop such abilities. Thirdly, one could claim that, within shamanistic societies, most people are encouraged to adopt an otherworld or expanded perspective of reality.

Lumping together all anomalous beings such as spirits, ghosts, angels, demons, aliens and fairies, English ufologist Dormer (1993) suggests that they may be “part and parcel of one single and underlying phenomenon,” which may mean that “the origin of all the world’s religions, both major and minor, might be explicable in terms of such encounters. It might well be that to solve the UFO mystery will be to solve all mysteries” (p.142, his italics). He believes that this underlying phenomenon may be something like Jung’s collective unconscious which, one suspects, Dormer would believe is also the explanation for shamanistic experiences.
A review of that section of the UFO literature that describes or echoes the abduction-shamanism connection is not complete without mentioning those writers who view close encounters in a religious light, because shamanism could be seen as a form of religious activity and secondly, as Vitebsky (1995) claims while discussing the history of shamanism, "As more elaborate societies developed over time, other forms of religion arose and shamanic ideas were often eliminated or incorporated. They sometimes lie hidden within the major world religions" (p.26).

While noting their similarity with some shamanic experiences, Ellwood points out how easy it is for close encounters — during which there was some form of dialogue with alien beings — to be interpreted in a religious light:

> Whether a simple contact with a message and vision or a ride in the UFO like a shaman's flight, the experience in these cases had all the overtones of an initiation into a universe of infinitely richer marvel and meaning than the ordinary. It left the recipient with a sense of mission, of having an ethic to follow and a message of hope or salvation to deliver. (1980)

Downing, who has a doctorate in the philosophy of science and religion as well as being a pastor in the US Presbyterian Church, is a proponent of what is termed the ancient astronaut theory (Story, 1980, p.102). Downing was one of the first to discuss the religious side of the UFO phenomenon in his book *The Bible and Flying Saucers* (1968). He points out that many Biblical events, such as chariots of fire in the Book of Exodus, could be primitive descriptions of alien intervention that were mistakenly assumed to be of a divine origin. One problem with the ancient astronaut theory is that it is often focussed solely on Christianity, for example, claiming that aliens somehow arranged for Christ's birth and miraculous abilities. Such advocates seldom explain whether it was aliens who also founded Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism and are even less likely to note the similarities between shamanism and abduction experiences, although shamanistic beliefs exist worldwide and are believed to predate all mainstream religions (Halifax, 1980, p.3).

The flip-side of the belief that aliens are divine beings here to ensure our salvation is the theory that they are evil, deceptive entities or manifestations of the devil.
There is some similarity to shamanism here, as Halifax (1982) illustrates in describing the beliefs of the Cuna people of the San Blas Islands off Panama in Central America. The Cuna believe that demonic spirits:

- can kidnap the soul of a man, woman or child and take it to one or another of the supernatural fortresses that are the lairs of these strange creatures. In the event of an abduction, the nele, or shaman, pursues the soul in his spirit canoe and does battle with the creature in order to retrieve the soul. (p.44)

Downing (1980) provides four demonic theories about UFOs and abductions. The first, which he calls the 'secular-scientific theory', claims that technologically advanced aliens masquerading as divine beings have provided us with misleading religious beliefs. He nominates Dione's book, *God Drives a Flying Saucer* (1973), as an example of this approach. One problem with this theory is that it assumes that it is possible to distinguish misleading religious beliefs from genuine ones.

Secondly, Downing refers to the 'secular-psychic' theory which suggests that, by becoming too technologically minded, humanity has repressed another equally important part of itself within its unconscious. This part is now attempting to redress the resulting imbalance by manifesting UFO and abduction events. Downing nominates Jung (1959) as an early proponent of this approach, as well as Clark & Coleman (1975) who describe UFO events thus: "The 'objective' manifestations are psychokinetically generated by-products of these unconscious processes which shape a culture's vision of the otherworld. Existing only temporarily, they are at best only quasi-physical" (p.242). This is a version of the psychosocial stress theory, mentioned earlier, which assumes that human consciousness can psychokinetically manifest physical or quasi-physical phenomena at a distance. However, mainstream science still has little understanding of such a process while many scientists completely deny such a possibility.

Downing's third theory is a 'secular-supernatural' one which he largely attributes to Keel (1970) who suggests that aliens with powerful paranormal abilities originate from another dimension and tend to regard humans as a form of amusement, which
means that we would have great difficulty meeting them on equal terms or believing what they tell us. This is a version of the otherworld theory. Keel’s work is discussed elsewhere in this review but, while at present there exists little scientific evidence for the existence of other realms populated by sentient beings, this a fundamental belief in shamanism.

Fourthly, Downing proposes the ‘religious-supernatural’ theory which claims that aliens are entirely the work of the devil and have been “set loose on Earth in preparation for the end and the Second Coming of Christ” (1980, p.100). This rather sensational theory seems to ignore religions other than Christianity and its proponents are generally not taken seriously by mainstream ufologists, largely because the theory requires an uncritical acceptance of the existence of an entity called the devil, and is, again, an attempt to explain one mystery in terms of another.

Downing’s four categories could not all seriously be regarded as demonic, but instead seem to be partly the product of a limited religious perspective. Nevertheless, as well as illustrating the variety of religious and paranormal theories about UFO close encounters, they also demonstrate how closely connected many of them are to shamanic beliefs which also propose the existence of unpredictable otherworld beings with baffling paranormal abilities and occasionally malevolent or mischievous intentions.

Other writers who also see aliens as demonic beings, but who do not fall neatly into one of Downings four categories are Kerner (1997); White (1992), and Worley (1997). On the other hand, Prevett (1998) rejects what he refers to as the ‘Demonic Eschatological Hypothesis’ (DEH), which claims that “ETs are a demonic deception heralding the approach of the return of Christ,” concluding that the UFO phenomenon, “should be seriously and calmly investigated by the full power of science” because, “the DEH is unsatisfying and theologically questionable. There are too many possibilities, and little ground for dogmatism” (Prevett, 1998).
As a variation to a Christian-based religious perspective on abductions, Richard Thompson's comprehensive *Alien Identities* (1993) compares the modern UFO phenomenon with descriptions of "transhuman contact" and aerial devices from the ancient Vedic literature of India. Thompson notes the similarities between abduction narratives and those about the Celtic fairy folk (p.291), and concludes that "the strongest argument linking UFO reports with accounts of parallel realities is that both involve beings with similar mystic powers and similar modes of behaviour" (p.307). He discusses the similarities between some abduction reports and near-death and out-of-body reports, claiming that the evidence "suggests that the UFO occupants themselves can operate both on a physical and on a subtle level.... They can make themselves physically manifest and visible to ordinary eyes, or they can become unmanifest and invisible" (p.384). Thompson also notes that reports of aliens' psychic abilities appear to challenge the beliefs of scientific materialism, especially about religion and the evolution of consciousness.

After reading Thompson's *Alien Identities*, Downing (1994) updated his religious theories about UFO close encounters. He now believes that the New Age view that "UFOs are pushing us towards a spiritual transformation of society which will usher in a golden age of peace, spirituality and love.... is too optimistic an interpretation" (p.8), but he also rejects the standard Christian demonic theory as too limiting. Instead he believes that "the UFO alien reality, and what the Bible calls the angelic divine reality, are the same reality, what I will call the alien/angelic reality" (p.9). Downing claims that not only was the alien/angelic reality involved in establishing other religions as well as Christianity, but that it actually established life on Earth and, in a manner similar to Vallée's control mechanism theory, is currently involved in a mid-course correction of humanity's progress. "The abduction phenomenon may be primarily a way for the alien/angelic reality to reveal its power to the public at large, and still keep its basic identity secret" (p.10). Downing is a little vague as to the aliens' ultimate purpose, but suggests that they "are making sport of us and our scientific culture" (p.10), perhaps with the aim of helping us adopt more appropriate paradigms. "Down the road, as more UFO evidence comes out ... undoubtedly the human race will begin to explore the religious dimension to UFOs."
When this happens, almost every world religion will undergo a pretty serious course correction" (Downing, 1994, p.11). While one may or may not agree with Downing's religious beliefs, it is clear that his involvement in ufology has certainly caused a 'course correction' in his opinions.

Raschke (1989), from the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Denver, also believes that close encounters are designed to influence human behaviour. He writes that:

Our interest in them should center on how the spreading and deepening convictions about them subtly, yet irreversibly, remould not just peripheral religious or metaphysical ideas, but entire constellations of culture and social knowledge. In this connection, UFOs can be depicted as what I would call ultraterrestrial agents of cultural deconstruction. (p.25, his italics)

Raschke's notion of cultural deconstruction is similar to Vallee's cultural control theory and Downing's idea of aliens nudging humanity into more appropriate paradigms. A phenomenon that science cannot currently explain is clearly going to remain unexplained until we come up with appropriate new ideas or methods of investigation. The problem is in thinking of those new ideas. On the other hand, Raschke's use of the word 'deconstruction' might imply that the major obstacle to an understanding of UFOs and abductions is not a shortage of ideas — there are plenty available — but the inflexibility of mainstream science's current approach to the subject. Whatever one thinks of Raschke's suggestions, it is interesting to note their connection to shamanism. In reviewing anthropology's changing opinions about shamanism over the last half century, Narby (1998, p.15) tells us that there has been a debate as to whether shamans are creators of order or disorder, which could perhaps be seen as a debate over cultural construction or deconstruction. Similarly, Lewis (1971) writes that:

The shaman's initiatory experience is represented as an involuntary surrender to disorder, as he is thrust protesting into the chaos which the ordered and controlled life of society strives so hard to deny, or at least keep at bay. No matter how valiantly he struggles, disorder eventually claims him and marks him with the brand of a transcendental encounter. (p.188)
If one views the shamanic realm of chaos and disorder as an unlimited source of creativity and intelligence, we can see the similarity between it and UFO otherworld theories such as those of Raschke and Vallee.

Creighton (1988), the current editor of the English UFO magazine *Flying Saucer Review*, and Line (1989), take a religious, otherworld perspective in claiming that aliens are actually beings called ‘Jinn’ as described in the Islamic holy book, the Qur’an. Line writes that “Jinn are beings which dwell on a parallel level to man, but due to their existing at a different vibratory rate, they are not normally visible to us or detectable by us” (p.13, his italics). He believes that their vibratory nature enables them to conceal themselves within the infra-red part of the electromagnetic spectrum, and that Islamic texts state that, like aliens, these beings have paranormal abilities that enable them to control physical matter and certain aspects of the human mind, as well as to create realistic illusions (p.13).

Druffel (1992) supports the Jinn theory but points out that, because the electromagnetic spectrum is an integral part of our normal reality, “I've come to think ... that very close-up sightings, and particularly those which involve paralysis, abduction, and other unpleasant experiences, might be from an intradimensional source, co-existing with our earth plane” (p.6). The claim that various otherworld entities, like shamanic spirits, have been interacting with humans throughout history is not new and seems to illustrate that the further afield one looks for new UFO theories the more one may find different versions of the same ideas.

In his book *The God Hypothesis* (1997a), American ufologist Lewels advocates a religious perspective on UFOs and alien abductions. Like others, Lewels points out that UFO close encounters may account for numerous descriptions of miraculous events in the Christian religious tradition and repeats the ancient astronaut suggestion that aliens may have ‘given’ us religion. However he takes a more tolerant view of abductions than Downing, claiming that:

The universe is, in fact, a paradox in which good and evil are the same — just different sides of the same coin. Such a view requires us to consider the possibility that there is a non-physical dimension that
exists in parallel to the physical world and that rather than being like a machine, the universe is instead more like a vast intelligence that exists in perfect balance between positive and negative forces. (Lewels, 1997b, p.104)

The perspective that Lewels adopts here is close to an animistic or shamanistic one.

Ex-Jesuit Freixedo (1992) discusses the connections between religion, the paranormal and close encounters. He believes that an unbiased study of what it is that links these phenomena will lead humanity to a better understanding of our place in the cosmos. He writes that, “If parapsychology has led us to a new perspective on religious dogma through the study of miracles and apparitions, ufology leads us to the source of religious phenomena” (p.137). Unfortunately, like many who advocate a religious interpretation of alien contact, Freixedo appears unable to view either ufology or research into the paranormal from outside his theological preconceptions.

Taking a religious-psychological approach is Alvin Lawson (1988, p.22) who claims that the various alien entities seen during close encounters can be classified into similar categories as those in traditional Christianity and that, “the classification can be extended to the Greek gods, demonology, science fiction, many of the works of Shakespere and Lewis Carroll — and even the characters of the Wizard of Oz” (p.24). Lawson’s six classifications are: human, humanoid, animal, robot, exotic and apparitional (p.25). He suggests that these classifications could be “a set of archetypes, deeply rooted in the subconscious, on which the mind draws when it is subject to unusual stimuli” (p.24). However, as Lawson admits, his theory tells us nothing about the nature of the stimuli, which are today called UFOs or aliens.

Kelly Cahill (1996) is an Australian abductee who writes and lectures about her close encounter experiences. There are several religious, paranormal and transformative components to her story. Cahill was intensely religious before her abduction, closeting herself in the back bedroom of her house for hours on end, praying, reading the Bible and seeking God’s presence (p.27). After her abduction,
her house was plagued with poltergeist-like activity. The television, the video player, the refrigerator and other electrical devices would turn themselves on and off or repeatedly malfunction (p.96) and at times she could sense strange entities around her (p.170). Her close encounters and their aftermath set her on a journey of discovery, and she writes that, “the process has been an ongoing expansion of mental and spiritual awareness” (Cahill, 1996, p.229).

Dolores Cannon (1999) documents numerous interviews with abductees and concludes that aliens are conducting an extensive genetic program in the event that we destroy Earth, because “human life must not be allowed to perish” (p.555, her italics). She acknowledges a spiritual component to close encounters, writing that “The aliens know we have an eternal soul, and that we came originally from the Source (their name for God)” (p.554), which leads her to assert that the aliens are “our ancestors” (p.556). It is interesting to note that encountering tribal ancestors is also an integral part of many shamanic initiations (Eliade, 1951/1989, p.81).

While discussing encounter phenomenon in general, Guiley (1993), who has written an encyclopedia on mystical and paranormal subjects, reports that, “Seemingly disparate encounters — such as visions of angels, possession, channelling of entities, religious conversions, shamanic journeys, near-death experiences (NDEs), and UFO abductions — share some common characteristics” (p.181). Noting the numerous paranormal components of these experiences (p.193), she claims that they may be interpreted as literal events, as psychic projections or as “interactions with a higher realm of consciousness” (p.182).

There is a brief but comprehensive coverage of the mythological, psychic, religious, and even psychiatric aspects of the UFO phenomenon in Story’s Encyclopedia of UFOs (1980).

To end this review of ufology literature, we now turn to a couple of short articles that discuss the abduction-shamanism connection. Price-Williams (1999), professor emeritus in anthropology at UCLA, compares shamanism and alien abductions in a
brief article which, as he admits, is “incomplete and preliminary and may serve as a
foundation for further studies and reports from other anthropologists” (p.1). He
points out that, “Although many shamans have begun their lives with a definite
vision quest, others have had ‘shamanism thrust upon them’” (p.2) in a manner
similar to some abduction experiences. Despite its brevity, Price-Williams’ article
may be the first occasion that a reputable anthropologist has discussed the
abduction-shamanism similarity.

A short interview in a popular magazine with Dr Irina Carten — a Russian born
academic who claims to have shamanic abilities — illustrates the shortage of
scholastic literature in this field. Carten claims that during her shamanic journeys
she is able to communicate with spiritual or, at a higher level, extraterrestrial
beings, depending on what it is she wants to know (Raynes 1999, p.23).

A magazine article by Macondy (1998) describes how he developed the ability to
communicate with animals and have precognitive dreams — both of which are
typical shamanic abilities — after several abduction experiences that began during
childhood.

2.3 Review of anthropological literature
The anthropological literature on shamanism is comprehensive, but is only the
subject of this review to the extent that it documents initiation experiences and the
continued interaction between the shaman and the spirit realm. This review is
therefore brief and no attempt is made to critique the various authors’ approach to
their subject. As expected, none of these books mentions UFOs or abductions.

Shamanic initiation experiences vary around the world, but anthropologists now
believe that their essential nature is the same. That is, that the initiate shaman is
somehow taken to or encounters a spirit realm that forms the backbone of
shamanistic beliefs and appears to hold the key to various paranormal powers. The
initiate may encounter various spiritual beings during dreams; may somehow be
transported into this realm unexpectedly; or may have deliberately set out on a vision quest by fasting or meditating.

Cowan (1992) documents the spiritual life of Australian Aborigines. In traditional aboriginal communities all men are initiated into a spirit realm called the dreaming (p.57), although it is only those that Elkin (1977) describes as 'men of high degree' who are regarded as the equivalent of shamans. Cowan writes that when an Aboriginal shaman is learning to develop his abilities he may have frightening visions of evil spirits, earthquakes, fires, or floods (1992, p.14). In comparison, it is interesting to note that numerous abductees describe aliens warning them that Earth is heading for ecological disaster unless humanity forsakes its destructive tendencies (Mack, 1994, p.367).

Kalweit's two books (1988; 1992) detail initiation experiences from various parts of the world. For example, he recounts an Australian Aboriginal initiation during which a young boy had two quartz crystals pressed into his chest and drank water “enriched by the addition of crystals” (p.37) after which he found himself able to see spirits. Experiences similar to this happen to some abductees (Mack, 1994, p.42).

Halifax is a medical anthropologist who worked with Joseph Campbell on an atlas of world mythology. She has published a survey of visionary narratives (1980) which provides detailed first-hand accounts of shamanic experiences from many parts of the world. In another book, Halifax (1982) describes how, in order to develop their healing abilities, initiate shamans are often required first to heal themselves from illness or injury, thereby gaining access and becoming familiar with the realm or state of consciousness in which healing spirits reside.

Harner's *The Way of the Shaman* (1990) is popular with New Age enthusiasts and has a chapter on the shamanic journey. Harner has been initiated as a shaman, and runs his own shamanic workshops in the United States. It was Harner who
originally coined the phrase ‘Shamanic State of Consciousness’ (SSC) to describe what appears to happen during shamanic experiences.

Two books by Drury (1991; 1996) provide, firstly, a conceptual framework that attempts to link visionary and shamanic experiences with various altered states of consciousness and, secondly, a richly illustrated overview of shamanic practices from around the world. Drury mentions the connection between shamanism and animals. For example, he claims that the Apache Indians, “fear owls because they believe that ghosts appear in this form” (1996, p.25). While it may be a coincidence, some abductees claim to see various animals, including owls, before an abduction, and aliens are often described as ghost-like, especially when they appear to move through solid objects like walls. As Mack (1994) writes, “The aliens themselves ... may appear at various times to the abductees in animal form. The connection that they have with animal spirits, a kind of shamanic dimension, remains to be explored” (p.408). For this reason a book by Saunders (1995) that documents the wide variety of beliefs in animal spirits around the world may be useful to this research.

Joseph Campbell was regarded as one of the world’s leading mythologists and his classic book *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (1949/1993) documents why he regards the shaman’s heroic journey of initiation to the spirit world as having the same basic structure and themes the world over. Campbell writes that:

This first stage of the mythological journey — which we have designated the “call to adventure” — signifies that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual centre of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown. This fateful region of both treasure and danger may be variously represented ... but it is always a place of strangely fluid and polymorphous beings, unimaginable torments, superhuman deeds, and impossible delights. The hero can go forth of his own violation ... or he may be carried or sent abroad by some benign or malignant agent.... Examples might be multiplied, ad infinitum, from every corner of the world. (p.58)

Vitebsky (1995) provides a good selection of initiation experiences as well as numerous shamanic drawings. He describes how, “in Siberia and Mongolia, the
first approach by the spirits takes the form of a violent onslaught which leads to what seems like a complete destruction of the future shaman’s personality” (p.59). In another example, a Canadian Eskimo woman developed shamanic powers after being “struck by a meteor in the form of a ball of fire” (p.59). Both these examples have characteristics that resemble some UFO abduction experiences. UFOs are frequently described as fast moving, brightly shining, balls of light (Wilson, pp.135 & 141) and some abductees claim to have been hit by a strange beam of light prior to their abduction (Thompson, 1993, p.116). Mack (1994) gives numerous examples of the terror many abductees feel and Grof (1991) points out that alien encounters, “can often precipitate serious emotional and intellectual crises that have much in common with spiritual emergencies” (p.95).

Blacker (1975) describes traditional shamanic practices in Japan and includes a chapter on initiatory journeys into the spirit realm. Nicholson’s anthology (1987) has a collection of twenty informative articles about shamanic views of reality by researchers such as Harner, Eliade, Achterberg, Krippner, Halifax, and Metzner. Cowan (1993) describes Celtic shamanism, which is very popular among New Age believers. De Martino (1972) gives numerous examples of shamanic initiation experiences and paranormal abilities from all over the world, including Africa. He describes how the invitation to become a shaman can come in a variety of ways, such as encountering various spirits or other shamans while dreaming (p.92) and that for most initiates their supernatural training is arduous and often baffling (p.61). Similar difficulties are encountered by abductees who may be at a complete loss to understand what is happening to them and may initially describe their experiences as unusually realistic nightmares (Strieber, 1988, p.153; Taylor, 1999, p.18).

Eliade’s classic work *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (1951/1989) is the most authoritative source of information in this field and includes chapters on initiation experiences to obtain shamanic powers in a wide variety of cultures. Many of these experiences are reminiscent of alien abductions. For example Eliade notes that, “a great Basuto prophet received his vocation after an ecstasy during which he
saw the roof of his hut open above his head and felt himself carried off to the sky, where he met a multitude of spirits" (p.141). Likewise, many abductees report being completely bewildered when aliens appear to carry them off through the walls or roofs of their bedrooms (Mack, 1994, p.33).

An anthology edited by Hoppál & Howard (1993) contains articles on shamanism from Korea, Japan, South-East Asia, North America and Eurasia. For example, Sadovszky (1993) tells us that among the Wintu Indians of California, “The arrival of the spirit was announced by a whistling sound” (p.131). Some abductees also report that they get a strange whistling sensation in their head before they have an encounter experience (Thompson, 1993, p.162).

Lewis (1971) discusses the difference between spirit possession and shamanism and concludes that while at times it could be claimed that shamans are possessed by various spirits, on other occasions they are clearly in complete control of the spiritual entities that they encounter or summon. Similarly, while many people report feeling powerless while being abducted, some claim to be able to resist (Druffel, 1998), while others are keen to cooperate with their abductors (Royal & Priest, 1992).

As an illustration of the degree of interest in shamanism in Western society today, Smoley and Kinney (1999) have a comprehensive chapter on the subject in their book *Hidden Wisdom: A Guide to the Western Inner Traditions*. Warning that, “the numbers of self-styled shamans seems to be growing exponentially” (p.180), they offer helpful advice to those that wish to learn more about shamanism in a modern context. In another chapter, the authors briefly discuss alien abductions and pose the following questions: “If in fact they happen, are these occurrences new or have they always existed among us? Were the alien abductions of today described in ancient myths as seduction or rape by the gods?” (p.293).

There are now various Internet sites available with useful information about shamanism. For example, Harner (1998) has his own site and several articles by
Horwitz (1998) on the relationship between shamanic rites and 'non-ordinary reality' are available on-line.

As a final comment on some of the anthropological literature quoted in the analysis of interviews later in this thesis, it should be noted that a few of the older texts — for example, Eliade's book which was first published in 1951 — do not follow the modern convention of using 'he or she' instead of just 'he' when referring to people such as shamans. I am conscious of this deficiency and intend no offence in using such quotations.

2.4 Summary of literature review

While there is abundant literature on shamanism and shamanic initiation experiences from around the world, few researchers have actually set out to compare them with alien abduction experiences. This is not surprising given that ufology is a relatively new, controversial subject while anthropologists have been studying indigenous peoples for several centuries. Add to that the well-documented official position that extraterrestrial UFOs do not even exist (Good, 1989, 1996) — which implies that alien abductees must at best be mistaken and at worst deluded — and one can understand why there has been little motivation or funding for mainstream research into the subject. Despite this, there is no shortage of theories about the UFO and abduction phenomenon and, as this literature review documents, the apparent connection between abduction and shamanic experiences is beginning to appear more frequently in UFO and New Age literature. This suggests that now is an opportune time to carry out some research specifically designed to explore whether such similarities do exist at anything more than a superficial level.
CHAPTER 3. Methodology

3.1 Target Population

The eleven people interviewed in this study are a sample of those who believe that they have had some sort of alien abduction experiences. To help clarify what ufologists generally mean by the term alien abduction the following definition has been adapted from an article on the psychosocial characteristics of UFO abductees by Rodeghier, Goodpaster & Blatterbauer (1991, p.64) in the Journal of UFO Studies, the only refereed UFO journal available:

1. A witness must consciously recall being taken from normal, terrestrial surroundings by non-human 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.

The abductees interviewed in the course of this research were not questioned by me as to whether they precisely fitted the above definition. Interview subjects were obtained from a local abduction support group on the understanding that they were considered to be genuine alien abductees by the counsellor(s) there. It became apparent during the interviews that, while some of the participants clearly fitted this definition, some of the experiences recalled by others were classified by them more in terms of visionary, anomalous, paranormal or dream experiences which at times included what seemed to be alien beings. This means that the results of a study such as this may depend largely on how rigidly one adheres to a particular definition in choosing interview subjects. Given that this is a qualitative research project, it was decided that participants who, along with the management of the abduction support group, believed that aliens in one form or another have been intruding into their lives, would be deemed suitable to be interviewed.
A UFO abduction support group, under the auspices of the ‘Australian Close Encounter Resource Network’ (ACERN), has existed in Perth, Western Australia, since early 1997 and claims to have been contacted by at least seventy people who suspected that they were alien abductees, in their first year of operation (Rodwell, 1998). The principal of ACERN, abduction counsellor Mary Rodwell, claims that by mid-1999 the number of possible abductees with whom she had spoken had risen to over two hundred and she agreed to provide contact information for those confirmed abductees who had stated that they were prepared to participate in this study. The ACERN management appears to be well informed on ufology, especially alien abductions and believes that the abductees selected to attend the abduction support group are credible. ACERN requires people wishing to attend the support group to have an initial consultation with a counsellor in order to eliminate those who are either too emotionally disturbed or who do not fit an established abductee profile. This profile has been assembled from the UFO literature and from several experienced abduction counsellors in the United States. It includes various questionnaires designed to discover whether the person has had experiences similar to those believed to be symptomatic of genuine abduction experiences (Boylan & Boylan, 1994, p.29; Pope, 1997, p.127; Hargrove, 2000, p.6). Abductees who are too traumatised to join the support group are asked to attend private counselling sessions or to seek professional psychological help until they are deemed ready. Those considered to be emotionally disturbed are advised to seek sympathetic psychiatric assistance.

ACERN principal, Rodwell (1998, p.31), claims that, in her experience, abduction support group participants come from all walks of life, all age groups, social backgrounds, educational levels and nationalities. This accords with research in other parts of the world (Mack, 1994, p.16). As with the rest of the general population, a percentage of the abductees already know something about the UFO and alien abduction phenomenon from the media or from their own reading, while others have previously had little or no interest in the subject. The immediate target population of this research project therefore consists of a volunteer sample of
abductees referred to me by the principal of ACERN's Perth Alien Abduction Support Group.

Potential participants initially had the research project's purpose, relevance and confidentiality safeguards explained to them at one of the support group's monthly meetings. Those who were prepared to be interviewed were asked to make themselves known to the abduction counsellor. The only requirements were that interview participants needed to be over eighteen and to have had one or more abduction experiences. The UFO literature suggests that many abductees have repeat abduction experiences, sometimes starting during childhood, so it was anticipated that some participants would have been abducted more than once.

This recruitment process for interview subjects could therefore be said to have occurred in two separate, unrelated stages. Abductees initially had had to undergo a detailed consultation process to be accepted into ACERN's support group and then later had to volunteer for this research project after having had its purpose explained to them. As mentioned earlier, it has not been my task to decide whether they were indeed 'genuine' alien abductees.

3.2 Design

This is a qualitative research project designed to discover whether a sample of Western Australian alien abductees have had shamanic-like experiences and, if so, to what degree. Many abductees are initially unsure whether they have had an unusually realistic nightmare or participated in an actual physical event. Such experiences are hard to quantify and no psychological, anthropological or spiritual test exists to analyse them. As both shamanic and abduction experiences largely consist of unwitnessed experiences that may be both baffling and frightening to the experiencer, a qualitative approach consisting of interviewing several abductees for about an hour to establish to what extent, if any, their experiences matched shamanic ones, was considered to be the most appropriate. Close encounter experiences may have such a high information content that a questionnaire could easily miss much data relevant to the study. A qualitative design enables interviews
to be relatively informal and unstructured. As abductees' reactions to their experiences may depend on whether they can find a meaningful context for them, it appears that interpretation rather than a statistical approach is important, further strengthening the case for a qualitative study involving a small number of in-depth interviews.

Shamanic initiation experiences are often described as frightening but nevertheless profoundly transformative spiritual experiences, which generally lead to the development of healing and other paranormal abilities, as well as the capacity to “journey to other worlds and return with revelations from the gods” (Drury, 1996, p.6). Abduction experiences can also be complex and confusing events which may start during childhood and extend well into adult life, so it was considered impractical to attempt to record everything the participants could remember about their abduction experiences in the hope that something shamanistic would turn up. Twenty-six specific questions were therefore composed which, it was hoped, would elicit relevant shamanistic-like information about the interview participants' close encounter experiences, including any spiritual, psychological or physiological changes they felt they had had undergone (see Appendix 3).

Choosing the most appropriate core interview questions needed careful consideration given that shamanism covers such a wide range of experiences. Interviews were planned to last about an hour, so the questions needed to elicit any significant similarities with shamanism within that time-frame. As mentioned in the literature review, some abduction researchers such as John Mack (2000) have discussed what they believe to be the significant shamanistic elements of close encounters, so this background information was helpful in choosing questions that concentrated largely on the transformative, spiritual, paranormal and otherworld dimensions of abduction experiences.

The interviews with the eleven alien abductees would best be described as semi-structured. Some of the twenty-six questions were straightforward, for example: “Have you ever been taken to an underground base or location by aliens?”
However, if anyone said yes to this question, I would ask them to describe the experience, which might again generate several more questions. Other questions were more complex and needed to be asked in stages, such as “Do you now believe in a human soul or spirit? Why? Do you believe there is any form of life or consciousness after death? Do you believe in a spirit realm or form of non-ordinary reality? If so please describe it?” This style of follow-up questioning was felt to be necessary because, according to the UFO literature, close encounter experiences can vary enormously and may involve paranormal phenomenon for which there are either too many, or too few, commonly agreed-upon descriptive terms. This meant that during the course of his or her interview, the average participant was asked well over one hundred questions.

3.3 Procedure

Once ACERN’s abduction counsellor had a list of abductees who had stated that they were prepared to assist with this research, she contacted me with their names and telephone numbers. I phoned them and explained again the aims of the research, the confidentiality safeguards and that the taped interviews would normally take about an hour. They were informed that they would have to give written consent to be interviewed and it was pointed out that privacy, sufficient time and a quiet location were desirable for the interview to be recorded clearly. None of the eleven abductees who were approached declined to be interviewed. Nine of the abductees were prepared to be interviewed at their homes, while two preferred to drive to my home in order to be away from the distraction of children or other family members.

Before each interview, participants were given a ‘Statement of Disclosure’ document (see Appendix 1) stating the title and aim of the research, the confidentiality safeguards and contact details for both the researcher and his supervisor. Participants were then required to sign two copies of an ‘Interview Consent Form’ (see Appendix 2), which were both then countersigned by the researcher. One consent form was retained by the subject, the other by the researcher. During the interview, each abductee was asked the same twenty-six
core questions (see Appendix 3) about their abduction experiences and subsequent beliefs. Participants' responses were taped with a small, unobtrusive, micro-cassette recorder and flat conference microphone. Whenever it was felt that a participant's answer required clarification or further probing, he or she was asked as many supplementary questions as seemed appropriate.

Each interview tape was transcribed to produce a hard-copy and floppy computer disc, so as to be available for data analysis. On average, the interview transcripts were about six thousand words long, with the shortest being about four and a half thousand and the longest being a little under eight thousand words. Once all the interview transcripts were available, the interview analysis was started.

3.4 Ethical Considerations
All participants provided informed, written consent before being interviewed. They were also told that they could withdraw from the research at any time. A reading of the UFO abduction literature reveals that some abductees may become distressed while being counselled. When volunteers were originally sought from the support group they were told by their counsellor that the interviews were for research purposes only and that the interviewer was not able to provide counselling. Any abductees that thought that they might become upset or have disturbing flashbacks were asked not to participate. Before any interviews commenced it was agreed with ACERN's counsellor that, if one of the abductees did get upset during the interview, it would be terminated. If immediate counselling assistance was thought necessary, ACERN would be contacted. If further assistance was required ACERN has a sympathetic psychologist or psychiatrist to whom the participant could be referred. As it happened, no participants became distressed while being interviewed, so these back-up arrangements were not required.

In order to provide confidentiality for the abductees, during the interviews names were not used and they were asked not to refer to other family members by name. The interview tapes were numbered sequentially with the result that neither the typed interview transcripts, the sound recordings, nor the tape cassettes give any
indication of who the interview participants are. The list containing the real names of the abductees and the signed interview consent forms are being kept under lock and key. At the start of the interview analysis the eleven abductees were given the pseudonyms Angela, Cheryl, Laurence, Betty, Arthur, Helen, Karen, Michael, Ruth, Nancy and Patricia and are referred to by those names throughout the thesis.

3.5 Analysis of Interviews
After reading the interview transcripts, it was decided to split the analysis into four chapters, each subdivided into several sub-sections to document the various shamanistic themes that they contain. These themes have been chosen as a useful means to present the findings and systemise a discussion of them. It should, however, be noted that as spiritual, paranormal and otherworld matters appear to be such complex and interrelated phenomena, this information could have been presented in a variety of ways. The chapter headings are not therefore intended to be definitive, merely convenient. For example, while there is a chapter on spirituality and otherworld encounters, various spiritual matters also form a part of the other three chapters. This illustrates the difficulty in attempting to present in a logical and linear fashion experiences that many shamans and abductees believe transcend time and space. In each section of the analysis of interviews, a direct comparison is made between quotations taken from the abductees' interview transcripts and the anthropological literature and a brief discussion is generally provided at the end of each section.

3.6 Validity & Reliability
The internal validity for a project such as this asks how congruent the research findings are with reality. This project does not seek to establish whether UFOs, a spirit realm or paranormal powers actually exist, although obviously such questions are of great interest. This research is only designed to look for similarities between the reported experiences of one sample of eleven alien abductees and shamanic experiences, especially initiation experiences. Whether any similarities are found or not, we could query whether the abductees are telling the truth, but we cannot assume that they are not. Even if the abductees sincerely believe that they are
telling the truth, because their experiences are generally unwitnessed and seem to occur during altered states of consciousness or dreams, it may still be possible that they have unconsciously distorted or misunderstood what it is that has actually happened to them. To confuse matter still further, as the literature review reveals, some ufologists even suggest that aliens deliberately mislead those they abduct.

It cannot be avoided that the interview participants may have previously spoken to each other and the counsellor(s) in the abduction support group and so may have influenced each other in several ways. Although no seriously traumatised abductees were interviewed, participants may still have been seeking a suitable context in which to integrate their experiences. UFOs and alien abductions are undeniably controversial and abductees may be sensitive to feeling stigmatised. Having previously been informed of the purpose of this study, the abductees may therefore have consciously or unconsciously embellished or adapted their accounts in an attempt to make them sound more shamanistic. However, most participants did not appear to be particularly well-informed about shamanism, so would have found it difficult to make such embellishment sound convincing and no such attempts were noted during the interviews. It should be remembered that people in traditional societies cannot be said to be culturally uncontaminated either and the fact that they may have pre-existing shamanistic beliefs is not considered an impediment to anthropological research.

One could debate how many similarities between alien abduction and shamanistic experiences are needed to conclude that they are significant. The analysis of interviews has taken into account that the literature on shamanism from around the world covers a wide range of experiences and that by picking and choosing one could expect to find some superficial similarities with alien abductions. It is also possible that some people in Western societies may have shamanistic-like experiences whether they have been abducted by aliens or not.

In an attempt to address the question of cultural influences on the abductees' interpretation of their experiences, they were asked whether they had heard or read
about alien abductions before their experiences started and, if so, whether they thought this may have influenced their subsequent understanding of what had happened to them. Their replies suggest that they believed that such influences were probably minimal. In interpreting such opinions, we should note that it is probably impossible to live in complete isolation from cultural influences and that people in modern Western societies may be presented with a larger number of alternative explanations for their alien abduction experiences that shamanic initiates would be given for their experiences in traditional societies. Whether abductees see these different explanations as equally desirable or probable is quite another matter.

Angela, whose experiences started as a child, took some time to come to the conclusion that she was encountering aliens. She points out that “in my teenage years, most of the stuff I was reading about was about spirits and spirit guides and ghosts and that type of thing.” Yet, when her experiences started, “I thought they [the aliens] were monsters,” and “A lot of the things that I remember and have seen are beyond anything I have ever read or seen on television. Things that I would never think possible.” Cheryl, who has a large collection of Star Trek books, admits to having “had an enormous, unprecedented attraction to any kind of material that was on that topic.” She comments that, “I don’t know whether I have interpreted the pieces of the jigsaw in a light that suits me, or whether it is all just wishful thinking, but at the end of the day does it matter?” Laurence, who was “very much into horror stories when I was a kid,” claims not to have much interest in reading about “abduction scenarios and stuff like that.... I am more into ... [a] scientific understanding of reality.” He says that he tries “to keep an objective perspective as much as possible.” Betty says that she has little interest in reading about alien abductions, but that she has “always been fascinated with pictures of spacecraft.” She recalls that, during a space scene in the film Cosmic Voyage at the Omni Theatre, she said to herself, “Oh, I know that, I’ve been past there before.” Arthur believes that his current interest in reading “anything to do with spiritual development or extraterrestrial life or beings” is the result of his experiences, rather than vice versa. Helen likewise claims to read “anything on UFOs, anything on
healing, [and] metaphysics," but did not do so during her teenage years. Karen, whose experiences started as a child, rejects the suggestion that she may have been influenced by what she had read. "I have only bought two books ever ... to do with alien abductions and one was about six months ago. Up until that point I was too scared to even read about them." She points out that, at the time, she had no idea what was causing her terrifying childhood experiences and only realised that they had anything to do with aliens a few years ago. "So my initial response wasn’t to draw conclusions and say, ‘Oh well, I have been abducted.’ That actually came out after a long haul and a long struggle."

Michael’s experiences started when he was about thirteen (he is now about thirty-five) and, although he thinks he had read about UFOs prior to that, he says that "I don’t think abductions were common back then," so is unlikely to have read about them. However, he does believe that some of the books that he has read as an adult have helped confirm his belief that aliens are responsible for his ongoing abduction experiences. Ruth’s father was interested in UFOs when she was a child, but she did not read about them then. "As an adult I have got some books [but] I’ve only read one, and that’s only in the last ten years." Nancy read nothing about UFOs as a child, "Because my parents were Catholic and that’s like the work of the Devil."

As an adult, Nancy says, "I was compelled to buy Whitley Strieber’s book Communion ... and there were a couple of others, but I am not very good at reading. I sort of pick something up and it takes me about five years to read it." Recently she has looked at an abduction book by Delores Cannon, but cannot recall the title. "That has influenced me in some ways in as much as now I can connect up certain memories with actual events." As a child, Patricia “used to love TV shows ... like My Favourite Martian," but does not think that they influenced her because, compared to her abduction experiences, such television programs “weren’t of the same form and they didn’t do the same things, so even though there was an interest, it was totally different.”

Obviously we cannot assume that these abductees have not been influenced into linking their anomalous experiences with aliens and spirituality by their cultural
environment just because they say that they have not. On the other hand we must
not assume that their belief in such a connection is misguided without some
supportive evidence and none has been put forward so far.

The external validity of a study such as this addresses the degree to which the
research results can be generalised to the wider population. Strictly speaking we
cannot claim to have proved that all alien abductees have opinions similar to these
ones because the sample size for this study is so small and the research project is a
qualitative and not quantitative one. Nevertheless, it is instructive to note that the
abductees' answers to the interview questions are largely as predicted in that they
consistently reveal what appear to be shamanistic-like experiences and attitudes in
keeping with reports in the ufology literature. However, this cannot be taken as
proof of anything other than that these abductees' beliefs appear to match those of
abductees in other parts of the Western world. Various means could be employed
to assess the validity of these results. For example, a similar or larger project could
be carried out in another Australian city or the same project could be carried out in
Western Australia in perhaps ten years time to see whether the participants still give
the same answers. One quantitative means of assessing these results would be to
select a control group of non-abductees in Western Australia and ask them the
same questions to ascertain to what extent their experiences and world-views
matched this sample of abductees.
CHAPTER 4 Initiation and Transformation.

This chapter explores those aspects of the abductees' experiences that could be compared with the transformational nature of shamanic initiation experiences. Shamanic initiation can start at almost any age from childhood until late in life. A person may actively seek such experiences, for example, by going on a vision quest, by meditating or fasting, or he or she may be approached unexpectedly by various spirits during dreams or daily life. Some people accept the invitation however it comes while others run from the calling and may suffer illness or spiritual harassment until they relent. For those who undergo shamanic initiation, the transformational nature of such experiences are profound and their lives are never the same again. To see whether such scenarios matched any of the abductees' experiences, they were first asked how their abductions started; whether they were undertaking something equivalent to a vision quest or were taken by surprise; and also about their prior religious and spiritual beliefs.

4.1 Childhood Antecedents

Obviously, someone who sets out seeking otherworld contact would have difficulty claiming that they were subsequently 'abducted' because that implies a lack of consent. Participants' accounts of how their abduction started were surprising, though not unheard of in the ufology literature. All eleven claim that their initial experiences occurred when they were children, with ages clustering around four, five, six and seven, and none claimed that they had actually set out to have such experiences, although several said that they often got a feeling that something untoward was going to happen.

In comparison to the age of typical shamanic initiates in traditional societies, such a predominance of youthful experiences is unusual. A few of the abductees are currently in their twenties, most are in their thirties, while two or three are over forty.
This implies that few of them would have heard of alien abductions and then set out to have such experiences themselves during their childhoods, although that possibility does exist. The pattern of events many of them claim to have undergone is that their childhood encounters were largely seen at the time as strange, frightening and unwelcome but not necessarily as anything to do with aliens. For many of them these experiences then ceased, or faded from memory, until adulthood when they restarted or resurfaced and it was only then, after hearing about the existence of alien abductions, that they looked back and began to interpret some of their childhood experiences in those terms. All the participants therefore — if we accept their retrospective interpretations — need to be seen as people who have had numerous close encounter experiences in both childhood and adult life.

Given that in various traditional societies some children may display shamanic tendencies and therefore be chosen to undergo further training by, for example, being apprenticed to an adult shaman, the question remains, how did these abductees interpret their childhood experiences at the time they were having them. A complicating factor is that some participants clearly recall that their childhood experiences were confusing, fragmentary and dreamlike. Laurence remembers having nightmares as a four- or five-year-old, and “seeing a claw come over the bed,” as well as the whole family having “blood noses,” which is considered by some researchers as a symptom of an abduction experience (Mack, 1994, p.179). Karen recalls that her experiences started when she was six years old:

I have a memory of being in my bedroom as a child and I was sitting on the floor near my doll’s house and it was night time and I looked up and basically saw the ceiling open up and it was like a pillar of light through the ceiling and I moved up through the pillar of light into a ship, where I was sitting cross-legged on the floor of the ship and ... I was being held in place so that I couldn’t move, by several cords ... and there was a group of beings that were actually standing around me and there was some sort of dome-like structure that was over my head and they were looking through that and that gave them the ability to look through my body.
Michael recalls how as a thirteen-year-old “I was lying in bed and I was awake, paralysed and I sensed two small beings at the foot of the bed and at that time I just thought they were ghosts.” Ruth had “a special being as a child who used to play with me.” Later, as an adult, her recollection was good enough to be able to draw this being. Nancy, who is now in her late thirties, vividly remembers her first experience when she was about seven:

I remember being brought back to my bedroom and landing on the bed with rather a large thump and then being aware of the craft outside. I forgot a lot of memories as a child until probably three or four years ago and then they started really coming back to me.... I kind of had a child’s naivete in as much as I was fairly open and experiencing a lot of spiritual things as a child myself, so to me it was, “OK this is just another one of those experiences that are unusual to me as a child.”

In traditional societies children are surrounded by adults who adopt a shamanistic perspective on events even if they themselves are not shamans. In such a cultural context, children having experiences such as those described above might naturally interpret them in such a light, as well as being given such an interpretation by their parents. However, these abductees found that, if they did mention such experiences to their parents, they encountered a variety of reactions ranging from ridicule to disinterest. For example, Michael’s father accused him of having fantasies. None claimed that their parents confidently informed them that they were having shamanic or alien abduction experiences and therefore not to be too concerned.

Other than those of Nancy and Karen, these childhood experiences could perhaps be better classified as anomalous or paranormal experiences, or as otherworld intrusions rather than as alien abductions, although that is not to say that aliens might not have been somehow involved. This of course introduces the vexing question of whether abductions and paranormal experiences are actually separate types of event, or whether they are both examples of otherworld intrusions or psychic projections. Secondly, we could ask whether having one type of experience can sensitise a child to another type, or whether some children are predisposed to
all types of anomalous experiences, but that their cultural conditioning favours one interpretation over another.

Perhaps, as well as these abductees' childhood experiences, there may be other factors that indicate their potential as shamans or as abductees. This is not the place to review the still evolving history of anthropology's opinions of the psychological disposition of most shamans. However, Narby (1998) points out that, in the early twentieth century, shamans "were unanimously considered neurotic, epileptic, psychotic, hysterical or schizophrenic" (p.15). Thankfully, interpretations have become less harsh or myopic since then. Eliade's (1951/1989) section on "Shamanism and Psychopathology" (p.23) discusses what it is about people that might predict their suitability for shamanistic initiation apart from some possibly random decision of the gods. Terms such as nervous, sickly, dreamy, withdrawn, absent-minded and contemplative are mentioned as possible precursors to a shamanic vocation. Could these also predispose someone towards being abducted by aliens? Later Eliade summarises this matter by writing that, "The shaman begins his new, his true life by a 'separation' — that is ... by a spiritual crisis that is not lacking in tragic greatness and in beauty" (1951/1989, p.13).

Kalweit (1988) writes that, "psychic and physical abnormalities can dispose a person towards the transpersonal, because such individuals, by virtue of their abnormality, are excluded from normal life within their culture" (p.134). Later he explains that for such people:

Their 'sickness' — their deviating psychic constitution — permits a dissolution of their personal and social identity and affords access to higher transpersonal layers of consciousness and to the world of the spirits.... Whereas the balance of a normal person must first become disturbed by shamanic sickness if that person is to experience another reality, socially abnormal people could be said to have a certain predisposition in this direction. (p.137)

Bearing this in mind, interview participants were asked whether they were sick or unhappy, or felt unusual or different before their initial abduction experiences. Their answers were fairly consistent. Laurence replied that, "I have always felt an
outsider ever since I was a kid. I never ... fitted in with my family." Betty said, "I've always been a loner as a child.... I was never one to mix with people.... I could never understand why there was so much nastiness with children ... I've always been a bit of an outsider." Arthur, who as a child "had a few select friends," recalls that, "There were some marital issues with my parents" which produced tension in the house, "and I think that probably awakened an awareness in me." He also claims that as an adult, "I tend not to be overly concerned about issues that other people are very concerned about." Ruth describes how she has “always felt different, as if I have never belonged here.... I have never been able to relate to other children and I've never been able to relate to learning. It’s like, ‘Why am I here?’ ” Helen also felt like an outsider. She describes being “very scared and lonely as a child” and that she “always felt I wasn’t supposed to be here.” She remembers “seeing things in my room” when aged about six or seven. “They scared me a lot because I didn’t understand what they were,” but her parents told her that “they were just nightmares or that I was being silly.” Karen, who sees herself as half extraterrestrial and half human, says that she has:

very vivid memories from when I was three and four. I can remember almost everything as if it was yesterday. I can remember my feelings, my emotions, my thoughts, the things I wore, everything. Very, very vividly. I knew how to manipulate, I knew how to provoke reactions in people, all sorts of things. I thought exactly the way I do now. And I can remember that. And I never, ever felt really connected to anybody at all, not even to my family — so in that way I felt unusual, I never really connected to anybody at all. So I felt very separate.

As a child Patricia believed that she came from elsewhere:

All my life I have felt that I am not from here. I use to have a very definite sense that I ... wasn’t part of my own family.... I use to look up to the stars and feel a connection with something up there... I used to tell the primary school children that I had friends that would come and get me at night and take me onto craft.

In keeping with the idea of shamanic initiates sometimes being sickly, Nancy recalls that, “I had kind of an unhappy childhood, my parents used to argue a lot, but I developed rather early in life a disease of the thyroid” which “was brought upon by a stressful situation I was put through when I was a child.” Nevertheless Nancy
claims that she “had this inner sense that I was really special, so that when I was old enough ... I would be taken care of.... I just had this intuitive knowing that I was safe, despite how aggressive my parents were.”

While these reports might illustrate how many children feel these days, there is no doubt that this group do not seem to have been particularly happy during childhood, which might reveal an interesting point. Given that they were not being raised in a traditional society, it is unlikely that they would have chosen shamanism as a career. Would it be more appropriate, therefore, to label their initial childhood experiences not as transformative initiations, but rather as formative experiences? Whatever or whoever was responsible for such anomalous experiences, an outside agency, an inner gift or some combination of the two, these children certainly learned that, despite whatever their parents or peers said, such experiences were possible and had actually happened to them. They had been primed, they could perhaps be seen as ‘sleepers’ waiting to be reactivated. Any subsequent adult experiences of this nature would be more of a reminder than a transformation and might be less likely to be interpreted as delusional. This in itself makes the experiences of these abductees different from typical shamanic initiations, mainly because they are occurring in a markedly different cultural context. Nevertheless, the cause or dynamics of the experiences may actually be very similar to shamanic experiences.

4.2 Early Religious Beliefs
Participants were asked about their religious or spiritual beliefs prior to their initial experiences and their responses dovetail well with their earlier comments about how most of them felt like outsiders when they were children. Angela’s parents were not at all religious, but as a teenager she felt that “there was something missing. I thought there was more to life than just the physical and I was seeing energy in words and began to pick up on thoughts and sensing things. So I started searching.” Laurence has always been a Catholic and believes that “Jesus was an alien. He was an advanced being from a different plane.” Before his adult abduction experiences Laurence started to meditate. “I remember the first time I
tried to do it in a class, we visualised the white light, and then suddenly these three black demons came up from underneath the white light, and that was quite a bit scary.” Betty was bought up as Church of England but “absolutely loathed” going to church and cannot recall thinking about spiritual matters at all as a child. Arthur was a Church of England choirboy whose only spiritual beliefs were those he was taught in church, but which were constantly challenged by the “very realistic dreams” he kept having. His parents, grandparents and friends “didn’t want to know” about them and the people in the church “dismissed any experiences I might have had as being bad dreams or the devil’s work” which left him feeling “very lonely” and “very isolated.” Helen was also Church of England and as a child “strongly believed in God.” Karen’s father was a Methodist minister and her mother was also fairly religious. “I believed in a God and I used to say prayers at night to a God, but I didn’t really feel or know what that was.”

Michael’s family wasn’t at all religious, but while at primary school he developed an interest in UFOs and the paranormal. “When I was younger I used to sort of meditate — focus on something and everything would go white and it was like you could see the particles in the air moving around, but not to a different realm.” Ruth’s parents were Presbyterian and sent her to Sunday school a few times, “but I was never interested.” She has never been religious although she thinks she used to go into trances as a child. When she was about ten her father started talking to her about UFOs. But she was “always scared in those days and I didn’t want to know about it,” largely, she thinks, because her mother was fearful of the subject. Nancy went to a private Catholic school “thinking that this [religion] is a bit crazy and not right, and became really interested in spirituality and started seeing beings at about eighteen.” She was able to see, “Anyone who had passed away in spirit — my grandmother, other grandparents.” Patricia was brought up as a Catholic but does not recall being particularly religious. As a child she could sense that there were “people around and that things were happening,” or that there was “a presence in the house,” but her mother — who would sometimes recount “sort of ghost experiences that she’d had” — would “totally discount” such reports and tell her that she had a vivid imagination, which left Patricia very confused.
These responses appear to be a mixed bag indicating that the abductees were generally disinterested in organised religion, but that several of them had what could be called a spiritual disposition, yet seemed unsure of what to do with it. Once again, this illustrates the difference between their Western cultural environment and that found in traditional societies. Such a situation may have influenced these children into having more definitive abduction experiences as adults, or to have been more inclined to interpret those experiences in spiritual terms.

4.3 Inverted Lives

Participants were asked whether ‘abduction’ was the appropriate word to describe their experiences. This was asked because (as mentioned in Chapter 1.4) the UFO literature claims that many abductees feel that the term is inappropriate, despite it having entered common usage. Most of the participants agreed, claiming that they would prefer words such as “contact,” “expansion” or “interaction.” Betty prefers the term “free choice,” adding, “I’ve always had a sense of adventure in that way.” Ruth points out that “if you want to go you can go,” while Nancy believes that “at some level I feel I have entered into a contract with the space brothers.” Expanding on the idea of having varying levels of awareness, Karen claims that, “part of me did agree on some levels but my human side really didn’t agree.” She explains that, “I feel I am an extraterrestrial in human skin, so my extraterrestrial side totally agreed to the experiences, but my human self had a problem.”

This presents a paradox. How can someone claim to have agreed to something at a deep, inner level but not at the level of their normal waking consciousness? Perhaps this indicates that humans, or at least some abductees, do have an inner self or spirit body, as shamanism claims, which is capable of coherent, rational thought while in an altered state of consciousness, but whose decisions subsequently get drowned out by the dictates of normal waking consciousness. This would help explain why shamans have to learn to achieve ecstasy, which might be better called an altered state of consciousness, in order to access the spirit realm. Harner (1990) writes that:
The 'ecstatic' or altered state of consciousness and the learned perspective that characterise shamanic work may be usefully termed the Shamanic State of Consciousness.... [which] involves not only a 'trance' or a transcendent state of awareness, but also a learned awareness of shamanic methods and assumptions while in such an altered state. (p.21)

This suggests that the claim of having agreed at a deeper level to be 'abducted' by aliens could in itself be seen as symptomatic of a shamanistic mentality.

Another perspective on the paradoxical notion of having one's inner self contradicting one's normal, outer consciousness is addressed by Kalweit (1992) when he points out that "The shaman is a fool who turns everything upside down, but he is a holy fool" (p.222). In order to pursue their profession, shamans must give priority to their perception of the inner realm, the spirit realm, and could therefore be seen as living double or inverted lives in all sorts of ways. They have a physical and a spirit body; they 'die' in order to be able to heal; they have normal eyes, yet they possess inner vision when those eyes are closed; for them the dead are still alive; what we regard as dreams they regard as real; and they may 'travel' during their visions while physically going nowhere. Shamans "are upside-down. They are the living embodiments of inwardness, of the hidden.... The shaman is a clown, a fool, the reflection of an antimatter universe, a mirror image" (Kalweit, 1992, p.226). Of course one cannot claim that this means that any abductee who answers question with apparently contradictory replies is therefore a shaman, but nevertheless it might help explain how someone, who is still undergoing what might be considered as the equivalent of shamanic initiation training, can have a feeling that their inner self knows something that they cannot quite grasp at a conscious level.

In an echo of some abductees' claims to feeling like outsiders, as well as further illustrating the similarity between their multi-faced personalities (which become more apparent as we discuss the rest of their interview responses) and that of the typical shaman, Vitebsky (1995) writes that:
Shamans are central figures in their societies, yet they are also marginal, marked off from others by the extraordinary nature of their experiences and personalities. Their different identities are often opposed in pairs and expressed simultaneously during rituals: the shaman is both healer and sorcerer, human and divine, human and animal, male and female. The sum of each paired term indicates the totality of the shaman's way of being. (p.91)

4.4 Dreams, and Out-of-Body Experiences

Eliade (1951/1989) points out that generally a shaman is not recognised:

until he or she has received two kinds of teaching: (1) ecstatic (dreams, trances, etc.) and (2) traditional (shamanic techniques, names and functions of the spirits, mythology and genealogy of the clan, secret language, etc.). This twofold course of instruction given by the spirits and old master shamans, is equivalent to an initiation. (p.13)

This means that what occurs during a shamanic initiate's dreams can take on considerably more importance than normally attributed to dreams in Western societies, although some Western theories of psychology do claim that dreams can reveal meaningful, often symbolic, information. Eliade further states that:

It is in dreams that the pure sacred life is entered and direct relations with the gods, spirits, and ancestral souls are re-established. It is always in dreams that historical time is abolished and mythical time regained.... Sometimes initiatory dreams are involuntary and begin even in childhood. (p.104)

Drury (1996) explains that shamanism is "a type of mythic 'lucid dreaming'. In the latter category of dreaming one is 'aware' that one is dreaming and likewise, in shamanism, one is conscious in the altered state and able to act purposefully within it" (p.52). Likewise, in The Art of Dreaming (1993), Castaneda describes his attempts to master lucid dreaming — using a Mexican shamanic tradition — as a means of accessing various otherworld realms. Drury also tells us that many North American Indians "pay special regard to their dreams for signs of omens, portents and psychic attack" (1996, p.25).

During their interviews, several abductees mentioned their dreams, and some of them report having their abduction experiences during what they call 'dreams'. Angela reports that in her "teenage years I used to have a lot of premonitions and
dreams that would occur in real life.” Cheryl works as an art therapist and has “done ten years of Jungian dream analysis where we explored symbology in dreams and I have always had this amazing connection with the depth of understanding that can be gained through the use of portraying meanings without words.” Laurence believes that he relates to aliens during “weird” dreams during which he is put through tests or “subconscious lessons.” Betty has her close encounter experiences during dream states, some of which she can recall clearly while others remain inaccessible. Arthur has what he calls “very, very lucid ... realistic dreams.” Helen had scary dreams as a child which her parents told her “were just nightmares, or that I was being silly.” Now, as an adult, she has vision-like experiences during which she is shown things or taken places by aliens. Nancy raises the philosophical question of whether in fact we are living in a dream. She sees her dreaming hours as an opportunity for “my soul to be free,” and, before she goes to sleep, she requests the “Space Brothers” to teach her something interesting, or to take her to visit her “off-spring tonight.” Patricia reports that her mother also describes “beings that have come to her in a dream-like state.”

As an alternative to travelling or acquiring information while dreaming, Patricia recounts an occasion when she had an out-of-body experience (OBE) or, as she puts it, “more like remote viewing,” during which she could ‘see’ her sister visiting a Sydney park with her children, an event that was confirmed in a subsequent phone call. ‘Remote viewing’ is the term used by some parapsychologists for the paranormal ability — somewhat like a form of clairvoyance — to describe a distant location without actually going there (Schnabel, 1997). The difference between OBEs and remote viewing appears to be minimal. In the former, people seem to visit a distant location, using what might be termed their spiritual body, while in the latter they claim to stay with their physical body and instead seem to 'pull' visual information about a distant location to them. Both abilities seriously challenge traditional Western conceptions about the nature of consciousness (Radin, 1997), but fit in easily with a shamanic world-view, which suggests a need for further scientific research into such abilities. Vitebsky (1995) tells us that “Out-of-body experiences resemble the shamanic journey in some respects” (p.73), and that
sometimes a shaman can journey "through a known landscape" such as nearby mountains and valleys, "reciting his movements step by step to his audience" (p.72). Speaking of the "symbolism of magical flight," Eliade notes the importance of "the mythical image of the soul in the form of a bird" (1951/1989, p.479). He then tells us that:

Sorcerers and shaman are able, here on earth and as often as they wish, to accomplish 'coming out of the body,' that is, the death that alone has power to transform the rest of mankind into 'birds'; shamans and sorcerers can enjoy the condition of 'souls,' of 'discarnate beings,' which is accessible to the profane only when they die. Magical flight is the expression both of the soul's autonomy and of ecstasy. (p.479, his italics)

Patricia describes another out-of-body experience when "I was healing someone, and I went up through this energy-form that was coming down onto the body, and found myself literally going up through the sky and up into a craft." Nancy claims that during some abductions "your whole body is taken, and I think on different occasions it's a soul experience" in which the physical body remains where it is. Ruth describes how:

I woke up one day and I just felt like everything was shaking.... As I looked up I saw this being and it was all dressed in [a] gold cape, and it told me to go and sit in the chair in the lounge. So I sat in the chair in the lounge ... and I started flying, and I flew to South Australia, where I used to live, from Queensland, and I ended up at the hospital there.

While in a disembodied state at this distant hospital Ruth was shown by her guide how to use her hands to help heal someone who "had had a bad accident." Karen, however, does not often remember what happens during her OBEs:

When I am going out of my body, I just blank out and then, when I am coming back in ... my body convulses. So if I am lying down, I will then jolt upright and be sitting up, or I'll flip over and then my breathing will go into quite an erratic pattern or hyperventilation with the shock of coming back.

Laurence "has always been interested in levitating myself" and in inducing OBEs because "that's when you start to feel the full potential of your consciousness." Betty used to have flying dreams in which she "had control," and Ruth has always felt that she can float and, before she was ten, she started to have dreams in which
"I used to become so big I was floating like a balloon." Michael recalls being woken up by something "like a vibration" and eventually realised "I was leaving my body at some level." He is unsure what causes such experiences, "But sometimes ... you feel like you are being expanded. You can see the sky above you at night and things around you." These dream and out-of-body experiences are clearly similar to some aspects of shamanism. It would be interesting to reinterview these abductees in a few years time to see whether they are continuing to have such experiences and whether, like many shamans, more of them have learnt to induce them at will.

4.5 Spirit Animals

Dreams or visions of spirit flight are an integral part of shamanism and introduce the important relationship between the shaman and spirit animals. Kalweit (1992) writes that, "Leaving the body by means of the soul is ... the basis of shamanism," which means that "many cultures associate shamans with birds or with flight in general" (p.139). Similarly, Halifax (1982) tells us that, according to the Siberian Buryats, the eagle is the prototype of the shaman and both are "intercessors between gods and human beings" (p.23). They believe that the first human shaman was created when an eagle, acting as an emissary of the gods, found a woman in the woods who had left her husband and, "transmitted his essence to her." Finding herself pregnant, the woman "returned to her husband and gave birth to a son, the first human shaman" (p.23). For reasons such as this, shamans all over the world either transform into spirit birds or are carried by one when they ascend to the celestial realm. Halifax (1982) further reports that, "Whether for sport or spirit, the shaman's ability to fly or the enactment of flight bespeaks a sublime metaphysical reality that appears to be a common feature of mystical experiences everywhere" (p.24). Vitebsky (1995, p.22) notes the link between consciousness, power and spirit animals:

Spirit is more than just consciousness, and because it is capable of causing things to happen in this world it is a form of power. Much of the shaman's work consists of harnessing it.... When shamans negotiate with this power it not only enables them to make things happen, but even to turn into animals.
Spirit animals are not just used for celestial flight. As Cowan (1993) points out, shamans may have a special relationship with certain animals that act as his or her helpers:

In both ordinary and nonordinary reality, a shaman's special animal companions bestow power and identity upon the shaman. Frequently a shaman will have powers analogous to the animal who serves as his or her spirit guide. A widespread practice among shamans is to shapeshift into animals while in a visionary state of consciousness in order to experience that power and identify with it more fully. (p.151)

Harner (1990) explains that some traditions believe that animals can appear within a shaman's dreams in human form, while a shaman's guardian spirit or 'power animal' may appear in animal form, thus revealing the close links between humans and animals (p.58). Speaking of dream animals, Krippner (1987) writes that "Among several ... American Indian tribes, initiatory dreams contain such birds and animals as bears, deer, eagles, and owls; the dream creature instructs the dreamer to take its power and begin shamanic training" (p.126).

When Laurence, a Catholic, was asked if he had seen any mythical or symbolic beings or animals during his experiences, he replied that he had seen Satan, and a lot of lions which to him "are a source of power, perhaps a source of origins." Caution must be shown in attributing any particular symbolism to animals seen in abductees' dreams or close encounter experiences given that they may have been influenced by other sources. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that Saunders (1995) tells us that, as well as being the symbol of power, royalty and Christ, its bravery and strength made the lion "a guardian of the underworld in Egyptian and Greek mythology" (p.63).

As a child, Betty recalls repeatedly having very realistic nightmares of being surrounded by "crocodiles, lions and snakes." These animals have various symbolic meanings in different cultures, for example, Saunders (1995) writes that because they are "able to live and hunt on water and land, crocodiles have been seen as archetypes of human ambiguity" (p.100). The ancient Egyptians had a crocodile
god, Sebek who was “linked to Set, god of the underworld” (p.101). Saunders (1995) also claims that:

The symbolic nature of the lion, like that of many cats, is ambivalent. In Egypt it represented not only the living power of the sun ... but also death and the afterlife, because of its association with Osiris, ruler of the underworld. The lion was also believed to guard the spirit realm. (p.62)

The snake, too, has a large variety of symbolic meanings. Saunders explains that in “Australian Aboriginal mythology the cosmic serpent” swallows and then regurgitates initiates, while “for many pre-Columbian civilisations the serpent symbolises transformation and cosmic rebirth” (p.104). For Native Americans, the serpent “stands for eternity and magic power, and is the mediator between humankind and the underworld” (p.104). As an adult, Betty now has an affinity with birds and her dreams feature eagles, which she believes symbolise the human spirit.

Helen too has an affinity with eagles: “Sometimes when I go into my trances I become an eagle.... I usually take the form of an eagle when I am getting shown things and also when I am with my Indian guide.” While meditating, Karen has been:

shown my power animals and I actually became a bear and a lion. It took me a while to work out that that was what had happened, and I started roaring and when I became a lion I was galloping through long grass and tearing at flesh; and I became a grizzly bear and was up on two legs and roaring. After that experience my view towards cats in particular really changed. I had a cat at the time and I saw her quite differently. I saw her as being very much a lion, and she was almost like my teacher.

These few examples illustrate that some of the abductees have occasionally encountered animals during their experiences, but not with the frequency that would be expected if they were traditional shamans. However, we might expect that this would be the case given that most Westerners are not so deeply conditioned about the symbolism of various animal species. Secondly, we could perhaps surmise that the average Westerner may be more likely to encounter otherworld
beings that reflect his or her cultural environment, such as robots or humanoids rather than animals. This is not to imply that shamans or alien abductees are imagining the entities that they encounter, but rather that such entities may be 'packaged,' or chose to represent themselves, in a culturally digestible manner. Nevertheless, some of the abductees report seeing aliens that resemble animals or insects. For example, Patricia reports, “seeing the Praying Mantis beings” and Helen has seen a Reptilian alien.

4.6 Initiation Illness and Refusal

In discussing shamanic initiation illness, Eliade (1951/1989) tells us that:

Any 'sickness-vocation' fills the role of an initiation; for the suffering that it brings on corresponds to initiatory tortures, the psychic isolation of 'the elected' is the counterpart to the isolation and ritual solitude of initiation ceremonies, and the imminence of death felt by the sick man (pain, unconsciousness etc.) recalls the symbolic death represented in almost all initiation ceremonies. (p.33)

In traditional societies not everyone accepts the call of the spirit world. For various reasons some attempt to ignore the signs and symptoms that herald their shamanic calling and try to continue their lives as if nothing had happened. Vitebsky (1995) writes that:

Shamanic power is not something to be taken lightly and often exacts a high price. In Siberia, Mongolia and many other areas, people dread being called by the spirits to become shamans and resist for as long as they have the strength. (p.22)

However, as Eliade (1951/1989) explains, “the traditional schemata of an initiation ceremony” involves “suffering, death, [and] resurrection” (p.33). This means that if those, whose calling has taken the form of an initiatory sickness, try to opt out of the situation, they may find themself getting worse rather than better. Harassment from various spirits may become relentless until they finally accede. As Kalweit (1988) writes, for people “who have already passed through long periods of suffering, sickness, and possibly, near-death experiences, a refusal to submit to the powers of the Beyond usually results in further torment, never ending sickness, and perhaps even madness or death” (p.182). Campbell (1949/1993), too, tells us
that, "The myths and folk tales of the whole world make clear that the refusal is essentially a refusal to give up what one takes to be one's own interest" (p.59).

Given that it would be well-known in most traditional societies that to refuse such a calling is to court illness or even death, one might wonder why anyone would refuse, unless they considered that accepting would be even more frightening and disruptive. But, it may not always be a matter of just accepting the calling or not. Vitebsky (1995) recounts how "Throughout Siberia and in many other regions," those afflicted with shamanic illness may spend weeks acting as if they had gone "out of their minds," and "refuse to undertake the onerous life of a shaman and are pursued and tormented by spirits who are determined to make them capitulate" (p.57). If such a spiritual onslaught can last for months or even years, could it not sometimes be that — regardless of their cultural environment — the people involved are simply too confused and debilitated to make the appropriate decision, or worse still, that they do not know just how to signal their capitulation to the spirits? Nevertheless, as Vitebsky (1995) comments, in these regions, "the shamanic 'gift' and the so-called 'mastery' of spirits are double-edged: they are not actively sought but are rather imposed against the shaman's will, and as well as granting power also cause lifelong anguish" (p.57).

Apart from the trauma of their abduction experiences, several interview participants described events or illnesses that might be seen as spiritual harassment, although they may have other explanations. Angela describes "shadowy beings around me that have physically attacked me — not on other levels — but physically strangling me." She stopped the attack by having the thought "that I had to acknowledge the light in whatever being that it was at the time. That was the only way I could get out of it." In her opinion, this experience was a lesson: "it was showing me the fear that I had within myself.... I saw the being as very negative and I was very frightened of it, but afterwards I realised that it was just helping me to strengthen myself." Cheryl, who is now in her thirties, reports that five years ago, before she recalled her childhood experiences, she "experienced a clinical depression" which she sees "as her time of spiritual transformation. And it has only been since then that I have
embarked on learning more about the spiritual pathway.” Since then she has found it easier to enter different states of consciousness. Karen remembers that after her initial abduction experiences, “I did get quite sick and ... I was incredibly nauseous, sick in the stomach, and that went on for weeks, and my parents took me to several doctors who couldn’t find anything wrong with me.”

The notions of initiation illness, refusal or lifelong anguish could also perhaps be applied to this whole group of alien abductees. As children it seems that many did not know what was happening to them and they felt very isolated. Their families and religion were little help and the experiences generally returned, sometimes in a different form, when they reached adulthood. If these were shamanic initiation experiences, we could hardly say that the abductees were refusing the calling because, for most of them the idea that the otherworld was beckoning may never have occurred to them. Yet we know that they all eventually felt the need to attend an alien abduction support group where they discovered that they were not alone, and where the reality of their abduction experiences was accepted. Furthermore, all of them now see their abductions as either a form of spiritual experience or at least as having some sort of spiritual dimension. Could this be seen as a Western version of accepting one’s shamanic vocation? If so, such acceptance does not make these experiences stop. It simply means that, from the abductees’ perspective, they continue in a more acceptable and less traumatic form. In other words, these abductees now either have more control over their experiences or at least believe they have more understanding of them.

4.7 Controlling the Spirits

In a typical shamanic initiation experience, whether sought after or unexpected, neophytes may find that at first they have no control over what is happening to them, which might lead some to describe these as possession experiences. This is not the place for a detailed discussion of whatever differences, if any, might exist between trance states, shamanic states of consciousness and possession. Lewis (1971), who devotes an entire book to the subject, writes that, “It is not for us to judge who is and who is not really ‘possessed’. If someone is, in his own cultural
milieu, generally considered to be in a state of spirit possession, then he (or she) is possessed" (p.46). This illustrates that different cultures have different perspectives on the subject of possession. In traditional societies, as Vitebsky (1995) explains, "Shamanic power depends on keeping control over the trance state" (p.22). The essential difference between what we could term an undesirable possession state and that of the typical shaman, appears therefore to be who is ultimately in charge: the spirit(s), or the person in the trance. As a result of their initiation experiences shamans supposedly learn to control their access to the spirit realm so that they can summon their spirit helpers at will and successfully do battle with any malevolent spiritual forces. However one views this process though, it appears that some spirits are more powerful than others and it is not possible for every shaman to be in complete control all the time. There may be occasions, therefore, when "the shaman’s degree of control appears only partial, as the relation with spirits is a tempestuous and stressful one" (Vitebsky, 1995, p.148).

Two quotations from Eliade (1951/1989) may help unravel this confusing matter in more detail:

It will easily be seen wherein a shaman differs from a ‘possessed’ person, for example; the shaman controls his ‘spirits’, in the sense that he, a human being, is able to communicate with the dead, ‘demons’, and ‘nature spirits’, without thereby becoming their instrument. To be sure, shamans are sometimes found to be ‘possessed’, but these are exceptional cases for which there is a particular explanation. (p.6)

Later Eliade explains in more detail the distinction between the various spirits that a shaman may encounter:

We must distinguish carefully between familiar spirits proper and another more powerful category of spirits known as tutelary spirits; so too, a distinction must be made between these last and the divine or semidivine beings whom the shamans summon up during séances. A shaman is a man who has immediate, concrete experience with gods and spirits; he sees them face to face, he talks with them, prays to them, implores them — but he does not ‘control’ more than a limited number of them. (p.88)

To see how this situation compares with abduction experiences, participants were asked whether they had more control over their experiences now than they previously did. All of them replied that they had no control over their initial
experiences, although Ruth could block them out of her mind. However, almost all of them report that they feel more at ease with their current experiences and can to a certain extent control them, although, unlike shamans, they do not feel that they can initiate the experiences. Angela feels that she has "more control over it now.... I now realise that I can interact with them ... it's a two way thing now, I feel now that I am able to ask them questions and find out what's going on." Laurence claims to "look forward to any intervention," as does Michael, while Arthur now feels he has the "capacity to choose the types of communication that I have. There is no trauma attached to any abduction or contacts." Helen says that sometimes she can refuse contact with the aliens, "but sometimes you just can't. But if there are ones there that you don't feel comfortable with I can say, 'I am sorry I don't feel comfortable with you, please leave'." Both Karen and Nancy have been able to negotiate better terms with the aliens, but none of the abductees claims to have been able to make their experiences stop permanently.

These answers reveal that the aliens still largely have the upper hand, although the abductees do at least feel more at home with their plight. To what extent this is similar to shamanism it is hard to say. The abduction support group notwithstanding, none of these abductees has had the benefit of advice from the equivalent of a master shaman about understanding or controlling their experiences to a greater extent. It might be interesting therefore to interview them again in five or ten years time to see whether the balance of power in their relationships with their abductors had changed and how that might have been achieved.

4.8 Transformation

A further theme to be explored is the transformational nature of shamanic initiation experiences. After being initiated, which may involve lengthy and often arduous training, the traditional shaman in effect becomes a different person, one who "walks between worlds: between the ordinary reality that we know and the hidden realms that are accessible only to those with the right power and knowledge" (Smoley & Kinney, 1999, p.159). Furthermore, this initiation process may involve a "symbolic death and rebirth: the candidate 'dies' to his old identity and is reborn to
a new one” (ibid., p.160). The interview participants were therefore asked to what extent their experiences had transformed them and whether this had caused them any difficulties.

Given that most participants had earlier said that they felt like outsiders during childhood, it is interesting that most still claim to feel like outsiders, but in a paradoxically different way. They now feel that their experiences have qualified them to attempt to teach other people about the nature of the greater reality that they have been privileged to experience. As Laurence puts it “ultimately we are all trying to find reality,” but “the reality that we are given at the moment is very shallow, ... a very small portion of what life is.” Similarly, Ruth believes that, “I know there’s more to life than what there is here.” Cheryl claims still to feel different but in a more positive way. “There is a sense of purpose, ... of understanding. I have ... a bigger picture in terms of what life and the universe is all about. There is a sense of fulfilment, ... that I never experienced before.” Helen too feels that “I know that I have got a purpose here.”

Halifax (1982) describes the feeling that shamans have to educate those around them. “The impulse to see and describe the structure of the cosmos everywhere exists for those peoples whose psyches have been opened to the experience of non-ordinary realities” (p.17). However, the interview participants also pointed out that there was a delicate balance between feeling that one has a role to play in teaching about a different perspective on reality and feeling overwhelmed about the enormity of the task after realising that so many people simply do not see things that way. As Laurence puts it, “most people are still asleep”. This also means that many abductees have a limited circle of friends because, as Helen laments, “a lot of people still look at you as if you are a nutter.” Similarly, Angela says that “most of us are asleep according to them [the aliens] and we need to wake up, so they are assisting.” She further explains that:

Understanding my new experiences and being able to integrate them has been a really big challenge. And it can be difficult because you know there is society saying, “OK, the physical is real and the other
stuff isn’t.” So that has been a challenge to find a balance and be able to live in both at once.

Patricia too describes the “enormous challenges” of integrating her new expanded perspective into her daily life. “I have absolutely changed every facet of who I am through these experiences. So the type of people I relate to are very different.... I have now a very different way of life.” She also describes how sometimes she feels, “so frustrated with having to be different and ... having to carry a sense of responsibility and knowing that things are not right here and that we need to fix them.” In a similar vein, Laurence adds that, “Sometimes it can be a little bit sad because you realise that you can see perhaps a different way of living than other people. But ... they are not really concerned because ... they are ignorant.” Karen feels the isolation of her position. “It is very hard to relate to other people who do not see the world like that.... That would be the main thing that I have found very difficult — the isolation, created by having that different perspective.” On the other hand, Nancy, who has a supportive husband, and children who are also being abducted, relates how her experiences have expanded her world-view to the extent that she now believes that “anything is possible. Absolutely anything. Even magic.”

Harner (1990) expresses sympathy for those that encounter problems convincing others about their shamanic experiences. “The persons most prejudiced against the concept of nonordinary reality are those who have never experienced it. This might be termed cognicentrism, the analogue in consciousness of ethnocentrism” (p.xx, his italics).

To assess the degree to which they had been spiritually transformed by their experiences, the interview participants were asked whether they could now sense invisible energies, or alien or spiritual entities. Such a skill is an essential part of shamanism. For example, Eliade (1951/1989) notes:

the extreme importance of ‘spirit visions’ in all varieties of shamanic initiations. ‘Seeing’ a spirit, either in dream or awake, is a certain sign that one has in some sort obtained a ‘spiritual condition,’ that is, that one has transcended the profane condition of humanity. (p.85)
Angela claims that some of the aliens “are always around. Even though they’re not in physical form, I still perceive them and I can hear them speaking, telepathically, so there is a communication happening all the time.” In her healing work Cheryl can sense the presence of entities from her physical reactions “like the goosebumps; like the hair on the back of your neck standing up — that sort of thing. But it’s also more a sense of knowing.” Amusingly, she also reports that some of her clients unknowingly bring various entities with them. “I have a full house sometimes. Sometimes I have one person in a chair in a room full of onlookers, an audience.”

Betty “can feel entities” around her, which she feels may be there “just to observe.” She also reports that “They can appear sometimes at the corner of the eye, like a shadow.” Another physical symptom can be “a temperature change in myself, my body heat will go up, and if it’s a negative sensation, my body temperature can go down.” Helen, whose partner has also had abduction experiences, can also feel the presence of invisible entities. “The other week we did a healing on a friend and we went into her bedroom and ... the air was very dense, thick. And when we found where the energy source was, it was very clammy and wet.” Nancy knows “when there’s another inter-dimensional being around, or spirit person,” and Karen can sense the presence of entities “in my everyday environment,” but does not often see them. However, “If I was reading any extraterrestrial-type books, I feel a lot of presences.” On those occasions Karen believes that, “they are there almost reaffirming what I am reading.” Ruth sometimes paints the various beings that she senses around the house. “They seem to like being drawn and painted,” so much so that sometimes “they tell me to get a pen and pencil.”

These reports demonstrate that the abductees — like shamans — are capable of sensing invisible energies or entities around them, some of whom may be aliens.

Several abductees report that they sometimes get a strange buzzing or ringing in their ears which they believe may have something to do with their close encounter experiences. Karen believes that the “ringing in my ears” is the result of the aliens
"manipulating or reconstructing my [energy] field or they will be imparting another
tool that I can use in my healing work. That sort of thing." Ruth has noted "funny
earaches, not like an earache, it’s more like pressure." While she believes this
symptom has something to do with various beings, she can only guess that “maybe
they want me to listen.” Michael reports that, “When I meditate, I can get to a
relaxed state when you can hear ringing in your ears and stuff like that.” Nancy
hears “a high pitched buzz and whiz” which she believes happens because the
aliens are trying to get through to her. She described hearing it recently when she
went to bed and saying to her husband, “Oh, they’re here. Can you hear that?” only
to discover that, despite it being “so loud,” he could not hear it. Nancy believes that
the noise, “is the sign that there’s a craft around,” and speculates that, “maybe
that’s the sign that if you are ... picking up on it, they know you are ready for an
encounter that night.”

The shamanic literature has very few references to ringing or buzzing sounds,
although Sadovszky (1951) describes how, among the Wintu Indians in California,
shamanic powers can be sought by anyone during an all-night initiation dance in a
ceremonial earth lodge:

> The shamans and the candidates danced naked around the fire and
> sang to invoke the spirits. Those who failed to gain a supernatural
> experience dropped out after a few hours, and went to bathe.... The
> arrival of the spirit was announced by a whistling sound above the
> smoke hole in the ceremonial lodge, and entered the body of the
> candidate through his ears. (p.131)

While this single comparison can hardly be claimed to prove any sort of similarity
with shamanic experiences, it does illustrate how — as with so many aspects of
abduction experiences — an encounter with spirits tends to focus specifically on
the shamanic initiate and not just anyone in the vicinity.

In summary, the abductees’ replies in this section do appear to reveal that most of
them have undergone a transformation similar to shamanic initiates although, as
mentioned earlier, their anomalous childhood experiences many have helped
reduce the shock of such later events.
4.9 Animism

In addition to their ability to sense various spiritual or alien entities, another reported consequence of the abductees’ experiences is the degree to which their sensitivity towards animals, nature and the environment has increased. This effect could perhaps be summarised by saying that the abductees have now adopted a more animistic or pantheistic view of reality. Hopfe (1991) defines animism as, “The belief that all nature is alive and filled with unseen spirits that may be worshipped or placated. Animists see a soul or a self existing in trees, stones, rivers and heavenly bodies” (p.455). Similarly, Goring (1992) writes that animism is, “A belief in spiritual beings thought capable of influencing human events based on the idea that animals, plants and even inanimate objects have souls like humans” (p.25).

This aspect of the abduction phenomenon might seem paradoxical because one could imagine that people who had had close contact with supposedly advanced beings in space-ships might develop a passion for high technology rather than an animistic perspective. However, that assumption may simply be a projection of Western society’s current preoccupation with high technology. Nevertheless, this animistic perspective considerably strengthens the argument for linking abductions with shamanism because, as Drury (1996) points out:

> Shamanism is really applied animism, or animism in practice. Because Nature is alive with gods and spirits, and because all aspects of the cosmos are perceived as interconnected (the universe consisting of a veritable network of energies, forms and vibrations), the shaman is required as an intermediary between the different planes of being.

(p.10)

Drury (1996) later quotes a female shaman, Luisah Teish, who describes how “the spiritual universe offers contact with ... the consciousness of Nature” which includes “elemental energies such as wind, fire, river and ocean.” These, she says, are “like ‘friends with extra-human powers that can help you’ ”(p.79). Given that she has this awareness, Drury tells us that Teish, “focuses on helping to build an environmental understanding that acknowledges the sanctity of Nature” (p.79). Vitebsky (1995) discusses “the shamanic view of the world in which everything — not only animals,
but also plants and rocks, wind and rain — may be imbued with spirit” (p.12). He goes on to point out that, “Spirit can also be consciousness: creatures, trees, rocks and tools can have consciousness similar to our own” (p.12). Like people, such spirits can have their own personalities, emotional needs and qualities:

So every stream and every mountain may have a specific spirit with its own name, properties and effects on humans.... These alternatives reflect the ambiguous properties of the environment itself in which animals, landscape and weather may either nourish or destroy us, according to their mood of the moment. The consciousness of spirits can merge into human consciousness. The soul of a living human is usually believed to become spirit when it dies, and dead humans may become either ancestor spirits or part of some larger elemental spirit. (Vitebsky, 1995, p.13)

The abductees were not directly asked whether they now had a more animistic perspective because it was thought that some of them might not be familiar with the meaning of the word and because, given that animism covers such a variety of ideas, it was thought that more specific questions might be more relevant. They were therefore initially asked whether their feelings towards the planet and the environment had changed. Almost all of them said yes and, while one could point out that current political correctness practically obliges people to voice a concern for the environment, some abductees went further and reported that the aliens themselves are puzzled at the short-sightedness of humanity's mistreatment of the planet. Angela describes how she has:

always felt a concern, a compassion for the state of the earth and I have always seen it as ... a creature, and I do feel the pain that the earth is in because of what we are doing to it. And ... the ETs are very concerned ... at the moment because it is apparently a very rare place to be, so diverse and ... unlike anywhere else in this Universe.

Helen is “concerned about the way we are destroying the planet,” and believes that the aliens are trying to help humanity curb its destructive tendencies. Betty sees society’s disrespect for the Earth as an affront to spirituality. “Everything is spirituality. It all comes together. One is not separate from the other.” She believes that plants and animals have their own spiritual energy and that it is important that people become aware that the environment is alive and full of spiritual beings. “The spirits are connected to us, they are certainly connected with
all of the mineral, animal kingdom." Since she has been remembering more of her abduction experiences, Nancy realises "how precious the planet is." She is now aware that plants have their own consciousness and claims to be able to see and interact with nature spirits in her garden. Patricia too claims to have developed a "much more heightened awareness" of the environment as well as a sense "that everything is sacred and that everything has a place." She also believes that nature has a form of consciousness. "I have actually had occasion to receive information from things like that. Like a sense of consciousness or information has been transferred from that tree or the place or the animal." Ruth also claims to have become "very sensitive to nature" and now believes that "everything is alive".

The notion that everything is alive and imbued with a form of spirituality is closely connected to a mystical experience that Michael describes during which he felt, "That everything was one, everything is connected, and it felt like the whole, everything around me ... was one". Because he feels this way, Michael points out that "we can't ... cut down all the trees without it affecting us on some level." As a result of his empathy for living things, Michael has been a vegetarian since he was "about eighteen." Betty, too, believes that "everything is connected," and Angela describes how "sometimes I feel really amazing oneness with everything. I don't feel that separateness."

Several of the abductees describe trees as having a form of consciousness. For example, Cheryl, who is also now a vegetarian, believes that "conscious energy can imbue anything. I think that a spirit can merge with a tree." Karen is aware that many abductees "become very environmentally conscious and aware, but I haven't really at all." She believes this is because her "focus has been on people, rather than saving the earth.... We all have different roles, so mine has been very much towards helping peoples' spirits, helping people to be aware of their abilities and their gifts and their uniqueness." Nevertheless, she too senses that "everything is interconnected, we are not separate from anything," and has had experiences that illustrate that nature is alive with spirituality and consciousness:
One was where I fed energy into a tree and I ended up lying down on the tree, almost became a part of it. It felt as though I had become part of the crevices and grooves in the tree. And then the tree actually fed me back energy into my body and the feeling was like the most immense ecstasy I could possibly imagine through my whole body, and I actually received that from water as well, in the same way. And I've also had connections with rocks where I have held a rock and it's told me information about where it was from.

In an example of how some modern spiritual beliefs originate from a variety of sources, while discussing the environment, both Betty and Nancy mentioned the existence of ‘divas’ which within the Hindu and Buddhist traditions are, “exalted beings of various kinds.” However, “In modern times divas are popularly thought of as nature spirits, who may elect to help people. They usually are invisible, but may be seen by clairvoyance” (Guiley, 1991, p.147). Nancy also claims to be able to channel Pan whom she refers to as “the nature god, king of the nature kingdom.” While the idea of nature spirits such as divas and Pan may have originated in completely different Eastern and Western spiritual traditions, these words now seem to have entered the New Age lexicon as generic terms for invisible spiritual entities found in nature and illustrate the animistic view of the world held by these abductees.

Concerns about nature and the environment, such as those expressed by these abductees, are clearly shamanistic in nature. As Drury (1996) points out, “Shamanism is, if nothing else, a religious perspective which venerates Nature. In this age of industrial pollution and damage to the ozone layer, shamanism urges us to attune our religious beliefs to working with Nature and not against it” (p.91).

In another animistic-related question the abductees were asked whether their feelings towards animals, including pets, had changed following their experiences, and, not surprisingly, most of them said yes. Angela now sees animals “as equals, and they are in their own awareness, their own reality as well, but I feel I can communicate with animals, even with plants.” For her, this means that animals see her as “a bridge between humans and where they are coming from.” Cheryl, who has several pets, has “an enormous affiliation with many different types of
animals," and is concerned about society's mistreatment of animals and use of animal products. She feels she can "commune telepathically" with some animals, for example, she has "friends who have animals on the property and they are all so amazed at the way that I interact with them and the way the animals respond to me." Betty feels "a particularly deep connection" to animals, especially birds because of their capacity for flight. Arthur, who has had numerous pets, claims to have once used his healing ability to save a cat that was "taking his last breath" but which then "got up and meowed at me — it really spun me out." Karen can interact with animals in an almost telepathic way. "It's not that I can sense their feelings, but I think that they can sense mine.... They are much wiser than I think we give them credit for. They know about people." Helen has had many pets and also believes she can communicate with them telepathically. For example, with her sister's budgie, "I can just look at him and say his name in my mind, 'Come here,' and he will come. He's always closer to me now than he used to be."

Two of the abductees claim that they would be unable to have pets because they feel too close to animals. For example, Nancy reports that if she had a dog that was "sad or lonely or didn't like that particular dog food, I could sense it ... and I just don't want to take on any of the hurt or pain of an animal, so I choose not to have one." Nevertheless, Nancy finds that, despite being "a bit allergic to them," other people's cats always try to sit on her lap. Ruth reports that she "can't cope with pets in case something goes wrong with them or they get ill. I can't handle that." Likewise she finds that other people's dogs are attracted to her. "Like my mum's dog, it was very ill before he died and he used to always come ... and just sit on my lap wanting me to put my hand on him."

In pondering the abductees' responses about nature and the environment it needs to be realised that animistic-sounding beliefs are an integral part of the New Age movement and so may be unconsciously influencing the abductees. Furthermore, a perspective that accepts that the universe is full of powerful but invisible spiritual beings and energies could be seen as an extension or variation of abductees'
claims that they have had contact with aliens from other invisible realms. It might seem strange therefore if they did not have such beliefs.

4.10 Visions of Disaster

As an interesting extension to the abductees’ claims that aliens are concerned about humanity’s abuse of the environment, a couple of them describe being shown visions of environmental or nuclear disaster. Helen reports that the aliens showed her “the underground [nuclear missile] bunkers and what happens if it all goes off. They’ve shown me .... mushroom clouds and then everything’s wiped out.” She was also shown “huge tidal waves, earthquakes [and] volcanos.” In her opinion these visions are not actually predictions of future events, but things that might happen if humanity does not mend its ways. Likewise, Michael has seen an image of a “meteorite impacting in the ocean,” but is not sure whether this was a prediction of natural disaster or “just to see my reaction.”

Cowan (1992) also refers to visions of disaster when discussing the shamanic training that Aboriginal initiates undergo in some parts of Australia. “As in any intense spiritual discipline psychic terrors are always lurking, ready to play havoc with the postulants mental stability” (p.14). Cowan then quotes a Yaralde tribesman saying that:

> When you sit down to see the prescribed visions, and you see them, do not be frightened, because they will be horrible.... You see your camp burning and the floodwaters rising, and thunder, lightning and rain, the earth rocking, the earth moving, the hills moving, the water whirling, and the trees which still stand, swaying about. Do not be frightened.... You may see dead persons walking towards you, and you will hear their bones rattle. If you hear and see these things without fear, you will never be frightened of anything. (p.14)

These visions, Cowan suggests, are a part of the training undergone by an initiate for the “effective conquest of the higher states of being within himself” in order to find “the primordial, motionless unity that existed before the rupture between himself and the spirit realm of the Dreaming” (p.15). If this is the case, then perhaps the modern disaster visions that some abductees experience are similarly the product of a lack of practice with their newly developing ability to access various
altered states of consciousness and their associated paranormal visionary powers. But, whatever their cause, the disaster visions experienced by abductees seem to have their shamanic equivalent.

This chapter has documented numerous similarities between the abductees’ early close encounter experiences and shamanic initiation experiences, as well as the degree to which their current abilities and world-view illustrate that they have undergone a shamanic-like transformation as a result of those encounters. The central theme of both the abductees’ and shamans’ experiences is the degree to which both groups are compelled to realise that, unlike most other people, they now have the capacity to experience some form of extended reality. Shamans term this the spirit world while abductees may refer to altered states of consciousness, but it appears as if both groups are ‘seeing’ characteristics of the same reality or otherworld. Furthermore, it appears that there is no going back once one has encountered the energies and inhabitants of such a realm. Whether they like it or not, both shamans and abductees are from then on markedly transformed.
Chapter 5  Origins, Genetics and Spiritual Relationships

This chapter brings together several interrelated themes found in the abductees' interview transcripts that closely match various aspects of shamanism. These relate to traditional myths about the creation of the world; the intervention of the gods in the appearance of the first humans; and various types of relationships between shamans and spiritual beings. Drury (1996) points out that for a shaman, entering the spirit world may involve "meeting with ancestors or creator gods, and sometimes even participating in the mythic drama of the Creation itself" (p.15). Relationships between divine or spiritual beings feature in many of the world's major religions as well as in shamanism (Kalweit, 1988, p.127). This introduces ideas about a possible interest in genetics by both aliens and shamans, which in turn leads to a discussion of heredity and relationships, either spiritual, alien or human. For example, some shamans inherit their vocation, which might imply that shamanic or paranormal abilities are genetically based, and which makes an interesting comparison with the fact that some alien abductions appear to run in families. However, an alternative suggestion is that the reported alien interest in genetics is a symbolic way of communicating to abductees that aliens and hybrid children are perhaps spiritual or imaginal beings, who are nevertheless 'related' to us in some sense that we have yet to comprehend.

5.1 Genetics

Some ufologists such as Jacobs (1998) believe that abductions are part of an alien breeding program that is using both male and female humans in an exploitative manner without their informed consent. As a possible example of this, Nancy describes being taken by the aliens to see her hybrid offspring. "They were very beautiful. They looked a little bit sad actually and occasionally I get a touch sad that I can't connect with them." It is not the purpose of this study to discover whether genetic exploitation of humans by aliens is literally taking place. However, it seems relevant to point out that the current understanding of genetics asserts that it is not possible for different species to mate and produce offspring. For example, geneticists claim that the closest relative to humans is the chimpanzee,
with whom we share 98.8% of our DNA (Andrews, 1993, p.55), yet even these two species are unable to combine and produce offspring. One might question therefore how it could be possible for aliens and humans to produce hybrid children unless perhaps alien genetic engineering is superior to that of humans, which may well be the case. Other possibilities are that humans and aliens are closely related enough to produce viable offspring or that the hybrid children mentioned by abductees are actually some sort of spiritual or otherworld beings, thus rendering genetics irrelevant.

The eight female and three male interview participants were asked why they thought they had been abducted and whether they believed humans and aliens were in any way related. While unsure why they had been abducted, several feel that they have a subsequent role to play here on Earth and most feel a strong connection to their abductors. Angela believes that on some level she has chosen to be abducted. She feels that “This is my first time on Earth ... [the aliens] are like my family. So for me to have contact with them it is ... quite normal and it’s also helped me to remember who I am.” She claims that the aliens have told her that:

The genetic make-up of human beings comes directly from ETs.... We were created, they say, by them and they are our family. We are all family. We just don’t realise that. So we fear them because they look different, but when you actually start to understand where they are coming from, you realise that there is much more that is similar than isn’t.

Cheryl believes that the aliens “are caretakers of the planet and act accordingly.” She thinks that they “have, in the past before intelligence was well established, influenced or accelerated the development of different species on Earth, and that might have been through gene manipulation.” Laurence has a dream memory in which “part of me ... actually helped to cross-pollinate [a] certain other breed,” while Betty believes that “We are all interconnected.” Arthur gets a “feeling of relatedness around certain [alien] species,” while Karen states that her repeat abductions are involved with a hybrid breeding program. “I was told that I had a certain purity that was needed for the breeding program, involving creating a new race.” In explaining what she means by ‘purity’ she claims that, “extraterrestrials
are not familiar with emotions as such. They were wanting to breed with humans who had a full range of emotions and capacities, and also that were very sensitive individuals.” She later describes the “excruciating pain over my whole body” as a result of “giving birth to the hybrid species” and how, in order to help alleviate it, she had negotiated with the aliens so that she “could hold the foetuses before they went, so there wasn’t such a dramatic parting.” She believes that, while not our direct genetic ancestors, aliens were involved in starting life on Earth, are continuing to nurture us, and that “a lot of people have been aliens before in other lifetimes and have soul families that are extraterrestrials.” Ruth claims that we “come from the stars” and that the aliens “are here to help us find out why we are here.” Nancy, who claims to have produced “twelve hybrid children,” believes that her abductions are partly an insurance policy in case we destroy our planet. “I think it is for colonising other planets,” and “to make clones again in the event that we do destroy our planet.” Like Karen, Nancy believes that aliens have “the knowledge themselves to create beings,” but are using humans “because they need that emotion that humans have. They want to create ... a race where they have the beautiful capacity for emotion that humans have, but have their [alien] genetic or physical make-up.” Likewise, Patricia claims that:

There is a concern for the future of our race and in some way they [the aliens] are trying to harness our genetic information so that they create a race of beings that are like a mixture of the two — no, they are actually a mixture of more than two. They are not just the Grey’s information, [all] the races are being put into that genetic material.

She explains that “our origins go back to these beings ... that we are all interconnected,” and that there has been “interaction down through history with our race and that at various times genetic information has been brought in or interfered with, to create our race.”

These interview extracts reveal a significant consistency among the abductees, both male and female, that something of a genetic nature is occurring, even if they are not entirely in agreement about the fine details. This may be because alien ‘biotechnology’ is beyond current human comprehension so the abductees do not have the appropriate words to explain what is happening to them. Other possibilities are
that abductees are being misled into cooperating by exploitative aliens, or that some abduction reports are perhaps imaginal, otherworld events that the abductees are unconsciously translating into a Western intellectual system which deems all experiences to be either real or not. Nevertheless, it seems that these abductees feel related to aliens — or that they are in some sense actually aliens themselves — and believe that something of a genetic nature is occurring during their close encounters.

There are several similarities with shamanism here. The first is to be found in Jeremy Narby's book *The Cosmic Serpent: DNA and the Origins of Knowledge* (1998). Narby did the field-work for his anthropology doctorate among the people of the Amazon jungle. Later research convinced him that, for hundreds if not thousands of years, Amazonian shamans, as well as traditional societies in other parts of the world, have had an intimate knowledge of the coiled, serpent-like structure of the DNA molecule. This he claims is illustrated in carvings, paintings and legends of twin or double headed snakes found in places as far afield as the Amazon, ancient Egyptian (p.83) and in Australian Aboriginal rock paintings (p.79). He believes that this information is obtained by shamans during otherworld encounters with the spirits of various plants and animals, or to phrase it another way, he believes that DNA and the cellular or molecular level of the Earth's biosphere is 'minded' and can therefore communicate with the consciousness of the shaman. As he puts it, “My hypothesis suggests that what scientists call DNA corresponds to the animate essences that shamans say communicate with them and animate all life forms” (Narby, 1998, p.132). Narby is conscious of the radical nature of his suggestions, and his book sets out his reasoning and references in considerable detail.

Whether further research proves him correct or not, what appears relevant to this study is that some abductees and some shamans claim that the otherworld entities that they encounter appear to have a profound expertise and interest in what we call genetics.
5.2 Creation Myth and Ancestors

A second genetic-related similarity between these abductions and shamanism is that some of the abductees — Karen, for example — believe that not only are aliens related to humans, but that the aliens are in some sense our ancestors and continue to watch over us. Likewise in shamanism, as Eliade (1951/1989) points out, “the future shaman’s vocation can be precipitated — in dreams, ecstasy, or during an illness — by a chance encounter with a semidivine being, the soul of an ancestor or of an animal” (p.81). This initial contact may precipitate subsequent spirit contact: “the shaman becomes a receptacle that can be entered indefinitely by other spirits, too; but these are always the souls of dead shamans or other spirits who served the old shamans” (p.82). This illustrates that people in traditional societies believe in life after death and accept that it is possible or even desirable for shamans to have otherworld encounters with ancestral beings for various purposes. For example, Eliade (1951/1989) tells us that in central and north Asia, while “the recent dead are feared, the long dead are revered and are expected to act as protectors” (p.207).

Creation myths — in which the gods created the first humans — are a part of many shamanic and religious myths. Long (1987) tells us that:

In many cosmogonic myths a supreme being or high god creates the world, after which other divine beings come into being, who in the form of cultural heroes or other types of gods reveal the realm of the sacred, death, sexuality, sacred geography, and the methods of food production.... These divine beings and cultural heroes form the ancestral lineages of the human race.

In Assyro-Babylonian mythology, for example, there are several explanations for the origins of life, one of them being that:

Lakhmu and Lakhamu were the first two to be born. They are rather vague gods, and seem to be a pair of monstrous serpents. They gave birth to Anshar, the male principle, and to Kishar, the female principle, who represent respectively, so some think, the celestial and the terrestrial worlds. (Guirand, 1968)
Whichever myth you choose, “one point is clear, namely that humanity was the work of divine hands — men were children of the gods” (Guirand, 1968). This particular myth makes a lot more sense than Guirand implies if one interprets “a pair of monstrous serpents” in the light of Narby’s (1998) work, as a symbolic description of the double-spiralled DNA molecule — supposedly the essential ingredient for life.

These points illustrate that while abductees and shamans may have a current involvement or interest in genetics, both groups also believe that otherworld beings — aliens and divine beings respectively — were originally involved and continue to play a part in the creation and management of their species.

5.3 Spiritual Relationships

A third similarity with shamanism is the sexual or relationship component of some abductions that may lead to the production of hybrid children. Michael who has “had some memories and flashbacks of babies and that type of thing,” says that, “I know what my role is aboard the craft, and that is a reproductive sort of thing, they collect sperm and also they monitor your health.” Though unsure as to the purpose of such genetic activity, he recalls an occasion when:

I was paired up with this female being and it was like, “This is your mate, you know you can live with her, but it won’t be here, it will be somewhere else.” So I think again that the reason may be like a genetic type of thing.

Eliade (1951/1989) discusses incidences of the seduction of a future shaman by spiritual beings (p.72), and Kalweit’s book on shamanism deals with sacred weddings, spirit marriages and dream sexuality (1988, pp.127-143). A male or female initiate shaman may be contacted, while asleep or in an altered state of consciousness, by an attractive spirit offering a sexual relationship and/or marriage, as well as instruction in the shamanic arts. Refusal may result in prolonged sickness which ceases immediately upon acceptance of the offer. Such spirit marriages can at times be complex. The shaman may already have a human partner and children, but may nevertheless marry a spirit who likewise has his or her own spirit partner. Such relationships may even produce spirit children.
However, Kalweit (1988) points out that, “sexual intercourse with spirit beings can be somewhat one sided — for instance, when the shaman is literally raped by his spirit partner. Protecting spirits furthermore are able to transform themselves into ugly and terrifying monsters, and frequently do so” (p.128). One could easily make a case that sexual contact between abductees and aliens, without the consent of the person concerned, is tantamount to rape, while ugly and terrifying aliens are reported in some abduction cases. ¹

Interview participants were asked whether they had any on-going relationship with an alien or spiritual being. Apart from the offer made to Michael mentioned earlier, none said that they were having a sexual relationship that sounded like a spiritual marriage. However, several claimed that they had what they termed ‘spiritual guides’ and a few occasionally recognised the same aliens. Helen claims to have a Greek goddess and an American Indian as guides and does sometimes recognise aliens that she has seen before:

The other week ... I saw my light-being and ... he was making me laugh. I have seen a blue Grey (with blue eyes), and just lately I have been seeing what you would call a Reptilian [alien]. They are negative ones, so obviously I hadn’t learnt a lesson properly.... You can’t pick who you’re going to see — it’s what message they have got for you or what you are supposed to know.

Karen regularly encounters a being that assists her healing work and appears able to shape-shift, an ability that some aliens and shamanic entities have in common:

I have one that is around me a lot, that I do recognise. He presented himself to me in several forms.... I first thought that he would be North American Indian, [but] I would now think he was a South American. He had dark skin, wore ... lots of metal necklaces around his neck and

¹ As a variation to humans giving birth to spirit children and abductees producing hybrid babies for aliens, Celtic folklore provides the idea of the changeling, which was something left by fairies after they had stolen a healthy human baby. Changelings were sometimes ridiculously scrawny — somewhat like the grey aliens. On other occasions, “a grown-up person is stolen — a nursing mother, needed to feed the fairy babies, or a beautiful young woman coveted by one of the fairy princelings” (Briggs, 1979, p.46).
heaps and heaps of bracelets going right up his arms, but then was pretty much wearing ... a leather skirt and leather ... sock-like things without feet that were around his calves.... He had a shaven head besides a long block of hair that was going ... from the back of his head straight down, and ear rings. And he presented himself to me like that because that was how my body remembered him from a previous lifetime, and he later presented himself to me as ... a very, very tall, blue elongated figure, incredibly tall.

Michael cannot tell if he sees the same entities again "because the majority of the time they look pretty similar." He does however have a healing guide he calls John who "wears a white robe and sandals." Nancy has one being that is "very close to me like a brother. I don’t see him, but when I think of him and I feel him, I know that he is there." Patricia, who finds it easy to distinguish between aliens and spiritual entities, reports that, "There are several beings I recognise on an ongoing basis and, yes, I do have — collectively — an ongoing relationship with that level of form — with extraterrestrials and spirit beings."

While warning that "the comparison must not be pushed too far," Eliade (1951/1989) tells us that, "We shall find shamanism within a considerable number of religions, for shamanism always remains an ecstatic technique at the disposal of a particular elite and represents, as it were, the mysticism of the particular religion" (p.8). Bearing this in mind, we can note that sexual contact with alien, spiritual or otherworld entities has its counterparts in the Christian religion. An entity — commonly regarded as a fallen angel — called an incubus would “continually search for women with whom they take their pleasure while the women are asleep,” while a succubus “tries constantly to take semen from men” (Trondriau & Villeneuve, 1972, p.104). Like some aliens, both incubi and succubi are apparently able to adopt various guises to achieve their aims. Patricia describes how while she was a child she would see what she knew to be a fake clown, but which she now believes was an alien being:

rushing into the room at rapid speed — so there was this sense of being scared by this, but also knowing that this clown tickled me.... It was a face and a presentation that [was] very typically fun and light and joyful ... and yet the confusion and the irony was that it wasn’t; that I
was scared of this clown, that this clown tickled me and touched me in a way I didn't like, and that part of it was that I could not move.

Being paralysed like this is a common feature of encounters with alien entities (Mack, 1995, p.33).

The next point to be made with regards to relationships between aliens and humans — whether they are sexual and/or spiritual — is that many abductees regard aliens as superior spiritual beings (see Chapter 6.1). Intimate contact with such beings introduces the religious notion of sexual union with the divine, either in symbolic or actual form. For example, some Catholic nuns see themselves as Brides of Christ. The symbolic or otherworld nature of such a union is emphasised by the notion of a virgin birth or immaculate conception. An example from Christianity would be the pregnancy of the Virgin Mary, while Buddhists believe that Siddhartha’s mother learnt that she was pregnant during a dream in which a divine elephant entered her body (Herold, 1954, p.8). As Kalweit (1988) puts it, “The concept of the sexual transmaterial union with God is found throughout the history of religion. It is indeed a universal symbol of mankind” (p.143).

The UFO literature has some instances of abductees claiming to have become pregnant while still being a virgin (Harpur, 1995, p.216), although such beliefs are certainly not a central feature of ufology. Somewhat similarly, Karen describes a terrifying ordeal during an abduction when she was six years old. She found herself:

on a table where they went through a procedure, and I actually gave birth to a foetus that was half human — like a hybrid species — it didn't look human to me at all... And they actually just took out that foetus and threw it in a dish — like a metal dish — and it was dead, and that was quite difficult.

Such an example certainly does not demonstrate that aliens are superior spiritual beings, but the point is nevertheless made that there does exist, on the one hand, a strange similarity between shamanistic and religious reports of sexual contact between humans and divine beings, and, on the other hand, sexual contact between abductees and aliens who are often described as spiritual beings.
5.4 Heredity

Eliade (1951/1989, p.13) tells us that in central and north-east Asia the two main methods of “recruiting shamans are (1) heredity transmission of the shamanic profession and (2) spontaneous vocation (‘call’ or ‘election’).” In these areas a person can deliberately set out to become a shaman, but “these ‘self-made’ shamans are considered less powerful than those who inherit the profession or who obeyed the ‘call’ of the gods or spirits” (p.13). Later Eliade reports that “inheritance seems rather to be a tendency in a child or other relative to acquire the power by drawing from the same source as the shaman” (p.21). There may be some advantage in learning the shamanic arts while one is young, impressionable and less rigidly socialised than as an adult. “Those destined to become shamans spend their youth mastering the doctrines and techniques of the profession” (Eliade, 1951/1989, p.16). Could this have anything to do with why abductions sometimes involve very young children as well as their parents?

Vitebsky (1995) points out that in some cultures a shaman needs to have a “distinctive personality,” while “Siberian cultures demanded great emotional and physical strength.... Yet a tearful, spindly child among the Sora may have the ability to see spirits and be earmarked for the calling” (p.54). If one of the prime requirements of being a shaman is to be able to access the spirit world, then any child who shows such tendencies is likely to be chosen as a candidate for initiation. The interesting question is whether such paranormal abilities can be inherited.

Kalweit (1988) discusses possible future research into the genetic basis for shamanic powers because he believes that “the physiological disposition towards heightened sensitivity can be passed on from one generation to the next.” But this will only be possible, “after the parameters of mediumistic phenomena and of the paranormal psyche have been clearly determined” (p.176). It is not the purpose of this study to pursue the ‘nature versus nurture’ debate as it applies to paranormal powers, but, given that some abduction researchers report that close encounter experiences sometimes seem to run in families (Mack, 1994, p.29), the interview participants were asked how their abduction experiences had changed their family
or friends, and whether any other family members had had abduction or paranormal experiences either before or after theirs.

Angela claims to have “seen my parents and my sister during [my abduction] experiences but they don’t consciously recall any of those.” Cheryl believes that both her husband and her sister have had abduction experiences, but her sister is at times “really fearful” about the subject, while her husband will discuss such matters so long as he isn’t feeling stressed. She says that her “whole family is actually quite spiritually adept and have abilities with healing and evangelism and different charismatic kind of principles.” Her mother presents an ambivalent attitude towards UFOs and the paranormal. She “got totally freaked and spooked” when Cheryl showed any interest in these matters during her youth, yet at the same time was “the local exorcist.” Today, Cheryl seems to have inherited this ability and is occasionally asked to clear ‘ghosts’ from friends’ houses. Helen has discovered that her sister has had experiences similar to hers, and that both her aunt and grandmother had healing abilities. Michael has a dream memory of seeing “my father sitting on an examination table.” He has also seen his mother during his experiences, but does not discuss the subject with either of them because of their negative attitudes. Patricia, who saw a clown-like alien when she was a child, believes that both her mother and her ten-year-old daughter are now having their own experiences:

My daughter has ... similar experiences in describing the beings, describing presences in the house. My mother has also described ... beings that have come to her in a dream-like state and UFOs.... My daughter is very intuitive and my mother is also very intuitive, but my daughter is able to see energies around people and she has given me information about other lives she’s lived. She has predicted information, and it will all be spontaneous, or she has sensed energies in the room.

Nancy says that her younger sister, who is in her late twenties, “has quite a violent memory of ... what we call the Greys, the little blobby ones, throwing her down on a slab and doing some very unpleasant internal things and examinations. She won’t talk about it.” Nancy, who appears to have an extraordinary rapport with the aliens
involved in her family’s ongoing abduction experiences, gives this example of negotiating with them on behalf of her young daughter:

She was bailed up in her bedroom one night, flat up against the wall when she was eighteen-months-old, and she said “Clowny is here, Clowny is here.” Clowny is the name she gives to the being with the big eyes.... And she was absolutely terrified. I don’t know why she was terrified this time because she [mentions] Clowny all the time.... I went over, and I could see the being, and I said, “Listen I want to have a talk to you.” And I basically said that if he was a good being who was working in the light and who was respecting our wishes then you will not come again at night to see my daughter.... “Can you do this for us because it is terrifying her and, if you are wanting to do work, it is just being negated because she is too scared.” So I said, “Will you come in the mornings or in daylight when she is playing so that she is not so startled.” And we left it at that. And I said, “If you are not a good being, and you are not in the light, we will certainly take care of you.” So, the next morning she was in bed with me still, because she was upset, and there they appeared, three of them, in the doorway with a hand gesture. And that was the first time they had come in the morning.

Nancy’s daughter is now six and is continuing to have her own experiences. “The other night she was crying. She said ‘They are stealing me again.’ She has been saying that a bit lately.” Clowny appears to be back as well. “Clowny did come back the other night actually, and she was quite startled, but emotionally she [the daughter] is on a different level than I am, and now we have been able to talk about it and come to an arrangement.” In addition to her human family, Nancy claims also to have alien offspring. “They have talked to me a lot about how they do cloning and how they do hybrid breeds of their race, and I have been to see offspring of mine.”

There is no way of knowing from this testimony whether this is an example of heredity shamanic-like abilities or aliens having their own particular reasons for involving a whole family in contact experiences. There is every possibility that in future other more pertinent explanations may be found. However, what does seem clear at present is that there are notable similarities between human-alien close encounter experiences, and the close links, both physical and spiritual, between shamans and otherworld beings.
This chapter has discussed various interconnected similarities of a genetic, heredity, ancestral, sexual and relationship nature between abduction experiences and shamanism. While genetic and sexual matters are frequently discussed in the UFO literature, and many of the abductees who were interviewed appear to believe that some form of genetic manipulation is the aliens' primary concern, some of the other similarities are mentioned much less often, if at all, by most ufologists despite the fact that they appear to strengthen considerably the similarity between alien abductions and shamanic beliefs and practices.
CHAPTER 6  Spirituality and Otherworld Encounters

This section of the abductees’ interview analysis investigates the apparent connection between aliens and spirituality as well as any similarities between the other-dimensional nature of the alien and shamanic otherworlds. One of the most fundamental aspects of shamanism is a belief in a spirit realm or otherworld, inhabited by various beings and entities with whom the shaman must learn to communicate or control. This spirit realm is the source of the shaman’s power and paranormal abilities, including healing. In most shamanic cosmologies this invisible world is divided into two realms that sandwich the Earth: an upper or celestial region often associated with the sky, which is generally seen as the domain of gods and semi-divine beings, and an underworld which is generally regarded as the abode of the dead (Eliade, 1951/1989, p.259).

Shamanism and traditional mythology are rich in symbolism which may help people understand the often esoteric concepts involved. For example, some shamanic cosmologies describe the link between the Earth and the upper and lower parts of the spirit realm as a tree. As Drury (1996) relates, “The three zones are usually linked by a central vertical axis, which is sometimes referred to as the Axis Mundi, or Axis of the World, and which is characterised in different mythologies as the World Tree, the Tree of Life and so on” (p.37). Halifax (1982) gives a more esoteric explanation in which she states that:

The Centre of the World, the Axis Mundi or world axis ... is the threshold place between space and spacelessness, between multiplicity and unity, between mortality and immortality. It is said of this cosmic centre that it is everywhere. And yet people of all times and places have created finite representations. (p.84)

Given that symbolism needs to be meaningful to those who use it, it could be suggested that a Western, space age symbol for such a transition between the mundane world and the otherworld could be the UFO, a mysterious flying craft that appears to defy both logic and the laws of physics. However, as evidenced by much New Age philosophy, we are also living in an era of inner space, in which the inward
journey of discovery is regarded by many as meaningful or even sacred. Such journeys are generally described using terms such as meditation, altered states of consciousness, different vibrational levels and invisible spiritual dimensions. The ufology literature sometimes claims that aliens have the paranormal ability to transport, or teleport, abductees to similar realms or states of consciousness. As devices capable of transcending both inner and outer space, and also of blending what seems to be futuristic technology with spirituality, UFOs and abduction by aliens could therefore be seen as a fitting icons for such an era.

6.1 Aliens and Spirituality

Interview participants were asked whether they saw any connection between aliens and spirituality or religion. No definition of these terms was provided, as it was thought that their answers would illustrate what they believed them to mean. Several of them pointed out that, while they saw a spiritual dimension to their abduction experiences, this had nothing to do with religion. In fact, some of them were rather antagonistic towards organised religion. For example, Laurence claims that “tradition religion is really about suppression,” and Betty sees it as “too limiting and conforming,” whereas, for her, spirituality involves “a more open minded, expanded consciousness.” Helen says “religion is just politics,” but believes that the close encounter phenomenon could be seen as a type of spiritual revival. Like the others, Angela sees a definite connection with spirituality and believes that some of the entities that people claim to see “such as angels or spirits are, in fact, ETs.... There is no real difference between an ET and a spirit — they are both beings and just another realm or aspect of our consciousness.” Cheryl sees spirituality as learning to connect with a deeper part of oneself:

My understanding is that the contact experiences are a part of a teaching exercise. But it's not so much learning knowledge for the first time — it's remembering and understanding what you were told before.... It's a very different experience from coming across knowledge and integrating it slowly. It's more like an awakening or a remembering.

Cheryl also points out that the distinction between aliens and spiritual beings is not that easy to make:
My understanding is that ETs can have a physical form and can be non-corporeal. So to me they are all extraterrestrial, they are all ‘not of this earth’. I guess some would make a distinction that an alien in a physical body is an alien, and an alien or an ET that does not have a body is a spiritual being. It seems pretty arbitrary to me.

Arthur sees his abductions as spiritual but not religious, because, now that he has more control of them, “They are very comfortable experiences to be in.... The fear has gone.... You are very at peace with yourself, very centred.” Karen feels that modern organised religion does not give “people freedom to choose a lot of the time. I feel it is about power and hierarchy.” However she feels:

that these beings are trying to share a deeper spiritual sense with people. It seems that people have lost spirituality as a focus and look more towards material wealth and possessions, so we are basically depleting all our resources, and ... the extraterrestrials are really concerned about us, so are trying to open up people’s minds a bit more.

Michael, too, sees a connection between spirituality and aliens but thinks that the distinction between “spiritual beings and ETs gets a bit blurry.... I think they ... can take on physical form and project the mind or spirit body somewhere else. I have had Greys and human-looking beings appear before me.” Ruth, who has “never felt the need for religion” because she sees it as “only a minute part of spirituality,” believes that aliens “are spiritual or they are spirits.” Likewise, Nancy see aliens:

as beings having a different role.... I think they are more advanced spiritually.... I think they are trying to help us to attain some kind of peace and harmony within ourselves, which to me is spirituality.... I think their presence in your life may expand your reality so that you believe that all things are possible — which to me includes spirituality.

Patricia sees a connection between her close encounter experiences and shamanism:

I think the whole experience ... has triggered me into a much deeper exploration of my reason for being, my reason for being here on this planet and how much I can do.... I get the sense of higher purpose for being here.... To me it is very different from organised religion. I feel that I am more spiritual in myself than I have ever been in my life ... and more connected ... just by a sense of understanding the bigger picture through your own journey. I guess for me that is where it relates to that shamanic experience, that natural spirituality, rather than conforming
and adhering to a set of rules and regulations. That one then attains a heightening of spirituality. I think this is much more of a natural authentic process.

6.2 Spirit Realms and Consciousness

Shamans believe that an after-death realm exists, and the consciousness or soul of a shaman is capable of visiting it. Eliade (1951/1989) writes that:

>'Seeing spirits,' in dream or awake, is the determining sign of the shamanic vocation, whether spontaneous or voluntary. For, in a manner, having contact with the souls of the dead signifies being dead oneself. This is why, throughout South America, the shaman must so die that he may meet the souls of the dead and receive their teaching; for the dead know everything. (p.84, his italics)

To see to what extent this perspective matched their views, the abductees were asked whether they believe in a human soul or spirit; whether there is any form of consciousness or life after death; and whether they believe in a spirit realm or form of non-ordinary reality. Such questions have engrossed philosophers and theologians for centuries, but the interviewees were asked for replies based on their close encounter experiences. The three questions are closely interrelated because anyone who claimed to believe in a human soul or spirit might find it hard to say that they did not believe in some form of life after death or the existence of some sort of spirit realm to provide a 'location' for such spirits.

Despite the complexity of these questions, the abductees' answers were very consistent. Cheryl claims to have always believed in a soul or spirit and today sees it as closely connected to her healing work. Laurence believes that "the soul is perhaps consciousness itself, which can disassociate from our body." Similarly, Betty regards the soul as "an expanded consciousness, a connection," while Arthur sees "my soul being part of the collective consciousness, so you have no physical form, but your energies are always there." Like Ruth, Helen believes the body is "just a vehicle — your spirit will go on," and Nancy claims that there "are places I have gone [that] you can't go in your physical body." Patricia claims that her abduction experiences "have done more than confirm [a belief in a soul or spirit]. They have led me in the direction of seeking and taken me on an enormous path of
personal and spiritual growth that I never even believed could occur." Karen, too, says she has:

always known I have had a soul or spirit because ... I have had quite a few profound experiences which have ... definitely proved that for me. One was an experience I had where I became freed from my body, and it was as if I was just energy, but I was a part of absolutely everything. I could feel the air moving through me. Everything was totally white and light ... and I felt completely free and at one, and at that point I had access to all knowledge, but it was there in such a simple way. They weren't answers that I could describe, but it was all completely there.

There was general agreement among the abductees about the existence of life or consciousness after death, except for Arthur who believed that it was "a possibility" and Laurence who wasn't quite sure. For example, Angela is definite that an after-death realm exists. "I feel that it's just another aspect of who we are and we are using it, but a lot of people are just not aware of it." Both Helen and Nancy have encountered their dead grandmothers, and Patricia reports that, when doing healing work on clients, "relatives of theirs will come in spirit and ... I would describe them and say how they died and pass on information." Karen describes how, "I have actually seen or been shown an experience where there is a place where souls go after they die. And there I saw groups of lights, or balls of light, and it was almost like a conveyor."

While the majority of interview participants claimed to believe in a spirit realm or form of non-ordinary reality, their descriptions of it varied. This seems largely to be the result of a lack of technical terms for such a subject. For example, Laurence, who is a musician, believes that what distinguishes one realm from another is, "A different frequency of vibration, just like sounds." He claims that a person in an altered state of consciousness is able to see or experience another realm "because then you are actually vibrating to that oscillation." Likewise, Betty believes that the spirit realm is related to consciousness and is a "more refined vibration and dimension." She further believes that aliens are "inter-dimensional beings" from "a higher vibration than this dimension." Karen uses similar terms to explain how a person can tune their consciousness to see other levels of reality:
It's like tapping into another frequency. And that's what I am working with [in] a lot of my work as a healer.... I tune people in to particular frequencies.... It's like opening up a gateway to allow them to access another reality. So I feel that for people like myself ... people that have psychic abilities are just tuned into a particular frequency that other people are not. If you like, it's a higher frequency.

Using different terminology, but appearing to say the same thing, Arthur claims that "state of mind" is what connects different "dimensions," and that "our energy exists in another plane and you are free to come and go from that plane." Taking the matter further, Helen points out that the non-physical realm is connected to altered states consciousness and is accessible to aliens, not all of whom have physical bodies. As an example, she describes an entity she calls "the Light Being, because he is just like a child in this bright light. He hasn't got a physical body, but I know he is there." She further believes that some aliens are teaching abductees how to access such realms. Ruth believes that there are many "dimensions" and that the lower ones are darker while higher ones are lighter, and that "there are aliens in the light ones and they're also in the dark." Nancy's experiences lead her to conclude that the human soul "can exist in any dimension or any reality," but that to learn certain lessons, "I am given a physical vessel [body]." However, "when I don't need that, my soul may take on another form" such as "an alien or space brother in another dimension. I sort of believe that your soul ... is a form of energy that needs a certain number of experiences to get itself to a perfect state."

Patricia provides a similar but rather more complex explanation. Firstly, she believes that some abductees are either having their genetic material altered or having objects implanted in their bodies "to enable us to ... have these abilities heightened to the point of seeing these other realities." Secondly, she believes that aliens have a greater capacity to access other realms than normal spiritual beings:

It seems to be that ... the non-human beings can travel through and access the same spirit realm, and the spirit realm can see these beings when they are in that realm, but the vibration and so forth can't allow these human beings in spirit to transverse through into the other dimension.
A distinction between the realms accessible by aliens and normal spirits is reminiscent of those shamanic cosmologies that posits an upper spiritual realm and a separate underworld. Furthermore, in both systems it seems that specialists in altered states of consciousness — shamans and perhaps experienced abductees — gain the ability to visit, or be taken to, either realm for a variety of purposes. As Drury (1996) puts it, whatever metaphorical or symbolic means are used to connect the levels of the cosmos, “Always, the shaman has some means of ascending to the cosmic skies or journeying to the underworld” (p.37). Such symbols may include “Cosmic mountains ... temples, palaces, stairs, ladders and rainbows” (p.37). As a possible illustration of this, Betty distinctly recalls an experience as a child when she was “just standing at the base of an actual rainbow” experiencing “all the colours and the sensation of it.” It is interesting to note that Australian Aboriginal tradition regards the rainbow as “a bridge over which only gods can walk in safety” (Cowan, 1992, p.81), although the karadji or clever-man — the local equivalent of a shaman — “can take up a postulant on the rainbow in order that the man might receive the inner knowledge known only to the Rainbow Serpent” (p.81). Similarly, Eliade (1951/1989) writes that “The symbolism of magical flight or of ascent by the rainbow, which dominates Australian shamanism, is archaic” (p.354).

These responses appear to illustrate a strong relationship between the abductees’ close encounter experiences and their spiritual beliefs. As with some of their other answers, it is almost impossible to deduce whether they have arrived at such an outlook entirely as a result of those abduction experiences, or whether they have been consciously or unconsciously influenced by other sources. Nevertheless, although they are using modern terms such as vibrations, energy, and dimensions, their views on spirit realms and consciousness do seem to be highly shamanistic.

6.3 Psychopomp

As a logical consequence of their belief in various invisible spiritual realms and life or consciousness after death, people in traditional societies rely on another of the shaman’s important abilities, that of psychopomp — one who guides the spirits of the dead to their place in the afterlife. As Eliade (1951/1989) so eloquently puts it:
It is always the shaman who conducts the dead person’s soul to the underworld, for he is the psychopomp par excellence. Healer and psychopomp, the shaman is these because he commands the techniques of ecstasy — that is, because his soul can safely abandon his body and roam at vast distances, can penetrate the underworld and rise to the sky. Through his own ecstatic experience he knows the roads of the extraterrestrial regions. He can go below and above because he has already been there. The danger of losing his way in these forbidden regions is still great; but sanctified by his initiation and furnished with his guardian spirits, the shaman is the only human being able to challenge the danger and venture into a mystical geography. (p.182)

Interview participants were not asked whether they had ever acted as psychopomps but, in discussing whether she had experienced any spiritual or paranormal events in her home, and her role in dealing with them, Cheryl commented that:

I think a bigger part of my role is to help spirits that have incarnated on this earth and the body has died. Part of my role is to help them move on. So part of the poltergeist activity or the spiritual activity, is from spirits that haven’t yet moved to where they need to be. A lot of my role is to assist that.

6.4 Good and Bad Spirits

A central feature of shamanic beliefs is that some inhabitants of the spirit world may be sufficiently harmful or malicious to cause misfortune, illness or disease. As Eliade (1951/1989) puts it, some traditional societies believe that, “disease is provoked by the evil spirits of the dead” (p.206). Vitebsky (1995) points out that a cause of illness may be that, “one or more of a person’s souls may be lost, in which case the shaman’s soul travels to the realm of the spirits to fight for it and bring it back” (p.98). Kalweit (1992) also reports that:

Sorcerers must always be ready to measure themselves against hostile forces, for the forces that menace them — whether they are spirits and polymorphous beings from the other world or rival shamans on the earth — are many and devious. (p.193)

Interview participants were asked whether they believed that some aliens were good and some were bad. Their answers revealed that for the most part they were reluctant to label any aliens as bad and none said that they caused disease. For example, Angela said:
I don’t know about good or bad, but I guess like any race you get some that are nice and some are not nice. The ones that seem to be in it for themselves and ... don’t care about choice or free will or other beings or entities or humans. Whereas there are others who have opened their hearts. If you say no, they’ll stop.

Cheryl believes that there is “a continuum.... I guess it’s to do with their level of development. They are more or less like us in that some are more developed and some are less developed.” This means that some aliens, “have made a choice to not follow a path of goodness. And yes, they are more malevolent.” Rather than good or bad, Arthur prefers to say that “some have a positive effect and some can have a negative effect,” meaning that, “some are there to enlighten you and give you strength and some are there to force you to look at other issues that perhaps you don’t want to.” He believes that even the more challenging aliens he encounters are trying to encourage him to “move along faster” in the task of expanding his consciousness.

Like Arthur, Helen prefers to label aliens as “positive and negative.” She believes that many of them, “are there to help you ... and guide you. The ones who are negative are there to test you on what you have learnt. Because sometimes you ... haven’t learnt that lesson properly the first time.” Karen has observed that different aliens “have different agendas. There are some that are much more concerned with power ... rather than love and harmony, and so I wouldn’t call them good and bad, although some people possibly would.” Michael used to think his abductions meant that some aliens weren’t “up to any good,” but now, like Karen, thinks that “some are definitely more spiritual than others.” Betty encounters warm and friendly beings but labels as “unpleasant” the “cold uncomfortable feeling” she gets from others. She also makes the point that this “can depend on your own emotions at the time.” Likewise, both Nancy and Patricia believe that labelling aliens as bad is something that people do when they are frightened or feel that they have no control during an encounter with them. However, Patricia does believe that “there very definitely are beings ... or humans in spirit, who have not such a high reason for interacting with us and that they probably are more driven by chaos.”
While the abductees may shun the word 'bad' when describing aliens, and do not blame them for causing diseases, they do nevertheless, like shamans, claim that they fall on some sort of positive/negative spiritual continuum. This tendency on the part of these abductees to see aliens and spiritual beings in a positive light or at least claiming to understand their motives, is not only a common New Age tendency, but may also be an attempt to interpret their abduction experiences in a constructive fashion. It might also reveal that, like most shamans, the abductees have a resilience, spirit of adventure and adaptability of consciousness not often found in the rest of the population.

6.5 Theophany

A further feature of shamanic experiences is that the neophyte may encounter a divine figure or supreme being who may provide them with a spiritual message or guidance to assist them in their role as a future connection between the gods and humanity. Eliade (1951/1989) tells us that, “the Arctic, Siberian, and Central Asian Peoples” believe in and “revere a celestial Great God, an all powerful Creator” (p.9).

Furthermore:

This celestial god, who dwells in the highest sky, has several 'sons' or 'messengers' who are subordinate to him and who occupy lower heavens. Their names and number vary from tribe to tribe ... and the shaman maintains special relations with some of them. These sons, messengers, or servants of the celestial gods are charged with watching over and helping human beings. (p.9)

Halifax (1980) quotes a frail, old, female shaman from Central America who eloquently describes her role in encountering the divinity inherent in the otherworld:

There is a world beyond ours, a world that is far away, nearby, and invisible. And it is there where God lives, where the dead live, the spirits and the saints, a world where everything has already happened and everything is known. That world talks. It has a language of its own. I report what it says. (p.130)

In discussing the work of shamans in various parts of South America, Eliade (1951/1989) provides a description that sounds similar to the experiences of some alien abductees:
His ecstatic capacities enable him, in addition to his usual prerogative of healing, to make mystical journeys to the sky to meet the gods directly and convey men's prayers to them. (Sometimes it is the gods who descend into the ceremonial hut; such is the case among the Manasi, where the god comes down to earth, converses with the shaman, and finally carries him to the sky with him, letting him fall to earth a few moments later.) (p.324)

The abductees were asked whether during their close encounter experiences they had observed any form of hierarchy among the aliens in the sense that any of them seemed more spiritual or senior than the others. While many claimed that some aliens did seem more spiritually advanced than others, their answers to this question revealed that they had observed more of a subtle organisational or operational hierarchy than an entirely spiritual one and none claimed to have been taken to meet a supreme spiritual being.

Angela reports that while some aliens seem to be in command, “they all have their own role in things.” Cheryl describes some “beings that exude love,” and Betty regards those aliens who have “a much more expanded consciousness” as being divine. Arthur says that aliens “seem to have different roles. So I would say there would be a hierarchical system.... Some are communicators, some seem to have the role of doing menial tasks and some ... give information and instructions.” However he has not seen anyone that he regarded as being completely in charge. Helen senses some sort of hierarchy among the aliens she has encountered. “There are ones who are just workers, there are some that are there to teach you things.” Karen has not encountered any spiritually superior aliens or ones that “had charge over others, but I would definitely say they have roles. There are some that are involved in the breeding program, then there are some who are involved in just genetics in general.” Michael has “definitely” observed some kind of hierarchy:

There are these small ones that just take you from here to there ... and there is this other type which will sort of come and look at you right in the face, right into your eyes. I started seeing this large Grey which is well over six foot with vertical pupils and he was like a supervisor presence.... When something important is going to happen, he will be there.
Nancy believes that the aliens “more or less have different roles as opposed to hierarchy, but I do believe there is a council made up of different groups.” She has also had an experience that suggests that some aliens are more senior than others:

I remember the last physical experience I had when they were trying to give me a needle.... I was quite upset about this and I kept gesturing to one of them, that I felt was ... softer and more gentle and sensitive, to please, please, reason with this other more senior being. ‘Please do my bidding for me.’ Because I was scared, I really didn’t want this needle, particularly down into the top of my skull. I was quite upset about it at the time ... and he just made a kind of gesture to the other being and they withdrew the needle.

Patricia, too, points out that the aliens that she has encountered have more noticeably different roles rather than different ranks, but that “as the hierarchy goes up it joins with other races [of aliens].”

These and earlier answers reveal that, while the abductees do describe their experiences in spiritual terms, they certainly do not appear to interpret them in religious terms. For example, none of them compared the location that they were taken to during their close encounter experiences with the Christian notion of heaven. In this sense, rather than theophany, their abduction experiences seem to reflect a more secular mentality.

A further set of questions asked the abductees whether they had been given any specific information by the aliens; if so, how they had felt about this information; whether they had understood it and, if they had, whether the information was for them personally or whether they felt required to pass it on in some way in order to help guide or change society. Their answers did not clearly indicate that the main reason for their abduction was that there was a specific message that aliens, or any other spiritual beings, wanted them to preach to the rest of humanity, although many of them did feel a need to explain their spiritual or animistic perspective to others. It almost seems as if any information that they did receive was coincidental to the still unclear purpose of the abduction experiences themselves. Another possible interpretation is that at this stage the abductees are undergoing some sort of educational and conditioning process designed to transform them into
appropriate mouthpieces or embodiments of whatever message the aliens might wish to impart at a later date, and that they have not yet been told or understood that goal.

Angela claims that she does get telepathic information and feels “privileged to be able to receive it.” She claims to understand “most of it” although, “the concepts are really difficult to comprehend.” The aliens have apparently told her that it is her choice whether she shares the information or not, but that, “it is beneficial for us to understand what they are trying to get across to us.” However, other than that humanity is largely asleep and behaving irresponsibly towards the planet and each other, precisely what this important information is seems unclear. Cheryl also receives information, but says that “I think that I have been a bit lax because I haven’t acted on it. I know I need to write. I know I need to impart the knowledge that I have.” She says that she sees her role as “assisting individuals to become the people that they were meant to be,” and that this may have an eventual “impact on the development of the [human] species as a whole.”

Betty feels that any information she receives is designed to help humanity learn to transcend its limited understanding of the nature of reality. However, at this stage she feels that it is primarily to assist her own personal development. Arthur does not recall being given any specific information but feels that his “role is activating other people” especially to try to counteract society’s destructive and wasteful tendencies. Karen receives a lot of information such as “universal soul languages which aliens speak,” but says that “I am unable to grasp it on a conscious level.” She sees herself as a messenger and believes that the “main function” of the information is “totally to change and guide society.” Michael describes waking up “and you feel like you have all this medical stuff flying through your head,” but, like some of the others, he has difficulty recalling the information clearly. To help explain this he makes the suggestion that “there’s a possibility that it may be needed in the future.”
Ruth receives a different type of information to the other abductees. For about ten years she has been drawing pictures of the spiritual beings that she encounters. Some of these are what she terms “past-life persons,” while others she describes as “definitely ETs.” She does not, however, report getting any educational or prophetic information from these beings. Ruth also describes an incident when she got some unexpected feedback from her fiancé about her drawings of aliens:

One day he came home with two other men and he was telling them about the two alien beings he had seen, and I just couldn’t believe it because he had not mentioned it to me. And so I pulled my book [of alien drawings] out and showed him, and we just looked at each other, and he said, “I didn’t know you had seen them too.”

Ruth reports that she was even more surprised when one of the other men looked at the drawings, and said “Oh, that’s such and such, and such and such.” He was apparently able to correctly name the two beings, “because he used to see them at his house.”

Like Ruth, Nancy does not worry much about the source of the information that she receives. She used to assume “that it was just some sort of spirit being, whether it was my dead grandmother ... or ... an angel.... To me it really doesn’t matter if it was aliens because we are all spirits living in different dimensions.” However, because of its nature, she now believes that some of the educational information she receives does come from aliens. “Although I am terrible at chemistry and mathematics ... I have a really good understanding of quantum physics and how time is not linear and how things can move inter-dimensionally. I have understood it.” She further believes that she is being educated for a future purpose. “I know I should get off my bum and do more. I am being told that all the time.” She believes that in a few years, at “about the age of forty, I will be giving lectures and talks. I have been told just to rest now and learn and integrate, and ... then I will blossom.” Helen laughingly reports that the aliens are constantly showing her “symbols and writing” such as hieroglyphics which she is slowly learning to understand. She believes that their aim is to help humanity reach a higher spiritual and technical level.
Patricia, too, describes hieroglyphics. “Often I have received information in hieroglyphic form that I don’t understand. But I have also seen other information in hieroglyphics that I have put my hand over and got a sense of its meaning.” She also recalls that, “sometimes I would sit down with a pen and paper and instead of writing in our language ... I would be writing in this sort of sign form.” Patricia has also seen this way of presenting information on UFOs. “I have had experience of remembering language — say when I am being examined or on a craft or something like that — and you can see ... that information ... there in sign form.” Patricia used to be concerned about what was happening to her. “Initially I would have said that I was being controlled, that I was being manipulated. But now ... I have been given an understanding of my role here, of things that I am going to do.” She believes that her role has several levels. Firstly, “to become a different sort of person ... to be a light-bearer or light-being for other people to see.” Secondly, “to be able to assist people on a one-to-one basis or a group basis.” And thirdly, “on a wider scale, being able to write books and give talks, be on TV, or do documentaries ... and reach up on a more global level.” Patricia believes that the aliens are working through people such as her for an important reason:

There is an understanding that I have now that most of the beings ... within the greater cosmos ... have ... an advanced spirituality, so that they cannot ignore what is happening on our planet and the sense of disharmony and chaos and low vibration that is interacting with the planet. So ... a lot of the information is to bring us into awareness so that they can help us in a way that isn't as obvious as, say, landing here, because that would be too much of a shock for people.

While there seems to be some confusion among the abductees as to what the primary message behind their abductions is, a frequent component of their answers is that, from a spiritual perspective, the human race has lost its way and is therefore in dire need of some sort of mid-course correction before it is too late. If it is the abductees' collective role to be the vanguard of such a spiritual revival, then that mission could be seen as a shamanic one because, as Eliade (1951/1989) writes, it is the shaman's “mission to ensure that the spiritual equilibrium of the entire society is maintained” (p.237).
The American folklorist Thomas Bullard (1989), who has studied a large number of abduction cases from several different countries, claims that theophany — which he describes as “An encounter with a divine being” (p.153) — occurs in a small number of cases. Obviously this statistic depends on one’s definition of a divine being. As the abductees interviewed in this study have indicated, while they certainly regard many aliens as being spiritually advanced in some sense, they do not generally regard them as divine beings. Part of the problem here may be the shortage of specific technical terms that can be applied to beings who seem to have such an extraordinary capacity to transcend the normal limits of human consciousness, quite apart from their other paranormal abilities. As miraculous abilities have generally been associated with saints, semi-divine and divine beings, it is quite understandable that the abductees may be somewhat confused about whether to regard aliens as divine or not.

6.6 The Underworld and Underground Bases

Eliade (1951/1989) reminds us that, “the shaman specialises in a trance during which his soul is believed to leave his body and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld” (p.5). Most people are aware that UFOs fly around in the sky, so in seeking similarities between abduction experiences and shamanism it seemed somewhat redundant to ask the abductees if they had ever been taken up into the sky. However, the UFO literature also contains several reports of underground or underwater UFO bases (Good, 1998, p.342), so asking the abductees whether they had ever been taken underground during their alien encounters was considered relevant because it was thought that if such an experience had any other-dimensional characteristics, it might in some way equate to a shamanic underworld or otherworld visit.

Angela recalls that she has “been underground with the Grey beings.” She remembers that she was “in a classroom situation with other humans and I was being taught how to create holographic images ... shapes and geometric figures just using my hands.” She believes that, because they are “not in such a dense form” as humans, some aliens, “who have been here for a very, very long time,” can move
Laurence describes his alien underground experiences:

Everything was vibrating, it's [as] if you have to increase your vibrations to actually go underneath. It was almost like swimming ... through a tunnel of cushions, then getting underneath. And there were these people there meditating, keeping the same frequency.... We had to do tests [there].

Laurence believes that in order for aliens "to go underground, they are actually going inter-dimensionally. If they can actually exist in a higher frequency there is no reason why they have to create some sort of [physical underground] space."

Laurence says that there were "some [North American] Indian ladies there. There were about four of them maintaining some sort of vibrational state." Betty recalls feeling "comfortable" when "being in cities underneath the earth." She describes the beings there as having, "more of a lighter vibration than humans. There's a glow around them" and because they have "more refined vibrations, they just go straight through [the ground]." Helen's only experience of going deep underground was having an alien giving her a guided tour of an American nuclear missile silo.

Karen reports two types of underground experiences. Firstly she describes being taken by aliens to:

a base which I thought was underneath the Sphinx, and it was a huge ... room. It had a very clinical, sterile feel about it, and there were huge pillars, vastly spread out. The rest of it was just empty space, and then there were tunnels coming off the main room.

During her second experience, Karen recalls being taken "into a root of a tree and then going down into the earth, and I had a lot of visions." An interesting comparison to this is an initiation experience described by Sereptie, a Siberian shaman. After felling a tree to make a special sledge to transport holy family relics, Sereptie was "petrified with fear" when "a man sprang out of its roots with a loud shout" (Halifax, 1980, p.38). The strange man then invited Sereptie to descend through the root of the tree which turned out to be the entrance to an underground shamanic realm where he underwent a variety of initiation experiences (p.38).
Ruth has had “a weird experience” in which she went into a tunnel in the ground and then found herself on what she thought was a space-ship:

I saw this hole in the ground and something made me go down it and ... I ended up going through this tunnel and then at the end ... there was the sky with stars. And that’s where I felt I was ... in a space ship.

Ruth’s only explanation for this experience is that she “went through the earth ... and out the other side.” Because she is “scared of going into dark places,” she was understandably reluctant “to go into this square hole at first, it was closed up and then all of a sudden ... there were steps going down.” Michael recalls a dream during which he was in “some type of cave and there was this rock entrance and there was this writing on the side.” During this experience Michael sensed the presence of Grey aliens.

Eliade (1951/1989) points out, “the importance of the cave in the initiation of the Australian medicine man,” and that “the cave and the labyrinth continue to have a function of the first importance in the initiation rites of other archaic cultures ... both, indeed, are concrete symbols of passage into another world, of a descent to the underworld” (p.51). In discussing paths to the underworld, Halifax (1982) tells us that:

In some shamanic cultures, the path of initiation is an invisible one. Scrolls, labyrinths, meandering trails, and straight lines, all roads of varying meaning, denote the ‘orientation’ of the neophyte’s direction. Certain forms, such as the labyrinth, represent explicitly the experience of initiation — entry to the abyss of the mysteries, the pilgrimage of the spirit. The journey is in fact an expression of the evolution of the human spirit out of worldly time and space. (p.68)

Given that some of the abductees’ underground experiences suggest that aliens are capable of moving through solid matter, it is interesting that Kalweit provides a few reports of shamans doing something similar. For example, he recounts the story of:

a Passamaquoddy shaman who made a bet with a white man about his ability to leave footprints [in hard ground]. First the shaman emitted a bone-rattling cry that paralysed everyone present and made them unable to talk; then he took seven steps on hard ground as if he were sliding through powdered snow, and his feet sank into the ground. (1992, p.123)
While some of the abductees' reports of being taken underground by aliens do have an other-dimensional flavour to them, they do not equate particularly strongly to the shamanic concepts of a spiritual underworld, especially its reputation as a realm of the dead. However, it is important not to interpret some aspects of shamanistic cosmology too literally. It may be unavoidable that shamans use words such as 'up' and 'down' when describing their otherworld journeys. Without a smattering of such terms it might be almost impossible to recount spiritual exploits that are supposedly beyond space and time, in a manner that makes any sense to their listeners.

This chapter has concentrated on the spiritual and otherworld components of the abductees' experiences. These are concepts which are hard to define or measure empirically but which will require closer attention if such matters are to be researched any further. For example, we need to understand whether the terms altered states of consciousness, other dimensions or spiritual realms do actually refer to the same phenomena or not. Nevertheless, as the various sections in the chapter illustrate, the abductees' descriptions of alien spirituality and the strange realms they find themselves in during their close encounters, contain numerous almost identical qualities to reports of the shamanic spirit realm. This might be interpreted to mean that aliens, abductees, spirits and shamans at times enter the same 'space'.

CHAPTER 7  Healing and Other Paranormal Abilities

As mentioned in the literature review, many ufologists claim that some abductees develop paranormal healing abilities after their experiences (Mack, 1995, p.398). Healing is also one of the most important abilities attributed to shamans the world over (Achterberg, 1987), and those who could not heal in some way would be most unlikely to be able to call themselves shamans in any traditional society. As Harner (1990) puts it:

The shaman moves between realities, a magical athlete of states of consciousness engaged in mythic feats. The shaman is a middle man between ordinary reality and nonordinary reality.... The shaman is also a 'power-broker' in the sense of manipulating spiritual power to help people, to put them into a healthy equilibrium. (p.44)

Quite apart from any medical or parapsychological analysis of such abilities, this raises some interesting questions, such as whether shamans and abductees alike are selected by spirits and/or aliens as candidates for their otherworld journeys of initiation or close encounters because they already have some latent or manifest paranormal abilities, or whether their experiences actually somehow provide them. As healing is not the only paranormal talent possessed by the typical shaman, interview participants were asked several questions about psychic events and abilities both before and after their initial abduction experiences.

7.1 Early Paranormal Experiences

Bearing in mind that all the abductees claimed that their first close encounter experiences occurred while they were still children, they were asked whether they could recall whether they were psychic, had clairvoyant dreams or any sort of paranormal or weird experiences prior to those experiences. Not surprisingly, many recounted a variety of anomalous childhood experiences, but because these started so early, they were often not sure whether they occurred before or after their first close encounter. As discussed earlier, another problem is what to define as someone's first close encounter as aliens are supposedly capable of shape-shifting so as to manifest in a relatively non-threatening manner (Mack, 2000, p.144). For
example, would it be reasonable to conclude that the ‘ghosts’ that an adult, who is currently having alien abduction experiences, repeatedly saw as a child, were in fact aliens in disguise?

Arthur claims that “the first [childhood] encounters that I had with an alien being really rocked my foundation of belief and then I started having these other abilities.” He reports being able to tell what was going to happen, “usually three to four days into the future.” For example, he was shocked to predict accurately the death of two neighbours who he knew. He would also hear strange noises and see ghosts around the house and, “Objects would disappear completely, vanish” and not come back. Nancy describes how, “as a little girl ... I use to sit under the trees and talk to fairies and ... just the magical, mystical things that most children do.” Laurence claims that, as a child, he occasionally “would know what would happen next” and was very scared at night because “when you look in the dark you start to see things that you very quickly actually learn to shut out.” Karen recalls that she “used to have quite horrific dreams ... when I was about five.”

Most of the participants described paranormal events in their teenage years. For example, Patricia reports having some psychic experiences when younger but, “it wasn’t until these experiences [abductions] began again that I had an enormously heightened psychic perception.... I used to get the feeling of a presence in the front part of the house and was very, very frightened.” Angela recalls that, “I used to have a lot of premonitions and dreams that would actually occur in real life, and just being able to pick up on people’s feelings and emotions and thoughts.” Helen says, “I could see things, and when I was about twelve or thirteen I actually saw a white-light outline of a girl with a Victorian dress coming round the outside of my bed.” Michael remembers having “the feeling of ghosts in the house” and how surprised his colleagues at high school were at his ability to predict accurately the toss of a coin. Nancy describes how, at about the age of twenty, while working for a retail outlet:

I would see people coming out of the lift before they actually came out and I would ring the particular buyer and say, “Joe Bloggs is here to see you.” And he would say, “Well send him through.” And he would come
out of the lift a couple of minutes later and I would say, "Well I've spoken to such and such, and he says to go on through." And then they used to call me a witch in the end because I would see it before it was actually going to be happening.

We can see from these responses that many of the interview participants appear to have had paranormal abilities and/or anomalous experiences during childhood or as teenagers. The question is whether these could be seen as separate from their abduction experiences. Were they precursors to such experiences, did they result from them, or would it be better to be cautious and claim that for some unknown reason, a variety of anomalous experiences occur to some children, including what are today referred to as alien abductions?

Anthropological literature makes few references to anomalous experiences among children in traditional societies, although we could surmise that all such experiences would probably be attributed to entities from the spirit world. In one example, Eliade (1951/1989) tells us that:

> Among the Alarsk Buryat ... shamanism is transmitted in the paternal line or maternal line. But it is also spontaneous. In either case vocation is manifest by dreams and convulsions, both provoked by ancestral spirits.... If there are no suitable candidates, the ancestral spirits torture children, who cry out in their sleep, become nervous and dreamy, and at thirteen are designated for the profession. The preparatory period involves a long series of ecstatic experiences, which are at the same time initiatory; the ancestral spirits appear in dreams and sometimes carry the candidate down to the underworld. (p.18)

7.2 Healing Abilities

As well as being questioned about paranormal events and abilities around the time of their first abduction experiences, participants were asked whether they had developed any form of diagnostic or healing abilities subsequent to those experiences. The probability of ninety percent of any sample of people claiming to have developed healing abilities, after any type of experience, would be extremely small, yet ten of the eleven interview participants said they had. Furthermore, many have chosen to formalise such abilities by doing courses to help them work as healers, mainly using techniques that required sensitivity in their hands. Patricia
describes how she has, "gone from being a counsellor and therapist through to doing intuitive healing work. Medical intuition, psychic surgery, or energy surgery and so forth." She also claims that she:

- can pick up information about where trauma has occurred or where energy blocks are in the body that may have manifested. Often I can pick up, say, if the liver is needing cleansing or certain organs of the body — what information, what emotion is held in that — or what trauma is held in the body in those areas.

Angela believes that her diagnostic and healing abilities came from her abduction experiences. "I could feel with my hands when I was about fifteen" and was able to “pick up on people's feelings and emotions and thoughts” and was able to see “where they had problems, like diseases in their bodies." Ruth has “been doing reflexology for over twenty years, and I can feel what is wrong with people.” Michael who — like Betty and Helen — has trained as a Reiki healer, describes how he can sense the location of an ailment. “You can leave your hands over someone and you tingle, it tingles, and you can feel the heat coming through and you know that's the place to be.”

Cheryl works as a therapist “with people who are in crisis” by day, and believes that her astral body, “works in the spirit realm at night.” Since her experiences she believes that, “Healing in terms of traditional laying on of hands and an exchange of energies, has been more apparent.” She describes her diagnostic abilities as, “my intuition in terms of dealing with people and having a quick appreciation of difficulties that they are experiencing.”

When asked about her healing abilities, Karen replied that, “The healing work that I do, which is using sound and colour is, I feel, a gift that I have obtained from my abductions. It is a gift that I have been given to use here. And when I actually perform my healings I do go into a trance-like state.” The connection between healing, sound — especially chanting or singing — and altered states of consciousness is especially strong in shamanism. Eliade (1951/1989) tells us that among the Eskimo, “Each shaman has his particular song, which he intones to invoke the spirits” (p.96), and that similarly, “In the Apapocuva Guarani tribe, the
prerequisite for becoming a shaman is learning magical songs, which are taught by a dead relative in dreams" (p.83). Songs and singing have a profound importance in traditional societies. Cowan (1992) explains that in the Australian Aboriginal tradition, "Singing, indeed the song as a metaphysical entity, is a product not of an individual but of tradition. Since it is handed down ... from the Dreaming, the song has a sacred life independent of those that sing it" (p.98). In South America, Vitebsky (1995) reports, "Chants are particularly powerful ... as expressions of the shaman's power and it seems that shamans can sometimes achieve altered states of consciousness through melodies alone" (p.48). The abductees were not asked any specific questions about singing and the only other abductee who mentioned music while being interviewed was Laurence who, as a musician, believes that aliens may sometimes assist him when writing his music assignments.

It is not possible to show whether the abductees' paranormal, diagnostic and healing abilities have resulted from their abduction experiences. Their interview responses do, however, illustrate that they believe that their close encounters were the main cause. Likewise, in traditional societies it is assumed by those around them that shamans' healing powers derive from their spiritual initiation experiences.

### 7.3 Spirit helpers

In addition to their diagnostic and healing abilities, some of the abductees report the presence of various invisible beings — either alien, spiritual or both — in the room while they are healing, which suggests they may be there specifically to assist with the healing. Arthur reports that sometimes, while healing, he can sense that "there are other forms in the room," and that the type of being depends upon, "What type of illness or what type of energy might be needed for that particular healing session." Ruth claims that "an African spirit" has guided her healing abilities, while Patricia reports that different entities assist in her healing work depending upon what the patient requires:

> What I find is that [with some patients] extraterrestrial energies will come in and do the most incredible healing work, with equipment that is nothing I can even describe, whereas at other times a more shamanic type of healing will take place and ... an American Indian will
come through, or a Chinese person doing acupressure, and that seems to be what that person needs at that particular time.

Shamans derive their power from the spirit world and various spirits may help them while they are healing people. In fact, the heroic otherworld journey of initiate shamans can be seen largely as a means of recruiting spirit helpers to assist in their future healing work. As Kalweit (1988) puts it:

Healing does not come from the visible world but from the invisible shadow world. This is the world to which our subtle material body belongs, our energy body; its visible form is the physical body. This shadow land is the homeland of shamans. (p.241)

Eliade (1951/1989) tells us that, “Among the Alaskan Eskimo the more helping spirits a shaman has, the more powerful he is” (p.90). On the other hand, Harner (1990) differentiates between a shaman’s guardian spirit and his or her spirit helpers:

The shaman frequently sees and consults with his guardian spirit ... has it help him, and uses it to help others to recover from illness and injury. In addition to the guardian spirit, a powerful shaman normally has a number of spirit helpers. These are individually minor powers, compared to a guardian spirit, but there may be hundreds of them at a particular shaman’s disposal, providing great collective power. These helping spirits have specialised functions for particular purposes. (p.43)

7.4 Self healing

The title of Halifax’s book *Shaman: The Wounded Healer* (1982) tells us something about the close links between shamanism and healing. For example, in a traditional society a person may be propelled into the spirit realm during a near-death experience as a result of becoming ill, being wounded or from a worsening congenital condition. Once there, he or she may experience some form of otherworld encounter or initiation (Kalweit, 1992, p.45) which may result, firstly, in their own ailment or injury being healed, and secondly, in their becoming a shaman who is now able to use that same spiritual power to heal others. Kalweit (1992) points to this as an example of the paradoxical nature of shamans who:

must become sick in order to become healthy. They die in order to become holy, to become healers. They die for their patients. Self-
healing comes first with them, before the healing of others. They become healers by experiencing illness themselves and overcoming it in themselves, then later in patients. (p.226)

Halifax (1982), too, emphasises the paradoxical nature of this process:

Paradoxically, the shaman's mastery of chaos can take the form of a battle with disease-spirits that overwhelm the neophyte to the point of near-death. These horrific adversaries become tutors as the shaman learns the way of the spirits that ravage and cause sickness. The neophyte Underworld-voyager learns the battlefield that he or she will enter on behalf of others in the future. (p.10)

A few of the interview participants spoke of healing themselves. Karen, who now works as a healer, describes a series of spiritual initiation experience during which:

I had a Native American Indian come through, and it was very strong and overpowering and I started chanting — very powerful, it used to vibrate through my whole body and I had no control over it and it would start when, say, I was driving my car for instance, or doing really ordinary things.... I had some visionary experiences too. I was shown previous lifetimes, one in which I had actually been a shaman and I was basically shown through that whole progression — so lots of visions.... and then I had some initiations where I was given particular healing gifts.

She later felt compelled to “go inside my house and lie down on my bed and then I actually performed healing on myself.... My fingers would connect [with] what felt like an intermeshing of lines ... energy waves which went through into all my organs.” Karen is a repeat abductee, and although these initiation-like experiences occurred well after her original abduction experiences, they do appear to be highly shamanistic in nature.

Laurence says that, as a result of now having an increased physical awareness, “I know there are certain blocks of energy in my own body,” and so is learning to “move my consciousness to help my own body to start to heal myself.” Laurence, who has a deep interest in the physical dynamics of music, also claims that, “I know my whole body has to be oscillating at the same sort of frequency before I start to actually heal other people.” It is noted that both these abductees describe the experience of energy vibrating through them. Betty, who was initially uncertain
Illness, healing, and flying dreams can occur to anyone without necessarily being interpreted as symptomatic of shamanism or alien abductions. However, it is the extent and frequency that such experiences are reported to occur to abductees that may be significant. Self-healing could perhaps also be seen as one means of resolving the process of shamanic initiation illness mentioned earlier (see Chapter 4.6). It might be helpful to compare how often such paranormal self-healing experiences occur to a group of people who do not claim any form of shamanic or abduction experiences.

7.5 Dismemberment and Skeletonization

Karen reports having “quite horrific dreams” before her first abduction experience when she was about five:

They were always with people chasing me with knives — which was the most terrifying bit, and then they would get me and actually chop me up into little pieces and eat me. I had a lot of cannibalistic dreams. And when I was being eaten, it wasn’t actually painful and my spirit was still there; like I was still me. The most terrifying bit was just being chased in the first place.

Karen is aware that such a dream — in which she was chased by people carrying some sort of phallic object that can inflict pain — might suggest that she had been sexually abused as a child, but pointed out that, “my father and I have an incredibly close relationship and.... [he] couldn’t have possibly done that in a million years.” Some abduction researchers have noted that, “There is a consistent tendency for both” abductees and near-death experiencers “to report a greater incidence of childhood abuse” (Ring, 1992, p.138). As a result of his research Ring has concluded that “one significant predisposing factor in the developmental history of our extraordinary experiencers may well be the presence of relatively high ... levels of childhood abuse and trauma and possibly other forms of stress” (p.139, his
It was only later as an adult that Karen was able to connect her childhood fear and trauma with her abduction experiences. Angela has had a similar death and rebirth vision:

I saw myself in this dark humid web — I was dead lying on this coffin thing and there were all these dark beings coming in and were eating my physical body and I felt that I had died and came back to life.

Dreams and visions of being dismembered are frequently an integral part of shamanic initiation experiences and, as these quotations reveal, can be a dramatic and unforgettable means of learning that one’s spirit transcends bodily death. Eliade (1951/1989, p.108) speaks of initiations during which the aspirants’ flesh is eaten by spirits, and Halifax (1980) quotes an initiation experience recounted by a Siberian shaman called Kyzlasov:

I had been sick and I had been dreaming. In my dreams I had been taken to the ancestors and cut into pieces on a black table. They chopped me up and then threw me into the kettle and I was boiled. (p.50).

As an explanation for such horrifying experiences, Halifax (1982) writes that:

The shaman-neophyte must die to finitude in order to attain knowledge of the immortal. The sacred dismemberment of the shaman’s body is a manifestation of the realm of chaotic multiplicity. The shaman is reborn ... to a higher order of existence. (p.76)

Vitebsky (1995), too, points out that, for some initiates, “the first approach of the spirits takes the form of a violent onslaught which leads to what seems like a complete destruction of the future shaman’s personality” (p.59). This may take the form of “bodily dismantling. He or she may see him– or herself as a skeleton, a theme widely found in Asia and the Americas. In Siberia every bone and muscle is taken apart, counted and put together again” (p.59). Such skeletonization experiences often appear to be symbolised in x-ray-like shamanic costumes, paintings and carvings featuring the bones of the human body (Halifax, 1982, p.76).

When asked about their healing abilities, two of the abductees briefly mentioned being able to see into, or through, their patients. Michael says that he can sense
what is wrong with people, “with my hands... it's like you can see the bone inside.”

Nancy also claims that:

Through massage, I can see colour spots on people... which means that there is problem there, but I don't necessarily know what the problem is. With me it is a bit sort of hot and cold. There are some days when I can look at someone when I am doing healing and I can look straight through them like x-ray vision, and I know everything that's happening.

This might suggest that another reason for the skeleton-like costumes, paintings and carvings used by some shamans is to illustrate that they can quite literally see through their patients. Kalweit (1992) provides a symbolic justification for such morbid displays. “Shamans are the living embodiment of inwardness, of the hidden, the skeleton — which is why skeletons are so often depicted on shamans' drums and clothing, as symbols of their nature” (p.226). However, Kalweit (1992) also tells us that Eskimo shamans supposedly have x-ray vision. “In general, it is believed that shamans are capable of looking into other people as deep as their skeletons and thus seeing their nature. The shaman's 'x-ray vision' is particularly highly emphasised in Eskimo culture” (p.116). Whichever of these explanations for skeletonization is correct, there is no doubt that terrifying dreams or visions of dismemberment — similar to those of two of the abductees — are a common feature of shamanic initiation experiences.

7.6 Poltergeist Activity

As mentioned in the literature review, in addition to initiating or enhancing a person's paranormal healing abilities, alien abduction experiences often appear to cause a form of poltergeist activity around the abductees themselves — much of which involves malfunctioning electrical devices in their homes. Little research has been done into this seemingly paranormal phenomenon which Ring (1992, p.156) has termed ‘Electrical Sensitive Syndrome’.

The two main theories about the cause of poltergeist activity are almost identical to two of the theories about the origins of the UFO phenomenon — the psychic projection and otherworld theories — which are described in the literature review.
The first theory could be called an otherworld theory. As Cassirer (1988, p.51) points out, the term poltergeist is of German origin and means 'boisterous spirit', which implies that a mischievous entity from some invisible dimension or otherworld is responsible for such disruptive events. The second theory is a psychic projection one and postulates that the energy and intelligence behind poltergeist activity is projected from the unconscious mind of a psychically and/or psychologically stressed individual; often a teenager undergoing various emotional difficulties. Advocates of this second theory, as Cassirer (1988) explains, have given the phenomenon a different name. “American parapsychologists prefer the ... [term] ‘Recurrent Spontaneous Psychokinesis’ (RSPK), which ... suggests that all such cases are (a) ‘person centred’, and (b) explicable in terms of human energies” (p.51). While not disputing either of these theories, it is clear that, like their equivalent UFO theories, they both replace one mystery (poltergeist activity) with another (the projection of paranormal energy, or the existence of invisible otherworld entities).

As with UFOs and abductions, some people advocate hybrid theories. For example, the paranormal researcher and writer Colin Wilson (1994) has been, “converted from the notion that poltergeists are simply a form of ‘spontaneous psychokinesis’, due to the hidden power of the unconscious mind, to the conviction that they are independent spirits” (p.552). By way of explanation, he quotes a conversation with Guy Playfair who combines the otherworld and psychic projection theories, referring to the resulting hybrid as a “football of energy”:

When people get into conditions of tension, they exude a kind of energy — the kind of thing that happens to teenagers at puberty. Along come a couple of spirits, and they do what any group of schoolboys would do — they begin to kick it around, smashing windows and generally creating havoc. Then they get tired and leave it. In fact the football often explodes, and turns into a puddle of water. (Wilson, 1994, p.554)

Interview participants were asked whether any poltergeist-like events — such as malfunctioning electrical devices or an unusual number of light-bulbs blowing — had happened around them or in their houses, after their abduction experiences, and almost all of them said yes. Most of the events described were of an electrical
nature, while some were more unusual. Angela describes, “most electrical appliances not working, having a lot of static. And the television ... often it just goes to static.” She also recalls an occasion, while she was watching television, when the video-recorder — which was switched off but had a video, that her sister had been watching, left in it — suddenly switched itself on and ejected the video, which happened to be called *The Haunting*. In reply to this question Helen laughs as she describes the television, the video, a fan, lots of light bulbs and the power in her section at work all blowing up. Karen recalls her stereo, “turning on in the middle of the night and then it would actually flip through to ... my favourite song on the CD ... and it would just play the song. And then it would stop and turn off.” Michael can sense a connection between his feelings and blown light bulbs. “If I am feeling relaxed I don’t seem to blow them — but yes, if I am agitated one seems to go.” He has also found that, “when I was agitated at work the radio would get a lot more interference.”

Sometimes such electrical quirks can be amusing, as Ruth describes: “I got four tapes from a friend.... She said to show people the videos, and I did. But some tapes wouldn’t work for some people and some would work with other people ... it was quite funny actually.” As well as experiencing “doors opening and closing,” Ruth can sense “people walking around” in her house. “Sometimes you can sit in the lounge and it’s like you are walking in the main street with all the people around.” These poltergeist-like events do not happen all the time for the abductees, but can be dramatic when they do, as Patricia recounts:

I had occasions when things would move off the shelf, and they wouldn’t smash on the floor; they wouldn’t just fall on the floor, they would be able to move from one place very carefully to another, you know, in the blink of an eye. And other times I would have enormous electrical activity in the house, so much so that it would blow. It would actually trigger my alarm system or trigger things to come on. The television came on one night [and] the stereo turned off one night.

Her explanation for these puzzling events is, “that in some way the electrical energy, or the electrical make-up of these beings or presences has in some way interfered with the electrical make-up of the alarm system or the stereo or television.”
Some abductees try to counter such unwanted events. Cheryl, whose abductions began when she was a child, reports that anomalous events have occurred around her family all her life. To counter this, she now regularly 'clears' her house of unwanted energies. In one incident, which she believes was caused by playful spirits:

'We went into the kitchen one day and the whole dining table was covered and brimming, like falling over the sides with water.... If someone had dumped water on it, it would have washed off more quickly. This was like oozing out of the table. And the stove that was a big, old, heavy stove, was sitting in the middle of the kitchen. And it was just like, 'OK who put that there?' And it had happened during the night and my dad put it back and said, 'If that comes out again we are moving.' All sorts of stuff like that [happened].

Betty, who lives alone, does not mind small anomalies around the house. She has not had electrical malfunctions, but finds that objects that she puts down sometimes go missing, only to reappear a few days later. "It's interesting. It doesn't bother me. I know it will show up again because I don't lose things." In her opinion this is caused by "someone on a more refined vibration" just "playing around." Nancy's only complaint is that, as in many households, individual socks go missing. "But we just say, 'Oh well it's just gone into another dimension for a little while'." Nancy believes that her family, some of whom are also having close encounter experiences, "have integrated [the events] that are going on around us.... There is no excess energy because of fear and things flowing around the house, so there doesn't need to be startling things happening to get our attention."

While these poltergeist or RSPK-like events are interesting, we could ask what connection they could have with shamanism given that it might be difficult for some of them to occur in a traditional society largely or entirely devoid of electrical devices. However, there do seem to be a few examples in the anthropological literature of poltergeist-like events occurring in shamanistic settings. For example, Eliade (1951/1989) reports that in Southern Siberia, "the gods choose the future shaman by striking him with lightning or showing him their will through stones falling from the sky" (p.19). Being struck by lightning might be the closest a traditional shaman gets to experiencing an electric malfunction, and anomalous showers of
stones (lithobolia) or other objects are a form of poltergeist activity (Rogo, 1991; Roll, 1976). In another case, Ernest de Martino (1972) recounts an example of “spontaneous vocation among the Yamana and the Selk’nam.” He describes how:

A young man goes off into the forest to look for some wood to make a harpoon. He becomes so tired in searching that he enters a psychic state that is very close to the actual loss of his presence. Finally he finds a suitable branch which he begins to cut off with his axe — but with the first notch he releases a flood of water, something completely unexpected and, for him, an extraordinary ‘sign’. He is greatly perturbed and returns to his hut. (p.91)

Like Cheryl’s earlier report of her family’s kitchen table oozing with water, such an event could be seen as an example of poltergeist activity and, interestingly enough, both cases appear to illustrate Playfair’s earlier claim that ‘footballs of energy’ frequently turn into puddles of water.

If we consider these abductees’ examples, it is hard not to suspect that there is some sort of intelligence behind them. Whether that intelligence is fragmentary or delinquent is another matter. However, it would make sense that such paranormal problems might initially occur to people — abductees and shamans alike — who had only had brief and, as yet uncontrolled, access to a spirit realm or otherworld containing anomalous energies and/or spiritual entities. We could describe such events as otherworld indicators, signs or, to use a popular term, as ‘collateral damage’. To support this contention, consider the well-documented poltergeist case of Matthew Manning (1974) who, as a schoolboy in England, suffered all sorts of alarming, anomalous events around him, but who then — like a shaman — became a healer, having apparently learned to use those same energies in a more constructive and directed fashion.

This chapter has focussed on healing and has revealed significant similarities between the paranormal abilities developed by both alien abductees and shamans. As the quoted examples document, the abductees appear to have acquired their paranormal powers early in life at the same time as their first encounters with
otherworld or alien beings, but since then, like shamans, they have largely concentrated on developing healing abilities which can be used for the benefit of others. Further connections between shamanism and abductions are revealed by the fact that in some of the abducteds' healing work they believe that they receive assistance from various invisible entities. Apart from noting such similarities, what is of great interest for future research is why it is that being 'abducted' into a spiritual or alien otherworld should confer paranormal abilities, and, from a medical perspective, how such healing actually works.
CHAPTER 8  Summary and Discussion

8.1  Summary
As stated in Chapter 1, the research question for this study is whether any of the eleven alien abductees have had experiences similar to shamanic experiences, especially initiation experiences, and if so, what were those similarities and what were the differences? During the interviews it became clear that many of them have had, and are continuing to have, numerous experiences similar to shamanic ones. These experiences, as well as the distinctly shamanistic world-view that the abductees appear to develop as a result of their experiences, have been documented and discussed in the four preceding interview analysis chapters. While discussing any particular shamanistic similarity, the interview analysis makes it clear whether most or just one or two of the abductees have had certain types of experiences. For example, while ten of the abductees claim to be involved in some forms of healing activity — an important shamanic activity — only one of them claims to carry out the less overtly shamanic function of psychopomp, although many of them believe in some form of life after death.

The similarities between the abductees' experiences and shamanism fall roughly into four categories which, as mentioned earlier, have been selected largely for convenience of analysis. Briefly, they are:

1) Initiation and transformation  The abductees' initial close encounter experiences often resemble shamanic initiation experiences because of their frightening, bizarre and paranormal nature, and the altered states of consciousness or dream states involved. These experiences can be repetitive, involve illness, symbolic animal imagery and various spiritual entities. They invariably also result in the development of an animistic perspective in which the abductees regard the natural world as filled with unseen spiritual forces, leading them to express a deep concern for animals and environmental matters. Most importantly, their experiences introduce the abductees to a realm or aspect of reality to which most others in their society have little direct access or understanding. Such experiences
and their new extended vision profoundly transform the abductees into people who, though unusual, may — like shamans — be valued because of their gifts.

2) Genetic, ancestral and heredity concerns As in shamanism, the abductees encounter a variety of beings, some of whom they feel are related to them, may be their ancestors or even the creators and guardians of the human race. A dominant theme running through their abductions is the profound interest in genetics possessed by the entities they encounter. This has its counterpart in some shamanic creation myths, drawings and carvings of intertwined or twin-headed snakes. There is also the interesting comparison between many of the abductees' experiences and mythological and religious narratives of sexual contact between humans and various divine beings. The abductees and sometimes their families may undergo repeat abductions leading to a familiarity with one or more of these beings. Shamanic abilities are also often inherited and shamans may have ongoing relationships with some spirits.

3) Spirituality and otherworld encounters The abductees regard most aliens as highly evolved spiritual beings although they see others as more confronting, frightening or mischievous. Shamans, too, regard some spirits as supportive and others as dangerous and must learn how to differentiate between them. Both aliens and shamanic spirits appear to have a similar capacity to transport people, sometimes in an out-of-body state, trance or dream state, into what seem to be other dimensions, an otherworld, or after-death realm. This suggests that aliens and spirits may access similar 'spiritual spaces' or altered states of consciousness.

4) Healing and other paranormal abilities As a result of their early close encounter experiences, the abductees, like shamans, appear to develop a range of paranormal powers, especially diagnostic and healing abilities which they then use to help others. They may, however, need to learn to heal themselves first in order to gain a familiarity with such abilities. Both shamans and some abductees undergo terrifying dismemberment and skeletonization experiences which appear to teach them that their spirit or consciousness can transcend physical death. Shamans
recruit various spirits to assist during their healing work and likewise some of the abductees report that alien or spiritual beings may observe or assist while they are healing.

These numerous similarities are not superficial or coincidental and provide powerful confirmation for the anecdotal claims of such similarities between shamanic and abduction experiences made by some ufologists, as described in the literature review. The differences between the experiences of the abductees and shamanism seem largely to result from their different cultural and technological context. In comparison to traditional societies, people in the West have a more secular and pluralistic culture and education system, with a considerable amount of information about science and differing spiritual beliefs available from the library, television, and the Internet. These sources frequently sensationalise, disparage or are silent about the notion of aliens, a spirit realm and paranormal talents, although these subjects are popular in science fiction. This means that, as some of the abductees mention, they generally feel that their paranormal abilities, spirituality and otherworld perspectives are ignored, ridiculed or marginalised, whereas in a traditional society they would be honoured or at least regarded as useful. This situation is perhaps changing slightly. The New Age movement is sympathetic to the spiritual and environmental concerns of abductees, alternative healing is popular, and paranormal research may be becoming almost respectable (Radin, 1997). Whether this is the result of alien abductions is difficult to say. It might be suggested that the abductees would assume that more of the beings they encountered were spirits rather than aliens were it not for their Western cultural backgrounds. But, on the other hand, it needs to be recalled that the shamans that Mack (2000a) has interviewed assert that they have encountered both spiritual and alien beings, a claim that is reinforced by the testimony of some of the abductees in this study.

In their interviews, the abductees describe a blend of spiritual and alien experiences and have therefore largely come to the conclusion that aliens are in some sense spiritual beings who have the interests of humanity and Earth at heart.
Admittedly, the questions that they were asked were seeking shamanistic-like experiences, but it should be pointed out that the fact that such similarities have clearly been shown to exist does not prove that aliens have humanity's interests at heart, although it is possible that they do. Further research would be needed to decide such matters.

While this project could be seen as an attempt to understand alien abductions by linking them with shamanic experiences, it needs to be realised that anthropology has no clear understanding of the dynamics of the shamanic otherworld or spirit realm. Nor does it have a coherent explanation for the various paranormal abilities that shamans supposedly develop as a result of their initiation experiences. In one sense, therefore, this study is comparing two similar types of experience to see whether that produces new insights into either of them. Speaking as an anthropologist about his profession's analysis of shamanism, Narby writes that:

> The answer lies in the mirror. When anthropology was a young science, unsure of its own identity and unaware of the schizophrenic nature of its own methodology, it considered shamans to be mentally ill. When 'structuralist' anthropology claimed to have attained the rank of science, and anthropologists busied themselves finding order in order, shamans became creators of order. When the discipline went into a 'poststructuralist' identity crisis, unable to decide whether it was a science or a form of interpretation, shamans started exercising all kinds of professions. Finally, some anthropologists began questioning their discipline's obsessive search for order, and they saw shamans as those whose power lies in "insistently questioning and undermining the search for order." It would seem, then, that the reality hiding behind the concept of 'shamanism' reflects the anthropologist's gaze, independently of its angle. (1998, p.16)

The UFO literature indicates that, over the last half century, ufologists have been equally confused about alien abductions. Bearing this in mind, can it be assumed that the beings that abductees encounter are genuine extraterrestrials or should their similarity with shamanic spirits lead to the conclusion that they are all actually spirits? Or could they be merely 'reflecting our gaze'?

A further question is whether the abductees' interview evidence provides any support for either the extraterrestrial hypothesis (ETH), the psychic projection theory
or the otherworld theory as explanations for alien abductions? It is, after all, possible that all three theories are misleading. The abductees appear to favour the otherworld theory, although this in itself is ambiguous because the theory does not clearly differentiate between alien beings that inhabit an otherworld and those that might travel or teleport through one as a means of crossing the vast distances of space.

8.2 Discussion and suggestions for further research.
What further investigation seems the most appropriate to follow on from this research? In the absence of any aliens or spirits as interview subjects, it would seem appropriate to investigate whether a multi-dimensional otherworld or spirit realm does exist, what its connection is to consciousness, and why shamans and alien abductees alike develop paranormal abilities as a result of entering it.

Shamans often speak about celestial realms and the underworld as actual physical locations and some religions have at times suggested the literal existence of spiritual spaces such as heaven and hell. Today, the term ‘altered state of consciousness’ and words borrowed from physics such as wavelengths, vibrations and dimensions are more often used to describe the entering of other realms. This suggests that, while such metaphors evolve to reflect their cultural context, researchers need to be cautious that they are not conceptually misleading.

Whatever terminology is used, the question remains whether shamans and aliens are both accessing the same ‘space’ and whether that space is exclusively spiritual or not? Abductees may only refer to the states of consciousness in which they encounter aliens as ‘spiritual’ because traditionally almost the only people using them were spiritual or religious. However, the realm may actually be accessible to anyone capable of getting there, aliens and shamans included. In short, it needs to be discovered how the topology of spiritual spaces and altered states of consciousness works and whether such realms have any inhabitants — spiritual, biological, or otherwise.
Drury (1991) combines mystical, shamanic, visionary and other dissociative states to create a sophisticated ‘map’ of altered states of consciousness (p.114). He then adds that:

"We are beginning to accumulate a real body of data on dissociative and ‘peak’ states of consciousness which in turn have a direct bearing on the authenticity of religious beliefs. We may well be entering a new phase where religious and mystical experiences can be demystified and subjected to some sort of testing and validation. Without doubt, a new pragmatism has appeared on the horizon." (p.99)

The abductees’ interview results suggest Drury is on the right track and that the spiritual spaces and altered states of consciousness experienced by both shamans and alien abductees can be put onto the same map.

To investigate why entering some sort of alien or spiritual otherworld appears to facilitate paranormal abilities could be seen as an investigation of both consciousness and the fundamental nature of reality. For example, Mack’s chapter in the anthology UFOs and Abductions (2000b, p.241) is entitled, “How the Alien Abduction Phenomenon Challenges the Boundaries of Our Reality.” A more focussed approach is to investigate the nature of paranormal abilities themselves. Of course, demonstrating that such abilities do exist might not initially explain how they work, but could be an important first step. Some psychokinetic abilities appear to act at a distance, raising questions about possible links between mind and matter, while clairvoyance appears to confound our normal understanding of causality and determinism. This may mean that consciousness can somehow transcend the physical brain. Any scientific discoveries of this nature would have profound implications for modern society. For example, science currently believes that consciousness remains firmly attached to the body during life, ceases to exist at death, and that there is no causal connection between consciousness and physical matter beyond the body. However, as this study has shown, many abductees, like shamans, have experiences that appear to demonstrate that not only is consciousness able to leave the body, but that it survives bodily death, and that the mind and physical matter are somehow connected. These opposing claims could not be more different, yet shamans and, it seems, many alien abductees are
living examples of the latter. Further research is clearly needed to see which set of beliefs is more appropriate or whether both are misleading. If the second set is shown to have any validity, Western society's conception of reality and the nature of consciousness will receive an enormous jolt and the claims of many abductees will appear even more convincing.

In conclusion, it can be claimed that this study has successfully shown that there are even more similarities between the experiences of both alien abductees and shamans than have been suggested by those few researchers that have investigated such matters. This adds weight to the argument that further research into consciousness, paranormal abilities and the reality of a multi-dimensional otherworld or spirit realm is clearly warranted.
References


Appendices

Appendix 1

Statement of Disclosure

Shamanism and Alien Abductions: A Comparative Study

Some UFO researchers claim that there are similarities between alien abductions and the experiences of shamans (medicine men, indigenous healers) who are sometimes abducted by ‘sky gods’ to a ‘realm of the spirits’. Both experiences involve an often frightening ‘flight’ to an unknown realm where strange entities are encountered. This experience may result in a period of emotional unrest, leading to a spiritual transformation, a greater interest in nature, and the development of paranormal abilities such as healing.

This research project will compare details from interviews with a sample of alien abductees, with reports of shamanic experiences from various anthropology books. The aim of the research is to see if there really are any similarities between alien abduction experiences and shamanism, and if so, what those similarities are. The results of the comparison will be put into a university thesis.

The approximately one hour interview with each abductee will need to be in a quiet, comfortable location so that it can be tape recorded. You will be given a pseudonym so that you cannot be identified on the tapes, in the written transcripts of those tapes, or in the thesis itself. You may withdraw from this research at any time and ask that your interview not be used.

The possible benefits of this research for abductees and UFO research in general may be that we all get a deeper understanding of alien abductions.

Any questions about this project, which is called “Shamanism and Alien Abductions: A Comparative Study”, can be directed to Simon Harvey-Wilson of the School of International, Cultural & Community Studies, Edith Cowan University, phone: 9295 2440.

If you have any concerns about the project, or would like to talk to an independent person, you may contact: Anne Harris, School of International, Cultural & Community Studies, Edith Cowan University, phone 9400 5017
Appendix 2

Interview Consent Form

Project Title: Shamanism and Alien Abductions: A Comparative Study
Investigator: Simon Harvey-Wilson
Institution: School of International, Cultural & Community Studies, Edith Cowan University, Mount Lawley WA 6050

- This research project will compare details from interviews with a sample of alien abductees, with reports of shamanic (initiation) experiences.
- The aim of the research is to see if there are any similarities between alien abduction experiences and shamanism, and if so, what those similarities are.

++++++++++++++++++++++++++

1. I (the participant) have been informed about all aspects of the above research project, and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

2. I agree to participate in this project, and realise that I may withdraw at any time.

3. I agree that any of the interview research data gathered for this study may be published provided that I am not identifiable.

Full name of participant

Signature of participant Date 2000

Signature of investigator Simon Harvey-Wilson Date 2000
Appendix 3

Guide list of questions for abductees.

1. Is “abduction” the appropriate word to describe your experiences? If not, what other word would you use?

2. How did your abduction experience(s) start? Did the aliens seize you unexpectedly, or were you waiting for them?

3. Do you see your abductors as aliens? If not how would you describe them?

4. Is there any form of hierarchy among the aliens? Are some of them in charge?

5. Why do you think you were abducted?

6. Do you feel special or different because you were abducted?

7. Were you sick or unhappy, or did you feel unusual or different before the experience? Has that feeling now changed?

8. How much control did you have over the original experience? If you have had repeat experiences, do you have more control now?

9. Did you meditate or anything like that before your abduction? Did you, or do you now, go into trances or altered states?

10. Briefly describe your religious or spiritual beliefs before the abduction?

11. Do you see any connection between aliens and spirituality or religion?

12. Do you now believe in a human soul or spirit? Why? Do you believe there is any form of life, or consciousness, after death? Do you believe in a spirit realm or form of non-ordinary reality? Can you describe it?

13. Has your abduction experience changed any of your beliefs or world view? If so, have you had difficulty integrating your new perspective into your daily life?

14. Before your abduction experience were you psychic, did you have clairvoyant dreams, or have any paranormal or weird experiences? Can you recall any such experiences during childhood? Have you developed any form of healing or diagnostic abilities since your abduction?
15. How has your abduction changed your family, friends? Have any of them had abduction or paranormal experiences either before or after yours?

16. Did any poltergeist-like events occur in your house, or around you, after your abduction?

17. Do you believe that some aliens are 'good' and some are 'bad'? Why do you believe this?

18. Do you have any sort of on-going relationship with the aliens or spiritual beings? If so please describe it? Can you now sense invisible energies or alien or spiritual entities? What do they do, or why are they there?

19. Do you get information from the aliens, and if so how do you feel about it? Do you understand the information? Did it seem telepathic? Is the information to help change or guide society, or is it just for you?

20. How do you think the aliens see human society?

21. Do you feel that the aliens are related to humans in any way? Did they ever mention this to you? What did they say?

22. Have your feelings towards the planet and the environment changed since your abduction? If so, why?

23. Have your feelings towards animals (including pets) changed since your abduction?

24. Were you ever taken to any underground bases or locations by the aliens?

25. Had you heard or read about alien abductions before your own experiences? If so, do you think that influenced your interpretation of what happened to you?

26. Are there any other aspects of your experience, that you feel are important or relevant, that you would like to mention?