

“SCULLY, WHAT ARE YOU WEARING?”:
THE PROBLEM OF FEMINISM, SUBVERSION, AND HETERONORMATIVITY
IN *THE X-FILES*

By

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This project explores the ways in which the recent television series *The X-Files* utilizes various filmic and literary tropes to uphold the dominant ideologies of patriarchy and heteronormativity. Specifically, I look to the dynamics of the Mulder/Scully relationship to examine the series' portrayal of feminism and feminist (dis)empowerment. Though the series is often looked at as a popular televisual text that portrays a strong female lead character, I argue that, rather than promote feminist ideals, the series draws from the subversive elements of science fiction (SF) and horror narratives to reinforce patriarchal and heteronormative ideologies. While, traditionally, SF and horror utilize subversive narrative tropes to undermine dominant ideologies such as patriarchy, phallogentrism, and capitalism, *The X-Files* upholds these ideologies in a number of ways.

By studying the pseudo-feminist character Dana Scully, the ways in which dominant ideologies are subversively upheld in popular culture texts such as *The X-Files*

can be examined. In particular, through various horror and SF tropes, the narrative denies female characters the cinematic gaze, promotes the theories of essential motherhood and intensive mothering, and aligns the feminine with the monstrous, all of which reinforce the dominant ideologies of patriarchy and heteronormativity. I argue that this, combined with the Othering of Scully's male counterpart Mulder, ignores the more troubling aspects of a patriarchal system and, by extension, ignores the problematic role of women within the patriarchy altogether.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

When it premiered in September of 1993, FOX's *The X-Files* was a bit of an anomaly in a primetime line-up consisting mainly of sitcoms and cop shows. The series, which chronicles the adventures of FBI agents Fox Mulder and Dana Scully as they encounter various forms of paranormal phenomena and wade through murky government conspiracies, developed a small following in its first few seasons, and by the premiere of its fourth season had emerged as a mainstream television hit. *The X-Files* pervaded many facets of popular culture during its nine-year run; in addition to the show, there were numerous video games, novel tie-ins, comic books, magazines, various television specials purporting to reveal the "secrets" of the *X-Files*, a feature film, and countless internet websites, chat rooms, and forums devoted to the analysis of the show and its characters. In short, *The X-Files* was one of the most pervasive and definitive television shows of the 1990s. In order to explain why the series and its characters became "pop-culture touchstones, late-'90s litmus tests of ironic power" ("Veneration X" 26) critics point to the ways in which *The X-Files* mixes elements of horror, science fiction (SF), and detective fiction to create a new kind of text that became vastly popular. As a narrative, *The X-Files* plays upon popular fears and concerns about technology, alien invasion, and the United States government in order to create weekly stories designed to "scare the pants off people" (Chris Carter qtd. in Kaufman).

In addition to borrowing from popular cinematic and literary narratives and tropes, the series also mixes elements of traditionally "masculine" and "feminine"

television shows in order to create a text that works as both a series of weekly horror films as well as a continuous, nine-year long soap opera. According to the critic John Fiske, television produces texts aimed towards one of two gendered audiences; shows made for the “feminine” audience are open-ended and likely to “resist narrative closure” (179), whereas shows produced for a “masculine” audience “are structured to produce greater narrative and ideological closure” (198). The difference in the need for narrative closure for differently gendered audiences is a result of the masculine audience’s lesser need to resist the ideologies of the patriarchy (Fiske 198). Because of its strong ties to science fiction, horror, and detective fiction, *The X-Files* would seem to fall quite easily into the category of “masculine” television series. However, because it does attempt to question dominant ideologies and because of its reliance on an ever-evolving “mythology,” *The X-Files* has a great deal in common with “feminine” texts such as soap operas which rely on an “ongoing, serial form with its consequent lack of narrative closure” (Fiske 180). This intertwining of “masculine” and “feminine” narrative form helped both to create a successful television show and also to complicate the ways in which the show acts as a subversively critical commentary on patriarchal ideologies.

In order to address the success of the show as a subversive text, it is first important to situate the show in the cultural climate of the 1990s and the state of televisual culture during that decade. *The X-Files* does not conform to traditional notions of televisual aesthetics; instead it “questions, undermines, and subverts conventional television codes, providing its own set of aesthetic pleasures” (Kellner, “The X-Files and the Aesthetics...” 164). In addition, the series refuses to even acknowledge the truths of its own narrative and occasionally adopts a tone of ironic mockery towards its normally

deadly serious addressing of alien invasion and conspiracy theory plots. The result is a text that “leaves its central characters and its viewers in a hermeneutic limbo” (Knight 49) and that never provides any real solutions to the questions and issues that it raises. This almost absolute absence of clarity, a result of both aesthetic and thematic subversions of traditional themes and tropes, results in an “infinite regress of interpretation” (Knight 49). This intertwining of postmodern aesthetic and subversive conspiracy-related narratives also hints at the ways in which questions of gender are tied to the more general “paranoid pop politics” (Kellner, “*The X-Files* and Conspiracy” 207) of the narrative. The paranoia of the text is, at heart, connected to issues of an all-seeing, all-knowing, all-controlling malevolent patriarchy. The connection between postwar paranoia and gender-related fears (as related to patriarchal ideologies as well as to questions of body politics and reproductive technology), is further indelibly tied to the characterization of men and women—especially as embodied by Mulder and Scully—in the narrative.

While some of the show’s popularity can be attributed to the political and cultural paranoia of the 1990s, the relationship between Mulder and Scully was, for many viewers, the draw of the series. Both popular media and fan attention centered on the relationship between the two agents and became the basis for most popular discussion of the show—“TV’s most successful, progressive marriage” (Tucker 36) became the driving force behind the popularity of *The X-Files*. And, as many critics have noted, the “quasi-marital” partnership of Mulder and Scully is rife with possibility for subverting gender roles and creating a kind of gender-liminal union between a man and a woman (Wilcox and Williams 112). The problem with this assumption lies in the staunchly

heteronormative narrative of *The X-Files*. In fact, because the series does conform so thoroughly to heteronormative gender portrayals in the Mulder/Scully relationship, while at the same time attempting to create “two gender-liminal characters” (Wilcox and Williams 115), the result is much more problematic than a simple gender stereotyping of men and women—it is a naturalization of gender roles. In order to examine the ways in which *The X-Files* reaffirms the naturalization of gender, it is important first to examine the rather unusual (for an SF text) casting of a male and female team as the focus of the narrative rather than the “lone male hero” archetype so common to SF, horror, and detective fiction.

Though previous science fiction films have played with this archetype—most notably the *Alien* films, with the lone female hero embodied by Ripley—*The X-Files* is unique in that it casts a man and a woman as (supposed) equally important protagonists. Much of the gender criticism about these texts focuses on the implications of introducing a female protagonist into a traditionally male-centered genre. Like *Alien*, *The X-Files* offers a new twist to the standard hero archetype of both SF and detective narratives. Whereas Ridley Scott’s film merely switched the gender association of the “lone hero,” *The X-Files* both adds a woman to the narrative and attempts to confuse the gender associations implied by a male/female partnership.

If for no other reason than the gender reversal of its main characters, *The X-Files* would seem to be a rather evolved text in terms of merging science fiction and feminism. A closer look at the series, however, reveals a complex ideological discourse on feminism, individualism, and motherhood, at the center of which is a reaffirmation of traditional patriarchal gender roles and male subjectivity. On the surface, the

Mulder/Scully partnership seems to defy normalized gender stereotyping, but upon further inspection, *The X-Files* does quite the opposite. The series reinforces the naturalization of gender and sets up a kind of “ultimate-feminist” woman in Scully, and then points to the ways in which her strength is both a façade and a deficit of her character.

CHAPTER 2

“THE FBI’S MOST UNWANTED”: MULDER AND SCULLY AS LONE HERO

The X-Files takes the “lone male hero” detective narrative and complicates it by adding another hero, a woman, to the narrative. On the surface, this introduction of another character would seem to necessitate the erasure of the “lone” part of the archetype. What the series does instead is to cleave the archetypal character into two. Mulder and Scully, though they do have each other, are still remarkably isolated characters, who, as a pair, work as lone hero(es). The two have no allies other than each other; they are physically separated from the rest of the FBI agents as a result of their location in the basement of the building, and they are professionally separated from the other agents because of the nature of their work. No one wants to work with either of them; as Scully tells Mulder early on in their partnership, other agents “don’t want [Mulder] involved, they don’t want to hear [his] theories,” at which point Mulder reminds Scully that she’s hidden in the basement now too (“Squeeze”). As a pair, Mulder and Scully are lone heroes—there just happen to be two of them, something that is further accentuated by the narrative’s emphasis on the necessity of their partnership. Before he is partnered with Scully, Mulder is seen as a joke. As an agent, he is almost useless on his own, more focused on running after aliens than on solving “real” crimes. Especially in the first season of the show, Mulder is characterized as almost manically irrational. He refuses at any point to acknowledge any kind of rational explanation for strange phenomena and immediately jumps to the most “out there” possibility. Conversely, Scully is rigidly rational and, even when confronted by paranormal activity, staunchly

refuses to recognize it as such. Without Scully, Mulder is merely a lunatic chasing lights in the sky, while, without Mulder, Scully is nothing more than another government drone (she does have use as a medical doctor, but this facet of her professional characterization is almost never seen independently from her law enforcement career). Mulder needs Scully to inject rationality into his insanity and to ground his forays into the unknown, and Scully needs Mulder in order to recognize the “truth” of the paranormal.

The Mulder/Scully partnership as isolated and necessary is established very early in the series and, as the characters evolve, the codependent nature of their partnership becomes more and more apparent. Mulder and Scully’s professional isolation from their peers and codependence on each other is first emphasized in season one’s “Squeeze.” At the beginning of the episode, Scully agrees to assist a former classmate on a case and she asks Mulder to help with the investigation as well. Though originally Scully and Mulder are brought on to work with the other agents, they quickly become the marginalized agents on the case, spurring them to eventually break off from the other agents altogether. When Scully expresses concern that she and Mulder might encounter resistance from the other investigators, he assures her that the others “will have their investigation, [Mulder and Scully] will have [theirs] and never the twain shall meet” (“Squeeze”). The rest of the series follows the same theme of “Scully and Mulder against the world” that is established in this early episode. “Squeeze” is also notable in that it is the first episode in which Mulder and Scully define themselves as a team separate from other FBI agents. Not coincidentally, this episode also depicts the first real “closing” of an X-files case; in the two previous episodes (in which Mulder and Scully had yet to solidify their working relationship), the case resolutions were shaky at best. The remainder of the first season

works towards portraying the Mulder/Scully partnership as both necessary to the agents' success as law enforcement agents and to their success in questioning dominant modes of authority, something that is further accentuated when the partnership is dissolved.

At the start of the second season, when Mulder and Scully have been assigned to different departments, both lose their effectiveness as agents. While Mulder chases after aliens in Puerto Rico, Scully returns to Quantico to teach forensics. As the scenes in these episodes show, once they are separated, Mulder and Scully are no longer characterized as "heroic" (Scully especially loses all heroic qualities and is reduced to the unexceptional job of teaching students in a morgue; though Mulder isn't really effective as an agent, he's still pursuing his quest). Unlike other lone hero types, neither Mulder nor Scully can be professionally successful without the assistance of other. However, they also can't be successful with anyone other than each other. At various points throughout the series, Mulder and Scully are broken up so that they each have to solve a case either on their own or with the help of another non-X-file assigned agent. Though neither agent is usually very successful without the other, Scully is almost non-functional (within the world-view of the series) without Mulder. Due to the nature of the show as a paranormal-based narrative, Scully is less able than Mulder to skillfully interpret the events she and Mulder experience and encounter because of her refusal to acknowledge the "true" way of the world around her.

Though this reimagining of the "lone hero" into the "lone couple" does seem to support the idea that *The X-Files* utilizes the Mulder/Scully partnership to create gender-liminality between its characters, as the narrative progresses it becomes clear that the role of each character in the partnership conforms to dominant patriarchal ideology. This

subversive reinscription of gender norms is made more obvious in episodes featuring only one of two characters. While Mulder and Scully rarely have to function independently of each other for most of the first seven seasons, Mulder's abduction in the season seven finale forces a reconfiguration of the partnership for the final two seasons. Once Mulder leaves, Scully is forced to become a lone hero by herself. Though she does get a new partner (named John Doggett), he is nothing like Mulder. In order to function successfully on her own, she resorts to solving cases as though she actually were Mulder.¹ Though Scully is not wholly successful at creating an imaginary Mulder-surrogate, she clearly does understand that she needs him in order to solve cases.

An interesting parallel to season eight are the previous episodes in which Mulder investigates cases without Scully's assistance—the episodes that make up Scully's abduction arc and season four's "Zero Sum." As shown, Scully is unsuccessful without Mulder's investigative influence—she needs to either consult with him or to think like him in order to solve cases. Scully's function for Mulder is curiously different. Without Scully, Mulder ends up in "a very dark place" ("One Breath"), still able to solve cases, but unable to make connections with other people. Scully's primary role in the partnership, then, appears to be emotional grounding Mulder. In other words, she fulfills the traditional "wife" role in their pseudo-marriage. A short exchange in season three's "Quagmire" encapsulates this relationship quite nicely. Mulder, having decided that the deaths occurring around a lake are the result of a "lake monster" coming to shore, demands that the local sheriff halt his investigation immediately to let Mulder investigate

¹ Season eight's "Patience" includes an exchange in which Doggett, after Scully confesses that she feels she is "trying too hard [to look for paranormal explanations]," tells her that he doesn't think her Mulder-influenced thinking is wrong.

instead. The sheriff scoffs until Scully gently asks if he can “spare two or three of his men to assist [them],” at which point he quickly acquiesces. Scully’s place in the partnership is, more or less, to enable the brilliant Mulder to interact within socially acceptable norms; she’s his “human touchstone” (Duchovny, “Inside *The X-Files*). By characterizing Mulder’s ability to interact more or less “normally” with other people as dependent on his relationship with Scully, the narrative supports traditional readings of masculinity and femininity—despite purporting to invert the gender stereotypes that normally accompany male/female partnerships on television.

A reading of the Mulder/Scully partnership in terms of the world-view of the narrative also supports reading of the characters as fulfilling the traditional male/female patriarchal roles. Initially, Mulder seems to be the more “feminine” of the two agents—he is emotional, intuitive, and impulsive, while Scully is stoic, rational, and precise. What is important to keep in mind, however, is that *The X-Files* is not a realist text. Even though it is set in the present day in an identifiable setting—Washington, DC in the 1990s—the events which occur in the series remove it from the realm of the real. The pilot episode does begin with a title card that emphasizes the “real” case that inspired the show, but, in all subsequent episodes, this title card is absent. What, then, to make of the “reality” of *The X-Files*? By setting up a narrative that is a fantasy inspired by the real, the series creates a world in which everything is just a bit off—including the gender politics of the narrative.

The Mulder/Scully partnership is a marriage of unequals. In the world of *The X-Files*, the fantastic is valued over the rational; in a world in which mutants and aliens are commonplace, reliance on known science is seen as foolish and close-minded. Unlike a

realist narrative, where the logical and rational explanation would be the obvious one, *The X-Files* almost always resolves narrative mysteries with an “out-there” answer—“the program’s worldview...is obviously Mulder’s” (Malach 74). Though the program does offer a gender reversal in terms of ideologies by making the man the believer and the woman the skeptic, *The X-Files* is set in a world in which the paranormal is valued over the rational.

Scully’s position as physician and scientist is therefore Other within the universe of the show—Mulder’s intuition and belief in the paranormal becomes the default stance and Scully’s rationality relegates her to the role of “Other.” While it is important to note that the presence of a central character who is a female FBI agent “foregrounds gender issues that have traditionally been denied or dislocated in FBI narratives” (Malach 74), unfortunately, Scully’s presence ultimately reinforces traditional gender roles in the narrative. Because Mulder’s point of view is privileged, thereby diminishing the importance of Scully’s rationality, no great changes have been made to the gender structure that values the masculine over the feminine. If *The X-Files* were a strictly realist text—a detective story, rather than a SF or horror narrative—then the gender implications would be much more radical. However, by simultaneously negating the value of science and attributing this science to the female character, *The X-Files* merely refigures the masculine as subject.² A more complete picture of the subject/object binary produced by the Mulder/Scully coupling can be found when examining the function of the cinematic

² In “What Do You Think? *The X-Files*, Liminality, and Gender Pleasure,” Rhonda Wilcox and J.P. Williams discuss the ways in which Scully’s inability to see the monstrous results in her “investigative gaze being disempowered,” p. 99.

gaze within the narrative, as well as by examining episodes which seem to focus on Scully as narrative subject.

CHAPTER 3
“I DO NOT GAZE AT SCULLY”: SCULLY, SEXUALITY, AND VISUAL
PLEASURE

Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” discusses the two central ways in which women function as objects of the male gaze, both diegetically and non-diegetically. Though Mulvey deals with much older cinematic works in which women were overtly displayed as glamorous, sexualized beings, *The X-Files* follows much the same patterns as the films to which Mulvey refers. Scully is almost never overtly coded as sexual (this is especially true for the first few seasons of the series). Her physical dress and appearance—pantsuits, little make-up, short hair—are in no way exceptionally feminine. Her lack of sexuality is compounded by the fact that Mulder and Scully are shown to have little or no social life outside of their work. Scully does go on a date in an early episode, but she leaves early to help Mulder on a case, and her social life is rarely brought up again. If anything, then, the show seems to go out of its way to de-sexualize Scully in the first season, though she is, of course, not completely divested of her femininity—it’s just not a central attribute of her character. But while Scully’s lack of “feminine” attributes would seem to provide a way to avoid objectification by the cinematic gaze, she is consistently made an object of this gaze by the aesthetic structure of the text.

Scully’s object status in the first season stems more from her relation to Mulder than it does from any overt feminine sexual signifiers. According to Mulvey, filmic texts are centered around a “main controlling figure with whom the spectator can identify. As

the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look onto...his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence.” In *The X-Files* this male/female power site is not quite as clear as it is in the films Mulvey cites, in large part because both Mulder and Scully seem to serve as “screen surrogates” for the show’s viewers. As mentioned, Mulder’s fantastic worldview is valued over Scully’s rational worldview. Mulder is right most of the time, and the viewer knows this after watching only a few episodes—Scully’s scientific explanations almost never pan out, and she is repeatedly denied access to the “truth” that is out there. In this way, the series apparently supports Mulvey’s discussion of the role of a male protagonist. A problem arises, however, because of the case report/voice-over framing device used sporadically throughout the series’ run, though most prevalent in the first few episodes.

In the pilot episode, Scully is established as the series’ connection to the rational and the real. She enters the series at the same place and time as the viewer—the viewer, like Scully, is expecting to “debunk the X-Files project.” She is the original screen surrogate and, through access to her inner thoughts as projected by the case reports that she writes while investigating with Mulder, she serves as the voice with which the viewer can originally identify. A problem arises, then, over how to view Scully in terms of Mulvey’s analysis of the male/female power binary in cinema, something which is even further complicated by the ways in which the pilot episode stresses Scully’s femininity. Throughout the course of the first episode, Scully is visually coded as an object of the male gaze in two key scenes.

The pilot begins with a black screen on which are typed the words, “The following story is inspired by actual documented accounts,” which then fades to an overhead shot of a wooded area. The camera pans down, and a woman in her early twenties runs into view. The camera follows the girl, dressed only in a nightgown, as she runs through the forest—the camera angles alternate between close-ups of the girl’s torso and legs and long shots of her entire body (though her face remains unseen, hidden behind her hair), remaining with her as she stumbles and falls through a forest. For the entirety of the scene, her face is obscured, the focus on her nightgown-clad body as she runs. After she finally stumbles and falls in a clearing, the camera cuts to the trees around her as they whip in the wind. The camera returns to the girl, whose face is finally revealed as she stares into the woods in front of her, which are soon brightly lit by an unknown source. As the camera cuts between the girl and the illuminated forest, a young man walks towards the girl. She remains on the ground, staring up with an arm shielding her face, as the man walks up to her. A cyclone of leaves swirls around the two figures, and the light gets brighter until the screen becomes a solid white. The scene fades back in on the girl, face down on the ground. A pair of latex-gloved hands prods her body while the camera pans back to reveal a crime scene, one man taking pictures of the body, one man examining the body, two men walking around discussing the scene, and numerous other men mulling around in the background. Two of the men walk up to the body, discussing the lack of evidence of sexual assault, lift up the girl’s nightgown to reveal the only physical evidence—two small bumps on the girl’s lower back. The men roll the girl over and the sheriff identifies her as Karen Swenson, a former classmate of his son’s.

This opening scene does two important things: it sets up the plot and situates men as the authority figures (and one man as the probable culprit) and women as victims. In the next scene, however, this dynamic is complicated, which is why the show is such an interesting text to look at in terms of gender implications. In the teaser, Karen fulfills the stereotypical “girl” role—she runs from the killer and is eventually caught, setting off a chain of events to catch her attacker. The scene is significant in that it portrays a standard gender binary of feminine as ignorant and weak and masculine as knowing authority. What is also significant is that the next scene seems to contradict these traditional gender distinctions. After we leave Karen Swenson’s body, the camera tilts up on FBI Headquarters and follows a young woman, who identifies herself as “Agent Dana Scully,” as she strides through the halls of the building. She arrives at her destination, a meeting with Section Chief Blevins. As Scully enters the office, the camera pans to show the presence of three men: Blevins, and two other unidentified men, one of whom lurks silently in the background, smoking a cigarette. The men ask Scully various questions about her experience in the FBI and inform her that she will be assigned to oversee a project called The X-Files, run by a man named Fox Mulder. After hearing her task, Scully smirks and asks if she is supposed to “debunk the X-files project,” to which Blevins responds that he “trusts she will make the appropriate scientific analysis.”

This meeting between Scully and her superior agents visually mirrors the earlier scene involving Karen Swenson’s body. Scully and Swenson are physically similar—both young, white women with red hair—and are positioned as the objects of the gazes of the men surrounding them. And, even though Scully is in a position of power—she is a government agent—she is first introduced in a scene that visually parallels her to the

victim in the previous scene, and also positions her, within the government system of power, as inexperienced and subject to the control of the men in Blevins' office.

The other important scene comes about halfway through the episode. After examining a few of the purported abductees, all of whom have the two small bumps on their lower backs, Mulder and Scully return to their motel rooms. As Scully is typing her case notes, the power goes out. She then decides to take a shower and goes into the bathroom wearing a robe. While running the water, Scully removes her robe and stands in front of the mirror wearing only a bra and panties. There is then a close up of her scantily clad lower body, and she slides her hands into her underwear to remove them. The camera then cuts to Scully's face as she quickly turns her head to examine her lower back, which is once again shown in close up. The scene then cuts to Scully, once again covered by the robe, as she knocks on Mulder's door. He opens the door and she shakily tells him that she needs for him to look at something. Scully then enters Mulder's room, walks to the center and removes her robe. Mulder, who is fully dressed, simply stares at her body until she gestures for him to examine her lower back. The camera cuts to a close-up of three small bumps on Scully's back. She asks Mulder what the bumps are and he remains silently focused on her back (and on the bumps, which are clearly not the same as those on the abductees). She asks again, and Mulder smiles, telling her they are nothing but mosquito bites. Scully sighs audibly, closes her robes, turns around and buries her face in Mulder's chest.

This scene does two key things: it makes Scully vulnerable and sets her up as an object for the gaze of both Mulder and the viewer. Up to this point in the episode, Scully is portrayed as strong and confident. In this scene, however, she is portrayed as

emotional, and the emphasis on her mostly naked body highlights her femininity. In her article, Mulvey notes that “conventional close-ups of legs (Dietrich, for instance) or a face (Garbo) integrate into the narrative a different mode of eroticism. One part of a fragmented body destroys the Renaissance space, the illusion of depth demanded by the narrative, it gives flatness, the quality of a cut-out or icon rather than verisimilitude to the screen.” The close up on Scully’s stomach and lower back functions much the same way a close-up of Dietrich or Garbo does in the scenes Mulvey discusses—she is reduced to her naked body parts by the scene. Scully is no longer Mulder’s equal, and what disguised her femininity—namely her clothing and “macho” attitude—is shed. In this scene Scully is an object of erotic pleasure, both for Mulder and for the viewer.

The pilot episode creates a strange contradiction in terms of casting women as the object of the gaze. Though Scully is clearly set up as a viewer surrogate, she also acts as a scopophilic object of the gaze; in other words, she seems to fill both the feminine and masculine roles that Mulvey defines: Scully is both the image and the “bearer of the look.” Since, however, the series quickly comes to value Mulder’s point of view over Scully’s (and he occasionally participates in the case report/voice over framing device), her role as “bearer of the look” is short-lived.

Throughout the rest of the series, Scully is cast in the role of sexual object for both the male characters and the audience. The series, despite breaking with the traditional “lone male hero” stereotypes of SF, is nevertheless quite heteronormative in its casting of a male/female couple in the lead roles. Regardless of any attempts to defeminize Scully by dressing her in sensible (rather than sensual) clothing or masculinizing her by affording her scientific rationality, Scully is clearly a woman—

usually one of the only women in *The X-Files* world. In addition, though there does seem to be an attempt in the earlier seasons to ignore or neglect Scully as sexual being, this aspect of her character is never erased (and, in later episodes, is actually accentuated). As the series progresses, the bodily fragmenting of Scully becomes more and more prevalent. The sixth season episode “Milagro,” for example, contains close-ups of Scully’s lips and eyes (as well as a tracking shot that moves up her body) and there are numerous shots of Scully’s bra-clad chest throughout the last three seasons.

If Scully was afforded some ability to be the “viewer surrogate” in the first season, this opportunity is denied her from the second season onward. The second season begins with a voice-over by Mulder, effectively taking over one of the key attributes of Scully’s connection to the viewers. By this point, Mulder is clearly the center of the series; with the closing of the X-Files at the end of the first season, the show shifts focus from cases investigated jointly by Mulder and Scully to those assigned solely to Mulder. Scully has returned to her position as an instructor at Quantico at this point, and appears in the episodes only when Mulder asks for help. The second season sets up a much more distinct gender binary, and it is Mulder who fulfills the traditional “man’s role as the active one of forwarding the story, making things happen” (Mulvey).

In addition to being the object of the cinematic gaze, women also fulfill a more material-object role in *The X-Files*. Throughout the series, female characters are discussed as pawns in an elaborate game. The driving force behind Mulder’s interest in the paranormal was the abduction of his sister Samantha—in the pilot episode he tells Scully that “nothing else matters.” As the storyline unfolds, it becomes clear that Samantha was taken by the alien colonists as some sort of insurance against the members

of the Syndicate. The majority of the show's "mythology" episodes revolve around the whereabouts of Samantha—who took her and why? It is never fully explained why Samantha was abducted and not Mulder; though Mulder eventually learns that his father (a member of the Syndicate) chose which of his children would be taken, there is never any definitive reason given as to why it was her and not him. One reason may be that it is women, not men, who are the objects to be sought. The introduction of Scully into Mulder's life provides him with, if nothing else, a new object upon which to focus his obsession.

When it first began, the Mulder/Scully partnership seemed to be a fairly normal relationship. The two got along together professionally, had complementary investigative strengths (Mulder's intuition balanced by Scully's grounded rationalism), and were not overly dependent upon each other in their non-professional relationship. And, though Mulder's point of view was valued over Scully's, there wasn't a constant subject/object binary in their relationship—the monster of the week was usually the object for Scully and Mulder. Scully's abduction in the second season changes this, however, and she becomes much more an object of both the gaze and of Mulder's own crusade than she had been previously.

In the "abduction arc" of the second season, Scully moves from an active, subject position to a passive, object position—and she never leaves this role for the remainder of the series. The first episode of this arc, "Duane Barry," sets up Mulder as an active participant in a hostage situation, negotiating with a psychotic man who believes he has been an alien abductee. Scully's role in the episode is much more peripheral—the X-files have been shut down at this point, so Scully's connection to paranormal cases is tenuous

at best since she is working as an instructor at Quantico at this point in the narrative. She only becomes involved in the cases when Mulder asks her, and her role is merely to perform a background check on Barry. The majority of the episode features Mulder's discussions with Barry and ends with Mulder successfully negotiating the release of the hostages, while Barry is shot by police and then later escapes as he is brought to the hospital. The episode ends with Barry breaking into Scully's apartment and violently abducting her as she screams into the phone (and Mulder's answering machine) for Mulder to help her. The following episode, "Ascension," begins with Mulder listening to Scully's plea for help and rushing to her apartment. The remainder of the episode is Mulder's quest to find Scully, a task with which he quickly becomes obsessed.

The taking of Scully and Mulder's subsequent search for her sets her up as an object in numerous ways. First, she is an object for Barry—he attacks her, ties her up, and spends the majority of the episode driving around with her in the trunk of his car. Scully is also an object for Mulder—she is the case of the week, the mystery that he must solve. For a third group (the villainous "Syndicate" of shadowy government men), represented in this episode by Mulder's new partner Alex Krycek, she is a means to get to Mulder; for this group, Scully's only value is her relationship to Mulder. Scully's role in the episode is passive; since she is bound and gagged in the trunk of a car, there's not much she can do other than look scared. For this four-episode arc, Scully serves no other purpose than that of object—everyone wants either to take her or to rescue her—and she is passive, either bound and gagged ("Ascension"), absent ("3"), or present, but unconscious ("One Breath").

In their essay on gender pleasure and *The X-Files*, Rhonda Wilcox and J.P. Williams note this object-positioning in the abduction arc, but then state that this Scully-as-object-body is unusual for the series—“the presentation of Scully as comatose victim—a beautiful body, pure object, unable to recount her perspectives and experiences—is highly unusual” (110). And it is unusual—up until that point in the series. However, Scully’s abduction marks a shift in her character to a much more passive role than she previously filled. She is abducted three more times in the second season, once by a “death fetishist” (“Irresistible”), once by an alien bounty hunter who uses her as a bargaining tool to get Mulder’s newly returned sister Samantha back (“Colony”/“End Game”), and once by a cannibalistic cult (“Our Town”). These episodes in which Scully is taken focus just as much on Mulder’s search for her as they do on what is happening to her (or what she is doing) during the abductions. It is her connection and importance to Mulder that is significant—not her own actions; “what counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance” (Mulvey).

Throughout the rest of the series, Scully remains in the role of object for Mulder, at times replacing his sister as the object of his quest. As the series progresses, she is abducted numerous times by both humans and aliens (usually as a way for another character to get to Mulder), given cancer (as a way to “make [Mulder] believe”), and used as a bargaining tool to get Mulder to do various things for the Syndicate. It is always Mulder’s actions that drive the plot—Scully is never seen as a threat to any of the characters, but rather as a means by which Mulder can be manipulated. Furthermore,

either she or Samantha serves as catalyst for Mulder's actions—everything that he does can be directly connected to a desire to find or save either his sister or his partner. The series is, in fact, built around the central theme that women must be saved by men; Scully and Samantha are the two most obvious examples of this trend, but the series is rife with women who serve no other purpose than to motivate Mulder to act heroically.

Halfway through the fourth season, Scully discovers that, as a result of her abduction during the second season, she has been given terminal brain cancer. In the episode in which her cancer is revealed (“Memento Mori”), Scully enters the hospital to begin treatment, while Mulder investigates possible causes and cures of her disease. Though Scully is in the hospital for most of the episode, she does take an active role in finding a cure. The episode ends with Mulder telling her that she will “find a way to save [her]self.” “Memento Mori” sets up Scully as more than just a victim; even though all of the other women who were abducted have died from the same disease, Scully is determined to find a way to save herself. For the rest of the season, however, Scully does very little in terms of finding a cure. Instead, both Mulder and Assistant Director Skinner (the agents' direct superior) bargain with the omnipresent Cigarette Smoking Man to get a cure. In one of these episodes, “Zero Sum,” Scully is never seen, for she's in the hospital for tests. Instead, the focus is on the different tracks that Mulder and Skinner take in order to help her. The cancer arc culminates in an episode in which Scully remains in a hospital bed as Mulder desperately bargains for a cure. As was the case with the abduction arc of the second season, the cancer arc of the fourth season simply portrays Scully as an object for men to either save or eliminate. Her storyline isn't as important as the ramifications that her cancer has on the men around her.

The feature film of *The X-Files* centers around a plot in which various members of the Syndicate try to get to Mulder by taking Scully—whom these men describe as “that with which he cannot live without [sic].” Though Scully begins the film in a much more active role as Mulder’s partner, she quickly becomes merely a tool for the men of the Syndicate to use against her partner. After learning that Mulder and Scully have managed to breach the security of a military-protected morgue, a room full of upper-class white men discuss the consequences that might arise because of Mulder’s knowledge. Even though it is Scully who examines the bodies (and therefore has first-hand knowledge of the virus that the men are attempting to hide), it is Mulder who poses a threat. Scully’s presence seems to serve no other purpose than as something that the men can take away from Mulder—her knowledge is not valued by any of the characters, she is merely a thing that can be manipulated, depending on the needs of the men who surround her.

It can of course be argued that Mulder is just as much of a pawn in the conspiracy games as Scully is—possibly even more so since he is so easily manipulated by the promise of his sister’s return, proof of the paranormal, or a threat to Scully. Mulder, however, is never merely a body or an object—he is always Mulder, heart of the crusade against the conspiracy. Even in episodes in which Mulder is in danger and must be saved by Scully, he is much more active in his attempts to save himself than is Scully. And when he is taken, he is taken because he is Fox Mulder, not as a way to manipulate Scully or because he’s simply another body for experimentation.

In “The Sixth Extinction”/“Amor Fati,” which open the seventh season, Mulder is held captive by the Syndicate, strapped to a table and unconscious as he is experimented

upon. These episodes provide a clear parallel to Scully's abduction in the second season; both agents are taken against their wills by a group of men, both are strapped to tables, unconscious and at the mercy of the experiments of the men around them. However, whereas Scully was shown only as a body on a table (in other words, the viewer saw her body, but was not privy to her thought process), Mulder is shown as both a body and as cognizant of something. The Mulder-abduction episodes switch from the "real"—Mulder unconscious on a table—to the imagined—what is going on in Mulder's head as he lies there. Mulder imagines himself living a fairly normal life, married, a member of the Syndicate; he is active even in his supposed passivity. In contrast, during her abduction, Scully is shown merely as a passive body. Even when the narrative does shift inside Scully's thoughts, she is still passive—her thoughts are of floating in a boat tethered to a dock, patiently waiting for something to happen to her.

In addition to the passive/active, object/subject binaries exemplified during these two episode arcs there is a difference in the relative importance of each character as character. Scully is one of many women taken and experimented upon; in other words, Scully is taken not because of who she is, but because of what she is: a female body. Mulder, however, is taken because of who he is; the Syndicate selects him particularly for their experiments, and no other body (male or female) could replace him. The value of the characters is therefore inherently different. Scully is useful as a female body and as a link to Mulder, but Mulder is useful because he is Mulder: crusader, and possible messiah-figure.

So Scully and various other women in the text serve as both material objects and objects of the gaze for the male characters and for the viewer. Scully is disempowered by

her object status. Because she is not considered a threat to the patriarchy of the FBI or the Syndicate, she lacks power in the narrative. Mulder, however, represents a marked threat to both organizations; Mulder's death would result in "turning one man's quest into a crusade" ("Ascension;" *Fight the Future*). Mulder is empowered by his position because he is both within and without the patriarchal systems whereas Scully is only excluded.

CHAPTER 4
“THERE’S NO WAY OUT, GIRLIE GIRL”: *THE X-FILES*, HORROR, AND SCULLY
AS FINAL GIRL

The power of the “gaze” lies in viewer identification with the bearer of the gaze. In this configuration, the audience identifies with the subject of the narrative and is therefore granted scopophilic power over the objects of the gaze. As Mulvey theorizes, the gaze is indelibly tied to issues of gender within the visual structure of a text. And while Mulvey’s theories can be readily applied to mainstream texts, certain marginalized televisual genres are able to work outside of the dominant ideologies both created and upheld by the configuration of the gaze within cinema. One of these marginalized genres, the horror film, is useful to look at in regards to *The X-Files* because the series relies a great deal on tropes of the horror genre to construct its stories.

While the continuing story arc involving the Syndicate and alien colonization are more straightforward SF narratives, numerous “stand-alone” or monster-of-the-week episodes belong more to the genre of horror than they do to SF. Series creator Chris Carter has said in interviews that his original intention with the show was “to scare the pants off people” (qtd. in Kaufman); in other words, to create a horror text. The narrative structure of many these “stand-alones” owes a great deal to the narrative model of the horror film. In *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, Carol J. Clover examines different narrative and aesthetic approaches to horror films, and the ways in which gender is portrayed in these narratives. Two of these genres, the slasher film and the rape-revenge film, are important influences on a number of the monster-of-the-week episodes of *The*

X-Files. I will focus on two episodes of the series which are important to the configuration of Scully's character and that conform closely to the guidelines set by Clover: season two's "Irresistible" and its sequel, season seven's "Orison."

The slasher film, the type of horror film at the "bottom of the heap" which is "the immensely generative story of a psychokiller who slashes to death a string of mostly female victims, one by one, until he is subdued or killed, usually by the one girl who has survived" (Clover 21), is probably the most oft-used formula for stand-alone episodes of the series. According to Clover, the slasher film consists of six basic elements: the killer, the "terrible place" where the killer takes his victims, "pretechnological" weapons, victims who are "sexual transgressors," shock, and a "Final Girl." Based on these qualifications, a large number of the monster-of-the-week episodes of the series are essentially forty-two minute long slasher films. From a feminist standpoint, the importance of the slasher film lies in the Final Girl character, who, Clover argues, is granted both the "investigative gaze" and who provides the only source of viewer-identification for most male audiences. In terms of gender representation and transgression, slasher movies are similar to rape-revenge films in that they also create viewer-identification with a female hero-victim and therefore allow the hero-victim to become bearer of the cinematic gaze. Though rape-revenge narratives are not as common in *The X-Files* as are slasher narratives, various episodes are influenced by the tropes of the genre, which makes it key to discussions of gender representation for the series.

In virtually all slasher films produced after 1974 (the release year of Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, which Clover pinpoints as the beginnings of the modern slasher film), a large portion of the narrative is devoted to the story of the

Final Girl. This girl, who is “abject terror personified” (Clover 35), spends a great deal of the movie tortured and pursued by the killer before turning the tables on her attacker and either escaping, or more commonly, killing him (the killers are almost always men). As she is characterized, the Final Girl is “the Girl Scout, the bookworm, the mechanic”

(Clover 39). According to Clover:

The Final Girl is boyish, in a word...she is not fully feminine—not, in any case, feminine in the ways of her friends. Her smartness, gravity, competence in mechanical and other practical matters, and sexual reluctance set her apart from the other girls and ally her, ironically, with the very boys she fears or rejects, not to speak of the killer himself. Lest we miss the point, it is spelled out in her name: Stevie, Marti, Terry, Laurie, Stretch, Will, Joey, Max. (40)

The importance of the boyishness of the Final Girl is connected closely to the “severely qualified” masculinity of the killer (Clover 47). Because of the way that a slasher film usually plays out, the audience is presented with only two characters with whom they can possibly form a connection—either the killer or the Final Girl. The other characters in these narratives are usually not well developed and are often quickly killed off, not allowing the viewer the time to make a connection to the characters. In other words, the viewer doesn’t have the opportunity to identify with any one besides the Final Girl or the killer. And even then, the killer is usually either so monstrous in appearance or, again, given so very little screen time, that an identification with the Final Girl is much more likely. The result of this, according to Clover, is an empowered female character, albeit one tempered by a nascent sense of masculinity. The plot ends when the girl “is effectively phallicized” (Clover 50) by adopting the tools of her killer and using them either to escape or to kill him. For this reason, the final character must be a girl rather

than a boy; since horror imagines a feminine audience,¹ the viewer surrogate must become masculinized throughout the text so that the audience can be masculinized with her (Clover 59). What is important here is that, for the slasher genre, the Final Girl must be a girl and she must be the only surviving character. Slasher films masculinize the feminized audience of the horror film, and to do so, the audience must identify with a feminine character who herself is phallicized through the narrative. And, even though the final girl is masculinized, she represents the actualization of feminist politics because she is granted the “investigative gaze” and becomes the subject of the narrative.

So, how does this work with the *X-Files* version of the slasher film? If, within the *X-Files* version of slasher, the narrative played out just as it does in most horror films, a case could be made for Scully as viewer surrogate and perpetrator of the gaze. As established, Scully clearly fits the mold of the Final Girl, complete with “masculine interests, . . . sexual reluctance, . . . apartness from other girls” and an androgynous name: Dana (Clover 48). During each slasher-monster-of-the-week episode, *The X-Files* is rewriting the slasher film with different killers, victims, terrible places, weapons, and shocks—the only constant is Scully as Final Girl. The most obvious recurring complication to Scully-as-Final-Girl in similar narratives on *The X-Files* is Scully’s position of authority and the ways in which her status and tools as an FBI agent serve to phallicize her before the final battle.

The importance of the victim-hero being a girl, rather than a boy, lies in the “feminized” audience’s connection to the victim-hero and their connection to her ultimate masculinization. Furthermore, because the ultimate goal of horror narratives is to frighten

¹ Clover credits the designated “feminine” horror audience to Hitchcock and his comments on *Psycho*. *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, p. 59.

their audiences, there must be a feeling of “abject terror” that pervades the film. Scully-as-Final-Girl problematizes this characterization because, as an FBI agent and therefore a wielder of phallic power, she doesn’t embody “abject terror.” While the audience may be concerned for Scully when she encounters the corpses of a killer’s victims, there is no real feeling of abject terror—she is surrounded by other people (mostly police officers) in public places and is granted narrative strength through her characterization as an authority figure. The effect of this is less fear for Scully on the part of the audience, and less of a sense of urgency for her safety. Unlike the Final Girl that Clover discusses, Scully is more clearly established as able to defend herself; she’s not just a boyish coed, she’s a boyish FBI Agent with a gun.

In season two’s “Irresistible,” one of the first episodes to conform to the slasher film formula, Mulder and Scully investigate a “death fetishist” who cuts the hair and fingernails off his dead female victims. This particular episode fits almost exactly Clover’s explanation of the slasher film. There is Donnie Pfaster, a “killer propelled by psychosexual fury” (Clover 27); a female victim who is “sexually transgressive” (in this case a prostitute); a “terrible place” in which the victims become trapped—in this case both Pfaster’s funereal apartment (in which he kills the prostitute) and his childhood home (in which he traps Scully); phallic-symbol weapons (Pfaster’s weapon of choice is a knife); “shock” in the form of close-ups on Pfaster’s victims, complete with “limbs dismembered”; and a Final Girl in the form of Scully. The episode unfolds much like a traditional slasher film. The killer is introduced and fulfills his role to “kill a bunch of women,” while Mulder and Scully track him down. This episode differs from most other earlier episodes in two important ways. First, it clearly characterizes Scully as disturbed

by the murders (at one point she turns away in horror from one of the corpses, which seems at odds with her role as a forensic pathologist who routinely examines mutilated corpses); second, it shows the killer as someone who specifically targets women (previous serial killer-focused episodes do not demonstrate a clear victim-gender preference on the part of the killer). These two factors create a much more palpable sense of fear for Scully's character than do earlier episodes that do not highlight her own terror and vulnerability as a woman. As the episode progresses, Mulder and Scully split up to pursue different aspects of the investigation. While they are separated, Pfaster, pretending to be a fellow agent, locates Scully and plans to abduct her when she is alone. The last act of the episode, in which Scully is taken and held captive by Pfaster while Mulder and the police race to find her, follows almost exactly the parameters set up by Clover for the Final Girl's struggle. It is important to note the emphasis on Mulder, as well as Scully, during this final act—the Scully/Pfaster plot is intercut with scenes showing Mulder attempting to locate Scully so that he can rescue her from Pfaster. Whereas, usually, the Final Girl's struggles with the killer make up the entire final act and climax of the film, "Irresistible" splits screen time between Scully's dramatic and frightening struggles with Pfaster and Mulder's attempts to find Scully. For this reason, the viewer is not forced only to identify with Scully (Final Girl) or Pfaster (killer). Instead, Mulder's presence makes another identification possible.

As noted, while Scully does seem to conform to the Final Girl role, her status as an FBI Agent (and therefore already "phallicized" by her gun) seems to complicate this formula quite a bit. "Irresistible" eliminates the complications arising from Scully's phallicized status by having the final struggle take place when Scully is not in possession

of her gun or badge; she no longer has her phallic tools during the climax of the episode, thereby rendering her a true Final Girl. In “Irresistible,” Pfaster forces her to crash her car and, by the time she regains consciousness, she is bound and gagged in a closet in his house. She is without her gun and without the authority afforded to her by her badge, and reduced to merely a woman tied up in a closet. This is further reinforced by the Mulder-plotline during the final act of “Irresistible.” When attempting to locate Scully, Mulder expresses frustration that no one can remember seeing “a pretty woman” in a rental car. The labeling of Scully as a “pretty woman” is important because it denies her “masculinized” status as FBI agent. In this final sequence, Scully is a “pretty woman” held captive by a killer and must rely on her own wits and resources, not on the authority bestowed upon her by a government agency. The final act stresses her femininity, making her abject terror all the more real for the viewer.

In the final act of “Irresistible,” Scully is the Final Girl, the victim who is able to best the killer, if only she’s strong and resourceful enough. And, according to her characterization, she should be. She’s characterized as physically strong, capable with weapons, able to act rationally in stressful situations, and intelligent. So even though Pfaster has the advantage of a weapon and knowledge of the house in the final chase sequence, Scully has the advantage of being the Final Girl, with a background in hand-to-hand combat. “Irresistible” is, in short, an opportunity for *The X-Files* to empower Scully with the cinematic gaze. Instead, though Scully does put up a good fight against Pfaster, she is ultimately saved by Mulder and a group of (male) police officers. Furthermore, the episode ends with a voiceover from Mulder describing the “evil” of Pfaster. It is Mulder who gets to bear the investigative gaze and who is the viewer surrogate for the audience.

Mulder's presence explicitly negates a viewer-identification with the Final Girl since it is Mulder, not Scully, who is credited with banishing the killer. What these two elements do for Scully, strangely, is make her a much less progressive female character than the Final Girls of innumerable horror movies. One of the most important aspects, in terms of progressive cinematic portrayals of femininity, is the ability to be the bearer of the gaze. As already established, Scully serves as the object of the gaze for both the other characters and for the viewers. Her role as Final Girl of the slasher stand-alone episodes would seem to provide another facet to her place within the bearer/object construct. However, because Scully is never allowed her own episode (Mulder is present in every episode in seasons one through seven, whereas Scully is absent in five episodes in these seasons), while she is the Final Girl, she is not the Final Person. Unlike the slasher films which leave the viewer only one option for identification (the Final Girl), *The X-Files* always ends with Mulder arriving on the scene or in some way interacting with Scully (at least in the monster-of-the-week episodes). "Irresistible" rewrites the slasher film by not allowing the Final Girl to be bearer of the gaze.

"Irresistible" is also an interesting case because, like many slasher films, it has a sequel, season seven's "Orison." In this later episode, Donnie Pfaster returns to stalk and once again try to kill Scully. Much like "Irresistible," "Orison" ends with a climax involving Scully being held captive by Pfaster (this time in her own apartment). Once again, Scully is the Final Girl, stripped of her masculine, FBI tools, fighting against the killer clad only in her pajamas. The struggle ends this time with Scully killing Pfaster. "Orison," finally, allows the Final Girl her comeuppance. But is it empowering? Since my argument against the events of "Irresistible" was that they did not allow Scully to

become the bearer of the gaze (because she was saved by Mulder), then “Orison” seems to overcome this by allowing Scully to vanquish her attacker. However, Mulder is again present during the Final Girl/killer confrontation, and once again provides an alternative figure for viewer identification.

If viewed as owing its narrative structure to the slasher film genre, then “Orison” seems to once again deny Scully the gaze because, once again, it introduces Mulder as viewer surrogate. Since, however, “Orison” is not a stand-alone episode in that it plays off events that occurred five seasons prior, the reading of this episode is more complex than as merely “Irresistible, Part II.” In fact, rather than rehashing the same slasher-influenced formula of the original episode, “Orison” is much more related to the rape-revenge genre of horror film. Whereas “Irresistible” was a study of Pfaster as psychokiller, with Scully as his incidental Final Girl, “Orison” is much more specifically focused on the connection and interaction between Pfaster and Scully as individuals. Looked at as an update of the slasher film, “Orison” is again problematic in that Mulder is again introduced during the final struggle as a possible viewer surrogate—though this time his presence problematizes the empowerment granted to the female victim-hero of the rape-revenge genre. Rape-revenge films are narratives in which a victim of rape takes revenge on the rapist. With a few exceptions, the victim-heroes of these stories are women, and the rapists are always men. Common themes in rape-revenge movies include an initial attack on the victim, an emphasis on the ineffectiveness of patriarchal authority (in the form of law enforcement and the judicial system) in punishing the attackers, and the ultimate killing of the rapist by the victim-hero.²

² Clover points to the way in which rape-revenge narratives often de-sexualize rape in order to justify death as the only true form of retribution. *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, pp. 152-53.

“Orison” begins with Pfaster escaping from the maximum security prison where he has been held since his capture five years earlier. Mulder and Scully, because they were the agents who originally captured him and because of the almost “supernatural” quality of his escape (he merely walked out and no one noticed), are called in to help find him once again. Upon arriving at the prison, Mulder talks to the detective assigned to the case, recapping for new viewers Pfaster’s M.O., while Scully looks at the case file. When Mulder expresses concern for Scully’s ability to work on the case—stating that he’s worried because Pfaster “did a number on her head like [Mulder’s] never seen”—she tersely tells him that she “doesn’t have a choice” on whether or not she should stay on the case. From the beginning, the episode stresses the relationship between Scully and Pfaster and emphasizes that Pfaster scared her more than any other monster, mutant, or alien ever has. In terms of narrative, “Orison” closely follows the structure set up in “Irresistible”—Pfaster kills one young woman and mutilates her body, attempts to kill another (in a scene which mirrors almost exactly one in “Irresistible”), is tracked by Mulder and Scully, and eventually captures Scully (this time in her own apartment), holding her captive in a closet. Despite this, the narrative does borrow more heavily from rape-revenge narratives than it does slasher narratives, since the focus in “Orison” is more localized on Pfaster’s desire to get the “one who got away.”

The rape-revenge genre of horror films usually begins with an on-camera rape and then follows the victim as she plans her revenge on her attacker. While the majority of rape-revenge narratives are specifically about revenge—the emphasis is more on the aftermath of the rape than on the rape itself—“Orison” deviates from this by not focusing on Scully’s desire for vengeance, but does conform to the model in that it focuses more

on the hunt for Pfaster than on his crimes. Scully wants to catch Pfaster because of the horrific nature of his crimes; she never specifically sets out to get revenge for herself, although that is how the narrative eventually ends. The other major divergence in this episode from rape-revenge narratives is that, nominally, Pfaster is not a rapist, he's a "death fetishist—a collector of bone and dead flesh." His intent is not to rape the women, but to mutilate them—that's what "gets him off." There is still a sexual component to Pfaster's crimes, thereby aligning them with rape. Pfaster, then, is in fact a rapist in all but name.³

As is common in rape-revenge narratives, "Orison" emphasizes the failure of the judicial and penal systems to punish Pfaster; Mulder and Scully "put [Pfaster] away" but, unfortunately, "someone forgot to throw away the key." The "system" fails Scully and Pfaster's other victims, allowing him to escape and kill again. The ineffectiveness of the system is further extended to the inability of all men to protect women against Pfaster. Pfaster's escape, it is revealed, was orchestrated by Reverend Orison, who broke Pfaster out of prison so that Orison could "do God's work" by killing the prisoner. Orison, however, is unable to control Pfaster; his attempts to "save" Pfaster by killing him backfire when Pfaster instead kills the Reverend, once again demonstrating that both man and God again fail to punish Pfaster for his crimes. Mulder's inability to punish Pfaster for his crimes is the final, and most glaring, example of the need for women to take matters into their own hands in order to punish their attackers.

³ According to writer Frank Spotnitz, in early versions of the script Pfaster was described as a "necrophile," but the standards and practices department of the network deemed the script "unacceptable for broadcast," so the writers "simply went through the script and changed all the references to necrophilia to death-fetishism" in order to make it acceptable for broadcast.

The narrative blames the patriarchal judicial system for failing to punish perpetrators of sexual violence. What is unusual in the rape-revenge plot of “Orison” is that Scully is a part of the patriarchal system that fails her; she herself tells Pfaster that she’s the only reason he’s still alive—she asked the court for mercy, thereby saving him from the death penalty. “Orison” points to the ways that patriarchy does not appropriately punish rape victims, but, because Scully is (professionally) a member of the dominant patriarchal system, she is partly responsible for this second attack by Pfaster. As outlined by the rape-revenge narrative, in order to punish Pfaster, Scully must not turn to the patriarchy, but must instead take matters into her own (female) hands. The final confrontation between Scully and Pfaster further emphasizes the need for Scully as a woman—not as a policewoman—to punish Pfaster. During this final struggle, she is clothed only in pajamas and slippers; her business suits and heels (her professional armor) are cast aside in favor of a more “feminized” uniform. In this way, “Orison” upholds the “hallmark of the rape revenge drama...female self-sufficiency” (Clover 143). Rape-revenge narratives set up rape as a crime which can only be appropriately punished by women, which creates a paradox for Scully as both a woman and as a badge-wielding representative of the patriarchy. The result of this paradox is a conflicted explanation of why Scully ultimately kills Pfaster while he is unarmed and held at gunpoint by Mulder.

Throughout the episode, Scully attempts to convince Mulder that there are outside forces directing her in some way—she hears an obscure song repeatedly, the Reverend seems to know personal details about her, her clock reads “6:66” at the exact moment that Pfaster escaped from prison—in short, she feels that God is trying to tell her something. When she confesses this to Mulder, he’s skeptical, and says that Reverend Orison is a

“nut bag” for believing that God talks to him. At this point in the story, though the viewer does see the same “666” as Scully and also hears the song repeatedly, he or she may still be skeptical of Scully’s theory since Mulder’s theories are usually much more likely to be correct. So even though the viewer knows that the supernatural is a common occurrence in the show, Mulder’s competing paranormal explanation (that the Reverend has increased blood flow to the brain and is therefore able to direct the actions of others) is more likely than Scully’s “God is talking to Orison” theory to be correct, if looked at in terms of how often Mulder is correct throughout the series’ seven season run. Throughout most of the episode, then, though the viewer is convinced of the failures of both Orison and “the system” to punish Pfaster, there is still the hope that Mulder will come through and that he will help Scully eliminate her attacker. This, however, doesn’t happen. Instead, after finding Orison’s corpse, Mulder and Scully hand the case over to the U.S. Marshals and return home. In the next scene, Pfaster enters Scully’s empty apartment, where he proceeds to wait for her to return home.

The final fifteen minutes of the episode show Pfaster’s attempts to finally kill Scully, the “one who got away,” intercut with scenes of Mulder at his own apartment as he gets ready for bed, completely oblivious to Scully’s plight. These scenes mirror both the climax of “Irresistible” and of standard slasher movies. Furthermore, at this point in the episode, the viewer is identifying with Scully. As soon as Pfaster enters her apartment, viewer identification shifts from Mulder to Scully; clearly she was right all along: Pfaster wants her, the signs really were there, and Mulder should have listened to her. As Scully enters her apartment, the camera shifts between tracking shots of Scully as she moves through her home and first-person, “through the killer’s eyes” shots (through a

crack in the closet door) showing Scully as she undresses and puts on pajamas. This camera-forced identification with the attacker is common in slasher films and rape-revenge narratives and forces the viewer to, at least momentarily, identify with Pfaster. These shots also emphasize Scully's vulnerability as she undresses (for Pfaster's voyeuristic pleasure), unaware of the danger lurking in the apartment. Once Pfaster emerges from the closet, he and Scully engage in a violent struggle, which she seems to be winning. He eventually overpowers her, however, ties her up, and locks her in the closet as he prepares her a bath. These scenes stress the violence perpetrated on Scully by her attacker both by mirroring her previous victimization at Pfaster's hands and by the sheer explicitness of the violence. In terms of the rape-revenge narrative, these struggle scenes are the "rape" sequence. Though there is no overt sexual violence (due, in large part, to the constraints of network television standards and practices), the struggle does have rape-like elements—Pfaster overpowers Scully by forcing her face down on the floor and sitting on top of her. The camera moves between Scully's face as she struggles and breathes heavily and Pfaster as he holds her down. The scene ends as Pfaster tells Scully he's going to go "run [her] a bath"—there's a close-up of Scully's face as she screams, then Pfaster's hand enters the shot and covers Scully's open mouth. These scenes, coming after Pfaster has killed at least one other woman in a similar situation and which visually mirror a rape, configure Scully as both Final Girl and as victim of (sexual) violence.

In the following scenes, Scully is bound and gagged, trying to crawl out of her closet in order to reach her gun while Pfaster moves around her apartment, drawing her a bubble bath, lighting candles, and turning on the stereo. Sex and violence are conflated in

this scene—the romantic gesture (bubble bath, candles, mood music) is in fact the precursor to a violation and murder. Intercut with these scenes are scenes of Mulder in his apartment, finally realizing that something is wrong after hearing the obscure song on the radio and then calling Scully’s apartment and getting no answer. The climax occurs (in slow-motion, dialogue drowned out by non-diegetic background music) as Mulder bursts into Scully’s apartment, gun drawn, to find Pfaster moving through the apartment to Scully’s bedroom. As Mulder motions for Pfaster to put his hands up, Scully emerges from her bedroom, gag around her neck, face bloodied, gun in hand. The camera moves between close-ups of the three characters, Mulder shouting something at either Pfaster or Scully, while Scully and her attacker stare at each other. The camera then cuts from Scully’s face, bathed in a flash of light, to a bullet casing falling on the floor, then returns to Pfaster, then moves to Mulder, looking confused, and then to a firing gun, before finally settling on Pfaster, who then falls out of the shot, leaving the camera lingering on the gun in Scully’s hand. The scene ends with a close-up of Scully standing wide-eyed and open-mouthed, holding loosely onto her gun. The episode concludes with a discussion between Mulder and Scully in which, after Scully expresses concern that the law doesn’t allow for vengeance, he tells her that his report will reflect that “[Pfaster] didn’t give [Scully] a choice.”

The ending of “Orison” is problematic in a number of ways. In terms of the slasher formula, the viewer does not necessarily identify with Scully (Final Girl) because of the presence of Mulder. As a rape-revenge narrative, the killing of Pfaster is bizarrely removed. The scene is shot in such a way that the viewer doesn’t necessarily make the connection that Scully has killed her attacker, until the camera rests on Scully looking at

the fallen Pfaster. In constructing the climax in this way, the narrative distances Scully from the viewer.⁴ The feminist power in rape-revenge films lies in the viewer's identification with the rape victim. The viewer identifies both through the initial attack as well as through the act of vengeance. In "Orison," the viewer identifies with Scully through her struggles with Pfaster, in her desire to get the gun, and even up until the point she walks in on the Mulder/Pfaster standoff. The identification problems arise during this final scene which is shot in an almost dreamlike atmosphere and which disconnects the viewer from identifying with Scully and Scully from her own actions.

Rape-revenge films "not only have female heroes and male villains, they repeatedly articulate feminist politics" (Clover 151). This feminist articulation occurs when the films align audiences with a female who, like the slasher's Final Girl, turns the tables on her male attacker and punishes him for his crimes. In order for this identification to happen in the rape-revenge film, "every narrative and cinematic device is deployed to draw us into her perceptions—her pain and humiliation at the rape, her revenge calculations, her grim satisfaction when she annihilates her assailant" (Clover 152). "Orison" fulfills the first two qualifications, but lacks the final element, the "grim satisfaction." Because Scully is ashamed of killing Pfaster, the viewer identification, and therefore the empowering of the female character, is not present in the narrative. Furthermore, Scully seems to reject any responsibility for killing Pfaster. In her conversation with Mulder after the shooting, she wonders aloud "who was at work in [her]" that made her shoot Pfaster, with the implication that it was either God or the

⁴ Clover cites film critic Phil Hardy's description of a similarly "external" rape-revenge drama in order to point to the implications that results from such a narrative distancing. *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, p. 119.

Devil. Much as the ending of “Irresistible” denied Scully the empowerment that comes with being the Final Girl and vanquishing the killer, the ending of “Orison” denies Scully responsibility for killing Pfaster and therefore denies her the empowerment that comes to the “victim-hero” in rape-revenge narratives.

The dichotomy between Scully-as-woman and Scully-as-FBI-agent is highlighted in “Orison” more so than in any other episode, and the resolution between these two roles is in no way neat. “Irresistible” resolved itself by not allowing the Final Girl revenge on her attacker. While Pfaster is sentenced to life in prison, he is not “appropriately” punished. The viewer is denied identification with Scully in “Irresistible” because Mulder is granted the investigative gaze: he looks for Pfaster, while Scully is merely captured by him. In “Orison,” though the viewer does identify with Scully throughout her ordeal, the woman is denied the empowerment of revenge: Scully’s killing of Pfaster is attributed to an outside force working through her. This, combined with the surreal atmosphere of the shooting scene, distances the viewer from Scully; in other words, “Orison” does not have a true rape-revenge resolution (just as “Irresistible” does not have a true slasher film resolution) and the result is a disempowering of Scully through a lack of viewer identification. In addition, Mulder is clearly upset by Scully’s killing of Pfaster—he looks slightly horrified when he realizes that Scully has shot an unarmed man, and, though he does attempt to placate her during their later conversation by telling her that “the Bible allows for vengeance,” he is clearly uncomfortable with her actions.

The X-Files rewrites the “feminist politics” of horror films (of both the slasher and rape-revenge narratives) by ultimately blocking viewer-identification with Scully. Like the Final Girl and the victim-hero of a rape-revenge narrative, Scully is a victim—

she is tortured and humiliated in her struggles with Pfaster—but then never gets to truly turn the tables on her attacker and be a hero. Instead, in part because of the presence of Mulder (and, in seasons eight and nine, of Doggett), Scully is attacked and then saved, thereby aligning the viewer with Scully's rescuer (something which is even more apparent given that Mulder's point of view is privileged by the narrative). In other words, *The X-Files*, though it does follow the other formulaic elements almost exactly, denies the Final Girl the gaze because it also provides the viewer with another survivor: the Final Boy. Even in "Orison," in which Scully does kill her attacker, Mulder arrives at her apartment and captures Pfaster before Scully emerges from her bedroom with the gun. Slasher and rape-revenge films are progressive from a feminist standpoint because they introduce a female character with which male audiences can identify, and who is allowed to become the bearer of the cinematic gaze, something which *The X-Files* negates by having Mulder present at the end of the final battles. Furthermore, there is no reason, other than to provide viewers with an alternate site of identification, for Mulder to show up at the end of either "Irresistible" or "Orison." In "Irresistible," Mulder's arriving after Scully has shot Pfaster as he attacks her would not change the outcome of the plot—Pfaster would be punished, Scully would still have her breakdown (compounded by killing a man), and she would be allowed to be a true Final Girl, one who saves herself. Mulder's presence in "Orison" seems even more unnecessary. Because of the way the episode is shot, it is unclear whether or not Scully would have reached the gun before Pfaster returned to the bedroom, but it is possible that she would have. Mulder's presence allows the viewer to identify with someone who is horrified Scully is killing an unarmed

man, thereby negating the “empowerment” of a (male) audience identifying with a woman who seeks revenge on her attacker.

CHAPTER 5
“ONE MAN’S QUEST”: PATRIARCHY, THE SYNDICATE, AND THE PRESENCE
OF THE OTHER

More than just being denied the power of the gaze, Scully is disempowered by her place in the patriarchal structure of the FBI. *The X-Files*, since it takes as its subjects two figures of authority who work within the monolithic structure of the American government, speaks clearly to issues of patriarchy and Othering within a structure representative of dominant ideologies. Mulder is marked by the difference of his beliefs and his disillusionment with the dominant power structure of the patriarchy. In this paradigm, Scully is cast as agent of the power structure since she represents rational scientific thought and obedience to authority, especially in the early seasons of the show (though these character traits gradually wane over the course of the series). In this original configuring of the characters, Scully is clearly a part of the dominant ideological and patriarchal structure (as demonstrated by her obedience to authority and her adherence to Christian religious teachings). Throughout the series, Scully slowly begins to pull away from the patriarchal government and to trust no one but Mulder. In doing so, she is merely switching patriarchal allegiances, adopting the beliefs of a new “father,” albeit a much more benevolent one. As set up by the series, there are two clear ideological options, one good (the ideology represented by Mulder), one bad (the ideology of the Syndicate), but both patriarchal—and women must choose which one they prefer. Furthermore, in structuring the narrative around “Spooky” Mulder, who is

marginalized within the FBI, *The X-Files* at once subversively critiques the malevolent patriarchy and ignores the presence of women as Other.

In her Lacanian analysis of the series, “You Only Expose Your Father,” Elizabeth B. Kubek illustrates the ways in which “the truth” and the erotic are conveyed through the themes of epistemophilia and voyeurism, and points to the ways in which truth and knowledge in *The X-Files* are phallogentric. Through the examination of specific narrative arcs and incidents, Kubek reveals ways in which the text complicates standard configurations of gendered power structures and criticizes a corrupted patriarchy. Kubek claims that the series “attacks patriarchal culture” (179) and that, overall, the text strives to overcome “patriarchal convention” (204), despite overriding themes of phallogentrism. I would argue, however, that while *The X-Files* does condemn a corrupt patriarchy (as represented in the Syndicate), it does not condemn patriarchy as a system.

Because it was published in 1996, Kubek’s analysis only concerns the first two and a half seasons of the series. While using only a partial text will necessarily change the overall analysis of the text, Kubek does offer an interesting theory as to the ways in which *The X-Files* can be read as non-conventionally patriarchal text. Kubek’s analysis is rooted in the idea of the Lacanian Symbolic Order, “which is presided over by the ‘dead’ Symbolic Father and his Law” (170). She cites specific episodes to illustrate the ways in which various characters fulfill the Symbolic roles. Much of her argument is rooted in the theory that, within the narrative of *The X-Files*, the “good” patriarchal figures lose their “phallic aggressivity” (196), thereby rewriting the Symbolic Order and, thematically, struggling against patriarchy. Due to the challenges to the corrupt, dominating patriarchy of the Syndicate in the narrative, Kubek notes the emergence in the text of “an

alternative, benevolent mode of paternal and masculine knowledge” (183). By connecting Mulder and Scully to the roles that their respective fathers play in the formations and motivations of their characters, Kubek is merely recasting the patriarchy as benevolent, rather than noting any real kind of change in structures of power. Instead, power is awarded to the “good” fathers over the “bad.”

In *The X-Files*, power and control are always masculine, and paternal influence shapes the Symbolic Order. In discussing the reasons behind Samantha’s abduction, Kubek notes the way in which Bill Mulder (Mulder’s father) apparently controlled the abduction of his daughter because his wife was unable to decide which child would be taken. Women, in this scenario, are powerless—Teena Mulder is unable to decide which child should be taken and, therefore (because the father decides), the female child is abducted. This situation marks a recurring theme in the series, that the “feminine...[is] repressed in favor of the masculine” (Kubek 201). Both mother and daughter lose choice and power.

The “alternative, benevolent mode of paternal and masculine knowledge” (Kubek 183) damns the daughter-repressing father figure and, eventually, “becomes the Mother, reintegrating the feminine into the heart of masculinity” (Kubek 191). Femininity, therefore, is only of significance when it can be reinscribed into a mode of masculinity. Scully and Samantha are useful not as people, but as women who are valued by men. Femininity is useful not in connection to women, but in its possible existence within men. The final implication of the resistance to the patriarchy of Mulder and Scully is to support a kinder, gentler kind of patriarchy, one which does value femininity, but only within the hearts of men.

Kubek's focus on the images of Fathers within the text is representative of the overriding phallogentrism that pervades the world of *The X-Files* and points to the ways in which, regardless of the actions of the women in the text, the masculine is valued above all else. And, just as Kubek's analysis points to the ways in which one masculinity is constantly challenging another, any analysis of the show must be predicated on the idea that, in the narrative, men have control. What is important to note, however, are the ways in which *The X-Files* uses apparently subversive story elements to constantly uphold the patriarchy it perpetuates.

Mulder and Scully are at once a part of, and excluded from, governmental structures of power. They are FBI agents, and therefore agents of the patriarchal system, but they are also Othered from this system of power by their status as rogue agents, relegated to the basement. In this way, Mulder and Scully are "a part of the very structure [they] attempt to resist" (Kubek 172). This statement, however, is only accurate if the structure that the agents are resisting is "the government" at large, which is not usually the case. Rather than opposing the government, Mulder and Scully are fighting against a specific group of men within the government, a group who call themselves the Syndicate. As portrayed on the show, the Syndicate is a group of men of various ages from Axis-power nations who are the controlling force behind pretty much everything. They are the stock bad guys—if something nefarious is afoot, they're the ones behind it. Alien abductions, subliminal messages, fatal illnesses, the Kennedy assassination—all are tactics used by the Syndicate to control the masses. It is also clear that most people, and even most government employees, aren't aware of the existence of such a shadowy group.

And while Mulder is Othered within the structure of the FBI, he is not necessarily Othered within the power structure created by the Syndicate, a group that both does and does not belong to known governmental agencies. Mulder is actually included in this controlling Other group because of his father's role in the conspiracy. Once Mulder's father is revealed to have been a major player in the conspiracy to abduct Samantha (as well as other nefarious alien-related plots), Mulder is clearly connected to the Syndicate. This connection is made even more clear once narrative cues point to the Cigarette Smoking Man as Mulder's biological father. In this way, Mulder's Otherness is self-made; he is included in the dominant power structures, much to his chagrin. And much of the series' narrative conflicts are a result of Mulder's liminal relationship with this group. Although they are the villains, the Syndicate are also part of the reason that Mulder is allowed to continue his work on the X-Files. He is able to be Other within the FBI because he is accepted by the dominant power structure of the Syndicate. Mulder's voluntary Otherness is used to erase the Otherness forced upon Scully as a woman within a male-dominated field. While Mulder is afforded a place in both the structures of the government and the Syndicate, Scully is not. Like Mulder, Scully is "a part of the very structure [s]he attempts to resist" (Kubek 172), but only if the structure she is resisting is the government, not the Syndicate. Unlike Mulder, she is not allowed to be a part of the Syndicate. It is a boys' club more exclusive than the FBI—and one with much more power.

Scully then is made Other in at least three ways: in her status "outside the Bureau's mainstream" as an agent on the X-files, as a woman in the male-dominated field of law enforcement, and as a woman not allowed into the all-powerful Syndicate.

However, by nominally casting Mulder in the role of Other, *The X-Files* subversively negates Scully's even more severe outsider status. Furthermore, since Scully's outsider status within the FBI is directly linked to her connection with Mulder (who, the show argues, is more of an Other than Scully because of his "spooky" nature), the dominant patriarchy is all but ignored as something which should be fought against. According to the narrative, Scully is Othered because of Mulder, not because she is a woman in a male-dominated field. The issue is not whether or not the *patriarchal* system is corrupt, it is whether or not the system is—the patriarchy is a given and the "real" battle doesn't even acknowledge the (obvious) presence of such a power structure. By subverting Scully's Otherness through attributing it to her connection to Mulder, *The X-Files* naturalizes a patriarchal power structure.

The X-Files is built around the premise that Mulder and Scully are exposing governmental secrets and uncovering the truth behind a web of lies perpetrated by the government. Theoretically then, one of Mulder and Scully's main goals is to expose the corruption of the patriarchal system on which the United States government is based. The show itself does reflect this—at least on the surface. *The X-Files* is constructed as a show that subversively reveals the corruption of patriarchy and authority. And, in many ways, it does. It also, however, naturalizes patriarchy and reinforces stereotypical gender roles, casting men in the roles of dominant authority figures and women as powerless victims—without ever totally rejecting these stereotypes. Rather than reject the "naturalized" system of patriarchy, the narrative simply calls for a re-casting of the patriarchy, with men like Mulder and Skinner (i.e., "good men") in roles of power. *The X-Files* narrative

is based on the naturalization of the dominant ideologies of patriarchy and phallogentrism.

CHAPTER 6
“I NEVER SAW YOU AS A MOTHER BEFORE”: ESSENTIAL MOTHERHOOD
AND THE NATURALIZATION OF GENDER

Beyond the categorizing of Scully as a sexual object, the series is also uncomfortable with her ability to reproduce—it is as a mother that Scully presents the most troubling aspect of femininity. Scully-as-mother is intertwined with issues such as alien technology, female sexuality, heteronormative familial structures, and maternal responsibility. Scully’s desire for motherhood evolves throughout the series and mirrors her change from rational scientist to intuitive pseudo-Mulder. The series’ depictions of mothering and reproduction support the theories of essential and intensive motherhood, reaffirm naturalized gender stereotypes and heteronormativity, and connect women to the monstrous and the alien.

According to the theory of essential motherhood, “all women want to be and should be mothers and...women who do not manifest the qualities required by mothering and/or refuse mothering are deviant or deficient as women” (DiQuinzio xiii). Essential motherhood, in addition to negating theories of individualism connected to various feminist theories (since it clearly categorizes women as essentially “different” from men and identical in some ways to each other), also perpetuates the “natural” states of heterosexuality and heteronormativity. Motherhood, in other words, is a necessary marker of femininity. Essential motherhood, therefore, supports the dominant ideology of patriarchy, since it does naturalize gender roles and highlights male/female difference (which defenses of patriarchy as the natural order do as well). Motherhood, as it is

portrayed in *The X-Files*, supports the theories inherent in essential motherhood. In doing so, the series also naturalizes patriarchy and male/female difference.

In order to illustrate the ways in which motherhood is used to support these theories it is necessary to examine the ways in which mothering—both in relation to Scully and other women—is portrayed on the show. Scully’s evolution as a maternal figure is central to an analysis of the series’ attitudes towards motherhood. In the first season, when the characterization of Scully is the least troubling from a feminist perspective, the agent acknowledges her discomfort around children. At a birthday party for her godson, Scully tells the boy’s mother she “doesn’t think she’s cut out” for having children and, though she doesn’t seem to dislike children, she is uncomfortable around them. Scully’s relationship to children throughout the first season remains the same. In the three other first season episodes that feature children—“Conduit,” “Eve,” and “Born Again”—Mulder bonds with the children. Scully, then, when she is at her most rigidly rational, and least femininely dressed, is also characterized as not interested in children. It is interesting to note that the one time that Scully does seem connected to maternity during Season One is when she encounters a possibly alien fetus (“The Erlenmeyer Flask”). Attempting to save Mulder’s life by negotiating with the men who have kidnapped him, Scully infiltrates a medical facility and gains access to what appears to be an alien fetus. As she removes the creature from its medical container, Scully holds the fetus up in front of her. The camera focuses on Scully face-to-face with the alien fetus, creating a visual connection between Scully and the monstrous baby.

A clear shift occurs in the second season with regards to Scully as a maternal figure. In one scene chronicling her experiences while she is missing, she is shown lying

on her back on a table while a long metallic rod rests on her swollen abdomen. This shot clearly connects Scully-as-pregnant-body to her abduction by alien beings and to the use of technology (since the impregnation seems to be as a result of alien technology in the form of the metal rod).¹ For the third time in the first two seasons, reproduction is shown as a result of technological intervention (the genetically engineered girls of “Eve,” the alien fetus, and now the apparently-pregnant-by-alien- technology Scully). Interestingly, though Scully is clearly coded as feminine through being represented as pregnant body during her abduction, the remainder of the second season shows little contact between Scully and children. It is not until the third season that Scully portrays any maternal feeling and that motherhood is a mental and emotional state for her.

Season three’s “Revelations” marks the beginning of Scully’s (eventually naturalized) “maternal instinct.” “Revelations” tells the story of Kevin Kryder, a young boy who may be a stigmatic (he bleeds from his palms, suggesting the wounds of the crucified Christ), something Scully believes, but Mulder does not. As the plot unfolds, Scully becomes increasingly protective of Kevin, and eventually comes to believe that she was sent by God to protect the boy. Scully’s sudden maternal instinct towards Kevin might not be considered significant to her overall character arc if it were an isolated incident. After all, Mulder also empathizes with children when they are parts of investigations (“Conduit,” “Eve,” and “Oubliette,” all of which aired before “Revelations”). After “Revelations,” however, it is usually Scully who becomes emotionally connected with and expresses interest in children. Furthermore, though

¹ The abduction-arc was written as a result of the real-life pregnancy of actress Gillian Anderson, who plays Scully. An eight-month pregnant Anderson was used in this scene, which further emphasizes the visual embodiment of Scully-as-pregnant-body.

Mulder does empathize with children on occasion (especially prior to the fourth season), his connection to them is usually explained by shared experiences—the children with whom Mulder attempts to make emotional connections either resemble himself (“Conduit,” where he connects to a young boy whose sister was thought to have been abducted by aliens) or his sister (“Oubliette,” where he empathizes with a young woman who had been the victim of a previous abduction; “Herrenvolk,” where he meets clones of an eight-year-old Samantha). After “Revelations,” Scully not only relates to children with whom she shares trauma but also exhibits affection for any child she meets. During the third season, Scully seems to become instinctually interested in and good with children, despite having been shown as distinctly uncomfortable around children earlier in the series.

Scully’s role as mother evolves much more completely after “Revelations,” when questions regarding her own abilities as a mother become a source of narrative focus. Scully’s ability to have children is first brought up in season four’s “Memento Mori,” when Mulder finds out that Scully and the other abducted women underwent super-ovulation treatments during their abductions in order to have their ova harvested, thereby leaving them barren. Though the viewer is only aware that Mulder (and not Scully) knows about the ova, Scully tearfully reveals to her mother in the fifth season episode “Christmas Carol” that she is unable to have children. In the episode prior (“Emily”), Scully discovers Emily, a three-year-old child who is biologically hers, and she suddenly expresses interest in having children and is determined to adopt Emily. Prior to these episodes, though Scully does express concern for children she encounters during cases, she never expresses interest in having children of her own or becoming a mother.

Interactions with children on cases aside, Scully's "mothering" is a non-issue until she finds Emily. In fact, just one season earlier, Mulder tells Scully that he "never saw [her] as a mother before" ("Home"). And, aside from "Revelations," neither had the viewers. So why does Scully suddenly want a child once she discovers Emily? Because she is Emily's biological mother. Biology is the reason for Scully's maternal desire—she finds out that she has a biological child and decides that she must therefore be a mother. It is also important to note that Emily was created using the ova harvested from Scully during her abduction and that Scully was unaware of the existence of such a child until she encounters her. In other words, even though Scully never gave birth to the child, making the maternal connection more tenuous, the narrative insists on labeling Scully as Emily's mother.

Scully's emotional connection and maternal interest in Emily is therefore naturalized through the biological connection. Her role as a mother is instinctual, despite the fact that she has very little experience with children and has only known Emily for a few days. Furthermore, because Scully is portrayed throughout the series as rational and grounded, her interest in Emily doesn't seem irrational. Over and over again, Scully is characterized as being almost rigidly grounded in reality and as someone who takes time to process and think her actions through. Mulder is the impetuous one, but Scully is the staid, thorough scientist. Her "natural" motherhood, then, is not dismissed by the narrative as being illogical. Though her abilities as a mother are questioned during the episode (both by Emily's social worker and Mulder), Scully's maternal instincts are ultimately portrayed as real—the audience wants Scully to adopt Emily because we are convinced of her love of the child and of her natural maternal abilities.

Though, in the end, the question of whether or not Scully would make a good mother is moot—Emily dies as a result of her part-alien DNA—her brief interactions with Emily are key to an examination of Scully as a mother. What is most troubling about the Scully/Emily storyline is Scully’s apparently inexplicable desire to adopt Emily. It is as though Scully’s maternal feelings toward Emily are “natural,” which supports the idea of essential motherhood. These particular episodes are also useful in showing two other examples of “mothering”: that of her mother, Maggie, and that of Scully’s sister-in-law, Tara. In this two-episode arc, Scully is visiting family (her mother, brother, and sister-in-law) in San Diego over the holidays. The narrative is constructed to show the marked contrast between Scully’s life and priorities and those of the rest of her family. Soon after arriving at her brother’s home, Scully becomes embroiled in the Emily case and neglects all familial duties and activities—something her family resents very much. Scully is incredibly unhappy during her stay with her brother, a fact which is further highlighted by both Tara’s and Margaret Scully’s happiness at being with their family. Unlike both her mother and Tara, who are completely devoted to their families and children, Scully’s primary interest is in her work. Though the viewer sides with Scully and believes that she does truly love and want Emily, her almost total involvement in her work marks Scully as not a good maternal figure. Scully’s essential motherhood is therefore hindered by her non-traditional professional drive, something which upsets her a great deal; Scully is not an appropriate mother for Emily because, at this point in the series, she is not “feminine” enough.

Following her interactions with Emily in season five, the characterization of Scully as a maternal figure is rather uneven over the next two seasons—though the

specter of Emily does still haunt her in “All Souls,” Scully also digs up a dead baby in season six’s “Terms of Endearment” without blinking an eye. It is not until the end of season seven that motherhood again becomes important to the plot and to the characterization of Scully. In “Requiem,” the seventh season finale, Scully discovers that she is pregnant—as much to her surprise as to the viewer’s (she tells Skinner that she “can’t explain” the pregnancy). Earlier in the episode, Mulder tells Scully that he thinks that she should leave the X-files because “the costs [of working with him] are too high,” and then goes on to clarify what “costs” he means: “a chance for motherhood and [her] health and that baby.” “Requiem,” which was written as a possible finale for the series, boils down all the trauma she has experienced during her partnership with Mulder (including her abduction, her sister’s murder, and a loss of credibility among her peers) to not being able to have children.

Scully’s pregnancy at the end of season seven seems all the more unbelievable considering that her infertility had been a major plot point since the fourth season—especially when combined with the fact that there was no on-screen depiction or acknowledgement of Scully having sex. In fact, the narrative never really makes clear who the father of her child is—most signs point to Mulder, but even that is unclear. What is explicitly shown (via flashbacks in season eight’s “Per Manum”) is that Scully underwent in-vitro fertilization at some point during seasons six or seven (no clear date is given for these procedures). Scully, then, specifically seeks to become a mother, despite the fact that there is no other textual evidence to support this. Other than the three episodes that feature Emily, Scully never at any point throughout the course of the series demonstrates any explicit desire to have children, nor does she express any regret at the

path her life has taken.² Scully's desire for children cannot be explained through her character traits, since these are stoicism, lack of interest in other people (including her own family) with the exception of Mulder, and an almost obsessive commitment to her work.

The final two seasons of the series further contribute to the rather troubling picture of motherhood set forth by the narrative. Much like the earlier depictions of Scully's relationship to motherhood, she is again only selectively portrayed as maternal during her pregnancy. Her pregnancy is all but ignored for the first half of season eight and, according to the timeline of the narrative, lasts eleven months. Scully's pregnancy is only mentioned when it contributes directly to the plot. During the first half of the season, when Scully is required by the plot to remain an active FBI agent who runs around in four-inch heels and form-fitting suits, she looks remarkably svelte and not at all pregnant. Once Mulder returns (he was abducted by aliens at the end of "Requiem") and another female agent is added to the storyline, Scully is suddenly, hugely pregnant. The reasons for this are two-fold. First, now that there is another agent able to investigate cases with Doggett (one who looks remarkably like Scully), there is no reason for her not to be pregnant. Second, it causes much dramatic tension between Scully and Mulder since he apparently doesn't know who is the father of her child. For her part, Scully's role following Mulder's return is to cry a lot and worry about Mulder. Scully's pregnancy almost completely feminizes her—even the "masculinity" bestowed upon her by her profession is momentarily lost as she leaves work to have her child. Combined with her newfound role as "believer" (which she adopts in Mulder's absence), Scully's more

² Quite the opposite, in fact. Season seven's "all things" concerns Scully's acceptance of her life as the "correct path" for her.

emotional mental state and almost complete inactivity turn her into a caricature of femininity. Her desire to have a child during the last two seasons, in fact, contradicts her characterization throughout the rest of the series. She does, however, have a child, a son she names William (after Mulder's father). Scully gives birth in the season eight finale, which ends as she and Mulder kiss while holding the baby. Season eight ends with the realization of the heteronormative union of Mulder and Scully.

Season nine then begins with Mulder leaving Scully and William (in order to somehow protect them), effectively making Scully a single mother. Scully's involvement with the X-files in this last season becomes ever more peripheral, as Agents Doggett and Reyes assume most of the responsibilities of the X-files. In this final season, Scully is resigned to the role of "mother" of both William and of Doggett and Reyes, staying behind to watch the children as Mulder disappears to have his adventures. Season nine, then, shifts the focus away from the lone hero archetype because the actual lone hero (Mulder) is gone. It is, however, important to note that Scully does not resign from the FBI. She remains working in an un-womanly profession, which has a very specific consequence for her role as mother.

Though in season nine Scully is more "feminine" than at any other point in the series (both in terms of her emotional expressions and her physical bearing), she is by no means an ideal of "femininity." While not as obsessed with her work, she does remain in law enforcement and continues to work while raising William. For his part, William is pursued by pretty much everyone—he's the new Mulder. Eventually deciding that she can't watch and protect her son, Scully gives him up for adoption to a farm couple in Wyoming. Because she chooses to remain an FBI agent, she is unable to keep her child.

Narratively, this plot development makes little sense. The bulk of the William storyline in seasons eight and nine revolves around his importance to the Syndicate and the conspiracy—they either want to control him or kill him—and the constant work of Scully, Mulder, and Doggett to protect him from this group. In season nine, the final solution to protecting him from this all-seeing, all-knowing, all-controlling government faction is not to have him in the custody of a competent FBI agent (his mother), but to send him to live with a nice, normal couple on a farm. William, it would appear, is better off with an ideal heteronormative family, than being raised by a woman like Scully. This plot development can only be explained by the theory of essential motherhood, which asserts that women who do not conform to patriarchal norms of femininity “do not manifest the qualities required by mothering and/or refuse mothering” (DiQuinzio xiii).

While Scully’s evolution as a “feminine” woman parallels her evolution as a good mother, she never becomes completely feminized; her role as an FBI agent always marks her as slightly “deviant” in terms of patriarchal ideals of femininity. In the early seasons of the series, when she is at her most “masculine,” Scully is uncomfortable around children and lacks interest in having children of her own. She also rejects the heteronormative “lifestyle” promoted by dominant ideologies in favor of the more gender-liminal relationship of her partnership with Mulder.³ As the narrative progresses, and Scully becomes increasingly more representative of female gender stereotypes, she also becomes more maternal. Even season five Scully, who is deeply embroiled in her work and alienated from her “normal” family, yet less rational and more intuitive than

³ “The Jersey Devil” contains a scene in which Scully turns down an offer to date a “normal” man in favor of chasing monsters with Mulder, who she earlier in the episode rejected as a romantic prospect, labeling him too “obsessed with his work.”

season one Scully, is not as “good” a mother as season nine Scully, who is less involved in the X-files, a “believer,” and more prone to displays emotion. Unfortunately, season nine Scully is also still in law enforcement and therefore not completely feminized. As Scully’s gender expression becomes less “deviant,” her abilities as a mother become increasingly better.

As it is portrayed in *The X-Files*, being a capable mother complies with what feminist critic Sharon Hayes calls “intensive mothering” (O’Reilly 5). Intensive mothering requires that “the mother is the central caregiver,” that the mother lavishes “copious amounts of time, energy, and material resources on the child,” and that “the mother regards mothering as more important than her paid work” (Hayes 8). The portrayal of the mothering of the three central mother-figures in the text (Scully, her mother, and Teena Mulder) can be explained through the themes of intensive mothering. Maggie Scully—the “good” mother—complies with all three of Hayes’ themes. Because she the wife of a Naval officer, a man who loved his rather time-consuming work, Maggie was the “central caregiver” to her four children—something that continues into their adulthoods, as all of her children remain fairly close to her. And since she does not engage in “paid work” outside of the home, Maggie is free to lavish “copious amounts of time [and] energy” on her kids. Throughout the series, Maggie is characterized as supportive of her family, and often voices her concern for Scully’s well-being and happiness. She is, in all senses, a “good” mother, something that becomes even more apparent when contrasted with Mulder’s mother, Teena.

The portrayals of Mulder’s and Scully’s childhoods (as shown via flashbacks throughout the series) are quite different. Mulder’s youth revolved around his sister’s

abduction; his memories are filled with arguing parents, mysterious strangers visiting his home, and a scared little sister. Scully's youth was filled with playing hopscotch with her sister and playing in the woods with her brothers. Scully had a normal childhood—happy family, supportive mother, three loving siblings. Mulder had an emotionally distant mother, an unhappy father, and a sister who vanished when he was twelve. The role that Mulder's mother played in causing his unhappy childhood (as well as his dysfunctional adulthood) is a troubling example of the ways in which *The X-Files* promotes the theory of intensive mothering.

Unlike Maggie Scully, Teena does not comply with Hayes' definition of intensive mothering. Though it is never established that Teena has "paid work" outside the home, and while she does seem to be her children's "central caregiver" (her husband is a busy government employee and member of the Syndicate), she does not fulfill the second qualification of lavishing "copious amounts of time, energy, and material resources on the child." While it is clear that Mulder's family is fairly wealthy, and that neither he nor his sister lacked "material resources," it is implied that Teena spent little time or energy on her children. While there are few examples of Mulder's childhood experiences before his sister was abducted, and most of Teena's ability as a mother must therefore be based on her role after Samantha was taken, there are a number of textual hints that Teena was not nearly as devoted to her children as was Scully's mother. In the flashbacks Teena is never shown "mothering" either of her children. Mulder appears to have had more responsibility in caring for his sister than did his mother. The most jarring example of this is Teena's absence on the night her daughter is taken, a scene that is portrayed numerous times throughout the series. While her daughter is being abducted, Teena and her

husband are socializing with neighbors, having left Mulder and Samantha home alone at night. Though it is never explicitly stated, the fact that Samantha was taken while her mother was absent, compounded with the suggestions that Teena wasn't a very attentive mother, implies that Teena was at least partially to blame for Samantha's abduction.

Despite the fact that it was Samantha's father who was a member of the Syndicate, and who decided that Samantha should be taken, as the series progresses, the burden of guilt for Samantha's abduction moves more and more towards her mother. Teena, because of her relationship with the Cigarette Smoking Man, is assigned blame. She is the mother—the one who should have participated in the “intensive mothering” of her children—and therefore the problems of her children belong to her. By the time the series ends, Mulder's father is redeemed (although his role in the “project” is never denied) because he did try to do his part to protect his family. Teena, however, did not. She was involved in her husband's work, did not put her children's needs above her own (nor did her husband, but he is never expected to), and her mothering is condemned by the narrative. Bill Mulder becomes the namesake for the next messiah; Teena Mulder kills herself after burning her photographs of her children and leaving a rather impersonal message on her adult son's answering machine. The vision of motherhood expressed by the narrative falls in line with the patriarchal-approved version of motherhood. Teena Mulder is a bad mother because she is not a “natural” mother.

In addition to gender implications, the series' portrayal of motherhood also implies a compliance with rules of heteronormativity. As she becomes more and more “feminine,” Scully also falls more and more in line with heteronormative gender ideals. As noted, the characterization of Scully in the early seasons of the series is as a

“masculinized” woman—her hair is cut short and distinctly non-feminine, her wardrobe is sensible and non-form fitting, she is defined by her scientific rationalism, and she explicitly rejects a “normal” life of dating. As the series progresses, Scully’s attitude and appearance become feminized, and she becomes increasingly less asexual. Scully’s evolving femininity accompanies her evolving maternal desires. While she and Mulder are not romantically involved when she attempts to adopt Emily, they are much more personally involved with each other than in earlier seasons (in which Scully was not at all maternal). Similarly, by William’s birth, they are clearly romantically involved and are shown as a cohesive family unit (“Existence”) but, once Mulder leaves (thereby destroying the heteronormative “family”), Scully again loses maternal ability. Motherhood, the narrative implies, requires heteronormativity and a clear expression of “femininity.”

CHAPTER 7
“THE TRUTH IS IN ME”: REPRODUCTION, TECHNOLOGY, AND WOMAN AS
MONSTER

The most basic narrative conflict of the series is between Mulder and Scully and the monsters they investigate. Each episode is about the agents’ attempts to locate the nature of the monster of the week: alien, mutant, ghost, or whatever. Mulder and Scully are positioned as the narrative subjects, with the monsters as their objects. As noted, however, Scully is repeatedly denied narrative subjectivity, in large part because of her role as object and as feminized being. In conjunction with Scully’s subjectivity, the subject/object binary of Mulder and Scully/monster is not upheld in the narrative. Scully is much more likely to be the object of the narrative than the subject, something which has ramifications for the agents/monsters division. Through the objectification of Scully as a feminized body, as well as through the othering of Scully’s scientific rationalism in the world view of the series, the narrative creates an identification between Scully and the monsters.

The storylines which portray female monsters of the week speak to patriarchal fears of powerful, evil women. These female monsters are often nothing more than the standard femme fatale recast as genetic mutant. For example, season one’s “Eve” is the story of a female scientist who creates clones of herself, little girls genetically programmed to kill their fathers. In terms of the monstrous-feminine, “Eve” is fairly straightforward in actualizing a masculine fear of powerful women. Further examples of women-as-monster generally cater to the same basic fears of powerful women. Rather

than focus on the “bad woman” model, I will focus my discussion on the ways in which the narrative aligns Scully with the monsters, and, as a result, distances her from Mulder.

More than anything else, it is Scully’s body, both in its configuration as object and as site for motherhood, that codes her as monstrous in the narrative of the series. In season two’s “Humbug,” for example, Scully’s breast is visually paralleled to a man’s mutant conjoined twin, suggesting a connection between the female body and a mutant body. The same episode, which concerns a town of side show performers being preyed upon by the mutant conjoined twin, ends with Blockhead, a self-proclaimed “self-made freak,” lamenting to Scully a future populated by genetically perfect humans. During the course of this conversation, Blockhead points to Mulder as a physical example of the dreaded “perfect” human, asking Scully to “imagine going through [her] whole life looking like that.” This conversation differentiates Mulder-as-perfect-specimen from both the freaks and from Scully; Blockhead doesn’t point to her as an example of the non-mutant, rather his statement aligns her with the mutant body. This conflation of the monstrous with the feminine (and with the specifically feminine features of Scully’s body), is representative of the way that the narrative consistently aligns women with monsters.

This connection between Scully’s body and the monstrous is made explicit during her abduction and its aftermath. In addition to the aforementioned abduction scenes, in which there is a clear visual connection made between Scully as reproductive body and the aliens as reproductive scientists, Scully’s abduction makes her reliant on alien technology to survive. Shortly after her return, Scully discovers a small computer chip embedded under the skin in her neck. The chip, she soon learns, was implanted by the

aliens during her abduction. Unsure of the implant's purpose, Scully has it removed, which makes sense in terms of the narrative where the aliens are malevolent beings preying on innocent human victims. In the next season, Scully meets a group of women, also purported abductees, all of whom had the same chips removed from their necks. One season later, Scully learns that all these women (in the year since she first met them), developed inoperable brain tumors and have since died. Shortly thereafter, Scully discovers that she too has brain cancer. While searching for a way to cure Scully, Mulder is told by the Cigarette Smoking Man that Scully's cancer was a result of the removal of the chip. The storyline is eventually resolved when Mulder steals another chip, which Scully has implanted in her neck, immediately curing her. After her abduction, then, Scully is indelibly connected to the monstrous-alien through the implantation of their technology into her body. As she tells Mulder after learning of her illness, the "truth is in [her]" ("Memento Mori"). The cancer-arc therefore solidifies Scully's connection with the monstrous. The result of her abduction is that she, like the monsters she chases every day, is part of "the truth" that Mulder seeks to find. Scully, because of the implant, is part alien, with the clear implication that if she attempts to excise the alien "piece" of herself, she will die.

The conflation of Scully with the monsters is further emphasized in her attempts to have a child. In addition to the connection created by the alien implant in her neck, the ova harvested by the alien beings forces another identification between Scully and the aliens. In season eight's "Per Manum," Scully is shown attempting to have a child using in-vitro fertilization. To do so, she uses the harvested ova Mulder found in season four's "Memento Mori," taken from her during her abduction. Scully's attempts to reproduce

are similar to those of the alien beings to create alien/human hybrids—they're even using the same basic genetic material. Reproduction, therefore, is the domain of two groups: women and monsters, while the role of men in reproduction is, more or less, nonexistent. The alien reproduction is apparently a result of only human woman/alien merging, while Scully's reproduction is also bizarrely free of male involvement because there is never a clear explanation of who or what is William's father.¹

In addition to the ramifications of alien abduction on her body, Scully's position within the world view of the narrative also serves to identify her with the monsters she investigates. Because Scully is the "skeptic," the narrative relies on her inability to see the aliens, monsters, and mutants (seeing is, after all, believing). For the majority of the series, it is Mulder, and Mulder alone, who witnesses the monstrous and the alien. Scully is repeatedly denied the ability to see these monsters—forever arriving on the scene seconds too late or being in the wrong place at the wrong time—while Mulder catches glimpses of the paranormal week after week. While some critics infer this to mean that Mulder is marked as Other by his experiences with beings "not acknowledged by the patriarchy" (Wilcox and Williams 118), I would argue that the ability of Mulder to see these Other beings allows him to differentiate himself from them. Because Mulder and the monster of the week are on screen at the same time, and because the viewer can compare the two, Mulder is—by virtue of being human—differentiated from the monstrous and alien body. The viewer identifies the non-human as Other in these scenes,

¹ Though the narrative does seem to point to Mulder as the father, this is never clarified. Scully's attempts at in-vitro are apparently unsuccessful, and even though there are suggestions in season nine of an earlier physical relationship between her and Mulder ("Trustno1"), a pregnancy resulting from this seems unlikely since she was rendered barren during the ova-harvesting procedures ("Memento Mori"). In addition, William displays "alien" tendencies, such as telepathy, suggesting non-human parentage.

which, by default, casts Mulder in the role of “Self.” More than anything, Mulder is humanized by his investigations and belief in the monstrous, since the monsters clearly are monsters. Conversely, Scully’s roles as scientist and skeptic serve to connect her to the monstrous in two ways: by forcing her to rationalize the monstrous (and therefore make the monsters less bizarre, less “alien”) and by creating visual parallels between Scully’s reliance on technology and the use of technology by the monsters to commit their crimes.

Along with the rise of the computer age in the 1990s, *X-Files* monsters are often characterized as utilizing technology—whether it be alien or terrestrial—to terrorize their victims. The aliens of the show’s mythology are often shown using advanced technology to torture, implant, and track their human test subjects. This connection between tools of technology and the monstrous is central to discussions of Scully’s connection to the monstrous. As a scientist, Scully is repeatedly shown using the tools of science to investigate crimes. Just as Mulder is more intuitive—and thus relies on investigating crime scene and psychological profiles of villains to solve crimes—Scully’s strict rationalism causes her to turn to science to investigate the crimes. In episode after episode, Mulder races off to track the bad guys while Scully stays behind to run lab tests and prove her theories through science. In so doing, Scully is much more closely connected to technology than is Mulder. Repeatedly, Scully is shown looking through microscopes and running lab tests, wearing her white coat, working in a sterile environment. Furthermore, scenes that depict alien abduction experiences (usually shown via flashback) are similarly constructed—abduction scenes usually take place in sterile white rooms and involve the use of medical equipment on the abductees. The aliens are

often shown looking down at their prostrate victims, who are laid out on medical tables. These scenes mirror ones that depict Scully as she moves around bodies laid out in her autopsy bay. This visual connection between what Scully does and what the aliens do further connects her to the monstrous in a way that Mulder is not. Mulder's investigative methods—on-site investigation and psychological profiles—are therefore characterized as more “human” than Scully's scientific investigative methods.

Scully's position as scientist also excludes her from the privileged world view of the show because her position is to debunk Mulder's fantastic claims. Unlike Mulder who, though he appears onscreen with the monstrous form, yet does not interact with it, Scully is not humanized by being shown onscreen at the same time as the monstrous. Scully's contact with the monstrous is not externalized; whereas Mulder sees the monstrous body and expresses wonder, Scully's examinations of the monster are grounded in rationalism. In this way, science connects Scully with the objects she studies—through her science she makes the monstrous rational and therefore less “alien” to her than it is to Mulder. She is not distanced from the monstrous body/object like Mulder is; instead, through her rationalism and scientific investigation, she is connected to it. In terms of the narrative, Scully is a forensic pathologist, so one of her key duties is to examine any physical proof (which often takes the form of a corpse) that comes up in the course of their investigation. In numerous scenes, Scully is shown examining evidence (of “monstrous” origin), a scientific practice which “involves bodily relations between the scientific subject and object” (Parks 125). Scully is visually coded as having a (scientific) connection to the monstrous objects. Scully is further connected to the monstrous scientific object through the act of the autopsy. By autopsying bodies (of both

the human and monstrous varieties), Scully becomes the monster, violating the bodies with the tools of science. Through her scientific (physical) probing, Scully becomes like the monsters she investigates, using scalpels and microscopes to perform this violation, rather than any kind of paranormal means. Scully's connection to the monstrous is always personal; she is connected to it either through her use of technology, her ability to reproduce, or her body. Unlike Mulder, who observes the paranormal, Scully is directly connected to it; for Scully, the monstrous is not observed, it is participated in. Throughout the series, Scully's confrontations with the paranormal are always personal; the monstrous happens *to* her, whereas it happens *around* Mulder.

CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION

Though *The X-Files*, through the subversion of traditional television themes and aesthetics, is a text that allows for the critique of dominant ideological discourse, the series often resists a complete subversion of these ideologies. The rejection of the patriarchy as represented by the Syndicate presents a clear rejection of conventional capitalistic and patriarchal modes of thinking, but the series' subsequent ignoring of larger patriarchal problems (stemming from the acceptance of naturalized gender roles) creates an incomplete critique of patriarchal ideology. And, though Scully is significant as a central character in an FBI narrative, her ultimate subordination to Mulder in the narrative is reflective of the ways in which women's disempowerment is ignored, while the disempowerment of men such as Mulder is emphasized in the series.

The X-Files relies heavily on elements of the horror and SF genres to critique the same dominant ideologies to which it conforms (and as a popular television show, it relies upon, in order to be successful in mainstream capitalist society). Because of the paradox of being at once a successful product of the dominant ideologies of capitalism and attempting to critique these same dominant ideologies, what *The X-Files* does produce, more than anything else, is a confused pseudo-critique of patriarchy and the American governmental structure. The series places at its center government conspiracies and distrust of authority, and then utilizes two authoritative government employees to expose the problems behind these ideologies. It asks the viewer to sympathize with the "marginalized" protagonists, and then sets up other, more marginalized groups (in the

form of demons, aliens, and mutants) as the villains. That being said, the series does attempt to be subversive, both thematically and aesthetically, though to varying levels of success.

By utilizing elements from both “masculine” and “feminine” television genres, the series offers a space in which gender-liminality can exist on television. Furthermore, because of the inclusion of “masculine” genres that do promote feminist politics (such as horror), the series does open places for the expression and support of feminist politics on television. And, in fact, the first season of the series does a fairly thorough job of reversing gender stereotypes. It is not until the series begins to foreground issues such as reproduction and parenting that it begins to naturalize gender stereotyping. Because of its ever increasing emphasis on the respective gender roles represented by Mulder and Scully, compounded with a refusal to question the naturalization of gender that is promoted by essentialist theories of motherhood, the text is ineffective at portraying a truly gender-liminal model, and merely reinforces the dominant ideologies of patriarchy and heteronormativity.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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