

A SURVEY OF UFOLOGISTS AND THEIR BELIEFS IN UNEXPLAINED
PHENOMENA

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In order to learn what beliefs UFOlogists hold about
paranormal phenomena--particularly parapsychological
phenomena--and
to determine whether a relationship exists between
witnessing UFO
events and belief in psychic abilities, I conducted a
small survey
of attendees of the 1983 MUFON Symposium, held in
Pasadena,
California. This report presents the results from that
survey.

There were three things I hoped to accomplish by
conducting
this survey. The first goal was mainly descriptive: to
determine
what pattern of beliefs exists among UFOlogists in the
various
paranomal phenomena listed in the questionnaire. I
thought it
would be interesting to find out to what degree these
beliefs
differ from those held by the general public. The
comparison data
was supplied by a survey of 1553 adults conducted by the
Gallup
Poll in February 1978. The results were reported by Jeff
Sobal and
Charles Emmons in the Zetetic Scholar (1).

The second purpose of the survey was to discover if
UFO
witnesses differ significantly from non-witnesses in
their beliefs
in unexplained phenomena, and especially to determine
whether UFO
witnesses have higher rates of belief in unexplained
phenomena.
Such a finding, if replicated, might lead to the
conclusion that
UFO witnesses, as a group, have a lower threshold of
acceptance for
phenomena not recognized or explained by current
scientific

paradigms. It could suggest that they are less skeptical and more credulous than non-witnesses. Evidence of this kind would tend to cast doubt on the validity of at least some UFO eyewitness testimony, because the ability of these observers to distinguish inexplicable phenomena from everyday events would be called into question.

The third objective was to test the hypothesis that a relationship exists between belief in ones own psychic abilities and the witnessing of UFO phenomena. A correspondence between belief in psychic ability and witnessing UFO events has been hypothesized by a number of authors, and some tentative evidence to support such a relationship was presented by Benton Jamison (2) at the 1976 C.U.F.O.S. Conference. This relationship, should it exist, could have a variety of causes. It could be that greater open-mindedness and perceptiveness on the part of psychic UFO witnesses allows them to witness possibly paranormal aspects of the UFO phenomena, it might be that psychic individuals are selected to witness UFO events, or it could be that so-called "psychics" are simply more gullible and more easily fooled by misperceived stimuli.

The survey was designed to elicit beliefs about UFOs and other unexplained phenonena. Two hundred questionnaires were distributed at the conference, and 70 completed questionnaires were returned, representing a 35% response rate. However, some of the participants were allowed to take and keep an extra copy of the questionnaire, so the actual participation rate may be higher. Since this is a "convenience" sample and not a true probability

sample of UFO researchers, inferences about the generalizability of the results are generally not warranted. However, it is my opinion that the answers provided by the sample probably reflect the views of a sub-population of those individuals indentified as "UFOlogists". This group consists of those people with enough interest in the UFO phenomenon to attend a conference, and with sufficient interest in the general purposes of this survey to participate.

The questionnaire consisted of two brief paragraphs describing the study, three questions on respondent's beliefs regarding the UFO phenomenon, twelve questions on other unexplained phenomena drawn from the Gallup Poll survey, four questions on belief in one's own psychic abilities, and two questions on how often the respondent had witnessed a UFO. All questionnaires were completed anonymously. In addition to completing the above mentioned items, participants were asked to supply information about their age, sex, race, education, and marital status.

A few survey participants objected to using the term "belief" to define their opinions about the existence of paranormal phenomena. While I readily concede that the word is not the best choice of terms because of the religious connotation associated with its use, it was necessary to retain the terminology used by the Gallup Poll to insure comparability with their results. I don't believe that it interfered with anyone's interpretation of the meaning of the questions.

Results. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents were male, and

the sample was nearly equally split between married (49%) and unmarried (51%) individuals. Ninety-one percent listed their racial or ethnic group as White, while 3% were Hispanic, 3% Black, and 3% Asian. Two of the Black respondents also indicated they were part American Indian. Only two of the respondents were younger than thirty. In general, survey participants tended to be middle-aged and very well educated, as Table 1 shows. Almost half (46%) of the respondents had witnessed at least one UFO, and one-third reported having seen UFOs on more than one occasion.

Table 1

Age and Education of MUFON Respondents

Age Category	Percent
18-29 years	3
30-49 years	24
40-49 years	30
50-64 years	28
65 years and over	15

	100%

Educational level

11 years or less	0
12 years	8
13-15 years	25
16 years	28
17 years or more	39

	100%

If we assume that the sample of UFOlogists is truly representative of a larger population, then we can disregard for the moment the inappropriateness of applying statistical tests to the results of a "convenience" sample. Concerning the first goal of the survey, it turns out that UFOlogists can be categorized as

similar to the general public in their beliefs in paranormal activity, except that they are significantly less likely to believe in angels, devils, and astrology, and significantly more likely to believe in evidence for psychic phenomena and the existence of valid cryptozoologic claims. Table 2 presents the results of the beliefs questions.

Table 2

Belief in UFOs and Other Unexplained Phenomena by MUFON Sample

Respondents		Percent of		
		No	?	Yes
100%	UFOs are real rather than imaginary	1	3	96
100%	UFOs are intelligently controlled devices	6	8	86
100%	UFOs are extraterrestrial visitors	4	26	70
Do you believe in:				
100%	Angels	48	24	26
100%	Devils	59	28	13
100%	Life After Death	18	19	63
100%	Loch Ness Monster	13	46	41
100%	Bigfoot (Sasquatch)	10	52	38
100%	Witches	62	23	15
100%	Ghosts	38	31	31
100%	Astrology	63	21	16
100%	ESP	9	23	68
100%	Precognition	11	25	64
100%	Deja vu	14	41	45

In general, the Gallup Poll results reveal that the more education one has the more likely one is to believe in psychic abilities. When compared to only those with college training, the differences in belief in psychic phenomena become less noticeable. Belief in precognition and clairvoyance are still significantly more common among UFOlogists than among the college trained general public, but no significant differences remain for "ESP" or "deja vu".

The results on whether UFOlogists who report having seen a UFO differ in their beliefs from UFOlogists who have never had a UFO sighting are not definitive. On the one hand, there was a trend among some who have witnessed the UFO phenomenon to be less critical of other unexplained phenomenon. However, the sample size is not sufficient to make any conclusions about that trend. The data are reported in Table 3. The data are presented in two ways: with the percentage who had responded "yes" to each of the "do you believe in" statements; and as an average of the numeric values of the responses, with "no" coded 1, "?" coded 2, and "yes" coded 3. There were 31 who reported having had at least one UFO sighting and 36 who reported not having had any sightings.

Table 3

Comparison of the beliefs of UFO witnesses and non-witnesses

Non-witnesses	Witnesses		
	% Yes	Ave.	% Yes
Ave.			

2.89	UFOs are real rather than imaginary	100	3.00	92
2.69	UFOs are intelligently controlled devices	94	2.90	78
2.52	UFOs are extraterrestrial visitors	77	2.77	61
	Do you believe in:			
1.56	Angels	43	2.17	17
1.42	Devils	21	1.75	8
2.29	Life After Death	76	2.66	51
2.19	Loch Ness Monster	48	2.41	36
2.19	Bigfoot	50	2.43	31
1.36	Witches	24	1.76	8
1.81	Ghosts	45	2.17	22
1.47	Astrology	21	1.66	14
2.56	ESP	73	2.63	64
2.54	Precognition	69	2.58	63
2.29	Deja vu	54	2.39	40
2.39	Clairvoyance	68	2.54	53

The differences between the two groups were greatest for beliefs in religious phenomena such as angels and life after death, and for the "Halloween" associated phenomena of ghosts and witches. While these differences prove nothing, they do suggest that the non-witnesses show more skepticism in general, which might lead one to infer that they also have a higher threshold for rejecting unusual phenomena they personally observe as lacking a mundane explanation. Conversely, it may also be seen as evidence suggesting that at least some UFO witnesses are less skeptical and

more credulous than non-witnesses. In one respect, "seeing" does seem to equate with "believing": respondents who had witnessed UFOs more than once were significantly more likely to say that UFOs are extraterrestrial visitors (87%) than those who had never witnessed the UFO phenomenon or had witnessed it only once (59%).

There were no significant differences between a belief in one's own psychic abilities and whether or not one has personally witnessed the UFO phenomenon. Table 4 displays these results for both witnesses and non-witnesses. However, there were significant differences for the number of UFO encounters for both belief in pre-cognition ability and psychokinesis ability. Those who responded yes to the pre-cognition question reported an average of 2.9 UFO sightings compared to an average of one UFO sighting for the remainder of the sample. Those who felt they had an ability with psychokinesis reportedly had seen UFOs an average of 3.33 times, compared to 1.1 times for those who said they did not have the ability or weren't sure.

Table 4

Comparison of the psychic ability beliefs of
UFO witnesses and non-witnesses

Non-witnesses	Witnesses		
	% Yes	Ave.	% Yes
Ave.			
Believe have some ability to gain extra-sensory perceptions (ESP) of thoughts and feelings of other people (telepathy)?	48	2.32	53
2.25			

1.92	Believe have some ability to gain impressions of events or objects which are outside usual environment (clairvoyance)?	45	2.10	36
1.86	Believe have some ability to gain impressions of future events (pre-cognition)?	42	2.16	33
1.64	Believe have some ability to influence the physical environment around you (psychokinesis or "mind over matter")?	27	1.76	19

This last finding is interesting, but it is certainly preliminary and open to a wide variety of interpretations. As I mentioned previously, "psychics" may simply be more gullible and more apt to misinterpret ambiguous stimuli, or it might be that they are actually more perceptive and that this perceptiveness has some relation to the UFO phenomenon. Before we lend further credence to this latter interpretation it would behoove us to test these individuals under controlled, laboratory conditions; to determine whether these abilities can indeed be proven to exist.

References

- (1) Sobal, Jeff and Charles F. Emmons (1982). Patterns of belief in religious, psychic and other paranormal phenomena, Zetetic Scholar, no. 9 (March 1982), pp. 7-17.
- (2) Jamison, Benton (1976). Some proposals: Modest, and maybe fundable. In Nancy Dourbos (ed.), Proceedings of the 1976 CUFOS Conference. Evanston, IL: Center for UFO Studies, pp. 119-132.

