

## **Belief in, and Alleged Experience of, the Paranormal in Ostensible UFO Abductees**

KEITH BASTERFIELD AND MICHAEL A. THALBOURNE

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**ABSTRACT:** It has often been asserted anecdotally that the UFO phenomenon is associated with reports of the paranormal. Thus far a statistical study has not been conducted. In the present research, a measure of belief in and alleged experience of the paranormal—the 18-item forced-choice Australian Sheep-Goat Scale—was administered to 21 self-selected ostensible UFO abductees and their responses compared with those of a control group—301 students. It was found that abductees reported significantly greater belief in, and alleged experience of, the paranormal (ESP, PK and life after death). The anecdotal reports were thus confirmed. However, it should not be concluded until more research is carried out that the abductees are necessarily more psychic.

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### INTRODUCTION

Over the years, a number of UFO researchers and parapsychologists have commented broadly about the reporting of paranormal events in connection with the UFO phenomenon (Basterfield, 2001, pp. 30-55; Druffel & Rogo, 1980, p. 218; Schwarz, 1983, p. 523; Spencer, 1994, p. 40). Other researchers (Evans, 1983, p. 49; Randles, 1988, p. 208; Vallee, 1977, p. 16) even thought that paranormal events were a *central feature* of the UFO phenomenon.

More specifically, attention was drawn to “close encounter” cases as generating episodes of paranormal experiences (Budden, 1995, p. 21; Spencer, 1994, p. 142; Vallee, 1977, p. 27). Some noted that it was not only close encounter cases which produced paranormal episodes, but that the abduction aspect of the UFO phenomenon is rife with such accounts (Bullard, 1987a, p. 152; Gotlib, 1994, p. 150; Mack, 1994, p. 13).

Apart from UFO researchers and parapsychologists, UFO abductees themselves (Boylan, 1994, p. 40; Jordan & Mitchell, 1994, p. xx;

Turner, 1994a, p. 248) began to document their own experiences with the paranormal, together with those of other abductees. However, despite the number of individuals commenting on this subject area, relatively few (e.g., Hough & Kalman, 1997, pp. 88-89; Keul cited in Phillips, 1993, p. 45; Ring 1992) have conducted research utilising an adequate methodology, with observations remaining generally anecdotal.

In a recent paper, one of the authors (Basterfield, 2001, p. 52), in looking for potential areas for future investigation suggested that work ought to be undertaken to determine the incidence of paranormal experiences in the lives of abductees. Specifically, a comparison needed to be undertaken between the self-reported rate of paranormal experiences in a non-abductee population, and the self-reported incidence in abductees. The hypothesis was that, based on the anecdotal reporting in the UFO literature, the incidence of self-reported paranormal incidents in abductees would be higher than in an appropriate control group lacking the abduction experience.

#### DEFINITION

Over the years one of the authors (K.B.) has interviewed several dozen people, mostly in Australia, who identified themselves as an abductee. However, upon examination of their accounts, it was evident that there was a large variation in the nature of these accounts. Some individuals reported waking paralysed in their beds with nothing further to report. Others recalled disturbing dreams involving alien beings; while yet others recalled a complex, lengthy series of apparently physical abduction by non-human entities. All, however, viewed themselves as “abductees.” So when is a UFO report an abduction?

Over the years UFO researchers have grappled to come up with a definition of an abduction. An inspection of the UFO literature going back to 1985 indicated that—arising from the well-known Hills case from the USA—a definition in that year featured encounters with motor vehicles.

In a typical scenario, the victim is driving along a deserted road late at night, sees a UFO, momentarily blacks out, regains consciousness a “moment” or so later, then discovers that over an hour or two has mysteriously passed away from his [sic] life. Later on investigators may ask the witness to undergo hypnotic regression, during which he “remembers” that his car stalled and

alien beings took him onboard the UFO. Many UFO abductees say they were given a medical examination, or a message before being returned to their cars with the command to forget what happened (Rogo, 1985, p. 8).

By 1987 a more general definition featured in the work of Eddie Bullard:

Abduction means the capture and temporary involuntary detention of a witness by extraordinary and perhaps alien beings aboard a flying craft of unusual design, for purposes that commonly include an event like a medical examination (Bullard, 1987b, p. 2).

In another 1987 work, English authors Evans and Spencer wrote:

In the stereotype abduction experience, the individual seems (but this is open to question) to be taken by surprise by an encounter with extraterrestrial beings; the witness is taken aboard the spacecraft and subjected, more or less involuntarily, to some kind of physical examination, which may include subcutaneous and even surgical probing, sample taking and even sexual operations leading in some cases to pregnancy (Evans & Spencer, 1987, p. 132).

Recognizing that some abductions are reported to involve a life-long interaction with alien beings, a 1992 Roper Poll in the USA provided the following explanation of an abduction:

The child is removed from his/her normal environment by small gray-skinned, hairless figures, and floated or carried into a circular, metallic craft hovering nearby. When inside the object the child's clothes are removed and he/she is placed on a table. Physical manipulation and palpation follows...(Unusual Personal Experiences, 1992, p. 11).

In the same year, the J. Allen Hynek Center for UFO Studies published an excellent paper that used the following definition:

1. A witness must be taken against his or her will from normal, terrestrial surroundings by non-human beings.
2. These beings must take the witness to another enclosed space that is not terrestrial in appearance and is assumed or known by the witness to be a spacecraft.

3. In this place, the witness must either be subjected to various procedures that appear to be examinations of some type, engage in communication (verbal or telepathic) with the beings or both.
4. These experiences may be remembered consciously or through various means of focused concentration, such as hypnosis, or by a combination of the two (Rodeghier, Goodpaster, & Blatterbauer, 1992, p. 64).

The following year, after the successful Abduction Study Conference held at MIT in the USA, a group of participants stated, in their exploration of a code of ethics for abduction researchers:

The abduction experiencer is defined as a person who reports experiences which conform to those elements commonly found in the abduction scenario as widely described in the literature (e.g., recall of an abduction; missing time related to recall of unidentified lights, objects or alien entities; dreams or dream-like experiences of alien entities or UFOs, etc. (Ethics code for abduction experience investigators and therapists, 1993, p. 2).

Abductee and author Karla Turner provided a simpler definition when giving a talk to the 1994 MUFON conference:

I am an abductee. I have been forcibly taken and controlled by non-human entities (Turner, 1994b, p. 20).

In reviewing the definitions above it was decided to use a slight variation of the CUFOS definition, as it appeared the most comprehensive and had already been used in a major study (Rodeghier et al., 1992).

## METHOD

### *Measures*

Potential abductees were administered the following list of criteria, and were asked whether those criteria fit them. These criteria were as follows:

- “You have been taken against your will from normal, terrestrial surroundings by non-human beings.

- These beings took you to another enclosed space that was not terrestrial in appearance and was assumed or known by you to be a spacecraft.
- In this place, you were subjected to various procedures that appeared to be examinations of some type, engaged in communication with the beings (verbal or telepathic) or both.
- These experiences may be remembered consciously or through various means of focused concentration, such as hypnosis, or by a combination of the two.”

If a person decided that they fulfilled all these criteria, then they went on to complete the 18-item questionnaire known as the Australian Sheep-Goat Scale (Thalbourne, 1995), which asks questions about beliefs about and ostensible experiences of the paranormal (ESP, psychokinesis, and life after death). A final statement was “I am more psychic now than I was before my abduction”. Possible answers to all 19 items were “true”, “uncertain” and “false”.

### *Procedure*

Packets containing a page of information ensuring confidentiality, a consent form, and the above-mentioned measuring instruments were sent all over Australia, to individual UFO researchers and to UFO research groups, including those specializing in supporting UFO abductees. A reply-paid envelope was also included. Approximately 300 such packets were sent out.

### *Subjects*

The control group consisted of 301 undergraduate psychology students at Adelaide University. They were invited to participate in a survey regarding psychic phenomena. Sex and age were not collected in the case of 108 individuals, but, for the remaining 193, 36% were male, and age ranged from 16 to 56 with an average of 21.1 yrs and a standard deviation of 7.5.

The abductee group consisted of 21 individuals from all over Australia. Gender was about evenly split. Age ranged from 29 to 66, with an average of 43.3 and a standard deviation of 9.68.

## RESULTS

The responses to the Australian Sheep-Goat Scale were scored such that a “true” response was allotted two points, “uncertain” one, and “false” zero points (blank spaces were taken to be “uncertain”s). There were 18 such item-responses, so theoretically the total score could range from zero to 36. The average score for the abductee group was 29.52 (standard deviation 5.50), and for the control group was 15.21 (standard deviation 7.68). The two averages were compared using the statistical test known as the *t* test for independent samples, and was found to yield a *t* ratio of 8.39 ( $df = 320$ ,  $\omega^2 = .18$ ), which is interpretable as telling us that the odds against chance of such a huge difference between the averages are over 1,000 to one. Abductees thus reported overall significantly higher belief and/or more experiences than the students.

We decided that it would be instructive to examine the frequency of “true”, “?” and “false” responses for each of the 19 items. (Statistical tests could not be performed in all cases because of low expected frequencies.) Therefore we present the raw data.

Table 1. “I believe in the existence of ESP”

Variable	Answer		STATUS		Total
BELIEVE IN ESP			student	abductee	
	FALSE	Count	44	0	44
		% within STATUS	14.6%	0.0%	13.8%
	?	Count	31	1	32
		% within STATUS	10.3%	4.8%	9.9%
	TRUE	Count	226	20	246
		% within STATUS	75.1%	95.2%	76.4%
Total		Count	301	21	322
		% within STATUS	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

(Expected frequencies too low)

It can be seen from Table 1 that while three-quarters of students believe in ESP, almost 100% of abductees do so.

Table 2. "I believe I have had personal experience of ESP"

Variable	Answer		STATUS		Total
PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF ESP			student	abductee	
	FALSE	Count	153	1	154
		% within STATUS	50.8%	5.6%	48.3%
	?	Count	31	1	32
		% within STATUS	10.3%	5.6%	10.0%
	TRUE	Count	117	19	136
		% within STATUS	38.9%	90.5%	42.2%
Total		Count	301	21	322
		% within STATUS	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

(Chi-square = 17.78,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < .001$ )

It can be seen from Table 2 that while only 39% of students believed they had a personal experience of ESP, significantly more (namely, 91%) of abductees claimed such an experience.

Table 3. "I believe I am psychic"

Variable	Answer		STATUS		Total
BELIEVE SELF TO BE PSYCHIC			student	abductee	
	FALSE	Count	255	3	258
		% within STATUS	84.7%	16.7%	80.9%
	?	Count	23	3	26
		% within STATUS	7.6%	16.7%	8.2%
	TRUE	Count	23	15	38
		% within STATUS	7.6%	71.4%	11.8%
Total		Count	301	21	322
		% within STATUS	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 3 shows that while 71% of abductees claimed to be psychic, only 8% of students thought this.

Table 4. “I believe it is possible to gain information about the future before it happens, in ways that do not depend on rational prediction or normal sensory channels”

Variable	Answer		STATUS		Total
BELIEVE PRECOGNITION POSSIBLE			student	abductee	
	FALSE	Count	73	0	73
		% within STATUS	24.3%		22.9%
	?	Count	35	2	37
		% within STATUS	11.6%	9.5%	11.5%
	TRUE	Count	193	19	212
		% within STATUS	64.1%	90.5%	65.8%
Total		Count	301	21	322
		% within STATUS	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 4 shows that while 91% of abductees thought precognition possible, 64 % of students thought this was the case.

Table 5. “I have had at least one hunch that turned out to be correct and which (I believe) was not just a coincidence”

Variable	Answer		STATUS		Total
HAVE HAD HUNCH			student	abductee	
	FALSE	Count	73	0	73
		% within STATUS	24.3%	0.0%	22.7%
	?	Count	23	0	23
		% within STATUS	7.6%	0.0%	7.1%
	TRUE	Count	205	21	226
		% within STATUS	68.1%	100.0%	70.2%
Total		Count	301	21	322
		% within STATUS	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 5 shows that while 68% of students claimed a hunch, 100% of abductees did so.



Table 6. "I have had at least one premonition about the future that came true and which (I believe) was not just a coincidence."

Variable	Answer		STATUS		Total
HAVE HAD PREMONITION			student	abductee	
	FALSE	Count	150	1	151
		% within STATUS	49.8%	4.8%	46.9%
	?	Count	21	1	22
		% within STATUS	7.0%	4.8%	6.8%
	TRUE	Count	130	16	149
		% within STATUS	43.2%	90.5%	46.3%
Total		Count	301	21	322
		% within STATUS	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

(Chi-square = 14.84,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < .001$ )

Table 6 shows that, to a significant extent, abductees report more than twice the percentage of veridical premonitions.

Table 7. "I have had at least one dream that came true and which (I believe) was not just a coincidence"

Variable	Answer		STATUS		Total
HAVE HAD PRECOGNITIVE DREAM			student	abductee	
	FALSE	Count	155	3	158
		% within STATUS	51.5%	14.3%	49.1%
	?	Count	18	3	21
		% within STATUS	6.0%	14.3%	6.5%
	TRUE	Count	128	15	143
		% within STATUS	42.5%	71.4%	44.4%
Total		Count	301	21	322
		% within STATUS	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

(Chi-square = 9.36,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .009$ )

Table 7 shows that significantly more abductees report precognitive dreams than do students. While only 14% of abductees fail to report such a dream, more than half the students so fail.

Table 8. “I have had at least one vision that was not an hallucination and from which I received information that I could not otherwise have gained at that time and place”

Variable	Answer		STATUS		Total
PARANORMAL VISION			student	abductee	
	FALSE	Count	243	2	245
		% within STATUS	80.7%	9.5%	76.1%
	?	Count	14	3	17
		% within STATUS	4.7%	14.3%	5.3%
	TRUE	Count	44	16	60
		% within STATUS	14.6%	76.2%	18.6%
Total		Count	301	21	322
		% within STATUS	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 8 shows that while only 15% of students report veridical visions, this percentage is a gigantic 76% for abductees.

Table 9. “I believe in life after death”

Variable	Answer		STATUS		Total
BELIEVE IN LIFE-AFTER- DEATH			student	abductee	
	FALSE	Count	74	1	75
		% within STATUS	24.6%	4.8%	23.3%
	?	Count	52	2	54
		% within STATUS	17.3%	9.5%	16.8%
	TRUE	Count	175	18	193
		% within STATUS	58.1%	85.7%	59.9%
Total		Count	301	21	322
		% within STATUS	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 9 continues to show the same pattern as we have seen thus far, with abductees being more likely to subscribe to the belief or experience. Here, 86% of abductees believe in life-after-death, compared to 58% of the control group.

Table 10. “I believe that some people can contact spirits of the dead”

Variable	Answer		STATUS		Total
BELIEVE IN SPIRIT-CONTACT			student	abductee	
	FALSE	Count	133	1	134
		% within STATUS	44.2%	4.8%	41.6%
	?	Count	45	4	49
		% within STATUS	15.0%	19.0%	15.2%
	TRUE	Count	123	13	139
		% within STATUS	40.9%	76.2%	43.2%
Total		Count	301	16	322
		% within STATUS	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

(Chi-square = 10.54,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .005$ )

Table 10 shows, for example, that while only one abductee did not believe in contact with spirits of the dead, 44% of students did not believe in this alleged phenomenon.

Table 11. “I believe that it is possible to gain information about the thoughts, feelings or circumstances of another person, in a way that does not depend on rational prediction or normal sensory channels”

Variable	Answer		STATUS		Total
RECEPTIVE TELEPATHY			student	abductee	
	FALSE	Count	74	0	74
		% within STATUS	24.6%	0.0%	23.0%
	?	Count	33	3	36
		% within STATUS	11.0%	14.3%	11.2%
	TRUE	Count	194	18	212
		% within STATUS	64.5%	85.7%	65.8%
Total		Count	301	21	322
		% within STATUS	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 11 shows that the majority (86%) of abductees believe in receptive telepathy, while just over two-thirds of the students did so.

Table 12. “I believe it is possible to send a “mental message” to another person, or in some way influence them at a distance, by means other than the normal channels of communication”

Variable	Answer		STATUS		Total
ACTIVE TELEPATHY			student	abductee	
	FALSE	Count	92	1	93
		% within STATUS	30.6%	4.8%	28.9%
	?	Count	36	1	37
		% within STATUS	12.0%	5.6%	11.5%
	TRUE	Count	173	19	192
		% within STATUS	57.5%	90.5%	59.6%
Total		Count	301	21	322
		% within STATUS	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

(Chi-square = 7.07,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .029$ )

Table 12 shows much the same percentages as Table 11. Abductees believe in active telepathy to a significantly greater extent than do students.

Table 13. “I believe I have had at least one experience of telepathy between myself and another person”

Variable	Answer		STATUS		Total
HAVE EXPERIENCED TELEPATHY			student	abductee	
	FALSE	Count	179	0	179
		% within STATUS	59.5%	0.0%	55.6%
	?	Count	23	1	24
		% within STATUS	7.6%	4.8%	7.5%
	TRUE	Count	99	20	119
		% within STATUS	32.9%	95.2%	37.0%
Total		Count	301	21	322
		% within STATUS	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

(Chi-square = 28.50,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < .001$ )

Table 13 shows that nearly three times the percentage of abductees—and almost all of them—believe they have experienced telepathy, significantly so compared with the control group of students.

Table 14. “I believe in the existence of psychokinesis (or “PK”), that is, the direct influence of mind on a physical system, without the mediation of any known physical energy”

Variable	Answer		STATUS		Total
BELIEVE IN PK			student	abductee	
	FALSE	Count	133	2	135
		% within STATUS	44.2%	9.5%	41.9%
	?	Count	48	2	50
		% within STATUS	15.9%	9.5%	15.5%
	TRUE	Count	120	17	137
		% within STATUS	39.9%	81.0%	42.5%
Total		Count	301	21	322
		% within STATUS	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

(Chi-square = 13.17,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .001$ )

Table 14 shows that a significant majority of abductees believe in PK, the percentage being more than double that for students.

Table 15. “I believe I have personally exerted PK on at least one occasion”

Variable	Answer		STATUS		Total
PERSONALLY EXERTED PK			student	abductee	
	FALSE	Count	264	9	273
		% within STATUS	87.7%	50.0%	84.8%
	?	Count	10	3	13
		% within STATUS	3.3%	14.3%	4.0%
	TRUE	Count	27	9	36
		% within STATUS	9.0%	42.9%	11.2%
Total		Count	301	21	322
		% within STATUS	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 15 shows that nearly half the abductees believe they have personally exerted PK, as opposed to only 9% of the students.

Table 16. “I believe I have marked psychokinetic ability”

Variable	Answer		STATUS		Total
HAVE PK ABILITY			student	abductee	
	FALSE	Count	283	11	294
		% within STATUS	94.0%	52.4%	91.3%
	?	Count	15	7	22
		% within STATUS	5.0%	33.3%	6.8%
	TRUE	Count	3	3	6
		% within STATUS	1.0%	14.3%	1.9%
Total		Count	301	21	322
		% within STATUS	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 16 shows that while only a tiny figure of the control group—1%—think they have marked psychokinetic ability, 14% of abductees believe this.

Table 17. “I believe that, on at least one occasion, an inexplicable (but non-recurrent) physical event of an apparently psychokinetic origin has occurred in my presence”

Variable	Answer		STATUS		Total
EXPERIENCE OF NON- RECURRENT PK			student	abductee	
	FALSE	Count	241	4	245
		% within STATUS	80.1%	19.0%	76.1%
	?	Count	23	6	29
		% within STATUS	7.6%	28.6%	9.0%
	TRUE	Count	37	11	48
		% within STATUS	12.3%	52.4%	14.9%
Total		Count	301	21	322
		% within STATUS	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 17 shows the, by now usual, trend, for abductees to report more of a paranormal phenomenon, viz. 52% as opposed to 12% of students.

Table 18. “I believe that persistent inexplicable physical disturbances, of an apparently psychokinetic origin, have occurred in my presence at some time in the past (as, for example, a poltergeist)”

Variable	Answer		STATUS		Total
EXPERIENCE OF RECURRENT PK			student	abductee	
	FALSE	Count	260	6	266
		% within STATUS	86.4%	28.6%	82.6%
	?	Count	20	3	23
		% within STATUS	6.6%	14.3%	7.1%
	TRUE	Count	21	12	33
		% within STATUS	7.0%	57.1%	10.2%
Total		Count	301	21	319
		% within STATUS	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

In Table 18, we see that more than half of the abductees report persistent inexplicable physical disturbances such as a poltergeist, compared to just 7% of the students.

Finally, in response to the statement “I believe I am more psychic now than I was before my abduction”, nearly half expressed uncertainty, and just over a quarter said “true” and a quarter “false”.

## DISCUSSION

This study unequivocally shows that, at least amongst the alleged alien abductees we surveyed, belief in and experience of the paranormal was extraordinarily high.

It might be proposed that only those abductees who were interested in the stated purpose of the survey—psychic phenomena—tended to reply, but it must be said against this that the students were likewise recruited for a survey of belief in psychic phenomena, so a similar extent of bias might be supposed to exist in both groups. Certainly these findings—on the surface so clearcut—need to be replicated with a larger group of abductees than our methods were able to attract.

As to explanations, there seem to be two contenders. The first is the surface explanation that the results are as they are—reflections of real phenomena occurring in the lives of the abductees. It would be interesting to see how these people score in laboratory tests of psi, provided those tests were engrossing enough and sufficiently similar to the alleged manifest-

ations in real life. This explanation can be reduced to a single phrase: the believers are experients.

The other obvious explanation is that the abductees are mistaken in some way, being prone to allege psychic events and belief in the absence of sufficient cause. Why they would do this is likewise something which future research—such as intensive interviews—could investigate

This research cannot discriminate between these two explanations except to reiterate that abductees appear to differ markedly in their attitudes towards and apparent experience of psychic phenomena. Since so many other studies have failed to find any difference between abductees and non-abductees (Apelle, Lynn & Newman, 2000) some priority should be given to elucidating the highly significant differences that we have found here.

A clue may be found in the answers to the statement “I believe I am more psychic now than I was before my abduction”. We expected most abductees to say “true” to this statement but only a quarter did, the majority expressing uncertainty and 25% denying the truth of that statement. Perhaps, despite the anecdotal evidence, alien abductions are by and large not “psi-conductive”, but happen to people who are highly prone to psychic encounters anyway.

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GPO Box 1894  
Adelaide  
South Australia 5001

Department of Psychology  
Adelaide University  
Adelaide  
South Australia 5005