

## EXAMINING THE X-FILES: AN INTEGRATIVE CONFLICT MODEL ADAPTATION FOR CONTEMPORARY PARANORMAL THOUGHT

Stan H. Hodges, Oklahoma State University, and  
Jason S. Ulsperger, Arkansas Tech University

### ABSTRACT

This is a study of perceptions of the television program the X-Files. Using a review of literary sources, descriptive statistics, and qualitative comments from on-line communities, it focuses on what makes the show popular and what people see as deeper meanings behind episodes. With the X-Files as a backdrop, it also applies an adaptation of the integrative conflict model to examine the increased presence of paranormal thought currently shaping public consciousness and influencing contested cultural ideologies. It builds on previous research using the integrative conflict model and studies of the X-Files as a cultural phenomenon.

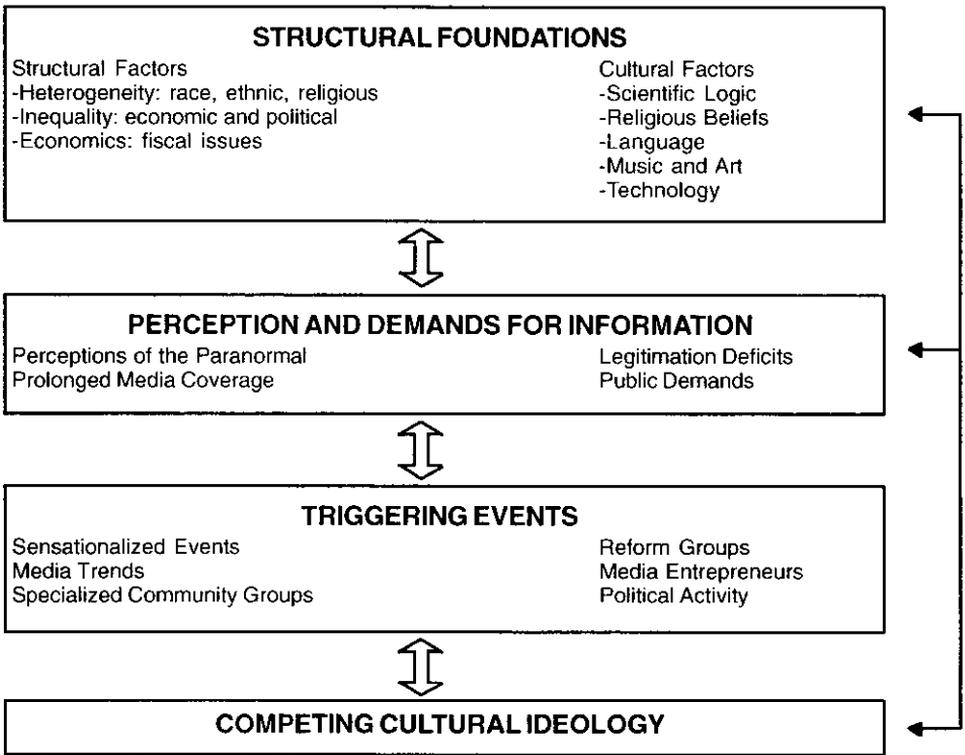
In a recent *Rolling Stone* article on pork-barrel politics and homeland security, the authors discuss government funding as "stuff right out of the X-Files" (Klinenberg & Frank 2005). The quote indicates the embedded nature of the X-Files in our cultural consciousness. The article does not give background information on the show. The quote only exists as a cognitive reference point for the reader. The article assumes we all know what the X-Files concerned. It is probably on target. The X-Files, a show following the work of government agents investigating conspiracies and the paranormal, still appears on television. The X-Files, which premiered on the Fox network in 1993, was cancelled in 2002. The show remains in syndication on cable networks such as WGN, TNT, and the Sci-Fi Channel (Randles 2000; Wikipedia 2006). Some attribute the success of the X-Files to its two stars - David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson. Duchovny plays Agent Fox Mulder. He is on a quest to unearth government conspiracies covering up paranormal events and extraterrestrial life. Anderson plays agent Dana Scully. With a background in physics and medicine, she pulls her explanations of the unknown from the realms of science and rationality. While the show is not a documentary, its producers indicate they based episodes on true-life accounts. Skeptics believe episodes are too fantastical for most people to interpret as fact. Nonetheless, the show continues to have millions of viewers interested in paranormal phenomena (Kurland 1999; Randles 2000; Goode 2002; Wikipedia 2006).

In relation to the cultural impact of paranormal thought, various researchers have examined the impact of supernatural ideologies, popular culture, and the media. Jung's

work (1958) notes increased discourse on the reality of UFOs and extraterrestrial beings and represents a political, social, philosophical, and religious conflict of unprecedented proportions splitting the consciousness of our age. It implies that an emerging cultural divide started in the 1950s involving scientific validity and the paranormal. Specifically, the idea exists that Western culture is currently experiencing a struggle between scientific logic and paranormal thought with Jung's work being an early acknowledgment of the trend. Shklovskii and Sagan's research (1966) extends Jung's work showing the belief of UFO myths represent a compromise between the need to believe in a traditional God and contemporary pressures to accept declarations of science. Recent works apply these ideas to the X-Files. From a biochemical perspective, Simon (1999) analyzes the scientific validity of X-File concepts. Goode (2000, 2002) examines the allure of the show at the crossroads of paranormal belief, conspiratorial thinking, and the public's struggle against the ruling elite. Peterson (2002) reviews the show in terms of religious connotations. Carter (2003) examines the influence of episodes on the mood and feeling of viewers.

Though previous work focuses on important issues, it leaves us with several questions. Years after television executives pulled the X-Files from primetime, what do people think leads to the initial and continued success of the show? Moreover, does the X-Files extend beyond mere entertainment? Do people perceive a deeper meaning to it? Does the show, along with the ideological conflict between the lead characters, represent a wider cultural struggle between religious and scientific belief discussed by pre-

Figure 1: The Integrative Conflict Model



Note: Figure adapted from McGarrell and Castellano (1991).

vious researchers? If so, has it acted as a base of knowledge in a wider paradigm shift leading to the increased acceptance of cultural ideologies contesting traditional scientific logic? Using an integrative conflict theory, this work examines these issues.

**THE INTEGRATIVE CONFLICT MODEL**

Multiple factors form the integrative conflict model. Originally formed to explain the sociological formation of law, it is modified slightly in this research to apply to cultural ideologies. Figure 1 indicates that the model operates on three basic levels. They include structural foundations, perception and public demands for information, and triggering events. To generate social change, it is not necessary that the levels occur in a sequential order, just that all are present (McGarrell & Castellano 1991).

Structural foundations include structural and cultural factors. Structural factors have an effect on cultural ideologies in numerous

ways. High levels of heterogeneity, inequality, and declining economic conditions influence social conflict. The most powerful actors determine the dominant ideology. In relation to cultural factors, conceptual assumptions influence perceptions of social phenomena. This concerns trends in scientific evolution, religious beliefs, language, music, art, and technological advances. In this study, all of these things shape values of a culture. They also help to promote perceptions of the paranormal. If the values indicate that a certain behavior is unexplainable, the public will demand information from those in power. This is especially true if they believe knowledge is being restricted. If values indicate issues surrounding the activity are explainable, people will tolerate the behavior and official positions held by society's elite (for adaptations of this perspective see Scheingold 1984; McGarrell & Castellano 1991; Ulsperger 2003).

In terms of perceptions of the paranormal

mal, media exposure of a paranormal event (i.e. UFO sighting, alien contact, conspiracy) creates an elevated sense of public awareness. This leads to public outcries for information from those in power, which creates a dilemma. If a dominant cultural ideology, such as scientific reason, explains a phenomenon and few contradictory frames exist, the demand for information will be minimal. If a contradictory frame is salient, the demand for information will be greater, and it is more likely that the validity of those in power will be open to question.

Triggering events produce an intense demand for information and lead to the gaining popularity of an alternative ideology. Triggering events, which can occur simultaneously, include information dissemination by specialized community groups, the actions of media entrepreneurs, the general influence of media trends, and political activity. They also involve sensationalized media events. Whereas media exposure sets the stage for action, triggering events set the rise of a competing ideology into motion (for related adaptations see Galliher & Cross 1983; Cross 1991; McGarrell & Castellano 1991; Ulsperger 2003).

Analysts have neglected to focus on any concept similar to the integrative conflict model to examine the increasing influence of paranormal thought. As indicated in this research, this model provides an understanding of how media presentations of the paranormal, such as the X-Files, are part of a larger scheme shaping public consciousness and influencing the development of contested cultural ideologies.

## METHODOLOGY

This research uses a combination of a literary ethnography, a survey, and a qualitative analysis of comments from on-line science fiction communities. The literary ethnography provided us with a base understanding of paranormal thought and its depiction in the media. It also put the X-Files into historical context with the existing conflict between scientific and supernatural ideologies. The survey allowed us to develop an idea of the public's perceptions of the X-Files. The qualitative analysis of comments from on-line science fiction communities gave us the opportunity to obtain thick descriptions pertaining to themes coded from the survey data.

A literary ethnography has six steps (Van

De Poel-Knottnerus & Knottnerus 1994). In the first, the author develops a scope of literary sources. We examined sources by various authors from 1900 to the present. This included 25 works dealing with paranormal ideologies and cultural perception. We considered hundreds of sources, but the ones selected dealt most adequately with the topic at hand. Several of the 25 sources selected for in-depth analysis specifically concerned the X-Files. The documents included scientific studies, autobiographies, biographies, magazine articles, newspaper accounts, interviews, and books focusing on religion. The second stage of a literary ethnography involves the reading and interpretation of literature selected. We read our selected literature and gained a better understanding of paranormal media presentations on cultural ideology. This helped us to gain an awareness of subtle nuances, repeated informal phrases, and technical jargon in this field of study.

The third step of a literary ethnography involves the identification of textual themes. In this work, these themes included issues on a wide range of topics. They dealt with epistemology creation, worldviews, publishing, media perspectives, culture, religion, and science. The fourth stage concerns the classification of thematic elements. We categorized and labeled specific patterns emerging from the textual themes. These concerned general references to the supernatural (including ghosts and psychics), the extraterrestrial, conspiracy theories, sexual themes, entertainment, science, religion, and art (Van De Poel-Knottnerus & Knottnerus 1994).

The fifth step involves applying an analytic construct. To increase the validity to the categorization developed in the previous stage, it is necessary to introduce and apply a previously developed theoretical model. We chose integrative conflict theory to enhance our analysis. The last stage of a literary ethnography deals with contextual confirmation. We went back and read all of the literature with our classifications and integrative conflict theory in mind. This helped us to decide if the documents correctly related to the final coding scheme. The rereading confirmed the categories and constructs accurately represented the major themes identified. By each author rereading selections from the documents, we established a

**Table 1: References to the Popularity of the X-Files**

Issue	Number	Percentage
Supernatural Elements	85	40.0
Extraterrestrial Topics	46	22.0
Conspiracy Theories	42	20.0
Sexual Icons	21	9.0
Entertainment Value	8	4.0
Scientific Substance	6	3.5
Religious Themes	2	1.0
Music / Art	1	0.5
Totals	211	100.0

Note: Numbers based on rounding methods.

level of intercoder reliability (Van De Poel-Knottnerus & Knottnerus 1994).

A literary ethnography can be a stand-alone methodology. However, in this research it was only an initial phase used to enhance our understanding of the topic and aide in our analysis of our research questions. Its main purpose was to provide us with a framework to apply to our survey and qualitative analysis. We administered the survey to 146 college students from universities in Oklahoma and Arkansas. Respondent ages provided us with data from younger students just entering college to non-traditional students in their forties. There was an evenly split gender division. The interview tool involved three basic open-ended questions: 1) What do you think of when you hear the word X-Files? 2) Why do you feel the X-Files is so popular? 3) Do you think there is an expression of deeper meaning in episodes that goes beyond entertainment?

Following data collection, we coded comments and applied them to our previously devised categories. We finally turned to individuals in sci-fi chat rooms to gain in-depth perspective from individuals dedicated to shows such as the X-Files. We interacted with 16 individuals. They provided us with thick descriptions on the meaning of X-Files. They also gave us insight into where the X-Files fits in the wider cultural landscape.

## FINDINGS

This section reviews our findings. First, it discusses general descriptive statistics from the survey. The focus concerns perceived reasons for the popularity of the X-Files. Second, it analyzes qualitative comments from the on-line community members. They concern the deeper meanings portrayed by the X-Files. Finally, emphasizing the X-Files, it synthesizes our data into a brief integrated

conflict analysis of the increasing influence of paranormal thought.

## Survey Results

In terms of the question, "What do you think of when you hear the word X-Files?" responses dealt with viewing and show familiarity. Of the 146 respondents, all were familiar with the show. All mentioned the **as** the main thought initially coming to them when hearing the word "X-Files." However, not all had viewed it. The results indicate 109 respondents (75%) view the show while only 37 respondents (25%) rarely or never watch the X-Files. Those who rarely watch indicated that they knew about the show through conversation with family or friends. This indicates the possibility that avid watchers discussed the show with others knowing nothing about the series. Respondents who never or rarely watch noted they had read about or heard about the show on television.

In relation to the question, "Why do you feel the X-Files is so popular?" we received a variety of responses. As Table 1 indicates, we coded the responses according to the categories formulated in the literary ethnography. The data contain 211 coded responses. This number is larger than 146, the number of respondents. The reason is due to the open-ended nature of the question. Sometimes a respondent would put an extensive answer containing more than one theme. In these instances, we would split a comment and separately place each part in the appropriate category. In other words, one response might contain a variety of references, or reasons, for the popularity of the show.

References to the show's general supernatural elements (including ghosts and psychic experiences) appeared the most – 85 times (40%). The second highest category

concerned the show's focus on extraterrestrial topics. References to this category appeared 46 times (22%). The show's orientation toward government conspiracy appeared as the third most prevalent reason for popularity. This category generated 42 references (20%). Phrases such as "new myths" and "new realities" presented themselves in this category. The fourth category, sexual icons, produced 21 responses (9%). Here respondents frequently indicated the sexual attractiveness of the show's lead characters. Phrases such as "Scully is hot," "Mulder is a real ladies man," and "Mulder is a hunk" appeared. Female responses implied the sexual tension and possible spark of love between Agents Mulder and Scully drew them into certain episodes.

As Table 1 shows, the remaining categories, entertainment value, scientific substance, religious themes, and music/art, each generated under 5 percent of the total sample. Given the literature previously discussed, this finding is quite surprising. It contradicted our belief going into the research that the public (in this case, college students) would blatantly depict the show as a symbolic conflict between the realities of science and the supernatural.

### On-line Qualitative Comments

Mining for thick descriptions on the deeper meaning of the X-Files, we turned to on-line communities more attuned to the show. Members provided us with in-depth responses on themes emphasized in the previous research stage. The comments focus on areas dealing with feelings of distrust, human relationships, character credibility, and the underlying simplicity of story lines.

Issues of trust discussed revolve around conspiracies. Respondents indicated the viewers of the X-Files predominately do not trust "scientific" experts. Moreover, the government is not honest with its assessments of paranormal issues. Comments imply that the show provides them with what they consider a more honest and realistic way of dealing with supernatural phenomena as the media pushes them to the forefront. This lack of trust goes both ways. Respondents indicated that the scientific community and the government fail to acknowledge any validity in the paranormal community. Interestingly, this plays out on the show. Mulder, the FBI agent on a quest to unearth government con-

spiracies covering up paranormal events and extraterrestrial life, is delegated an office in the basement. Some believe this marginalization to be the show's symbolic representation of the government's stance on the relevance of the paranormal.

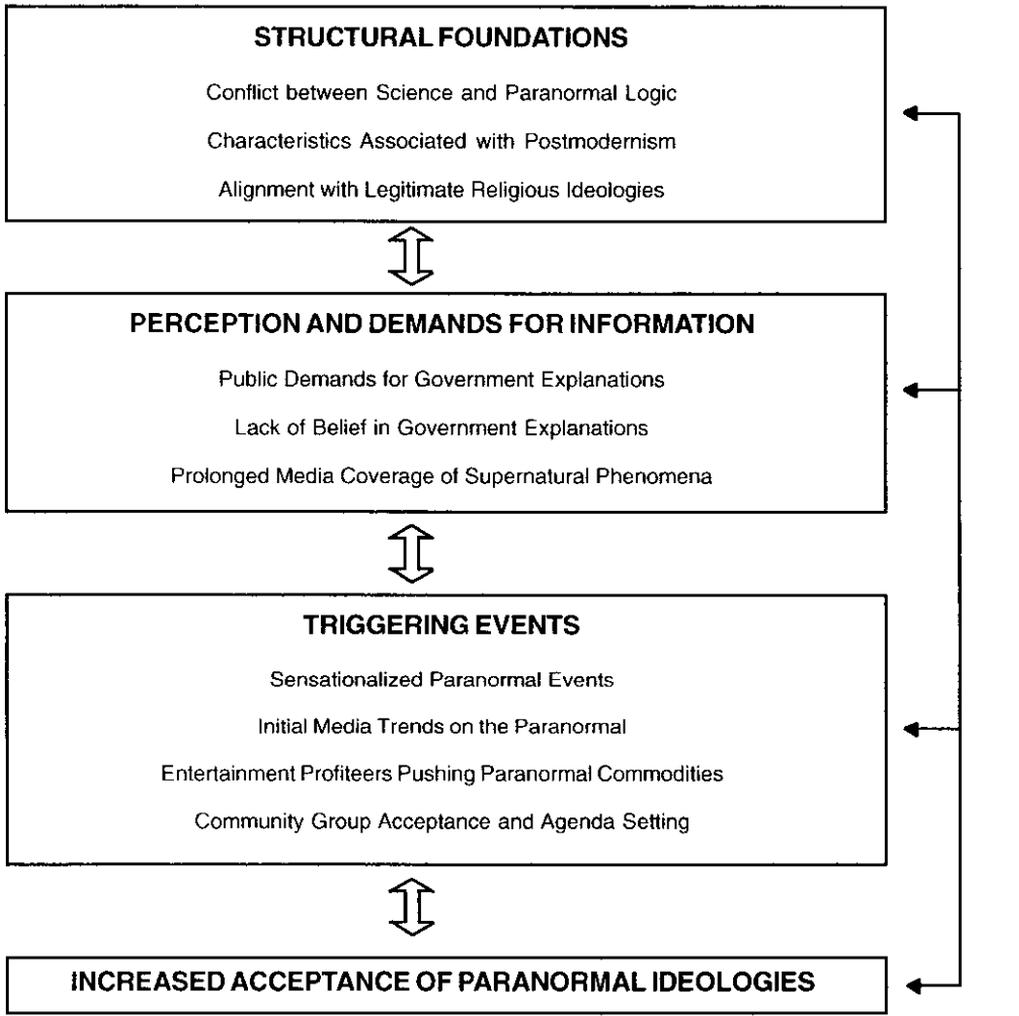
In terms of the focus on human relationships, chat room members took the sexual icon theme previously discussed to a greater distance. They find episodes less about sexual tension between characters and more about bonds of trust. One respondent noted, when thinking of the deeper meanings behind the X-Files:

I think of friendship, dedication, self-denial, mysteries, and horror. (It became popular) because it was intelligently written, scary and interesting. It required more than passive watching. We had to think too. Not only did it show horrible things and the worst side of people, it also showed beautiful things about people (It showed) what a true friend is - what loyalty is.

Again, the respondent goes beyond the aesthetics of main characters, which the survey of college students emphasized. Rich social bonds between the main characters was key for the respondent because, as noted, active watching and thinking about the show was a requirement. This is not surprising because most people in an on-line sci-fi community dedicate themselves to finding deeper meanings to shows like the X-Files. However, we would expect them to focus on paranormal themes of the supernatural. They did not. In contrast, this theme of emotional connection repeated itself. As another respondent noted:

When I hear the term X-files I think provocatively intriguing, undeniable intellectuality, and passion. I think the relationship that Mulder and Scully have with one another is something that is indescribable with simple terms. There was so much depth between the characters built into their affiliation with one another and the bond was indeed unbreakable. The loyalty amongst the two is somewhat of a rarity that we don't normally associate ourselves with, but we all long to see. Not only was the characters' camaraderie incredible, but also the story lines were astounding as well.

Figure 2: Applying the Integrative Conflict Model to Popularity of Paranormal Thought



Along with an emphasis on the human relationship factor, this respondent notes the wondrous story lines of the show. Others made note of this, and in fact questioned the credibility of the story lines. As Goode (2002) notes, the shows may be a bit too fantastical. Surprisingly, some sci-fi chat room respondents agree. Acknowledging the power of story lines while being a critic of their extreme positions, one indicated:

People were so enthralled in the story because the topics that they brought up were controversial and almost horrifying. Those two factors are very intimidating to people

and make them want to know more... (However) I think the theories and philosophies that were presented on the X-files were so absurd, that no one would believe such things.

The respondent did go on to state that the lead actors, with a high level of credibility, did a convincing job of making the viewer perceive the episodes as reality. The respondent later noted:

Mulder made it seem so plausible (and also considering his theories were the ones that usually seemed to end up being fact) and

Scully's scientific theories actually were the ones that rationalized the situation that everything fit into a perfect puzzle. I believe that was amazing to the audience. It sure was for me.

In a similar vein, another respondent stated, "the series portrayed themes in a way which they could be seen as true." These sorts of comments suggest that the people that watch and are loyal to the X-Files perceived a "possible reality" behind the episodes. This is consistent with the perspective of other research indicating X-Files stories are presented and perceived as the truth (Kurland 1999). However, the degree to which dedicated sci-fi viewers and the public feel that the X-Files is truly an ontological possibility is beyond the scope of this research. Regardless, our data leads us to believe that for many the X-Files compares to other paranormal parables existing throughout culture – similar to the historical belief in stories of fairies, vampires, or goblins.

The belief in the show's supernatural stories and characters are interpreted at whatever perspective the individual desires. Moreover, though many may feel the possibility of an X-File story line being true, the dominant scientific cultural ideology may keep them from admitting it. One cognitive frame that typically correlates with paranormal plot lines throughout history that respondents did not deny is the simplistic portrayal of good versus evil. One respondent indicated,

Everyone had a role in the battles against good and evil, and sometimes those lines weren't black and white but you could tell who wanted to be good and who wanted to be evil.

Many others provided similar comments. Their comments imply that the good versus evil themes provide deeper meanings that make unbelievable plots familiar. They parallel a line of thought represented in religious ideology that what is fair and just is always competing with what is wrong and immoral, all with an undertone involving the unexplainable.

### **An Integrative Conflict Model Adaptation of Paranormal Ideologies**

As previously discussed, Western culture is experiencing a struggle between scien-

tific logic and paranormal thought. The X-Files represents this struggle. With its prolonged media coverage of the supernatural, the show is also part of a wider scheme increasing support of perceptions related to paranormal belief.

The integrated conflict model provides us with a better understanding of this process. This work uses the core components of the theory in modified form. This includes structural foundations, perception and demands for information, and triggering events that lead to ideological shifts. To generate social change, it is not necessary that the levels occur in a sequential order, just that all are present. Figure 2 outlines our modified version of the theory (see for elaboration McGarrell & Castellano 1991).

### **Structural Foundations**

In terms of structural foundations, it is important to discuss Western culture's recent alteration. Scholars argue that the quality of it changed considerably over the last few decades. In this new phase, what some discuss as postmodernism, cultural products such as art, movies, and architecture follow a different path than those of the modern era. These emerged in the 1960s, around the same time that Jung (1958) proposed the divide between scientific logic and paranormal thought. The heart of the change involves irrationality, multiple realities, a blurred line between what is real and what is simulated, the consumerism of image, and the rejection of authority all brought on by the rapid rise of technological innovation. Some argue this line of thought is a fad. Whether it is or not, there is little argument that shows like the X-Files occur in the setting of a society with these "postmodern" characteristics (Baudrillard 1973, 1983; Jameson 1984; Kellner 1989). Consider comments by respondents indicating that the X-Files is somewhere between what is real and what is fiction. Think of previously discussed quotes indicating the show euphorically pulls viewers into stories. Consider the salience of themes in the survey and on-line chat analysis acknowledging or agreeing with government conspiracy theories and the questioning of the dominant scientific logic.

With art being a part of a wider postmodern shift, it is not surprising artistic characteristics of the show's episodes reflect postmodern characteristics, but also influence con-

temporary art. Literature points out the show's use of light and shadow, dreams, hallucinations, meditation, and narratives trigger associations that stir the human imagination. They discredit past views of reality and promote new ways of viewing the world. It is reported that some artistic viewers, consequently, alter their creative direction (Carter 2003).

Aside from art, another cultural foundation that relates to the X-Files and its promotion of the paranormal concerns religious belief. It appears an increase in the acceptance of paranormal thought is the result of a frame alignment with religious ideologies. Literature implies that religious thought is another aspect of socially constructed paranormal thought (Berger 1967). However, religion maintains a high degree of credibility in the Western world, especially Judeo-Christian beliefs. Hence, the alignment of religious belief and paranormal thought is a logical occurrence. In fact, recent research indicates people in careers related to the paranormal intentionally link their occupations to religious beliefs to enhance their credibility (Hodges & Ulsperger 2005). Ironically, religious topics presented on television enflame some social groups, but networks are successfully producing shows related to the paranormal with little anger resulting (Miles 1997). Aware of this and emphasizing the show's connection to religious, faith based ideologies, the executive producer of the X-Files notes:

To me, the idea of faith is really the backbone of the entire series—faith in your own beliefs, ideas about truth, and so it has religious overtones always. It is a more sensitive area on television because you run the risk of pissing certain people off, but I think we handled it in such a way as to make it about miracle belief, or lack of belief - and we set it against the paranormal. (This) is why Mulder can believe in things that go bump in the night, and when Scully believes in a miracle, he shuts her down. (Lowery 1996 138-139)

Interestingly, several denominations have made remarks about the X-Files series through their respective newsletters and magazines. Allen (1997) states in the *National Catholic Review* that the series resonates with their readers because it involves

a demand for justice, sympathy for marginal people in society, and a will to believe despite feelings of doubt. He goes so far as to state these are the same themes constantly appearing in the *National Catholic Review*. He also implies agent Mulder exhibits priest-like qualities such as a willingness to listen to neglected voices, compassion, loyalty to friends, and determination to find the truth. Wilson (2002), of *Christianity Today*, finds two constants in the series. One, in relation to the findings in our survey and on-line analysis, involves the relationship of Mulder and Scully. The other involves the way episodes wrestle with faith and skepticism and question secular rationalism. Jensen (2003), of the Anglican Media, sees the show playing to basic human fears under a veil of paranoia. The fears he identifies include loneliness, a sense of confusion, claustrophobia, lack of conclusion, and death. Similar to responses from on-line community members noting the good versus evil themes in the show, he points out conquering evil is an ongoing task with the X-Files. He believes the Bible offers similar themes, but without the paranoia.

So in relation to structural foundations increasing the validity of paranormal thought, a conflict between science and supernatural belief has been occurring for decades. A show like the X-Files reflects this conflict and cultural trends related to postmodernism. This makes the show a facilitator in the promotion of paranormal thought, with the best example being its alignment with religious ideologies to enhance its credibility.

### Perception and Demands for Information

In terms of perception and demands for information, it is relevant to note that trends of government skepticism emerged in the 1960s alongside the emergence of increased paranormal thought. Against the backdrop of conflict between science and paranormal thought, people started demanding answers for the failures of the government and their lack of adequate disclosure of information. Lyndon Johnson's war on poverty quickly became a failure by what was supposed to be a rational, scientifically based program. Vietnam became a lost cause promoted by government hawks into the 1970s. Even into the 1990s, the Reagan administration failed to implement effective policies to deal with issues such as drug

use. Some even started to argue the government has a conspiracy to intentionally allow illegal drugs into the country for economic advantage and social control (Ritzer 1996; Fenster 2001; Bracken 2002). Perhaps the most popular conspiracy associated with the government directly relating to the paranormal involves Area 51, the facility in Nevada rumored to be involved in extraterrestrial contact and also discussed in numerous X-Files episodes (Picard 1999; Books 2005). Based on our literary ethnography, it seems now, more than ever, a large quantity of published books, magazine articles, television shows, and feature films dedicate their content to conspiracies and the paranormal. As we have indicated with the X-Files, this increased media exposure of supernatural phenomena is influencing the way people think about the paranormal. Even if it is not changing their view on the validity of paranormal thought, it is exposing them to alternative ways of thinking and increasing the popularity of ideologies competing with rational, scientific thought. This corresponds with comments previously discussed by on-line sci-fi community members.

Therefore, media coverage of a conspiracy or paranormal event creates an elevated sense of public awareness. With the segments of the public being skeptical of the governments official position on many other issues, the public cries out for information from those in power. When people do not get it, a shift toward competing ideologies slowly starts alongside of elevated media coverage including fictional shows and non-fiction news reports. With skeptics questioning scientific reason and past actions of the government based on rational logic, the increased acceptance of competing, paranormal ideologies emerges giving them greater validity.

### Triggering Events

With triggering events, it is important to discuss sensationalized paranormal events, resulting publicity, advances in technology leading to specialized community groups, increased access to information, and actions of media entrepreneurs. In terms of sensationalized paranormal events, Randles (2000) argues that specific circumstances involving individuals and supernatural phenomena activated the increasing belief in paranormal thought. Situations cited include,

but are not limited to, Whitley Strieber's perceived alien abduction and the Bud Hopkins UFO sighting.

Strieber says extraterrestrial beings abducted him in upstate New York in the winter of 1985. He details the event in his book *Communion* (1987). Its popularity with the public led to three subsequent books and a feature film based on his experience. Considered an icon in the alien research community, Bud Hopkins was involved in a UFO sighting in 1964. He also published a book on his experiences called *Missing Time* (1981). Pushed by the publics demand for more information on his past, he engaged in subsequent research on extraterrestrial life and human contact. He continues to disseminate information through publications and lectures. Information detailing his experiences appears in publications such as *Time*, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and *People*. Along with appearances on National Public Radio, he has been a guest on television shows such as *Oprah Winfrey*, *Good Morning America*, *48 Hours*, and *Unsolved Mysteries* (Intruders 2005). The publicity resulting from the stories of these men, and similar situations with others involved with the paranormal, laid the foundation for supernatural books, television miniseries, documentaries, and shows like the X-Files. Analysts believe shows based in the supernatural, like the X-Files, streamlined a variety of paranormal stories, and pushed forward lines of thought associated with the unknown in recent decades. The argument is that the X-Files:

...turned into a global phenomena that feeds off of and in turn enthralls the UFO (and paranormal) community. UFOlogy's myths and trends are skillfully incorporated, from Area 51 to abductions, and the governmental conspiracy oozes out of every episode. Of course what the series has done is transcend fiction and become accepted almost as fact by many viewers... The excesses created by the "X-files" has waned somewhat created by the ballyhoo in 1997 around the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the modern UFO mystery. But this is no bad thing as the people with unrealistic expectation are fading from the scene and the hard core of longstanding researchers still remain. The growth of the Internet has triggered a fantastic arena for instant debate and analysis

of evidence. UFOs remain the second most popular subject to be discussed on there, with thousands of sites. (Randles 2000 393-395)

As indicated by this comment, an important component also triggering the rise of paranormal thought in recent years involves technology. Outlets like the Internet allow people ostracized for beliefs in paranormal phenomena to come together - much like the sci-fi communities studied in this research. This allows for a mobilization of believers dedicated to pushing a paranormal agenda (Intuition Network 2000; Hodges & Ulsperger 2005). It is also relevant to note that with the increase in the acceptance of paranormal ideologies, entrepreneurs have invested and profited. Commercialism resulting from interest in paranormal triggering events, media coverage, and thought increased considerably over the past few years. Some critics even argue that some individuals claiming to have paranormal experience do so with only profit motives in mind (Randles 2000; Evans, Forsyth, & Forman 2003; Hodges & Ulsperger 2005). This is a neglected area in this field and warrants further exploration (for more see Camp 1997).

## CONCLUSION

In December of 2005, CNN's *Larry King Live* aired a primetime episode entitled "Are Psychics for Real?" Guests on the paranormal side included clairvoyant James Van Praagh, self-proclaimed psychic Sylvia Browne, and spiritual intuitive Char Margolis. Showing some media bias on the issue, only one member of the skeptical, scientific community appeared - Dr. Brian Farha. Farha teaches a course at Oklahoma City University called "Science and Pseudo-science." The religious representative was co-author of the book *The Psychic and the Rabbi* (2001) - Dr. Shmuley Boteach. When first speaking, Boteach stated,

I have yet to find a single psychic medium who can offer any information of any public utility or real personal usefulness. For example, where's Osama bin Laden?

Acknowledging the link between the paranormal and religion, Van Praagh responded, "Hasn't God told you yet?" At a later point, Farha attacked Browne, noting that he tracked

her predictions for 2005 and found her to have a 25-30 percent accuracy rate. The problem was that he gave the same topics she predicted for to a fourth grade class. They had a 50 percent accuracy rate. Van Praagh stepped in and defended her stating "How can we apply three-dimensional laws to information that's a fourth or fifth dimension?" Regardless of who was right and who was wrong, the show crystallized the positions of competing paranormal and scientific ideologies while including religious perspectives. Interestingly, few callers telephoned into the show supporting the scientific paradigm (see King 2005).

Using an adaptation of McGarrell and Castellano's (1991) integrative conflict theory, it becomes apparent that a larger cultural shift is leading to an increased acceptance of paranormal ideologies. The backdrop of structural foundations relating to the conflict between science and paranormal logic, characteristics associated with post-modernism, and an alignment with legitimate religious ideologies created a climate for this occurrence. It helped to facilitate demands for official knowledge from a government making mistakes based on rational, scientific logic. It helped to generate prolonged media coverage of the paranormal and the crafting of competing perceptions of reality. With the stage set, triggering events such as individual experiences, media trends, the coming together of communities in cyberspace, and profit motives pushed the acceptance of paranormal ideologies to a new level. Playing a part in all of this is the X-Files. Many people are familiar with the show. Moreover, casual viewers of the X-Files acknowledge its important themes on supernatural elements, extraterrestrial beings, and conspiracy theories. This implies the show is a success in exposing and normalizing the public to paranormal themes. Interestingly, on-line sci-fi fans indicate trust and the importance of social bonds represented through the show's lead actors gave them a connection with the characters and increased their perception of legitimacy of the show's topics.

As this research implies, there is little doubt that a show like the X-Files is playing a part in the increased acceptance of paranormal ideologies. Whether these ideologies will replace the scientific paradigm remains to be seen. One thing we do know, is that if

they do, they end up being as useless as paranormal proponents claim science currently is. As Dr. Boteach stated on *Larry King Live*,

A year ago this week, Larry, 300,000 people were killed in a tsunami. James Van Praagh says to us that he feels energies... not a single psychic felt that?

Van Praagh responded by saying,

Just because things cannot be proven scientifically in the scientific method or the way you choose it to be in your paradigm, your way of thinking, it doesn't mean it doesn't exist.

His comment sounded "just like stuff right out the X-Files."

#### REFERENCES

- Allen J.L. Jr. 1997. National Catholic Review impulse palpable in The X-Files. *National Catholic Rev* January.
- Baudrillard J. 1973. *The Mirror of Production*. St. Louis, MO: Telos Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1983. *Simulations*. NY: St. Martin's Press.
- Berger P. 1967. *The Sacred Canopy*. NY: Doubleday.
- Books A. 2005. *Top-secret Area 51*. Kansas City, MO: Andrew McMeel Publishing.
- Bracken L. 2002. *Shadow Government: Drugs, Guns, Oil, and the Bush Dynasty*. Kempton, IL: Adventures Unlimited Press.
- Camp G.S. 1997. *Selling Fear: Conspiracy Theories and End-Times Paranoia*. Ada, MI: Baker Books.
- Carter C. 2003. *The Art of the X-Files*. NY: Harper-Prism.
- Cross J.R. 1991. An attempt to legalize gambling: the politics and morality of reverse stigmatization. Pp 39-64 in *Gambling and Public Policy: International Perspectives*. W.R. Edington & J.A. Cornelius, eds. Reno, NV: Institute for the Study of Gambling and Commercial Gambling.
- Evans R.D., C.J. Forsyth, & R.A. Forman. 2003. Psychic accounts: self-legitimation and the management of a spoiled identity. *Sociological Spectrum* 23 359-75.
- Fenster M. 2001. *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture*. Twin Cities, MN: U Minnesota Press.
- Gallihier J. & J.R. Cross. 1983. *Morals Legislation Without Morality: The Case of Nevada*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers U Press.
- Geller U. & S. Boteach. 2001. *The Psychic and the Rabbi*. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks Inc.
- Goode E. 2000. *Paranormal Beliefs: A Sociological Introduction*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press Inc.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2002. X-Files: Why was it so appealing? *Skeptical Inquiry* September.
- Hodges S.H. & J.S. Ulsperger. 2005. Presentations of the paranormal: the impression management strategies and professionalization tactics of psychics and spirit mediums. *FICS* 33 35-50.
- Hopkins B. 1981. *Missing Time*. NY: Richard Marek Publishing.
- Intruders. 2005. The Budd Hopkins story. *Intruders Foundation*. Retrieved January 12, 2006 ([http://www.intrudersfoundation.org/budd\\_hopkins.html](http://www.intrudersfoundation.org/budd_hopkins.html))
- Intuition Network. 2000. Intuition network biography. *Intuition Network*. Retrieved February 24, 2004 (<http://www.intuition.org/jmbio.htm>).
- Jameson F. 1984. Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism. *New Left Rev* 146 53-92.
- Jensen M. 2003. X-Files. *Anglican Media* August.
- Jung C. 1958. Flying saucers: a modern myth of things seen in the skies. In *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton U Press.
- Kellner D. 1989. Introduction: Jameson, Marxism, and postmodernism. In *Postmodernism, Jameson, Critique*. Washington DC: Mauseonneuve Press.
- King L. 2005. Are psychics real? *Larry King Live*, December 28. Atlanta, GA: CNN Broadcasting.
- Klinenberg E. & T. Frank. 2005. Looting homeland security. *Rolling Stone*. [http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/story/8952492/looting\\_homeland\\_security/](http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/story/8952492/looting_homeland_security/) copy retrieved 22 December 2005.
- Kurland M. 1999. *The Complete Idiots Guide to Extraterrestrial Intelligence*. NY: Alpha Books.
- Lowry B. 1996. *Trust No One: The Official Third Season Guide to The X-Files*. Scranton, PA: Harpercollins.
- McGarrell E.F. & T.C. Castellano. 1991. An integrative conflict model of the criminal law formation process. *J Res Crime & Delinq* 28 174-96.
- Miles J. 1997. God and television. *TV Guide* March 29, 25-45.
- Peterson P.C. 2002. Religion in The X-Files. *J Media & Religion* 1 181-196.
- Picard G. 1999. *Liquid Conspiracy*. Kempton, IL: Adventures Unlimited Press.
- Randles J. 2000. *The Little Giant Encyclopedia of UFOs*. NY: Sterling Publishing Company.
- Ritzer G. 1996. *Sociological Theory*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Scheingold S. 1984. *The Politics of Law and Order: Street Crime and Public Policy*. NY: Longman.
- Shklovskii I.S. & C. Sagan. 1966. *Intelligent Life in the Universe*. NY: Dell Publishing.
- Simon A. 1999. *The Real Science Behind The X-Files: Microbes, Meteorites, and Mutants*. NY:

- Simon and Schuster.
- Strieber W. 1987. *Communion*. NY: Beech Tree Books.
- Ulsperger J.S. 2003. Greed, ghosts, and grand juries: the formation of nursing home law and Oklahoma's health department scandal. *FICS* 31 115-124.
- Van De Poel-Knottnerus F. & J.D. Knottnerus. 1994. Social life through literature: a suggested strategy for conducting a literary ethnography. *Sociological Focus* 27 67-80.
- Wikipedia. 2006. The X-Files. *Wikipedia Database*. Retrieved January 12, 2006 ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_X-Files](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_X-Files)).
- Wilson J. 2002. Closing the X-Files... with the sign of the cross. *Christianity Today* May.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The authors would like to thank the reviewers and John R. Cross for helpful comments on previous drafts of this manuscript.