Paranormal Sweden?

Paranormal beliefs and practices in contemporary Sweden

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Abstract
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This dissertation aims to study the contemporary occurrence of paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences in Sweden as well as a paraculture of practices dedicated to these issues, with a particular focus on issues of knowledge and authority. The study is placed against the backdrop of academic and popular claims that paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences are not only common but are also on the rise.

A quantitative survey targets a representative sample of Swedish adults (n=1101) and assesses the relation between demographic characteristics and paranormal beliefs and practices. The survey is complemented with fieldwork in the form of participant observation and semi-structured interviews in the paraculture. More specifically, settings and organizations related to mediumship, cryptozoology, ghost hunting, parapsychology and ufology are studied as cases of paranormal practice. The data is analyzed in relation to theorizations of occulture and epistemic authority, the latter by combining the concepts of epistemic capital and boundary-work. The findings point to gender (i.e., being female) and the number of recent occultural contact points as the strongest predictors of paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences. In the paraculture, participants are prone to appeal to different strategies of epistemic capital depending on the setting they were recruited from. One notable result is that while most participants and groups relied on counter-epistemic strategies, such strategies are combined with conventional strategies of science-like and traditional strategies of epistemic capital. Paranormal practice, distinctly epistemic, accordingly becomes a case of how knowledge-making on contested and controversial phenomena may take form in light of the tectonic social and cultural shifts implied by modernization.

Keywords: Paranormal; Paranormal beliefs; Paranormal practices; Mediumship; Ghost hunts; Cryptozoology; Parapsychology; Ufology; Occulture; Epistemic authority; Epistemic capital; Boundary-work.

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To Clara.

Abbreviations

CAM. Complementary and alternative medicine. See page 39.
DV. Dependent variable.
ESP. Extrasensory perception (e.g. clairvoyance, telepathy). See page 17 and 33.
IV. Independent variable.
SCB. Statistics Sweden (Swe: Statistiska centralbyrån)
UAP. Unidentified Aerial Phenomenon. See page 17 and 34.
UFO. Unidentified Flying Object. See page 34.

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Stockholm, late 2023
Cristoffer

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Chapter 1. Introduction

As far back as I can recall, claims of paranormal phenomena have accompanied and enticed me and many of my peers. I have found stories and representations of the paranormal occasionally puzzling, sometimes frightening, and always entertaining. Furthermore, I have had my own share of strange experiences, ostensibly qualified as paranormal. When I was a child, a neighborhood friend and I spotted a strange, intimidating doglike creature with glowing red eyes at the edge of a small forest when we were walking home one early winter night. At least that is how we remembered the event, and that is how we shared the story among ourselves and with others afterwards. As I grew up, I would often look back on the event with some alarm, although I gradually came to question its authenticity. A few years later, most of my classmates saw what they took to be a UFO while we were waiting outdoors for the bus. Ironically, I was one of the few who happened to be looking the other way at the moment. To this day, I have no idea if my classmates were sincere or played a prank on me and the others who missed out. Many years later, in my adolescence, I attended a folk high school that was steeped in claims of hauntings. Among other things, my peers reported detecting ghostly messages through EVPs[1] and electronic devices turning on by themselves. I myself witnessed some occurrences that, to the best of my knowledge, remain unexplained. As distance has been created between me and my childhood and adolescence frights by the passing of the years, I have become increasingly doubtful of what I in fact heard and saw, and even if it was anything at all. That said, these events make for good anecdotes, stories to pass time with after the sun has set, preferably accompanied by a glass of wine. Things that go bump in the night continue to create bonds in settings of intimacy and joviality. I am sure many a reader would agree.

Being a millennial, representations of the paranormal were commonplace as I grew up, ranging from toys and collectibles, movies, TV shows and cartoons, to video games. Early encounters included the long-running hit TV series *The X-Files* (1993-2018), while blockbuster franchises such as *The Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003) and *Harry Potter* (1999-2011) dominated the land-

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[1] EVP, electronic voice phenomena, is a frequently debated phenomenon within ghost-hunting circles (Wikipedia "Electronic voice phenomena," n.d.). To some, it is evidence of communications with a spiritual realm.

scape of pop culture as I entered early adolescence. Apparently, my early encounters with claims of the paranormal and the unexplained have left their mark on me, and so much so that I decided to do a PhD on the topic, or, rather on how people engage with these phenomena socially.

As we shall see, I am far from alone in being fascinated by paranormal claims. Indeed, studies and polls suggest that belief in unconventional and controversial phenomena such as ghosts, UFOs and telepathy, as well as in related activities and experiences, is fairly widespread globally, and there are indications of longitudinal growth in such beliefs, at least during the last decades (e.g., Bader et al. 2011, 192-195; Sjödin 1995: Sjödin 2001; Morhed 2001; Partridge 2004, 58-59; Davies 2007). Variously labeled as paranormal, esoteric and occult (e.g., Höllinger & Smith 2002), these ideas and practices are increasingly disseminated in popular culture, resulting in what Annette Hill (2011) has described as a paranormal turn in culture, or what Christopher Partridge (2004; 2005) has called (popular) occulture. The latter refers to a cultural reservoir through which esoteric, occult and paranormal motifs are represented, distributed and transformed by means of media and popular culture. According to Hill (2011, 170), the growth of paranormal media, especially paranormal reality TV (e.g., ghost-hunting shows), reflects a transit of the paranormal "from the margins to mainstream," corresponding to an increase in belief in paranormal phenomena: "polls around the world indicate 50 per cent of the global population believe in at least one paranormal phenomenon such as extrasensory experiences, hauntings, or witchcraft" (Hill 2011, 170). Indeed, since the turn of the millennium, TV shows with occult and paranormal themes have emerged as a regular subgenre within reality TV at unprecedented levels (Baker & Bader 2014; Moberg 2019).

With this dissertation, I aim to study the occurrence of paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences in contemporary Sweden as well as some forms of social engagement around them. By doing so, I hope to contribute to an enhanced understanding of paranormal practices as well as hint at explanations for their relative popularity. Ultimately, I hope to provide a clearer picture of the status of paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences in contemporary Sweden and how they may be understood from a sociological perspective. The latter furthermore implies that I make no attempt to assess the truth values or plausibility of paranormal phenomena in their own right. This debate, I leave to proponents of paranormal practices and their adversaries (e.g., skeptics). I will elaborate upon what this approach, sometimes called methodological agnosticism (e.g., Ninian Smart 1973, 121), entails later on.

This dissertation has few direct predecessors, but there are a couple, most notably Ulf Sjödin's (1995, 2001) studies of parascience and paranormal beliefs in Sweden around the turn of the millennium and the American study *Paranormal America*, conducted by Christopher D. Bader, F. Carson

Mencken and Joseph O. Baker (2011). I will return to these works and how their design has inspired my own.

Although I will develop a working definition of the paranormal later, I will briefly foreshadow this conceptual debate in order to set the stage for the dissertation. Paranormal phenomena are usually conceptualized as phenomena unrecognized and/or unexplained by current scientific frameworks (e.g., Tidelius 2020). The concept usually includes extraordinary powers of the human mind, sometimes referred to as extrasensory perception or ESP,[2] practices such as astrology and divination, and the notion of the existence of non-human entities of various kinds, ranging from spirits of the dead to extraterrestrials and cryptids,[3] such as the Loch Ness Monster (cf. Irwin 2009; Robertson 2013; Morhed 2000). Based on this stipulation, the designation paranormal is contingent: the paranormal of today is not necessarily the paranormal of tomorrow. Something being "paranormal" may prove a transitory state. After all, the carcass of a Bigfoot may be found and examined, and the remains of a crashed extraterrestrial aircraft may be salvaged and presented to the public. As is indirectly implied by Hill's (2011) paranormal turn, the mainstreaming of representations of the paranormal may in time not only increase the phenomena's plausibility in the eyes of large audiences but may also lead to increased pressure (successful or not) being put on governmental entities and societal institutions to take paranormal claims seriously.

I want to linger on the latter statement for a moment. At the time of writing, there are some clear and global tendencies of this kind concerning UFOs, or UAP as these are sometimes called. In late 2017, *The New York Times* published Helene Cooper, Ralph Blumenthal and Leslie Kean's widely read *Glowing Auras and 'Black Money': The Pentagon's Mysterious U.F.O. Program*. The gist of the article is that the Pentagon had conducted a program of secret investigations of UFO phenomena, at least partly in collaboration with private parties and contractors. The existence of such a program was confirmed by the Pentagon when prompted by the newspaper. In the early summer of 2023, Blumenthal and Kean followed up with a feature in *The Debrief*, in which they presented the statements of whistleblower David Charles Grusch, a military veteran and intelligence officer assigned to a later program investigating UAP[4] phenomena. In short, Grusch stated that the U.S. government had

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[2] Extrasensory perception (ESP) is the parapsychological equivalent of emic terms such as a sixth sense or second sight and it is attributed to biologist and parapsychologist J. B. Rhine (Wikipedia "Extrasensory perception", n.d.; cf. Rhine 1934). ESP includes phenomena such as telepathy, clairvoyance and precognition.

[3] Cryptids denotes the legendary, unknown or purportedly extinct species, ranging from man-apes such as Bigfoot and the Yeti to various dinosaur descendants, that are the subject of cryptozoology, a subculture devoted to finding and documenting these creatures (Wikipedia "Cryptozoology", n.d.; Regal 2011).

[4] This is an acronym for Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena and acts as a successor term to UFOs, or unidentified flying objects (Cooper, Blumenthal & Keen 2017, Blumenthal & Keen 2023).

retrieved non-human crafts and debris, both clandestinely and illegally (Kean & Blumenthal, "Intelligence Officials Say U.S. Has Retrieved Craft of Non-human Origin," The Debrief, June 5, 2023). These forms of narratives about government cover-ups and conspiracies have over the past several decades become commonplace within the field of ufology (e.g., Denzler 2001, Rothstein 2001). At the time of writing in late 2023, the veracity of the information presented by Grusch is unclear. I am, however, tempted to infer that these have been exciting times for ufologists. It remains to be seen whether this may be a step towards the smoking gun (i.e., conclusive evidence) or whether the ufological community will be led down the road to disappointment.

After this cursory introduction to my research interests in the most general sense, it is time to introduce the study more fully, starting with the purpose statement and research questions informing the project.

1.1. Purpose statement(s), research questions and disposition of the dissertation

The purpose of this study is to explore the occurrence of paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences in contemporary Sweden, both within the general population and in a paraculture of enthusiasts. The dissertation hence combines two sets of empirical materials corresponding to two target groups. While a first set of data on paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences is studied in terms of their population-level distribution, the second set of data is aimed at meanings ascribed to paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences in a subset of the population with an active engagement in these topics, with a particular focus on issues of knowledge and authority.

The materials are analyzed through theories of occulture and epistemic authority, which places the study in relation to a debate within the sociology of religion on authority in relation to social, cultural, religious and spiritual change in the late modern West.

The general aim is specified through the formulation of the following research questions:

- To what extent are paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences found in contemporary Sweden, and how are they distributed in different strata of the population? (RQ1)
- How are paranormal practices enacted in the studied paraculture, and how are these practices intertwined with participants' paranormal beliefs and experiences? (RQ2)

- How are attitudes to paranormal phenomena related to different social settings and relationships, both in the population at large and in the studied paraculture? (RQ3)
- How are paranormal practices related to participants' understandings of reliable sources of knowledge? (RQ4)

RQ1 and RQ2 are essentially descriptive and empirical in character. RQ1 aims at mapping what is "out there" in terms of paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences in the general population of contemporary Sweden, while RQ2 directs attention towards paranormal paraculture. Both of these RQs are mainly answered by the empirical results themselves. RQ3 and RQ4 aim at mapping the social sources that influence the formation, interpretation and knowledge-making of and around paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences and are hence more inferential and theoretical in nature.

A query underlying the choice to study two different target populations is if paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences are constituted *differently* in the paraculture than they are in the general Swedish population. This question is, however, impossible to answer on the basis of this study alone which, at best, may provide some hints, since the quantitative data paint broad strokes of general patterns in the general population while the qualitative data exclusively concerns paranormal practices within the paraculture. In order to assess differences between the general population and the subpopulation of the paraculture in terms of views and interpretations of paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences, qualitative studies (e.g., interviews) with research participants representing the general population would need to be conducted as well. This is simply beyond the scope of this dissertation, but I encourage it as a task for future research.

Another way to describe the purpose of this dissertation is by highlighting its contributions to the study of sociology of religion. Empirically, it provides new knowledge about 1) how widespread paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences – overlapping but not identical with a wider culture of alternative religion and spirituality – are in contemporary Sweden and 2) in which social strata, a subject matter we have hitherto known very little about. The study further demonstrates how paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences are ascribed meaning by those who actively engage with the paraculture as well as how this engagement is enacted as practice in different social settings. Theoretically, the dissertation puts notions of occulture and epistemic authority to the test: the first as a set of resources and the second as a desired goal for agents interested in paranormal phenomena. The latter roots the analysis in theorizations about authority, knowledge-making and emic epistemologies. Indirectly, the theoretical framework and the analyses of the empirical results can help shed light on social, cultural, religious and spiritual change in the late modern West.

In the rest of the first chapter of the dissertation, I will introduce the reader to some of the main scholarly descriptions and theorizations of social, cultural

and religious change in the West following modernity, with a particular focus on the religious landscape of contemporary Sweden. As part of this sociohistorical contextualization, I will also provide a short introduction to some notable precursors of contemporary paranormal culture. Together, this backdrop serves as a crash course in the sociology of religion and the history of the paranormal, territories that may be unfamiliar to the reader. Towards the end of the first chapter, I account for some key concepts and their use in the dissertation, most notably that of the paranormal and social engagement with it.

The second chapter opens with an overview of previous social scientific research on the paranormal as social and cultural phenomena, ranging from sociology to religious studies, and then moves on to present metatheoretical presuppositions and the theoretical framework proper.

In the third chapter, I turn to the methods (and methodologies) used in the study as well as to a presentation of the empirical materials.

In the fourth chapter, quantitative results from the survey *Paranormal Sweden* are presented, alongside various exploratory and inferential statistical analyses of these.

The fifth and sixth chapters present the results from my study of the paranormal paraculture, ranging from my experiences in the field (i.e., observation and participant observation) to the results from the interviews with research participants.

In the seventh chapter, the empirical results are reassessed and analyzed in light of the theoretical framework of occulture and epistemic authority.

Lastly, the analytical scope is broadened in the eighth chapter to a wider debate. Here, I discuss the results in a more general sense, with a particular focus on insights from the study and suggestions for future research. This final chapter, and the dissertation in its entirety, are then wrapped up with a summary.

1.2. A sociohistorical backdrop: Modernity and religion in Sweden and precursors of the contemporary paranormal

This subchapter serves to contextualize the dissertation and its findings and to familiarize the reader with the social and historical background that precedes paranormal culture in contemporary Sweden. I start with a summary of statistics on paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences in order to shed light on how widespread these may be. As Swedish studies and polls are scarce, I mainly include examples from the U.S. and the U.K. in order to provide a broad sketch of Western distributions of paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences.

Next, I turn to sociological theorizations of the tectonic changes underlying the contemporary cultural, religious and spiritual landscape, most notably those related to modernity and modernization. After this, a snapshot of the status of religion and spirituality in Sweden is provided, since religion and spirituality partly overlap with paranormal practices and partly act as a contradistinction to the latter. Lastly, a backstory to what I will later call paranormal prototypes is introduced, including brief outlines of currents such as Spiritualism and mediumistic practice; psychical research and parapsychology; and cryptozoology and ufology.

1.2.1. Some previous statistics on paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences

A number of studies indicate that paranormal beliefs and corresponding activities and experiences are becoming increasingly widespread, at least in the West (Bader et al. 2011, 189-20; Sjödin 1995, 2001; Partridge 2004, 58-59; Davies 2007, 241). During the early 2000s, Sjödin (2001, 31) reported that only 20 percent of the adult Swedish population rejected *all* of his survey's parascientific (i.e., paranormal) belief statements. Assessing national surveys since the 1960s, Sjödin further concluded that several parascientific views (e.g., belief in divination, astrology, ghosts, superstitions and reincarnation) show longitudinal growth. According to a Swedish poll conducted in 2012 (Novus October, 31 2012), every fifth Swede would be willing to consult a medium, and every fourth claimed to have had experiences of contact with spirits. More recently, the SOM (i.e., Samhälle, Opinion och Medier) Institute found that, among six paranormal beliefs included in their national survey conducted in 2022, the proportion of believers ranged from 14 to 33 percent (Bergquist & Lundmark 2023; cf. Chapter 2). In neighboring Norway, Pål Ketil Botvar and Jan-Olav Henriksen (2010, 65) have demonstrated that 13 percent of Norwegians believe in astrology, about 15 percent affirm belief in reincarnation, 18 percent believe the dead possess supernatural powers, and 24 percent are open to the possibility that some people can predict the future.

Turning to the English-speaking world, a Gallup poll from 2001 demonstrated that 54 percent of Americans believe in psychics or spiritual healing, 50 percent in extrasensory perception, and 42 percent in haunted houses (Irwin 2009, 1). According to the American Baylor Religion Survey, 21 percent agreed that it is possible to communicate with spirits of the dead, 22 percent claimed to have visited or lived in a haunted place, 39 percent reported believing that places can be haunted, and 49 percent responded that they found it likely that ghosts exist (Baker & Bader 2014, 572). Women, younger persons, those with lower incomes, the moderately religious, and Afro-Americans were groups that were overrepresented in relation to belief in and experiences of

ghost and hauntings (Baker & Bader 2014, 575-578). A CBS News poll conducted in 2005 indicated that 48 percent of Americans believe in ghosts, and an American AP/IPSOS poll from 2007 showed that 48 percent of the American population affirmed belief in extrasensory perception, while 14 percent claimed to have seen a UFO (Bader et al. 2011, 7). A 2018 YouGov poll demonstrated that, although only 15 percent claim to have seen one, the majority of Americans believe in ghosts, and 35 percent believe that extraterrestrials have landed on Earth (Frankovic 2018). As these numbers demonstrate, statistics on paranormal beliefs and experiences differ somewhat from study to study, but the affirmative American minorities are consistently large. Even larger is the proportion of the population that affirms having *at least one* paranormal belief. Indeed, results from the Baylor Religion Survey (Bader et al. 2011, 129) showed that a majority – 68 percent[5] – of Americans affirm belief in at least one paranormal phenomenon, while 51 percent claim to have had some sort of paranormal experience or to have engaged in a paranormal activity, such as consulting a psychic or medium, or having had an out-of-body experience (Bader et al. 2011, 75).

Across the pond and around the turn of the millennium, 38 percent of the British population reported believing in ghosts (Davies 2007, 241), while a survey from 2009 showed that 37 percent of the British adult population claim to have had at least one paranormal experience (Castro et al. 2013, 1-4). In a research overview of post-death contact, Anne Austad (2015, 14) shared the estimate that 40 to 50 percent of mourners in the U.K. and U.S. have experienced some kind of contact with those who have passed away.

Whether or not paranormal variables are more common within certain strata of the population is subject to debate. Several studies have shown that women are generally more prone to accept paranormal beliefs than men (Irwin 2009; Bader et al. 2011; Sjödin 2001), but there are exceptions. Within the American context, Bader et al. (2011, 56-57, 195) found that men are more willing to accept belief statements concerning UFOs. Harvey J. Irwin (2009, 57), reviewing previous studies, inferred that women are more prone to believe that they have been abducted by aliens while men are generally more prone to believe in UFOs, extraterrestrials and cryptids. Other studies have shown ambiguous relationships between UFO-related beliefs and socioeconomic class. Some studies have reported men with low income as overrepresented in terms of belief in UFOs, while others point to a predominance of such beliefs in "relatively privileged social strata" (Clarke 2013, 89). Bader et al. (2011, 195) demonstrated that some paranormal beliefs, such as psychic powers and ghosts, appeal more to relatively marginalized groups, while elites are more prone to self-report having had out-of-body experiences and having

[5] The figure is also presented as 69 percent elsewhere in *Paranormal America* (Bader et al. 2011, 75).

seen UFOs. The authors (ibid., 143-148) also found that marital status covaries with paranormal beliefs and experiences: married individuals are less likely to affirm paranormal beliefs or report paranormal experiences than the unmarried. How paranormal variables relate to religious belonging, belief and behavior is similarly ambiguous. Bader et al. (2011, 92) noted that the majority of their American respondents, regardless of affiliation, reported believing in at least one paranormal phenomenon. They further (ibid., 98) found that attending religious services intermittently (about once a month) has a positive relationship with paranormal beliefs and experiences in contrast to those who attend church less *or* more often (weekly or more frequently). In the Swedish Enköping Study, Birgitta Laghé (2008, 152) and Jonas Bromander (2008, 99-100) found that several "New Age" experiences, a number of which may be classified as paranormal, were more common among respondents who were regular worshipers and strongly Christian.

To summarize, relations between different paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences and certain demographic strata are messy and ambiguous or, in the words of Bader et al. (2011, 73), "the paranormal simply refuses to behave. When we break down paranormal experiences by key demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, race, marital status, income, and education we find a complicated tale." Such demographic factors, significant or not, may further be placed in light of fundamental changes of the social, economic and cultural fabric of Sweden and, by extension, the modern West, to which I turn next.

1.2.2. Modernity and modernization: Large-scale sociocultural shifts in the West

This subchapter presents some of the tectonic social and cultural shifts that mark the era of modernity or, more generally, modernization. Although some claims associated with theories of modernity and modernization, as well as successor categories such as late- and post-modernity (e.g., Beckford 1992; Turner 1990), may be problematized, they are generally accepted at face value in this dissertation. In other words, some key characteristics of modernity and modernization are viewed as sociohistorical facts. Most of these descriptions are furthermore aimed at the level of macro-sociology, although they entail consequences for meso- and micro-level developments as well. As such, the theorizations of states and processes of modernity and modernization more or less act as overarching theoretical assumptions rather than instruments of theoretical analysis put to the test.

1.2.2.1. Modernization, secularization and complexity

Following Bryan S. Turner (1990), I understand modernity as an era closely tied to expanding Western imperialism and the emergence of capitalism and

marked by interlinked processes of modernization. The latter denotes a package of developments whereby

> the social world comes under the domination of asceticism, secularization, the universalistic claims of instrumental rationality, the differentiation of the various spheres of the life-world, the bureaucratization of economic, political and military practices, and the growing monetarization of values. (Turner 1990, 6)

The list of concomitants of modernity can be expanded. Leaning on Karel Dobbelaere's (1981, 136) succinct summary, notable features of modernization include "societalization,[6] industrialization, urbanization, bureaucratization, mobility." During the twentieth century, the transition from industrial to advanced industrial (Inglehart 1990) or post-industrial (Bell 1973) service economies could be added to the throng of societal changes.[7]

In the rest of this subchapter, I linger on a couple of concomitants of modernization that are especially pertinent to religious and spiritual change, namely differentiation and secularization. I will also briefly introduce some rivaling attempts to classify the contemporary religious and spiritual landscape in terms of the reemergence or new visibility of religion and spirituality.

A major modernization process is that of functional and/or structural differentiation (e.g., Luhmann 1977; Martin 1978, 69; cf. Bruce 2002, 8), which means that each societal domain or sphere of society becomes increasingly specialized, complex, autonomous and governed by its own rationale, resulting in religion becoming a separate sphere of social life whose influence on other spheres becomes limited (and vice versa) (Dobbelaere 1981, 10). Differentiation is usually viewed as a parallel process to social and professional stratification and differentiation (e.g., Bruce 2002, 9). In a seeming paradox, there are tendencies of de-differentiation (i.e., the blurring of boundaries between previously distinct and differentiated spheres) evident in late modern societies as well (e.g., Woodhead 2016, 41, 44). This warrants a sidestep. Developments such as mediatization (e.g., Hjarvard 2016; Hjarvard & Lundby 2018) – the process whereby logics or rationales associated with media as

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[6] Societalization is arguably the least self-evident and familiar of the terms. It denotes the general development whereby "human life is increasingly enmeshed and organized, not locally but societally," as Wilson (1982, 154) has suggested. It is hence a centripetal force which places human agents and institutions in "complex relationships of interdependence in which their role performances are rationally articulated" (Wilson 1982, 154), thereby weakening the bonds to local settings and communities. The author's footnote.

[7] For instance, the proportion of Swedes working within agricultural professions has decreased from 70 to 2 percent from the mid-nineteenth century until today, while 80 percent of the workforce today is employed within the service sector rather than farming or industry (Pettersson & Leis-Peters 2022, 41).

emergent or established institutions increasingly come to influence the rationales of other institutions, spheres and social interaction at large (Lövheim & Hjarvard 2019, 208) – could be viewed as one such de-differentiating feature.

Secularization, and the corresponding secularization thesis or secularization paradigm,[8] denotes, to quote Bryan Wilson (1982, 149), "that process by which religious institutions, actions, and consciousness, lose their social significance." The latter description is important, as some critics of secularization have been too prone to discard it as there are abundant contemporary examples of religion and spirituality, some forms of which may be growing. As Steve Bruce (2002, 240), himself a staunch supporter of the secularization paradigm, argues, the final destination of secularization is not a society wholly and explicitly irreligious but rather one marked by relative indifference towards religion. Following authors such as Dobbelaere (1981) and José Casanova (1994), I would like to highlight that the term secularization, and accordingly secularization theory, is multidimensional. Dobbelaere (1981, 11-12) argued that secularization has three different meanings. First, secularization refers to the aforementioned (functional/structural) differentiation,[9] or the degradation of religion into "one institution alongside other institutions" (Dobbelaere 1981, 11). Second, it denotes a decline in religious involvement or in how members engage with the "beliefs, rituals, morals" of religious organizations (ibid., 12). Third and last, secularization is an internal process within religions, resulting in this-worldly adaptions (e.g., rationalization, bureaucratization) to other institutions and spheres of society (ibid., 12). Casanova (1994, 7; 2006) similarly argued for a subdivision of secularization theory into three sub-theses, namely "secularization as religious decline, secularization as differentiation, and secularization as privatization," especially targeting the last of the three as empirically dubious.[10] Others (e.g., Beckford 1989, 2003; Woodhead 2012, 1, 22-24) have suggested features such as deregulation as hallmarks of religious and spiritual life in recent times. The gist of the argument thus far is that, compared to pre-modern times, religion has become one of many institutions whose influence on other institutions and agents has at least partially decreased. This baseline of differentiation and secularization has, however, not gone uncontested.

Whether or not we recognize an ongoing deprivatization (Casanova 1994) of religion, a growing public *visibility* of religion has led some sociologists and theologians to, in different ways, proclaim a new state of de-secularization

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[8] Bruce (2002, 39) prefers the secularization paradigm as there is no single secularization theory or thesis, but instead "a cluster of testable explanations."

[9] Although Dobbelaere (1981, 11) prefers the term *laicization.*

[10] Casanova (1994, 65-66) instead demonstrates tendencies of de-privatization, or how religion across the globe "abandons its assigned place in the private sphere and enters the undifferentiated public sphere of civil society to take part in the ongoing process of contestation, discursive legitimation, and redrawing of the boundaries."

or counter-secularization (e.g., Berger 1999), a post-secular society[11] (e.g., Habermas 2008), the re-enchantment of the West (Partridge 2004, 2006) and a spiritual revolution (e.g., Heelas & Woodhead 2005). All of these perspectives assume a return of religion and spirituality in one way or another. Some of these claims rest upon the emergence of new religious movements, cults and forms of alternative spirituality (e.g., Heelas & Woodhead 2005), but also the success of conservative, fundamentalist and charismatic congregations (e.g., Wilson 1976, 37; Beckford 1992, 17; Berger 1999, x; Habermas 2008, 18). An acknowledgement of an increased visibility of religion, however, does not necessitate any quantitative or qualitative growth. Instead, an increased visibility of religion may simply imply that religion has become increasingly salient, debated and politicized[12] in the public sphere, regardless of whether religious movements are growing or not. Hence, I refrain from affirming what Titus Hjelm (2015, 1) has labeled as "celebrationist" accounts of the return of the religion as a cultural and social force gaining momentum. By contrast, other researchers within the sociology of religion (e.g., Voas & Crockett 2005; Bruce 2002) still view secularization as more or less unchallenged, not least due to continued disaffiliation from religious organizations and the increase in number of religious nones (e.g., Lee 2015; Pew Research Center 2012). Some researchers (e.g., Voas 2009; Bruce 2006) have furthermore argued that the emergence of alternative spiritualities, New Age currents and other phenomena bordering the paranormal is a consequence of secularization rather than proof against it, as it, at the end of the day, may imply a growing indifference to religious worldviews (cf. Wilson 1976, 96).

As I see it, secularization can, at a certain place and time, be near-complete at, for instance, a meso- or macro-level and partial or even reversed at the micro-level. Or vice versa. Modernization can take many forms, as Shmuel N. Eisenstadt (e.g., 2000; c.f. Casanova 2006) has argued. David Martin wrote back in 1978 (Martin 1978, 2-3) that secularization is a likely but hardly necessary outcome when certain social conditions (e.g., growth of a heavy industry sector) are met, hence opening up for its reversion. Meanwhile, Inger Furseth (2018; 2021) has argued that contradictory trends of ongoing secularization, the growing visibility of religion, contested public roles of religion and in some cases the numerical growth of certain religious movements warrant religious complexity as the most apt approach to religion in the Nordic countries. Religious complexity denotes a religious landscape in which there is "a simultaneous presence of different religious trends at the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels" (Furseth 2021, 7). Personally, I see no reason to view ei-

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[11] In short, in post-secular societies "religion maintains a public influence and relevance, while the secularistic certainty that religion will disappear worldwide in the course of modernization is losing ground" (Habermas 2008, 21).
[12] In short, politization denotes the process whereby "religion becomes more directly involved as an issue in political debates" (Lövheim et al. 2018, 139).

ther secularization or de-secularization as non-reversible or other than contingent: they may prove transitory. However, I assume secularization in the sense of functional differentiation to be a real sociohistorical development. I furthermore concur with Peter Berger (1967, 62) that, at least partly, the increasing plurality or religious and ideological diversification warrants some degree of relativization: each of these world-building projects loses some of its credibility due to the plain fact that there are so many of them. As Berger (1975, 151) put it:

> the pluralistic situation multiplies the number of plausibility structures competing with each other. Ipso facto, it relativizes their religious contents. More specifically, the religious contents are 'de-objectivated', that is, deprived of their status as taken-for-granted, objective reality in consciousness.

This relativizing effect was phrased succinctly by Bruce (2002, 18): "When the oracle speaks with a single voice, it is easy to believe it is the voice of God. When it speaks with twenty different voices, it is tempting to look behind the screen."

1.2.2.2. Shifted loci of authority: Detraditionalization, the subjective turn and value change

It has been argued that modernization is followed by a shift to new loci of authority in the culture at large, most notably in the sense of a turn to the self. Such processes have been described and theorized in a multitude of ways. Mika Lassander (2014, 16) has suggested that all such perspectives can be distilled into a "basic postulate" of individualization (cf. Beck 1992, 92; Botvar & Henriksen 2010, 60). Other examples of terms (with related theories) for this cultural shift are detraditionalization (e.g., Beck 1992; Heelas 1996a), the subjective turn (Heelas & Woodhead 2005) and the silent revolution (Inglehart 1977, 1990). They will all be briefly recapitulated in this subchapter.

Paul Heelas has defined detraditionalization as a general process that denotes "a shift of authority: from 'without' to 'within'. It entails the decline of the belief in pre-given or natural orders of things" (Heelas 1996a, 2; cf. Ahlin 2005, 209). Sjödin (2001, 20-21, 139-149) used the term detraditionalization to denote the waning of authority or a crisis of confidence in institutional religion, science and educational institutions in favor of idiosyncratic, individualistic and alternative views of knowledge. The latter includes, among other things, beliefs and practices related to the paranormal. Sjödin's understanding of detraditionalization is indebted to sociological theorizations regarding the status of modernity, such as Ulrich Beck's (1992) writings on the emergence of reflexive modernity or the risk society. The latter denotes a second phase of modernity marked not by the distribution of wealth but of risks,[13] the latter

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[13] Beck (1992, 21) defines risk, as understood within modernization theory, thusly: "*Risk may be defined as a systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced*

in themselves a product of modernization and techno-scientific developments (Beck 1992, 20). Turning back to Sjödin (2001), modernization has certain corrosive effects on the institutions associated with it (e.g., science). Both science and technology are implicated in the creation and management of risks,[14] resulting in a collective predicament of uncertainty and fear. The rapidity of scientific knowledge production furthermore makes salient the fallibility inherent in it, which results in skepticism and relativism (Sjödin 2001; Beck 1992, 156-170). Wilson (1976, 102) has made similar arguments concerning an ongoing process of detraditionalization accompanying modernization: "What the modern world has lost in losing its traditional culture has been the basis for legitimated control." This entails a crisis of not only legitimacy and authority but of knowledge as well, and I quote Wilson (1976, 106-107) at some length here:

> Just what people should know, and in what order they should acquire knowledge, is something that our contemporary society has lost the power to assert. Modern man lives in a random supermarket of knowledge that is in fact a maze. […] The consequences are numerous. Personal growth is challenged and perhaps stultified by over-exposure to an abundance of expertism. A plurality of styles if offered that leads to facile cultural relativism which destroys the individual's confidence in his own culture and which leaves unmanned the cultural defences of any given society. Even the institutionalized systems of knowledge and procedures for learning, as embodied in universities, are assaulted and undermined.

Detraditionalization may be placed in relation to one of the foci of this study, namely *epistemic* legitimation and authority. Katja Valaskivi (2022) has described the contemporary cultural landscape as marked by a crisis in terms of knowledge-making authority. Using Jaron Harambam's (2020) notion of epistemic instability, a snapshot description of the late modern West is that of:

> a situation where collective imaginaries of the world, i.e. "truths" about how the world is and how we can find information are being challenged. Traditional knowledge producing authorities such as science and universities, media and cultural organizations, governmental bodies and decision makers as well as established religious institutions are also being contested, undermined, and challenged for different reasons and motivations. (Valaskivi 2022, 1)

A status of epistemic instability is especially salient and exacerbated in new hybrid media environments, in which the logics of different media practices, old and new, intermingle and crosspollinate (cf. Chadwick 2017). The main

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by modernization itself." Beck especially has global, nearly omnipresent catastrophes in mind (e.g., pollution, ecological disasters).

[14] As Beck (1992, 155) puts it: "Science is *one of the causes, the medium of definition and the source of solutions* to risks, and by virtue of that very fact it opens new markets of scientization for itself."

point here is that these developments have consequences for views on knowledge and knowledge production, as "communication technology alters our epistemic processes and perception of knowledge, but also affects how knowledge and understanding of the world is produced" (Valaskivi & Robertson 2022, 2).

In close proximity to detraditionalization is the notion of the subjective turn as formulated by Heelas and Linda Woodhead (2005). Heelas and Woodhead have based their thesis on several sociological diagnostics of late modern culture, most notably those of philosopher Charles Taylor. Succinctly put, the subjective turn denotes "a turn away from life lived in terms of external or 'subjective' roles, duties and obligations, and a turn towards life lived by reference to one's own subjective experiences" (Heelas & Woodhead 2005, 2). This mode of subjectivity, which Heelas and Woodhead (2005, 3) call subjective-life, is characterized by its embrace of "states of consciousness, states of mind, memories, emotions, passions, sensations, bodily experiences, dreams, feelings, inner conscience, and sentiments." The subjective turn accounts for societal and cultural change at large, while the claim regarding a spiritual revolution is a sub-thesis acting as a prediction of religious and spiritual change. In short, it states that cultural expressions such as New Age or holistic spiritualities that cater to subjectivist sentiments in Western populations will fare better than those that do not: subjective-life spiritualities will eventually outcompete traditional and collectivistic modes of religion (Heelas & Woodhead 2005, 6-7; cf. Botvar & Henriksen 2010, 62).

Another example of a theory that places tectonic changes in (primarily Western) culture in the center is the study of values as approached by sociologist Roland Inglehart (1977, 1990). The gist of Inglehart's argument for the materialist/postmaterialist thesis[15] is that a fundamental shift in values has occurred in which populations are successively abandoning materialist priorities revolving around material safety, comfort and economic growth for post-materialist (Inglehart 1990, 66) values or ones related to self-expression (Wetzel & Inglehart 2010). The latter are orientations that prioritize "belonging and intellectual-aesthetic needs" (Inglehart 1977, 363), emancipative approaches to human life and greater individual agency (Welzel & Inglehart 2010, 44). People can accordingly be classified as materialists or post-materialists, although it is most fruitful to view these as ideal types, especially since large parts of populations can be classified as mixed types (Inglehart 1990, 76). This shift in values is furthermore driven forth by generational replacement. As the

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[15] This is in turn based on two subordinated hypotheses: "(1) a *scarcity hypothesis* that one's priorities reflect one's socioeconomic environment so that one places greatest subjective value on those things that are in relatively short supply; and (2) a *socialization hypothesis* that, to a large extent, one's basic values reflect the conditions that prevailed during one's preadult years" (Inglehart 1990, 56). These two hypotheses correspond to short term period effects (i.e., "Periods of prosperity lead to increased Post materialism, and periods of scarcity lead to Materialism," Inglehart 1990, 82) and long-term cohort effects (i.e., generational replacement).

latter implies, individuals belonging to certain generations are primed by specific "formative experiences" (Inglehart 1990, 3) that set them apart from preceding and succeeding generations. A generational shift in values thus reflects a change of living conditions and, accordingly, priorities and strategies. In Pippa Norris and Inglehart's (2006, 71) estimates, the shift from materialist to post-materialist values, which explicitly corresponds to economic growth and equality as well as to an increased sense of existential security, is also conducive to secularization. Vulnerability and insecurity instead prime generations in favor of materialist values. It is indeed Inglehart and Norris' (2017) claim that the success of right-wing populist parties (e.g., Brexit, Donald Trump's presidency) in recent decades rests upon socioeconomic effects such as growing economic inequality.

1.2.3. The religious and spiritual landscape of Sweden

Although this is not a dissertation on religion or religiosity per se, some recurrent elements of the paranormal have nevertheless been approached from the purview of religious studies, especially research on alternative religion and spirituality, while certain researchers have argued that paranormal and conventional religious beliefs are both subsets of supernaturalism (e.g., Goode 2000). For this reason, and in order to contextualize the results, the religious and spiritual landscape of Sweden will be outlined in the following according to some of the main measurements on religion in use, namely the three "big 'B's' of religion," to quote Abby Day (2011, v): belonging, belief and behavior.

Starting with religious belonging, one prominent feature of the religious landscape in Sweden is the relative privilege of a Lutheran majority church, in this case the previous state church, the Church of Sweden. The year the *Paranormal Sweden* survey was conducted, a majority (55 percent) remained members of the Church of Sweden, while 64 percent of the population are members of religious congregations in general (Pettersson & Leis Peters 2022, 51). During the period spanning from 2000 to 2020, the proportion of the population that belongs to a registered Muslim congregation doubled from 1.1 to 2.2 percent, not least due to migration,[16] while membership in the Church of Sweden and the free churches is generally waning. The largest growing group is those with no affiliation, the religious nones (Pettersson & Leis Peters 2022, 50-51). Concerning beliefs, the European Value Survey (EVS) from 2006 showed that 54 percent of the Swedish population affirmed belief in "some

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[16] During the last decade, the proportion of people with roots outside of Sweden (either themselves or both parents being born outside of the country) has increased from 14.5 percent to 25.9 percent, with Syria and Iraq recently replacing Finland as the most common country of origin (Pettersson & Leis-Peters 2022, 47).

sort of spirit or life force," an option often interpreted as indicative of alternative spirituality, while only 16 percent opted for the indicator of traditional monotheism, namely belief in a personal God, with 14 percent rejecting any form of religious or spiritual belief (Willander 2014, 67, 95). Lastly concerning the topic of religious behavior, a large study – the Sweden Count (Swe: Sverigeräkningen) – was conducted around the turn of the millennium, making a total inventory of the religious activities of both mainstream and marginal religious congregations and milieus. Margareta Skog (2001, 23) found that only about 6.2 percent attended worship services during an average weekend, out of which 1.2 percent attended worship services arranged by the Church of Sweden. At the start of the twenty-first century, then, Sweden was assessed as being comparatively homogeneous in terms of religion (e.g., Sundback, 34; Klingenberg 2019, 50), with immigration singled out as the main driving force behind increased diversity in the religious sphere. A general disaffiliation from religion remains a defining trend in the contemporary religious landscape of Sweden and the other Nordic countries (Furseth et al. 2018, 43-45). Generally, Sweden exhibits high degrees of irreligiosity, which has prompted descriptions of Sweden as a highly secular-rational and self-expressive country (Inglehart & Baker 2000) or, more sharply put, one of the most secularized countries in the world (Willander 2014, 93; Zuckerman 2009).

Secularistic discourse in the form of criticism towards religion is furthermore commonplace in Sweden, in the public sphere as well as in settings such as religious education (e.g., Tjurfjell 2015; Kittelman Flensner 2015; Wrammert 2021; cf. Rosen 2009, 150). David Thurfjell (2015, 9) has used the term post-Christian secular Swedes to refer to the mainstream urban middle class. The latter comprises a part of the Swedish population that remains affiliated with the Church of Sweden, is prone to celebrating Christmas and participating in Christian rites of passage, while its members are nevertheless reluctant to view themselves as Christian or religious. This group may hence be classified as semi-secular, to use af Burén's (2015, 35) categorization.

The emergence of alternative spirituality deserves some additional comments. The aforementioned Sweden Count survey (Skog 2001) assessed alternative religious milieus as diminutive. In *Den mediterande dalahästen*, an inventory of the religious and spiritual life of the region Dalarna similar to the Kendal Project (Heelas & Woodhead 2005), Liselotte Frisk and Peter Åkerbäck (2013, 54) reported finding that about 2.7 percent of the regional population was active within a popular religious milieu similar to the holistic milieu of the Kendal Project as presented by Heelas and Woodhead (2005). The Enköping Study, mapping out the religious and spiritual life of Enköping Municipality in 2004, found no support for claims of a spiritual revolution according to which a holistic milieu of new spiritualities would eventually surpass Christian congregational life. Instead, Bromander (2008, 99-100) inferred that indicators of mainstream religious beliefs, behaviors and belonging

covary with indicators of alternative spirituality and, in some cases, the paranormal (cf. Botvar & Henriksen 2010).

As I will discuss further in the second chapter, paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences have frequently been approached as indicators of alternative religion and spirituality in general, a relationship that can partly be explained by their conjoined histories. It is to the history of the paranormal that I now turn.

1.2.4. Precursors of the paranormal

In this section, I sketch a brief historical outline of some notable precursors to contemporary paranormal paraculture. As an aspiring sociologist rather than historian, I am, to quote Wilson (1976, 63), "concerned with patterns rather than with specific contents," and for this reason I will prioritize general trajectories rather than detail. It is recommended that readers interested in, for instance, the history of Spiritualism or psychical research read other texts. The references in this subchapter may serve as a starting point.

I want to add that several paranormal practices have precursors within, for instance, folklore and folk, or vernacular, religion (e.g., Primiano 1995), ranging from communicating with spirits of the dead to alternative medical practices. Although folkloristic and theological entities such as little people, angels and demons were occasionally mentioned during my time spent in the field, they were not foci of the practices. Interest in paranormal phenomena has furthermore been cultivated within the historical currents and milieus of Western esotericism (e.g., von Stuckrad 2005) and occultism (e.g., Hanegraaf 1996). I will only present two examples of such currents, namely Spiritualism and Theosophy.

1.2.4.1.   Spiritualism and Theosophy

Belief in spirits and hauntings as well as the possibility of communicating with the dead seems as old as society itself, although these beings have appeared under different guises in different times, and the narratives of these encounters thus vary accordingly (e.g., Davies 2007, 41; Baker & Bader 2014, 570). Some characteristics remain fairly constant from Antiquity to late modern society in the West, such as the notion that ghosts or other undead entities have unfinished business that binds them to the world of the living (Davies 2007). Similar features live on, for instance, in the form of mediumistic house cleansing today (e.g., Kalvig 2015, 2017; Moberg 2016). Other characteristics have faded into the realm of irrelevance, such as spirits haunting the living from Purgatory in order to get the latter to pray or make donations to the Catholic Church (see Finucane 1996; Davies 2007). Although features such as trance states were already present in earlier movements like Swedenborgianism and mesmerism (e.g., Hammer 1999; Carleson & Levander 2016), practices involving communications with the spirit world have not been the same since

the emergence of Spiritualism[17] in the nineteenth century, the latter more or less serving as a blueprint for later formulations of spirit communications. Spiritualism marked a departure from previous views of hauntings as visitations from Purgatory, demonic activity, etc., framing spirit communications as desirable rather than unwanted.[18] Spiritualism as a discernable movement was inaugurated by the Hydesville events revolving around the Fox sisters in New York State in 1848. The two younger siblings, Margaretta and Catherine, received messages from a deceased and possibly murdered peddler in the form of rappings, the number of which at first acted as code for yes or no and eventually for the letters of the alphabet. Soon, the two, together with their older sister Leah acting as manager, held public séances demonstrating their gift, which quickly inspired other mediums to follow in their footsteps (Hammer 1999, 158-159; Frisk 1998, 32-33). The two central components of Spiritualism following the Fox sisters were, as Olav Hammer has argued (1999, 161), the mediated message itself (i.e., survival beyond bodily death) and its main format, séances. The latter gradually, as the century drew to a close, assumed more sensationalist forms (e.g., the appearance of ectoplasm, physical manifestations of spirits, levitating objects). Several attempts to critically assess Spiritualist phenomena were made in the nineteenth century, most notably investigations carried out by the Society for Psychical Research (e.g., Hammer 1999, 161-168; Palfreman 1979, 210), which I will return to shortly.

Early Spiritualism was characterized by a high degree of individualism and a lack of official creed on matters of philosophy, theology and politics (Hammer 1999, 170-171; cf. Owen 1989; Sanner 1995). Spiritualism was from its inception a stage upon or arena in which women, as Spiritualist mediums, could advance and amass both fame and fortune (Owen 1989, 1; Hammer 1999, 171). Essentialist gender roles, aligning with social class and notions of respectability, were both affirmed and subverted in ambiguous ways through mediumship (Owen 1989, 1-40; Faxneld 2020, 123). Central to the early success of Spiritualism was likely its dissemination – not only in the sense of Spiritualist creed but also as a channel for alleged spirit phenomena – through different media technologies (Faxneld 2020, 126; Hill 2011; Moberg 2016, 99).

Factors such as public scandals and the lack of robust organizations capable of reproducing themselves have been pointed out as decisive for the decline of Spiritualism from the time of the Second World War and onwards (e.g.,

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[17] I use the term Spiritualism in a general sense to encompass both the American and English variants of Spiritualism as well as the French and Latin-American variation Spiritism (cf. Hammer 1999, 172-175; Kalvig 2017, 30-31; Faxneld 2020, 124; Sanner 1995, 350).

[18] As Davies (2007, 71) put it: "It would seem that, until the rise of spiritualism in the nineteenth century, the main reason for wishing to encounter the dead was in order to banish them rather than to seek their spiritual guidance."

Kalvig 2015, 205). In Sweden, several small Spiritualist groups and associations had formed around the turn of the previous century (Carleson & Levander 2016, 524-525). Around the turn of the millennium, the major Spiritualist associations in Sweden could, taken together, count about a thousand members (Frisk 1998, 34). "Spiritualism as a distinct religious phenomenon" Carleson and Levander (2016, 532) wrote, "has […] lost much ground since the 1980s, despite the fact that several Swedish commercial television channels in the first years of the twenty-first century have presented popular shows with spiritualist themes." Anne Kalvig (2017, 27) has inferred that Spiritualism, or elements thereof, lives on in the form of an "unorganized folk religion" (Kalvig 2015, 207), mainly taking place outside of the boundaries of religious congregations and associations. The legacy of Spiritualism hence lives on by means of media, popular culture and as part of New Age or holistic spiritualities.

The two founders of the Theosophical Society, Helena Blavatsky and Henry Steel Olcott, were both engaged in Spiritualism prior to launching Theosophy, the former as a Spiritualist medium (Hammer 1999, 221-222; Campbell 1980). They would later, perhaps in a move motivated by rivalry, re-evaluate séances and spirit communications as misguided or even dangerous (Faxneld 2020, 127; Hammer 1999, 222-225). Theosophy would, compared to Spiritualism, contribute with paranormal claims steeped in Orientalist and distinctly non-Western vocabularies, such as belief in hidden, ascended Tibetan masters (with whom Blavatsky claimed to communicate), the tenet of karma and reincarnation, and the system of chakras, to mention just a few examples (Hammer 1999, 221; Sanner 1995, 296-301). Theosophy also synthesized elements from various strands of Western esotericism, such as Freemasonry, mesmerism, magic and kabbalah, claiming to reveal an ancient wisdom religion, or syncretistic core of truths, underlying all religions and philosophies (Hammer 1999, 223-225). Theosophical cosmology is a complex web of correspondences, in which the universe, including human kind, emanates through seven descending planes of existence: individuals as well as civilizations and, more controversially, human races aspire to ever greater degrees of spiritual complexity in an evolutionary scheme (Hammer 1999, 217-246; Frisk 1998, 36-42). Theosophy also popularized the notion of ancient lost civilizations, such as Atlantis and Lemuria, now part and parcel of alternative spirituality (Hammer 1999, 323). After Blavatsky's death, the Theosophical Society was shaken by conflict related to succession and competing claims to authority. The major remaining faction of Theosophy after Blavatsky was the Adyar Lodge, led by Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater, the latter popularizing belief in auras and chakras in the West as well as proclaiming the young Indian boy Jiddu Krishnamurti as the new "World Teacher" who would guide humanity through a new age and stage of spiritual evolution (Hammer 1999, 225-240; Frisk 1998, 36-39).

In Sweden, as was partly the case for Spiritualism, Theosophy gained sympathizers and followers across the different social strata, including the Swedish Parnassus (e.g., author Viktor Rydberg), nobility (e.g., Countess Constance Wachtmeister) and royalty (King Oscar II) (Petander 2016, 578-580). As was the case among Spiritualists, at least some Theosophists had a penchant for involvement in movements for social reform (Sanner 1995, 317). Like Spiritualism before it, Theosophy also provided an arena for women in which they could aspire to positions of spiritual authority and leadership, most notably through leaders such as Blavatsky, Bessant and Katherine Tingley, thereby challenging the relegation of women to the private sphere during the nineteenth century (e.g., Dixon 2001). As was the case globally, Swedish Theosophy was soon divided through schisms by the end of the nineteenth century (Frisk 1998, 37-38; Sanner 1995, 324). The Theosophical Society Adyar is still active in Sweden and had about 150 members in 2014 (Petander 2016, 584). Compared to its heyday, the present and future seem bleak for Theosophy, nationally as well as globally. Theosophy's influence on other alternative religious movements such as Anthroposophy and New Age spiritualities is, however, vast, long-lasting and difficult to overestimate (Hammer 1999; Frisk 1998).

1.2.4.2.   Psychical research and parapsychology

Psychical research, as the study of purportedly super- or paranormal phenomena, emerged alongside the excitement surrounding Spiritualism, Theosophy and the occult boom of the nineteenth century. Although paranormal claims had been scrutinized before (Palfreman 1979, 203-209), the founding of the British Society of Psychical Research (SPR) in 1882 marked a hitherto unmatched examination of extraordinary claims. The term psychic and psychical were coined in order to capture phenomena that were apparently contradicting the known laws of nature (Penman 2015). The history of psychical research and parapsychology rests upon the shoulders of three consecutive generations of psychical researchers, as argued by Egil Asprem (2014, 373): first, the circle around the founding fathers of the SPR during the 1880s; second, those seeking to establish a coherent research program before and after the First World War; and third, the generation of "*professional parapsychology*" in the 1930s. The first generation consisted of what were largely amateurs in the field of psychical research, their interest stemming from "a personal mission" (Allison 1979, 273), and therefore cannot be described as having been a research milieu following any coherent program. The second generation, described by Asprem as "pre-paradigmatic science," deepened entrenchments between pro-Spiritualist and pro-scientific camps, sometimes with remarkable

effect.[19] A few decades later, the third generation, with botanist-turned-psychical-researcher Joseph Banks Rhine at the helm, rebranded psychical research as parapsychology. Rhine and the forming of parapsychology also introduces the concept of extrasensory perception (ESP), which is the parapsychological equivalent to emic terms such as a sixth sense or second sight (e.g., Rhine 1934), encompassing phenomena such as telepathy, clairvoyance and precognition. Parapsychology was, and still is, characterized by experimental research designs and statistical analyses as well as other standardizing procedures (Allison 1979, 273-275). While psychical research remained indebted to Spiritualism, the introduction of parapsychology as a successor discipline mirrors the consolidation of an experimentalist and quantitative rather than qualitative research program informed by the burgeoning science of statistics (Asprem 2014, 349-350). Historically, David J. Hess argued, the transition from psychical research to parapsychology continues older disenchanting discourses:

> parapsychology represented a skeptical version of psychical research, and it can be viewed as yet one more development in the history of skeptical revisions of religion. In other words, parapsychology stood to psychical research as psychical research to Spiritualism, Spiritualism to Universalism and Swedenborgianism, those religions to conventional Protestantism, and even Protestantism to Catholicism. (Hess 1993, 25)

In another sense, however, psychical research and parapsychology, as argued by Asprem (2014a, 348), may be viewed as projects of (re)enchantment "[b]y moving certain of the claims and phenomena associated with religious and esoteric discourses into the laboratory." An open-ended naturalism was thus attempted (Asprem 2014a, 302), in which elements previously placed in the supernatural realm were placed within the purview of scientific investigation.

The earliest organizational attempt at psychical research in Sweden was the establishment of the Swedish Society for Psychic Research (Swe: Svenska Samfundet för psykisk forskning), founded in 1890 (Carleson & Levander 2016, 524; Nilsson & Bärmark 1972, 248). Medical doctors Alfred Backman and Poul Bjerre were early proponents and conducted investigations and experiments on hypnosis, somnambulism, clairvoyance and haunted houses (Nilsson & Bärmark 1972, 249-269). A notable contemporary example of parapsychology in Sweden is the Thorsen Chair in psychology, parapsychology and hypnology at Lund University (Lund University research portal, n.d.), currently held by Etzel Cardeña.

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[19] In Asprem's (2014, 334) words: "some of the most prominent first-generation figures had returned from the afterlife, quite literally haunting the second generation from beyond the grave. From their new vantage point, they were now prompting the next generation to go much further in the direction of spiritualism than they themselves had thought wise while alive."

Amateur paranormal investigations, or ghost hunts,[20] may furthermore be viewed as a popularized reiteration of nineteenth-century psychical research (e.g., Hanks 2019, 64; Eaton 2015, 390). Following the success of ghost-hunting reality shows, such as *Most Haunted* (2002-) and *Ghost Hunters* (2004-2016), ghost hunts as paranormal practices are becoming increasingly globalized and mediatized (Mayer 2013; Molle & Bader 2013; Ruickbie 2019).

1.2.4.3.   Ufology

There is a long pre-history to the modern UFO phenomenon: people have observed unexplained occurrences in the sky throughout all of recorded history (Clarke 2013, 79.) Two early waves of sightings were predominantly Scandinavian and Swedish, namely the ghost fliers and ghost rockets of the 1930s and 1940s (Denzler 2001, 7). Interpreting historical religious events (e.g., Ezekiel's vision) as UFOs is furthermore quite common within branches of ufology such as astro-archeology, according to which human civilizations have been visited by and have interacted with space aliens since the dawn of time (e.g., Rothstein 2001, 39-41). The modern UFO phenomenon entered common discourse in 1947 through private pilot Kenneth Arnold's report of nine disc-shaped objects in the skies above the Cascade Mountains, Washington State (Rothstein 2001, 11; Denzler 2001, 4). The acronym UFO, unidentified flying object, originates from classifications within the U.S. military, which from the 1940s onwards has conducted investigations of UFO reports, public and clandestine (Denzler 2001, 12; Cooper, Kean & Blumenthal 2017). In popular usage, the term UFO is often used as interchangeable with the concept of flying saucer. The latter was based on Arnold's descriptions of the movements of the unidentified objects he witnessed, which the press swiftly popularized (Clarke 2013, 79; Denzler 2001, 4). More recently, the acronym UAP (i.e., unidentified aerial phenomena) has been used by the U.S. military in their investigations of unknown phenomena in the airspace (Clarke 2013, 79; Cooper, Kean & Blumenthal 2017). The status of UFO research in the scientific community has generally been one of dismissal and ridicule since the phenomenon's inception, at least officially and in public, with the exception of a small minority of scientists (Denzler 2001, 74). There are, however, signs of change, such as the Galileo Project at Harvard University, which is explicitly dedicated to the search for extraterrestrial life, both on- and off-planet (Harvard, n.d.).

After the Second World War ended and the Cold War started, it was no longer the obvious choice to assume that UFOs were spacecraft operated by non-human intelligences. Instead, the E.T. hypothesis (i.e., interpreting at least some cases as extraterrestrial visitations) only gradually came to be the most common explanation (Clarke 2013, 80; Rothstein 2001, 29). In the 1950s, the ufological community started to divide into subtypes of materialist

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[20] Both terms used in the emic sense as well as in the etic sense.

and religionist factions (Rothstein 2001, 29-35; Denzler 2001, 67; Moberg 2015, 394). The former denote mainly nuts-and-bolts approaches to UFOs according to which they are viewed as objects of scientific investigation. Religionist ufology is instead associated with the emergence of contactee movements, that is, social and new religious movements centered around contactees, people who claim to have met extraterrestrials and are now spreading their existential and spiritual message. More sinister features, such as government cover-ups, incidents of cattle mutilations and alien abductions (i.e., the kidnapping of humans against their will) have become increasingly prominent within UFO lore in later decades (Rothstein 2001, 145-177; Denzler 2001, 10, 27. 34-67; Moberg 2015, 392; Bader 2003).

In Sweden, ufological groups started to crop up in the late 1950s (Östling 2015, 379; cf. Blomqvist 2010; Olsson 2013). The rivalry between materialist and religionist perspectives has been apparent in the Swedish setting as well, and the country has had its own share of contactees (Östling 2015).

1.2.4.4.   Cryptozoology

Like ghosts, belief in various forms of monsters and legendary creatures has accompanied humankind throughout history (Regal 2011, 2). Cryptozoology as an amateur- or pseudoscience (depending on who you ask) mainly took form in the twentieth century. In essence, cryptozoology denotes the belief "that some animals thought to have gone extinct still lurk in remote parts of the world, and that creatures once thought only to have existed as myths and legends have some basis in biological reality" (Regal 2011, 19). These creatures are called cryptids. Notable examples include the suspected primate(s) Sasquatch, Bigfoot and the Yeti, and plesiosaur and dinosaur descendants such as the Loch Ness Monster or the Mokele-Mbembe (Wikipedia "List of Cryptids", n.d.). Like ufology, cryptozoology can be viewed as a descendent of older naturalist research, in which gentleman amateurs engaged in either armchair or field research, prior to the professionalization of the natural sciences (Regal 2011, 11). The positive appraisal of amateurs and freethinkers standing against the pressures of scientific orthodoxy and the closed-mindedness of academic peers has been a salient feature of the self-image of several cryptozoologists (2011, 3, 26).[21] As is the case with ufology, members of the scientific establishment have occasionally engaged with the subject matter of cryptids, albeit as side projects (Regal 2011, 4-5, 168). A notable example of such an organization is the International Society of Cryptozoology, ISC. Sweden is, I

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[21] As stated by Regal (2011, 3): "The traditional heroic narrative of monster hunting situates mainstream scientists […] as the villains rejecting the existence of anomalous primates and cryptozoology as something unworthy of study, The narrative gives a privileged place to untrained, but passionate amateur naturalists […] who soldier on against great odds, including the unwarranted obstinacy of the mainstream against bringing knowledge of these creatures to light."

infer, marked by a relative scarcity in terms of both cryptids and cryptozoology. Sweden's most famous cryptid is arguably the Great Lake Monster (Wikipedia "Storsjöodjuret", n.d.).

1.2.4.5.   Comments on two concomitants: conspiracy theories and CAM

I will briefly discuss two other forms of unconventional, rejected (Webb 1974,1976) or stigmatized (Barkun 2013) knowledge claims that warrant our attention, namely conspiracy theories and alternative or complimentary medicine. This section serves to give the reader a very short orientation regarding these phenomena because of their claimed affinity and, perhaps more importantly, because the survey *Paranormal Sweden* included items on both conspiracism and alternative medicine.

Conspiracy theories[22] are gaining an increasing amount of attention in both public and academic debate (e.g., Harambam 2020; Lantian et al. 2016; Barkun 2001/2013). Michael Barkun (2013, 3-4) has suggested that conspiracy theories have three main characteristics, namely that nothing happens by accident, that nothing is as it seems, and that everything is connected (albeit in clandestine ways). In this dissertation, I will employ the concepts of conspiracy belief and conspiracism following both Barkun's (2013) and David G. Robertson's (2014) uses of the terms. According to the latter, conspiracy theory refers to "a discrete unit of belief" (Robertson 2014, 44) in any particular conspiracy while conspiracism denotes a larger construct, "a world-view made up of a number of interconnected conspiracy beliefs (Robertson 2014, 44)." Charlotte Ward and David Voas (2011) have pointed out relations between alternative religion and conspiracy theories as the bourgeoning research field of "conspirituality." Problematizing the novelty of this phenomenon, Asprem and Asbjørn Dyrendal (2015, 375-376) have demonstrated that conspiracy theories have long been an integral part of alternative religion and spirituality. Furthermore, it has been shown that positive statistical relationships exist between tendencies to conspiracy theoretical thinking and paranormal beliefs (e.g., Brotherton & French 2014 a, b). The status of conspiracy theories as rejected or stigmatized knowledge may furthermore be problematized as contingent, since conspiracism may be endorsed by elites, the mainstream and in some cases by states, such as the antisemitism of the Third Reich (e.g., Hagemeister 2022).

Since the 1970s, there has been an upsurge in complementary and alternative medicine (Bivins 2010, 1; Heelas & Woodhead 2005, 80, 167), or CAM, ranging from traditional South and East Asian medicine to homeopathy and

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[22] A conspiracy theory may provisionally be defined as "an unverified and relatively implausible allegation of conspiracy, claiming that significant events are the result of a secret plot carried out by a preternaturally sinister and powerful group of people" (Brotherton & French 2014, 238).

various forms of healing. In Sweden, between 14 and 71 percent of the population has some experience of CAM (Wemrell et al. 2017, 303-304). At least some CAM practices, not least various forms of healing, are arguably either paranormal or tangent to the paranormal, and variables on such phenomena have been included as indicators of alternative, holistic spirituality (e.g., Heelas & Woodhead 2005; Frisk, Höllinger & Åkerbäck 2014). Together with conspiracy theories and paranormal beliefs, CAM practices can furthermore be classified as at least partially rejected or stigmatized knowledge (Webb 1975, 1976; Barkun 2013). Furthermore, there is evidence (Van den Bulck & Custers 2009; Jeswani & Furnham 2010) suggesting that paranormal beliefs are fairly strongly associated with the support of CAM. It is worth noting that some CAM practices, such as acupuncture, are increasingly embraced by mainstream, orthodox medicine (Bivins 2010, 183-199).

1.3. A sociological vocabulary for paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences

> During my research, when asked by various people about the subject of my study, I found the easiest explanation was to tell them that I was studying people who are interested in "*X-files* stuff." This nearly always brought a nod of instant recognition and interest. (Northcote 2007, 48)

The above was shared by Jeremy Northcote in his study of contemporary paranormal debates. I agree with Northcote: referring to the long-running TV show *The X-Files* has at times been helpful. Some of the other concepts I have found useful when delimiting the paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences in question are "the unexplained," "unexplainable" or "mysteries." Most of these descriptions can be found in the section labeled as Bl, "contested phenomena" (Swe: Omstridda fenomen), in Swedish libraries, a section that many of my informants proved familiar with, it may be added. We, however, need to unpack "X-files stuff" or, in other words, the paranormal. In this subchapter, I present my choices for a working definition of the paranormal and beliefs, activities and experiences related to it, as well as attempts to classify sociologically social engagement with these matters.

1.3.1. Conceptualizing the paranormal

Most conceptualizations of the paranormal within disciplines such as sociology, psychology and religious studies latch onto a common, emic use of the term as referring to phenomena that are mysterious or unexplained in light of contemporary scientific explanations. Irwin (2009, 8-9, 16) has suggested that paranormal belief denotes a "proposition that has not been empirically attested

to the satisfaction of the scientific establishment" yet is advocated by a group or subculture. He continues:

> For these people, the belief is phenomenologically a part of their sense of reality and truth rather than 'a proposition they endorse'. Like other types of belief, a paranormal belief will be either intuitive or reflective; will have cognitive, affective and (sometimes) behavioural components; will be distinct from a value or simple statement of preference; will be relatively stable and thus somewhat resistant to the influence of counterargument; and will be dimensional, that is, marked by various degrees of endorsement between the poles of extreme scepticism and extreme gullibility. (Irwin 2009, 17)

In other words, one who believes in paranormal phenomena can be placed on a scale between doubt and affirmation, yet it makes little sense to talk about paranormal belief unless endorsement has some consequences, be they subjective or objective.

Erich Goode (2000, 19-20) also focused on the believer or practitioner, defining paranormalism as "a non- or extra-scientific approach to a phenomenon – a scientifically implausible event is believed to be valid and literally and concretely true." Robertson (2013, 60) has provided an inventory of examples of phenomena usually designated as paranormal:

> Popular definitions typically include psychic phenomena such as telepathy and clairvoyance, and alleged anomalous physical phenomena such as ghosts, crop circles, UFOs and reincarnation. Somewhat less common are cryptozoological animals such as the Yeti or Loch Ness monster, alternative medical therapies, and religious, mystical or magical practices, with Western Christian experience less likely to be included. It is worth noting that "normal" supernaturalism associated with religion (i.e. Christianity) is usually excluded from definitions of the paranormal, while scholars such as Irwin (2009) and Goode (2000) have included religious supernaturalism within the category.

In his doctoral dissertation, Sven-Eric Morhed (2000, 238) defined the paranormal by referring to its constituents, namely phenomena related to parapsychology, Spiritism, magic, traditional folk beliefs and astrology. For Bader et al. (2011, 24), the paranormal denotes beliefs, activities and experiences that are "dually rejected" by both mainstream science and institutional religion (cf. Robertson 2013, 61). Sjödin has argued along similar lines in his classification of paranormal or parascientific beliefs as deviant:[23]

> It remains a fact that Religion does not accept the paranormal as religion, and that Science does not approve of the claims of the paranormal to be based on some kind of science. Thus, in this sense, paranormal phenomena are regarded as deviant (1995, 48-49)

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[23] It is worth noting that neither Sjödin nor Bader et al. (2011) use deviance in a pejorative or normative sense.

Lars Ahlin (2001, 11) has approached alternative spirituality, conceptualized as New Age and folk religiosity, in a similar way, namely as ideas and practices that are outside of the confines of both institutionalized science and religion. Several of the beliefs (e.g., clairvoyance, ghosts, UFOs) Ahlin (2001) studied are arguably paranormal in nature. My own attempt at a working definition, an abbreviation of a conceptualization I have presented elsewhere (Tidelius 2020, 233), builds upon these arguments. It runs as follows:

> The paranormal refers to purported phenomena, or beliefs, activities and/or experiences related to these, which fall outside of the boundaries of current scientific explanation. These phenomena are marked by some degree of tension in relation to mainstream and institutionalized science and religion, and are to some extent rejected by both.

I further argue that sets or types of paranormal phenomena and the engagement surrounding them may best be viewed as prototypes. I base this view on the idea of family resemblances, most notably associated with the work of (the late) Wittgenstein, a theory which has been applied to the concept of religion by Benson Saler (1997, 2000). According to this approach, referents encompassed by a category are united through commonality and similarity rather than identity. The referents are thus *alike* to some extent. From Saler's (2000, 213) perspective, religion, thus viewed as a category, becomes a "pool of elements." Accordingly, phenomena under study are compared to prototypical examples, such as Christianity, Islam or Buddhism, that they may resemble to a lesser or greater degree. Phenomena can be classified as *more or less* religious (Saler 2000, 25). By analogy, referents within the category of the paranormal can be brought together in the same way through shared traits rather than a predefined set of strict criteria. Paranormal phenomena's status as at least partially rejected by science and religion is one such trait.

Based on the inventory of items usually designated as paranormal taken up in the preceding paragraphs, I derived five paranormal prototypes that are employed throughout this dissertation. I would like to stress that they are highly provisional in nature. Other researchers may define a different set of prototypes, and the borders between them are arguably porous. The prototypes' main merits are that they 1) encompass engagement surrounding most phenomena usually designated as paranormal and 2) help me create a sample frame of organizations to approach. The prototypes are: mediumistic practice; ghost hunts; cryptozoology; ufology; and parapsychology. Mediumistic practice and ghost hunts are mainly indebted to the emergence of Spiritualism discussed in the previous subchapter, while parapsychology is a successor of psychical research. The preceding chapter also demonstrated that cryptozoology and ufology have emerged as emic fields or subcultures in their own right. I will discuss sampling strategies in more detail in the third chapter.

Although I mostly refer to the ideas, practices and paraculture under study as paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences, I occasionally use the term the paranormal as shorthand for this wider set of phenomena. The social engagement surrounding paranormal phenomena, however, warrants further elaboration, and it is to this subject I now turn.

1.3.2. Paranormal cultures from the cultic milieu to paranormal practice

In this section, I discuss some of the main attempts made within social scientific research to classify engagement with paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences, ranging from nebulous milieus entangled with new religious movements and alternative spirituality in general to distinct movements.

One prominent example of the paranormal as part of a larger cultural milieu of heterodox ideas and practices is indebted to the sociological and theological church-sect taxonomies associated with authors such as Weber and Troeltsch (e.g., Dawson 2009). In *The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization*, Colin Campbell (1972) suggested *the cultic milieu* as a supplement to previous cult-typologies, building on the acknowledgement of cults as "loosely organized, ephemeral and espouses a deviant system of belief and practice" (Campbell 1972, 120).[24] The main argument Campbell (1972, 121) proposed is that these unstable groups come from a common space, "a milieu which, if not conducive to the maintenance of individual cults, is clearly highly conducive to the spawning of cults in general" (Campbell 1972, 121-122). The cultic milieu is hence the humus from which new cults grow, "absorbing the debris of the dead ones and creating new generations of cult-prone individuals to maintain the high levels of membership turnover" (Campbell 1972, 122). Although the cults themselves tend to be short-lived, the cultic milieu of seekers is not. The unifying principle making the cultic milieu a single whole and discernable entity is that all its referents are "heterodox or deviant items in relation to the dominant cultural orthodoxies" (Campbell 1972, 122, 126), most notably orthodox or institutional religion and science.

Another attempt to define engagement with the paranormal in relation to the extent to which it is rejected by established authorities and the degree of tension that exists between the two came from historian James Webb who, in *The Occult Underground* (1974) and *The Occult Establishment* (1976), proposed the category of *rejected knowledge* to denote views and practices adversarial to rationalism and secularism associated with the Enlightenment project. These boomed during the occult revival of the nineteenth century and its

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[24] Not to be confused with the later pejorative use of cult as more or less synonymous with a "bad" new religious movement (Beckford 2003; Dawson 2009).

"crisis of consciousness" following the upheavals of various revolutions (social, political, techno-scientific) (Webb 1976, 7). Webb defined the occult, and rejected knowledge, thusly:

> The occult is rejected knowledge. It may be knowledge which is actively rejected by an Establishment culture, or knowledge which voluntarily exiles itself from the courts of favor because of its recognized incompatibility with the prevailing wisdom. (1976, 191)

Judging from Webb's superabundance of empirical examples, the occult signifies most ideas and practices not commonly accepted, ranging from Freemasonry to Spiritualism, from psychical research to flying saucers. Essentially, rejected knowledge encompasses most unconventional or countercultural views and practices, united by their shared status of being dismissed, in effect resulting in a cultural wastebasket category (cf. Truzzi 1974, 245).

Almost 30 years later, Barkun (2013, 38; cf. Barkun 2001) argued that both the cultic milieu and rejected knowledge may be encompassed by a new category, namely *stigmatized knowledge claims*, or "knowledge claims that have not been validated by mainstream institutions" (Barkun 2013, 28) such as "universities, communities of scientific researchers, and the like" (Barkun 2013, 42). In short, stigmatized knowledge claims consist of "underground worldviews" which together form a "cultural dumping ground of the heretical, the scandalous, the unfashionable, and the dangerous" (Barkun 2013, 39). Although Barkun (2013, 38) was mainly interested in contemporary conspiracy theories, stigmatized knowledge includes various esoteric, occult, fringe and pseudo-scientific topics, ranging from folk medicine to astrology and ufology (Barkun 2013, 42-43). Like Campbell before him, Barkun (2013, 243) viewed this potpourri of stigmatized knowledge claims as upheld by distinct subcultures. Tommy Ramstedt has aptly drawn out the common rationale evident in Campbell's, Webb's and Barkun's social unit(s) thusly:

> These environments thrive on standing in opposition to the social and cultural mainstream; this is the main unifying force that brings adherents of forbidden or rejected knowledge together. (Ramstedt 2018, 32)

The issue with all these views is, however, that they may overstress the stigmatized character of the occult, the paranormal, etc. Problematizations of a relationship with the cultural mainstream characterized by tension and rejection were admittedly present back in Webb's work which, as the title *The Occult Establishment* (1976) implies, includes occult ideas that were once in vogue among elites. Partridge's (2004, 2006, 2013) concept of *occulture* evades this issue of tension and rejection, especially when conjoined with the term popular (i.e., *popular* occulture). Occulture is described as a pool of resources, or an "environment/reservoir/library of beliefs, ideas, meanings and

values" (Partridge 2004, 187) associated with the occult, Eastern religious and spiritual traditions, fringe science, the paranormal, etc. Occulture is not limited to any particular social forums, groups or movements but is open-ended and multipolar, hence avoiding the reliance on an underlying social unity behind the mishmash of heterodoxies as implied by Campbell's (1972, 122) cultic milieu. Popular occulture (2004, 123), or occulture as disseminated by means of popular culture and various media, furthermore highlights how previously esoteric, occluded or mystified social phenomena are now "ordinary and everyday" (Partridge 2014, 113). In a sense, then, occulture is characterized by its everyday character, being near-omnipresent as well as having lowered the stakes of engagement and decreased the state of tension between it and mainstream culture.

In common for all the hitherto presented theorizations of paranormal culture is that they all point at a general milieu or reservoir of ideas and practices. With the exception of occulture, these theorizations all characterize these ideas and practices as being marked by tension, rejection and stigma in relationship to authorities in the cultural mainstream. Other notable sociological typologies aimed at paranormal engagement have focused on discourse on paranormal phenomena and distinct paranormal subcultures. Hess (1993) suggested the term *paraculture* to denote any engagements with, contestation over and debate on paranormal phenomena. Hence, both advocates and adversaries (e.g., skeptics) are included in the paraculture. Together, the various agents – in Hess' (1993, 15) terminology the ideal types of New Agers, parapsychologists and skeptics – all share a distinct culture, which is connected to older discursive formations about knowledge and authority. Northcote (2007, vi) suggested the term *paranormal scene* to denote debates on paranormal phenomena, these scenes being settings "where people pursue their interest in paranormal topics, including participation in debates and other dealings with fellow participants." Like Hess, Northcote (2007, 55) argued that contemporary paranormal debates reproduce a certain doxa or "politics of truth" of unstated epistemic norms which reaches back to at least the seventeenth century. The term scene is also used by Ramstedt (2018) and by Ramstedt and Moberg (2015), albeit in a different way. In their use, scene is indebted to post-subcultural theorizations from the 1990s, originally aimed at studies of popular music culture. Ramstedt (2018, 58) defined alternative religious scenes thusly:

> as a particularly geographically located and structured spatial and discursive environment that brings together people who share an interest in or sensibility for a certain set of religious or spiritual ideas, teachings, and/or practices.

One such example is the Finnish fringe-knowledge scene known as *Rajatieto*, in which agents gather around a set of alternative spiritual and paranormal topics including a scenic infrastructure, such as magazines (Ramstedt 2018, 62). The theorization of scene further includes relationships of authority

through the term scenic capital, which simply denotes the "different forms of merit, reverence, or notoriety that certain people involved in a particular scene may accumulate or acquire in accordance with the logic of that scene (Ramstedt 2018, 62)."

Bader et al. (2011, 115) preferred the term subculture in their study of paranormal engagement, which was defined thusly: "A subculture is simply any group that possesses characteristics that distinguish it from the wider culture." Marc A. Eaton opted for the term idioculture - i.e., a shared system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, customs, goals and a sense of history (Eaton 2019, 157) - to designate ghost hunts.

Turning to the empirical cases of this dissertation, I argue that we may discern several subcultures, idiocultures or scenes having little to no contact with each other rather than a single one. However, as I am looking for a broader term encompassing *all* active engagement with the paranormal prototypes suggested in the preceding subchapter, I opt for the term paranormal paraculture. In my usage, the paranormal paraculture encompasses several organizations, subcultures and communities aligning with the suggested paranormal prototypes.

Within the purview of this dissertation, adversarial agents such as skeptics are not studied, but they may be viewed as part of the paraculture as well, in line with Hess' (1993) argument. Although paranormal paraculture by definition becomes part of occulture – a cultural reservoir encompassing all kinds of ideas and practices related to the occult, the paranormal, alternative religion, etc. – I will reserve the use of occulture for specific theoretical purposes presented in the next chapter.

To summarize my use of terms, I use paranormal paraculture to denote social engagement with the paranormal prototypes suggested. Besides this nomenclature on paranormal culture, some other important concepts need consideration, and this is the task to which I will now turn.

1.3.3. Other key terms

I will conclude this chapter by briefly discussing, though not always defining, some other terms of mostly sociologically provenance that are used intermittently throughout the dissertation. These are religion, authority, institution and socialization.

It is beyond the scope and aim of this dissertation to study *religion* and *spirituality*, or any of their referents, per se, yet, as this is a dissertation written within the sociology of religion, the categories merit some comments. Following James Beckford (2003, 3), I am more interested in emic and etic uses of the term religion and the "processes whereby the meaning of the category of religion is […] intuited, asserted, doubted, challenged, rejected, substituted, re-cast," without making any contribution of my own to the conceptual debate.

Although I do not base any arguments on a coherent conceptualization of religion, Bruce's (2002, 2) substantive definition covers the most common features implied by the term:

> beliefs, actions and institutions predicated on the existence of entities with powers of agency (that is, gods) or impersonal powers or processes possessed of moral purpose (the Hindu notion of karma, for example), which can set the conditions of, or intervene in, human affairs.

When I refer to religion in this dissertation, it is usually accompanied by terms such as institutional and institutionalized. When I refer to *institutional religion*, I mainly mean religion and religiosity in the form of churches, denominations and other faith communities. This use of the term overlaps with what Woodhead (2012a, b) in a set of essays suggested as *reformation style religion*. This roughly denotes "a clerically led community, affirming unchanging dogma, participating in prescribed rituals, and holding conservative social attitudes" (Woodhead 2012 a, 1). Woodhead's (2012 a) argument is that reformation style religion is giving way to new, idiosyncratic forms of religion that transgress the boundaries of the former. According to Woodhead (2012 a, 2), this shift can be viewed as a transition towards "everyday, lived religion" and various forms of spirituality. As sociologist of religion Day (2013, 158) has noted, there are furthermore many overlaps between the paranormal and several concepts in use within the sociology of religion:

> I was particularly struck by a prevailing tendency within the sociology of religion to stretch the definition of religion to include a wide variety of phenomena, much of which I would describe as paranormal. Scholars often defined paranormal experiences as religious or spiritual, renaming them as folk, common, invisible or implicit.

It may furthermore be stated that such attempts to "stretch the definition" have a long history within the sociology of religion. As founding father Émile Durkheim (2001, 36) stated concerning folklore in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* over a century ago:

> In general they are the debris of vanished religions, disorganized remnants; but some are formed spontaneously under the influence of local causes […] maypole festivals, the summer solstice, carnival, various beliefs relating to genies and local demons, and so on. A definition that fails to take them into account would not cover everything religious.

Such an approach may easily be extended to encompass contemporary paranormal culture, yet I am not invested in classifying any of the paranormal prototypes in the paraculture as religion.

The point of this digression is mainly to state that paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences are more easily distinguished from institutional religion and less so from alternative religion and spirituality. The latter warrants elaboration. As the introduction to Campbell's (1972) concept of the cultic milieu and Partridge's (2004, 2006, 2013) occulture made clear, the paranormal has frequently been viewed as either part of or tangent with a general alternative religious and spiritual milieu. It is worth mentioning that, although I have approached paranormal paraculture as something that occurs outside of the confines of both institutional religion and science, some of the paranormal prototypes may fit within more nebulous terms from the sociology of religion. Mediumistic practice, for instance, qualifies as in between Stark and Bainbridge's (1979) terms audience[25] and client cults.[26] With *authority*, I refer to, building upon Max Weber (1968, 212), "the probability that certain specific commands […] will be obeyed by a given group of persons." It is hence a quality of command and influence over others that some agents hold, a command, it may be added, that others most likely willingly follow. Compliance (Weber 1968, 212) may follow from any number of motives. In this dissertation, however, I am mainly interested in *epistemic authority*, a term that I will return to in the second chapter.

Although I will present my understanding of the concept of *practice* and practices in the second chapter, I will for now settle for a shorter working definition. Practices denotes routinized and "organized nexuses of activity" (Schatzki 2001, 55). By contrast, activity simply denotes any*thing* that agents may do in a more commonsense or everyday use of the term. In this dissertation, I differentiate practices as nexuses of organized activities from the more modest and discrete use of the words activity and activities. Whenever I write about paranormal practice, I am informed by practice theory approaches, while paranormal activities simply denotes any particular thing, implicating paranormal phenomena, that agents may engage with. Practice is hence used in a more analytical and theoretically informed sense.

Building upon this use of practice, Anthony Giddens has argued that the "practices which have the greatest time-space extension" in society are *institutions* (Giddens 1984, 24). As put by Engelstad et al. (2022, 3), an institution can be defined as "a set of rules or norms regulating the behavior of individuals, as well as organizations and other corporate actors." Accordingly, I view institutions as norm-, value- or rule-governed social formations (cf. Lövheim

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[25] Audience cults denotes loose assemblies of organization around some practice, for instance, attending lectures or subscribing to magazines devoted to specific topics: "there are virtually no aspects of formal organization to these activities, and membership remains at most a consumer activity (Stark & Bainbridge 1979, 126)."

[26] Client cults denotes organizations in which "those promulgating cult doctrine and those partaking of it most closely resembles the relationship between therapist and patient, or between consultant and client (Stark & Bainbridge 1979, 126)." Unlike sects and cult movements (such as most new religious movements), audience and client cults are usually compatible with continued affiliation with other religious organizations.

& Nordin 2022, 23). One important aspect of this sociological use of the term institution is that it becomes, to quote Glock and Stark (1965, 4), "a stable property of groups to such a degree that it will be maintained even though the personnel of the group continues to change." Accordingly, institutions, although not static, outlive the actors that uphold them. Examples of institutions include certain domains or segments of the social world, such as the family system, religion and media, which can further be subdivided into more specified divisions (cf. Engelstad et al. 2022, 4). This departs from the popular use of institution as synonymous with specific organizations.

Although socialization theory is not discussed in its own right, *socialization* is nevertheless implied by theorizations such as occulture, as the second chapter will show. With socialization, I refer to the process whereby "individuals selectively acquire skills, knowledge, attitudes, values and motives current in the groups of which they are or will become members" (Sewell 1992, 155). It may further be described as the adoption of certain roles in particular social settings.

Chapter 2. Previous research and theory

This chapter has two main sections, the first of which presents previous social scientific research on paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences, while the second introduces the theoretical framework of the study.

2.1. Previous research: Social scientific studies of paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences

In this subchapter, social scientific studies of paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences are introduced. An inclusion criterion is that the studies treat paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences as distinctly *social phenomena*. This entails that contributions to the debate on whether or not paranormal phenomena are *real* are mainly left aside. As a consequence, debates between, for instance, paranormal believers and skeptics (Hess 1993; Northcote 2007) are excluded. Furthermore, studies on distinct religious and spiritual movements and currents are left out, with the exception of some studies that have approached paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences as indicative of alternative spirituality. Needless to say, I am strategic rather than exhaustive in this literature review.

This subchapter is grouped into four main sections. First, I present studies on relationships between the paranormal, media and popular culture. Next, I follow up with a selection of studies on specific paranormal prototypes, such as ghost hunters: I refer to this subsection in shorthand as case studies. Thereafter follows a section on studies of alternative spirituality that have included paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences as indicative of this. Lastly, I introduce studies that have focused on the emergence, distribution and contents of paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences in a more general and sociological sense – in other words, those studies that are closest in proximity to my own research design. Prior to this literature review, however, I will briefly discuss psychological studies of paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences. Although these studies focus on, for instance, personality and cognition, and therefore stand apart from sociological approaches that emphasize the phenomena's social characteristics, they nonetheless warrant some attention.

As stated above, research debating the reality of paranormal phenomena is excluded from this literature review. This includes invested perspectives such as parapsychology and anomalistic psychology (e.g., French et al. 2009; French & Wilson 2008; French & Brotherton 2013, 2014). I will instead briefly recapitulate some of the main findings pertaining to psychological and cognitive aspects of paranormal beliefs. I strongly suggest that the interested reader consult Irwin's (2009) comprehensive literature review, *The Psychology of Paranormal Beliefs*, which is an essential and exhaustive presentation of mainly psychological empirical studies up to the date of its publication. Irwin (2009) has straightforwardly summarized the main psychological and cognitive theories explaining paranormal beliefs, which have all gained some support, albeit to varying degrees. First, acceptance of paranormal beliefs has been explained by the social marginality hypothesis. In short, these perspectives predict that paranormal beliefs appeal to socially marginalized, non-privileged strata (e.g., lower socioeconomic class, women, minorities) (Irwin 2009, 51-66). Second, what Irwin calls the worldview hypothesis entails that paranormal beliefs indicate a highly subjectivist worldview associated with religiosity and esotericism as well as a sense of being vulnerable to external forces (Irwin 2009, 67-76). Third, the cognitive deficits hypothesis states that paranormal believers are "illogical, irrational, credulous, uncritical and foolish" (Irwin 2009, 77). In other words, these explanations turn to (erroneous) peculiarities of human cognition, such as the (in)ability to assess probability, memory, styles of reasoning, attributional style, tendencies to dissociativity and fantasy proneness (Irwin 2009, 77-89). Irwin (2009, 92-104) furthermore presented studies that have sought explanations for paranormal beliefs in psychodynamic functions and characteristics of the believers, including dysfunction (e.g., alienation, anxiety), vulnerability (e.g., schizotypy), pathology (e.g., depression, narcissism), trauma and personality types having a higher need for a sense of control. Irwin (2009, 111) furthermore proposed his own theory according to which paranormal beliefs are often held implicitly and unconsciously. Accordingly, paranormal beliefs and their corresponding behaviors are situational and need to be activated, which can be prompted by a range of contextual circumstances. Generally, the latter are stressors, that is, circumstances that have stressful or disconcerting effects, varying from everyday life events to major traumatic events (Irwin 2009, 113). Paranormal beliefs and concomitant behaviors oftentimes serve to alleviate such contextual stress by establishing a sense of mastery over life events seemingly outside of one's control (Irwin 2009, 119).

It is worth mentioning that several quantifiable measurements of paranormal beliefs have been attempted, out of which Tobacyk and Milford's (1983) *Paranormal Belief Scale* and later the *Revised Paranormal Belief Scale* (Tobacyk 2004) are probably the ones most commonly used. Among other fairly recent results, Lindeman and Aarnio (2007) have argued, on the basis of a

Finnish survey, that those who believe in magic, superstitions and the paranormal mix up, in contrast to skeptics, phenomena of different ontological categories (i.e., mental, physical and biological entities), resulting in ascriptions of intentionality to phenomena that lack it. These results have been partially supported by an experimental study in which believers' brainwaves were compared to those of skeptics following exposure to semantic stimuli (Lindeman et al. 2008).

2.1.1. The paranormal, media and popular culture

In this first subchapter of the literature review, I present prior findings on the relationships between media and popular culture and paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences. Many studies have of course been conducted regarding representations of paranormal phenomena *in* popular culture and media, but in this subchapter, I exclusively include studies that relate back to the formation of paranormal beliefs or what informs paranormal practice among practitioners. The reader interested in portrayals of the paranormal may consult the anthologies edited by Jenzen and Munt (2013) and Caterine and Morehead (2019) as points of departure.

Partridge's (2004, 2006, 2013) conceptualization and study of occulture, introduced more fully later in this chapter, needs to be mentioned in relation to research on the paranormal, media and popular culture. As signaled by the use of the word popular, Partridge (2013, 116) aimed to capture how occultural themes are "feeding and being fed by popular culture," resulting in at least a partial mainstreaming or "ordinariness of occulture." The two- volume *The Reenchantment of the West* (2004, 2006) is a vast catalogue of interactions between esotericism, the paranormal and alternative religion on the one hand and culture in general on the other. Another example from the early 2000s is Lynn Schofield Clark's *From Angels to Aliens: Teenagers, the Media, and the Supernatural* (2003), which deals with how American teens engage with representation of the supernatural and paranormal in popular culture.

Andrea Molle and Christopher Bader (2013) have explored some recent developments in the representations of paranormal phenomena common to both fictional and non-fictional works due to changes in paranormal discourse from the 1970s onwards. In tandem with results from *Paranormal America* (Bader et al. 2011), Molle and Bader (2013, 124) have argued that this is an expression of an emergent subculture of paranormal discovery, characterized by an increased use of scientific language, jargon and technology among its participants, a democratization of paranormal investigations and the growing availability of paranormal experiences. Unlike the practices associated with New Age and alternative spiritual beliefs, investigations of hauntings, UFOs and cryptids such as Bigfoot are increasingly framed in science-like vocabularies (Moller & Bader 2013, 125). Furthermore, these vocabularies and tech-

niques are usually expressed in contradistinction to the elite culture of professional scientists and academia, which makes paranormal investigations the subject of both popularization and democratization (Moller & Bader 2013, 126). The availability of paranormal experiences not only refers to an ever-increasing list of cryptids or number of abductees but also to the fact that several investigatory techniques are aimed at producing or invoking paranormal phenomena directly:

> Simply put, paranormal investigators used to chase the phenomena but over time have developed techniques designed to bring the phenomena to them. Bigfoot hunters blast Bigfoot screams, knock pieces of wood together, place pheromone chips in trees, and otherwise attempt to attract any Bigfoot in the vicinity to their location. Some UFO hunters engage in 'sky watches', which may involve flashing lights in the sky or meditating, in an attempt to facilitate communication with extraterrestrials. Ghosthunters entice nearby spirits to communicate by asking them to implant their voices on a voice recorder (electronic voice phenomena or EVP) or, similarly, communicate by lighting up a flashlight or LED bulb in response to questions. From this perspective, any tract of woods may be tested for the presence of Bigfoot. Any abandoned building might have ghosts waiting to register a message on a recording device. And the hill outside of town is as good a spot as any to try to draw down flying saucers. (Moller & Bader 2013, 127)

Furthermore, the culture of paranormal discovery is not restricted to the U.S. but has spread across the globe, as the authors illustrate by using Italy as a case. The paranormal investigations cropping up in Italy closely resembles those in the U.S., which implies a globalization of paranormal practice and, to some degree, an Americanization of paranormal culture (Moller & Bader 2013, 128).

There are a few Nordic studies on relationships between the paranormal, media and popular culture. Ahlin's (2001) dissertation on the New Age milieu aimed to explain the distribution of alternative spiritual motifs in the Swedish press. Although Ahlin's (2001) viewed the material he analyzed as expressions of New Age spirituality and folk religiosity, some of the phenomena included are distinctly paranormal, such as clairvoyance, ghosts and UFOs. As part of a larger study on the visibility of religion in Nordic media, Knut Lundby et al. (2018) included representations of alternative spiritual and paranormal themes in lifestyle magazines. A conclusion was (Lundby et al. 2018, 216) that coverage of alternative spiritual and paranormal phenomena had increased over the past 20 years. Jessica Moberg (2015 a, 2016, 2019) has in several publications studied popular Spiritism in popular culture, namely the emergence and portrayals of Spiritualist mediums in paranormal or occult reality shows such as *The Unknown* (Swe: *Det okända*, 2004-2019, Wikipedia n.d., 'Det okända'), with a focus on how media genres influence the forms and contents of mediumistic practice. One such example is how the practice of house cleansing (e.g., abating or resolving hauntings by helping spirits over to

the other side), a chief ingredient in shows such as *The Unknown*, was not a common practice among mediums prior to the show's existence (Moberg 2015, 17-19; 2019, 118).

Only a few attempts have been made to measure the influence of media consumption on paranormal beliefs. Irwin (2009, 31-33) recapitulated prior findings on the influence of socialization for the formation of paranormal beliefs and inferred that, out of all institutions, media may be the most effective in priming people to accept paranormal beliefs, although the data in support of this claim is hitherto scant. Sparks et al. (1997), building on previous experimental research (Sparks et al. 1994), tried to assess the influence of paranormal media on the formation of paranormal beliefs through an American survey. Sparks et al.'s (1997, 348) main hypothesis was that the viewing of TV shows containing paranormal representations is positively correlated with paranormal beliefs (Sparks et al. 1997, 348). The hypothesis was corroborated by regression analyses, although the effect of consuming paranormal TV shows proved to be small, with a mere 6 percent of the variance within paranormal beliefs being explained by the independent variable (Sparks et al. 1997, 355). The results were largely replicated in Sparks and Miller (2001). Following the release of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence's *Preliminary Assessment of UAP*, or UFO phenomena, in 2021, Stise et al. (2023) have more recently hypothesized that consumption of paranormal reality TV, outlet-specific TV news (i.e., Fox News), YouTube and podcasts (i.e., *The Joe Rogan Experience*) may predict greater levels of UFO belief in the U.S. All of these variables significantly predicted higher overall levels of UFO belief, while demographic background variables (e.g., gender, race, socioeconomic class) did not (Stise et al. 2023, 9).

2.1.2. Case studies on paranormal culture

Various studies have been carried out on particular paranormal groups and subcultures, such as ghost hunters and ufologists. In this subchapter, I introduce this body of research, with no claim to be exhaustive. I furthermore leave out studies of particular religious and spiritual movements in line with previously discussed delimitations. It is worth mentioning that both Bader et al.'s (2011) *Paranormal America* and Robertson's (2013, 2014) work include fieldwork in paranormal settings. These studies are discussed elsewhere in this dissertation.

Gerhard Mayer (2013) has studied ghost hunts in both American and European settings, using a combination of methods and materials. Mayer (2013) drew a distinction between ghost-hunting groups and parapsychologists, the latter of which are (at least in some settings) professional and trained scientists, while ghost hunters are mainly hobbyists. Although ghost-hunting groups in part can be traced back to psychical research, contemporary practice is heavily indebted to ghost-hunting reality TV (Mayer 2013, 366). Mayer

(2013, 374) furthermore argued that German ghost-hunting groups are increasingly adopting approaches associated with American paranormal TV, which I infer as an indication of an ongoing globalization, Americanization and mediatization of the field of ghost hunting.

In the article *A Social Anthropology of Ghosts in Twenty-First Century America*, Joseph Baker and Christopher Bader (2014) presented results of fieldwork on three ghost-hunting groups in the U.S. Some notable themes that emerged are: appeals to science as common strategies for legitimizing ghost-hunting practice; a general proclivity among participants to engage with several supernatural, alternative spiritual and conventional Christian beliefs and practices simultaneously; extensive use of technological apparatuses; and the centrality of narratives about paranormal experiences, both the participants' own and those of others (Baker & Bader 2014, 579-584).

Marc Eaton (2015, 2018) has shown that ghost hunts are spiritually meaningful to most of their participants and should be viewed in the light of an individualization and pluralization of a spiritual marketplace (2015, 393; cf. Roof 1999). Eaton (2015, 394) engaged in participant observation as a paranormal investigator himself. On the basis of the investigators he met, Eaton problematized the dichotomy between paranormal discovery and enlightenment suggested by Bader et al. (2011), suggesting that these modes of engagement tend to coexist (Eaton 2015, 398). Michelle Hanks (2016 a, b; 2019) conducted fieldwork among ghost hunters in England, the results of which she published in several articles. The U.K.-based ghost hunters under study generally employed both technologies (i.e., machines) and Spiritualist mediums during their investigations. Hanks made some astute observations about the views of science implied in modern ghost hunts, which to a great deal rely on technology:

> paranormal investigators embrace an idealized, technologically mediated understanding of science as a means of producing ultimate truth. […] Machines[…] seem to offer highly objective views of the world. Drawing on these persistent understandings of machines, paranormal investigators heavily rely on their technologies, such as EMF readers and digital cameras, in their attempts to query the paranormal. Investigators hope that such machines will either capture direct evidence of a paranormal event, such as a ghost caught on film, or that they will provide corroboration for investigators' own experiential senses, such as verifying that an investigator had in fact walked into an empirically colder are of a room. By using these machines, they hope to produce objective evidence regarding the paranormal. (Hanks 2016a, 265)

An additional argument made by Hanks is that questions of uncertainty and doubt stands in the foreground as a defining feature of the ghost hunters' "epistemological project" (Hanks 2016 b, 813). Hanks also observed the ghost hunters' use of humor (e.g., self-effacing anecdotes) as a way for them to ne-

gotiate their proximity to and distance from rationality as a dominant epistemic value in the West: "these enactments of humor discursively constitute investigators as rational, sane researchers while also deflecting potential criticisms of their enterprise" (2016 a, 263).

Lastly on the topic of ghost hunters, Leo Ruickbie (2019) has attempted to assess the demographic profiles of ghost hunting groups through surveys targeting the subculture. Some key findings pertaining to ghost hunters in the U.S., the U.K. and, to a lesser extent, Germany, France, Poland and Sweden include a slight male predominance, an average age of 43 and a lack of an occupational pattern: the ghost hunters "came from all walks of life" (Ruickbie 2019, 95).

Ufology has been the object of several studies from Festinger et al.'s (1956) classic *When Prophecy Fails* onwards. In *The Lure of the Edge*, Brenda Denzler (2001) portrays the (predominantly) American UFO community existing in the intersection between scientific and spiritual outlooks and its history from Kenneth Arnold's sighting in 1947 onwards. Anne Cross (2004) has studied the American UFO community through participant observation. One of her main contributions is showing how science, or the rhetoric of science, is repackaged by ufologists in order to legitimate their field by means of the emulation and democratization of scientific approaches (Cross 2004). In *American Cosmic* (2019), Diana Walsh Pasulka presents results from fieldwork carried out among ufologists recruited from elite segments of the American population, such as scientists and entrepreneurs, thereby illustrating that the UFO phenomenon is hardly a fringe topic for outcasts. There are a few examples of studies of Swedish ufology. Jessica Moberg (2015) has taken an interest in the "indigenization" or adaptation of the international UFO myth into a particularly Swedish setting, while Erik Östling has written, among other UFO-related topics, about prominent contactee Sten Lindgren. I myself (Olsson 2013) studied the emergence of a pro-scientific profile of a ufological organization in an undergraduate thesis.

Anne Kalvig's (e.g., 2017, 2019) studies of contemporary Norwegian Spiritualism deserve to be mentioned. Going beyond Spiritualism in the form of faith congregations, Kalvig, who has approached Spiritualist practices as instances of "unorganized folk religion" (2017, 27) and "popular spiritualism" (2019), has conducted fieldwork among mediums and their clients.

Approaches to the paranormal as part of a more general milieu or culture of alternative religion and spirituality are hardly uncommon. Although several of these studies fall outside of the scope of this literature review, the field in general, as well as a selection of studies, warrants some comments, and this is the subject to which I now turn.

2.1.3. Overlapping phenomena: Paranormal phenomena approached in studies of alternative religion, spirituality and superstition

Paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences have occasionally been studied as expressions of, inter alia, the New Age movement (e.g., Heelas 1996b; Hanegraaff 1996), alternative religion and spirituality (e.g., Partridge 2004, 2006; Ramstedt 2018) and superstition (Torgler 2007). Such studies are recapitulated here, insofar as their scope is a more general form of alternative religious and spiritual milieu rather than any specific movement.

Robert Wuthnow's (1976) examination of the social determinants of astrology is an early example that sits on the border between studies of alternative spirituality and paranormal beliefs. Wuthnow (1976, cf. 1978) set out to test if the countercultural (i.e., astrology as more common among countercultural youth) or marginality (i.e., astrology as more common among marginalized or deprived strata) hypothesis fared better in light of a Californian survey conducted in 1973. The marginalization hypothesis gained the most support.[27] Wuthnow (1976) further found that the relationship between astrology and church attendance was negative.

Based on an American survey conducted in 2001, William Sims Bainbridge tested two hypotheses concerning alternative spirituality's relationship to conventional religion. The first stated that conventional religion competes with "para-religious or pseudoscientific phenomena" (including paranormal beliefs), resulting in a negative relationship, while the other predicts positive associations due to an affinity with supernaturalism (Bainbridge 2004, 381-382). The latter hypothesis gained the most support, implying favorable and open-ended relationships between conventional religion and para-religion, especially among the unchurched (Bainbridge 2004, 392).

Tony Glendinning's (2006) study, based on a 2001 survey, of relations between religion and other nonmaterialist beliefs in Scotland is another example of such an approach. Although Glendinning (2006, 591) found clear correlations between religiosity and non-conventional beliefs and experiences, regular churchgoers were less likely to affirm non-conventional items.

Questions related to the paranormal have furthermore been included in some large-scale survey studies, such as the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), the European Value Survey (EVS), and Religious and Moral

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[27] Wuthnow (1976, 163) summarizes the main findings thusly: "It was the uneducated more than the educated, ethnic minorities more than whites, women more than men, broken marriages more than persons leading conventional married lives, persons out of work more than persons working, the overweight more than persons of average weight, and persons bothered a lot by loneliness, work problems, health problems, and problems of grief more than persons not bothered by such worries who exhibited the greatest amount of interest in their horoscopes and were most likely to believe in the claims of astrology."

Pluralism (RAMP). For instance, the 1981 EVS included the following question:

Did you ever have any of the following experiences?: A) Felt as though you were in touch with someone when they were far away from you; B) Seen events that happened at a great distance as they were happening; C) Felt as though you were really in touch with someone who had died; D) Felt as though you were close to a powerful, spiritual life force that seemed to lift you out of yourself. (EVS Question 228, wave 1981)

In the ISSP religion study, several variables denoted by Benno Torgler (2007) as "superstition" were included, that is: good luck charms sometimes do bring good luck; some fortune tellers really can foresee the future; some faith healers do have God-given healing power; and a person's star sign at birth, or horoscope, can affect the course of their future. The second and fourth quite clearly aim to measure beliefs in divination. Some of his main findings were that women are more superstitious than men and that older age shows a negative relationship with the indicators of superstition. Results regarding socioeconomic class were ambiguous as the lowest income group was the least prone to accept superstitions while higher levels of education resulted in lower degrees of superstition. Results concerning religion were ambiguous as well: religious engagement (voluntary work in particular) covaried negatively with superstition, while religious belief showed a positive relationship with superstition (Torgler 2007, 729).

Using ISSP data, Botvar (2009) has approached alternative religion and spirituality from the viewpoint of its political potential, asking whether or not it may represent a new political cleavage in the Norwegian setting. Botvar (2009), however, answered the question in the negative. Furthermore, he showed that the segments of the population that affirm alternative spiritual beliefs are not identical with those who place great value on spirituality in general, although that has often been assumed to be the case (Botvar 2009, 382). Instead, Norwegian religiosity is characterized by three main groups, namely traditional Christianity, spirituality and New Age spirituality (Botvar 2009, 386). In other words, two alternative spiritual blocks coexist, out of which one is the "avantgarde" (cf. Botvar & Henriksen 2010, 70) associated with the former New Age movement, while the other resembles a more general alternative spiritual and folk religious milieu. These results were apparent in Botvar and Henriksen's (2010) analysis as well. The spiritual avantgarde and those belonging to the more general spiritual milieu furthermore differed regarding some key demographic factors: the avantgarde, unlike those affirming spiritual beliefs in a more general sense, appealed more to higher socioeconomic strata, and they were less subject to conventional religious socialization (Botvar and Henriksen 2010, 71, 78). Botvar further demonstrated that belief in astrology, fortune telling and reincarnation had declined somewhat in recent decades (Botvar 2009, 380).

Turning to Sweden, Ahlin's (2001, 2005) research on New Age and folk religious beliefs warrants mentioning. In his dissertation (Ahlin 2001), Ahlin found, on the basis of analyses of texts from weekly newspapers, that non-conventional, alternative religiosity in Sweden may be subdivided into two main types, namely folk religiosity and New Age. Ahlin (2005, 273) followed up on these findings with a randomized survey in 1999 and 2000. Alternative spirituality was measured by indicators such as belief in reincarnation, divination, astrology, ESP phenomena (e.g., telepathy, clairvoyance), alternative medicine and hauntings (Ahlin 2005, 91-92). According to Ahlin (2005, 89, 92), all such beliefs have in common a view of individuals as passive objects of external and more-than-human powers. I see reason to object to this inference but will restrict myself to posing this question: Why would someone consult mediums and astrologers or try to produce experiences of ESP if these practices do not help the individual (re)gain some degree of control over these more-than-human forces? That said, Ahlin (2005, 148, 159) found that these forms of folk religiosity were overrepresented among women and those who expressed a higher degree of feelings of powerlessness and, to a lesser extent, among lower income groups and younger people. Furthermore, factors such as religious socialization were demonstrated to have no effect on folk religious beliefs (Ahlin 2005, 220). Another notable finding was that these indicators of folk religiosity seemed compatible with traditional religiosity, with the exception of regular attendance at worship services (Ahlin 2005, 68, 102).

The aforementioned Enköping Study (Swe: Enköpingsstudien) is based on a wide-spanning survey that was distributed to residents of Enköping Municipality at the start of the millennium. Several alternative spiritual beliefs, activities and experiences (e.g., yoga, astrology and divination, experiences of contact with the dead) were included. As previously stated, Bromander (2008, 99-100) and Laghé (2008, 152) found that these New Age phenomena in fact covaried with conventional Christian religiosity.

In a study from around the turn of the millennium, Höllinger and Smith (2002) compared student populations in ten countries (five European, five American) in regard to their levels of religious and esoteric beliefs as well as engagement with corresponding practices. Esotericism was operationalized through a range of "occult beliefs" (e.g., nature spirits, contact with the dead, healing, telepathy) and "New Age activities" (e.g., fortune telling, horoscopes, alternative medicine) (Höllinger & Smith 2002, 234). In addition to noting a general female overrepresentation among believers, Höllinger and Smith (2002, 239) also found that both religious and occult beliefs were more common in Latin America and the U.S. compared to Europe. Concerning New Age practices, results were complex. Asian-inspired techniques (e.g., acupuncture, meditation) were more common in Western European student groups and in larger Latin American cities, while practices such as fortune telling were more prominent in Latin America. Although the levels of occult beliefs were high in the U.S., the use of alternative medicine was lower than

in Western Europe and Latin America, while more U.S. students had consulted fortune tellers and astrologers (Höllinger and Smith 2002, 239). The results pointing to greater U.S. numbers for certain esoteric variables, Höllinger and Smith (2002, 245-246) argued, can partly be explained by deprivation theory: U.S. life trajectories are more vulnerable and existentially insecure compared to those in Western European states.[28] Overall, however, the study pointed to the coexistence of contradictory patterns.

Jeffrey Kripal has addressed the paranormal in several works, such as *Mutants and Mystics: Science Fiction, Superhero Comics, and the Paranormal* (2015), which discusses representations of paranormal phenomena and abilities in popular culture (e.g., science fiction, comics), and *Authors of the Impossible* (2011), which contains case studies of anomalistic scholars such as Charles Fort. However, as Kripal strives to conjoin studies of the paranormal as social phenomena and the reality of paranormal phenomena,[29] his contribution to this dissertation remains limited. According to Kripal's (2011, 9) view, the paranormal denotes "the sacred in transit from the religious and scientific registers into a parascientific or 'science mysticism' register." Paranormal phenomena are hence as modus of the sacred as sui generis (as opposed to social) phenomena (cf. McCutcheon 1997, 26).

2.1.4. General studies of paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences

In the concluding part of this literature review, I turn to distinctly sociological studies of paranormal culture in a more generalized sense, the earliest of which is arguably Andrew Greeley's (1975) *The Sociology of the Paranormal: A reconnaissance.* In it, Greeley reviews survey data collected in 1973 on experiences of the paranormal within the American population. The included experiences were psi (or psychic) phenomena, communications with spirits of the dead and mystical experiences. About 15 percent self-reported psi experiences, 27 affirmed experiences of contact with the dead and 35 percent reported having had mystical experiences (Greeley 1975, 14, 36, 57-58). Taken together, Greeley (1975, 7) found that a majority of the American population affirmed having had at least one paranormal experience. The results established something that has since proven to be a regular feature, namely that paranormal variables are difficult to pinpoint to any particular social strata. Concerning the included variables on psi phenomena, Greeley found that

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[28] Höllinger and Smith (2002, 245-246) pointed out several factors of relevance to this American precariousness: "Geographical and occupational mobility is much higher, family ties are looser, the nuclear family is less stable, the social security system is less developed, and both property offence and physical violence are more widespread in the USA than in Northwest Europe."

[29] One noteworthy example is his collaboration with horror writer and UFO abductee Whitley Strieber (Strieber & Kripal 2017).

younger people were more prone to reports these, as were women and Afro-Americans, while the least educated and those with the lowest income were less so (Greeley 1975, 15). Women and Afro-Americans were also overrepresented concerning experiences of communication with the dead (Greeley 1975, 43), as were widowed respondents. However, unlike psi experiences, communication with the dead correlated with lower levels of education and income (Greeley 1975, 37), yet Greeley (1975, 39) argued that these were spurious effects that in fact can be attributed to age (i.e., older respondents being less educated, having less income). Respondents affirming mystical experiences were instead more likely to be male, over forty years of age, college educated and have stable incomes (Greeley 1975, 59-60). Greeley (1975, 19) also found that affect-prone persons (i.e., susceptible to reporting both positive and negative emotions) were somewhat overrepresented concerning psi experiences, while those reporting mystical experiences were more prone to report higher levels of well-being and share positive assessments of relationships with fathers and the latter's religiosity (Greeley 1975, 66-73). On the basis of these results, Greeley (1975, 74) suggested that mystics are in general "happy people who apparently had happy childhoods." The gist of Greeley's (1975, 7) reconnaissance may be summarized in the statement that the "paranormal is normal," at least in the sense that we find experiences of it across different strata.

Another early example was the aforementioned American study conducted by Wuthnow (1978) on astrology and ESP in the San Francisco Bay Area in 1973. Some of these results were introduced in the previous subchapter. Concerning ESP, Wuthnow (1978, 76) found that demographic background characteristics such as gender and education had no significant effect on either belief in or experiences of ESP. Indeed, Wuthnow (1978, 76) singled out religiosity as the sole positive predictor of belief in and experiences of ESP.

Charles Emmons and Jeff Sobal's (1981) *Paranormal Beliefs: Functional Alternative to Mainstream Religion?* set out from a 1978 Gallup poll and argued, based on prior findings, that the increase in paranormal and alternative religious beliefs may be explained by "the void left by declining religious institutions" (Emmons & Sobal 1981, 301), which implies that the functions of paranormal beliefs rival those of religion. Emmons and Sobal's (1981, 302) study furthermore explicitly addressed the paranormal's status as rejected by both mainstream science and conventional religion, a description that has since recurred in social scientific research.

Goode's (2000) *Paranormal Beliefs: A Sociological Introduction* provides the reader with an overview of previous results on paranormal beliefs and experiences. In the monograph, Goode (2000, 19-22) argues in favor of an approach towards these phenomena in terms of paranormalism, in the sense of a general approach, disposition or belief system (Goode 2000, 19-22) among paranormal believers, practitioners and experiencers. Paranormalism constitutes, according to Goode (2000, 232), an epistemological outlook of sorts that

shares certain "epistemological building blocks" comprised of "reasoning about how the world works, notions of causality, what constitutes evidence, how one draws conclusions, what in one's life is important and what is secondary, and what it all means." These building blocks, Goode (2000, 161, 232) inferred, are dependent on socialization and hence on relations to peers, demographical characteristics and institutions (e.g., religion, media, politics).

Alan Orenstein (2002, 303) has studied paranormal beliefs in Canada based on a nationally representative sample collected in 1995. Orenstein acknowledged contradictory patterns in previous studies, which have pointed to mixed relationships between paranormal beliefs and religiosity. The survey in question included a set of paranormal (i.e., ESP, psychic powers, predictions, astrology, communications with the dead, reincarnation) and religious (i.e., heaven, hell, angels, God, experiences of God's presence, belief in life after death) items. All of these proved to correlate together, hence implying positive relationships between the paranormal and conventional religion (Orenstein 2002, 304). However, regular attendance at worship services had a negative relationship with paranormal beliefs (Orenstein, 305). Orenstein (2002, 306) inferred that religious belief and behavior are in fact some of the strongest predictor variables for paranormal beliefs, yet they "operate in different directions." Among other results, Orenstein (2002, 307) further found that women, divorcees, younger people and people who are "geographically mobile" are more prone to accept paranormal beliefs. He furthermore suggested that paranormal believers can be viewed in light of a more general individualization and detraditionalization of the religious landscape, according to which a growing number of people approach the religious and spiritual as "a type of postmodern spiritual journey" (Orenstein 2002, 310).

Turning to the U.S., Tom W. Rice (2003) has also studied the relationship between paranormal and conventional religious beliefs. Rice (2003, 99) found, for instance, that women were more likely to believe in the paranormal, albeit with exceptions, such as belief in UFOs, which was more common among men. Results were ambiguous when it came to a number of variables, such as age, income and level of education (Rice 2003, 100-101). Rice (2003, 101) further found positive associations between paranormal and religious beliefs. About 40 percent of the American population held paranormal and conventional religious beliefs simultaneously (Rice 2003, 104). Like Orenstein (2002), Rice argued that this may indicate a general shift in the religious and cultural landscape towards individualized and idiosyncratic belief systems.

F. Carson Mencken, Christopher D. Bader and Rodney Stark (2008) used the Baylor Religion Survey of 2005 in order to test the relationship between conventional religiosity and the paranormal, in this case in terms of activities and experiences. As later discussed in Bader et al.'s (2011) *Paranormal America*, the authors (Mencken et al. 2008, 195) assumed that alignment with conventional religion signals a stake in conformity. A derived hypothesis is that

those invested in conventional religion will be less prone to accept the paranormal, due to the latter's status as deviant and the interest mainstream religions have in dissuading people from experimenting with paranormal phenomena or condemning it outright, and this was largely corroborated by the results (Mencken et al. 2008, 196, 203). Church attendance, as Orenstein (2002) suggested previously, had a negative relationship with paranormal experimentation (Mencken et al. 2008, 203).

In *Round Trip to Hell in a Flying Saucer*, Mencken and Bader, together with Ye Jung Kim (2009), looked more closely at the relationship between Christian religiosity and the paranormal through the Baylor Religion Survey of 2005. In the article, Mencken et al. (2009, 67) restated hypotheses based on previous research. The first hypothesis, the deviance/marginalization hypothesis, poses that engagement with conventional religiosity indicates stakes in conformity, while marginalized strata are more prone to engage with deviant and unconventional beliefs and practices. The second, the small step hypothesis, builds on Goode's (2000) argument that conventional religious and paranormal beliefs are largely compatible as they share supernaturalist, nonmaterialist and non-falsifiable views. A third hypothesis suggests that compatibility between religiosity and the paranormal is dependent on the type of religious affiliation and the degree of religious engagement: regular church attendance makes believing in the paranormal less likely, as congregations seek to out-define rivalling supernatural claims, while Evangelical groups are more invested in keeping the paranormal at bay (Mencken et al. 2009, 71). The deviance/marginalization hypothesis was supported in so far as demographically less privileged strata (i.e., women, younger, non-white, lower income groups and people with lower levels of education) were more prone to accept paranormal beliefs (Mencken et al. 2009, 77), while correlations between conventional Christian and paranormal beliefs imply that the small step hypothesis also has merit. As church attendance and religious affiliation somewhat predicted the degree of paranormal beliefs (i.e., Evangelicals were less prone to accept the paranormal compared to mainline Protestants and Catholics), the third hypothesis gained support as well (Mencken et al. 2009, 80-81). Like Bainbridge (2004) and Glendinning (2006) previously, the authors hence suggest a curvilinear relationship between conventional religiosity and the paranormal.

Joseph Baker and Scott Draper (2010) found, also based on the Baylor Religion Survey of 2005, that those most prone to accept paranormal beliefs fit in a specific niche in the population, namely those with moderate levels of conventional religious beliefs and practices, in contradistinction to materialists and those with exclusivist religious outlooks, reiterating the relationship between religion and paranormal beliefs as curvilinear.

In *Countervailing Forces: Religiosity and Paranormal Belief in Italy* (2012), Christopher Bader and Joseph Baker, together with Andrea Molle, turned to a predominantly Catholic context. They set out from the hypothesis

of a curvilinear relationship between religion and the paranormal in light of prior findings (e.g., Baker & Draper 2010; Bader et al. 2012). The curvilinear tendency was largely corroborated in a national survey conducted in Italy in the 1990s (Bader et al. 2012, 715-716). Among other results, the authors (Bader et al. 2012, 716) found that women and younger persons were overrepresented among the paranormal believers, findings in line with several of the studies discussed in this section.

Based on fieldwork and interviews conducted in England, Day (2011, 2013) has analyzed how people's spiritual experiences, some decidedly paranormal in character, are social and relational. Using examples such as experiencing the presence of deceased kin, Day (2011, 2013, 153-158) coined the terms the sensuous and performative social supernatural (Day 2011) and paranormal (Day 2013, 158), which denote how spiritual and paranormal experiences and corresponding beliefs are embedded in social relationships. Indeed, these beliefs, experiences and narratives are conducive to sustaining social relationships and a sense of belonging and identity after death (Day 2011, 114, 196).

Bader et al.'s (2011) monograph *Paranormal America: Ghost Encounters, UFO Sightings, Bigfoot Hunts, and Other Curiosities in Religion and Culture* is arguably the work that has been most influential for this project, and their approach to studying paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences in both the general population as well as in a subculture of enthusiasts directly inspired my own research design. Among key findings, Bader et al. (2011, 75, 129) discovered that 68 percent of Americans affirm belief in at least one paranormal phenomenon, while 51 percent report having had at least one paranormal experience or having tried some kind of activity related to the paranormal. They further found that paranormal engagement gravitates towards one of two main ideal types that they labeled paranormal discovery and enlightenment. While the former denotes a quest for externally validated truths (e.g., finding evidence for the existence of Bigfoot or extraterrestrial visitors), the latter signifies a quest for inner spiritual transformation. Participants drawn to paranormal discovery hence mainly seek to prove the existence of contested phenomena. In a sense, their quest for truth is for "a truth that anyone will accept" (Bader et al. 2011, 38). Participants drawn to the enlightenment side of paranormal culture mainly engage with practices overlapping with alternative spirituality, such as "astrology, psychic powers, and similar practices," in order "to better themselves" (Bader et al. 2011, 38). Their truth is found within rather than outside of themselves, so to speak.

Madeleine Castro, Roger Burrows and Robin Wooffitt (2013) followed Greeley's imperative to study the paranormal as social phenomena in *The Paranormal is (Still) Normal,* presenting the results of a survey on paranormal experience in Great Britain in 2009. Castro et al. (2013, 4, 6) found, for instance, that women, middle-aged people and residents of the South West were

overrepresented in affirming paranormal experiences, in their case precognition, extra-sensory perception, mystical experiences, telepathy and after-death communication.

Several authors have approached the paranormal in terms of discourse connected to knowledge and power in Western culture, some of whom have already been mentioned in the first chapter. Hess' (1993) study *Science in the New Age: The Paranormal, Its Defenders, and Debunkers, and American Culture* warrants a closer look. Hess (1993) argued that debates on paranormal topics are tantamount to a discernable paraculture with a shared doxa, or a set of (unstated) epistemological presuppositions. In spite of conflict and polemics between different camps regarding claims about paranormal phenomena, the contesting groups have a great deal in common, such as a shared set of basic, implicit cultural assumptions. One such example is an alignment with skepticism, albeit interpreted differently in the different groups:

> skeptics, parapsychologists, and New Agers are all, in a sense, 'skeptics'. In the United States, 'skepticism' is often a positive trait; it suggests an empirical, pragmatic, independent, self-reliant, and antiauthoritarian approach to the world. The arena of positions, then, is defined not by one absolute form of skepticism, but instead by what may be called the varieties of skeptical experience. A vast dialogue and debate ensues, but the sharp differences of opinion play themselves out over a 'doxa' of unstated cultural assumptions and values that the rival orthodoxies and heterodoxies create through their differences […]. As the various actors construct their irrational Others and draw boundaries between the credible and incredible, they forge a new paraculture that itself has shared assumptions, histories, and key terms. (Hess 1993, 15)

To analyze and make sense of the contestations surrounding categories such as skepticism – or knowledge and science – Hess (1993, 17) utilized the concept of boundary-work (Gieryn 1983; Gieryn 1999), which will be properly introduced in the second half of this chapter.

Roughly a decade later, paranormal discourse was examined by sociologist Northcote in *The Paranormal and the Politics of Truth: A Sociological Account* (2007). Northcote (2007, 13) noted how the category of the paranormal is in itself distinctly Western. Like Hess before him, Northcote argued that the seemingly diametrically opposed views of believers and skeptics reproduce shared epistemological assumptions. Following Michel Foucault, Northcote dubbed these shared assumptions "the 'tree of enunciative derivation'":

> Employing this model, we can see how, for example, scientific-oriented paranormal research may be regarded as a subversive branch of the same enunciative discursive base from which Skepticism is derived—both positions valuing Rationalist ideals such as objectivity, logic and provability, but expressing them in different ways. (Northcote 2007, 83)

Northcote further argued that contemporary paranormal debate connects back to an intermingling between magic, the occult and various forms of radicalism:

> [T]he emergence of radical discourses has always been part of the Western intellectual landscape since the Renaissance and undoubtedly earlier, and occult ideas have long functioned as a vehicle for their expression. These legitimacy crises may be more pronounced in some historical epochs over others, but they have always taken place. For those who become embroiled in discursively based legitimation crises, they will turn away from the solutions offered by established institutions in favour of discourses that seem more in tune with their "new" needs. Paranormal-related discourses represent one such solution and merge readily with other radical discourses in the course of people's conversion, helping to overcome "gaps" between the old and new discourses in the process, thereby minimising feelings of fragmentation. This is not a matter of occult ideas serving a functional purpose in "magically" alleviating anxiety in times of change. It is simply a matter of occult ideas appearing more valid to larger numbers of people during certain periods as a result of the legitimacy crisis, and having enough personally and existentially rich material to make these new orientations satisfying. More importantly, because occult ideas span a continuum between established discourses (existing beyond their accepted bounds), they serve as a ready bridge between the old and the new. (Northcote 2007, 99-100)

Asprem (2010 a, b; 2013; 2014) has followed up on the queries of Hess and Northcote by applying a genealogical approach to the history of parapsychology. Asprem (2010, 661) argued that the paraculture presented by Hess may be viewed, following Partridge's concept of occulture, as part of a "wider occultural re-enhantment".

Using Whitley Strieber, the author of *Communion*, and his Dreamland festival as a case, Robertson (2013, 62) has argued that paranormal experiences serve to mediate various "counter-epistemic positions," that is, views that contest the dominant "epistemic norms" of our time. Strieber and his audience, as well as David Icke and David Wilcox, all viewed as examples of conspiracist millennialism following the demise of New Age spiritualities, are more fully explored in Robertson's doctoral thesis, *Metaphysical Conspiracism: UFOs as Discursive Object Between Popular Millennial and Conspiracist Fields* (2014), and the monograph *UFOs, Conspiracy Theories and the New Age: Millennial Conspiracism* (2016).

Throughout the years, a few studies of paranormal beliefs in Sweden have been conducted. Sjödin has argued several times (Sjödin 1995, 2001, 2002) that paranormal or parascientific[30] beliefs are on the rise in Sweden by juxtaposing his own survey results on belief statements about ghosts, divination

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[30]Sjödin (2001, 13-25) uses the term parascience to refer to alternative views that go against the "tested experience" (Sjödin 2001, 150) of both religion and science as traditional institutions of knowledge. In other texts, Sjödin refers to the same set of belief statements as "the paranormal" (Sjödin 2002) and "the occult" (Sjödin 1995). I view their use in Sjödin's writing as interchangeable.

and reincarnation, etc., with older survey data on equivalent variables (Sjödin 2001, 40-42). Sjödin (2001, 32-34) also explored if parascientific variables stick together in the sense of hidden, latent variables through the use of factor analysis. His analyses showed that parascientific belief statements, incongruous as they may seem, group together in three overarching dimensions: the magical dimension (belief in psychics, magic, dreams coming true and healing); astrology (astrological explanations of personalities, astrological predictions, and palm reading); and spirit communications (table tipping, telepathy, extraterrestrials and ghosts). Sjödin (1995, 47; 2001) furthermore viewed the increasing support of parascientific ideas as indicative of social and cultural detraditionalization, the latter resulting in a waning authority of institutions such as religion and science. Geographically speaking, the research Sjödin conducted in the 1990s and early 2000s lies closest to my own project, and his focus on relationships between paranormal beliefs and views of knowledge has been an important point of departure for my own approach.

Morhed's (2000) doctoral dissertation on paranormal beliefs and experiences in Sweden makes use of both survey data and follow-up interviews. Focusing on how the paranormal relates to views of knowledge and science. Morhed found that most Swedes do not affirm paranormal beliefs, nor do they claim to have had paranormal experiences, although some items (e.g., the efficacy of alternative medicine) gathered support from a large minority. One of the chief results that Morhed highlighted is that

> there is no correlation between belief in paranormal phenomena and appreciation of science. The respondents who claim to believe in paranormal phenomena express the same high appreciation of science as those who do not believe in such phenomena. (Morhed 2000, 241)

Although published as popular science, Per Anders Östling's (2012) *Spöken, medier och astrala resor* deserves mentioning. The book contains a wide array of examples of Swedes testimonies of paranormal experiences based on different materials, such as letters, interviews and reports appearing in weekly magazines. One inference that Östling (2012, 191) drew that Swedish media sometimes dealt with these stories in a critical way but more often handled them in a benevolent, though occasionally, tongue-in-cheek manner.

Although decidedly normative in the sense that paranormal beliefs and practices are in these cases viewed as potentially harmful, the Swedish skeptical organization Föreningen för Vetenskap och Folkbildning (VoF) has, together with Demoskop (Vof 2015) and Kantar Sifo (VoF 2021), contributed with statistics on Swedes' relations to paranormal beliefs through surveys conducted in 2015 and 2021. Several belief statements (2021) were included that measure some form of paranormal phenomena. In the following, I delimit myself to proportions of believers from the 2021 survey. Twenty-seven percent of the respondents affirmed belief in paranormal phenomena in general

(phrased as phenomena unexplained by science), 16 percent affirmed belief in extraterrestrial UFO visitations, 16 percent affirmed belief in ghosts and spirits, 13 percent belief in the possibility of communication with spirits of the dead, 12 percent in telepathy, 12 percent in predestination, 10 percent in healing, 10 percent in reincarnation and 8 percent in astrology (VoF 2021, 59). With the exception of belief in UFOs, women were more prone to accept paranormal beliefs (VoF 2021, 61), while age, in contrast to a number of other polls, did not exhibit a negative relationship with paranormal beliefs: instead, younger respondents were less prone to accept such beliefs (Vof 2021, 62, 72). The relationship between level of education and paranormal beliefs was generally negative (VoF 2021,63). Concerning party sympathy, sympathizers of the Sweden Democrats and to a lesser extent the Christian Democrats were generally more prone to accept paranormal beliefs than other groups (VoF 2021, 65). Thirty-one percent attested to the efficacy of alternative medicine, while conspiracy theory beliefs attracted between 1 (Holocaust denial) and 22 (a cover-up of the real reason behind the Estonia catastrophe) percent of the respondents: rather than increasing, the authors of the report (VoF 2021, 75) inferred that paranormal beliefs are waning slightly.

Julia Bergquist and Sebastian Lundmark (2023) recently reviewed results from the SOM[31] Institute's national survey of 2022, which included six paranormal belief statements: predictions of the future through divination (e.g., tarot cards); communicating with spirits of the dead; predictions based on astrology (e.g., horoscopes); memories from previous lives; healing through the laying on of hands; and the existence of a sixth sense. The affirmative minorities of these beliefs ranged from 14 percent (healing) to 33 percent (a sixth sense) while about 40 percent of the Swedish population affirmed at least one paranormal belief (Bergquist & Lundmark 2023, 12). Differences were mainly attributed to gender (i.e., being female) and age (i.e., being born in 1996 or later) (Bergquist & Lundmark 2023).

It is worth mentioning some Nordic studies of paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences conducted within neighboring disciplines such as the psychology of religion, and in the intersection between psychology and sociology. For instance, Anne Austad's (2015, 13, 21) dissertation "*Passing away – Passing by*" concerns meaning-making processes and interpretative schemes among Norwegians who self-report "post death contact" following grief and bereavement – in other words, experiences of contact with spirits of the dead. Ingela Visuri (2018) has studied experiences viewed as supernatural, or unusual somatosensory experiences, among autistic adolescents in Sweden, a group more prone to self-report religious or paranormal experiences compared to the non-autistic population. Visuri's (2018, 10) participants drew frequently on supernaturalist and paranormal representations in media and popular culture, thus implying that their attribution of supernatural agency was informed

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[31] This stands for society, opinion and media (Swe: Samhälle, opinion och medier).

by occulture. Sara Duppils has studied Spiritist online communities in Sweden (2013) and is currently working on a PhD project on contemporary Spiritist ideation. Katarina Johansson (2022) is presently carrying out a PhD project on meaning-making in relation to mystical experiences, several of which can arguably be classified as paranormal, in both Sweden and Finland.

To conclude this literature review, the two studies most akin to my own, acting as main sources of inspiration, are Sjödin's (1994, 1995, 2000) work on parascience and the paranormal and Bader et al.'s (2011) *Paranormal America*. In terms of theory, however, it is mainly Partridge's (2004, 2006, 2013) notion of occulture and Robertson's (2014) discursive approach to the paranormal as counter-epistemic social phenomena that have informed my own theoretical framework, and it is to this subject I next turn.

2.2. Theory

I start this subchapter by introducing a set of theoretical choices that are mainly metatheoretical (i.e., pertaining to epistemology and heuristics) in nature. Here, I am mainly indebted to philosophical pragmatism and social scientific practice theory. Next, the theoretical framework proper is presented. The latter, which will be applied as a framework of analysis on the empirical results in the sixth chapter, consists of Partridge's (2004, 2006, 2013) theory of occulture, Robertson's (2014, 2021) theory of strategies of epistemic capital and Thomas Gieryn's (1983, 1999) theory of boundary-work. The latter two bring to light and explain a stake at play for those engaged in contestations over knowledge-claims, namely *epistemic authority*. I will argue that Robertson's and Gieryn's differing theorizations of epistemic authority are compatible, and they will both be put to use as means of analysis. Occulture provides a classification of cultural resources, mainly from media and popular culture, that are brought into play for those engaged in paranormal paraculture. A hypothesis is further derived from occulture, occulture-as-plausibility, which is later put to the test on the population-level statistics. Stakes (i.e., epistemic authority) and resources (i.e., occulture, strategies of epistemic capital and boundary-work) pertaining to knowledge-making are what unites the theories conjoined into a theoretical framework. Practice theory contributes in two ways: first, as a metatheoretical set of presuppositions and second, as a taxonomy of the social structure and dimensions of paranormal practices. The latter will partly steer the disposition of the fifth chapter into a thematic presentation of the qualitative results based on dimensions of practice. Prior to introducing practice theory more fully, I will first further discuss epistemology.

2.2.1. On metatheory: From epistemology to practice theory

In terms of metatheory (e.g., Ritzer 2001) and social scientific paradigms (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba 2011), this project is mainly indebted to two branches of scholarly thought, namely pragmatism within the philosophy of knowledge and science on the one hand, and practice theory within social scientific research on the other. While the latter will be put to use empirically as a thematical structuration of the materials, the former mainly concerns issues regarding the nature of knowledge. This subchapter should be read as part of an ongoing self-reflexive approach employed within the project and as a sister chapter to Section 3.3.

In terms of epistemology, I am mainly indebted to pragmatist philosophy. As much as I appreciate the unmasking and deconstructing capacities of false universals (e.g., Hacking 2001, 12) within paradigms (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba 2011) such as social constructionism and critical theory, their general inclination towards semiotic, linguistic and discursive aspects of reality makes for an ill fit with my reliance on quantitative methods. Early philosophical pragmatism is usually attributed to scholars such as John Dewey, William James and Charles Sanders Peirce (e.g., Lassander 2014, 45; Rorty 1999, 24-25), while I am mainly influenced and inspired by the late- or neo-pragmatist Richard Rorty. Knowledge and language, following Rorty (1999, xxiii, 27, 54; 1979/2009), are, like other human enterprises, motivated by practical purposes and utility. This means that knowledge mainly serves humankind's orientation towards, and accommodation, in our environment, rather than its accuracy in representing a reality independent of human subjects, or truth with a capital T. The various philosophies associated with the latter position, building upon the legacy of, for instance, René Descartes and Immanuel Kant, are recurrently referred to by Rorty in ocular metaphor, such as "mirroring" (Rorty 1979/2009, 335), hence the name of his monograph, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979/2009). Rorty thus positioned himself as an anti-realist, anti-Platonist and anti-dualist in the debate on the nature of knowledge as justified true beliefs, rejecting what he occasionally has called the correspondence theory of truth (e.g., Rorty 1999, 270). Instead, belief in a particular statement or state of affairs over any competing truth-claim is warranted by its utility, or how this belief may provide us with "a better habit of acting" (Rorty 1999, xxv) as we interact with the world. Epistemologically, then, Rorty's (1999, xxv) suggestion is that we "treat beliefs not as representations but as habits of action, and words not as representations but as tools."

Following the ideas of Richard Rorty, or perhaps rather interpretations of Rorty by his critics (e.g., Bromwich 2009, 428), the researcher may run the risk of reaching a Feyerabendian (Feyerabend 1975) *anything-goes* relativism concerning competing knowledge-claims about the world. In this case, I believe that social scientific practice theory, in this dissertation employed as a form of social theory (e.g., Beckford 2003, 11) on the fundamentals of the

social world, may contribute to holding the reins and steering us in a more constructive direction, and it is to the topic of practice theory I now turn.

Practice theory, sometimes referred to as practice theories or theories of practice, has become increasingly popular in recent decades and, as Davide Nicolini (2013, 1) has argued, is best viewed as a family of theories with several traits in common. In shorthand, I will however use the term practice theory rather than practices theories or theories of practice, although I acknowledge their plurality. Simply put, practice theory makes practices, rather than beliefs, discourse or the practitioners themselves, the basis of social order(s)[32] and hence the core social units of analysis (Nicolini 2013, 7; cf. Schatzki 2001, 56). So, what is practice? According to Theodore R. Schatzki (2001, 55) practices are "organized nexuses of activity" (e.g., cooking, child rearing, politics). Intentionality and casual connections turn activities into practices, as the latter are aimed at achieving something (Schatzki 2001, 57). According to Andreas Reckwitz (2002, 250), practice denotes "a routinized way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood" (cf. Schmidt, 36). More simply put, Nancy Ammerman (2020, 12) describes practices as "patterned regularities in what people do."

In addition to their focus on practices, theories of practice share other traits as well. According to Nicolini (2013, 3), they, first of all, "foreground the importance of activity, performance, and work in the creation and perpetuation of all aspects of social life." Second, they "bring to the fore the critical role of the body and material things in all social affairs" (Nicolini 2013, 4; cf. Reckwitz 2002, 251). Third, agency and agents are viewed as the carriers of social practices, which "thus leave[s] space for initiative, creativity, and individual performance" (Nicolini 2013, 4). Fourth, a specific view of knowledge is entailed according to which "knowledge is conceived largely as a form of mastery that is expressed in the capacity to carry out a social and material activity" (Nicolini 2013, 5), hence emphasizing knowledge-making as a social enterprise. Accordingly, discourse is viewed as practice in itself. Fifth, practice theories stress "power, conflict and politics" (Nicolini 2013, 6) as integral to practices. Discussing Schatzki's practice theory, Geir Afdal (2022, 81) furthermore underlines that practices contain teleo-affective structures, which means that they "have a drive and a motive and are producing processes; in other words, that the purpose of the practice characterizes both its present character and its direction and that this drive comprises affective aspects." Hence, practices are *aimed* at realizing something. As put by Schatzki (200, 60), teleology denotes these "orientations towards ends, while affectivity is

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[32] Following Schatzki (2001, 51), social order(s) denotes "arrangements of people and the organisms, artifacts, and things through which they coexist." These entities are furthermore arranged spatially, casually, intentionally and prefigurationally, the latter signifying how they enable and constraint each other and said practices.

how things matter." The latter, what matters, is determined by "emotions and moods" (Schatzki 2001, 60), or affective involvements with the intentions at hand.

Returning to Nicolini's fourth point taken up in the above paragraph, practice theory posits agents, the carriers of practices, as goal-oriented with particular know-how understandings within the social order of which they are part (Reckwitz 2002). Schatzki (2001, 55) calls this "practical intelligibility," or "the state of affairs that action makes sense to someone to do."

Furseth and Pål Repstad (2005, 67-69) have suggested the conceptual pair of agency and structure as the two ends of a spectrum on which social theories may be placed. Explanatory social theories tend to favor either individual and collective actions on the one hand or supra-individual forces, such as institutions and systems, on the other as the main motors of social reproduction and change. Practice theory entails a specific position regarding agency and structure. The notion of practitioners as the carriers of practice, suggested by Reckwitz, should be viewed as a particular solution to the divide between agency and structure:

> In practice theory, agents are body/minds who 'carry' and 'carry out' social practices. Thus, the social world is first and foremost populated by diverse social practices which are carried by agents. Agents, so to speak, 'consist in' the performance of practices (which includes – to stress the point once more – not only bodily, but also mental routines). (Reckwitz 2002, 256)

On the same note, Ammerman (2020, 12) states that practices are "both habitual and emergent, constrained and creative. In them we can see both the structures they assume and the agency of the actors." This point was foreshadowed in Giddens' structuration theory a couple decades prior to Reckwitz' attempt to systematize practice theory. For Giddens (1984, xxi), structuration theory is an explicit attempt to solve the issue of a divide between agency and structure by means of proposing a "duality of structure." This claim rests upon a view that social activities and practices are "reproduced chronically across time and space" (Giddens 1984, xxi), that is, practices are "not brought into being by social actors but continually recreated by them by the very means whereby they express themselves *as* actors" (Giddens 1984, 2). The gist of structuration theory may be summarized thusly:

> The constitution of agents and structures are not two independently given sets of phenomena, a dualism, but represent a duality. According to the notion of the duality of structure, the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize. (Giddens 1984, 25)

Hence, both agent and structure are necessarily involved in social processes and the reproduction of institutions. Indeed, according to practice theory as

aggregated by Nicolini (2013, 3), both organizations and institutions "are all kept in existence through the recurrent performance of material activities, and to a large extent they only exist as long as those activities are performed." As expressed by Reckwitz (2002, 255), "fields and institutionalized complexes – from economic organizations to the sphere of intimacy – are 'structured' by the routines of social practices." Accordingly, institutions stem from the routinizations involved in practices. Differences between social practices and institutions hence become a matter of degrees of consolidation and their extension in space and time.

Translated to the qualitative results of this dissertation, namely engagement in paranormal paraculture, I argue that the latter consists of several social practices, more specifically *paranormal practices*, that is, certain active orientations towards claims about paranormal phenomena. Furthermore, as practices include various know-how understandings of whatever object the practice at hand is aimed at, paranormal practices are also epistemological. Arguably, all of the paranormal practices under study are explicitly aimed at gaining knowledge about paranormal phenomena, although in different ways. In Schatzkian (2001) terms, gaining knowledge about the unexplained is part and parcel of the paranormal practices' teleo-affective structures: they are aimed at making sense of the paranormal, or knowing the unknown, and they entail, as I will demonstrate later, various emotional responses, such as awe, wonderment and even fear.

In this dissertation, I use the term *paranormal practices* to designate the orientations towards paranormal phenomena and their corresponding beliefs, activities and experiences that I encountered among participants within paranormal paraculture. Although the participants of this study interact with paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences in a multitude of ways, my argument derived from practice theory is that all these individual and sometimes idiosyncratic practices also latch onto and reproduce shared social practices. Indeed, the individual practitioners and solitary practices that I encountered are assumed to be some of the carriers of super-individual paranormal practices. The whole point of using an approach informed by practice theory is therefore to highlight how individual relationships to paranormal phenomena connect to super-individual and, to some extent, routinized behaviors.

Although not included in Lincoln, Lynham and Guba's (2011) overview of contemporary social scientific paradigms, I argue that practice theory, together with pragmatism, fulfills a similar function. While pragmatism entails certain positions vis-á-vis ontology, epistemology and the philosophy of science, practice theory certainly informs research by acting as a more or less coherent social theory (Beckford 2003) that, as stated, sets out from practice and practices as comprising the elementary forms of social units available for analysis.

In addition to serving as a metatheory, practice theory is also used in this study in an attempt to produce a taxonomy of paranormal practice. Seeking to

solidify the social theory underlying the research approach of lived religion, Ammerman (2020) has argued that practice theory is not only consonant with lived religion but may also act as a theoretical foundation of the latter. Although I do not suggest that we view paranormal practice as instances of lived religion per se, the taxonomy suggested by Ammerman may be extended to them. Ammerman (2020, 14, 19) has argued that distinctly religious practice can be approached and analyzed through a practical theoretical lens and has acknowledged the following dimensions or qualities of religious practice: embodiment, materiality, emotion, aesthetics, moral judgement, narrative, and spirituality. Embodiment acts as a "fundamental dimension" (Ammerman 2020, 15) of practice, as practices by necessity entail the entanglement of human bodies as ways of being in the world. In a similar way, materiality implies the entanglement of practices with "things and places" (Ammerman 2020, 15). Or as put by Reckwitz (2002, 252), "objects are necessary components of many practices." Perhaps more self-evident, emotion denotes human subjects' affective involvement with the practices at hand (Ammerman 2020, 15-16). Narrative highlights the importance of communication and storytelling to practices, with narratives "linking past, present, and future" (Ammerman 2020, 30). As Reckwitz (2002, 254) has argued, talk and discourse "are one type of practices among others." Aesthetics refers to practices' appeals to the sublime or to beauty (Ammerman 2020, 16). Morality, like aesthetics, involves normativity and judgements, although pertaining to values (Ammerman 2020, 16). Lastly and specifically for religious practice, Ammerman (2020, 17-18) proposes spirituality as a defining feature, as all religious practices "presume a reality that is perceived to be 'other than' everyday in ways that fit the actors' religious or spiritual 'province of meaning.'" Rather than resting upon any substantial or a priori conceptualization of religion or spirituality, Ammerman (2020, 18) includes understandings of the "other than" everyday, or the sacred. Within the purview of this study, the spiritual dimension could at first glance be extended to most of the paranormal practices under study. All of these practices refer to something other than everyday, regardless of whether the latter are spirits or extraterrestrials. However, given that some practitioners may argue that the paranormal phenomena with which they engage are in fact empirically verifiable and/or falsifiable, at least according to future science, Ammerman's understanding of the spiritual dimension may not be applicable to all paranormal practices. The etic view and the researcher may of course object, but I would nevertheless urge us to exercise caution. Is Bigfoot or a Sasquatch a thing set apart? To most of those engaged in cryptozoology, this is probably the case, although they may have an empiricist approach towards the cryptid's existence. To others, however, it may simply be a big ape.

Out of the aforementioned dimensions of practice, I will specifically apply the aspects of embodiment, materiality, emotion and narrative as thematizations revealing the social structuration of paranormal practice. The dimensions

of aesthetics, morality and spirituality were less easily discerned in the material and are, for this reason, excluded. They warrant some brief comments, however. One may argue, for instance, that the use of particular colors and the iconography of angel cards among mediums and the illustrations reminiscent of science fiction in ufological publications may qualify as instances of aesthetics. These were, however, neither targeted as interview topics, nor were they the foci of my attention in other ways. Morality in the sense of normative value statements is, I argue, sufficiently captured by the other dimensions applied and the thematical analysis in its entirety. Lastly, as all paranormal phenomena are arguably "other than" everyday (Ammerman 2020, 17-18), all paranormal practices become spiritual. Applying the spiritual dimension separately may hence prove tautological.

I will in shorthand refer to this taxonomy of emotionality, embodiment, materiality and narrative as practice-in-dimensions, and it will guide the disposition of the qualitative results on paranormal paraculture in the fifth chapter. Practice-in-dimensions is hence "pre-analytical" in the sense that it precedes the application of the theoretical framework, to which I will now turn.

2.2.2. Occulture and occulture-as-plausibility

Coined as a sociological term by Partridge, occulture[33] denotes a general form of culture, frequently described as a pool or reservoir of ideas and practices revolving around notions of magic, esotericism, the occult and the paranormal inter alia. In the words of Partridge (2006, 2), occulture is

> the new spiritual atmosphere in the West; the reservoir feeding new spiritual springs; the soil in which new spiritualities are growing; the environment within which new methodologies and world-views are passed on to an occulturally curious generation.

Hence, occulture denotes a broad, wide and nebulous social and cultural domain. Far from constrained to notions of Western esotericism as implied by the similarity to the term occult, Partridge (2004, 40) expands this "magical culture" to encompass most heterodox or alternative religious and spiritual phenomena, such as "Eastern spirituality, Paganism, Spiritualism, Theosophy, alternative science and medicine, popular psychology, and a range of beliefs emanating out of a general interest in the paranormal" (Partridge 2006, 2). By using the term *popular*, Partridge captures the mainstreaming of occultural ideas and practices. Indeed, as Partridge (2013) states, occulture has become ordinary in the sense of being commonplace, nearly ubiquitous, and widely represented and disseminated through media and popular culture. Asprem (2013, 332) has commented upon occulture thusly:

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[33] This term originated in emic designations by musician and artist Genesis P. Orridge (Partridge 2013).

particular groups, individuals, ideologies and belief systems may be described in terms of deviance from the mainstream, the broader occultural *environment*, as such, is becoming so ordinary as to *engulf* the mainstream. This is particularly emphasized by the place of *popular* culture in occultural production and dissemination; that is, the formation of a popular occulture manifesting itself in widely distributed products of literature, film and music.

Partridge has further suggested, and this is of sociological importance, that occulture acts as "the spiritual/mythic/paranormal background knowledge that informs the plausibility structures of Westerners" (Partridge 2004, 187; cf. Sjödin 2001, 42). Succinctly put, the argument is that the wide dissemination of occulture, not least through media and popular culture (i.e., *popular occulture*, Partridge 2013), in part explains its own growth: more frequent encounters with a near-omnipresent occulture may serve to prime populations in favor of its plausibility.

As I argued in the first chapter, occulture connects back to previous conceptualizations of social formations within alternative spirituality, religion and the paranormal, such as the cultic milieu (e.g., Campbell 1972), rejected knowledge (Webb 1974; 1976) and stigmatized knowledge-claims (Barkun 2013). As with the term the cultic milieu, occulture is intended to denote the fertile ground from which new alternative religious and spiritual formations (e.g., cults) spring. However, as a pool or reservoir of ideas and practices, it is far wider in range and more detached from social organizations and movements. "Occulture does not refer to a hierarchical organization, or even a network," Partridge (2004, 187) has argued, adding that:

> it is simply a broad type of 'culture'[…] [which] has been used simply of an environment/reservoir/library of beliefs, ideas, meanings and values which inform the processes of thinking, of symbolizing, and of reflecting on experience.

Occulture furthermore mitigates the level of rejection, tension and controversy implied by aforementioned concepts such as rejected and stigmatized knowledge.

Besides acting as a plausibility structure (cf. Berger 1967), resulting in occulture as a self-reproducing cultural domain, occulture implies latent theorizations on socialization (cf. Giddens 2007, 164-167), as occultural ideas or practices are encountered through various social relationships and settings, including secondary socialization agents such as media and popular culture. The argument somewhat resembles the cultural priming hypothesis included in Heelas and Woodhead's (2005, 88) spiritual revolution claim: even if a large audience mainly engages with alternative spiritual ideas and practices as sources of, for instance, recreation or entertainment, their wide availability entails that at least some will be more prone to take them seriously.

Although occulture takes a welcome step outside of the boundaries of Campbell's (1972) cultic milieu, it contains some confusion as to what it de facto denotes in terms of classification. For instance, according to Partridge (2013, 116),

> occulture, as a sociological term, refers to the environment within which, and the social processes by which, particular meanings relating, typically, to spiritual, esoteric, paranormal and conspiratorial ideas emerge, are disseminated, and become influential in societies and in the lives of individuals.

The fact that Partridge includes "the social processes" through which occultural themes and motifs are transmitted in his definition is arguably a stretch, which makes the category more opaque than useful. For all intents and purposes, then, I suggest the term occulture as a pool of heterodox and (mainly) non-institutionalized ideas and practices related to, inter alia, alternative spirituality and the paranormal that, together, acts as a cultural backdrop at large. Social processes underlying occulture's transmission is, however, best reserved for other sociological concepts.

In this dissertation, references to and representations of paranormal phenomena are *a priori* viewed as indicators of occulture, as are any social contact points (later: occultural contact points) with these representations. As the word representations implies, a particular focus is placed on occulture as disseminated in media and popular culture. However, other social contact points with occulture, such as in conversations with other people (e.g., family, friends), are also intended with this use, including the engagement with the associational life of paranormal paraculture. This entails that an engagement with paranormal practice, per definition, is indicative of occulture. The paraculture's status as occultural is hence assumed rather than demonstrated while I, empirically, will focus on relationships to occulture in media and popular culture as well as contact points through peers whenever apt.

The sub-thesis that occulture serves as 1) a driver of its own growth by 2) being a plausibility structure, will be critically assessed in relation to the empirical results. This sub-thesis will henceforth be called occulture-as-plausibility.

2.2.3. Strategies of epistemic capital

Robertson's theory of epistemic capital (a concept previously used by Karl Maton 2003) takes its point of departure in Pierre Bourdieu's theories on capital and fields. According to Robertson (2014, 34), *epistemic capital* is distinguished from symbolic and cultural capital as it "does not map *what* you know, but *how* you can know." In this view, epistemic capital denotes pathways to *epistemic authority*. The latter denotes the status of an agent being ascribed a position of authority in terms of knowledge claims. Although Robertson

(2014) applied the theory of epistemic capital to alternative spirituality and conspiracy theories, its use must by no means be restricted to religion or spirituality as it is applicable to social life in general.

As the theory of epistemic capital is greatly indebted to and inspired by Bourdieu's theories, a digression into the latter is warranted in order to contextualize Robertson's theoretical contribution. According to Bourdieu (1984, 226), social life can be divided into various *fields*, frequently likened to "worlds," in which agents contest for advantageous positions by means of accumulating resources. Somewhat opaquely, Bourdieu (1998, 33) describes the key concept of field as "a field of forces […] and a field of struggles," in the sense of a supra-individual space that both gives room to and circumscribes agents. Accordingly, fields act as arenas or places of contestation, in which agents fight to either conserve or transform the field itself. Rephrased by Nicolini (2013, 60), fields "are partially autonomous spaces […] determined by the distribution of social capital and objective relations between social positions. They correspond roughly to the various spheres of life such as art, religion, economy, and politics."[34] In a general and broad sense, fields hence coincide with different social domains. These fields can then be subdivided into smaller fields in which agents compete for resources and advantages. Within the purview of this study, discourse on the paranormal may be viewed as a field in which various stakeholders debate the reality or unreality of paranormal phenomena. Turning back to Hess (1993) and Northcote (2007), the paranormal field would denote both paranormal practices and debates on the paranormal in society in general, although this dissertation solely focus on advocates rather than adversaries of paranormal phenomena. This field of paranormal discourse could further be subdivided into fields that resemble the paranormal prototypes introduced in the first chapter, such as fields of mediumistic practice and ufology, which in turn encompasses smaller fields, such as materialist and religionist ufology, respectively.

The resources for which agents compete are called *capital* in Bourdieu's terminology. As succinctly put by Nicolini (2013, 59), capital denotes "anything that can be exchanged, determining as a consequence a variation in legitimacy and power." Besides its most straightforward and common sense-form of *economic* capital (e.g., wealth), capital comes in other forms as well. Most notable[35] in Bourdieu's use are *symbolic* and *cultural* capital. Symbolic capital denotes the value ascribed to things and attributes that come to represent something other than themselves, or:

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[34] Bourdieu (1984, 209) furthermore exemplified fields with "sport, or music, or food, decoration, politics, language etc."
[35] Bourdieu (1984, 13) for instance also refers to "educational capital".

an ordinary property (physical strength, wealth, warlike valor, etc.) which, perceived by social agents endowed with the categories of perception and appreciation permitting them to perceive, know and recognize it, becomes symbolically efficient, like a veritable magical power. (Bourdieu 1998, 102)

For Robertson (2014, 33), who understands symbolic and cultural capital as interchangeable, both denote "knowledge and skills." Symbolic and cultural capital are furthermore supplemented by *social* capital, or "a capital of social connections" (Bourdieu 1984, 122), which Robertson (2014, 33-34) has argued is best viewed as a category that "maps how social relations are converted into economic capital, and vice versa." Indeed, Bourdieu's (1977, 183) theory entails that different forms of capital can be transformed into other forms of capital (cf. Furseth & Repstad 2021, 177).

An intermediate category between structure and agency, or fields and agents, is *habitus*. Habitus designates an often implicit, tacit or unconscious orientation, disposition or inclination to act in a certain way or to view and assess things and situations in a certain light. It becomes, in a sense, "second nature" (Bourdieu 1998, 56). Habitus is social and collective rather than individual, although it works through agents and is hence a shared disposition in common for a certain class of people within a particular social order (Bourdieu 1998, 5-9; cf. Furseth & Repstad 2021, 178). Bourdieu put it thusly:

> Habitus are generative principles of distinct and distinctive practices – what the worker eats, and especially the way he eats it, the sport he practices and the way he practices it, his political opinions and the way he expresses them are systematically different from the industrial owner's corresponding activities. But habitus are also classificatory schemes, principles of classification, principles of vision and division, different tastes. They make distinctions between what is good and what is bad, between what is right and what is wrong, between what is distinguished and what is vulgar, and so forth, but the distinctions are not identical. Thus, for instance, the same behavior or even the same good can appear distinguished to one person, pretentious to someone else, and cheap or showy to yet another. (Bourdieu 1998, 8)

As Robertson (2014, 35-36) has suggested, habitus may be understood as an internalization of fields that are in themselves subject to change due to habitus and the actions of agents. The view of social reproduction and change implied by Bourdieu's work is hence similar to the structuration theory suggested by Giddens (1984), briefly discussed in the previous subchapter. In a fundamental sense, the asymmetry of the possession of capital – the latter understood as "differentiating factors" (Robertson 2014, 33) within fields – among agents in fields is part of a coherent social theory in which inequality and power struggles are key (c.f. Furseth & Repstad 2021, 173).

With some of Bourdieu's central concepts now introduced, it is time to return to the theory of epistemic capital. Epistemic capital takes the form of

various epistemological appeals, or strategies.[36] Robertson (2021, 28-29) has summarized the baseline of the social processes that the theory of epistemic capital aims to capture thusly: "When an agent cites research, invokes their 'lived experience', or claims that God told them, they are mobilizing particular forms of epistemic capital in order to influence others, and thereby gain an advantage within the field" (Robertson 2021, 28-29). This advantageous position within a field is tantamount to a position of authority, in this case *epistemic* authority, or a position in which agents are ascribed a status as trustworthy, reliable or exemplary in regard to issues of knowledge and knowledge-making in the emic epistemologies, or views on knowledge in the life-worlds of practitioners. Or, as put by Hammer (2003, 42): "a set of methods and sources of knowledge that spokespersons from within that tradition regard as legitimate," pertaining to both religious and non-religious contexts. Robertson's theory of epistemic capital and epistemic strategies captures the processes by which agents amass epistemic authority as well as ascribe or deny epistemic authority to themselves and others.

Robertson's theory of epistemic capital has recently been placed within a broader emerging social scientific research field on epistemic contestation – that is, debates, conflicts and arenas in which knowledge becomes contested– applied to diverse empirical topics ranging from conspiracy theories to legislation and public health (Robertson & Valaskivi 2022). In public debate, epistemic contestations are paralleled by the emergence of discourse on alternative facts, fake news and post-truth politics (for a recapitulation of these topics, see McIntyre 2018). Epistemic contestations are, Robertson and Valaskivi (2022, 2) have argued, unprecedently salient due to the proliferation of communication technologies and the emergence of new digital media, especially social media and various hybrid media arenas, in which the rationales of older and newer media are intermixed. A corollary of this new field of communication is the diminished control of epistemic institutions (e.g., media institutions, journalism) on both the forms and contents of public debate. The current predicament has been described as a state of epistemic instability (Harambam 2020) or an epistemic crisis, not only between competing agents and institutions claiming knowledge, but also within epistemic institutions as well (Robertson & Valaskivi 2022, 2-3).

According to Robertson, the strategies of epistemic capital may be subdivided into five main types. The main forms of strategies of identified by Robertson, building upon the work of Hammer (2003), are traditional, scientific, experiential plus channeled and synthetic.[37] They can be described succinctly as follows:

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[36] Later (2021) replaced with the word modes. As the word strategies is more compatible with the rhetorical strategies encompassed by the term boundary-work following Gieryn, presented in the next subchapter, I stick to its use.

[37] Later (2021) assemblage. Since the concept is somewhat less intuitive, I keep to the earlier use of synthetic epistemic capital.

- Strategies of traditional epistemic capital denote appeals to a "people like us do things like this" ethos (Robertson 2021, 29), or habitual and inherited practice, ranging from customs to systems of law and governance to religion.
- Strategies of scientific epistemic capital, in this dissertation revised as *science-like* strategies. These refer to or seek to emulate the reproducibility and experimentalism associated with the scientific method(s). It is worth noting that these strategies of science-like epistemic capital do not equal the use of scientific methods. Instead, scientism is a discursive approval of science, or the credibility and authority that it entails, without necessarily aligning with scientific practice (although they may). The notion of science-like strategies is indebted to the concept of *scientism*. Scientism denotes

  the active positioning of one's own claims in relation to the manifestations of any academic scientific discipline, including, but not limited to, the use of technical devices, scientific terminology, mathematical calculations, theories, references and stylistic features— without, however, the use of methods generally accepted within the scientific community. (Hammer 2003, 206)

  It is for this reason that I favor the use of *science-like* rather than scientific strategies of epistemic capital: it denotes a resemblance to or partial alignment with scientific practice, while the practices under study may in fact depart from scientific procedures in relevant ways.
- Strategies of experiential epistemic capital refers to appeals to direct personal experience, something that has become increasingly salient and commonplace in highly individualized late modern societies, as Hammer (2004, 339) has suggested. In the words of Robertson (2021, 29), experiential appeals rest upon "an emotional response of 'truthiness' – one feels that it is true."
- Strategies of channeled epistemic capital denote appeals in which the agent is a recipient or intermediary (e.g., a prophet or medium) of knowledge gained from contact with higher beings, such as gods, spirits or extraterrestrials.
- Lastly, strategies of synthetic epistemic capital refers to the particular "dot-connecting" rationales in which other forms of epistemic capital, or "data across time, space and context" (Robertson 2021, 29), are compiled in order to reveal the bigger pictures or hidden links behind or between seemingly random occurrences. These strategies are prevalent within, for instance, conspiracy theories.

One of Robertson's (2014, 51) salient points is that certain forms of epistemic appeals, most notably strategies of channeled and synthetic epistemic

capital, are *counter-epistemic*, as they are not formally recognized by institutional epistemic authorities, such as academia. Consequently, those who base their claim to epistemic authority on rejected strategies, for example, conspiracy theorists or paranormal investigators, often construct an identity as part of an *epistemic counter-elite* (Robertson 2014, 196). This perspective brings Robertson's theory in line with previous conceptualizations of alternative knowledge milieus, such as rejected knowledge (Webb 1974; 1976) or stigmatized knowledge claims (Barkun 2013).

The contribution of the theory of epistemic capital does not, I argue, rest upon epistemic capital's status as something other than symbolic and or cultural capital, although this is Robertson's (2014, 34) argument. Even if we were to view epistemic capital as a subset of symbolic or cultural capital, its explanatory merits remain. I am undecided, possibly agnostic, regarding the question of whether or not epistemic capital is a standalone form of capital or a subtype of cultural and social capital. The point here is that epistemic capital remains useful regardless.

As for the role of epistemic capital and its strategies in this study, the materials will be analyzed looking at participants' appeals to and expositions of different forms of knowledge and knowledge-making, with the five main strategies identified by Robertson (2014, 2021) in mind. Through this employment of epistemic capital, research participants' relationships to knowledge and authority are brought into light, and the sources that are deemed as reliable (and unreliable) in terms of knowledge-making will be identified.

Striving for epistemic authority for themselves is but one aspect of agents' contestations of knowledge within a field. Another is assessing the epistemic authority of *others*. It is often at least as important to make clear who lacks epistemic authority on any given subject as it is to ascertain which agents have it. This brings me to the next theorization of epistemic authority, namely the strategies of boundary-work.

2.2.4. Boundary-work

If epistemic capital highlights how agents seek to claim or aspire to epistemic authority by means of appealing to and acknowledging different pathways to knowledge, boundary-work denotes the processes whereby others are either ascribed or denied it. Gieryn (1983, 1999) has recurrently likened these rhetorical strategies of ascribing and denying epistemic authority to agents and institutions to the drawing of maps. What is at stake is, directly, the status of epistemic authority, a concept shared with Robertson – or "the legitimate power to define, describe, and explain bounded domains of reality" (Gieryn 1999, 1) – and, indirectly, other forms of benefits (e.g., financial funding, esteem) that the former may entail. As a term, *boundary-work* is intended to capture the rhetorical strategies whereby actors aspire to epistemic authority,

usually by arguing that some others lack it, thereby drawing boundaries around legitimate knowledge. As argued by Gieryn (1999, 14),

> The legitimate right to have one's reality claims accepted as valid or marginally useful is no plum at all if everybody enjoys it all the time. Epistemic authority exists only to the extent that it is claimed by some people (typically in the name of science) but denied to others (which is exactly what boundary-work does).

Gieryn (1999, 5) developed boundary-work as the rhetorical and strategic representations of science by its advocates in contrast to some other "less authoritative non-science" (e.g., rivaling sciences, politics, religion, pseudo-science). The debates in which advocates of science encounter other non-scientific actors and institutions – or engage audiences "downstream" (Gieryn 1999, X) – are hence the arenas where processes of boundary-work occur. These occurrences of boundary-work are called *credibility contests* (Gieryn 1999,14). In spite of Gieryn's focus on clashes between advocates of science and other agents, I argue that boundary-work may be studied among non-scientists (e.g., politicians, amateur scientists, journalists, pseudo-scientists) as well, that is, groups that would usually be out-defined from the body of science by the latter's main advocates. Indeed, Hess (1993) used the concept to study the American paranormal paraculture in *Science in the New Age*, while I have previously used the concept in an undergraduate study on ideological debates between ufologists and organized skeptics (Olsson 2013).

Besides the rhetorical strategies of representing others as unreliable, gullible, closed-minded or irrational – in other words *out-defining* them (cf. Wennerholm 2008137) from the purview of legitimate knowledge – I suggest the term *alignment* for the benevolent attempts by agents to place their own enterprises in relation to an idealized other ascribed the status of epistemic authority, thereby enjoying some of said authority by means of similarity, kinship, or emulation. In paranormal paraculture, these strategies of alignment may, for instance, denote the use of experimental and statistical research designs to investigations of extrasensory perception or the incorporation of investigatory techniques associated with science and journalism in order to study UFO phenomena. In other words, unlike out-defining, alignment points to attempts to redraw the cultural cartographies by means of *opening up* rather than closing boundaries.

Boundary-work contributes to making explicit aspects implied by Robertson's theory on epistemic capital, namely that actors not only need to aspire to epistemic authority themselves but also assess that of others. This assessment of how other agents are positioned towards epistemic authority within the paracultural fields is thus captured by the concept of boundary-work, achieved by out-defining some agents and aligning with others.

By applying the strategies of epistemic capital and boundary-work on the empirical results, I hope to demonstrate how those engaged in paranormal practices grapple to either contradistinguish themselves from or align themselves with the main epistemic authorities in the late modern West. Recognized and rejected pathways to and positions of knowledge among the participants are hence identified as strategies of epistemic capital and boundary-work. These strategies together attempts to reach epistemic authority, or an authoritative position from which participants can differentiate reliable sources of knowledge from those that are not. As part of these strategies, occultural resources are sometimes brought into the fore.

I furthermore argue that, much like practice theory, the theory of epistemic authority, derived as a combination of both Robertson's and Gieryn's use of the term and their corresponding strategies (i.e., strategies of epistemic capital, boundary-work), functions as a social theory[38] (cf. Beckford 2003, 11) in so far as it brings to light, makes relevant and explains how people grapple with questions pertaining to reliable knowledge in the social world. Directly, this combined theory posits that agents desire positions from which they can discern which knowledge-making procedures are reliable and which are not, as well as who has access to them and who does not. Indirectly, it entails that other benefits are at stake as well. For instance, gaining a position of authority implies that others are willing to listen to you, to take you seriously, to rely on you, and to hold you in esteem in matters of making knowledge about the world or, in this case, specifically paranormal phenomena. Epistemic authority hence implies that you gain access to other resources (e.g., get hired, gain clients, secure financing). This is a lightweight version of Bourdieu's postulate that one form of capital can be converted into others, as discussed above. It further explains some social functions that knowledge-making processes on paranormal phenomena can fulfil, besides knowledge in its own right: namely to decide from whom or from which position reliable knowledge-claims about the paranormal can be gotten or made and, if lucky, these loci of knowledge may be the actors themselves.

2.3.   Assessing the use of theory

Having introduced the theoretical framework, it is time to make clear how theory works on different levels of this dissertation.

The empirical results will be analyzed and discussed in light of the theoretical framework (i.e., occulture, epistemic authority) and their subordinated theses and concepts (i.e., occulture-as-plausibility, strategies of epistemic capital, boundary-work as out-defining and alignment).

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[38] Following Beckford (2003, 11), I view social theory most generally as "accounts of social phenomena at a relatively high level of generality."

Occulture contributes by offering a means of classifying available resources for agents' engagement with paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences. Quantitatively, occulture is studied as relationships between affirming or rejecting paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences and variables measuring occultural contact points. In this way, it will be possible to shed light on how warranted the sub-thesis occulture-as-plausibility is. Qualitatively, I focus on identifying references to occultural resources (e.g., in media, popular culture), and how these are employed (e.g., as sources of inspiration, knowledge-making, entertainment) in the agents' respective paranormal practices.

The theory of epistemic authority posits that aspirations to and assessments of reliable and legitimate position of knowledge-making are desired. This is demonstrated by identifying the participants' use of rhetorical and interpretative processes that takes the form of strategies of epistemic capital and boundary-work, respectively. Hereby, the theoretical framework demonstrates that paranormal practices are distinctly epistemic.

Taken together, while the strategies of epistemic capital together with boundary-work explain what is at stake (i.e., epistemic authority) and how this may be achieved, occulture points to a pool of resources that agents will relate to and employ in these endeavors.

Practice theory, including its application as practice-in-dimensions (Ammerman 2020), acts as both a social metatheory and as a way to sift through the empirical materials by means of creating a thematic taxonomy. The application of the dimensions embodiment, materiality, emotion and narrative serves to reveal the social structuration of the paranormal paraculture as a set of paranormal practices hence provides a focus for the qualitative results presented in the fifth chapter.

Steve Engler and Mark Q. Gardiner (2022, 114) have argued that both theory and data may be viewed as "relative terms" that can be placed within "a data-theory spectrum," ranging from relatively simple classifications of empirical materials to high levels of abstraction. In this dissertation, theorizations at the lower end of the spectrum, closest to pre-theorized data, are the methodological choices governing, for instance, the interview guide and the survey questions, which, together, make possible the gathering of empirical materials. One and a few steps up on the data-theory spectrum are classifications such as variables and codes followed by conceptualizations and sensitizing concepts, or "points of departure to form interview questions, to look at data, to listen to interviewees, and to think analytically about the data" (Charmaz 2006, 17), for instance, the paranormal prototypes and the empirical focus on authority and knowledge. Next are levels of propositions, models and ontology, ranging from the theoretical framework with derived hypotheses and analytical categories to the metatheory of practice and philosophical pragmatism. The main point of the data-theory spectrum is the insistence that even the purest of em-

pirical data is formed by choices which are at least in part theoretically informed. And it is to the collection of data, and these procedures' underlying methodological choices, that I turn in the following chapter.

Chapter 3. Methods, methodology and materials

In this chapter, the methods and empirical materials of the study are presented, alongside some heuristic, methodological and ethical considerations. First, however, the general research design is introduced.

3.1. Research design

The research design involves two main stages of data collection and combines quantitative and qualitative methods in a consequent fashion (Creswell 2009, p. 210-213).[39] The first stage involves the distribution of a questionnaire to an Internet panel representative of the Swedish population. The second consists of fieldwork, including participant observation and interviews, among and with participants engaged in paranormal paraculture. The choice of combining methods stems from the rationale that they together may cast light on the distribution and contents of paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences in contemporary Sweden. As the methods correspond to different target populations, I am, however, hesitant to use the label mixed methods (e.g., Creswell 2009).

The survey *Paranormal Sweden*, aimed at the Swedish population in general, was distributed through the internet panel *The Swedish Citizen Panel* (Swe: Medborgarpanelen*)* at the SOM (Swe: Samhälle, opinion, medier) Institute (University of Gothenburg, n.d.). In addition to questions and items having to do with paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences, the panel and questionnaire included questions regarding religious belonging and practice, cultural values and conspiracism, as well as a plentitude of background variables. Statistical inference was used to map between-group differences concerning paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences, as well as to run tests to determine which independent variables predict a respondent's likelihood to affirm paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences the most and, conversely, the least. The initial probe of suitable candidates for fieldwork in Swedish paranormal paraculture was conducted online. The matter of sampling will be discussed more thoroughly in the next two subchapters.

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[39] In reality, however, different stages of data gathering and analysis would sometimes co-occur, making the project design concurrent (Creswell 2009, 213-216) rather than sequential.

Besides combining different research methods and materials, the project employs deductive, inductive and abductive modes of inference and analysis (e.g., Reichertz 2014; Timmermans & Tavory 2012) when apt. In agreement with Jo Reichertz (2014), I view induction, deduction and abduction as integral to research in general, and they can all be employed within the same project at different stages. The collection and analysis of qualitative data was mainly inductive from the onset, seeking patterns of interest from the bottom up, although research foci such as authority and emic epistemology entered as sensitizing concepts (e.g., Charmaz 2006). Later, the theoretical framework was superimposed upon the quantitative and qualitative data, an approach more akin to deduction.

3.2. Methods.

3.2.1. Survey research

A survey on paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences started to take form in the spring of 2019. The questionnaire underwent several revisions, for instance, after input from a pilot study. The survey questions, as well as their items, construction and origin, are presented in 3.3.2. below. In this section, I instead focus on the sampling strategies associated with internet panel data and their implications for statistical methods of analysis and inference. Particular statistical techniques (e.g., principal component analysis, multiple and logistic regression) are discussed in conjunction with the results in the fourth chapter.

The Swedish Citizen Panel had two main benefits compared to traditional (e.g., postal surveys, telephone interviews) survey strategies. First, the distribution of a survey through the internet panel was cost efficient (e.g., Hays et al. 2015, 685). Second, some of the main methodological issues associated with the usage of internet panel survey data were mitigated or avoided through the particular sampling strategies used by the panel, which warrants some comments. The use of internet panels is booming, especially within marketing and consumer surveys but also regarding opinion polls (Surveyföreningen 2014, 6), a development that is interlinked with a downturn for classical sampling and distribution strategies (e.g., postal or telephone surveys). Internet panels are frequently comprised of non-probability samples of self-recruited individuals, which is also a common critique directed towards their use.[40] *The Swedish Citizen Panel*, however, provides a way around this issue, since it contains a subsample of randomly sampled members, which I opted to use

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[40] Another issue is the occurrence of double dropout rates (Surveyföreningen 2014, 6). Simply put, there is a first wave of dropouts consisting of those that decide not to join the panel altogether followed by an additional wave of dropouts consisting of those panel members who choose not to answer the particular survey.

exclusively. All respondents in *Paranormal Sweden* were accordingly recruited from this randomized sample frame. The main issue concerning internet panel data was thus avoided. Weights were furthermore applied for gender, education and age in order to mitigate patterned non-response (i.e., over- or under coverage of certain groups) within the sample and make the latter more similar to the general Swedish population. Another advantage of this particular internet panel was that data on several background variables were already collected by *The Swedish Citizen Panel*.

Another issue, not exclusive to the use of internet panels, was the normality of the variables under study. As is often the case with variables studied within the social sciences (e.g., Pallant 2011, 68, 111), assumptions of normality do not hold for several of the variables in *Paranormal Sweden*. Indeed, as others (e.g., Ashton 2018, 304; Voas 2009, 156) have observed, measures of religiosity and spirituality are rarely normally distributed and instead are negatively skewed. Fortunately, the central limit theorem – which roughly states that "regardless of the shape of the population, parameter estimates of that population will have a normal distribution provided the samples are 'big enough'" (Field 2013, 230) – partly comes to the rescue.[41]

To sum up, there are pros and cons to internet panel sampling, the worst of which is mitigated by the randomization of the sample. I will return to some other practical issues which may affect the representativeness of the sample (e.g., dropout rates) in 3.3.2.

3.2.2. Participant observation

Participant observation, one of the two methods I used as part of my fieldwork in the paraculture, denotes "a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people" (DeWalt & DeWalt 2011, 1). Instances of participant observation can be classified according to a continuum based on the level of interaction for the researcher (Rosengren & Arvidsson 2002, 169-175; Fangen 2005, 108), ranging from pure observation to fully engaged participation. The extreme end is perhaps best represented by the expression *going native,* that is, becoming an insider or adopting the views of the studied population (e.g., Bryman 2018, 531; Aspers 2007, 105). The level of systematization varies as well, from studies figuring out issues as they come along to those characterized by a high degree of planning and anticipation of various problems. In terms of the level of interaction, the participant observations carried out as part of this project varied, ranging from the passive role as observer during board meetings and lectures

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[41] The central limit theorem is thought to come in play for sample sizes larger than 30 (Field 2013, 102-104; cf. Pallant 2011, 206), which makes the present sample very large (n = 1,113, 1,101 post-weighting).

to being heavily engaged in the groups' activities. Concerning systematization, I came prepared insofar as I had established contact with gatekeepers, and interview guides were constructed beforehand, but I remained open to improvisation and often did not know quite what to expect at the events. Accordingly, the (participant) observations remained largely explorative and unstructured (Patel & Davidsson 2019, 94). Out of the methods used in this project, none was more inductive than participant observation. There were no clear hypotheses at work derived from theory in advance other than a set of sensitizing concepts that guided what I wanted to explore. Besides preparing myself to be both attentive at the events themselves as well as sensitive to the behavior of and reactions from research participants, keeping the preliminary research questions in mind, I really did not know quite what to expect from the various activities. Did I, for instance, have the required skills for rapidly adopting the role of a ufological field researcher? What if I saw a ghost or, conversely, if no signs of a haunting were detected, what would the appropriate response be? The only course to follow regarding these "what ifs" was to make it up as I went along.

Participant observation usually entails long periods in the field during which researchers immerse themselves in the everyday life of the target population (e.g., Fangen 2005, 111; Bryman 2018, 513). However, an increasing amount of research employs participant observation for shorter segments of time, such as rapid appraisal procedures and focused ethnography[42] (DeWalt & DeWalt 2011, 38). This expanded notion of how participant observation can be done inspired this project. Indeed, I chose to attend only one or a few events organized by the selected groups within the paraculture, as the project was designed to cover several kinds of paranormal prototypes. It was hence not a feasible option to follow any single organization or actor for longer periods of time. The intent was thus to take a preliminary snapshot rather than craft an exhaustive portrayal of the different groups. The fact that my fieldwork coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic was hardly beneficial to the frequency or length of excursions. Indeed, some groups that I approached cancelled all their events during the first year of the pandemic, while others proceeded under restrictions, some of them confining their practice to online activities.

As stated, participant observation is dedicated to the study of the everyday, ordinary life of a group of people. However, the method is not exclusive to the study of events or situations that are commonplace (e.g., Fangen 2005, 29). Indeed, paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences are distinctly *non-ordi-*

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[42] As McGuire (2002, 331) has argued, the term ethnography is sometimes used as synonymous with participant observation. I abstain from the classification ethnography due to its association with long and immersive times spent in the field and instead describe my qualitative method as participant observation.

nary, some seemingly transcending the world of mundane, everyday experience. However, despite their reference to non-ordinary realities, the paranormal practices I encountered were both social and recurrent, although admittedly often sporadic. The participants' levels of engagement naturally varied. To some, paranormal practice and attendance at shared events is a regular feature in their lives, while others only intermittently engage in the paraculture. This has consequences for the participant observation: if the groups' events are sporadic, so too will the opportunities for participant observation be.

A key issue for the participant observer is the establishment of rapport, or a "close, trusting relationship" (DeWalt & DeWalt 2011, 41) between researcher and research subjects revolving around a shared sense of goals. In ethnography, rapport is usually established gradually over long periods of time. Since my circumstances did not allow for long periods in the field, rapport established between me and my research participants was restricted to what DeWalt and DeWalt (2011, 51-52) designate as instant rapport, that is, "to put informants at ease to answer the questions being asked" and, it could be added, to let me spend time in their setting. Suffice it to say, had I spent more time in the field establishing rapport, I may have become privy to more information (e.g., on more sensitive topics).

The primary form of documentation of the participant observation was field notes (e.g., DeWalt & DeWalt 2011). I generally took notes as soon as possible following the studied events. In some instances, ones characterized by more or less pure observation, I could write them at the research sites during the events in question, expanding them later. In other cases, instances marked by a higher degree of participation, it was not possible to take notes during the events and I would then need to rely on memory. In the field notes, I recorded sequences of events, characteristics and numbers of participants, interactions and communications between participants (including myself), spatial aspects (e.g., descriptions of the sites) alongside some preliminary reflections.

One of the main benefits of participant observation is that it allows the researcher to study less obvious and non-verbal aspects of social phenomena as well as discrepancies between discourse and behavior (e.g., Aspers 2007, 109). By comparison, methods such as interviews rely more heavily on the self-awareness of research participants (Fangen 2005, 32-33). As DeWalt and DeWalt (2011, 128) have argued, however, participant observation can be successfully triangulated with other methods of inquiry. For this reason, the observations I carried out within the paranormal paraculture were accompanied by semi-structured interviews, the method to which I now turn.

3.2.3. Interviews

Prior to the interviews, whether conducted individually or in groups, an interview guide was constructed around a set of topics the interviews were to cover.

The paranormal topics in focus varied from paranormal prototype to proto-type. Follow-up questions (cf. Kvale & Brinkmann 2014, 180-182) were not only expected but warranted in most interviews in order to cover new topics and validate my interpretations of the interviews' contents. This conduct, per-mitting improvisation but sticking to a certain formula, made the interviews semi-structured (Kvale & Brinkmann 2014, 45). After conducting a few inter-views, I revised the interview guide slightly since some of the standard for-mulations of questions posed difficulties for the participants, especially those concerned with epistemology.

The main difference between the interviews conducted with individuals and those done in groups was that the latter were more spontaneous in the sense that I, as interviewer, acted more as a moderator of sorts, facilitating interactions between participants. In this sense, group interviews are more asymmetrical and non-hierarchical when it comes to relations between inter-viewer and interviewee (Kvale & Brinkmann 2014, 156). Due to the ways in which participants can influence each other in group interviews, the views ex-pressed in these settings may be especially difficult to ascertain as "authentic." This, however, is a double-edged sword having perks as well: participants may be prompted to reflect upon and take a stand on issues that would have other-wise remained tacit.

I would further like to stress the interview as a collaboration between inter-viewer and interviewee, the information gained being a product of the active efforts of both parties rather than the matter of simply mirroring what the in-terviewee *really* thinks or experiences (e.g., Holstein & Gubrium 1995, 17). In the group interviews, this situation not only provides opportunities for in-teractions between interviewer and interviewees but also between the inter-viewees as well. It is possible, following Holstein and Gubrium (1995), that at least some interpretations and statements shared by participants would never have been articulated, or perhaps even conceived of in the first place, unless prompted by me or other participants. However, this risk is integral to all forms of interviews and cannot fully be eliminated. That said, I opted for a modest approach in which I tried neither to encourage nor discourage any par-ticular direction for the conversation to take, especially in terms of normativity and value judgements.

Some comments on the procedures of transcribing and coding the recorded interviews are warranted. The initial transcriptions were rendered close to ver-batim in the sense that repetitions, pauses and filler words were noted, alt-hough not in great detail. These transcripts only rarely included non-verbal elements such as exhalations, sighs or similar expressions. All quotes from the transcripts appearing in the following have been rendered into English by me and have been somewhat polished, since passages too closely resembling ac-tual speech patterns, as Kirsti Malterud (2014, 91) has argued, might make informants seem more incoherent or chaotic than was actually the case in the de facto interview.

The transcripts were coded using the software NVivo (twelfth ed.). First, all text segments were coded following the order of the interview questions they covered (e.g., Q1 Paranormal experience, Q3 Epistemology and knowledge). Next, the text was coded according to the kind of topic, or what Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006, 94) have called "the data collection questions," the interview questions were intended to cover (e.g., paranormal experiences, emic epistemologies). These passages were coded as *Topic*. After that, topics either raised by the participants or the researcher were coded as *Subject*. This initial coding scheme was mainly concerned with organizing the text segments according to the intent of the interview guide and in line with subject matters addressed by participants. I use the term *theme* in contradistinction to both topics and subjects. The themes denote, as Braun and Clarke (2006, 82) put it, a form of "*patterned* response or meaning within the data set." Accordingly, themes are recurrent and shared to some extent between interviewees. The second phase of coding was an attempt at thematic analysis, as I was looking for patterns among informants' interpretations and ascriptions of meaning to the topics and subjects covered. A last stage of coding was done in which concepts from the theory of epistemic authority were superimposed on the transcriptions in a more deductive sense. These were coded as *Theory* and served as a preparation for the theoretical analyses presented in the sixth chapter.

The coding of interview data, which largely followed the step-by-step guide for thematic analysis as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006, 86-93), hence started as mainly explorative and inductive, while aspects of theory were later added deductively. As Braun and Clarke (2006, 81) have argued, thematic analysis resembles grounded theory. The basic idea of grounded theory is that the theory is generated from the data in a bottom-up fashion, and it is hardly a coincidence that grounded theory is often referred to as a prime example of inductive inference and theory generation (e.g., Mason 2002, 180; Charmaz 2006). Thematic analysis, however, is not in and of itself bound up with any particular epistemological positions or social scientific paradigms (Braun & Clarke 2006, 81). In this project, I used the approach of thematic analysis as a set of heuristic and methodological guidelines rather than as a mode of theory generation per se.

3.3. Positionality towards the empirical field

Besides acting as a bridge between the presentations of methods and materials, this section is a follow-up to the metatheoretical and reflexive section found in the second chapter. I start with outlining some ethical considerations actualized during the study, after which I turn to reflections on the interactions between me and the empirical environment, including research participants.

3.3.2. Ethical considerations

The perhaps most important consideration pertaining to research ethics is the intent to avoid harm to research participants, or at least to balance the risks and intrusions against the knowledge gained (e.g., Vetenskapsrådet 2017, 15). In this section, I address ethical concerns such as informed consent (e.g., Fangen 2005, 205-210) and confidentiality (Fangen 2005, 218) as well as data management and practicalities related to interactions between me as a researcher and the research participants.

In all cases of the fieldwork and interviews discussed in the following, the organizations are left unnamed and the research participants have been assigned pseudonyms in order to mask their identity (cf. Nilsson 2014, 163). Although some participants expressed an interest in having their identities revealed, all were anonymized as a safeguard to prevent any unintended consequences of participating in the project. Informed consent was given either orally or in written form depending on the context. During participant observation in contexts that included many attendees, information about the project was given orally, mainly through gatekeepers who introduced me. No participants in these settings objected. Written informed consent was reserved for respondents and interviewees (included as part of the survey in Appendix 1 and separately for interviewees as Appendix 3.). In the case of respondents, informed consent was given prior to filling out the survey. I was, in all stages of fieldwork, transparent about my role as a researcher in order to avoid masked observation (e.g., DeWalt & DeWalt, 32-33).

Another issue pertaining to research ethics and fieldwork is the researcher's degree of identification with and sympathy for the studied population (e.g., Fangen 2005, 176-181). A guiding rule proposed by Fangen (2005, 180) is to be sympathetic while at the same time maintaining a sense of critical distance. These two conflicting goals are often achieved during different phases of the research being carried out. For instance, a researcher out in the field may be more inclined to gravitate towards the sympathetic end, while the critical viewpoint comes into play to a larger extent during the analysis and write-up stages. As stated above, the degree of engagement or immersion varied between different settings. My main approach for balancing the scales between being utterly disengaged from or wholly immersed in the research environments was to continuously remind both myself and the participants that I was there to conduct research and thus had my own agenda.

My impression is that all interviews were conducted in good spirits, even when dealing with volatile subject matters, such as relationships with the departed. More generally, I tried to cultivate an easy-going, respectful and modest demeanor, so as not to provoke any feelings of discomfort or alarm.

The panel members of *The Swedish Citizen Panel* were informed regarding the terms and conditions for participation upon being recruited. They had thus given their consent prior to the distribution of any particular questionnaire.

Personal data and details (e.g., names, contact information, social security numbers) were removed from the survey data collected by the Swedish Citizen Panel as the data set was delivered to the researcher. In other words, it was, and still would be, impossible for me to identify any of the respondents of the survey, and I would need the help of the Swedish Citizen Panel to attempt any such identification. For this reason, respondents were informed that they would need to contact the Swedish Citizen Panel if they wanted get access to information resulting from their participation or if they wanted to drop out.

It is also important to consider more far-ranging and indirect ethical concerns. Is it, for instance, possible that participation may contribute to stigma or any other negative consequences for those who are willing to talk about their paranormal beliefs, activities or experiences? Not in itself, I would argue. In fact, exploring a hitherto understudied terrain, or giving a voice to people whose views may otherwise be seen as abject or deviant from the perspective of mainstream society, may even be beneficial. Several participants expressed the hope of alleviating any stigma by speaking out about their interests. This desire was what led some of them to participate in the first place. It remains, however, an important consideration for me as a researcher to not reproduce normative assumptions or essentialize or reify any between-group differences pertaining to certain strata of the population.

In regard to data management and storage, all documentation (physical or digital, be it signed consent forms, field notes or transcriptions of interviews) was placed in secure storage (physically at the Department of Theology, digitally on encrypted servers). Materials will be archived for 10 years according to the university policy on archiving, after which the material will be destroyed.

The project was approved by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority in May 2020.

3.3.3. Observing and participating: Reflexivity in relation to milieus and participants

In this section, I discuss self-reflexivity in a couple of ways. First, I discuss ways in which my own identity and personality may interact with research participants. Second, I address more personal aspects of the research process, such as my entry into the paranormal field as well as some reflections from the fieldwork I carried out. Taken together, this account not only serves to make apparent any bias but also to make transparent several tacit and implicit aspects of the research process in general.

Although I firmly believe that the knowledge gained from this study is an end in itself and may prove beneficial for the self-understanding of the research participants, my approach and analyses will necessarily diverge from the emic understandings of the paranormal that I encountered. This hardly

qualifies as harm of participants, although they may disagree with my infer-
ences. Following my preference for neutrality, the study did not encompass
any of the strategies associated with the paradigm of participatory action re-
search (e.g., Lincoln, Lynham & Guba 2011). My intent was accordingly not
to make it easier to be a participant within paranormal paraculture, but neither
was it to make it any harder.

   Although I at times not only emulated but performed and adopted certain
roles in the studied events, I continuously stressed, both to the research par-
ticipants as well as to myself, that I was a researcher with an agenda of my
own. Indeed, the main divide between me and other participants was and re-
mains the fact that I, unlike the others, was there to study *them*, their activities,
and the settings in which they occur. Although my participation was in no way
insincere, it remained subsumed under my primary goal, namely to conduct
social scientific research. It must, however, be stressed that no instance of par-
ticipant observation or interview is a mere mediation of what goes on in cer-
tain social events or in the minds of their participants. Instead, the knowledge
produced is constituted by social interactions between participants and re-
searcher alike. As Tanya Luhrmann stated more than 30 years ago following
fieldwork among Londoner magicians and witches:

> Fieldwork […] does not grant a blanket awareness of the hearts and minds of
> the fieldworker's chosen society, as if he were a woolly sponge. The field-
> worker cannot learn what 'they' 'believe': nor can she ever really know what
> really occurs in the mind of any one individual. Fieldwork consists, instead, of
> a series of conversations, as flexible, tendentious, and idiosyncratic as conver-
> sations between individuals often are. And the fieldworker is to some extent
> caught in an intellectual trap not of his own making: to tell the story of an
> experience, one must distort, simplify, symbolize, compress the complex ho-
> lism of daily life into a plot. (Luhrmann 1989, 14)

Another aspect I will linger on is how my own person may influence the
knowledge produced, besides acting as an interviewer prompting participants
to articulate various thoughts, views and stories (e.g., Holstein & Gubrium
1995). Most central is probably the sense in which my own person either
makes possible, mitigates or inhibits access to different research settings, and
topics, especially in the case of participant observation and interviews. The
aforementioned establishment of rapport may furthermore be at least partly
determined by the researcher's persona and identity, and their effects on the
research subjects. Quoting Schatzmans and Strauss, Fangen argued aptly that
the "observer is observed" (Schatzmans & Strauss 1973, 63 in Fangen 2005,
66). Thus, behaviors and identities, be they mannerisms, language, mode of
dressing or gender, will likely influence the research sites and subjects. This
is one of the reasons prompting DeWalt and DeWalt (2011, 212) to argue that
"the researcher is the primary research instrument." At times, these kinds of
dynamics became salient to me, such as when other participants within the

mediumistic training program ascribed me ancestors according to what I infer was their (sometimes inaccurate) assumptions about my own socioeconomic background. There is, however, no simple answer or imperative for the participant observer regarding how to resolve these issues. As noted by Fangen (2005, 66-67), attempts to blend in pertaining to, for instance, attire and sociolect may be disruptive, provoking the research subjects since they are usually well aware that the researcher is, essentially, an outsider. So, would me being a white urban male in my 30s doing a PhD be favorable or disadvantageous in the setting of the séance, the ghost hunt, or ufological field research? Does it make me more or less trustworthy as a conversational partner or interviewer? In part, this concerns social characteristics that I as a researcher may, or may not, share with the research participants, gender being one of the most obvious ones. Other parameters such as age, dialect, sociolect and socioeconomic class may very well influence the outcome, although these risks may be overstated, and it is arguably impossible for me to ascertain the influence from these. Even in settings in which I demographically may "fit in" (e.g., predominantly urban, white, middle class) I still likely deviate from the group due to my relative lack of engagement with the paranormal and the fact that I am, after all, present as a researcher. It ought to be stressed as well that the influence of the researcher's various identities is not necessarily negative. Ramstedt (2018, 90), noted in his study of a Finnish paranormal scene how his young age was appreciated by the (mainly) older research participants: "They were delighted that a person of my age was interested in 'spirituality' and 'knowledge' and not just 'violent video games, rock music, and alcohol.'"

This study overlaps with research on alternative religion and spirituality, including new religious movements, New Age currents and Western esotericism. There are possible commonalities between this project and these other fields. For instance, I believe that there is some likelihood that the observer is not only observed but may also be read by the researched as well. Writing on the topic of contemporary esotericism, Asprem and Kenneth Granholm (2013, 48) have noted how scholarship on these movements is frequently read by esotericists themselves. In other words, the etic influences the emic. These issues are familiar from research on new religious movements as well, in which researchers have needed to navigate between etic and emic views, the latter both in the form of the participants of the movements but also their adversaries (e.g., anti-cult movements, the media). There are plenty of examples of what Beckford (2003, 153) has called "lay theorising" (e.g., theories of brainwashing, and/or the deprogramming of cult members) which in themselves become part of the research field. Some new religious movements are themselves, like the aforementioned esotericists, prone to engaging in the public debate about their relationship to mainstream society and even establish "in-house institutions for research" (Beckford 2003, 154) which enlist researchers sympathetic to their cause. The organizations within the studied paraculture are not as institutionalized as new religious movements, and they

have no formal institutions of research as of yet, although a couple of them have publications of their own. That stated, I do not find it unlikely that this dissertation may be read by some participants in the paranormal paraculture and that the results and analyses presented in it may inform their practices to some extent.

So far, the reflexivity of this subchapter has mainly concerned interactions between researcher and the researched from the viewpoint of research methodology. Other aspects are more personal. For instance, what motivates me to engage with the field in the first place? Am I a believer or a skeptic regarding paranormal phenomena? Despite my alignment with the research principle of methodological agnosticism, I am certainly invested in the sense that I, personally, find the truth or falsehood of claims of paranormal phenomena intriguing, albeit I make efforts to bracket this fascination. Indeed, I would likely not have chosen the subject matter of this dissertation unless I had some affinity with "X-files stuff" (Northcote 2007), albeit I mainly engage with these as entertainment. As stated in the introduction, I myself have experienced some unexplained (but not necessarily unexplainable) events, mainly in my childhood and adolescence. These events have not prompted me to become either a believer or a skeptic, however. Although I did come across a couple of events during my time in the field that I find hard to categorize (and they will be presented in due course in the fifth chapter), I am hesitant to describe them as unexplained, paranormal or, conversely, ordinary, misidentified or fake. I remain content with the notion that I will probably never get any answers. The principle of methodological agnosticism is thus not only methodologically suitable but is also in line with my personal relationship to claims of the paranormal.

3.4. Materials

I will now present the empirical materials of this study, starting with an introduction to the survey *Paranormal Sweden*, followed by descriptions of the settings in which the fieldwork and interviews were carried out.

3.4.1. The survey *Paranormal Sweden*

I start with an introduction to the survey questions themselves and what they intend to measure, adding some comments about their origin. Next, I share some general reflections on the questionnaire and thoughts about its implications. After this, the resulting dataset is introduced; it will be elaborated upon more fully in the fourth chapter, which consists of a presentation of the quantitative results.

3.4.1.1. The questionnaire

Rather than introducing the various survey questions in order of their appearance, I present them here according to their relevance for the research and analytical (see 3.5) questions on paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences. A single item on conspiracism is thereafter introduced, followed by a set of background variables and, lastly, questions on cultural values. The original Swedish-language questionnaire is included as Appendix 1.

Paranormal beliefs were operationalized by 10 items within the overarching survey question "How likely do you find the following statements?" The specific paranormal beliefs were:

- Ancient advanced civilizations, such as Atlantis, once existed;
- Some alternative treatments are at least as effective as traditional medicine;
- It is possible to influence the physical world through the mind alone;
- Some astrologers, palm readers, tarot card readers, fortune tellers, and psychics can foresee the future;
- Astrology impacts one's life and personality;
- It is possible to communicate with the dead;
- Places can be haunted (by ghosts, spirits, energies or something similar);
- Dreams sometimes foretell the future or reveal hidden truths;
- Some UFOs (i.e., unexplained flying objects) are probably spaceships from other worlds;
- Renowned creatures such as Bigfoot and the Loch Ness Monster will one day be discovered by science.

Responses consisted of a five-point scale, ranging from *not likely at all* to *very likely* with an additional option of *don't know*. The items were mainly reproduced from the Baylor Religion Survey[43] (see Bader et al. 2011). A version of the latter has also been used in a study of neo-pagans (Dyrendal et al. 2017).

Paranormal activities and experiences were jointly operationalized through the overarching question "Have you ever done or experienced any of the following?" All of the items were provided with responses consisting of an ordinal scale with four values ranging from *no, never* to *yes, regularly*, and they were the following:

- Used alternative medicine or complementary treatments (e.g., homeopathy, reiki or aroma therapy);
- Consulted a medium, astrologer, fortune teller or seer;

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[43] One of the items from the original Baylor Religion survey, namely "We are approaching an entirely new age that will radically change our view of science, spiritual knowledge, or humanity," was excluded since measuring alternative or New Age spiritualities was outside of the scope of this study.

- Felt the presence of some form of spirit;
- Experienced contact with someone deceased;
- Had a near-death experience (e.g., life passes in revue);
- Communicated telepathically with someone;
- In a supernatural or unexplainable way been able to predict the future;
- In a supernatural or unexplainable way been able to see something from afar;
- Had an experience as if you were leaving your own body;
- Witnessed an unexplained aerial phenomenon (UFO phenomena);
- Visited or lived in a place that is haunted;
- Used "the spirit of the glass," a Ouija board or another method for contacting spirits.

The question and items were inspired by the Baylor Religion Survey (Bader et al. 2011) and the Enköping Study (Ahlstrand & Gunner 2008), combining items from both.

Two additional survey questions related to paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences were constructed, one of which was intended to measure active searches for information about a set of paranormal topics, the other the number of contact points with paranormal themes in a range of social settings (e.g., among family members, peers, various media). In common for the two is that they measure degrees of *proximity* to paranormal topics, albeit in different ways: while the first measures respondents taking an active interest in any of the items, the second covers contact points with paranormal themes or motifs that may occur passively. The first question was posed as "Have you ever actively searched for information on any of the following topics?" with the supplement "For instance, by reading a book or visiting a website," followed by the following items:

- Alternative or complementary medicine (e.g., homeopathy, reiki or aromatherapy);
- Mediums, fortune tellers or seers;
- UFO phenomena;
- Ghosts and hauntings;
- Mystical animals/creatures (e.g., Bigfoot, the Loch Ness Monster);
- Astrology; Prophecies (e.g., Nostradamus);
- Parapsychology or psi (e.g., telepathy, clairvoyance).

The variables were inspired by both the Baylor Religion Survey (Bader et al. 2011) and the Enköping Study (Ahlstrand & Gunner 2008).

The second question on proximity to the paranormal phrased as "How often have you during the last six months encountered depictions or stories about the supernatural, the unexplained or the paranormal in the following contexts?" included the following items:

- In my family;
- Among friends;

- In school;
- At work;
- In church or another religious building;
- On TV;
- On the Internet;
- In newspapers (both paper and online);
- In books.

The response scale consisted of five values from *not at all* during the last six months to *every day* with the additional value of *not relevant*. The question was inspired by a similar one aimed at Swedish youth (Swe: Unga och Religion, see Klingenberg & Lövheim 2019) on contact points with religion in different social settings, including media. As representations of the paranormal are occultural following the occulture-as-plausibility thesis discussed in the second chapter, I will henceforth refer to the question and items as *occultural contact points.*

Next up is an instrument designed to measure the phenomenon of conspiracism, or tendencies to conspiracy theory ideation. The inclusion of such an item follows from previous demonstrations that paranormal beliefs covary with belief in conspiracy theories (e.g., Swami et al. 2011; Lobato et al. 2014; cf. Darwin et al. 2011) but also because prior theorizations, such as stigmatized knowledge (e.g., Barkun 2013), rest upon an affinity between the paranormal, conspiracy theories and other forms of alternative knowledge claims. The item on conspiracism was preceded by the following vignette:

> Some political and social events are debated (e.g., the terror attacks 9/11 in 2001, the death of Princess Diana and the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Olof Palme. Some persons have suggested that official accounts of these events might be an attempt to conceal the truth from the public. This official version would, according to these persons, mask the fact that these events were planned in secret by hidden and powerful individuals and groups.

This introduction was followed by the question proper: "How true or false an image of reality do you yourself think that official accounts most often give?" The ordinal scale ranged from 1, *completely false* to 9, *a completely true picture*, with 5 as a neutral or intermediate category. The question was inspired by Lantian et al.'s (2016) single-item instrument designed to measure peoples' tendency to believe in conspiracy theories in general (rather than any specific conspiracy theories), making it a cost-effective option. The instrument has furthermore been demonstrated to correlate well with other variables measuring particular conspiracy beliefs (Lantian et al. 2016). The original item was phrased as: "I think that the official version of the events given by the authorities very often hides the truth (ibid.)."[44] In its original form, the instrument

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[44] With the vignette stated as: "Some political and social events are debated (for example 09/11 attacks, the death of Lady Diana, the assassination of John F. Kennedy). It is suggested that the

proved difficult to use, which became apparent in the pilot study in which several participants reacted negatively to the question, specifically towards the way it was formulated rather than the content itself. The research team at *The Swedish Citizen Panel* further found that that the instrument warranted simplification. Thus, instead of affirming or denying that authorities (very often) hide the truth, respondents were asked to judge if authorities (most often) describe contested events truthfully or falsely, while the item's ordinal scale was kept, but reversed. One could indeed argue that the question and item rephrased in this manner measure something else than the original instrument. While the original measures a tendency to affirm or reject conspiracism through the statement that authorities (very often) hide the truth, the new formulation more generally measures the level of confidence and trust (or lack thereof) regarding official versions of contested events.

The survey included a wide array of background variables, most of which were available prior to the study. Gender was determined with the straightforward question "Are you:" followed by the three nominal responses, namely *woman*, *man*, and *other*. Age groups (in tens of years, e.g., 30-39) were calculated based on year of birth. The question "In what kind of area do you live?" added an urban-rural variable, with the nominal responses *city, central*; *city, vicinity/suburbs*; *town, central*; *town; vicinities/suburbs*; *larger urban area*; *smaller urban area*; *countryside*. Country of origin was measured by asking where the respondent was born, with the nominal response alternatives *in Sweden*, *in another country in Europe*, *in another country outside of Europe* and *don't know*. Respondents were prompted to state the level of education that best fit them: *did not complete elementary school*; *elementary school*; *high school, shorter than 3 years*; *high school, 3 years or longer*; *post-secondary education, not university, shorter than 3 years*; *post-secondary education, not university, 3 years or longer; college or university, shorter than 3 years*; *college or university, longer than 3 years*; *research/doctoral degree*. Respondents were also prompted to rank their own monthly income by selecting 1 of 13 income groups (plus the responses of *don't know/don't want to answer* and *other*) ranging from less than 4,000 SEK to more than 65,000 SEK. Voting intention and political party preference were measured through the question "What party would you vote for if it was general election today?" In addition to all the parliamentary parties, respondents were also given the opportunity to choose *other party*, *protest/ blank vote*, *wouldn't vote*, *I don't have the right to vote*, *don't know* or *don't want to answer*. The survey also measured housing situation by asking "How do you currently live?" with the responses *in a house/town house*, *in an apartment*, and *other type of accommodation*, and it

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'official version' of these events could be an attempt to hide the truth to the public. This 'official version' could mask the fact that these events have been planned and secretly prepared by a covert alliance of powerful individuals or organizations (for example secret services or government). What do you think?" (Lantian et al. 2016, 10)

also included a question on religion, namely "Do you belong to any church or religious congregation?" Through three nominal values for all the included items, both religious affiliation and practice are measured, albeit very roughly: *yes, and I have attended service/meetings in the last 12 months*; *yes, but I have not attended service/meetings in the last 12 months*; *no*. The items included were: *the Church of Sweden*; *another Christian church/congregation*; *a Muslim congregation/association*; and *another religious congregation/association that is neither Christian nor Muslim, state which one*. The question was reproduced from the SOM Institute's recurring survey on religion (cf. Willander 2019) and was only slightly revised.[45] The question follows the rationale of cost-efficiency, as it concisely captures both religious belonging and behavior in one and the same question.

A set of variables on cultural values was included in order to explore their aggregate relations to paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences. The included items were all reproduced from the Short Schwartz Value Survey, an abbreviated version of the Schwartz's Value Survey and the Portrait Values Questionnaire. All items comprising the cultural values set out from the instruction "Please rate the importance of the following values as a life-guiding principle for you" and were ordinal with 9 different response alternatives (ranging from 0, labeled as *Opposed to my principles*, through 1 labeled as *not important*, 4 as *important* and 8 as *of supreme importance*). The items represent the ten broader value types in Schwartz's (e.g., 2006; cf. Schwartz & Lilach 1995) theory of values and they are presented to respondents as overarching categories followed by explanatory key words (in parentheses). The cultural values (with their respective explanations) were:

1. POWER (social power, authority, wealth);
2. ACHIEVEMENT (success, capability, ambition, influence on people and events);
3. HEDONISM (gratification of desires, enjoyment in life, self-indulgence);
4. STIMULATION (daring, a varied and challenging life, an exciting life);
5. SELF-DIRECTION (creativity, freedom, curiosity, independence, choosing one's own goals);
6. UNIVERSALISM (broad-mindedness, beauty of nature and the arts, social justice, a world at peace, equality, wisdom, unity with nature, environmental protection);
7. BENEVOLENCE (helpfulness, honesty, forgiveness, loyalty, responsibility);

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[45] The original item *I am Muslim* was replaced with *a Muslim congregation/association* in order to align it more closely with the other items, while *other religious congregation/association that is neither Christian nor Muslim* was expanded with the free text addition, namely *state which one*.

8. TRADITION (respect for tradition, humbleness, accepting one's lot in life, devotion, modesty);
9. CONFORMITY (obedience, honoring parents and elders, self-discipline, politeness);
10. 10. SECURITY (national security, family security, social order, cleanliness, reciprocation of favors).

The Short Schwartz Value Survey was developed and introduced by Marjaana Lindeman and Markku Verksalao (2005), and they have demonstrated that the instrument shows apt reliability and validity as well as correlations with the aforementioned longer instruments on cultural values. Out of the individual cultural values, the higher-order values of *conservation versus openness to change* and *self-transcendence versus self-enhancement,* respectively, were calculated according to Lindeman and Verkasalo's (2005,173) instructions. Succinctly put, high values on the conservation vs. openness to change variable imply that respondents lean towards conservative values, favoring the status quo, while low values measure tendencies of openness to social change in various forms. High values on self-transcendence vs. self-enhancement imply favoring cultural values related to self-sacrifice and submission, while low values imply self-enhancing values such as hedonism and stimulation. These higher-order value dimensions represent value patterns underlying the distribution of any individual cultural value, and conservation, openness to change, self-transcendence and self-enhancement can be understood as four corners in Schwartz's model, or as ends on two spectrums. Conservation is associated with the underlying cultural values of tradition, conformity and security, while openness to change is related to self-direction, stimulation and hedonism. Meanwhile, benevolence and universalism fall under the purview of self-transcendence, while self-enhancement captures the underlying value constructs of power and achievement. It has been demonstrated that this model correlates with other central concepts within values research, such as materialism and post-materialism (e.g., Inglehart 1977, 1990), the former being positively associated with cultural values, such as security, and the latter with cultural values, such as universalism and self-direction (Braithwaite et al. 1996; Wilson 2005; Beckers et al. 2012; c.f. Lassander 20). In the analyses presented below, the aggregate higher-order values are employed as independent variables.

An issue concerning the questionnaire, not least for instruments such as the single-item conspiracy scale and the Short Schwartz Value Survey,[46] is the matter of translations from English to Swedish. Due to constraints related to budget and timeline, more refined translation methods, such as back translation were not possible, which may have enhanced the validity and reliability

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[46] I would thus like to stress that the translated version of SSVS could, in this form, be viewed as somewhat of a pilot study in itself, and congruence with international, English-speaking usage cannot be entirely assured. The same goes for the single-item conspiracy scale.

(e.g., Creswell 2009, 149, 190-193; Patel & Davidsson 2019, 98-99) of the instruments. The first round of translations was done in consultation with my supervisors, and the questionnaire was tried out in a pilot study. The use of a pilot study and the insights shared by the research team at *The Swedish Citizen Panel*, both of which led to some revisions being made to the questions and items, may be viewed as precautionary attempts to enhance the validity and reliability of the survey.

Another issue concerning both validity and reliability concerns how the survey's questions and statements ought to be interpreted. I will delimit myself to discussing a few examples. Although the belief *ancient advanced civilizations, such as Atlantis, once existed* steers respondents towards mythical civilizations, it cannot be completely ruled out that some respondents may have "real" civilizations (i.e., Ancient Egypt) in mind. Items such as *places can be haunted* are also complex. Finding hauntings likely can imply a range of positions and explanations for them, ranging from paranormal ones, such as spirits of the dead, to the mundane. I cannot exclude the possibility that some respondents view experiences of hauntings as very real, but as products of, for instance, hallucinations, even though the included examples (ghosts, spirits, energies or something similar) ought to draw the respondent to paranormal interpretations. Based on previous findings (e.g., Wuthnow 1978, 65; Morhed 2000, 54; Östling 2012; Tidelius/Olsson 2016) as well as insights gained from the interview study, parapsychological phenomena such as telepathy may also be interpreted as instances of synchronicity or seemingly meaningful coincidences by respondents. One common example is how you come to think of a person you have not heard from in a while only to receive a phone call from this acquaintance shortly after. This is a milder and more mundane, although possibly still paranormal, claim than the notion of direct thought transference that the word telepathy implies in a strictly parapsychological sense. It needs to be considered that affirmative responses may have this "weaker" interpretation of telepathy in mind. Another reservation can be added and ought to be kept in mind. Affirming any paranormal activity and experience does not entail any particular belief or attitude towards these. A respondent reporting the use of the spirit of the glass or Ouija boards may stem from a playful pastime as well as sincere interest.

3.4.1.2. The data set

The questionnaire was distributed from Tuesday, September 15, until October 26, 2020. A total of 1,900 panel members, exclusively probability sampled, were prompted to participate in the study. The questionnaire was returned by 1,113 respondents, and out of these responses 1,067 were counted as complete (i.e., at least 80 percent of all included items were answered), while 1,101 respondents are included in the weighted data set. The response rate was hence about 59 percent. The age frame of participants was 18 to 85 years of age, and the sample was stratified according to respondents' gender, age and level of

education. There were 75 cases of dropout in the form of "bounce backs" (e.g., disabled or invalid e-mail accounts). Prior to the delivery of the data set, it was screened for value errors and other inaccuracies by the research team at the SOM Institute.

How the proportions of panelists in *Paranormal Sweden* compare to the general population in Sweden can be assessed in relation to several background variables. In the case of *Paranormal Sweden*, respondents deviate from the general population in several ways. One response to this, and as a precaution to bias in the sample, was to use the aforementioned weights. These weights are used in all descriptive statistics and analyses henceforth. In Table 2, sample proportions in comparison with SCB statistics on age, gender and level of education are introduced prior to and after weighting the data set according to these variables:

Table 1. Proportions in percent, SCB, pre-weighted and post-weighted *Paranormal Sweden*.

Variable	Value	SCB	Pre-weight	Post-weight
Age (mean/median)		41.4 (mean)	50-59 (median)[2]	40-49 (median)[2]
Gender	Men	50.3	47.3	50.2
	Women	49.7	52.7	49.8
Education[1]	Pre-secondary, shorter than 9 years[3]	4.2	5.2	5.3
	Pre-secondary, 9-10 years[3]	13.4		
	High school, max. 2 years	20	11.5	10.6
	High school, 3 years	24	19.8	23.7
	Post-secondary <3 years[4]	14.9	31.1	32.9
	Post-secondary ≥3 years[4]	22.3	29	25.6
	/PhD, etc.	1.15	2.3	1.9

1 – Based on SCB numbers from 2018 instead of 2020.

2 - Since birth year or de facto age for respondents is not included in the dataset but transformed into age groups, mean-values become nonsensical.

3 – Pre-secondary/elementary is just one category in *The Swedish Citizen Panel* and *Paranormal Sweden* accordingly.

4 – Four categories in *Paranormal Sweden*, namely post-secondary education shorter and longer than 3 years and university/college shorter and longer than 3 years, respectively.

Some further comparisons with the target population are worth mentioning. Concerning country of origin, the proportion of respondents born outside of Sweden was only 6 percent compared to 19.6 percent of the population for the year the study was conducted (SCB 2020a). The distribution of income can furthermore be compared with both the panel in its entirety and corresponding statistics from SCB, all of which are found in Table 3 below.

Table 2. Income groups in valid percent, MP (Medborgarpanelen, *The Swedish Citizen Panel*), PS (*Paranormal Sweden*, pre-weighting), SCB (Statistiska centralbyrån).

Yearly income MP	MP	PS	SCB	Percentage SCB groups	Percent aggregated
<48 000	4.83	7.13	1-19 000	1.65	4.66
			20-39 000	1.41	
			40-59 000	1.60	
48-107 988	3.15	3.68	60-79 000	1.39	6,85
			80-99 000	1.94	
			100-119 000	3.52	
108-155 988	7.11	7.66	120-139 000	3.23	6,99
			140-159 000	3.76	
156-191 988	5.86	5.82	160-179 000	4.20	8,72
			180-199 000	4.52	
192-227 988	5.31	5.34	200-219 000	4.32	8,53
			220-239 000	4.21	
228-275 988	6.83	8.02	240-259 000	4.11	8,15
			260-279 000	4.04	
276-311 988	7.30	7.54	280-299 000	4.07	8,34
			300-319 000	4.27	
312-359 988	11.00	10.45	320-339 000	4.40	8,82

			340-359 000	4.42	
360-443 988	18.54	18.47	360-379 000	4.26	22,91
			380-399 000	3.90	
			400-499 000	14.75	
444-539 988	13.83	12.95	500-599 000	7.56	7,56
540-659 988	8.49	6.89	600-799 000	5.38	5,38
660-779 988	3.59	3.38	n/a	n/a	n/a
≥780 000	4.14	2.67	800-999 000	1.62	3,08
			≥ 1 000 000	1.46	

Concerning voting intention, comparisons can be made with SCB's regular poll *Partisympatiundersökningen* (SCB 2020b) from spring 2020, just prior to the distribution of the survey. The latter clearly deviates from SCB respondents. Take, for instance, voting intention for the Social Democrats: 33.7 in Partisympatiundersökningen, compared to merely 14.4 percent of the panel members, i.e., less than half. The same goes for the second and third largest parties, the Sweden Democrats and the Moderate Party. Respondents in *Paranormal Sweden* expressed the intent to vote for the Sweden Democrats and the Moderate Party in proportions of 14 and 10.3 percent, respectively, compared to SCB, which points to 17.1 and 20.1, respectively. This may imply that either the panel members of *The Swedish Citizen Panel* or those who opted to partake in *Paranormal Sweden* cover groups sympathetic to the three largest political parties rather poorly. The proportion of uncertain or undecided voters was quite similar, with 11.1 percent in the panel compared to 12 percent in SCB's poll. Voting intention for all parliamentary parties as well as other options are included in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Voting intention in *Paranormal Sweden*, in valid percent.

Figure 1. Voting intention in *Paranormal Sweden*, in valid percent.
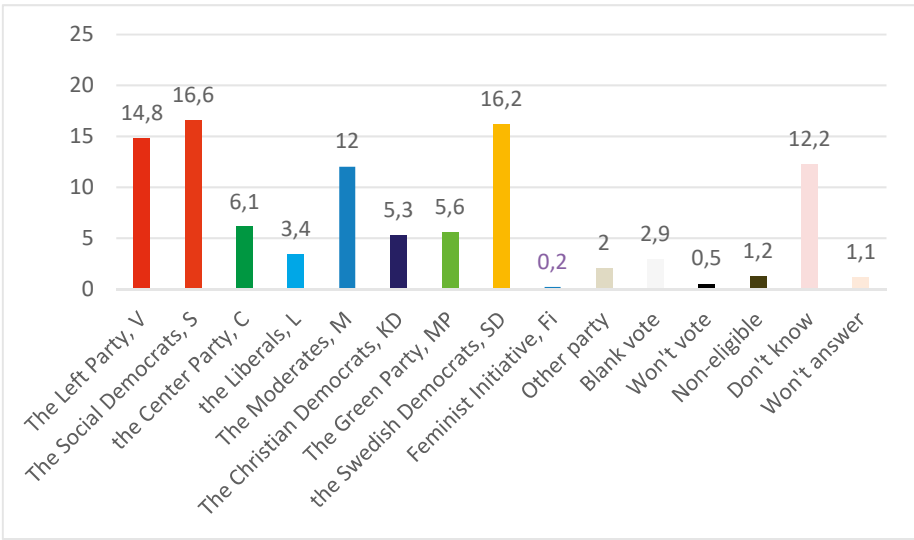
Even though *Paranormal Sweden* diverged from SOM and SCB in certain ways, I believe that the randomization of respondents and the stratification and weighting of the data set contribute to the survey's quality. The shortcomings are small in comparison to the general gain, namely to conduct a probability-based survey on the occurrence of paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences in contemporary Sweden, attempts at which have not been made since the 1990s and the turn of the millennium. Even by international standards, the survey is unusually extensive. Other than *Paranormal America* (Bader et al. 2011) and the Baylor Religion Survey, I can think of no other surveys that include variables and items related to the paranormal to such an extent.

3.4.2. Sampling the paraculture: The organizations and events

The sample of organizations was both convenient and strategic, the former due to matters of availability, the latter pertaining to the prototypical approach suggested in the first chapter. The last point warrants some elaboration. I aimed for a spread with regard to organizations so that the resulting sample would somewhat reflect the main paranormal prototypes. In this sense, the resulting material may be viewed as instances of judgement or purposive sampling (DeWalt & DeWalt 2011, 130; Bryman 2018, 496-498), that is, based on inclusion criteria derived from theoretical and conceptual considerations. The approach resulted in a set of organizations and settings based on the following prototypes: mediumistic practice, ghost hunts, cryptozoology, parapsychology and ufology.

It is worth noting that paranormal prototypes may occasionally overlap, both pertaining to their substantive contents as well as to the audiences they

gather. For instance, the selected ufological organization sometimes investigates reports of general paranormal phenomena, while agents within popular Spiritualism may take an active interest in extraordinary powers of the mind such as ESP, commonly associated with parapsychology, etc. Although it is impossible to assess whether or not the organizations selected are representative of the paranormal paraculture in Sweden in its entirety, I argue that the approach may at the very least serve as the basis for making some generalizations insofar as the main prototypes are captured by the sample.

In order to find organizations reflecting the paranormal prototypes, searches were carried out online. The possible number of candidates was hence delimited to organizations and actors with an online presence, searchable by a set of generic paranormal terms.[47] Another demarcation was to determine exclusion criteria for actors and organizations. As stated above, the paranormal is in the case of this study operationalized as those purported phenomena and corresponding beliefs, activities and/or experiences that fall outside of the frameworks of both institutionalized science and religion. This creates a caveat for some of the prototypes usually designated as paranormal. For instance, Spiritualist phenomena, such as ghosts, apparitions, séances and mediums, exist both within Spiritualist and Spiritist faith congregations and within a wider field of folk religion (Kalvig 2015, 208; 2017, 30). A strict understanding of the paranormal as defined in this thesis excludes formal Spiritualist organizations since they do not fall outside of the boundaries of institutional religion. For this reason, I chose to search for organizations that are not organized as de facto faith organizations. Ufology as well has its share of religious organizations, most notably new religious movements (e.g., Raëlism, the Aetherius Society and Heaven's Gate) that revolve around UFOs (e.g., Saliba 2005, 9432). My strategy was to, as it was for Spiritualism, exclude formal religious organizations from the sampling frame. Eventually, one particular UFO organization with no explicitly religious or spiritual ideological profile was selected.

Out of all paranormal organizations and associations approached, six responded positively and were selected as sites for participant observation and interviews. I had intermittent contact with a couple of other paranormal investigation teams that also agreed to participate, but they were either inactive during the pandemic or reluctant to invite me for specific events and were thus excluded in the end. Following the selection of organizations, various events

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[47] Terms that were put into the search engine (Google in February 2020) included, among others: ghosts (spöken), hauntings (hemsökelser), mediums (medium och medier), ghost hunters (spökjägare), cryptids and cryptozoology (kryptider och kryptozoologi), UFO and ufology (UFO och ufologi), ESP (ESP och extrasensorisk perception), parapsychology (parapsykologi), and the more general categories of paranormal investigators and investigations. Search results were limited to Swedish websites (although not necessarily sites in Swedish). To ensure the anonymity of research participants, the de facto search hits and resulting sample frame are excluded.

were chosen as subjects of observation and/or participant observation. These included a mediumistic training program; a course for ufological field investigators; a board meeting for a cryptozoological association; three ghost hunts with two ghost-hunting teams; and an annual meeting, as well as a set of lectures, on parapsychology and related phenomena. In the case of meetings and lectures, I settled for observation rather than participant observation for obvious reasons. Due to the pandemic, some events (e.g., lectures) took place online. The resulting sample of organizations, the studied events as well as the paranormal prototype I intended the former to cover are included in Table 3 below.

Table 3.

Para-normal proto-type	Type of organization	Type of event(s)
Medi-umistic practice	A mediumistic training center	A 4-day training program on mediumistic abilities for beginners
Ufology	A voluntary association	A 2.5-day field investigators' course
Crypto-zoology	A voluntary association	A board meeting
Parapsy-chology	A voluntary association	A board meeting, lectures
Ghost hunting	Two ghost-hunting teams	A joint search/paranormal investigation with two teams collaborating, one registered as a voluntary association, the other formed as an online Facebook-based group. Follow-up solo investigations with the two groups

The organizations and events selected warrant further introduction, and this is the topic to which I now turn.

3.4.2.1. The mediumistic training program

The mediumistic training center was established more than a decade ago under the direction of three certified mediums. The organization does not subscribe to any particular creed or ideology, including that of Spiritualism proper. They seem rather to fill a niche within a more general environment of alternative

spirituality, intermingling distinctly Spiritualist practices with those of other practices, for instance, holistic healing.

The event in question was a four-day training program in 2020 for individuals wishing to hone their mediumistic skills. I signed up to be a participant after receiving approval from a gatekeeper and took part in the training during all four days. Ten people participated in the course. Their backgrounds within the field of popular Spiritualism varied, ranging from those with no previous experience to a few senior participants who self-identified as mediums themselves. Although my gatekeeper insisted that these events are usually predominately attended by women, half of the attendees were male. The participants had varying occupational backgrounds, from healthcare workers to entrepreneurs to pensioners.

The mediumistic activities we were instructed in mainly concerned communication with spirits (human and non-human), in the form of both individual and group séances. We were also trained in exercises in other forms of psychic abilities, such as remote viewing, reading auras, the use of pendulums as a means of divination, and healing by the laying on of hands. Prior to the training program, the teachers instructed us to complete a set of online exercises intended to prime us for our upcoming mediumistic tasks. Each day of the program started with a guided meditation in which we, under the direction of the three teachers, "opened up" by visualizing various tranquil settings (e.g., a forest path leading to the sea, being on top of a high mountain). All of the days took their point of departure in this exercise designed to sensitize our minds to the spiritual reality we were to in some way experience. Most of the training can be described as consisting of attempts to (re)frame and (re)interpret ordinary sensory and inner impressions as indicative of spirit communications. Below, I share some observations regarding the first day of the training program and some preliminary activities.

The first online preparatory lecture started out by setting the record straight: you do not need to be among the chosen few in order to cultivate and hone mediumistic abilities. Much like other abilities, they are present in all of us and can be developed accordingly. The first exercise was to imagine a lemon and try to determine the sense that was engaged the most. Was it sight, smell, or touch? The results indicated the sense most active in our personal mediumistic communication. For instance, those more inclined to receive impressions visually are more prone to clairvoyance, while those that hear sounds are more prone to clairaudience. The arguably most important exercise was focused on the processes of opening up and closing down. This was a central feature during the days to come, and I will therefore try to describe it in some detail. The exercise of opening up served to, as the name implies, open up the subject to mediumistic influences and contact with the spirit world. As conducted at this particular school, it was achieved through a visualization technique involving the seven main chakras, envisioned as lotus flower buds of different colors. The buds, one after another, opened up, from the base chakra

up to the top of the head, revealing the flower petals within. After this procedure, the participant is receptive to communications from the spirit world. When the communication is over, the aspiring medium will need to close down, which is achieved through a reversion of the previous process (i.e., the flowers are visualized as closing into buds once more). Although the online exercises described may strike the reader as highly individualized due to their solitary character, they were nevertheless put together by the teachers at the training center as preparatory work for all of us. Hence, they were neither individual nor bipartisan activities but instead were distinctly social activities involving teachers as well as clients.

I arrived early at the course center the first day and was greeted by my gatekeeper, Miranda, with whom I had hitherto only communicated with via e-mail. I introduced myself and she exclaimed, "I know! I could sense that Cristoffer was on his way!" Following an informal introduction to the other participants in the coffee room, we started the day with a meditation guided by Miranda. We were to imagine ourselves walking barefoot along a forested path leading down towards the sea. After being dissolved into and merged with the sea and the sky, we were transported back to our chairs. What would now ensue, Miranda said, was a journey, more specifically "a journey within," which was, she light-heartedly added, "guaranteed virus-free!" The quote testifies to the fact that the Covid-19 pandemic was in full swing, although the program occurred in between peaks of contagion. Each of the consecutive days also started with a guided meditation, including the "opening up" procedure described above.

After lunch, we were instructed to attempt to establish contact with a personal spirit guide. The exercise set out from the same visualization exercise previously assigned (i.e., the forested path leading towards the beach), after which we were to reach out and contact a guide, in whatever form (e.g., kin, animal, energy) appropriate. As time passed, I found myself still alone on the beach. Simultaneously, I noticed how I had started to make up excuses for my own failure: someone was attending a digital conference in the room next door and the sound insulation was poor; I had consumed too much coffee; one of the other participant's phones would ring, not once but twice. I quickly realized that I, despite my role as guest and researcher, did not want to disappoint. Having spent less than a day in this group, I already felt that I wanted to contribute to the in-group goals or, at the very least, not cause any disturbance to the others' experiences. This fear of disappointing others would prove to be a recurring experience for me, not least as I consistently failed to contact any spiritual beings, although one of my fellow participants would attest to my abilities in other regards, a matter I will return to later.

3.4.2.2. The cryptozoological association

The cryptozoological organization, based in the middle of Sweden in the vicinity of the Great Lake, home of the renowned Great Lake Monster, invited

me to attend one of its board meetings in early autumn 2020, after which a group interview was conducted. The organization did not host any public events during my time in the field due to the pandemic. Ordinarily, it invites the public to storytelling evenings featuring eyewitnesses who would come forward and share their experiences.

In addition to promoting tourism related to the Great Lake Monster, the organization also encourages witnesses to report their observations in writing by means of forms distributed (together with mailboxes for their collection) around the lake, especially at sites that either would attract visitors and tourists or had a history of sightings in the past. The organization does not conduct cryptozoological investigations of its own but instead aims to preserve and disseminate local knowledge and lore about the Great Lake Monster as well as try to involve the public.

All but one member of the board was male, the median age being somewhere above retirement age. This is a demographic feature that I recognized in some of the other paranormal groups as well, i.e., members and participants being upper middle-aged or older. The association consisted of some 40 members, most of them living in the area surrounding the Great Lake. It was thus a local rather than national organization, although there are members scattered across the country.

The Great Lake Monster has a fairly prominent position in the region and it has left its mark on the cityscape of Östersund. While visiting Östersund's Jamtli Museum, I could view excerpts of newspaper articles about the beast, listen to recorded observations (or, rather, retellings of these), survey a map of the Great Lake detailing reported sightings, and marvel over a huge animal trap constructed in the nineteenth century to capture it. I skipped the monster-shaped slide, which resembled, as is typically the case, a plesiosaur-like creature, for fear of getting stuck. Strolling through rainy Östersund, I noticed several statues (I counted six or seven) of the city's informal mascot, Birger, the reptilian offspring (quite like Nintendo's Yoshi) of the Great Lake Monster. Birger came in various forms, such as Cybirger, the cyborg version of Birger, and Hamlet Birger, skull in hand, standing outside of the city theatre. I would later learn when I attended the board meeting that Birger has been the subject of several children's books, which have gained some popularity.

Besides formal items (e.g., approving the agenda), topics such as the maintenance of vantage points were handled at some length during the board meeting. These are places from which it is thought to be especially likely to see the monster based on previous experiences (e.g., frequency of reports), not least since these sites are fairly well visited and hence may produce new witnesses. These vantage points are sometimes subject to vandalism as well as to the effects of less sinister forces, such as being blocked or made inaccessible by construction sites or vegetation. The printing, cost and distribution of information sheets that simultaneously function as report sheets in the case of sightings were also matters dealt with during the meeting.

Already prior to the group interview, I noticed that storytelling was key: the board members shared their own, and others', experiences and observations during the meeting. Other encounters, weird and mundane, were retold during both the board meeting and the interview, ranging from encounters with animals such as elk, bears and wolves to more extraordinary stories of ghosts and ESP. During our coffee break, Ulf took me on a tour of the area. He guided me down to the waters, now partly covered by vegetation, and showed me the spot from which he himself once saw the Great Lake Monster. Ulf also stressed that it had been seen by "completely credible persons" and that this supports the phenomenon's plausibility: "You shouldn't doubt people," he said. "You have to believe in their experience." His fellow cryptozoologist Göran agreed with this sentiment. Although he does not claim to have had any paranormal experience of his own, he acknowledges that many people have, a fact that obliges him to take the phenomenon seriously: "Since so many people have experienced something, […] whether it be a UFO or the Great Lake Monster […], you have to trust that these people have seen something." Besides Ulf, Bror was the only board member who shared any cryptid sighting of his own. Bror had seen the creature twice, and on one of these occasions he saw the monster pluck birds from the water's surface. He showed me drawings printed on a postcard of the creature that he viewed as accurate. Essentially, the creature resembles a dinosaur, more precisely the aquatic cousins of the dinosaurs, the plesiosaur. When discussing the drawings, Bror told me how he once visited Ukraine and showed some people the pictures and that "there was a woman who said that her dedushka – that's paternal or maternal grandfather – had seen the same thing in Yakutsk." Indeed, to some extent the organization takes an interest in reports of lake and sea monsters from other parts of the world, not least the legendary Loch Ness Monster.

3.4.2.3. The ghost hunters

I got in contact with both ghost-hunting teams online, at first through e-mail and, after receiving an invitation, as a member of a ghost-hunting group on Facebook. Invitations to investigate haunted places were posted quite regularly on this forum, and group members could respond by expressing an interest in coming along. The first ghost-hunting group was, in fact, the loose network consisting of the Facebook group. The engagement of the members varied greatly, and its demographic profile seemed heterogeneous, involving women and men, as well as both younger and older participants. Symptomatically, aside from gatekeeper Olivia, all members who participated in the second ghost hunt arranged by the Facebook group were unfamiliar to me and had not been part of the first ghost hunt. It is worth noting that membership in the Facebook group did not entail membership in any formal association or organization. The bar of membership was thus low: an invitation sufficed. The second group was organized as a formal association. The group, with only male members, was invited to join the former group for my first ghost hunt on

Halloween in 2020. I would later accompany both groups separately for consecutive ghost hunts about a year later. During these two later ghost hunts, the groups did not work together.

The ghost hunts were spread out over different regions, from Stockholm to Östergötland to Dalarna. While the two latter sites were explored in the darkness afforded by night-time, the former was conducted during the day. In conjunction with the first ghost hunt, which was carried out at a haunted stable, I conducted two group interviews with members from both teams, while a third group interview was conducted with other members of the Facebook-based group during a ghost hunt a year later. I will, in the following paragraphs, share some scenes from what transpired during the ghost hunts, events that will be examined more in more detail in the fifth chapter.

Shortly after I arrived at the haunted stable together with Frank, whom I met at the bus station en route, the Stockholm-based research team arrived by car. As we introduced ourselves, Sebastian's presentation of himself certainly stood out as memorable: "I'm the guy who always gets possessed (Swe: besatt)!" After this round of exchanges, the team immediately started setting up their gear, a task they carried out meticulously. Already at this early stage, it struck me that there was a sense of differentiation of labor and expertise within this particular ghost-hunting team. Although all of them were somewhat familiar with and proficient in using the equipment and the accompanying shared jargon, their roles were somewhat specialized. For instance, Johan was the most mediumistic in the crew and was accordingly introduced as such since he immediately tunes in to the spirit world and opens up a line communication in Spiritualist fashion. I often found him rubbing his hands in a sensitizing manner, trying to make contact, invoking the spirits. Ken was somewhere in between the role of tech-nut and medium, somewhat sensitive to spirit communication but also more focused on the technical apparatuses. David was a casual member of the group and specialized in photography. Anders, father of Sebastian, was the leader of the group, overseeing the investigation proper, while at the same time engaging with the technical apparatuses, but he also introduced a mediumistic activity, which I will return to later. Sebastian, lastly, was the agent provocateur in the group, teasing the spirits, trying to provoke a reaction from them.

Soon, the others arrived. First, a larger group of curious people tagging along with the Facebook-based group showed up, and then came Olivia, the administrator of the latter. Most of the gadgets were already installed in the main building (i.e., the stable) when the investigation proper started, while other devices were portable and brought along as we were divided into smaller groups, investigating the stable and its surroundings, including a small garage and tool shed. It was cold, damp and drizzling. I interpreted the Stockholm-based team as very serious, carrying out the investigation with great concern. The others were more easy-going, chatting and giggling, and I casually talked

to people throughout the night. Some participants brought up previous paranormal experiences in conversations with me and each other as well as what piqued their interest in the subject in the first place, and they asked me about my story in turn. Storytelling and testimony also seemed to be a salient feature in this environment as well.

Almost a year later, a second ghost hunt took place at a community center (Swe: Folkets hus) in central Sweden. Other than Olivia, none of the former participants was present. Much like the previous ghost hunt, the participants came prepared with a range of equipment, such as EMF meters, REM pods and spirit boxes. After setting up, we were divided into smaller groups which went on to investigate the venue.

My third, and last, ghost hunt occurred about a month later with the Stockholm-based ghost-hunting team that had been present for the first event. I had expressed my interest in tagging along for a second ghost hunt with the group, and the chairperson, Anders, happily obliged. This, it turned out, was a very special event since the paranormal investigation team was to conduct a daytime search, in which three persons, one of them a child, were to be instructed in the practice of ghost hunting. In a sense, then, it was not only a paranormal investigation but a pedagogical event as well.

3.4.2.4. The parapsychologist association

The parapsychological organization, founded in the middle of the twentieth century, is formally dedicated to conducting and promoting research on anomalous phenomena related to the human mind, such as ESP. It is based in Stockholm but has members throughout the country. In practice, the association gravitates towards popularizing subjects within the purview of parapsychology through lectures and publications rather than by conducting experiments of their own, although they sometimes arrange for participants to take part in small-scale demonstrations.

I followed the group digitally during their annual meeting and several lectures, acting as an observer. As it was the year of the Covid-19 pandemic, most events I attended took place online. Most attendees were, as far as I could tell from their profiles, in their 60s or older, with more men participating than women. The board was also comprised of more males than females but included two women as ordinary members. A large part of the audience, however, consisted of middle-aged and older women, whom I noted as recurrent attendees. Less present were people in their youth. In addition to gatekeeper Svante, I interviewed three other recurring attendees. Alongside the cryptozoological organization, the parapsychology association was the one I engaged the least with, although I followed the group for some time due to the predominantly online character of events during the time that I collected my material. Early in November 2020, I was able to attend a lecture in real life between the peaks of two Covid-19 waves.

One feature I took notice of early on was that the association engaged with most topics that can be referred to with the designation paranormal, ranging from the classical parapsychological topics of extrasensory perception to popular Spiritualism and mediumistic channeling, aura readings, past lives, reincarnation, near-death experiences, healing and alternative medicine, both in terms of what was taken up in lectures and discussions but also as subject matters the audience referred to during events. Thus, the organization's parapsychological profile included most things paranormal, although no references were made to UFOs or cryptids during the sessions that I took part in.

3.4.2.5. The ufologists-in-making

The ufological organization was formed in the 1970s. The association, dedicated to the investigation of UFO sightings, has representatives and field investigators scattered throughout the country. They further encourage the public to send in their testimonies regarding suspected UFOs and other paranormal phenomena. The organization makes preliminary assessments of received reports and decides whether or not the observation is worthy of further investigation. Many reports can straightforwardly be explained away as misinterpretations of celestial and astronomical phenomena, aircraft, birds, balloons, light reflections, etc., while others require time and thorough scrutiny. Only a small percentage at most is classified as UFOs, that is, currently unexplainable. The E.T. hypothesis, that is, the view that at least some of the unexplainable phenomena observed is caused by extraterrestrial visitors, is not formally endorsed by the organization, although it was by some of the people I talked to. Instead, the E.T. hypothesis is one of several contenders for explaining the remaining cases.

Besides their core task of reviewing witness testimonies, the organization is engaged in activities aiming to educate the public on UFOs and other paranormal phenomena. The ufological field investigators' course, which I had singled out as the most promising venue for participant observation and interviews, was cancelled in 2020 and postponed until the following year due to the pandemic. It then took place in the fall of 2021 at a hostel and conference center. On the trip there, I conducted a lengthy group interview with the driver and two other passengers headed for the course.

The two days spent at the ufological field investigators' course were filled to the brim with lectures on UFO phenomena. One of the focuses of the course was how to identify purported UFO observations by finding sources of misinterpretations of known phenomena, ranging from misidentified aircraft (e.g., planes or balloons), astronomical phenomena (e.g., stars, planets and bolides) to natural occurrences such as birds and meteorological phenomena. We were hence introduced to a variety of topics, from radar readings to witness psychology, and these features were included as possible suspects in the roleplaying exercise in which we were to find the explanation for a fictional UFO case. In other words, the ufologist-in-training was instructed in explaining away

most UFO reports. However, finding the sources of misidentification leaves room to the residual, unexplained phenomenon, or the genuine UFO phenomenon. As put by a speaker during the introductory lecture, paraphrasing the grand master of ufology, Allen J. Hynek, a UFO is something that is not only unidentified to the person astonished by it but also must remain unidentified even after a thorough investigation. Then, and only then, is it a UFO.

Demographically, there was a preponderance of men, either middle-aged or older. Judging from both interview data and conversations, the participants' backgrounds spanned from working to middle class in terms of occupations. Most of the participants already knew each other, some being regular participants. Interviewee Stefan, for instance, had taken the course 11 times previously. Some attendees were not only previously acquainted but were long-time friends or even family members, such as newcomers Karin and Britt, daughter and mother, whom I interviewed together.

3.4.3. The interviews and interviewees

Interviewees were recruited from all the sites described in the previous sub-chapter. In total, 37 individuals were interviewed in 16 interviews, out of which 9 were done in pairs or groups. For the sake of brevity, the interviewees are presented in Table 4 below with their assigned pseudonyms, the organizations they were recruited from and some remarks about their background and roles in the organizations. The length of the interviews varied, ranging from just under 30 minutes to about 90 minutes in length.

Table 4. Interviewees.

Name	Interview no	Organization	Background	Role
Miranda	1	Mediumistic	Female, middle-aged	Teacher
Ernst	2	Mediumistic	Male, middle-aged, spouse to Anna	Participant
Anna	2	Mediumistic	Female, middle-aged, spouse to Ernst	Participant
Lars-Åke	3	Mediumistic	Male, middle-aged	Teacher
Johannes	4	Mediumistic	Male, middle-aged	Participant
Roland	5	Cryptozoological association	Male, elderly	Board suppliant

Bror	5	Cryptozoological association	Male, elderly	Board member
Göran	5	Cryptozoological association	Male, elderly	Board member
Ulf	5	Cryptozoological association	Male, elderly	Board member
Annika	5	Cryptozoological association	Female, elderly	Board member
Anders	6	Ghost-hunting team	Male, middle-aged, father to Sebastian	Leader
David	6	Ghost-hunting team	Male, young	Participant
Johan	6	Ghost-hunting team	Male, young	Participant
Ken	6	Ghost-hunting team	Male, young	Participant
Sebastian	6	Ghost-hunting team	Male, young, son to Anders	Participant
Frank	7	Facebook-based ghost-hunting group	Male, middle-aged	Participant
Olivia	7	Facebook-based ghost-hunting group	Female, young	Organizer
Svante	8	Parapsychology association	Male, elderly	Board member
Charlotte	9	Facebook-based ghost-hunting group	Female, middle-aged	Participant
Tommy	9	Facebook-based ghost-hunting group	Male, middle-aged, spouse to Jeanette	Participant
Jeanette	9	Facebook-based ghost-hunting group	Female, middle-aged, spouse to Tommy	Participant
Allan	10	UFO association	Male, middle-aged	Organizer and participant
Kenneth	10	UFO association	Male, middle-aged,	Participant
James	10	UFO association	Male, middle-aged	Participant

Mattias	11	UFO association	Male, young	Participant
Malin	11	UFO association	Female, young	Participant
Kjell	11	UFO association	Male, middle-aged	Participant
Stefan	11	UFO association	Male, middle-aged	Participant
Wilma	12	UFO association	Female, middle-aged, aunt to Daniel	Participant
Daniel	12	UFO association	Male, young, nephew to Wilma	Participant
Carl	12	UFO association	Male, young	Participant
Marcus	12	UFO association	Male, middle-aged	Participant
Karin	13	UFO association	Female, middle-aged, daughter of Britt	Participant
Britt	13	UFO association	Female, elderly, mother of Karin	Participant
Mats	14	Parapsychology association	Male, middle-aged	Participant
Jesper	15	Parapsychology association	Male, young	Participant
Miriam	16	Parapsychology association	Female, middle-aged	Participant

3.5. Analytical working model: Bringing back theory

Both the quantitative and qualitative data were made subject to a set of secondary research questions, specifications and operationalizations of the research aim and research questions. Several of these analytical questions, AQs, connect the empirical results to the theoretical framework elaborated in the second chapter.

The analytical questions AQ1-3, which target the quantitative data, are the following, all being specifications of RQ1:

> o Do the variables on paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences group together? (AQ1.)

o Do the respondents form different groups in relation to the variables on paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences? (AQ2.)

o Which independent variables affect all variables on paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences taken together the most (and least)? (AQ3.)

Although RQ 1 is partly answered by the presentation of descriptive statistics, the auxiliary analytical questions help specify the statistical analyses to come. Both AQ1 and AQ2 are explorative, but while the former investigates potential groups within the variables themselves, AQ2 seeks groups among the respondents participating in the study. The corresponding methods of AQ1 and AQ2 are principal component analysis and cluster analysis, respectively. AQ3 brings together all variables measuring paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences and aims to test which IVs will best predict a respondent's affirmation or rejection by means of multiple regression analysis. In terms of the disposition of the dissertation, RQ1 and AQ 1-3 are all answered by statistical analyses of the quantitative results in the fourth chapter. These analytical questions are in part tangent with and will help answer RQ3 as well.

RQ2 is standalone with no subordinated AQs, and it rests upon a practice theory approach towards engagement with paranormal phenomena. In a general sense, the formulation of RQ2 aims to show what participants within paranormal paraculture are *doing*. In other words, it targets the forms of practices that are enacted in the paraculture, how these are organized, and how, for instance, beliefs, discourse and embodied experiences are conjoined with these practices. RQ2 will mainly be answered by the qualitative results presented in the fifth chapter, structured around practice-as-dimensions as introduced in the second chapter.

The following AQs are derived from the third research question:

o What is the relationship between occultural contact points on the one hand and paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences on the other? (AQ4.)

o Which social settings and relationships do the participants in the studied paraculture(s) highlight as of importance for their paranormal practice? (AQ5.)

Both the quantitative and qualitative data will be analyzed with the theory of occulture in mind, not least its sub-thesis presented above as occulture-as-plausibility. Quantitatively, occultural contact points serve as operationalization, and AQ4 is answered by quantitative data. AQ5 is directed at the qualitative materials by means of classifying and assessing the main tendencies in the use of occultural resources in paranormal practice. Although occultural resources are mainly found by mentions of representations of paranormal phenomena in media and popular culture, other social relationships are indicative

of occulture as well, such as talk about paranormal topics and shared experiences. Meanwhile, engagement with paranormal practice in the paraculture *a priori* becomes indicative of occulture: paranormal practice is occultural, per definition. AQ4 is partly answered by the fourth chapter on quantitative results, although I return to an interpretation of these findings with occulture explicitly in mind in the sixth chapter. Likewise, AQ5 is partly answered by the empirical results presented in Chapter 5, while the theory of occulture is applied to these findings in Chapter 6.

Lastly, the fourth research question is operationalized through the following AQs:

- o AQ.6: Which ways of gaining knowledge about paranormal phenomena do participants in the studied paraculture(s) view as reliable/trustworthy?
- o AQ.7: Which social sources and relations do participants consider to be reliable as they seek knowledge about paranormal phenomena?
- o AQ8: Which social sources and relations do participants consider to be unreliable as they seek knowledge about paranormal phenomena?

AQ6-8 will be answered by using the conjoined theories on epistemic authority. Taken together, the analyses initiated by AQ 6-8 explain the main ways in which paranormal practice works as distinctly knowledge-making ventures, both in terms of acknowledged pathways to knowledge (i.e., strategies of epistemic capital) and which agents to trust (i.e., alignment) or distrust (i.e., out-defining) in these procedures. Although already present as empirical results in the fifth chapter, the theoretical synthesis of epistemic authority is fully engaged in the sixth chapter, which hence mainly answers RQ4 and AQ6-8.

The application of the theoretical framework may be clarified in light of the introduced AQs. Although it mainly acts as a pre- or metatheory in this dissertation, practice theory is also applied as a thematization of the results through the practice-in-dimensions typology derived from Ammerman (2020), which structures the fifth chapter on the qualitative results. The practice-theoretical dimensions of embodiment, materiality, emotion and narrative are conducive to making sense of the structure of practice and will hence help answer the question regarding what the participants are *doing* as they engage in and around claims of paranormal phenomena. In terms of population-level statistics, occulture is indicated by any occultural contact points. Positive associations between the number of occultural contact points on the one hand and affirmation of paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences on the other are viewed as indicative of occulture-as-plausibility. In other words, a derived hypothesis of occulture-as-plausibility *is* a positive association. The presence and influence of occulture are operationalized by looking at participants' references to, and receptions and assessments of, paranormal themes and motifs

qualitatively. The sub-thesis can only be hinted at qualitatively, while any reference to paranormal themes and motifs is viewed as an instance of occulture a priori. Strategies of epistemic capital are analyzed through participants' appeals to and expositions of different forms of knowledge and knowledge-making, inspired but not limited to the five main strategies identified by Robertson (2014, 2021), namely tradition, science, experience, channeling and synthetic strategies. Turning to boundary-work, both in the sense of alignment with and the out-defining of others, participants' statements concerning how others either fail or succeed in producing knowledge about paranormal phenomena take center stage.

Chapter 4. Quantitative results: The survey *Paranormal Sweden*

In this chapter, the results from the survey *Paranormal Sweden* are presented. Hence, it is dedicated to the distribution of paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences in the general population, and attempts are made to test which, if any, strata or groups are more (and less) prone to affirm these variables. The findings presented will answer RQ1 and AQs 1-3, the latter of which were presented in the preceding chapter. While RQ1 is partly answered through the introduction of descriptive statistics, AQ1 corresponds to the use of principal component analysis; AQ2, to cluster analysis; and AQ3, to multiple regression analysis. Prior to the results being given, the specific techniques of statistical inference will be introduced.

In order to contextualize the results, I will briefly recapitulate some of the main findings on paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences from previous research. Patterns include a general overrepresentation of women compared to men in affirming paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences, with few but notable exceptions, such as belief in UFOs (e.g., Bader et al. 2011, 56, 195; Irwin 2009; Sjödin 2001). Results in relation to socioeconomic class (e.g., through indicator variables such as income and education) have generally been ambiguous and non-conclusive (e.g., Bader et al 2011; Clarke 2013). Pertaining to religion, there are tendencies towards positive relationships (e.g., Bader et al. 2011; Laghé 2008; Bromander 2008) as well as curvilinearity (e.g., Baker & Draper 2010; Bader et al. 2012). Attempts have also been made to classify paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences into groups of variables, such as Sjödin's (2001) three-part typology of parascience into the magical, astrology and spirit communications, or Bader et al.'s (2011) two-part classification of paranormal engagement into the ideal types paranormal discovery and enlightenment.

The underlying rationale of the analyses presented below is that some variables are dependent (e.g., variables as an outcome), while others are independent (e.g., variables as causing or influencing change in dependent variables). The variables measuring paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences have consistently been approached as dependent variables (DVs), while background variables (e.g., gender, educational level) and variables such as religious affiliation and voting intention have been used as independent variables (IVs). This division into DVs and IVs is summarized in Table 5 below. I would

like to stress that this does not necessarily imply causation, and one could very well approach analyses from the other way around. Put differently, it is warranted to analyze paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences as IVs, but this falls outside of the scope of this dissertation.

Table 5. IV's and DV's in *Paranormal Sweden*.

Independent variables (IVs)	Dependent variables (DVs)
- Gender - Age - Country of origin - Urban-rural residence - Type of residence - Income - Education - Religious belonging and behavior - Voting intention - Cultural values: conservation vs. openness to change. - Cultural values: self-transcendence vs. self-enhancement - Occultural contact points - The conspiracist item on trust/distrust regarding official versions of contested events	- Paranormal beliefs - Paranormal activities and experiences - Active searches for information about paranormal topics

Before I turn to the results of exploratory techniques and tests of statistical significance, I will first introduce some descriptive statistics on both IVs and DVs in *Paranormal Sweden*.

4.1. Descriptive statistics

This section starts with a presentation of descriptive statistics for a selection of IVs in *Paranormal Sweden*. The subchapter then turns to paranormal DVs. The variables are presented through frequencies and proportions, all post-weighting.

4.1.1. Independent variables in *Paranormal Sweden*

In this section, I present data on independent variables that were not part of the pre-existing set of background variables included in *The Swedish Citizen Panel* and accordingly presented in the third chapter (see 3.4.1.2.). These are the variables on religion, cultural values and the conspiracist item on trust/distrust regarding official versions of contested events.

Concerning religious belonging and practice (i.e., the survey question "Do you belong to any church or religious congregation?"), comparisons can be made with the SOM Institute's surveys. Proportions in *Paranormal Sweden* are placed alongside results from the SOM survey of 2019 and early 2020 (Willander & Stockmann 2020, 14-16) below:

- 60.5 percent of respondents self-declared as affiliated with the Church of Sweden in the SOM survey, compared to 50.4 percent in *Paranormal Sweden,* which may further be compared to official Church statistics (Svenska kyrkan, n.d.), according to which 56.4 percent of the Swedish population were members.
- Added together, the Roman Catholic Church, the Free Churches, the Orthodox Churches and other Churches comprised 7.5 of the SOM respondents, compared to 4.4 percent in *Paranormal Sweden*.
- 2.5 percent self-declared as Muslim in SOM, compared to 0.7 percent in *Paranormal Sweden*.
- the "other religion" category of the SOM survey gathered some 2.3 percent, compared to 0.7 percent in *Paranormal Sweden*.
- 31.2 percent of SOM respondents declared no religious affiliation, compared to 41.2 percent in *Paranormal Sweden*.

Thus, it seems that the survey was fairly poor at capturing not only religious minorities but also members of the Church of Sweden. Among the few respondents (26 in total) opting for the additional free text item on "other" religious affiliation, examples included Norse religion (one), Jewish (two), Krister (one), Swedenborg (one) and Pastafari, alternatively, the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster (two).

The 10 cultural values are all presented jointly in Figure 1 below. When used as IVs, this is done in the form of the aggregated continuous constructs of higher-order value types suggested by Lindeman and Verksalo (2005). At this point, each individual cultural value is presented separately, subdivided into the values unimportant or opposed, important, and highly important. As becomes apparent from the figure below, the cultural value deemed most important by the respondents is benevolence, followed by self-direction, universalism and security, with power at the very bottom.

Figure 2. Cultural values ("Please rate the importance of the following values as a life-guiding principle for you"), in valid percent.
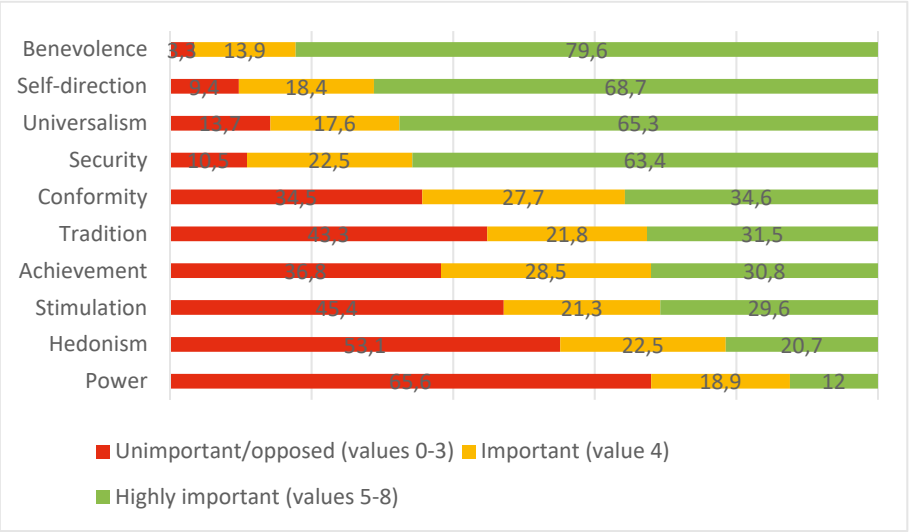
Lastly, the conspiracist item on trust/distrust regarding official versions of contested events is introduced. The distribution is somewhat positively skewed, most respondents affirming trust rather than distrust (i.e., grading their position as the intermediate 5 or higher), which is illustrated by Figure 3 below.

Figure 3. The conspiracist item ("How true or false an image of reality do you yourself think that official accounts most often give?"), in valid percent.
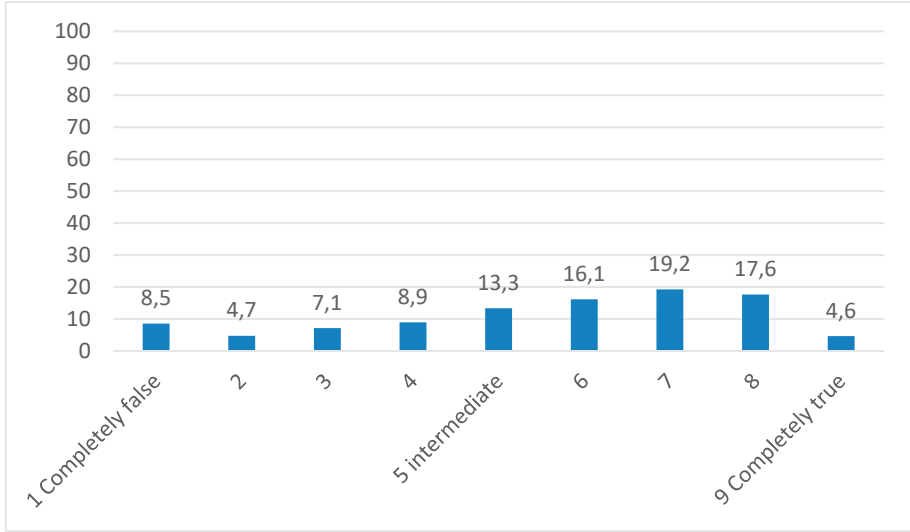
This concludes the distributions of IVs in *Paranormal Sweden*.

4.1.2. An overview of paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences

I now turn to frequencies and proportions of the DVs measuring paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences as well as the two survey questions[48] on proximity to paranormal themes, motifs or topics.

I start with paranormal *beliefs*. Proportions for all paranormal belief statements are presented in Figure 3 below, with those responding to the items affirmatively (4 or 5 on the ordinal scale) set apart from the neutrals (3) and the dismissives (1 and 2). Note that the items are abbreviated. For the complete items, see Chapter 3.4.1.1. or Appendix 1. The overarching question asked how *likely* respondents find the existence of various paranormal phenomena, which arguably makes the responses somewhat weaker than formulations such as "Do you believe in any of the following phenomena?" The most salient feature of the distribution is how it is skewed towards the negative, that is, a rejection of the belief statements, captured by the red bars in the bar graph. A majority of respondents are hence outright dismissive of most of the items. The item regarded as most likely is alternative medicine, affirmed by about one in five adults. Most other belief statements are supported by roughly one in ten, with the exception of cryptids, the existence of which a mere 3.6 percent find likely or very likely. These frequencies set the stage for a recurring feature in this survey: most Swedes today seem to have little or nothing to do with anything paranormal, in the sense of having a serious or significant engagement with its referents.

Turning to paranormal activities and experiences, those who have replied affirmatively to *any* degree, ranging from activities and experiences occurring only once to more often, range from very minor groups (6.5 percent witnessing UFO phenomena) to fairly large minorities (27.8 percent experiencing the presence of some form of spirit). Figure 5 illustrates this distribution, with abbreviated items. The rarest activities and experiences are (in descending order) telepathy, remote viewing and UFO sightings. The most common activities and experiences are feeling the presence of a spirit, using alternative medicine, experiences of predictions or premonitions, playing spirit of the glass or using Ouija boards, and visiting or living in haunted places, all of these being reported by at least one in five of the respondents, with alternative medicine, the presence of one or more spirits and predictions being reported by more than one in four.

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[48] For specific questionnaire phrasing and items, the reader is referred to the Materials suchapter on the survey *Paranormal Sweden* (see 3.4.3.) and the questionnaire in Appendix 1.

Figure 4. Paranormal beliefs ("How likely do you find the following statements?"), in valid percent (n within parentheses).
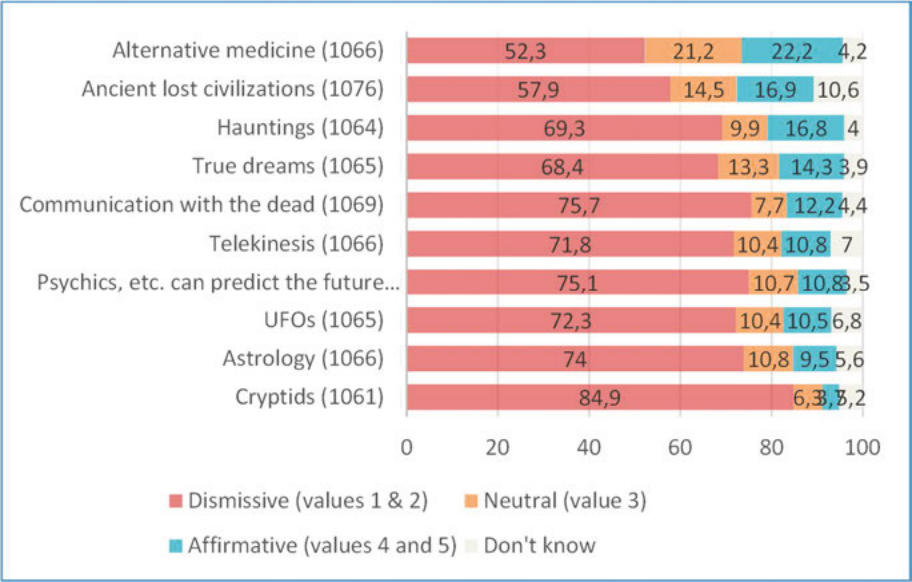
Figure 5. Paranormal activities and experiences ("Have you ever done or experienced any of the following?"), in valid percent (n within parentheses).
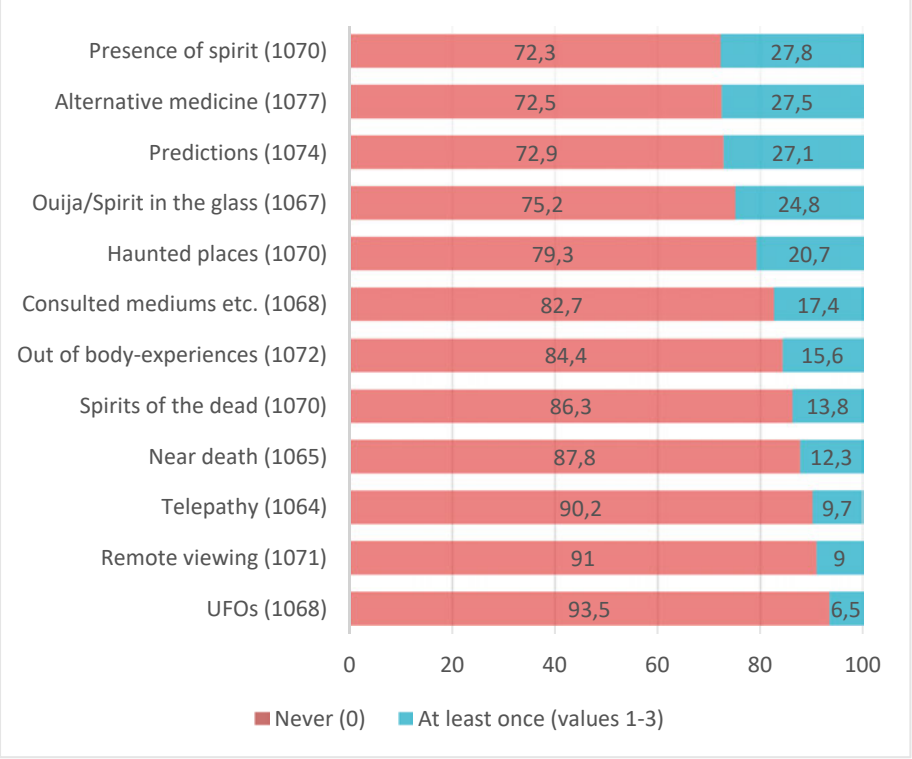
Worth noting is that the proportions reporting activities and experiences are generally larger than those who affirm paranormal beliefs. In some part, this may be due to more conservative formulations of belief statements, in the sense that only actively affirmative responses (i.e., finding the statement likely) count. By comparison, those who report activities and experiences do not necessarily have any specific relationship to these phenomena. Despite this differing pattern, I am tempted to infer that seeing is *not* believing. Take, for instance, belief in vs. experiences of hauntings. While only 16.8 percent of the respondents affirm belief in the phenomenon, 20.7 percent claim to have experienced it. The contemporary Swedish population is hence, judging from this sample, more reluctant to accept belief statements than to self-report having had the corresponding paranormal activities and experiences. This mismatch is an interesting result in its own right.

Next, I turn to the two survey questions encompassing proximity to paranormal topics. The first, occultural contact points, measures *any* encounters at all in a set of social settings during the last six months. If we add together the groups that report occultural contact points to *any* extent (i.e., ranging from a few times to daily), it becomes apparent that this affirmative minority is quite large. For the media settings of TV and the Internet, it is in fact more common to encounter occulture than not to. The rarest social settings, in which occulture is scarcely encountered, are churches and other religious venues, followed by schools. The graph below illustrates these results and compares them to dismissive respondents (and those who opted out).

The survey question on active searches for information about a set of paranormal topics resulted in similar patterns. The items were recoded as binary in order to reach the proportions of respondents affirming active searches for information to any extent. The proportion of respondents being categorically dismissive was larger, ranging from 57.1 percent (the topic of alternative medicine) to 79.6 percent (mediums, fortune tellers, seers). The affirmative minorities were still quite large, ranging from 20.4 (mediums, fortune tellers, seers) to 42.9 (alternative medicine).

Figure 6. Occultural contact points ("How often have you during the last six months encountered depictions or stories about the supernatural, the unexplained or the paranormal in the following contexts?"), in valid percent (*n* within parentheses).
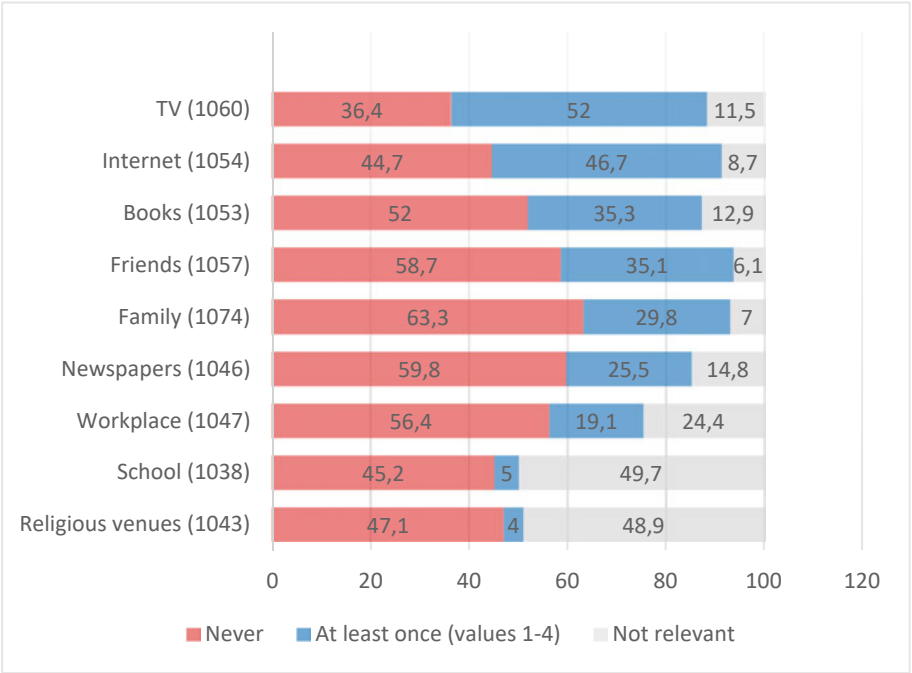
Figure 7. Active searches for information about paranormal topics ("Have you ever actively searched for information about any of the following topics? For instance, by reading a book or visiting a website"), in valid percent (n within parentheses).
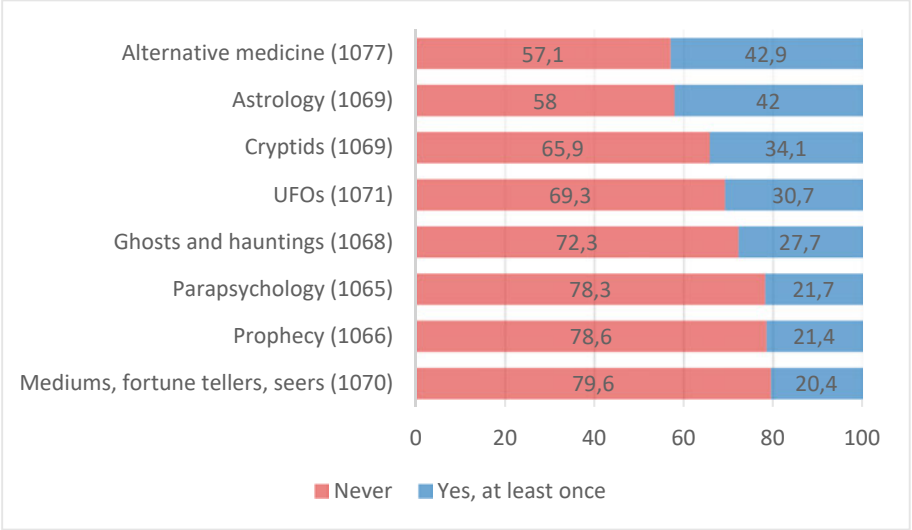
Before heading on to further analyses of the data, proportions of those who affirm *any* paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences as well as investigating paranormal topics are presented, compared to the proportion of respondents who reject *all* of them. This aggregate picture is very different compared to the individual paranormal DVs. In fact, a majority of respondents (71.5 percent) have, at least at some point in their life, actively investigated at least one of the paranormal topics that were included in the survey. A majority (66 percent) further report that they have either tried and/or experienced at least one of the activities and experiences included. In terms of belief, the proportion of respondents who view at least one paranormal belief statement as likely is 41.4 percent. These results are summarized in Table 6 below.

Table 6. Paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences, and active searches for information about paranormal topics in total, in valid percent.

Total scale (n)	Rejects all	Affirms at least one item
Beliefs (810)*	58.6	41.4
Activities and experiences (1039)	34	66
Actively searched for information about paranormal topics (1048)	28.5	71.5

*For this purpose, those opting for "don't know" were coded as missing.

Concluding this section on descriptive statistics, I would like to highlight some common trajectories. Most paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences are affirmed by fairly small minorities. Yet, when different categories of affirmative responses are added together, some of the items encompass about one fifth or one fourth of the respondents. That the proportions of respondents who affirm occultural contact points in general are larger is hardly surprising, as the survey question may include casual encounters. Turning to those who have actively searched for information about any paranormal topic, the affirmative minorities are larger than those for the beliefs, activities and experiences. This, too, is hardly surprising, since one may very well take an active interest, at some point in life, in any paranormal topic without coming out on the other side as a believer of paranormal phenomena. Explicit skeptics will likely affirm some of these items as well. The category of dismissives may similarly be problematized. Despite rejecting paranormal beliefs as unlikely, some will nevertheless self-report paranormal experiences or practices, as the aforementioned mismatch between these two survey questions has made apparent. And those denying paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences

may of course still be interested in or intrigued by paranormal topics. Response alternatives such as "don't know" or "not relevant" may further point to something other than being opposed to or unfamiliar with the items in question, such as a lack of relevance of paranormal topics in everyday life or a general indifference to them. Nevertheless, most Swedes have not taken an active interest in any paranormal topic, nor do they find paranormal beliefs likely, but they are somewhat more likely to self-report paranormal experiences or engaging with paranormal practices, and a majority has recently come into contact with representations of the paranormal via media such as television.

Some cautionary remarks may be added. Affirming active searches for information about paranormal topics does not entail that the respondent takes the topic seriously or engages with it in any normative way. Curiosity, school assignments, skeptical polemics and a keen interest due to their perceived plausibility are all thinkable motives for any inquiry, and it is beyond the scope of the questionnaire to attempt such an assessment. A similar rationale should be employed towards affirmation of the paranormal activities and experiences. Reporting having tried activities such as alternative medicine or visiting a medium does not entail any particular relationship to the said practices. It could have been for fun, as an activity during a bachelor(ette)'s party or for educational purposes, or it could be an indicator of a serious interest in the subject matter. Similarly, reporting a paranormal experience of any kind does not necessitate that the respondent views the experience as inexplicable or in any way transgressing ordinary, mundane explanatory frameworks. A respondent reporting a UFO sighting may just as well view an astronomical explanation as most plausible, or interpret experiences of predictions or premonitions as resulting from mere chance or wishful thinking. The questionnaire simply does not provide us with this information regarding relationships and attitudes to the affirmed (or rejected) statements. The survey question on paranormal beliefs is, however, more straightforward in the sense that respondents have to find the statements at least somewhat likely in order for their responses to be coded as affirmative. That being said, the affirmative minorities (and, more rarely, majorities) may still serve as an indicator of the paranormal DVs real distribution in the population.

4.2. Components and scales of the paranormal

In order to ascertain if there are any discernable groups of variables underlying the DVs on paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences, principal component analyses (PCA) were conducted. The purpose of PCA, an exploratory and data-driven technique, is to detect which potential latent variables the individual items are indicative of. An implicit question behind this choice of method was thus if the relationships between a selection of DVs represent hidden

structures of variables and, if so, how many? In principal component analysis, these latent variables are called components (Pallant 2011, 182) or, sometimes, factors. A major rationale behind the choice of PCA is reduction: instead of working on 20+ individual survey items, the analysis focuses on a lesser number of components This procedure hence makes a large set of data more manageable.

Several measures were used in order to determine the number of components, namely the Kaiser's criterion (only components with eigenvalues of 1 or above were retained), scree tests and parallel analyses (Pallant 2011, 184).[49] All items on paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences, occultural contact points and active searches for information about paranormal topics, respectively, were analyzed separately. I furthermore tried out tests including *all* paranormal items regardless of their placement within their respective survey questions, but these results were opaque and difficult to interpret and were hence discarded.

Concerning paranormal beliefs, the PCA pointed to a one-component solution. In other words, all items included within the survey questions cluster together as one single group.

Next, I turned to the items on paranormal activities and experiences. The PCA (KMO 0.86, Bartlett's P <0.05) initially suggested (based on eigenvalues above 1) a three-component solution, but the parallel analysis suggested keeping only two. I thus opted for a two-component solution, accounting for 44.74 percent of the variance within the variables. The first component mainly concerned various forms of spirit communications, with consulting mediums and fortune tellers, experiences of the presence of spirits and contact with the spirits of the dead loading the highest on the component. The second consisted of items associated with parapsychological subjects or phenomena indicative of extrasensory perception, ESP. For this reason, I named the first component *activities and experiences of Spiritualism* and the second *activities and experiences of ESP*. The two components are presented with their respective item loadings in Table 7 below. Telepathy loaded nearly as high on both components. The item witnessing UFO (phenomena) did not load sufficiently on any of the components and was hence excluded. For the sake of brevity, the two scales are henceforth referred to as Spiritualism and ESP.

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[49] Since correlation between variables and components was expected, I opted for oblique rotation (direct oblimin). (Pallant, 185) The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity as well as eigenvalues for the components are included in the text, while the reader is referred to Appendix 2 for pattern and structure matrices, together with unrotated loadings in the Component Matrix and scree plots.

Table 7. Two components of paranormal activities and experiences.

Component 1 Spiritualism	Component 2 ESP
Visited medium/fortune teller 0.74	Near-death experiences 0.82
Felt the presence of a spirit 0.68	Out-of-body experiences 0.73
Experienced contact with spirits of the dead 0.65	Experience of predicting/foretelling the future 0.58
Visited or lived in a haunted place 0.63	Seeing something from afar, clair-voyance/remote viewing 0.56
Used alternative medicine 0.59	
Used Ouija boards or played "the spirit of the glass" 0.57	
Experienced telepathy 0.41	

Factor loadings based on pattern matrix. For structure matrix, see Appendix 2.1.

A PCA (KMO 0.84, Bartlett's, $P<0.05$) on active searches for information about paranormal topics generated two components, together explaining 62.5 percent of the variance among the variables. The first factor was concerned with phenomena "out there," such as UFO phenomena, cryptids and ghosts, while the second encompassed alternative medicine, consulting mediums, etc., and (lastly) parapsychology and psi. The first component resembles the discovery side of paranormal culture as suggested by Bader et al. (2001, 12, 38), since it includes some salient contested topics which are often assumed to be external to the human mind. The second component resembled what Bader et al. (ibid.) labeled as the enlightenment side of paranormal culture due to its focus on the inner life of the individual and powers of the human mind. To this extent, Bader et al.'s two-part typology of paranormal culture as bifur-cated in enlightenment and discovery is echoed in these results. For this rea-son, the components are henceforth labeled as *active searches for information about paranormal discovery* and *enlightenment*, respectively. In shorthand, I refer to the two scales as discovery and enlightenment. The components, which items they include and their respective factor loadings are presented in Table 8 below.

Table 8. Two components of active searches for information about paranormal topics.

Component 1 Discovery	Component 2 Enlightenment
UFO phenomena 0.88	Alternative Medicine 0.81
Cryptids 0.88	Mediums, fortune tellers, seers 0.81
Ghosts and hauntings 0.73	Astrology 0.65
Prophecies 0.63	Parapsychology and psi 0.46

Factor loadings based on pattern matrix, for structure matrix, see Appendix 2.1.

One way to make use of the components is to rearrange their respective items (recoded as binary variables) into additive scales, in which affirmation of any included item raises the new scales' score by 1. In order to assess whether or not it makes sense to assemble separate items together is reliability tests using Cronbach's alpha (α, e.g., Pallant 2011, 97-101; Field 2013, 829-836), with values of 0.7 or above generally viewed as apt. The activities and experiences of Spiritualism component performed well, with an α of 0.74, while activities and experiences of ESP only reached an α of 0.62. None of the component scales would, however, improve if any of their items were deleted. The components on active searches for information about paranormal discovery and enlightenment performed fairly well. The discovery component measured α 0.79, while the enlightenment component got α 0.66. Neither of the two components improved if any of the scale items were deleted.

Furthermore, a total paranormal beliefs scale (i.e., including all belief items) performed nicely with an α of 0.83. Values on this new scale range from 0 to 10. This scale will be referred to as paranormal beliefs in shorthand.

I also conjoined the items on occultural contact points in order to use it as an IV. Affirmation of any single type of contact point increased the value on this new scale by 1, resulting in a scale ranging from 0 to 9. The scale on occultural contact points scored α 0.71, with a value range from 0 to 9. The α of all of the scales are presented in Table 9 below.

Table 9. Paranormal scales and α.

Paranormal beliefs	Paranormal activities and experiences		Active searches for information about para-normal topics		Occultural contact points
Total scale: α 0.83	Spiritual-ism: α 0.74	ESP: α 0.62	Discov-ery α 0.79	Enlight-enment: α 0.66	Total scale: α 0.71
Number of values/items					
10 (0-10)	7 (0-7)	4 (0-4)	4 (0-4)	4 (0-4)	9 (0-9)

Next, these new scales are explored as DVs.

4.2.1. Paranormal scales and analyses of variance

I now turn to analyses of the components, both those derived from the PCA and the total scale on beliefs introduced in the previous section. To recapitulate, these new DVs are the scales on paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences of Spiritualism and parapsychology, and active searches for information about paranormal discovery and enlightenment, respectively. Occultural contact points will instead feature as an IV. Statistically, tests are conducted on which, if any, group differences that may prove statistically significant[50] rather than the subject of random variation. Group differences are tested through multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA), supplemented by follow-up analyses of variance (ANOVA). The analyses hence contribute to answering AQ2.

The purpose of MANOVA is to test for group differences not only on a single measurement or DV but on several simultaneously (Pallant 2011, 283). MANOVAs were thus made for every IV. An underlying assumption behind this choice of analysis was that the DVs likely stick together and covary to some extent, since they all in their respective ways measure beliefs, activities and experiences related to paranormal phenomena. This tendency was further demonstrated by reliability tests discussed in the previous subchapter.

An issue for the parametric technique MANOVA is violations of normality, which for MANOVA includes normality in terms of homogeneity of variance and covariance (e.g., Field 2013, 759). As discussed in the third chapter, the paranormal DVs – including their scale formats – are generally not normally

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[50] For all of the significance tests, the null hypothesis, H_0, states that the population means on the select DVs are not caused by group differences in the IVs (e.g., gender, level of education), and differences in the sample are thus inferred to be caused by random variation and chance. The alternative hypothesis, H_a, states the opposite, namely that the differences in the sample are caused by real differences in the population. A statistically significant result entails that we reject H_0 on behalf of H_a. The significance level is set to 0.05 for all of the tests.

distributed but negatively skewed. In most cases, some degree of violations against assumptions of normality was detected. [51] These issues are, however, mitigated by the large sample size.[52]

The purpose of the ANOVAs is to discern significant group differences on the mean scores for one rather than several DVs, and they are used as a univariate follow-up test for MANOVA when the IV has more than two categories (Pallant 2011, 240, 296). The follow-up ANOVAs are thus used to discern specifically *where* and between *which* groups significant differences regarding the paranormal DVs lie when the groups are three or more.

Rather than presenting the results from the numerous MANOVAs and ANOVAs one by one, I will, for the sake of parsimony and readability, restrict myself to summing up statistically significant group differences (i.e., $P<0.05$). It is worth noting that the effect size[53] assessing the strength of the relationships between IVs and DVs by the amount of variance explained by the IV ranged from small (<1 percent) to large ($\geq$13.8 percent) (Pallant 2011, 210). Large effect sizes, explaining between 11 and 22 percent of the variance within the DVs, were exclusively detected for occultural contact points, while most other significant IVs accounted for a few percent of the variance. In other words, most IVs explained only a small portion of the variance within the paranormal DVs, while occultural contact points yielded larger effects.

Prior to the analyses, all paranormal scales were transformed into standardized z-variables, with a mean of 0 and standard deviation of 1. The benefits of using standardization are that variables with different units of measurements are given equal weight. Another variable transformation was the tripartite division of the higher-order cultural values variables into roughly equally large groups measuring low, intermediate and high conservation and self-enhancement respectively, since the MANOVAs require nominal groups rather than continuous variables.

4.2.1.1. Paranormal beliefs

Starting with beliefs, several tests provided statistically significant results, namely the following:

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[51] Assessments of multivariate normality and linearity were made following Pallant's (2011, 285-290) suggestions, which included screening for outliers. Using Mahalanobis distance values, a total of 11 possible outliers for the DVs in question were detected. An inspection revealed that these were cases with high values on the different paranormal scales. Since I expected that all of the paranormal variables would be more extreme (i.e., negatively skewed) than variables normally distributed in the population, I chose to retain the outliers. This entails that they may affect the results in rather unpredictable ways (e.g., Tabachnick & Fidell 2007, 73). Correlations between the paranormal scales ranged from 0.316 to 0.625.

[52] As stressed by Pallant (2011, 293), "If you have over 30, then any violations of normality or equality of variance that may exist are not going to matter too much" (cf. Tabachnick & Fidell 2007, 251).

[53] Precise measurements of partial eta squared as well as other measurements and diagnostics may be shared by the author upon request.

- Women are more prone to accept paranormal beliefs with a mean-value of 0.16 compared to -0.21 for men.

- Higher degrees of paranormal belief were found in mid-range educational groups, yet the ANOVAs failed to discern any group differences as statistically significant.

- Sympathizers of the Sweden Democrats score higher on the paranormal belief scale compared to sympathizers of the Social Democrats and the Moderate Party. The effect size was, however, small, accounting for a mere 3.1 percent of the variance within the paranormal beliefs. Using descriptive statistics, Figure 7 below demonstrates that the mean values of sympathizers of most parliamentary parties were negative, while the group scoring the highest consists of those favoring a party outside of parliament.

- Respondents in their 30s were most prone to accept paranormal belief statements, with a mean of 0.24 on the total paranormal belief scale. In contrast, the youngest (mean -0.19) and oldest (mean -0.25) age groups were the least likely to accept paranormal beliefs. Differences between the youngest and oldest respondents were statistically significant, as were those between respondents in their 30s and 40s (mean 0.13). Age accounts for 3.1 percent of the variance within the DV and the effect is hence minor.

- The relationship between trust regarding official versions of contested events, an indicator of conspiracism, and paranormal beliefs was negative. This means that those less prone to accept official versions of contested events are more prone to accept paranormal beliefs, albeit the effect is small at 4.6 percent.

- The number of occultural contact points covaries positively with paranormal beliefs, resulting in higher mean scores on the total belief scale.

Figure 8. Voting intention and paranormal beliefs, standardized mean scores. Output from ANOVA.
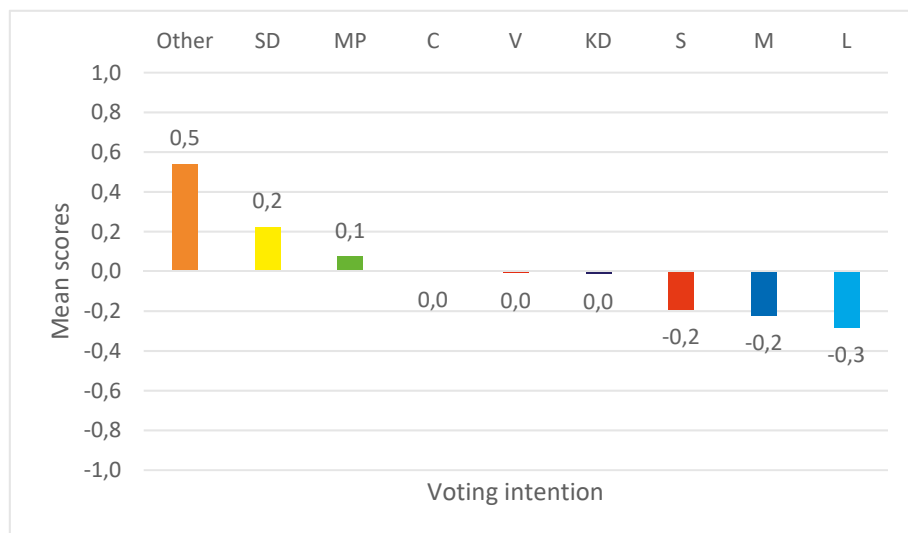
SD = Sweden Democrats, MP = the Green Party, C = the Centre Party, V = the Left Party, KD = the Christian Democrats, S = the Social Democratic Party, M = the Moderate Party, L = the Liberal Party. Those small groups that were undecided, did not intend to vote or opted out of the question have been excluded for the sake of parsimony.

4.2.1.2. Paranormal activities and experiences

Turning to the scales on paranormal activities and experiences, the following statistically significant effects were discerned:

- Women were clearly overrepresented in affirming both Spiritualism and ESP, with mean-scores of 0.30 and 0.10, respectively, compared to -0.33 and -0.15 for men.

- Tests of ESP yielded significant between-subjects effects for type of residence, with those living in apartments (mean 0.09) scoring higher on the scale compared to respondents living in villas or townhouses (-0.08).

- The relationship between monthly income and ESP proved statistically significant. Lower-income groups scored higher on the scale compared to higher-income groups.

- Education yielded statistically significant results when tested against Spiritualism. Those with a post-secondary education shorter than 3 years (mean 0.21) scored higher than those with

elementary education (mean -0.34) as well as a those with a high school education of 3 years or more (mean -0.11).

- Tests between voting intention and Spiritualism pointed to significant differences between respondents opting for the Moderate Party (mean -0.28) on the one hand and the Green Party (mean 0.31) on the other. Concerning ESP, those opting for the Other party option (mean 0.69) differed significantly, by higher scores, from those favoring the Social Democratic Party (mean -0.13), the Liberal Party (mean -0.31), the Moderate Party (-0.14) and the Green Party (mean -0.19).

- The youngest (mean -0.28) and oldest (mean -0.26) age groups differed from all others in regard to Spiritualism. Respondents in their 40s scored the highest (mean 0.21) on the scale. All groups in their 40s or younger (means ranging from 0.03 to 0.21) scored significantly different than those in their 70s or older (mean -0.30), the latter being least prone to self-report ESP.

- Affirming openness to change rather than conservation-type values covaried positively with Spiritualism. Preferring self-transcendence over self-enhancement type values seemed to covary with higher scores on the same scale, yet the ANOVA failed to differentiate significant group differences.

- Degrees of trust regarding official versions of contested events negatively predicted scores on both scales on paranormal activities and experiences. In other words, conspiracism seems conducive to paranormal activities and experiences, albeit the effect size was small (3.9 and 4.7 for ESP and Spiritualism, respectively).

- The relationship between number of occultural contact points and scores on both scales on activities and experiences was decidedly and significantly positive.

4.2.1.3. Active searches for information about paranormal topics

Lastly, tests of the scales on active searches for information about paranormal discovery and enlightenment yielded the following statistically significant results:

- Women were more prone to active searches for information related to enlightenment, with a mean score of 0.28 compared to -0.30 for men. Conversely, men scored slightly higher on discovery, but this result was not statistically significant. The scale included items such as UFOs and cryptids, and the result hence falls in line with previous studies that have shown that men are more pone than women to take

an interest in topics such as UFOs (e.g., Bader et al. 2011, 56-57; Goode 2000, 170).

- Respondents living centrally in the city (mean -0.13) differ from those living in the countryside (mean 0.22) in terms of discovery, the latter group being more prone to active searches.

- Although monthly income yielded significant results in the initial MANOVA, the follow-up ANOVAs failed to discern significant group differences.

- Regarding discovery, differences were significant between those opting for Other party (mean 0.71) and those with a voting intention for the Social Democratic Party (mean -0.10), the Christian Democrats (mean -0.38), and the Moderate Party (mean -0.19), as was the difference between those opting for the Sweden Democrats (mean 0.20) and the Christian Democrats. In other words, those favoring other parties and the Sweden Democrats score higher on active searches for information on discovery. Concerning enlightenment, the difference between those opting for the Left Party (mean 0.21), and the Moderate Party (mean -0.21) was singled out as of significant, the latter being less prone to active searches for information about enlightenment.

- Those under 30 years of age (mean 0.05) scored significantly different on discovery compared to respondents in their 30s (mean 0.36) and respondents in their 70s or older (mean -0.48), while those in their 30s significantly differed from those in their 60s (mean -0.21) as well as the oldest group. Respondents in their 40s and 50s (mean 0.13 and 0.11, respectively) scored significantly different from the 2 oldest groups. Higher scores were hence found among respondents in their 30s, 40s and 60s. On enlightenment, those under 30 years of age (mean -0.14) scored significantly different from those in their 30s (mean 0.20), while all other age groups scored significantly different in relation to the oldest group (mean -0.30). As for discovery, the youngest and oldest generally score lower on the scale.

- Concerning cultural values, respondents favoring openness to change (mean 0.15) over conservation (mean -0.14) scored higher on the scale on paranormal enlightenment. The follow-up ANOVA failed to detect significant differences concerning self-transcendence vs. self-enhancement.

- As was the case for paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences previously, a negative but somewhat curvilinear relationship was detected between the two scales on active searches for information

about paranormal topics and trust regarding official versions of contested events. Breaking with the generally negative but weak pattern were those who viewed official versions of contested events as completely false. This group did not seem to be particularly interested in searching for information about paranormal topics.

- Higher scores on occultural contact points positively predicted scores on both scales on active searches for information about paranormal topics.

To summarize the results of the MANOVAs and ANOVAs, gender (i.e., being female) significantly predicted scores on four of the five paranormal DVs, as illustrated by Figure 9 below.

Figure 9. Gender and paranormal scales, standardized mean scores.

* - statistically significant results on the 0.05-level or below.

The relationship between the degree of trust regarding official versions of contested events and the paranormal DVs was negative. Conversely, lower degrees of trust, indicative of conspiracism, positively predict paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences, although these patterns are weak. As scores on the paranormal DVs are lower at both of the extreme ends of distrust and trust, the pattern becomes somewhat curvilinear, which is illustrated by Figure 10 below.

Figure 10. Conspiracism item, standardized mean scores. Output from ANOVA.
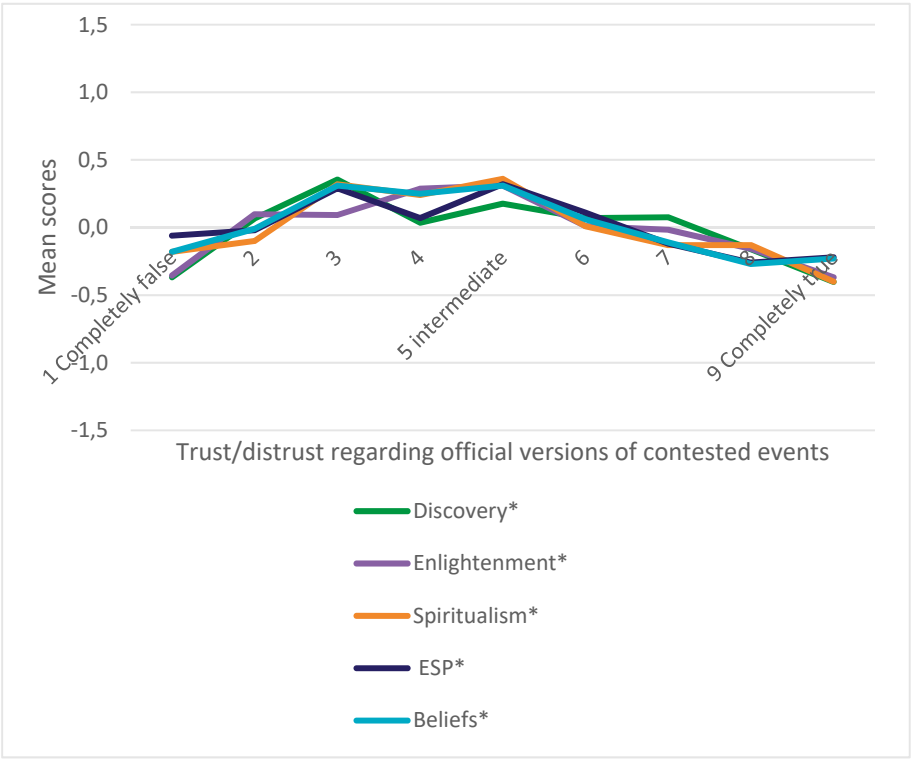
The results were unambiguous between the number of occultural contact points and all five scales: more occultural contact points implies higher mean scores on all of the DVs. Conversely, few or no contact points entails lower mean scores on all of the scales. The effects of the IV occultural contact points on the paranormal DVs were furthermore assessed as moderate (> 6 percent) to large (> 13,8 percent) (Pallant 2011, 210). As Figure 9 below shows, this tendency only goes so far: after affirming seven or eight occultural contact points, the mean scores drop. I suggest two admittedly speculative interpretations of this pattern. First, fewer respondents are placed within the higher echelons of occultural contact points, and the falling scores may be due to an inadequate number of cases in the topmost groups. Another interpretation is that a very high number of occultural contact points may have a disenchanting effect on paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences.

Figure 11. Occultural contact points and paranormal scales, standardized mean scores. Output from ANOVA.
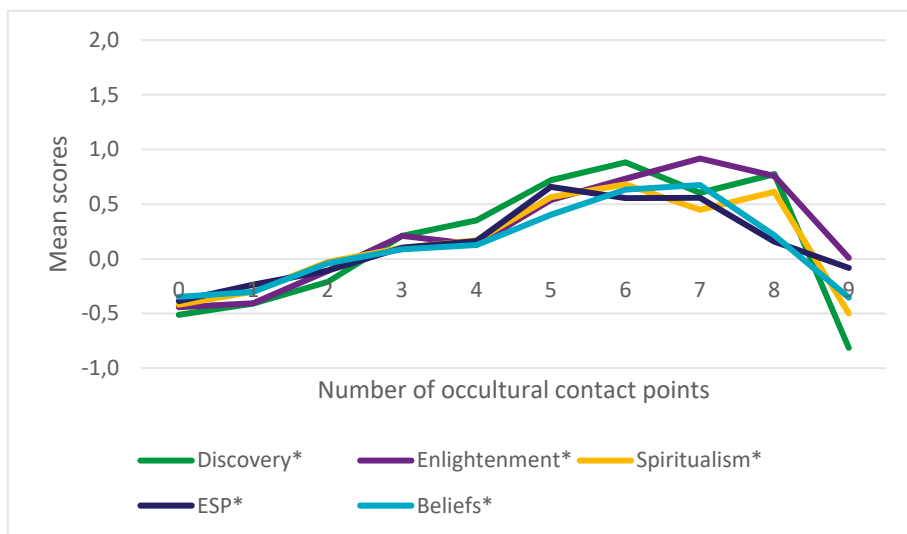
* - statistically significant results on the 0.05-level or below.

Conversely, many results on tests between IVs and DVs were not statistically significant, while others were only significant for one or a few of the scales. A somewhat crass inference would be that the paranormal DVs are almost equally uncommon in most socioeconomic groups. Results on educational levels and the paranormal DVs were non-linear and rarely significant: It was the mid-segment of those with post-secondary education (not university) shorter than three years that, through their higher scores on Spiritualism, differed from those with the lowest and highest levels of education. As income and education may be viewed as two indicators of socioeconomic class, the latter seems to predict paranormal tendencies in the population poorly.

After this exploration of latent variables – the components and scales – I next turn to another exploratory and data-driven technique, by which the respondents rather than the variables themselves are grouped together.

4.3. Respondent profiles vis-à-vis paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences

Cluster analysis aims to discern clusters or groups of cases or individuals, in this case respondents that who "are more similar to one another than they are to objects in other clusters" (Hair et al. 2014, 478; cf. Everitt 2011), maximizing homogeneity *within* clusters and heterogeneity *between* clusters. Hence, respondents with similar response patterns on select variables will be placed

together in a cluster contradistinguished from clusters with other response patterns. Accordingly, my use of cluster analysis on the paranormal DVs attempts to answer the question of whether or not there are larger, discernable groups of respondents defined by their responses vis-à-vis the paranormal scales. This analysis thereby addresses AQ2.

A twostep cluster analysis[54] resulted in two clusters. The first and largest cluster is characterized by a complete rejection of all (or near-all) paranormal DVs, with mean values close to zero. Thus, respondents in this group generally do not search for information about any paranormal topics, they do not report any paranormal experiences, nor do they engage with any paranormal practices or hold paranormal beliefs. For this reason, I label them as *the dismissives*. This cluster contains 72.9 percent of the respondents ($n = 738$). Unlike the first and largest group, the second cluster is marked by a general affinity with at least some paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences as well as active searches for information about paranormal topics, scoring higher on all of the scales. I thus call this group *the open-minded*. The second cluster contains 27.1 percent of the respondents ($n = 274$). The mean values for each scale within the clusters are included in Figure 12 below. Together, the two clusters comprise 91.2 percent ($n = 1004$) of the respondents.[55]

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[54] It is preferable to traditional forms of cluster analyses since the twostep procedure in itself finds the solution with an optimal number of clusters while simultaneously including different kinds of variables (IBM Knowledge Center, n.d.). The variables were standardized as part of the analysis.

[55] The remaining 8.8 percent counted as missing data (e.g., caused by respondents opting out of the particular questions and items).

Figure 12. Respondent profiles derived from twostep cluster analysis and paranormal scales, standardized mean values.
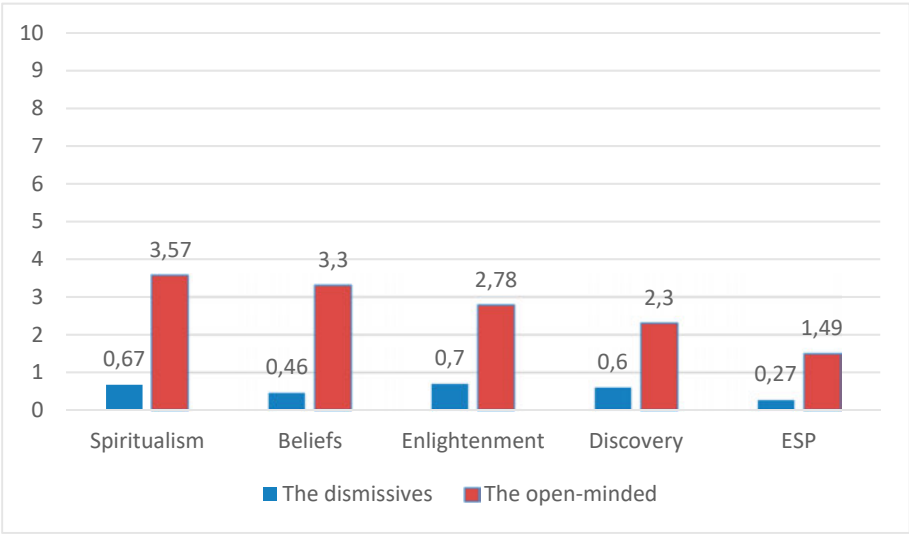
Like the components of the PCA previously, the clusters are a result in their own right as they illustrate a trend in the data that has already become apparent from the initial descriptive statistics, namely that the largest group of respondents are either neutral to or dismissive of paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences. But it also sheds light on the fact that there is a fairly large minority that affirms paranormal belief statements, searches for information about paranormal topics and self-reports paranormal activities and experiences, albeit the extent to which these variables are affirmed varies greatly.

In order to delve deeper, I wanted to explore the possibility of subclusters within a subsample of individuals who had not completely rejected all of the paranormal statements. Thus, a second twostep cluster analysis was conducted, excluding respondents with the value 0 on all of the paranormal scales, hence resulting in a smaller group than the aforementioned cluster the openminded for analysis. Two clusters emerged, with the same overall pattern on all of the paranormal scales, namely a group with slight or minor affirmation of a few items within the scales (54.5 percent, $n = 79$) and a group with elevated mean values on all of them (45.5 percent, $n = 66$). I labeled these two subgroups as *the curious* and *the enthusiasts*, respectively. Their respective proportions are presented in Figure 13 below.

Figure 13. Respondent profiles derived from twostep cluster analysis within the open-minded, standardized mean values.
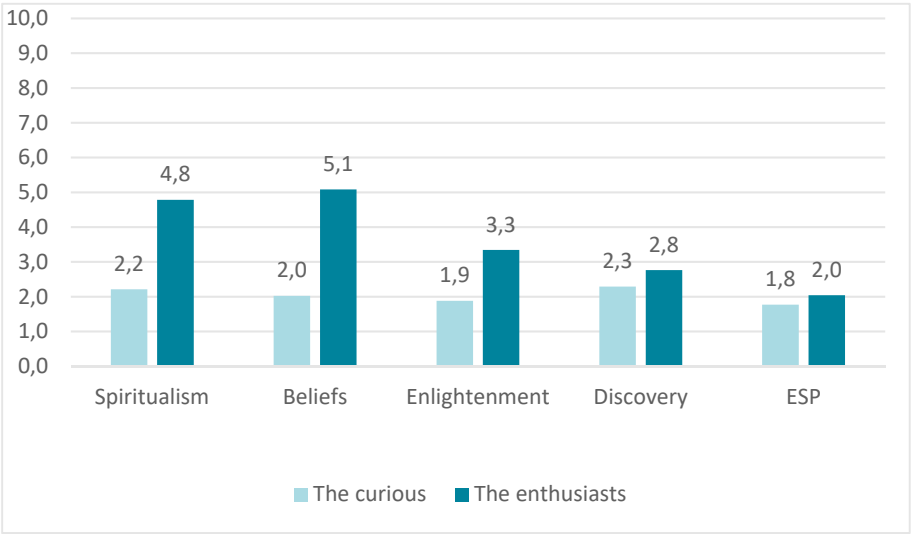
I next turn to the question of whether or not the select IVs impact the odds of respondents belonging to one or the other cluster, first the dismissives and the open-minded, second the curious and enthusiasts, respectively. Relations between the general clusters, the subclusters and the IVs were explored through logistic regression (e.g., Pallant 2011, 168-180). The IVs used in the model were gender, type of residence, religious belonging, country of origin, and urban-rural area, all of which were recoded as binary variables, together with age groups, monthly income, education, the conspiracist item on trust/distrust regarding official versions of contested events, and the higher-order cultural values, all interpreted as continuous variables.

Turning first to membership within the clusters of dismissives and the open-minded, the model in its entirety turned out to be statistically significant - χ^2 (12, n = 790) = 182.9, P ≤ 0.05 - while significant effects were found for the IVs gender, occultural contact points and the conspiracist item on trust/distrust regarding official versions of contested events. The model accounts for in-between 20.5 (Cox & Snell Square) and 29.8 (Nagelkerke R Square) percent of the variance on cluster membership, while the model correctly classified 76.8 percent of the cases. All of these numbers are included in Table 10 below. This table also reveals that females have an increased odds ratio of 4.43 (see the column *Odds ratio*) for belonging to the open-minded compared to men. In other words, women are 4.43 times more likely than men to be classified as open-minded rather than dismissive. The odds of belonging to the cluster of the open-minded increases by 1.57 per number of occultural contact points that respondents affirmed, while each degree of trust regarding official versions of contested events lowered the odds of belonging to the group of enthusiasts by 0.90.

Table 10. Logistic regression predicting the likelihood of belonging to the clusters of dismissives or enthusiasts.

IV	B	S.E.	Wald	df	p	Odds ratio	95% C.I. for Odds Ratio	
							Lower	Upper
Gender*	1.49	0.20	53.53	1	0.00*	4.43	2.97	6.60
Residence	0.02	0.51	0.0	1	0.97	1.02	0.38	2.75
Urban-rural	0.28	0.19	2.10	1	0.15	1.32	0.91	1.93
Country of birth	0.18	0.41	0.19	1	0.67	1.19	0.54	2.64
Occultural contact points*	0.45	0.05	85.58	1	0.00*	1.57	1.43	1.73
Conservation vs. openness to change	-0.02	0.12	0.04	1	0.85	0.98	0.77	1.24
Self-transcendence vs. self-enhancement	0.05	0.12	0.15	1	0.70	1.05	0.83	1.33
Monthly income	-0.01	0.03	0.02	1	0.88	0.10	0.94	1.06
Age group	0.05	0.06	0.50	1	0.48	1.05	0.92	1.19
Religious belonging	-0.1	0.19	0.28	1	0.60	0.91	0.63	1.31

IV	B	S.E.	Wald	df	p	Odds ratio	95% C.I. for Odds Ratio Lower	Upper
Trust regarding official versions of contested events*	-0.10	0.04	5.92	1	0.015*	0.90	0.83	0.98
Education	0.01	0.09	0.03	1	0.87	1.01	0.85	1.20
Constant	-2.91	0.66	19.65	1	0.00	0.05		

* - significant on the 0.05-level or less

Turning to the subclusters the curious and the enthusiasts, a logistic regression including the same IVs as the former was performed. The model overall proved significant - χ2 (12, n = 119) = 26.133, P ≤ 0.05 - accounting for between 18.9 (Cox & Snell Square) and 25.3 (Nagelkerke R Square) percent of the variance, with an accuracy of 67.1 percent in terms of correct cluster classification. The IVs of gender and the higher-order cultural value of self-transcendence vs. self-enhancement were singled out as significant. Being female increasing the odds of qualifying as an enthusiast by 6.76 times, while higher scores on self-transcendence as opposed to self-enhancement decreased the odds by 0.51. This model is accounted for in Table 11 below.

Table 11. Logistic regression predicting the likelihood of belonging to the subclusters of the curious and the enthusiasts.

IV	B	S.E.	Wald	df	p	Odds ratio	95% C.I. for Odds Ratio	
							Lower	Upper
Gender*	1.91	0.55	11.88	1	0.00*	6.76	2.28	20.04
Residence	-1.33	1.18	1.262	1	0.261	0.27	0.03	2.68
Urban-rural	0.24	0.43	0.31	1	0.58	1.27	0.547	2.95
Country of birth	0.09	0.85	0.011	1	0.92	1.09	0.21	5.38
Occultural	0.26	0.14	3.50	1	0.06	1.30	0.99	1.71

contact points								
Conservation vs. openness to change	-0.37	0.27	1.87	1	0.17	0.69	0.41	1.17
Self-transcendence vs. self-enhancement*	-0.68	0.31	4.70	1	0.030*	0.51	0.274	0.94
Monthly income	0.04	0.07	0.28	1	0.59	1.04	0.91	1.19
Age group	0.13	0.15	0.69	1	0.41	1.13	0.84	1.52
Religious belonging	0.01	0.43	0.00	1	0.97	1.01	0.43	2.37
Trust regarding official versions of contested events	-0.15	0.11	1.90	1	0.17	0.87	0.70	1.06
Education	-0.23	0.24	0.91	1	0.34	0.80	0.50	1.27
Constant	1.02	1.82	0.32	1	0.58	2.78		

* - significant on the 0.05 level or less

Summing up the results of the logistic regression of cluster membership, the number of occultural contact points as well as scoring lower (i.e., gravitating towards distrust) on the conspiracist item on trust/distrust regarding official versions of contested events both increase the likelihood of a respondent

belonging to the group of the open-minded rather than the dismissives. Favoring self-transcendence over self-enhancement furthermore decreases the likelihood of being an enthusiast rather than curious. The only IV being decisive for the likelihood of both counting as open-minded and as an enthusiast is gender, being female clearly increasing the odds of both.

An inference based on comparisons between the subclusters is that all of the paranormal scales stick together in the sense that the clusters are not based on diverging response patterns on one or several of the scales but rather on all of them. Respondents within one cluster score higher than respondents within the other cluster on all of the scales: it is thus the magnitude or degree of affirmation of paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences taken together that differentiates the groups.

4.4. A linear model of paranormalism

Based on results from the cluster analyses and logistic regressions, I infer that the paranormal scales stick together to a high degree and that cluster membership is formed around degrees of affirmation or rejection of all paranormal scales rather than any particular scale. I therefore suggest the construction of a total paranormalism scale, added together from all of the previously introduced scales. This new measurement enables us to answer the third analytical question of whether or not it is possible to subsume all paranormal scales into an all-inclusive total index of *paranormalism*.

Cronbach's alpha for this new aggregated construct was sufficient, 0.82. A multiple ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis was performed on the new total scale of paranormalism, the results of which follow below. In short, regression analysis represents our attempts to fit the data into a linear model, using the latter to predict values on an outcome variable or DV (in this case, total paranormalism) from one or more predictor variables or IVs (cf. Field 2013, Chapter 8).

A couple of underlying questions for this particular technique may be posed, such as how well do the IVs predict the outcome of the scores on the total paranormalism scale, and which IVs are the best predictors? Or, alternatively, which background factors affect the likelihood, positively or negatively, of persons holding paranormal beliefs and self-reporting activities and experiences measured jointly together? Through multiple regression analysis, the contribution of each IV becomes clear.

A standard multiple regression analysis was thus applied on the total paranormalism scale as a DV, using the IVs used in the logistic regression model presented in the preceding subchapter. Some assumptions (see Pallant 2011, 148-167) were met, others were violated to some degree: as stated previously, all DVs within the *Paranormal Sweden* survey gravitate towards a non-normal distribution, with some signs of homoscedasticity towards the negative end

while assumptions of linearity fare somewhat better; there were no signs of multicollinearity, however, nor outliers assessed as affecting the outcome to any greater extent (e.g., Cook's = 0.01 , Tolerance above 1 and VIF around 1 for all IVs according to collinearity statistics).[56] The model was in itself significant ($P<0.05$), explaining about 27.5 percent of the variance (R Square 0.28) of the DV in its entirety.

The effect of the IVs gender, urban-rural area, the number of occultural contact points, and the conspiracist item on trust/distrust regarding official versions of contested events were singled out as significantly contributing to the model, as becomes apparent from Column P in Table 12. The effect of the different predictor variables was assessed with the regression coefficient *b* (and β in standardized form), where *b* represents the change in the outcome variable (total paranormalism) per unit change in the chosen predictor variable. The significant relationships may be summarized thusly: being female increases the predicted score on the paranormalism scale by 1.58;[57] living in a rural area increased the scores on paranormalism by 0.47; each occultural contact point increased the total paranormalism value by 0.80; and each score (i.e., more trusting) on the conspiracist item on trust/distrust regarding official versions of contested events decreased the paranormalism score by -0.12. The relationships were thus positive for all significant IVs besides the conspiracy item on trust/distrust regarding official versions of contested events, which covaries negatively with paranormalism. All of these measurements together with error terms and standardized beta coefficients are included in Table 12 below.

Table 12. Multiple regression coefficients on the standardized total paranormalism scale.

	b	SE B	β	P
Constant	-2.26 (-3.56, -0.95)	0.67		
Gender (female)*	1.58 (1.14, 2.01)	0.22	0.21	0.000*
Residence (other)	0.21 (-1.10, 1.47)	0.64	0.01	0.75
Urban-rural (rural)*	0.47 (0.02, 0.91)	0.23	0.06	0.04*

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[56] Other diagnostics such as the normal P-P plot and scatterplot may be shared by the author upon request.

[57] Or 0.21 with a standardized beta, which makes little sense for a categorial-binary variable.

Country of birth (outside of Sweden)	0.13 (-0.76, 1.02)	0.45	0.01	0.77
Contact points*	0.80 (0.70, 0.91)	0.05	0.44	0.000*
Conservation vs. openness to change	-0.16 (-0.40, 0.08)	0.12	-0.04	0.19
Self-transcendence vs. self-enhancement	-0.00 (-0.28, 0.27)	0.14	-0.00	0.98
Income	-0.01 (-0.08, 0.06)	0.04	-0.01	0.82
Age group	-0.01 (-0.15, 0.13)	0.07	-0.00	0.91
Religion	0.01 (-0.38, 0.48)	0.22	0.01	0.80
Trust regarding official versions of contested events*	-0.12 (-0.21, -0.02)	0.05	-0.07	0.02*
Education	0.02 (-0.17, 0.22)	0.10	0.01	0.81

R2 = 0.28
Confidence intervals in parentheses.
* = Significant at the 0.05-level or lower.

4.7. Summary and concluding remarks

The time has come to wrap up this dense chapter before we turn to the findings from the fieldwork and interviews.

The proportions of respondents who dismiss paranormal beliefs and do not self-report any paranormal activities or experiences exceed those who replied affirmatively, for all items. This means that "believers" were a minority, while the affirmative minority generally is larger for paranormal activities and experiences compared to corresponding belief statements. In regard to social settings (i.e., occultural contact points) such as TV and the Internet, it is more

common to encounter paranormal themes and motifs than not to, but the proportions of those who have ever actively searched for information about any paranormal topics were smaller than those who have never done so. However, when adding the proportions of those who have actively searched for information about any paranormal topics to those who have tried any paranormal practice and/or self-report any personal paranormal experiences, the affirmative groups become majorities, encompassing 71.5 and 66 percent of the respondents, respectively. Although those who affirm belief in at least one of the paranormal phenomena, taken together, remains a minority, it is a large one at 41.4 percent.

Principal components analyses of paranormal activities and experiences as well as of active searches for information about paranormal topics resulted in two-component solutions in both cases, namely activities and experiences of Spiritualism and ESP on the one hand, and active searches for information about paranormal discovery and enlightenment on the other. AQ1 was hence answered affirmatively. Significant group differences (by MANOVA and ANOVA) on these new paranormal DVs included:

- Among paranormal believers, women were overrepresented, as were those with a voting intention for the Sweden Democrats compared to those who favored the Social Democrats and the Moderate Party. Those in their 30s scored higher on paranormal beliefs compared to the youngest and oldest cohorts, as did those less prone to accept official versions of contested events and those who affirm more occultural contact points.

- Turning to paranormal activities and experiences, women scored higher on Spiritualism and ESP, as did those who lived in apartments compared to those residing in townhouses or villas. Lower income groups were overrepresented in affirming activities and experiences of ESP, while respondents with a post-secondary education (not university) shorter than three years were more prone to affirm Spiritualism compared to lower and higher educational groups. In terms of voting intention, those opting for the Green Party were more likely than sympathizers of the Moderate Party to affirm activities and experiences of spiritualism, while those who favor the option of a party outside of parliament scored higher than those favoring the Social Democrats, the Liberal Party, the Moderate Party and the Green Party concerning ESP. In terms of age cohorts, the middle groups scored higher than the youngest and oldest on Spiritualism, while the oldest were less likely to affirm ESP. Those gravitating towards cultural values marked by openness to change rather than conservation were more likely to affirm Spiritualism, as were those favoring self-transcendence as opposed to self-enhancement. Those with low up to intermediate (i.e., distrust-

ful) scores on the conspiracist item on trust/distrust regarding official versions of contested events were more prone to score higher on both Spiritualism and ESP. The number of occultural contact points covaried positively with both of the scales.

- Concerning active searches for information about paranormal topics, women were overrepresented on paranormal enlightenment, but men scored higher on paranormal discovery, albeit the latter result was not statistically significant. Those who live in the countryside were somewhat more prone to actively searching for information about discovery. Further on the topic of discovery, those opting for a party outside of parliament and the Sweden Democrats were marked by higher scores, as were those favoring the Left Party compared to sympathizers of the Moderate Party in terms of paranormal enlightenment, albeit all of these effects were small. Those in their 30s were the age group most likely to search actively for information about both paranormal discovery and enlightenment. Respondents gravitating towards openness to change rather than conservation were slightly more prone to affirm paranormal discovery. For both paranormal discovery and enlightenment, the relationship was slightly negative towards the conspiracist item on trust/distrust regarding official versions of contested events and positive towards the number of occultural contact points.

A twostep cluster analysis revealed that the respondents may be grouped together in two main categories, here labeled as the dismissives (the largest group) and the open-minded, the latter subdivided into the curious and the enthusiasts through a consequent cluster analysis. AQ2 was accordingly answered affirmatively. The likelihood of being open as opposed to dismissive was most affected by gender (i.e., being female) followed by the number of occultural contact points, while it decreased somewhat per increase in trust regarding official versions of contested events. Being an enthusiast rather than merely curious was positively predicted by being female and favoring self-enhancement instead of self-transcendence.

Lastly, the results of a multiple regression analysis of the total paranormalism index pointed to several statistically significant relationships. Gender (i.e., being female) increased the overall score on paranormalism by 1.58. The score on paranormalism increased by 0.80 per occultural contact point. Living in a rural setting furthermore increased paranormalism by 0.47. Meanwhile, each increase in trust regarding official versions of contested events decreased paranormalism by -0.12.

Succinctly put, the main and most general patterns that appear are that gender (i.e., being female) and the number of occultural contact points affect the likelihood of affirming paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences the most. Another general pattern is the negative relationship between trust regarding official versions of contested events and affirmation of paranormal

beliefs, activities and experiences, albeit this effect was smaller. Other significant group differences included income, educational group, voting intention and the higher-order cultural values, but these differences were restricted to one or a few of the paranormal scales. Respondents in their 30s were generally most prone to report an affinity with the paranormal, albeit the effects of age were mild. Besides interpreting the effects as the outcome of age in itself, one may argue that they are the outcome of age cohorts or generations. It has, for instance, been suggested that millennials (i.e., 30-39 years of age) have been molded by a *Harry Potter*-effect more than any other generation (Gierzynski with Eddy 2013, 47, 74) in the sense that fantastical and magical elements are commonplace in the culture at large. The results are non-decisive in terms of age vs. generation effects, yet these questions are worth pondering.

5. Paranormal practices

In this chapter, qualitative results from the fieldwork I carried out (i.e., participant observation, interviews) are presented pertaining to how the paraculture can be approached as a set of practices. In a basic sense, this subchapter sets out from the following question: What were the organizations and those involved in them in fact *doing*? In the first subchapter, I present a tentative typology of the main types of practices encountered. These are: paranormal practices as dissemination; paranormal practices as conducive to paranormal experiences; and paranormal practices as training, instruction and gaining knowledge. After this attempt at classification, I present themes pertaining to the roles and locations of paranormal practice in the everyday lives of the participants. In the second subchapter, the structure of the paraculture is revealed by bringing in the practice-in-dimensions typology and the aspects of embodiment, materiality, emotion and narrative.

5.1. Types of paranormal practices

In this subchapter, I present the main types of practices that I encountered in my fieldwork in the paranormal paraculture under investigation. While the presentation sorts the practices into a provisional typology, several organizations in reality engaged with more than one of these main types of practices, yet they tended to gravitate towards one or the other and are here placed within the type of practice that was most prominent within the group. After presenting the main types of practices, I turn to some other prominent features within the paraculture, namely varying levels of engagement and the practices' placement in relation to the everyday lives of the participants.

5.1.1. Paranormal practices as dissemination

As both the cryptozoological and parapsychological organizations mainly aimed to spread knowledge, information and lore about their respective fields rather than conduct investigations of their own, they may both mainly be classified as practices of dissemination. Practice as dissemination was, however, of importance to all of the organizations to varying extents, and I share a few examples of this before the conclusion of this subchapter.

The cryptozoological organization is devoted to the Great Lake Monster that purportedly resides in the Great Lake in the vicinity of Östersund. The organization does not conduct cryptozoological investigations but rather collects, preserves and disseminates local knowledge and lore surrounding the monster. As put by cryptozoologist Ulf:

> We receive reports and add them to our documents, and we share them with people who are interested. But it isn't our job to analyze or explain them in any way. The experiences that people have, they have, and we won't deny them these.

Occasionally, the organization engaged the public through storytelling events based on eyewitness accounts of the cryptid. Members also received regular newsletters providing information about the activities of the organization as well as recent sightings. The organization is also involved in local associational life and promoting tourism in the region. For instance, it appeared a few decades ago in a local TV commercial in which a prominent coffee brand promoted various voluntary associations. Through board members such as Göran, the organization also has ties to the promotion of cryptid-related tourism in the region. In other words, disseminating information about the cryptid, for a range of purposes, is the most salient goal of the organization.

The parapsychological association aims to spread knowledge about various parapsychological topics by organizing events such as lectures for members and the public and, less often, popularized experiments. The purpose and statutes of the organization were originally formulated as promoting the study of parapsychological phenomena, but the operation today mainly seems to be concerned with the dissemination and popularization of knowledge produced elsewhere. Besides organizing lectures, the association keeps its members up to date by publishing a newsletter, maintaining a website including a blog, and running a podcast.

Practices of dissemination featured in the other organizations as well. Training and instructing clients and course participants, which unites both the mediumistic training program and the ufological field investigators' course, is in itself a form of dissemination of information and knowledge. It was also acknowledged as such by some of the participants. In the words of ufologist Allan:

> What we are doing now, today, tonight and this weekend is holding courses to teach how to analyze UFO reports and to reach – what people really see – to teach people about possible sources of error and […] the good UFO cases that exist. I believe this is a good way of producing knowledge.

In Allan's statement, the production and dissemination of knowledge align. The UFO organization's journals and podcast were furthermore appraised as

central means of communicating UFO lore to both members and the public, as were the organization's recurrent exhibitions and lectures. The ghost hunters in turn were not only present online to establish contact with other teams and find potential recruits but also in order to reveal the fruits of their investigations to the online community of paranormal researchers. Live streams from ongoing investigations on social media platforms such as YouTube were thus common.

This presentation has demonstrated that various modes of dissemination, to both group members and the public, were apparent, even integral to all of the organizations within the studied paranormal paraculture, although most prominent among cryptozoologists and parapsychologists. The attainment and sharing of paranormal experiences was another main type of practice that proved to be recurrent, albeit to various extents within the different organizations investigated, and it is to paranormal experiences I now turn.

5.1.2. Paranormal practices as conducive to paranormal experiences

Although present or implied by the other paranormal organizations to varying degrees, the production of direct paranormal experiences was truly the focus of the paranormal investigations of the ghost hunts. After all, the aim was to both induce and hopefully document paranormal events by conducting paranormal investigations of their own, namely of hauntings. In this section, I present examples of the forms paranormal experiences could take during ghost hunts. It is worth noting that paranormal experiences were by necessity involved within mediumistic practice, as mediumistic communication by definition *is* paranormal. Other examples of participants' paranormal experiences are shared later on (e.g., in 5.3).

During ghost hunts, inner and bodily sensations are combined with outer stimuli, which together form the building blocks of paranormal experiences. As in the mediumistic training program, otherwise ordinary sensations, such as warmth and cold, tingling and numbness and emotional states become indicative of ghostly activity. These are triangulated with external output such as noises, objects moving of their own accord and, most centrally, readings taken by the technical apparatuses (see further 5.3.).

Almost immediately after the gear was set up at the haunted stable, the setting of the first ghost hunt I participated in, things started to happen. Members of the Stockholm-based team talked about sinister energies and shared experiences of threats, the latter manifested as feelings of being repelled from or thrown out of one of the stalls. Sebastian ran out of the stable, coughing, after being assailed by an unknown force that made him feel as though he was being suffocated. Ken also felt faint and started to cough. Otherwise, it was a fairly quiet night in the sense that the devices only rarely registered any activity that

may have indicated the presence of something paranormal. When prompted, I voluntarily placed myself in the haunted stall that, earlier that night, was singled out as the source of negative energies. When asked, I was frank and stated that I did find the stall very unpleasant, but that this may have been due to the copious amounts of horse dung and dirt in it. Sebastian appeared to be a bit disappointed, although not necessarily with me. "It seems to be very quiet here," he concluded. The lack of output from the apparatuses became the object of some interest during the night. Their silence was viewed with suspicion as a portent that something unsavory was brewing. It was suggested that a sinister force was interfering with the equipment, occluding any ghostly activity so that it would not be properly registered. There was thus a discrepancy between a lack of physical manifestation on the one hand and a plentitude of subjective, embodied signs of the spirit world on the other.

Later during the night, Anders and Sebastian attempted to cleanse the stall of negative, possibly even demonic, energies. In short, Anders, who claimed no previous experience of this sort of activity, acted as a medium for any spirits potentially bound to the place and urged them to cross over to the other side. Anders, Sebastian and Ken all expressed experiencing the stall as quieter, more pleasant and less oppressive after the cleansing. The ritual, they suggested, had worked.

During our interview, Olivia shared a story from another ghost hunt conducted with a friend that may shed some light on what can transpire during a paranormal investigation. Her friend had previously established contact with a demonic entity through a Ouija board, which was now, at the time in question, making its presence known. When the actual investigation was underway, a loud crashing sound suddenly emanated from a chest of drawers at the same time that her friend jumped off the couch he was sitting on, prompted by a sensation of being pushed or attacked. Apparently, her friend also caught a glimpse of the entity, although Olivia herself could not see it. "He is very, very open and susceptible to the paranormal. He saw it. *Really*."

The following episode exemplifies that the effects of ghost hunting may reverberate after the investigation itself is over. After the first hunt, the night was assessed in a Messenger group. One of the participants shared that he had felt faint while browsing through pictures taken during the night, suggesting that this was a sign that some form of energy had accompanied him home.

During the second ghost hunt, which took place at a haunted community hall, I teamed up with participants Charlotte and Jeanette. Our investigation started in the basement. It was slow going for the first hour. One of the others remarked that she felt silly walking around with all her gadgets, none of which was registering any activity. Sticking to the same area of the building, we entered the rooms beneath the stage that the community hall housed. Here, we turned off all the equipment and made ourselves comfortable on a set of chairs in the dark. As the room became silent, the atmosphere, at least in my recollection, turned hazy. A short while after we had descended into the quietude,

we were snapped back into a state of alertness as we heard the sound of hinges from, presumably, a door being discreetly opened. Almost immediately afterwards, we heard two creaks on the stairs leading down to us. At this point, I was a bit taken aback, as were my fellow investigators. We made some small talk in hushed voices and tried to gaze upwards into the darkness. One participant discerned a nebulous shape, while I admitted that I at first thought I detected movement but then suggested that it may be our minds playing tricks on us as our eyes tried to adjust to the dark. We discussed the matter a bit as the events faded into memory, and nothing else of note occurred. The event sparked some excitement and optimism among the others, who saw it as a portent of future activity that would occur as the night unfolded.

Prior to my third and last ghost hunt, Anders had intimated that the children of a relative had expressed an interest in paranormal phenomena, especially ghosts. A task would thus be to instruct them in how to conduct paranormal investigations in a responsible and careful manner. I met up with the group at the destination, namely a house belonging to Sebastian and David's current employer in a Stockholm suburb. Since I last saw them, David had advanced from being a curious guest doing a photo project to a regular member of the group. The ghost hunt started with Anders showing us how the EMF readers (see 5.3.) could be used in order to detect hidden electrical wiring, thereby ruling out a potential source of measurement error. We set out from the basement, which the team found remarkably quiet, since it had been singled out as a place of activity at previous investigations. We then proceeded to the second floor where some activity was noted by EMF readers, REM pods and the paranormal music box. Meanwhile, Sebastian tried to contact what he perceived to be the spirit of "an old man" (Swe: gubbe) who had assaulted him on a previous occasion. He felt compelled to go to the top floor, which proved to be quiet aside from the discovery that, much to our surprise, there was someone sleeping in one of the rooms. For this reason, we headed back down to the second floor and convened in a meeting room. At this point, there were only minor readings registered by the equipment, but Johan and Sebastian both suddenly felt afflicted by headaches. "Is it you giving me a headache?" Sebastian asked out loud, addressing the terrible old man. As he walked down the hallway, Anders further shared that he could see a silhouette passing by, just out of the corner of his eye. He debated whether or not it was an illusion caused by a mirror on the opposite wall but concluded that this was impossible. At this point, one of the relatives expressed fear and discomfort, and we ended the investigation shortly afterwards.

The examples above illustrate how paranormal experiences may take form during ghost hunts. I will return to certain aspects, such as the use of technology (see 5.3), of ghost-hunting practice below. The attainment of direct personal experiences was also salient in mediumistic practice. However, in that

particular setting, paranormal experiences were intimately connected to paranormal practice as training, instruction and gaining knowledge, the subject to which I turn next.

5.1.3. Paranormal practices as training, teaching and gaining knowledge

While issues of training, teaching and learning paranormal practice were integral to all of the organizations, the two settings most clearly dedicated to this main type of paranormal practice were the mediumistic training program and the ufological field investigators' course. However, the training occurred in quite different ways in these two settings. While the mediumistic program was designed to instruct participants in developing their own innate mediumistic abilities, and hence make possible direct and personal paranormal experiences, the field investigators' course was aimed at scrutinizing others' UFO sightings.

In this section, I present examples of how the practitioners grappled with issues of instruction and knowledge in the various settings. The results are thematized according to the main ways in which training and teaching were directed in terms of gaining knowledge about paranormal phenomena, namely: learning by doing; by direct experience; through texts; through others; through media and popular culture; as and by personal quests; and, lastly, gaining knowledge by applying or emulating science. As participants' views of knowledge and knowledge-making, or emic epistemologies (Hammer 2003), acted as a sensitizing concept behind the collection of the qualitative materials in their entirety and were hence one of the main foci of the study, this subchapter is one of the lengthiest of the dissertation.

5.1.3.1. Learning by doing

Learning by doing, by trial and error, training and repetition, was often acknowledged by the participants as a main form of gaining knowledge about the paranormal, especially those from the mediumistic and ghost-hunting settings. In this section, I illustrate this form of practice with some relevant examples.

Medium Johannes highlighted the importance of learning by doing as a pathway to knowledge about mediumistic and healing phenomena, succinctly putting it thusly: "it's more [about] practicing, how you practice." Miranda, who ran a mediumistic training center, also highlighted the importance of training. Everyone has certain fundamental or innate abilities, Miranda argued, both for mediumship and for musicality, which can be developed and perfected: "Training as well as practice makes perfect." Her mediumistic colleague Lars-Åke also attested to the importance of habitual practice and the long processes it entails. "It took many years," Lars-Åke said regarding his

current mediumistic practice. "I don't like people who take [a couple] week-end courses and then put a label on themselves: 'I'm a healer' or 'I'm a medium.' 'I'm damned good at it.'" To Lars-Åke, the path to mediumship is a long one that cannot be achieved by attending a few events.

Although his ghost-hunting team was heavily influenced by ghost hunters on social media, Ken highlighted the importance of trying out investigatory techniques for oneself. "I'm self-taught," Ken said, "but there are certain techniques that I basically just copy. But that is to evaluate if that particular technique works for me." His fellow ghost hunters agreed upon the importance of trying out investigative techniques first-hand as a way to differentiate between reliable and unreliable methods.

Hence, views of learning by doing and trying out techniques for oneself featured as acknowledged pathways to knowledge among both mediums and ghost hunters. Closely related to the honing of skills is the notion of direct and personal experience as being conducive to gaining knowledge about paranormal phenomena. It is to this neighboring theme that I now turn.

5.1.3.2. Learning by direct experience

Throughout the interviews, direct personal experience was repeatedly taken up as a prominent pathway to learning in regard to paranormal practice and gaining knowledge about paranormal phenomena. In this section, I recapitulate some observations on the use of sensory and emotional experience in the field and then introduce some of the participants' assessments of the importance of experiential knowledge.

Learning by direct personal experience was especially salient among mediums and ghost hunters. Sensitizing the mind and body was an integral feature of mediumistic practice and the knowledge conveyed through mediumistic communication. The medium-in-training was advised to be attuned to visual and auditory impressions, bodily states, emotions, language, and symbols. Features that might otherwise be viewed as ordinary were (re)interpreted as indicative of a spiritual realm. Together with the others at the mediumistic training program, I was instructed to be attentive to sensations of heat and cold, inner pictures, tingling or numbness in any of my limbs, and the presence of physical objects that may function as symbols for spirit communications. As our instructor Lars-Åke put it, impressions such as dizziness, faintness and exhaustion could indicate mediumistic phenomena. A key feature of training to be a medium is to learn how to tell the difference between impressions that *really* are indicative of mediumistic phenomena and those that may be misinterpretations caused by our egos and fancies of the mind. Such features were prominent among the ghost hunters as well: the feelings of suffocation and being repelled or thrown out of places on behalf of participants serve as examples.

To medium Miranda, experiential knowledge was key for mediumistic practice. She summarized her view of mediumistic knowledge thusly: "it's a

direct experience of the divine or the supersensible or whatever you want to call it, and I think in order to really understand it […] you need to have had your own experiences." Miranda also pointed to the limits of other pathways to knowledge, such as studying texts. Personal knowledge is, as Miranda put it, "when [the knowledge] settles. You can […] intellectually understand and agree, but, without experiences, it won't anchor in you as a person." Hence, direct personal experience should validate other ways of gaining knowledge. Miranda's fellow mediums Ernst and Anna went even further. As Anna viewed it, prior knowledge may stand in the way of the kind of direct experiential knowledge that is of interest to the medium. "The less you have in your head," Anna suggested, "the better." Her spouse, Ernst, elaborated his endorsement of direct personal knowledge: "In reality, all knowledge is in the universe […] All knowledge is there, if you have the ability to connect to it." Ernst likened this process to a "download." What emerged during the interview with Anna and Ernst was a radical epistemology according to which knowledge can be gained through practices such as channeling that directly tap into the universe. Lars-Åke expressed a similar view and drew a distinction between mediumistic practice ad his occupation as a nurse, a domain largely governed by evidence and proven experience. Unlike the latter, knowledge gained through mediumistic communication was regarded as more direct, subjective and ephemeral:

> [there is] so much in the mediumistic world that builds upon personal experience, what I can do myself, so to speak […], where I say that a truth is a truth right here and right now, it's *my* truth, it's not certain that it's *your* truth. It's not certain the truth is the same to me now as it was five years ago.

Parapsychologist Jesper expressed views similar Miranda's, as he regarded personal experience as the most reliable source of gaining knowledge about the paranormal. "You have to go out and interact with what you're interested in in order to gain real knowledge," he explained. "Theoretical knowledge," he continued, "is fine, but – it should be more of a complement to the real experience." To ghost hunter Johan, who combined the technical skills of the ghost hunter with mediumistic abilities, direct experience was not only a pathway to knowledge but also a goal in itself: "experiences of the paranormal -- can't have too many of those." The attainment of paranormal experiences was a major motivator for ghost hunters Charlotte, Tommy and Jeanette as well. Jeanette wanted to "feel something," while Charlotte hoped to gain access to paranormal experiences that were not easily conveyed through paranormal reality TV.

I have thus shown that experiential knowledge was a salient, even preferred, pathway to knowledge, especially among mediums and ghost hunters. The importance of direct experiential knowledge was less prominent, though

far from absent, among the participants from the cryptozoological, ufological and parapsychological settings, perhaps as these activities are more focused on other peoples' accounts or paranormal claims rather than on generating experiences of one's own.

Leaving experiential knowledge behind, I next present a theme that may seem dry by comparison, namely views on textual knowledge.

5.1.3.3. Learning through texts

A few participants explicitly referred to reading texts as a particular mode of learning about paranormal phenomena and gaining knowledge in general. As became apparent from the previous subchapter, while medium Miranda established that mediumistic practice could be learned through texts or "book knowledge" (Swe: boklig kunskap) only to a limited extent, she still acknowledged its merits. Along similar lines, parapsychologist Jesper drew a distinction between knowledge gained through texts and theory, which he acknowledged as important, and personal experience, which he viewed as superior.

In contrast, ghost hunter Charlotte singled out reading as a primary way to gain knowledge. Along similar lines, ufologist Allan was not only an avid reader about UFO phenomena but also a prolific writer. "I write many articles," he said, "in different mass media contexts. And I constantly try to provide a balanced picture of these complexes of phenomena. […] The production of knowledge is something I devote myself to on a daily basis. Producing knowledge so that others may take part of it." To Allan, then, texts were regarded as key to the dissemination of knowledge, be it his own or the knowledge of others. The importance ascribed to others when learning about paranormal phenomena in a more general sense also presented a distinct theme, and it is to this theme that we turn next.

5.1.3.4. Learning through others and through organizations

The influence of peers was recurrently mentioned as an important aspect of learning about paranormal practice and attaining knowledge. Ghost hunter Anders mentioned how he, inspired by paranormal reality TV, asked the other members of his ghost-hunting team for guidance, especially pertaining to skills related to mediumship. Fellow ghost hunter Ken concurred and explained:

> Everyone has different techniques. […] For instance, Johan here does a lot with his hands when he's walking around, kind of spinning them together, while I walk around with my arms stretched outward, senses, and runs the fingers over the palms. So, you copy a lot of stuff but somehow make it your own.

For similar reasons, ghost hunter Frank mentioned the importance of "spending time with other paranormal people and sharing some experiences" as a

pathway to knowledge. Medium Anna emphasized the importance of group activities, such as the mediumistic training program, as ways of both gaining and maintaining knowledge:

> when you meet up, when you see each other once a week or so, that's important. It's incredibly important. Because then you sit and meditate, and you play, and you connect with your [spirit] guide and all the stuff I might be a bit sloppy with at home. I have trouble getting centered my own. So, that's a big part of it for me, these groups.

Various group activities were recognized as important by all participants from the mediumistic setting that I interviewed, which is hardly surprising since we met at a training center. Other training and course centers, such as the Swedish Ramsbergsgården, were mentioned as well, and the institution that mediumistic instructor Lars-Åke took up the most was the British Arthur Findlay College. The college, which applied rigorous and standardized procedures for both teaching and evaluating their students, stood out as a clear role model for his own mediumship.

The ufological field investigators' course was highlighted by its participants as a central forum for learning about ufological practice. The organization's journals and podcast were also mentioned by several attendees as being of central importance to their interest in and knowledge of ufology. Malin described the status of ufology as, to a large extent, "a matter for civil society and associations" since it is only scarcely acknowledged by governmental actors. Accordingly, those interested in ufology are dependent upon coming together with like-minded people to form and maintain their paranormal practice.

In sum, working together with others was recurrently ascribed importance in participants' assessments of reliable pathways to knowledge. In addition to peers, fellow association members, voluntary associations and course centers, media and popular culture represented other institutions that the participants' returned to as important sources of knowledge about paranormal phenomena. The next section specifically deals with the role media and popular culture play in knowledge-making.

5.1.3.5. Learning through media and popular culture

Media and popular culture were mentioned by several participants as both a key inspiration for paranormal practice and as a pathway to information and knowledge about paranormal phenomena.

Popular culture, in various media formats, was near-omnipresent in the interviews I conducted and my observations from the field. The media categories that participants mentioned most frequently were books, TV and the Internet. Podcasts and online streaming platforms such as YouTube and Netflix

were also taken up. Among TV shows, the classic science fiction and horror show *The X-Files* was most frequently mentioned, followed by Swedish paranormal reality TV shows as *The Unknown* and *A Night at the Castle* (Swe: En natt på slottet, 2014-2017, IMDB, n.d.). LaxTon, arguably Sweden's most successful ghost-hunting duo, was well-known among the ghost hunters and mentioned often. Their collaboration with Jocke and Jonna Lundell in the reality show *Ghost Hunt* (Swe: Spökjakt, 2019-) was frequently mentioned as well. However, far from all of these productions were regarded as pathways to reliable knowledge. For instance, ufologists Kjell and Wilma expressed an appreciation of paranormal reality TV shows like *Ancient Aliens* (2009-, Wikipedia, n.d., 'Ancient aliens') but had reservations. As Wilma put it: "I just want to say that I didn't take [it] that seriously."

As demonstrated previously, the all-male ghost-hunting team generally acknowledged that emulating others, not least other ghost hunters appearing in paranormal reality TV shows and social media, was a productive way of developing their own paranormal practice, especially when combined with input from others belonging to their own team. "I watch a lot of other paranormal investigators on YouTube," ghost hunter Ken explained. and Team member Anders added: "You find investigatory techniques there, […] there is a flow of information to benefit from." Ghost hunter Olivia expressed a similar sentiment: "Social media is a big motivating factor. And my interest started when I watched a lot of ghost hunters do this." Ghost hunter Charlotte said that her recent interest in ghost hunts was directly sparked by encounters with ghost-hunting media, both online and on TV. Without this input, she would not have been aware of the practice at all. Paranormal reality TV, especially the ghost-hunting duo LaxTon, directly inspired spouses Tommy and Jeanette to try out ghost hunting in person. Watching LaxTon had also provided them with some practical, in Tommy's words, "tips and tricks" that they could apply in the field. Tommy particularly emphasized LaxTon's use of technological apparatuses as integral to his own engagement with ghost hunts:

> I've become a bit gadget crazy: […] since I started following LaxTon and have seen how they've gone "all in" with all their toys and gadgets […] 'All right, there's my domain.'

Social media platforms like YouTube influenced the cryptozoologists as well. The board members took an active interest in reports about lake and sea monsters from other parts of the world, not least the legendary Loch Ness Monster, as the information provided could guide their understanding of the Great Lake Monster by analogy. Cryptozoologist Annika followed reports from "Norway and Sweden and Finland and Russia and Canada" since "they're all on the same latitude," implying that the appearance of lake and sea monsters may follow a meaningful pattern.

Many participants, however, stressed the importance of critically assessing sources, especially those from media and popular culture. Medium Johannes, who was heavily influenced by mediumistic and ghost-hunting shows such as *The Unknown* and *A Night at the Castle*, stated that he tries to differentiate between reliable and unreliable media sources by asking if there could be financial motivations behind their production: "I don't buy into everything. If I feel like "there's money involved here," I let it go." Ufologist Marcus applied a similar cui bono way of reasoning regarding ufology on social media. He was especially skeptical of paranormal YouTubers, suggesting them being dependent on economic incentives: "out for clicks [i.e. views], are we?"

In spite of LaxTon's omnipresence as a point of reference among the ghost hunters, their status as role models was contested. Several times during our conversation, Sebastian accused LaxTon of being "sell outs," mainly due to their collaboration with Joakim and Jonna Lundell on their show *Ghost Hunt*. Sebastian questioned the ghost-hunting duo's integrity and expressed doubts about the authenticity of the show. In spite of this, Sebastian's ghost-hunting persona reminded me of Joakim Lundell: both played the role of the provocateur, trying to goad spirits into manifesting themselves.

Hence, although media and popular culture were widely recognized as sources of inspiration and information by several participants, the matters of format and content were also partly questioned. In the next section, I turn to more introspective assessments of knowledge and paranormal practice.

5.1.3.6. Learning as and by a personal quest

To some participants, especially from the mediumistic setting, learning about the paranormal was a matter of learning about oneself and of growing as a person. I will share a few examples illustrative of these narratives about personal growth being aligned with paranormal practice.

For parapsychologist Miriam, the theme was actualized in relation to the practice of meditation, which she had recently started. She described the process of familiarizing herself with meditation, and by extension her interest in the paranormal, as a "stepladder." This stepladder represents the processes by which she tries out various ideas and practices, adopting some while rejecting others. Her description is hence an apt example of the learning by doing theme presented previously. For Lars-Åke, who had been involved in mediumistic practice for decades, progress has been gradual and intermittent:

> My truth today isn't the same the truth I had five years ago. And I've realized this about myself as well [...] that I can't sit down on the sofa and just think "no, now that I've gotten this far, it's enough." I'm not like that. I always thirst for development.

Lars-Åke's journey of learning and self-exploration further involved confronting his own "shadow sides, weaknesses, ego." His mediumistic colleague Miranda described her own path towards mediumship as one of "personal spiritual development." She described this personal development as integral to her job as a medium, as part of which she helps, guides and teaches others. Mediums Ernst and Anna also framed their skills (e.g., meditation, yoga, mediumistic channeling) as resources for personal development. The spouses further expressed their own past within the mediumistic milieu as one of personal development, or as an inner journey or path of their own. Accordingly, the journey of personal development that people embark on differs depending on individual preferences and needs, and there is no one format that works for everyone. "The inner journey is what really matters," Ernst reasoned, "for you to grow and become a good person."

The theme of personal development as part of gaining knowledge about the paranormal was especially prominent among participants from the mediumistic setting. In a way, becoming a medium seems to be a journey turned inwards, marked by introspection and lessons by which the medium continually grow into the practice of mediumship. By contrast, the next and last theme on paranormal practice and knowledge, to which I now will turn, is arguably the least subjectivist of the approaches, namely paranormal practice aimed at incorporating methods associated with science.

5.1.3.7. Learning by applying or emulating science

I conclude this subchapter with one of the most prominent themes that characterized paranormal practices as training, teaching and gaining knowledge, namely the endorsement of science and scientific methods, most notably those of the natural sciences.

For most of the participants from the ufological field investigators' course, scientific methods were something to emulate as much as possible. As ufologist Carl assessed the situation: "I don't think anyone, at least not in this crowd, thinks anything other than the more scientific ufology is, the better." Scientific approaches had long been advocated by ufologist Allan: "I've always been of the opinion that the UFO-phenomenon can be investigated scientifically, but it warrants an interdisciplinary approach." Ufologist Stefan referred to investigatory methods as the main way in which science inspired the ufological organization's approach: "It's [in] the form, the method, the collection [of evidence or data]."

Like the ufological organization, the cryptozoologists, according to Ulf's description, received reports of sightings from the public, and witnesses were kept up to date whenever pertinent. Hence, aspirations to emulate ideals and norms associated with science were reflected in standardized data collection procedures. However, unlike the ufological organization, Ulf stressed that the cryptozoological association did not seek out explanations for the reports.

Medium Miranda regarded mediumistic truth claims as non-empirical as they refer to another domain of reality. She suggested that the scientist, in order to approach the paranormal scientifically, "needed to broaden [his/her] methodology," as the phenomena under study at least partly falls outside of the purview of empirical research. Although Miranda stressed the limitations of scientific methodologies, she nevertheless acknowledged the importance of verifying mediumistic messages. She further said that she and her spouse had discussed the need for a mediumistic database, compiling various forms of mediumistic communications, allowing for comparisons and cross-checks. In other words, Miranda suggested some degree of standardization for mediumistic practice. Although this hardly qualifies as an endorsement of scientific method per se, the call for a standardization of practice and terminology (e.g., a database) nevertheless resembles a scientific approach.

Although the ufologists were generally very positive in their assessments of the role of science in ufology, a number nevertheless addressed deficiencies in scientific approaches, as ufologist Carl did:

> [Most cases] can't be investigated with scientific methods. It's the same thing with police investigations. […] You should use science as much as possible. But it's these other parts – calling witnesses – and these soft questions, then. There's not a whole lot of scientific method to apply here.

Both Carl and Marcus compared ufological fieldwork to police investigations and investigatory journalism rather than scientific experimentation. Marcus elaborated upon this point:

> When we say that we have scientific ambitions, we mean precisely this when it comes to how we collect data, how we report it, how we document it, how we disseminate it – here, we follow the scientific method as best as we can as amateurs. But then there are things that…like, you can't really prove a UFO case. That is where the science part of it fails. It is more akin to the legal definition of whether or not someone is guilty, so to speak.

Other participants also addressed the limits of scientific methods. Parapsychologist Miriam doubted whether paranormal phenomena could be sufficiently quantified and objectified from the purview of science, at least with the scientific tools currently available. Parapsychologist Mats also explicitly addressed the limits of scientific methods. "Scientific knowledge is the best tool we have," he said, although he went on to stress that "life's most meaningful experiences" (e.g., falling in love, visiting a city) cannot be replicated. Accordingly, individually and socially meaningful experiences remain outside of the scope of scientific explanation. This argument was reminiscent of how

parapsychologist Svante viewed many people's relationships to their own paranormal experiences. Although Svante himself had dedicated parts of his career to finding scientific evidence in support of phenomena such as telepathy, he nevertheless recognized that, for many people, scientific evidence, experiments and replicability are simply irrelevant. He stated that, for many people who have had paranormal experiences, the experience in itself is enough: "If you're interested in having the experience confirmed, you need to go one step further. But it's not necessary. Many people aren't interested in that. For them, their subjective conviction is enough."

While the participants frequently invoked science in their views of reliable pathways to knowledge, they also delimited the authority of science. While some, most notably participants recruited from the ufological field investigators' course, stressed that scientific methods ought to be emulated as much as possible, experiences involving UFOs, as with other paranormal phenomena, were regarded as non-replicable and impossible to predict. In other words, many participants grappled with the relationship between science and paranormal phenomena. Most of them acknowledged the merits of science, but with reservations, as they found that paranormal experiences and subjectively meaningful events simply fell outside of the purview of scientific investigations.

In this subchapter, I have presented themes pertaining to emic views of knowledge. Some featured more prominently in certain groups. The mediums tended to view knowledge as bound up with a quest for personal development, while the ufologists embraced scientific methods. While gaining knowledge through reading texts came across as the least prominent theme, this may be due to the fact that textual knowledge was simply overshadowed by experiential knowledge. The empirical examples furthermore illustrate that the organizations tend to gravitate towards certain pathways to knowledge more than others, although scientific knowledge was acknowledged as important by most participants.

Besides these differences in how practitioners viewed issues of knowledge, they also displayed differences in terms of how engaged they were and in the role paranormal practices had in their lives. These issues are explored in the next subchapter.

5.1.4. Roles and location of the paranormal: On levels of engagement and functions of paranormal practice in everyday life

I now turn to results pertaining to how the participants assessed their own engagement in paranormal practice. The subchapter includes descriptions of

change over time as well as the various roles and functions that paranormal practice fulfills in participants' lives.

5.1.4.1. Between hobby and lifestyle

The levels of engagement varied between the participants across the different paranormal prototypes. To some, paranormal practice was a central, even defining, feature of their lives, while others engaged with it as a casual hobby.

I begin with a few descriptions of those who assessed paranormal practice as one of their main interests in life. Ghost hunter Ken summarized his passion for paranormal investigations thusly: "I view it as both a hobby and a lifestyle. […] If you do this, you have to be really passionate about it. And really invest yourself and go *all in*. It's not a game. It's not something you play around with." Fellow ghost hunters Anders and Sebastian nodded in agreement. Olivia stated that ghost hunting was one of her major interests in life. "When I'm not at my day job" she said, "I devote nearly all my time to it." Allan, a UFO veteran with decades invested in the organization, dedicated much of his time to ufology and related fields. "It pretty much occupies all of my leisure time," he explained. "I invest at least three hours a day on it." Svante recognized parapsychology, and his relationship to it, as a central feature of his life to the extent that "[parapsychology] gives life meaning." Mediums Johannes and Miranda likened their interest in mediumistic and healing practice to, in Johannes' words, "a calling," or as Miranda put it:

> It's a big part of my everyday life, my way of being, thinking and relating […] Not the school in itself, but my own spiritual belonging and my way of viewing both myself and others in this world and on this planet. And my own mediumship, well, yes– it is a calling, I would say.

To spouses and mediums Anna and Ernst, paranormal practice had become integrated into everyday life, informing day-to-day decision-making. "At first, it was so scary and it was mystical and it was so special and all that," Anna explained. "But now it's commonplace, she added."

For other participants, paranormal practice was not a regular feature of their lives. The description of a fairly passionate albeit intermittent hobby was common among the interviewees. "It's pretty peripheral," ufologist Mattias said about his interest in UFOs, and fellow ufologist Stefan concurred. Similarly, some participants mainly engaged with paranormal practice through media and popular culture rather than through associational life in their everyday lives. Although Kenneth did not describe ufology as an integral part of his leisure time, he nevertheless either listened to podcasts or watched documentaries on the subject on a daily basis, as did parapsychologist Mats on the sub-

ject of parapsychology. While ufologist James was not that engaged in associational life, UFOs and similar topics were part of his daily media consumption.

Relationships to paranormal phenomena outside of the scope of the respective paranormal prototype from which the participants were recruited were often more mellow or casual. For instance, apart for some of the ufologists, few participants expressed any familiarity with or engagement in cryptozoology. Some participants were uninterested in paranormal topics outside of the purview of their respective organizations. Anders admitted that his ghost-hunting team had received requests to investigate UFO phenomena, which they have thus far turned down, although he does not want to "close the door" in a definitive manner.

To some participants, paranormal phenomena were present as a bundle of existential questions that may, or may not, entail practical engagements. "You could say that these thoughts have been with me since birth," parapsychologist Miriam said with a laugh. "These things weren't very strange for me, until I learned that they were strange. You could say I have continued with them in my own way." Although ufologist Daniel only intermittently engaged with ufology, he remained emotionally and intellectually invested, or as he put it: "the question lies very, very close to my heart."

As the statements from the participants have made clear, the level of engagement with paranormal practices varied, ranging from being a lifestyle to an intermittent hobby and, for some, a bundle of existential questions. As the next section will demonstrate, the paranormal practices were not necessarily consistent over time but were themselves subject to change.

5.1.4.2. Change over time and changes of heart

For many participants, their paranormal practice had changed over time. For some, their interest took shape in their early years. Others accounted for conversion-like moments after initially being uninterested or skeptical. Some of the participants described their current views of paranormal phenomena as being more complex than they were before.

Several participants described their active interest in paranormal topics as stemming from childhood or adolescence, often inspired by encounters in media and popular culture. Ufologist Allan told me how he started collecting newspaper clips about UFO sightings and other unexplained phenomena, which he preserved in scrapbooks while he was growing up: "The Philadelphia Experiment, the Bermuda Triangle, levitation, UFOs and, Loch Ness, it was all a great midden [Swe: kökkenmödding] of exciting stuff." Ufologist Marcus came into contact with these topics through his school library. He started reading about outer space and soon ended up hoarding books about UFOs and contactees, the contents of which he accepted back then at face value. Fellow ufologist Stefan's interest in UFOs was triggered by movies

such as *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, while *The X-Files* tinted ufologist Malin's childhood with a mix of horror and fascination. Ufologist James referred to a couple of books on mysterious phenomena which he read growing up, as did Mattias, who had a little "green book" filled with all kinds of strange, scary and anomalous phenomena.

Some interviewees described a change over time that could be likened to a conversion process. Regardless of they were initially uninterested in or directly hostile to paranormal phenomena, the shared trait among them is that they started to take it seriously. Medium Johannes, formerly dismissive of claims of the paranormal, framed his emergent mediumistic practice as "a conversion of sorts," which was triggered by his fascination with paranormal reality TV. Prior to his own sighting of the Great Lake Monsters, cryptozoologist Ulf ridiculed the notion of its existence: "Just like everyone else has, [I've] laughed at it and have maybe made a nasty comment or two about it. Until you witness it yourself." Ufologist Carl described himself as a reformed skeptic. He was deeply affected by an episode of *The Joe Rogan Experience* (2009-, joerogan.com, n.d.) featuring a military pilot who shared his own UFO-related experiences. "So, I set aside my preconceptions," Carl explained, "and listened to what he had to say. And I read up on the case." After reviewing available documentation and evidence, Carl inferred that "the phenomenon is real." For parapsychologist Mats, his academic studies brought him into contact with parapsychology and ESP, and he was prompted to take the subjects seriously. "I laughed the first time I heard they were conducting experiments on telepathy at the [department]," Mats told me. "It was just so weird." Mats became convinced of the reality of ESP due to his observations of others. Specifically, Mats' witnessed interactions between a husband and wife that he interpreted as telepathic during an experiment. The wife had a disability that made her dependent on her husband, and their relationship was a close one. As Mats described the experiment:

> We put them in two different rooms, as far from each other as we could in that department, with soundproofing and what-not. – One of them was to watch a movie, and the other was put in an altered state of consciousness, a hypnagogic state between sleeping and being awake, and one of them would try to sense which movie their partner was watching and then identify what kind of movie it was. Now, not only did these two identify the film that the partner had seen, which they did twice in a row: what was even more impressive […] was that they also described this film [in real time], and this was recorded. […] So, when something happened in the film […], the other person said it, precisely at the same time it was happening in the film. I have no explanation for this. It made a deep impression on me.

Medium Lars-Åke's first consultation with a professional medium was prompted by a friend's suggestion following the death of his mother. He was

greatly amazed by the experience. "I nearly fell off the chair," Lars-Åke said, "since it became so hands-on. So much of it was true." Puzzled, Lars-Åke took on the daunting task of transcribing the recorded consultation, which resulted in 14 pages of text filled with verifiable statements about his life, from childhood onwards. This convinced Lars-Åke of the reality of mediumistic phenomena.

Several participants also described change over time in the form of a more complex understanding of the paranormal practice in question. "I've realized how difficult things are," Svante told me regarding his view of parapsychology, "how huge these things are." "I've kept my curiosity," Allan said of his long engagement in ufology, which started in the 1970s- "At the same time, I've seen how it has become more complex […] How things are connected in ways we didn't really believe back then. And it's not as easy to explain as you'd think." Marcus, another veteran within the ufological field, reported a similar transition from gullibility to complexity with reference to the early contactee and astro-archaeology literature he had read during his childhood and adolescence: "So, back then, you were completely convinced – a lot of people were [sharing their UFO experiences]. They wouldn't *lie* about it, right?" After his initial acceptance of claims of extraterrestrial contact, Marcus later came to view the E.T. hypothesis as one among several contending explanations for UFO-related phenomena.

Not only did the levels of engagement in paranormal practice and the degree to which things changed over time vary among the participants, the practices themselves seemed to fulfill different functions in their lives. One such function was paranormal practice as a source of guidance in life.

5.1.4.3. Guidance in life and coping with hardship

Some participants attested to their paranormal practice as a source of guidance in everyday life, both for themselves and for others. Several of these testimonies, especially but not exclusively found in the mediumistic setting, framed paranormal practice as helpful in alleviating hardships such as stress and distress. Such statements can be interpreted as indicative of coping or coping processes, to use an analytical concept common within psychology. In short, coping denotes "our efforts to manage adaptational demands and the emotions they generate" (Lazarus 2005, 19), especially demands that are stress-inducing.

Medium Miranda was motivated by her desire to help others navigate existential issues. When I asked her what engaged her the most about mediumship, she said:

> Well, it's been to make people, or to *help* people, see and understand that this reality we live in is far greater than the everyday-life we normally stick to, with

its everyday routines and all of that. That existence is multifaceted and immense. To be reminded that we have a spiritual nature and that it may be our true essence and it may be where we belong, not in this outer world. That is probably my main motivation.

For Miranda, then, mediumistic practice was about guidance, for herself and others.

Medium Ernst's journey towards mediumship was triggered by a period characterized by pain. "In 2009, I broke my foot, and I lay on the couch, feeling sorry for myself," Ernst said with a laugh. "And then, I remember that I decided, 'now, I'm going to develop my mediumship, all in.'" His spouse Anna also testified to how mediumistic practice helped her deal with hardships in life, such as recurrent depression. Medium Sonny stated that he was no longer "afraid of dying" due to his paranormal practice as well as a near-death experience. During an informal conversation in connection with our second ghost hunt, ghost hunter Sebastian shared previous experiences of vulnerability and pain, and how his current paranormal practice helped keep him on track. Medium Lars-Åke framed his paranormal practice as a way of coping with the harsh realities of life, which he succinctly described in terms of "keys" to different situations and dilemmas:

> I mean, you end up in various situations where you – you lock yourself in somehow, where you reach the end of the road […] Sometimes you don't know what to do, how to move on. […] Of course people can figure it out in different ways, when you end up in those situations, but – I've found that the input that I get from kin, the dead, or the other side, or whatever you want to call it has given me a key that I can insert, turn, and then move on.

Parapsychologist Miriam expressed how her interest in parapsychology and practices such as meditation was motivated by the need to cope with hardship, especially stress. Her current paranormal practice was hence shaped by the need for stress-relief.

In addition to these views of paranormal practice as means of coping, they were more generally acknowledged as existential orientations, which is explored in the next and concluding section of this subchapter.

5.1.4.4. Riddles of existence: answers to the ultimate questions

Several participants said that a key motivation for their paranormal practices was the possibility of finding answers to the big questions, mysteries and puzzles of existence. Paranormal phenomena were viewed as clues that, if deciphered, would better help humankind to understand existence, ranging from the nature of consciousness to the question of whether or not man is alone in

the universe. Within the sociology of religion as well as theology, these distinctly existential issues are sometimes labeled as questions of ultimate meaning (e.g., Glock & Stark 1965, 4-5) or ultimate concerns (e.g., Tillich 1956). In this section, I present examples of participant statements that signify issues of ultimate meaning or concern.

For the participants recruited from the parapsychological association, parapsychology and similar endeavors were closely linked to the nature of human consciousness. "Of course, it has something to do with my place [in the grand scheme of things]," parapsychologist Miriam said with some hesitation when I asked what it was about consciousness that mainly intrigued her. Svante framed the main motivation for his interest in parapsychology as a quest to discover "the nature of reality." For Miriam, the nature of consciousness was the common denominator of ESP-related phenomena, such as telepathy. Mats described the potential of parapsychology as a way of gaining "a broader understanding, an expansion of the concept of consciousness to be able to situate events we otherwise can't relate to."

Medium Miranda suggested that her own mediumship as well as the general widespread interest in mediumistic and other paranormal phenomena testifies to a deep human need that secularization does not satisfy:

> I believe, in part because it's such a bit interest for people, that we're not as secularized as has been implied but rather it has to with leaving conventional religion behind. The existential quest and anxiety and spirituality and the curiosity remain, but in other forms.

Miranda said that people from all walks of life are drawn to her course center and argued that this punctures the myth that the paranormal mainly appeals to the uneducated. "It's everywhere. Because it appeals to what lies deepest in us as human being. […] Who am I? Where do I come from? What happens when I leave this world? Do I perish with my body?" Medium Lars-Åke expressed a similar view: "Part of me understands there is something else, there is something we can't see, we can't touch, but that sometimes reveals itself." For the mediumistic instructors. then, mediumship was deeply implicated in the nature of reality and the prospect of a continued existence after bodily death.

The latter was a prominent theme among the ghost hunters as well. Charlotte suggested that ghost hunts could potentially serve as a way to finding (at least partial) answers to the question of whether or not "there [is] life after death." Fellow ghost hunter Tommy expressed it thusly: "What happens […] when it is time for me [to die]? […] Could I perhaps get a sneak peek?"

For the ufologists, existential issues were implicated by UFO-related phenomena: they both constituted an enigma that testified to the complexity of the world and the limitations of our current understandings of it, and suggested

that humankind is not alone in the universe. For ufologist Daniel, UFO phenomena strike at the core of our place in the universe: "If we could really prove it, and really prove there is something more. It is the *ultimate* that attracts." When I asked Mattias to put into words the main appeal of UFOs, he replied: "I think it's the element of the unknown. The riddle that still remains." For these ufologists, the existence of unknown phenomena implied by unexplained UFO reports denoted a frontier for our knowledge that prompts careful scrutiny and respect. Allan summarized the main appeal of ufology in the following way: "I want to know what people really see. All these thousands of people only in Sweden who have sent reports [to us]. And those who reported things that we despite meticulous investigations *cannot* explain." Marcus directly addressed the possible existence of an other than human intelligence:

> I, too, am convinced that this phenomenon has an explanation that goes far beyond anything we can explain with the natural sciences today. [I] also believe that we're dealing with a non-human intelligence that somehow interacts with us. In an unknown way. And I want to get to the bottom of what the heck it is, what kind of creatures or intelligences or gods or whatever it is that are involved in our world through this phenomenon.

It is worth noting that Marcus was not convinced of the truth of the E.T. hypothesis. He recognized it as but one of several possible explanations. Hence, regardless or not whether or not extraterrestrials are involved, the UFO phenomena was recognized as a testimony to the great mysteries of existence by the participants from the ufological field investigators' course.

Existential questions about the nature of reality and humankind's place within it were hence salient in all settings of the paraculture, ranging from the question of whether or not there is life after bodily death to whether or not we are alone in the universe.

This subchapter has introduced pertinent aspects of paranormal practices. First, I have argued that the paraculture may be subdivided into three main types of paranormal practices, namely practices as dissemination; as conducive to the creation of paranormal experiences; and as means of training, instruction and gaining knowledge about paranormal phenomena. Most organizations and, accordingly, paranormal prototypes are engaged in more than one type of practice. Second, I have intimated what participants suggest that they gain by being engaged in paranormal practices, ranging from having an intermittent hobby to coping with hardships and attempting to find answers to questions of ultimate meaning. Next, by applying the practice-in-dimensions typology on paranormal practices, I demonstrate that they involve emotional, bodily, material and narrative components.

5.2. Practice-in-dimensions

This chapter employs practice-in-dimensions (see Chapter 2) in order to identify indications of emotionality, embodiment, materiality and narrative in paranormal practice.

While practice-in-dimensions is not part of the theoretical framework per se, it was applied deductively to the results at a later stage of coding. The main contribution of the classification is to make salient some key aspects of the structures of paranormal practices that may not otherwise come to light.

5.2.1. Emotion

Following Ammerman (2020, 15), emotionality signifies references to affect and emotion pertinent to the ways in which participants were "involved" with the paranormal practices in question. While references to and expressions of emotions featured prominently in the statements made and stories told by the participants, I find it likely that emotional aspects were often understated and implicit. Emotional aspects were not explicitly addressed in the interview guide, and the participants' narratives often had other discernable main aims, such as conveying an air of plausibility regarding claims of paranormal phenomena.

The attainment of certain emotions was integral to, for instance, mediumistic practice and ghost hunting. In these settings, paranormal phenomena are at least partially conveyed by emotions, and the latter hence became building blocks of paranormal experiences. In these settings, emotional responses to spiritual contact were therefore both wanted and expected. What may ordinarily be viewed as states of anxiety, calm and excitement became indicative of spirit activity and hauntings, and learning to decipher emotional states was a central concern for the participants.

The territory of emotionality is here divided into a number of themes: positive emotions, such as awe, thrills and suspense, and more negative emotions, most distinctly fear. Lastly, I will present examples of intermediate or mixed emotional responses in relation to paranormal practice.

Feelings and states of awe, puzzlement and profound appreciation were prominent in some of the participants' statements. Ghost hunter Sebastian told of an experience from his childhood in which he saw an apparition of his uncle, a man he had never met, and punctuated the account with the exclamation "wow," implying a state of wonder. For parapsychologist Svante, parapsychology was a harbinger of a profound paradigm shift previously unheard of, which filled him with a sense of amazement: "It's incredible, really." Several participants also singled out thrill-seeking and suspense as key features in, and even a motivation for, paranormal practice. "I mean, I get a kick out of it," Sebastian said of ghost hunting, explicitly referring to the recurring experiences of spirit possession, and his father Anders concurred: "You get a rush

of adrenaline, you know!" As demonstrated previously, ghost hunters Charlotte, Tommy and Jeanette described the attainment of personal experiences, including suspense, as one of the major motivating factors for their fairly new-found interest in ghost hunting. Hence, participants were able to experience the thrill of the hunt, something that to a certain extent cannot be communicated via paranormal reality TV. Olivia and Frank also described ghost hunts in terms of "adrenaline" and "kicks," respectively. Other examples of positive emotional responses have been intimated in other sections (e.g., 5.1.4.3.), including paranormal practice as alleviating stress and depression or as a means of dealing with the fear of dying.

I next turn to less pleasant emotions prompted by paranormal experiences and paranormal practice. Both medium Lars-Åke and cryptozoologist Ulf described their early paranormal experiences in terms of shock, as implied by the events presented in 5.1.4.2. Ulf shared how he, after seeing the Great Lake Monster for himself, was confused to the extent that he "became all empty-headed." He continued: "'What have I experienced? What was that?' You seek explanations, and your hard drive is spinning to find [one], but there is no explanation." Fear was a recurrent sentiment expressed in relation to the paranormal, and to some it stretched all the way back to childhood. During our interview, ufologists Mattias and Malin recalled how early encounters with representations of paranormal phenomena were imbued with fear. Both Mattias and Malin recalled being drawn to books on mysteries such as hauntings and UFOs even though they were frightened by them. Hearing that the show *The X-Files* was airing on TV put Malin in a state of dread. "I hadn't seen much of it," Malin said, "but I'd seen enough that I nearly soiled myself when I heard the theme song!" Medium Miranda recalled how she became terrified as a child when her mother suggested she visit a fortune teller at a local amusement park. Medium Ernst shared how he, well up into his 30s, suffered from a fear of the dark. This prompted him to commence on his path towards mediumship. "For me, it's always been about understanding what's going on," Ernst reflected with a laugh, "because when you're so afraid of the dark that you don't dare turn off the light when you're 40, you've got to do something about it." Ufologist and medium Karin shared a couple of paranormal experiences that she found intimidating, one of which I will share here. The episode, which took place at a very specific time on a very specific date, was recounted thusly:

> Me and my husband experienced something [unexplainable]. […] It was a sound unlike anything you've heard before that would blare out like it was coming from some kind of universal speaker. And then a high tone [that sounded like it came from] a trombone. It was really strange. And in conjunction with this, we saw something [in the sky]. That was blinking. And that had different colors and that landed out on a hill not far from our […] house. […] We actually got scared.

Fear started to permeate ufologist Mattias' relationship to UFOs as he was coming of age. He shared how he became increasingly attracted to the more intimidating aspects of the phenomena:

> I think I was in high school then. It was like I was reading too much about [UFO cases]. I felt like it had gone too far. I was almost obsessed by it, so I had to stop because I felt like it was a bit like staring into the abyss, and now the abyss was on its way back! To get me.

Mattias' story about his attraction to the darker sides of ufology pinpoints one last feature that I would like to comment upon, namely the mixing of ostensibly contrary emotions, such as fear and fascination. Medium Miranda explicitly framed her childhood relationship to paranormal topics as one of fascination intermingled with fear. As her path towards mediumship commenced for real as an adult, it was heralded by what she called a spiritual emergency, a prolonged state including anomalistic sensory impressions and contradictory feelings, such as ecstasy and discomfort. "It became kind of euphoric," Miranda said. "I didn't get at all what [the experience] was about, and I felt really good. After a while, these emotions got stronger and stronger, and then it wasn't pleasant anymore but started to feel unpleasant. It simply got to be too much." The episode left Miranda feeling shaken up and fearful. Ghost hunter Frank emphasized that the element of fear was, in fact, an important ingredient in the appeal of ghost hunting: "It's hard to explain. It's like a kick to want to explore that darkness and what you're a bit afraid of." Hence, Frank's positive appraisal of ghost hunts as conducive to getting one's kicks implied that they are frightening as well.

I next turn to a dimension of practice intimately related to emotions, namely their embodied features.

5.2.2. Embodiment

Following Ammerman (2020, 15), bodies are always implied in practices. In this analysis, embodiment points to references to sensory and bodily experiences as well as the way in which bodies were engaged in paranormal practices more generally. Also included are participants' interpretations of sensory input as indicative of paranormal phenomena.

Although aspects of embodiment were often tacit in participant statements, there were situations when embodiment was salient. At the mediumistic training center, bodies and sensory experiences took center stage: after all, mediums-in-training were instructed to both induce and interpret various forms of spirit communications, of which most were distinctly embodied. The preparatory exercise in which we were to deduce which sense (e.g., sight, scent) was the most engaged as we "visualized" a lemon illustrates this aspect. During

the days with our instructors, we were trained to decipher ordinary sensory experiences, for example feelings of heat or cold and tingling in limbs, as indicators of non-ordinary realities. The healing techniques that we were instructed in were also self-evidently embodied, as the end goal was to heal or relax bodies and minds through the healer's body and mind.

The ghost hunts also involved interpretations of sensory experiences. The feelings of suffocation and fits of coughing that assailed both Sebastian and Ken as they attempted to investigate the haunted stall illustrate this aspect. Upon revisiting the box stall after Anders cleansed it, they assessed it as quiet and calm since it did not prompt any further physical responses.

Medium Miranda shared several experiences with distinctly embodied aspects. Her spiritual emergency, described in the previous section, featured distinctly bodily symptoms. She started her story of the event thusly:

> It was an ordinary, calm night in May. I was a single mother, and my son was sleeping upstairs. I sat working with something, in peace and quiet, nothing at all, and all of a sudden, I started to feel really weird. My body started to tingle. I started to see bubbles of light around me, My head felt very heavy.

During the following weeks, the sensations recurred. A few years later, these episodes climaxed in a fashion best captured in Miranda's own words:

> It was as if something all of a sudden opened up in my mind, and fragments appeared at a rapid pace, like a flood., Fragments of dreams, memories, experiences, sensation just flew through my mind. […] Sometimes it happened while I was driving a car, which wasn't that great, and at some point, I passed out and woke on the floor. And I got so scared and thought, 'now I've got a brain tumor," and I think I actually had an EEG done, but there was nothing wrong.

Instead of viewing this as an episode of sickness, Miranda interpreted these events as the culmination of a long journey towards mediumship, instigated by a spiritual emergency. The vivid and chaotic impressions, mental and bodily, were part of the sensory tools that she could later employ in mediumistic communication.

Miranda's mediumistic colleague Lars-Åke also recalled distinctly bodily sensations that occurred on his path towards mediumship, most notably in events that occurred following his mother's death. This included the experience of being touched all of sudden, which he interpreted as caused by his mother's spirit: "It's not like when I put my hand on my body. It's not that kind of force. […] But it is something similar. It's so hard to describe it. I can't really put it into words." Besides these sensations, Lars-Åke recalled how the scent of his mother's perfume appeared in his home out of nowhere.

Ghost hunter Charlotte shared some tangible sensory experiences from her visit to Borgvattnet vicarage, a notoriously haunted place in mid-Sweden.[58] The visit was an excursion with both colleagues and clients from her place of work. After the group had attempted to contact spirits, Charlotte started feeling anxious, and her ears became blocked. At the same time, her ghost-hunting equipment started to register activity. She elaborated what happened next thusly:

> After this event, we took a break and then did the same thing over again after about 20 minutes, and I experience pretty much the same things. Not quite as emotional, but then I feel pressure on my back from the energy behind me. It heated up my neck, and the people with me saw that I was turning red. Later that night, we smelled smoke and heard a big thud. We were downstairs and we heard a big thud upstairs, which is unexplainable, since no one was there, and it didn't come from the ceiling either. So. it was cool. To kind of feel it. That it's real, sort of.

Medium-in-training Johannes described how his desire to heal others immediately prompted tingling sensations in his hands as a response. "I just need to know that someone is in pain," Johannes said, "and my hands start tingling in my hands, as if it's time *to mend* [something]." The tingling sensations started after he had invested considerable time in exploring mediumistic and healing practices.

Some bodily experiences were interpreted as indicative of ESP. Parapsychologist Svante recalled how he had experienced a sense of being larger than his own body, possibly implying an out-of-body experience, following a meditation session: "[I felt] like a big egg, you could say, a few meters up in the air." Ufologist Marcus shared experiences of precognition from mundane settings, for example, when leisurely watching antique shows and sports on TV. He remembered that he suddenly came to think of a number or a score, only to have them appear on the screen shortly after in the form of assessed prices or scores.

These examples demonstrate that bodily experience and sensory input were fairly prominent in the empirical materials. While several of the experiences presented qualify as indicators of a spiritual dimension of practice, all examples relied on the interpretation of sensory input and, accordingly, embodied experiences. As such, they remain apt as illustrations of embodiment.

Thus far, I have focused on how paranormal practice involves emotions and bodies. In the upcoming section, I explore how the material dimension surfaces in accounts of practice.

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[58] Borgvattnet vicarage is one of Sweden's most renowned, or infamous, haunted locations (Borgvattnet prästgård n.d.).

5.2.3. Materiality

Materiality was often implicated in both accounts of paranormal experiences and in the paranormal practices. An inclusion criterion for the empirical examples invoked in this section is hence that they involve one of these aspects.

Although aimed at communications with a more-than-material reality, the mediumistic training program involved a large array of material objects, such as angel cards and tarot cards, photographs, drawings of auras, colored ribbons and pendulums that were used for mediumistic communication and divination. Materiality in the form of sustenance was also stressed. Cookies and chocolate were available at the venues, and our instructors reminded us that mediumistic practice depletes the energy of the medium, pointing to the importance of both embodiment and materiality in the setting. Sometimes, material aspects stood in the way of our activities, such as the disruptions and irritation caused by one of the participants holding a digital business meeting in the room next to ours or me spilling my coffee on another participant's purse.

Like the mediums, the ghost hunters sought indications of a more-than-material reality through material objects. There were numerous machines and gadgets involved, and while I do not aim to be exhaustive, they warrant some introduction. In addition to cameras and video cameras (for documentation), the gear included instruments somewhat familiar to me from paranormal reality TV. Indeed, the ghost-hunting duo LaxTon, regular guests on the award-winning show *Ghost Hunt*, has an online store where most of them are available for purchase. Some are furthermore available as applications for smartphones. One notable device is the EMF reader,[59] which measures electromagnetic fields that spirits purportedly can manipulate, causing its LEDs to light up or flicker. It was frequently used by the ghost hunters. The spirit box[60] was, as ghost hunter Anders explained to me, essentially "a broken radio" that rapidly scans and emits AM and FM radio signals. It is assumed that spirits are able to manipulate these signals and transform them into messages in the form of electronic voice phenomena (EVP). Several REM pods,[61] resembling a short cylinder with a radio antenna and LED lights on top, were employed as well. These devices can radiate a static electromagnetic field that may be manipulated by spirits. If REM pods are touched by human or non-human agents, they will emit both light and sound. The paranormal music box[62] works in a similar fashion but uses the same technique as a parking sensor: if something comes within close proximity of the casket-shaped music

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[59] The product is available at LaxTon's online store (Laxton n.d.).
[60] This is another product available at LaxTon's shop as well as from large-scale retailers such as Amazon.com (LaTon, n.d.).
[61] LaxTon sells several versions of the REM pod (LaxTon, n.d.).
[62] LaxTon has designed a paranormal music box of their own, which one of the ghost-hunting teams had purchased (LaxTon, n.d.)

box, it will play a creepy tune. One of the teams also brought a Kinect,[63] a device originally designed for video games (Microsoft's X-box, specifically). The Kinect scans its environment visually through motion detection, looking for patterns resembling human agents. These patterns are represented as dots with joints on a screen. Since all of the equipment mentioned above, with the exception of the Kinect, was either available through LaxTon's online store (Laxton, n.d.) or readily available on smartphones, I inferred that contemporary ghost hunts are characterized by some degree of standardization. The use of gear, objects that are simultaneously commodities, are part of the practical know-how of ghost hunts. Certain forms of technology, such as online flight radars and star maps, were part of ufological field investigations. Regardless of whether the preferred explanations for unexplained UFO phenomena were material (e.g., extraterrestrial aircraft) or not, ufological practice most certainly is.

Self-evidently, all paranormal settings I visited were material in the respect of being, or being part of, specific locations: everything from rented premises in which training programs, lectures and other meetings were held, to haunted houses and outlook points around the Great Lake. Although some of these were inaccessible to me, they are all examples of sites integral to the practices at hand.

I now turn to some examples of how materiality was made salient in the participants' stories. Most of these examples concern the physical effects of paranormal phenomena, such as hauntings. Ufologist Kenneth recalled how he inferred that his previous apartment was haunted following a period during which he was heavily engaged in practices such as yoga and meditation. His experimentation with alternative spiritual practices, he suggested, prompted anomalous phenomena in his home, such as mysterious rapping sounds. Ghost hunter Tommy recalled how he, giddy with excitement, had barely removed his outerwear and shoes as he unwrapped and plugged in his recently purchased PlayStation. As he was resting on the sofa later during the night, the console's packaging still spread out on the floor in front of him, he suddenly heard the sound of footsteps approaching. Suddenly, the packaging materials stirred as if someone touched or walked on them, yet no one was there. Ghost hunter Sebastian also shared tangible experiences of hauntings. "I started to note," he said, "that, in the apartment I was living in, the TV would turn itself on and off, the volume would turn up by itself, the microwave would start by itself, kitchen drawers would be pulled out […], chairs would move and stuff [like that]." Parapsychologist Jesper shared a story revolving around an object moving by itself at his workplace. On the top shelf of a cabinet, there was an old porcelain doll, or a "rather terrible thing," as Jesper described it. The cabinet itself was securely locked with a cable tie. However, one morning Jesper

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[63] A history of the Kinect can be found on Wikipedia (n.d., 'Kinect'). For its application in ghost hunting, see Henley (2020).

and some of his colleagues found that the doll had been moved outside of the cabinet and placed on top of it. The same cable tie was still in place, and there were no signs of manipulation or forced entry. Two hours later, another colleague called out to Jesper and the others. The doll, it turned out, was once again placed inside the cabinet, cable tie still intact.

Similar experiences were recalled in relation to mediumistic practice. Ufologist Stefan remembered how he, together with other members of his family, had played with a mysterious three-legged table used for Spiritualist communications when he was growing up. One leg represented yes, one was no, and the third was used for counting. The table raised its respective leg when prompted with remarkable accuracy, which amazed Stefan. As mediums Ernst and Anna embarked on their path to mediumship, they experienced various anomalous physical phenomena in their home. Mechanical toys and their TV as well as other electrical equipment would turn on and off by themselves, and objects fell from shelves of their own accord. The evening of the spiritual emergency that medium Miranda talked about, described above, when she experienced a strange state of euphoria and saw bubbles of light, was concluded with a mysterious knock at the door. No one was there. Miranda also featured in a story that medium Lars-Åke shared. After a séance, Miranda approached Lars-Åke and told him that it was time to service his car. He replied that this was not necessary as his car had recently been serviced. Miranda then said that he should not get upset if his car broke down. Sometime later, the engine of Lars-Åke's car did break down on the highway. In spite of having "one hell of a temper," Lars-Åke did not get angry, which he attributed to Miranda's warning.

Ghost hunter Frank shared a story about remote viewing, or clairvoyance, revolving around a particular object that was dear to him. He narrated the episode, which involved a friend with paranormal abilities, thusly:

> I had this jacket […] that I thought I had lost, and I asked [my friend] if he could sense where it was. So, he asked me to look at the picture [of it] and he sensed that "ah, yes, it's from that festival" and "no, it's in your home." […] So, he asked me, as if I was radio-controlled […], to go out in the hall, and then [he said] it was behind me somewhere. And it was a bit wrong at first, in the hall and a chest of drawers, but he could sense that it was inside a wardrobe, in a box. Something brown, he said, and it was exactly so. And *there it was*.

Another paranormal experience with clear material effects was shared by ufologist-and-medium Karin. About four years after Karin's father, and Britt's husband, had passed away, Britt met a new man who was dismissive of Karin's line of work as a medium. While visiting Britt's apartment together with her young son, who had gone to bed in an adjacent room, a commotion suddenly started, with loud banging sounds emanating from a wall. At first, they thought that someone was causing a stir outdoors, but the sounds were coming

from a cabinet. As they stared at the cabinet, the scene escalated. As Karin herself put it:

> Then, furniture […] starts moving in the kitchen, moving back and forth. You can hear it. Loudly. You hear and see the furniture being pulled across the floor, and then it starts banging from the bedroom where the little son is laying down, and I think that it's him, so I run in [to him]. And he's fast asleep. By that time, I was completely shocked […] I go back to the room, and we sit down and talk, and this [man], then, he says […] "What is this? It's not funny. It's not amusing. What are you doing?" And I said, "I'm not doing anything. I thought you didn't believe in the spirit world. […] They just want to tell you that you're very wrong!" […] I mean, he was about to *faint*.

As illustrated by the empirical examples, the participants shared a plenitude of stories about paranormal experiences that involved things and material effects. Material features of the paranormal have been partially intimated by examples in the preceding subchapters, and more will follow as I continue to unpack the results from my ventures into the paraculture. In the next section, I turn to distinct narrative, or storytelling, aspects of paranormal practice.

5.2.4. Narrative

While all statements from the participants in the preceding subchapters contain narrative features, I reserve this last section for instances of storytelling not covered by the previous sections.

Some of the narratives shared by participants were disturbing or invoked suspense and fear, nearly qualifying as horror stories. Ufologist James recalled an incident that occurred during his adolescence when he was together with a couple of friends. They had gotten ahold of an alleged grimoire and attempted to recreate a ritual from it:

> My friend […] had somehow gotten ahold of a page of […] the Devil's Bible, and another one of my friends had gotten an old Jerusalem cross from his great-grandmother, and we placed it on a mirror in my room. […] It was winter, so we had no sources of light, no street lights or anything from outside. We had the blinds pulled down, so it was quite dark. And then we did a séance. You know, when you were a kid, how you'd play [Bloody Mary]? We did more serious stuff that we had found somehow. And as we're doing this, we, [my friend] in the middle, he gets the connection. So, we're on each side of him […] and we're holding each other's hands. And then he gets into some strange, I don't know, *trance state* or something, and we think – what are we, 14, 13, 15 [years old] –we think he's fooling around. But when we open our eyes and look in the mirror, his eyes are glowing red.

The ritual ended there and then as the friends tumultuously went their separate ways in a state of fear. The story about the accursed porcelain doll was not the only one that parapsychologist Jesper shared from his workplace. Once when Jesper was working the night shift, one of the residents pressed the security alarm. As he responded to the call at the resident's room, which was located at the far end of a hall next to a fire escape, he was struck by a feeling of unease, as if he was being watched intently. At the same time that the feeling came over him, the door to the fire escape softly opened. Jesper could see the door handle being pressed down, yet no one was there. Frightened, he slammed the door shut and entered the resident's room. The feeling then subsided, and he saw that the door to the fire escape was still shut when he exited the room.

Jesper was not the only one who shared a paranormal experience occurring at his place of work. Lars-Åke told me of one case of spontaneous mediumistic communication at the hospital ward he was then working at. As he entered the room of a child patient, the patient's mother asked him if anyone had died in the room. Lars-Åke continued the story thusly:

> I say, 'no, absolutely *not*.' 'But there was someone in here last night!' [the mother said] And I got really surprised. Why is she telling me this and not the assistant nurse or one of the others? And then we talked about it a bit, and I got this picture of who [the spirit] was, so to speak. Stupidly enough, I told her who it was. 'Dear God, it's my grandmother,' she said.

Lars-Åke then made the woman swear to never speak of the incident, lest he get in trouble with his employer.

Cryptozoologist Bror had plenty of stories up his sleeve, including two sightings of the Great Lake Monster. He also shared childhood experiences of precognition and a UFO sighting. One of these early encounters with the paranormal occurred when he experienced several physical signs of a haunting while staying at a relative's home. In addition to seeing the apparition of a suited man with a hat, he was attacked by a projectile in the attic. "And that projectile," he added, "was a *cat*." To his surprise, the cat that jumped at him immediately vanished into thin air. The morning after, Bror found a dead rat in the attic, indicating that the ghostly cat was the guilty party. Even after this house was sold, Bror intimated, the haunting persisted until its next inhabitants found a pile of bones of unknown origin and buried them.

One story was shared in an informal conversation at the ufological field investigators' course. On the second evening of the course, I was approached by one of the participants, Urban, whom I had not yet talked to. "I want you to interrogate me." he said. "I have seen gnomes, and there are other witnesses." Urban told me how he used to live in a stand-alone house up north in the countryside. At some point during his time there, he started to feel uneasy at night, and he eventually noticed how a small figure would stare at him

through the window while he was watching TV. This little humanoid figure, which was distinctly male, was hooded, and he identified it as a gnome (Swe: tomte), a folkloric creature that resembles miniature men, usually dressed in archaic-style clothing. He further intimated that he attempted to avoid the gnome's gaze by moving the TV and furniture, but this resulted in the intruder picking another window to peep in through. Urban also heard sounds at night, as if small feet were running around in the hall, and he could sometimes detect shadowy figures out of the corner of his eye. His children and their friends claimed to have seen the shadowy little figures who were causing the commotion and, like the watcher in the window, they resembled the gnomes of Swedish folklore.

The interviews covered a few UFO-related experiences, some in the form of lights in the night skies and a couple of seemingly physical objects. I will limit myself to presenting ufologist Allan's sighting, which occurred one night when he was driving home from a party with his wife. As they approached their neighborhood, they noticed two men standing at a bus stop, pointing upwards while looking at the sky. As they finished the short remainder of the trip home and parked the car by their house, Allan and his wife stayed outside for a few minutes, trying to catch a glimpse of what the men might have seen. In the words of Allan:

> We were standing there for maybe four or five minutes, then I think, "all right, let's go inside," when, suddenly, three glowing plus signs appear in the sky. Not from the horizon, but straight out of the darkness, out of nothing. And these plus signs shine brightly and are quite large. They fly past us and disappear around the edge of the house, so I run around the house and can see how they keep flying, beyond the neighbor's house, and then disappear.

After this wondrous sighting, Allan and his wife filled out a report form to be submitted to the ufological organization, including sketches of the phenomena seen.

Out of all the participants, medium Ernst was the only one who claimed to have had contact with extraterrestrials. Once, after having wrapped up a meditation session, he established contact with the crew of a spacecraft. This meeting included a tour of the spacecraft, conducted by a female extraterrestrial. "What she looked like, so to speak," Ernst said, "was a bit special. Among other things, she only had four fingers. That's what I noticed. And she looked a bit unusual. She was very tall and slender." He shared that a mediumistic peer of his had a similar encounter and could therefore corroborate the appearance of the extraterrestrial woman. However, he told his story with reservations: "If it was real or not, I don't know." Both of these stories of UFO activ-

ity hence involved multiple witnesses, yet Allan's matter-of-fact account, resulting in a report that was submitted to a UFO organization, stands in stark contrast to Ernst's narrative of a tour he was given onboard an alien spacecraft.

Most of the narratives discussed in this subchapter and the preceding ones strike me as conducive to either: 1) creating a sense of mystery, suspense, fright and/or entertainment; or 2) explaining how participants had a change of heart in light of their own, or others', paranormal experiences, making the latter plausible. While these stories were shared in interviews, my experiences from the fieldwork I conducted gave me the impression that storytelling also was a prominent feature of the milieus studied. During the board meeting with the cryptozoologists, board members shared several stories of their own paranormal experiences as well as those of others'. All of them were, at least in my estimation, thoroughly entertaining. Indeed, the storytelling nights, upon which the organization invited the public to listen to eyewitness accounts of the monster, were mentioned as important events for the association. In connection with the ghost hunts, participants shared their own prior paranormal experiences and described their expectations for the night. During my time with the field-investigators-in-training, several people shared their own UFO sightings as well as other stories about the unexplained. It is also worth mentioning that the ufological association actively invites the interested public to exhibitions and lectures, during which UFO reports are shared. Stories seemed to permeate paranormal practices of all kinds.

As stated, many of the stories were centered on how either personal experiences or the testimonies of others prompted the participants to take paranormal phenomena seriously. They had a change of heart, so to speak, thereby transitioning from either disbelief or disinterest to belief and engagement. For some participants, this transition took the form of a "conversion," as medium Johannes put it, while other stories may be placed on a scale ranging from long-term changes in perspective to sudden realizations. I argue that these stories served to impregnate paranormal claims with an air of plausibility. For example, medium Miranda framed her spiritual awakening as unexpected, as she at the time was busy pursuing "an academic career," which was implied to be incongruent with engagement in paranormal practice. Yet she was struck by the sheer force of her experience, which set her on a different path. Fellow medium Lars-Åke's initial dismay at his friend's suggestion to contact a medium, which later convinced him of the reality of mediumistic phenomena, is in a similar vein. Cryptozoologist Ulf attested to having ridiculed the notion of a Great Lake Monster until he saw it for himself, and ufologist Carl and parapsychologist Mats had brushed aside claims of paranormal phenomena until evidence prompted them to reconsider their positions.

Taken together, then, narratives and storytelling were prominent in paranormal practices across the paraculture, and they generally contributed by providing entertainment and suspense as well as by making paranormal phenomena plausible.

5.3. Summary and concluding remarks

In this chapter, I have introduced the various paranormal practices that I encountered in the paraculture. The initial focus was to introduce key features of the practices themselves, starting with the very general question: What were the participants engaged within the paraculture(s) in fact *doing*? An initial classification subdivided the practices into practices of dissemination; practices conducive to paranormal experiences; and practices of training, teaching and gaining knowledge. Most organizations overlapped several of these ideal types. Assessing the various levels of engagement, I demonstrated that paranormal practices in terms of centrality or marginality ranged from hobby to lifestyle while fulfilling different purposes in the everyday lives of the participants, such as tools for coping with stress and grappling with issues of ultimate meaning. Applying the practice-in-dimension typology furthermore helped reveal the distinctly emotional, embodied, material and narrative aspects of paranormal practices and the stories shared by the participants.

Turning briefly back to the narrative aspects, I would like to add that not all experiences of possibly paranormal phenomena have been included in this presentation. Some experiences were mentioned in passing or were idiosyncratic in the respect that they lie beyond the paranormal prototypes suggested. These experiences included fairies, the use of dowsing rods, tarot cards and witchcraft.

As suggested in the second chapter, paranormal practices may be viewed as epistemological practices, an argument that I will elaborate upon in Chapter 7. First, however, comes an analysis of the role of relationships to others.

6. Relationships and the paranormal

In this chapter, I turn to the importance of social relationships and settings for paranormal practice. First, I present how participants in the paraculture attest to the importance of others for their paranormal practices. Second, I turn to the sense of community that the paranormal practices entail. Third, I present results on how participants assess the relationship between paranormal practices and the surrounding society and institutions. Fourth and last, I turn to internal relationships within the paraculture, especially attempts at social regulations of practice.

6.1. Paranormal practice and relationships to others

Several participants attested to the importance of other people for their paranormal practices. This subchapter is devoted to these accounts and also includes examples of paranormal experiences that were shared with others.

Responses to the participants' paranormal practices from partners and family members varied. Although parapsychologist Miriam's husband was "not that interested" in paranormal topics, he accompanied her to an overnight stay at the haunted Borgvattnet vicarage. Medium Johannes, ufologist-and-medium Karin and medium Miranda shared their interest in mediumistic practice with their partners, while mediums Ernst and Anna as well as ghost hunters Tommy and Jeannette participated together as spouses. Medium Miranda recounted mixed but generally positive attitudes to her engagement from her immediate family. "Our kids," she told me, "are partly open to it [as are] some of our friends." Ufologist Stefan's first encounter with Spiritualist phenomena, the aforementioned tipping table, was prompted by his mother. Ufologists Karin and Britt and ghost hunters Anders and Sebastian were engaged as parent and child. However, a few other participants, such as parapsychologists Mats and Svante, spoke of hostile responses or lack of interest regarding paranormal phenomena from their family members.

Friends were occasionally mentioned as relationships beneficial to paranormal practice. As stated previously, Lars-Åke's path towards mediumship was prompted by a friend's suggestion to consult a medium. Parapsychologist Miriam, who was otherwise reticent about her interest in the paranormal, stated that she confides in a close friend concerning such topics. Ufologist Daniel's

openness to unexplained phenomena had resulted in him becoming an authority on UFOs among his friends and acquaintances: "after I brought it up and talked about my interest, others opened up, and they feel that it is more okay to talk about their experiences and thoughts on the subject." Daniel hence generally received a positive response from his surroundings. Anders' interest in ghost hunting was foreshadowed by excursions to allegedly haunted places with friends when he was a child, while both ufologist James and ghost hunter Frank improvised rituals together with friends growing up. For these participants, childhood and adolescent friendships were described as important to the formation of paranormal practice.

Despite his long-time engagement in ufology, Marcus was perhaps the most reticent about his interest. "I have withdrawn from it," he explained, "a bit out of the fear of being seen as a bit weird and, well, maybe not losing friends but being viewed in another light than the serious Marcus I like to be seen as." Associational life remained his main form of engagement in ufology and other paranormal phenomena, while he at the same time avoided these topics in other settings.

Responses to paranormal practice from family and friends were hence mixed. Accordingly, there were no unambiguous relationships between paranormal practice and primary and secondary socialization agents (e.g., Giddens 2007).

6.2. Paranormal community

In this subchapter, I identify features and processes that I interpret as conducive to building a sense of community among the participants. These features and processes are presented in the form of three main themes. The first, which lies close to how the participants themselves described their collective practices, concerns the inherent importance of practicing together as a group. The two other themes are largely based on my own inferences from the fieldwork I carried out. The first concerns the use of confirmation and positive reinforcement in dealings with other participants, while the other concerns the use of humor in practice.

As for the first theme, meeting like-minded people was recurrently mentioned as an important way to form and uphold paranormal practice. Ufologist Mattias phrased it succinctly, presenting the course itself as an amplifier of the participants' individual interests in ufology:

> Now, it's something you share with others, and, besides, when [I'm] not together with the others, it's not like I read anything at all [about UFOs] It happens in this environment. [This] is when the interest really comes to life, for real.

Following the cleansing of the stall at the haunted stable, ghost hunter Anders also attested to the importance of working together as a group, thereby developing the paranormal practice further: "You evolve as a team, and […] we protect ourselves as a group by talking about these things [with each other]."

Confirmation and positive reinforcements were mainly enacted through testifying in favor of other participants' skills. This was especially prominent at the mediumistic training program. I became the subject of this form of confirmation myself a couple of times. For several exercises, I was partnered up with Sonny, an elderly man. At one point, he attested to my healing abilities. Sonny suffered from a pulmonary disease and coughed frequently. "Ever since the PhD student laid his hands on me," Sonny exclaimed after our healing exercise, "I have not coughed once!" Another time, we were to divine traits of each other's relatives. Family members were symbolized by photographs, concealed in envelopes. While I managed to successfully infer that Sonny's envelope contained an old picture of his daughter, I failed to pinpoint the clothing she wore. In spite of this, Sonny, perhaps out of kindness, attested that I had described her outfit accurately. The way in which Ken and Sebastian testified in favor of the efficacy of their team member Anders' cleansing of the haunted stall is yet another example of how positive reinforcement was employed. These acts struck me as conducive to establishing a sense of community and collegiality among the participants.

A fairly prominent feature in several settings and interviews was how the use of humor contributed to an atmosphere of joviality as well as self-distance among participants. Prior to the second ghost hunt I took part in, some of the participants I was traveling to the site with made a stop at a mansion that was allegedly haunted. Unfortunately, the building turned out to be a hotel with a restaurant that was serving guests at that moment. The group was left awkwardly standing in the rain. Some of the attendees started to crack jokes: Which psychiatric hospital had we just escaped from? Should we introduce ourselves as ghost hunters and ask the waiters to show us around? Later during the ghost hunt, at some point past midnight, the group seemed struck by fatigue, boredom and impatience. Voices previously hushed turned loud as some attempted to provoke a reaction from the spirits. Some dirty jokes were made, such as when two of the women dared a male spirit to come and grab them or when a male ghost hunter urged the ghosts to come and play with his balls (he was, in fact, carrying around a pair of beach balls).

Another example of the use of humor is taken from the ufological field investigators' course. Following a lecture on misinterpretations of natural phenomena, a person in the audience brought up a Swedish case of cattle mutilation. "I have this vague memory," he began, "of an event involving a cow and a rock face. It looked as if the cow had been dropped from far above." The storyteller implied that the cow might have been dropped from above by a

UFO. In response to this anecdote, the lecturer, familiar with the case, sardonically retorted, "It was a moose on a mire, struck by lightning, [you've lost it]!" To this rebuttal, the storyteller replied, causing bursts of laughter from the audience, "I told you it was a *vague* memory!" Humor thus struck me as conducive to creating a sense of community by means of laughing, or simply having fun, together.

Meeting up and practicing at organizational events, affirming each other's abilities and having a laugh together were hence all themes that seemed beneficial for the participants' relationships and getting along with each other in the respective settings. Succinctly put, these processes were conducive to building community and establishing at least a temporary sense of belonging within the group. A sense of belonging stands in focus for the next subchapter as well, but here belonging is expanded to include departed kin.

6.2.1. Fellowship with the dead

A prominent feature among the participants' claims of paranormal experiences is the involvement of spirits of deceased acquaintances, especially kin. For some participants, then, social relationships informing paranormal practice extended to social others beyond the grave. This was especially salient among participants recruited from the mediumistic training program and among the ghost hunters.

The earliest mediumistic experiences Miranda shared concerned visitations from her late maternal grandmother, who was, as Miranda only learned as an adult, a medium herself. "She was super-important to me as a child," Miranda started and then continued by telling a story about a visitation later in life:

> By then, she had passed away, and I had received a waffle iron – her old waffle iron – and so I had made waffles, and I had a photograph of her placed on a window sill, and I got caught up in doing something, I don't remember what, watching TV or reading or something like that, and all of a sudden, the photograph of her falls down just like that – poff! – down on the floor, and I was thinking, "What's going on?" And I got up and could smell something burning. [I] walked out into the kitchen and I saw that I had forgotten [to unplug] the waffle iron so [the waffles were] burning.

Miranda interpreted the episode as a benevolent intervention from her grandmother that helped prevent a potential disaster.

Ghost hunter Anders said that he believed his deceased brother was watching over him: "He's by my side." This belief was decisive for his engagement in ghost hunting and paranormal investigations. His son Sebastian shared his experiences of having been visited: "I saw my father's brother walk up a stair-

case in my cousin's house, and at that time I didn't know who [he] was." Sebastian only recognized his uncle after having seen a picture of him. "He died before you were born," Anders added, corroborating the claim.

Ghost hunter Jeanette told me that after some unexplained occurrences, such as objects seemingly moving of their own accord, she came to visit a medium and was told that a benevolent spirit was following her: "It feels good to know that there is someone watching over me." Lars-Åke's stories about visitations from his mother, mentioned previously, are also indicative of ongoing relationships with the departed, as in the case of the following episode. Driving home late one night, Lars-Åke dared the spirit of his departed mother to give him a sign by making a street light blink as he passed it. As he approached the street light, it indeed started to blink: "On and off, on and off, on and off. I nearly soiled myself!"

Medium-and-ufologist Karin shared recurring experiences of contact with her deceased dog, which illustrates that visits from ghostly kin are not necessarily restricted to humans. Britt corroborated her daughter's claim by attesting that the dog made its presence known in surprising ways: "Whenever you paint a picture, he's in it." Hence, the sense of community and a continued relationship with those who have passed at times included departed non-human companions.

The theme accounted for in this section, I infer, suggests that some paranormal experiences are conducive to continued social relationships past bodily death. As mentioned in the second chapter, such experiences have been denoted as the sensuous and social supernatural and paranormal by Day (2011, 2013) in order to highlight their importance for social belonging and identity.

The following subchapter focuses on social relationships and settings that were regarded as either indifferent, or directly hostile, to paranormal practices.

6.3. Navigating indifferent and hostile settings

Several settings were described as either indifferent or hostile to interests in paranormal phenomena. Recurring settings included the workplace, academia, and the company of religious people and skeptics. After introducing these settings, I turn to some counterexamples: some participants viewed these settings as accepting of their interests in the paranormal, while others claimed to be vocal and open about their paranormal practice regardless of context.

Work was frequently mentioned as a hostile setting. Miranda, who only worked part-time as a medium, described her main place of work as negative in regard to her paranormal practice. There had been instances in the past when colleagues found out about her mediumistic practice, which was challenging for Miranda who preferred to keep quiet about it. Ufologist Carl and medium Lars-Åke also singled out their respective workplaces as the setting in which

they were hesitant to talk about their paranormal interests. Ghost hunter Charlotte, who had visited Borgvattnet vicarage with colleagues and clients, was an exception to the trend of avoiding paranormal topics at work. Wilma also shared a positive experience of mentioning her paranormal practice at work: "It was like now, as I was going to attend this course. […] I said, 'I'm going to take a UFO course this weekend.' There was nothing *weird* about that."

To some, academia was highlighted as an environment hostile to discussions about paranormal phenomena. Medium Miranda, for instance, argued that "the academic world is generally very narrow." Parapsychologist Mats specifically mentioned his previous employer, an academic institution, as an environment unhospitable to parapsychology and related fields. His impression was that any person who expressed positive sentiments about paranormal phenomena was likely to be brushed off: "You may even come across as, well, *stupid*, simply put." In spite of this hostility towards the paranormal within academia, both Mats' and Jesper's first proper contacts with the discipline of parapsychology occurred through their studies. A few other participants also touched upon academia as an unwelcoming arena for paranormal discourse. Ufologist Carl noted a lack of academic advocates of ufology in the Swedish public sphere. Daniel agreed and added the following comment: "Many would view it was a career suicide."

Ghost hunters Olivia and Charlotte said that they were reluctant to talk about their paranormal interests among people who were "very religious" or "deeply religious," respectively. Olivia implied that religious people may vilify her activities and portray them in an unfavorable light.

Another hostile context addressed was the company of skeptics: mediums Anna and Ernst described skeptics as people who were outright dismissive of the possibility of a spiritual realm. Ghost hunter Ken was also reluctant to talk about ghost hunting with skeptics or people "who don't really believe in it." The main issue for Ken and the others on his team was that the subject matter is dismissed at face value without any attempt to take the evidence seriously and that those who are interested in it are ridiculed and portrayed as "psycho" (Anders), "stupid" (Sebastian), or "not quite [psychologically] healthy" (Ken). Parapsychologist Svante likened some debunkers and skeptics, the group with he was most hesitant to share his paranormal interests with, with conspiracy theorists, as they "refuse at any cost to accept [paranormal phenomena]." Ghost hunters Anders made a similar interpretation, associating skeptics with conspiracy theorists, as both "find explanations for everything." Parapsychologist Mats referred to skeptics as "science fundamentalists," as they frequently engage in debates on pseudoscience and the paranormal. They were, Mats argued, "not real skeptics, but they label themselves as skeptics, but, really, they just reject all phenomena." Mats' point was that these skeptics depart from scientific methodology in so far as they from the onset reject certain subjects (e.g., ESP) as unworthy of study.

Regardless of context, many interviewees treaded carefully around conversations about paranormal phenomena generally. Parapsychologist Mats evaded paranormal topics unless with colleagues that he knows share his interest in parapsychology or with a select set of friends. Besides one of her close friends, parapsychologist Miriam generally avoided paranormal topics for fear of being perceived as weird or deviant: "I keep it to myself. You could say that." Ufologist Marcus was also generally reticent about his interest in ufology outside of the UFO association that he is engaged in.

By contrast, a few participants were remarkably open about their interest in the paranormal and expressed willingness to talk about it in most settings. One such example was ufologist Allan, who had made a name for himself as a public figure popularizing all sorts of paranormal phenomena, most notably UFOs. Fellow ufologist Kjell said: "With the privilege of age […], I can now speak up about it. […] I have no problem talking about it." Both mediums Anna and Ernst agreed that Ernst was the more vocal of the two, but it had taken him time. "To me, it doesn't matter," Ernst said when he started discussing settings where he dared to talk about his mediumistic practice. He continued:

> I feel confident in this. I can talk about it anywhere if I feel that the person is receptive. It's not like I try to hide it. […] I'm completely open about it. But it was scary to "come out" in the sense that, when we started our practice, that […] I was worried that the kids would be [bullied] in school – "Your dad is super-weird! He talks to ghosts and stuff."

Ghost hunter Olivia was outspoken as well, which is perhaps to be expected since she started and leads the online group for people interested in ghost hunting. Parapsychologist Jesper was also committed to being open about his paranormal practice in all contexts. As previously mentioned, ufologist Daniel was open and explicit about his interest in paranormal phenomena as well, which generally prompted positive responses from his peers.

Most interviewees were, however, arguably neither very zealous nor discreet about their paranormal engagements but somewhere in between. At first, Ernst claimed to talk to everyone about his mediumistic engagement but when probed he nuanced the statement: "When you've [gotten to know someone a bit better], and you sit chatting with them or go out for a beer one night and [the conversation turns to] 'So, what do you do, then?' Then, I talk about it." Like Ernst, some other participants tried to read the room before opening up. With the exception of his workplace, Lars-Åke talked about his interest in mediumistic practice with family and friends to some extent, unless he detected a lack of interest or a note of hostility. Kenneth said regarding his interest in UFOs that he had no problem being open or talking about it with close friends, "but it's not something I advertise to people I don't know." One may perhaps best describe these approaches as strategic and selective.

Paranormal topics seemed to reside someplace in between the very public and the decidedly private, the trivial and the provocative. The balancing act of taking a stand and being open on the one hand and evading negative attention on the other recurred in the interviews but was played out in different ways.

6.4. Relating the paraculture to surrounding society

In this section, I present the main themes that emerged in the participants' assessments of relationships between paranormal practice and other domains of society. These views include participants' experiences of both stigma and a sense of growing acceptance among society at large vis-á-vis paranormal phenomena. Focus is placed on the relationship between, first, the paranormal and science, second, the paranormal and religion and, third, the paranormal and other forms of rejected knowledge such as conspiracy theories.

Several interviewees viewed their paranormal practice as at least partially ridiculed or rejected by society in general, especially by established authorities, ranging from academic experts, governmental agencies to media power houses. Medium Miranda, for instance, described mediumistic practice as stigmatized, as did parapsychologist Miriam. On the question of how he perceived the general attitude towards mediumistic practice, Johannes, who himself attested to a conversion-like experience, replied: "Suspicion. Kind of like how I used to be." Ghost hunter Anders explicitly stated that he and his fellow ghost hunters risk being treated like "nutcase[s]." The hesitance some felt regarding being open about their paranormal practices, mentioned in the previous subchapter, supports this tendency. Parapsychologist Svante furthermore argued that the reasons behind the large-scale rejection of parapsychology, and the subject matter it subsumes, by the scientific community are mainly "sociological" rather than scientific. Stigma and ridicule thus stand in the way of producing scientific knowledge about the paranormal, not the phenomena in themselves.

The status of paranormal practice as ridiculed and rejected did not, however, go undisputed in the interviews. Several interviewees raised notions of acceptance and the popularity of paranormal phenomena. "They believe in almost anything," parapsychologist Svante said with a little laugh regarding the popular fascination with the paranormal. "UFOs and reincarnation and ghosts are the most common responses you get in surveys." In ufologist Daniel's experience, most encounters with others reveal at least some curiosity about paranormal and unexplained subjects if certain conditions are met:

> I don't think I've ever come across anyone who hasn't at least had a minor interest in the subject. Lots of people have thought about it or have some ideas about it even if it varies in terms of how much they believe in it. But most [people] seem to be interested.

Parapsychologist Jesper shared a similar view: "it's [...] *more* seldom that I meet someone who is very critical."

The board members of the cryptozoological organization reported having a favorable position in local society, especially compared to what was reported by participants from some of the other groups. One possible reason for this, I inferred, was likely the fact that they not only act as a repository of local folklore but also as promotors of the cryptid itself, the Great Lake Monster. Indirectly, this may be conducive to tourism in the region. As stated above, the association had also been included in a TV commercial for a major coffee brand that promoted local associational life some years ago. Although the association has not been directly involved with the creation of Birger, the offspring of the Great Lake Monster and an informal mascot for the region, board member Göran was part of a local committee having the goal of promoting the Great Lake through Birger. Göran's previous engagement with the promotion of Birger and, by extension, tourism in the Great Lake region may hence be viewed as indicative of a fairly positive relationship between this particular paranormal practice and regional and municipal actors. Bror, however, did not share Göran's positive view of the mascot. According to Bror, representing the mysterious cryptid in such a frivolous way harms its international "credibility," although it may be beneficial to tourism.

Members of the ufological organization also reported having a fairly respected position in the public sphere, not least through collaborations with public institutions, ranging from the Swedish Armed Forces to governmental agencies, schools and universities. "It's changed quite a bit," Allan said in his assessment of the situation:

> over the years I've been doing this, especially from the 70s, when it was viewed as weird and strange and not taken very seriously, to how things are today. That [the association] is taken far more seriously as a partner to, for instance, [a Swedish university].

The New York Times report (Cooper, Blumenthal & Keen 2017) on military investigations of UFO reports was highlighted by several participants as a pivotal point on the road to greater acceptance. And yet others, such as Daniel, viewed the topic of UFOs as virtually absent in Swedish public debate, while Carl dolefully described ufology as "pretty much completely dead" in the Swedish media landscape. Thus, an ambivalent picture of increasing acceptance and indifference emerged from the interviews.

Related to Daniel's and Carl's descriptions of public indifference to the UFO phenomenon, several interviewees painted a picture of Swedish culture and public debate as being especially hostile to the paranormal and unex-

plained. Hence, Miriam found most information on such phenomena on websites and in sources from other countries (e.g., Germany, the U.K., the U.S. and Canada). Carl recognized a greater interest for ufology elsewhere, especially in the U.S. Marcus concurred and added: "I agree that in the public sphere in Sweden, things are very quiet. TV4 has brought it up a bit, a few times, more seriously, not turning it into a joke." Parapsychologist Mats, who had lived abroad several times, described a similar situation of a more open climate for paranormal subject matters existing elsewhere.

Concerning change over time, several interviewees perceived both an increasing number of representations of the paranormal in media and popular culture as well as a greater acceptance of paranormal phenomena in the culture at large compared to a few decades ago. Ufologist Malin remarked that paranormal and alternative spiritual topics may be becoming trendy: "it seems like lots of people are involved with them kind of publicly. With astrology or tarot or what have you. Crystals are hip. [She laughs.] And that could be interesting. Why *now*?" Both medium Ernst and ghost hunter Ken attributed a growing acceptance of paranormal phenomena to the production of paranormal reality TV shows such as *The Unknown.* Ufologist Wilma expressed a similar assessment of paranormal reality TV: "Maybe I don't quite believe it, but I'm intrigued, and I feel like there are more [shows about it] on TV. You can talk about it more. […] It's not as taboo as it used to be." The show *Ghost Hunt*'s two consecutive wins, based on viewers' votes, of the Crystal Award (Kristallen, n.d.) was hailed by ghost hunter Tommy as evidence of a surge of interest in paranormal phenomena. Medium Miranda echoed these views, adding that the paranormal is becoming mainstream, even run-of-the-mill.

Ufologists Stefan and Kjell deviated from the aforementioned view. Instead, they described a decrease in interest, at least concerning UFOs and ufology. "There were more news items in the papers in the 70s and 80s," Stefan said, which was corroborated by Kjell. Their assessment may be correct, yet I wonder if this may indicate a movement of ufological conversations from old to new media rather than a decline per se.

As this subchapter has shown, participants expressed contradictory assessments of the relationship between paranormal paraculture and the culture at large. Next, I delve deeper into the relationships between paranormal practice and two distinct institutions, namely science and religion.

6.4.1. Science and the paranormal

The relations between paranormal practice and science were often viewed as tense and difficult by the interviewees, as intimated by previous subchapters, although some, especially those recruited from the ufological association, were positive to the extension of scientific methods to encompass UFO phe-

nomena. In this subchapter, I explore how the participants assessed the relationships between science and paranormal practice that have not hitherto been introduced in other sections. The main themes included are assessments of a continued rejection of paranormal phenomena by science on the one hand and a growing acceptance from the scientific community regarding these phenomena on the other.

As medium Lars-Åke succinctly expressed the relationship between science and mediumistic practice: "They don't go hand in hand." For mediums Miranda and Lars-Åke as well as for ghost hunter Jeanette, the conflict between the paranormal and science was personal, as their occupations seemingly contradict what they experienced in mediumistic practice and ghost hunts, respectively. Parapsychologist Svante noted a striking discrepancy between the disinterested attitude of mainstream science and the popularity of paranormal topics among people in general: "It's an intriguing contrast to the scientific establishment, which rejects *everything*." In spite of this, Svante assessed that phenomena such as telepathy and healing have been "confirmed, statistically speaking" to such an extent that they ought to be recognized by the scientific community yet remain firmly rejected due to the stigmatization of paranormal claims.

Some participants, however, addressed what they perceived as a growing interest in paranormal phenomena in the scientific community. Concerning ghost hunts and science, Anders claimed that some scientists were starting to pay attention to ghostly phenomena, which may be conducive to future developments for ghost hunting: "I hope this development continues so we get even better equipment and techniques to search with." To others such as medium Miranda and ghost hunter Frank, quantum physics still[64] seemed to contain a promise of building bridges between science and claims of the paranormal. Ufologist Daniel reasoned that UFO phenomena may not be explainable within current scientific frameworks, but investigations of UFOs may lead to scientific innovation. For Tommy, the concept of energies was a common denominator for scientific research as well as ghost hunts. "Everything builds on energies. Is it not so?" Tommy queried, to which his spouse Jeanette skeptically replied that there was hardly any science behind the practice of ghost hunting. The instruments, Tommy insisted, are, however, "scientifically developed," and their measurements must be the result of some external stimuli. Recapitulating an argument made by the ghost-hunting duo LaxTon, Tommy suggested that "in a not-too-distant future, you might sit with a pair of glasses on and *watch* the energies." Ufologists Allan, Kenneth and James discussed

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[64] The at least partial appropriation of quantum physics has been demonstrated as common in alternative religious and spiritual milieus (e.g., Hanegraaff 1996; Hammer 2001).

the emergence of scientific projects such as SETI[65] and the Galileo Project,[66] both aimed at finding signs of intelligent extraterrestrial life, the latter explicitly including studies of UAP (a rival term to UFOs), as a sign that ufological issues were coming in from the cold. Parapsychologist Miriam shared the impression that mainstream scientific disciplines may be opening up to the subject matters of parapsychology, albeit only to a limited extent due to a remaining stigmatization of paranormal claims. Miriam furthermore suggested that the emergence of discourse on alternative facts may serve to uphold the stigma, in effect alienating people from scientific and educational institutions.

The participants' views on the relationship between science and the paranormal hence mainly gravitated towards either a continued rejection of paranormal phenomena by science or a gradual shift towards acceptance of paranormal claims, with various intermediate positions. The views of relations between paranormal practice and another major epistemic institution, namely religion, were less optimistic, as the next subchapter demonstrates.

6.4.2. Religion and the paranormal

While science had an ambivalent status among the participants as both a role model for and repressor of knowledge-making on paranormal phenomena, religion was viewed decidedly more negatively by the participants. Yet there were instances when participants affirmed certain aspects of religion, such as esotericism and syncretism. Some furthermore discussed similarities and contradistinctions between phenomena interpreted as religious and paranormal, respectively. These themes are presented in this subchapter.

Medium Ernst was most vocal in his criticism: "I'm pretty allergic to religion. I think it's shit. […] I see it as a way of repressing people." Parapsychologist Miriam was mainly dismissive of religion as she associated it with dogmatism and "religious views that limit and control." She further expressed a distaste for people who go too far over the line into the speculative and spiritual side of paranormal phenomena, dismissing it as "woo-woo." When prompted about relationships between religion and paranormal phenomena, some participants mentioned cults, sects and new religious movements, and mostly in a negative sense. Although parapsychologist Svante appreciated the integrity of subjective belief in paranormal phenomena, he viewed the consolidation of the latter in new religious movements, sects and cults as potentially

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[65] The NASA-affiliated SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) Institute looks for signs of extraterrestrial life (SETI Institute, n.d.).

[66] On the official webpage of the Galileo Project, conducted at Harvard University, it is stated that the project aims "to bring the search for extraterrestrial technological signatures of Extraterrestrial Technological Civilizations (ETCs) form accidental or anecdotal observations and legends to the mainstream of transparent, validated and systematic scientific research." (The Galileo Project, n.d.).

harmful. Medium Miranda, with exploitative tendencies among male mediums in mind, referred to charismatic leaders as possible perpetrators of abuse within her own environment of mediumistic practice. To ufologists such as Allan, religion was a social and cultural phenomenon that makes UFO-related phenomena more difficult to investigate. Allan exemplified these believers with the contactees from the 1950s onwards, some of whom started their own religious movements. To Allan, these movements create a white noise of sorts that distorts the UFO phenomenon. He described his own organization's approach in contrast:

> There are a lot [of people] who narrow their investigations already from the start because they [have preconceived notions] about what the answer will be. So, in [this organization], we are very careful and say that we don't want to believe. We want to know. We really want to separate these two things.

Fellow ufologists, such as Marcus, also expressed an adversarial view of the contactee movement. Equally skeptical was ufologist Daniel, who dismissed the conflation of ufology with ideas and practices associated with the New Age movement, representatives of the latter being "tinfoil hat people": "I generally think that faith is quite *harmful* to ufology." For similar reasons, Wilma pointed to New Age spirituality as a culprit behind much of the stigma surrounding ufology, reducing the field to a subject matter for "fools". Carl viewed religion and belief as completely compatible with ufology: "Ufology is about evidence, and believing something to be true is faith. You shouldn't believe in something if you don't have good reasons for believing it to be true."

Ufologist Kjell, by contrast, expressed a positive interest in spirituality and seemed open to various holistic practices, while both he and Mattias discussed the possibility of UFO phenomena as a cause for the emergence of religion. Kjell referred to Ezekiel's vision as an example of what may have been a UFO sighting prompting religious belief: "'And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north' [...] That is how you described it back then. [...] Angels. In the old days. If they were visitors [from other worlds]." Hence, both Kjell and Mattias addressed the emergence of religion, particularly mystical experiences, as a possible derivate of UFO phenomena. Both Johannes and Lars-Åke, perhaps owing to their mediumistic engagement, were positive to the notion of a core or profound common ground behind all religious traditions and their apparent disunity and disagreement. For Lars-Åke, this syncretistic outlook was phrased in terms of esotericism. "I've heard," he started and continued

that if you talk about one level higher than religion, I mean the higher esoteric doctrine […], where religions came from, if I am to venture out onto this thin ice. [He laughs.] There, I have understood that Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity, and Judaism, the thoughts there [on this higher level] are the same. There is much that religions won't recognize and don't want you to tinker with.

Johannes expressed a similar view, namely that "there are different religions […], but they all point to the same thing." A syncretistic approach was evident in practice as well, such as in the mediumistic teachers' insistence on actively choosing which techniques and spiritual entities (e.g., angels) to work with. For instance, following a session on automatic writing, participants reported channeled messages from figures such as Jesus, a vague being of light and the Egyptian deity Ra (who urged the recipient to "pay heed to Thoth").

The above points to another feature that a few participants addressed, namely contradistinctions between religion and the paranormal. "The belief in miracles in the Bible, belief in spirits, belief in angels," parapsychologist Svante reasoned, "to be able to show yourself after death – there are many paranormal features in the Bible." Beliefs in and activities related to communication with spirits was highlighted by ghost hunter Olivia as a parallel between religion and paranormal phenomena. Ghost hunter Ken expressed a similar view of overlaps between religion and spirits more generally:

> In Christian belief, there has been a lot of silence [surrounding the topic], but the paranormal is becoming more and more accepted. And if you really think about it, there are still [paranormal elements] in the Christian faith, and they've always been there, since in the Bible […] they always say "in the name of the Holy Ghost". Who is that Holy Ghost? A ghost is something paranormal.

Some participants suggested the notion of evil spirits and demons as a bridge between religious and paranormal phenomena. As mentioned previously, ghost hunter Olivia shared a story about her friend's encounter with a demon, while Sebastian introduced himself as the "guy who always gets possessed." During our second ghost hunt together, he furthermore shared experiences of having been assaulted by a malignant spirit at his former workplace. Ghost hunters Charlotte, Jeanette and Tommy also engaged with belief in demons. "How much of an asshole did you have to be, then," Tommy queried in a jovial tone and to the amusement of the others, "in order to become a demon? You must be a real asshole." Meanwhile, Charlotte was hesitant to accept the existence of demons at all: "I don't want to touch it. I instead believe there are energies from people who lived on Earth that you feel."

To summarize the findings pertaining to religion and the paranormal, several participants sought to distance themselves from religion in various ways, suggesting religion as dogmatism, a system of control or white noise distorting

paranormal phenomena. Others viewed religion and spirituality more favorably, especially in the form of esotericism and syncretism, while some reflected upon both similarities and differences between religious and paranormal phenomena. In the next subchapter, I turn to participants' views of and engagement with social phenomena that have been suggested as overlapping with the paranormal due to shared characterizations such as rejected and stigmatized knowledge.

6.4.3. Relations to other rejected knowledges

In this section, I unpack patterns in the participants' relationships to knowledge claims that, together with claims of paranormal phenomena, have been suggested as rejected (Webb 1974, 1976) or stigmatized (Barkun 2013), namely conspiracy theories, alternative medicine, alternative spirituality and Western esotericism.

Most interviewees replied affirmatively to the question of whether or not they ever get in contact with conspiracy theories, albeit only a few expressed any deeper affinity with or knowledge about them. Most participants clearly and strongly distanced themselves from the phenomenon in various ways. Parapsychologist Miriam started by stating that conspiracies are a real thing – "they exist, it's human [to conspire]" – yet she cannot really stand conspiracy theories. Medium Miranda attested that conspiracy theories are quite common in alternative religious settings, as did her colleague Lars-Åke, although they were decidedly not her "cup of tea." Whenever a client expressed an interest in conspiracy theories, Miranda said she approaches the issue with caution, trying to encourage her clients to critically scrutinize various claims: "to fact-check when possible and see if there's anything that supports these kinds of claims, if you can find it in some more established sources." Parapsychologist Svante suggested that conspiracy theories are particularly common among "New Age people," including acquaintances of his who are "more prone than others to accept conspiracy theories." Although positive to a vast array of paranormal phenomena, including UFOs, mediums Ernst and Anna distanced themselves from conspiracy theories as overly complicated and bizarre. Ernst was the most vocally opposed: "I think it's like, 'knock it off!' [Swe: gå och lägg dig] [he laughs] as soon as it gets *strange*. Go away!" Fellow medium Lars-Åke was equally sardonic in his dismissal of conspiracy theories. Speaking of COVID-19-conspiracies, he exclaimed, "Oh, come on now. *Calm down*!" Ghost hunter Tommy shared that one of his long-time friends had started to engage with conspiracy theories in a tiresome way, summarizing his friend's outlook thusly: "The whole world is a conspiracy. […] It's all one giant conspiracy."

At the ufological field investigators' course, it became apparent that conspiracy theories are both common and commonly contested within the ufological field. Ufologist Marcus jokingly suggested that "if you haven't come into

contact with conspiracy theories, you should get involved in [the UFO organization] and you'll get your fair share!" One issue predating my time at the course was how the organization's decision to only accept attendees vaccinated against Covid-19 had provoked a conspiratorial outcry among certain stakeholders. In addition to Covid-19 conspiracy theories, ufological participants also mentioned the moon landing, 9/11 and the Roswell incident as prominent conspiracy theories. Carl admitted that he believed in the E.T. interpretation of the Roswell incident, implying the crash and retrieval of extraterrestrial aircraft and a subsequent government cover-up, making him one of only a couple of participants affirming belief in a conspiracy theory. "In that case," Carl explained, "I believe in that conspiracy theory." Ufologist Mattias dismissed conspiracy theories lightheartedly, saying that "it feels a bit like the 90's," implying that they are dated.

Apart from Carl's belief in the Roswell incident, Olivia was the only one who expressed belief in or a positive view of conspiracy theories in general: "Conspiracy theories are very interesting, and it's a taboo subject." She mentioned some of the ideas that intrigued her: "9/11, the Bermuda Triangle, the U.S. started the war in the Middle East, I mean I really believe these things. Area 51's got a zombie virus that might break free." Parapsychologist Jesper expressed a positive relationship to conspiracy theories, but for very different reasons than Olivia. "To start with, I love conspiracy theories. It's not that I believe in them, but I love […] when you dive down the rabbit hole and […] find a new conspiracy theory. To submerge yourself in it. I find the whole journey incredibly fun." Jesper thus found conspiracy theories alluring and entertaining, although he did not subscribe to their contents.

Ufologist James raised the concern that the terms conspiracy theory and conspiracy theorists were increasingly used in popular debate in a pejorative, stigmatizing way, likening it to cancel culture: "It's been hijacked and is now used in a dangerous way to polarize. […] And it's so easy to use the word conspiracy as soon as someone has another idea or agenda or view of something that you yourself may not share." Allan, who recurrently debated proponents of conspiracy theories, supported James' view and stressed the importance of engaging with these perspectives. However, as Allan interacted with conspiracy theorists as an adversary in public debate, his view of conspiracy theories was accordingly negative. "I think it's important that we all," he said, "believe in things that are good and sound. And that we don't question what has been proven thousands of times before. And instead focus on questioning what is really worth questioning. Turning the stones left unturned."

I, however, see reason for caution concerning the overwhelming dismissal of conspiracy theories among the participants, and this caution is indirectly aimed at the validity regarding questions covering conspiracy theories. My concern is that of social desirability: I believe that it is more or less common knowledge, based on public debate, that conspiracy theories are viewed with

suspicion or are even seen as being harmful and that the term conspiracy theorist is usually used in a pejorative sense. This may impact answers to survey questions as well as to ones posed during interviews questions, and I will present one indication that this may be the case. As I followed participants indirectly via the organizations' online presence so that I would not miss out on invites to upcoming events, I became aware of ongoing conversations outside of my time spent in the field. As part of this online presence, I have seen at least a couple of individuals expressing themselves favorably regarding conspiracy theories in ways that seemingly depart from statements they made as interviewees. The extent to which this tendency holds for other participants would, however, be pure speculation, and I will hence settle for this reservation, namely that social desirability may affect some of the results pertaining to conspiracy theories.

Turning to another form of rejected or stigmatized knowledge, namely alternative medicine, I inferred that it was an integrated feature in the form of healing at the mediumistic training program. Spiritualist institutions such as Ramsbergsgården in Sweden and the Arthur Findlay College in the U.K. were furthermore mentioned as places were healing practices were taught. Various forms of healing occasionally featured as a topic in the calendar of the parapsychological association as well. The efficacy of healing was also one of parapsychologist Svante's main interests within the purview of parapsychological research.

Holistic and alternative spirituality, including wellness activities such as meditation and yoga, were mentioned by some interviewees as bordering with paranormal phenomena. Medium Miranda mentioned the New Age movement as an immense influence on Swedish mediumistic practice. In their part-time careers as holistic entrepreneurs, mediums Ernst and Anna instructed their clients in practices such as meditation and yoga. Kjell nurtured, as mentioned earlier, an interest in spirituality apart from his interest in ufology, while fellow ufologist Kenneth shared experiences of hauntings triggered by his interest in alternative spirituality (e.g., yoga, meditation, Shamanism) in the 1990s.

Besides esotericism in the sense of an affinity between different religious and philosophical traditions espoused by mediums Lars-Åke and Johannes, specific currents were mentioned by a few participants. In his youth, parapsychologist Svante not only dabbled in ufology but Theosophy as well. Although she ran a course center for mediumistic practice, Miranda mentioned Theosophy as a key influence on contemporary mediumistic practice. Parapsychologist Jesper nurtured an explicit interest in "mysticism and esotericism," both as private interests and as foci for his academic studies.

Among phenomena suggested as rejected or stigmatized knowledge, conspiracy theories were most prominent in the interviews, although most participants were skeptical of or adversarial to conspiracy theories. Alternative medicine in the form of healing was one of several skills taught at the mediumistic training center, while it occasionally featured as the topic of lectures held by

the parapsychological association. Several participants attested to experiences of various alternative spiritual and holistic activities, and a few took an interest in esoteric currents, most notably Theosophy.

In the next subchapter, I leave relations to other domains of society behind and turn to other facets of paranormal practice, namely the social control and regulations implied by it.

6.5. Internal order: Social control and regulations of practice

Related to the creation of community through shared paranormal practice is the establishment of a social order of agreed-upon yet often tacit, possibly even subconscious, rules of conduct. Using a sociological phrase, this may be viewed as indicators of social control. The latter denotes processes whereby agents adopt certain roles and align with a set of shared objectives and norms (e.g., Mead 1925) – a process occasionally called internalization[67] - and the responses that agents and institutions may employ for successes and failures to conform, such as incentives and sanctions (e.g., Durkheim 1933, 425). In this subchapter, I present results that I interpret as indicative of attempts at social regulations of practice. Most of these examples furthermore qualify as examples of informal social control as opposed to formal (e.g., Giddens et al. 2018, 74-75), yet I have a few examples of the latter, which conclude the subchapter. The subchapter is subdivided into two sections that encompass the themes pertaining to social control and regulations. First, I introduce the establishment, more or less explicit, of rules of conduct and sanctions aimed at those who transgress them. Second, I present how imposing regulations is attempted by directing criticism towards oneself and others within the group.

6.5.1. House rules and sanctions

The practice of decoding spiritual communication was, I inferred, distinctly social. During the days I spent together with the other mediums-in-training, we sat in pairs and groups, attempting to bridge the gap between our own selves and another reality. I observed that the prospective medium needs to be not only attentive to his or her own impressions and states but to others' as well. Put differently, becoming a medium requires some degree of social competence, and there are consequences for those who are inconsiderate towards their peers.

One highly individualized regulation of practice encouraged by our mediumistic teachers was the establishment of "house rules." The latter denoted

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[67] As eloquently put by Peter Berger (1967, 10), "It is through internalization that man is a product of society."

provisional and personal rules of conduct that the medium set up in relation to both clients and non-human agents. For instance, it was suggested that we work with spiritual entities (e.g., angels) from different traditions, but only if they made sense to us. If they did not, we could skip them in favor of other approaches to the spirit world. Lars-Åke introduced another house rule of his own which he asked all of us to comply with: mediumistic practice was to be limited to the lecture halls and hence not occur outside of them nor outside of our schedule. Lars-Åke did not appreciate any spirits "flying about" unexpectedly and unbidden, catching him off-guard. This view testified to the efficacy of mediumistic powers, I reckoned, as the mediumistic powers may be overwhelming for the unprepared medium. His colleague Miranda's insistence on closing down after a mediumistic session may also be viewed as a testimony in favor of the power of mediumship, as an excess of mediumistic communication may fatigue the medium. A similar sentiment was expressed in relation to healing practice as well. Healing, Lars-Åke suggested, is a force to be reckoned with and not to be dealt with lightly or passed on to the unaware. Even practiced from a distance, healing requires consent from the receiver, which was another informal rule that Lars-Åke asked us to comply with. There were other, more formal rules of conduct pertaining to healing that Lars-Åke stressed, such as keeping one's hands off of the recipient's crotch and, if female, bosom.

More than once as Lars-Åke instructed us in mediumistic practices, he referred to the Arthur Findlay College[68] in the U.K. as exemplary in terms of Spiritualist practice. The institution was clearly a role model in Lars-Åke's estimation. There were points of contestation, however. "Don't talk about chakras in England," Lars-Åke exclaimed in one of his lectures, "or they will *kick you out*!" The same went for talk of ghosts and evil spirits: "then you'll be kicked out, too!" Although Lars-Åke said this jokingly, he touched on a more serious note, namely that there are differences in the belief systems and practices surrounding mediumship, and the Arthur Findlay College was described as more purist and traditional than Miranda's training center. Thus, certain elements – e.g., chakras and ghosts - that had been mentioned as part of our training program were controversial subjects in other settings.

Sticking to the mediumistic training program, I will share two examples of what I inferred were informal sanctions aimed at participants who transgress norms of mediumistic practice. After our healing exercises on the third day of the program, a woman paired with a man was notably distressed, possibly on the brink of a panic attack. With aid from another participant, they both communicated to the entire group that they believed that the man had transferred some kind of spiritual dirt or taint to the woman. The accused man self-confidently suggested that the woman may have gotten in contact with some kind

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[68] The Arthur Findlay College is an institution of Spiritualist education in Essex run by the Spiritualists' National Union (Arthur Findlay College, n.d.).

of inner trauma brought to the surface by the healing procedure, a claim that seemed to make her even more upset. It was quite an alarming and confusing situation. As I look back, I am struck by two social functions of this drama, whether or not the healing de facto caused any negative transfers or raised repressed trauma. First, it testified in favor of the power of healing by enacting a demonstration of what may happen when it is performed wrongly: it will cause harm. Second, the incident may be viewed as a sanction against the man who transgressed unspoken norms, in this case being inconsiderate and unemphatic towards another participant.

The repercussions of the incident described above were felt the following day. I was paired up with the aforementioned man for an exercise in which we tried to divine the identity of kin, represented by a concealed photograph. As the man tried to divine the identity of my kin, he was at first chastised for being too loud by some of the others. As we later presented the results in front of the group, the man complained that he and his partner (i.e., me) got most of the information wrong. As a response to this, our teacher narrowed his eyes at the man and exclaimed, "And whose fault is this? It's *your* fault!" I was a bit taken aback by the harshness of the reprimand, which was followed by a mini-lecture clearly aimed at the man specifically on the importance of differentiating between mediumistic and psychic communications,[69] which the man had clearly failed to do, at least according to the instructor. Besides acting as a reprimand, a sanction, I also inferred that the rationale underlying the reprimand may be viewed as conducive to explaining away or rationalizing shortcomings of the mediumistic method. The man's shortcomings were his own, so to speak. Hence, mistakes are not caused by faults in the techniques and practices taught per se but are instead individualized.

There were a few instances indicative of social regulations among the ghost hunters as well. In the days prior to the first investigation I took part in, issues such as the logistics of getting to the place were dealt with through a Messenger chat, but also some of a controversial nature: one participant planned to bring a Ouija board to the horror of some of the others. The controversy revolved around the Ouija board's purported ability to channel or summon darker, demonic energies and entities. In the end, the use of Ouija boards was banned from the current investigation, albeit this seemed to be the result of pragmatic negotiations rather than a unitary condemnation of the instrument itself. Frank mentioned in passing during our interview that certain people within the ghost-hunting milieu were fervently against the use of Ouija boards, echoing the prior Messenger debate, while he himself favored their use with some caution.

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[69] Medium Miranda described this differentiation in terms of horizontal and vertical communication. Horizontal communications would be reading other people through seemingly paranormal means, for instance, gaining information about other people by using ESP. Vertical communications refer to access to spirits or entities outside of ourselves and our human peers (e.g., spirits of the dead), suggested as mediumistic communication proper.

During the first ghost hunts, I inferred that the participants tentatively could be divided into two groups. On one side was the Stockholm-team plus Olivia and Frank, all of whom were heavily invested in the hunt, and on the other was the group of more casual and curious participants whose level of attachment and engagement with ghost hunting as a practice was fairly low. Members from the Stockholm-based team at times made remarks questioning the sincerity of the second group, not least since the latter at times would talk rather cheerfully, breaking the mood of suspense. As I perceived it, the group was viewed as tourists by the Stockholm-based team: tagging along for the ride but not very invested or serious, causing some annoyance as they did not show the practice the reverence that the first group thought it deserved. The at-times vented frustration from the heavily engaged ghost hunters perhaps did not function as a regulation or sanction per se but may instead be indicative of a threshold that the tourist would need to cross in order to be recognized as part of the practice (and group) proper.

Related to the "tourists" described above, the second ghost hunt I attended had its own internal targets of rebuke. At least two people who had signed up never showed up. They did not read or comment in the preparatory chat group, nor did they pay the agreed-upon fee (which covered the rent of the community hall for the night) despite various attempts made by the administrator to get ahold of them. Olivia opted to reprimand them, calling out the members who had signed up for the event yet failed to show up, and, as far as I can tell, they were banned from the group. During my time following the group, similar attempts to check that members were alert and invested were occasionally made, such as requests for members to read and comment upon Facebook posts regarding whether or not they were still interested in taking part in ghost hunts at all. These were direct sanctions Olivia likely found necessary to impose in order to keep the group alive and well.

The examples of social control provided have hitherto concerned informal modes. There were, however, a couple of instances involving more formal modes of social control that were mentioned, both shared by medium Lars-Åke. In his introduction to healing, Lars-Åke started with an overview of Swedish legislation, especially the Patient Safety Act. The latter entails that healing cannot legally be provided for the treatment of disease or sickness and hence only for other benefits, such as relaxation. For this reason, it is important to be cautious, Lars-Åke stressed, and not promise clients more than what is legally permissible. An opinion voiced by some of the participants was that the law is unduly restrictive in this case. It is of course good to keep the quacks at bay, it was suggested, but surely a larger array of alternative and complementary forms of medicine would be beneficial? Lars-Åke further highlighted the Arthur Findlay College, together with the related Spiritualists' National Union, as an institution that keeps its members in check. He shared a story of a British medium of some renown who had embezzled sick benefits from the state. Lars-Åke recalled how the medium came driving a flashy, new sports

car to an event organized by the Spiritualists' National Union. However, his fraudulence was soon revealed, and he was convicted by the British courts. Following this, the medium was expelled from the Spiritualists' National Union. On the subject of fraud, mediums Ernst and Anna shared one example based on their personal experiences of a charlatan medium in their midst. The main instructor at a spiritual training center of questionable quality they once attended attempted to physically manifest spirit communication. As Ernst summarized it, "he got a trumpet to levitate but by using *strings*."

This section has dealt with attempts at social regulation within two of the groups under study, namely the mediumistic course participants and the ghost hunters. Most of the example have included expressions of frustration and annoyance directed towards attendees, as well as reprimands, some of which were indirect rather than direct. In the next section, I turn to more intellectualized attempts at social regulation.

6.5.2. Control of self and others through critique and doubts

Many participants underscored the importance of criticism and doubt as means of keeping both themselves and others in check. One theme pertaining to this is the endorsement of source criticism, especially pertinent in relation to media and popular culture.

Source criticism was integral to the ufologists, both towards other actors within the ufological field and as a rule of conduct within the ufological association's own activities and publications. As Allan put it, "Those of us who write about it always publish our sources so people can check [our work]. It's really important." His relationship to media and popular culture was more negative, and he likened it to noise: "I get influenced by media and podcasts and things like that because people [are influenced by them], and then they come to me with questions that I'm expected to answer." Inquiries from the public about UFOs and other paranormal claims are something Allan faces on a daily basis. Fellow ufologist Carl also discussed source criticism and the discernment of credible sources, using ufologist Jacques Vallée as an example: "He would never fudge the numbers or make something up in order to make money or something like that." Jacques Vallée, a long-standing authority with many decades and publications within the field of ufology (e.g., Kripal 2011), was contrasted with rising and now declining stars such medical doctor Steven M. Greer.[70] Ufologist Marcus described Greer's fall from grace thusly:

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[70] Founder and front figure of the former *The Disclosure Project* (e.g. Wikipedia n.d. 'Steven M. Greer').

My trust in him was broken when he -- it was a beach somewhere -- gathered people, and lights appeared in the sky, and he said 'Now we have telepathic contact with extraterrestrials,' but they were paratroopers from a military drill. After that, you have a hard time taking him seriously.

Hence, a would-be-authority within the arena of ufology becomes a fallen idol, at least in Marcus' assessment. Another example of an adversarial relation to an authority within the paraculture was ghost hunter Sebastian's bashing of the ghost-hunting duo LaxTon mentioned in prior chapters.

Peer assessment and criticism was not only important as an integrated feature in making knowledge about mediumistic phenomena, instructor Miranda argued, but also as a means of holding others accountable. Without the critical voices of mediumistic peers, the dangers of hubris and other forms of misconduct lurk unchecked. Miranda assessed the situation thusly:

Many are self-taught. Unfortunately, some people think, "I'll take a weekend course and then I'll be a medium. I'll learn on my own," and I'm very much against this. You should stand firmly on your feet before you set out. – Being mediumistic is one thing, but working as a medium is a big responsibility. […] This is an occupation where you can be relatively successful without any book knowledge or [formal] education. And I think that has attracted some people who may have needed to work more on themselves before throwing themselves into it. And that there has been a certain grandiosity [among them].

Even though Miranda mentioned this in relation to young female mediums-in-the-making, she also directed criticism towards male mediums specifically, echoing the #MeToo social-media movement (Wikipedia n.d., "MeToo movement") of the 2020s. Noting the general overrepresentation of young women within the mediumistic milieu and alternative spirituality in general, Miranda stated that, "The *men*, they get a lot of attention. Good for them, maybe. But it hasn't always been that sound." Although she reported only being aware of one example involving sexual misconduct, Miranda said she had noticed that "some male mediums" had a trail of ladies following after them," which may imply unequal gender relations.

More generally, some participants mentioned critique as an important way of eliminating the influence of bias in various forms. Using both conspiracy theories and angel spirituality as examples, medium Miranda told me how she tried to foster a critical and self-reflective view in her participants:

We provide mediumistic training, and part of it includes reading some literature as well, some books where people make claims and say "this has been given by my guide" or by God or the Holy Spirit or whatever the case may be, and they are to [ask themselves] "Where does this author come from? What is his or her background – religiously, culturally, temporally? How can you see this in the text? […] We don't want to bash anyone. We try to avoid that. But

to reflect upon that, you can view things from different perspectives, and we are very affected by where we come from. So, you get more critical, simply put. Not skeptical but critical. It's important.

In a similar way, medium Lars-Åke embraced the ethos that "You will never be a good therapist, or whatever you want to call it, unless you observe yourself and your own shadow sides. Weaknesses. Your ego." Two episodes from my time spent in the field may be invoked as illustrations of this approach. During my second day at the mediumistic training program, one attendee shared his communications with Jesus. Teacher Sara replied that this was likely a manifestation of his own worldview or belief system, adding that it was "nice that you got to meet it." During our first day, a large number of us failed to establish contact with any spirit guides whatsoever. This prompted Miranda to address the issue. She emphasized that spirit guides can manifest themselves in many different forms, all of them valid, depending on the recipient. The latter were interpreted as roads or pathways leading to the same goal, another example of the embracing of syncretism within mediumistic practice. Along with syncretism, the suggestion that spiritual encounters may be expressions of our own ideations seemed to, alongside the establishment of house rules with peers, act as a form of safeguard against excessively self-confident narratives of communications with deities and spirits. I inferred that this was a form of social regulation. On a similar note, medium Miranda discussed the role of the professional medium and the risks that accompany it. "We are ordinary people with unusual jobs," she said and continued:

> It's is very easy for us to [feel] a little, if you have narcissistic traits, a bit omnipotent. There's definitely a risk for that, without a doubt. And it's something you have to watch out for. You need to keep your shadow sides in check. Really. Before you start dignifying yourself.

Self-criticism was not restricted to the mediumistic setting. Ufologist Daniel, for instance, emphasized the importance of reviewing personal bias and a willingness to kill your darlings in relation to UFO phenomena: "You have to be very self-critical and conscious of – if you have your own beliefs -- so don't just accept things that fit with your own worldview that you want to be true."

Venting doubts in a more general sense also struck me as an integral feature of the paranormal practices under study. A recurring question among the participants at the mediumistic training program was the following, and I quote how one of them phrased it to our teacher Miranda: "How do I know if my impressions are real or if I'm just making things up?" Miranda's and, later, Lars-Åke's explanation was that truly mediumistic impressions are more immediate, or faster, than fancies of the mind. Thus, if communications and impressions are somewhat slow and resemble our own everyday thinking, we may be under the influence of our own imagination.

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Some doubts were voiced regarding paranormal experiences, both the participants' own and those of others. Ghost hunter Olivia was at times critical of her own experiences, including those occurring during our night in the stable. She, for instance, suggested that a door slamming shut may just have been caused by a cross-breeze. While we were setting up equipment both in the stable and at Sebastian's previous place of work, Anders meticulously ran EMF readers around walls and ledges in order to detect electrical wiring that may have affected the readers later during the investigation, hence trying to eliminate any measurement error. This illustrates that there was an acknowledgement that ordinary circumstances (e.g., electrical wiring) may influence the gadgets. Regarding the experience of a dream coming true, parapsychologist Miriam admitted that she struggled with it: "You can analyze it to pieces […] I try to find a sensible explanation for it." As he told a story about his deceased mother's old car showing up driving in his neighborhood, medium Lars-Åke added a bit sullenly: "Maybe I read too much into that one." Ufologist Daniel recalled experiences of shadowy figures from his childhood, which he suggested was the product of sleep paralysis: "It's nothing I would consider unexplained or unnatural today." As the examples in this paragraph have made clear, then, there were plenty of instances when claims of paranormal phenomena were hardly accepted at face value.

There were times when not only the others but I myself came to question some of the events that took place, methodological agnosticism aside, and I will conclude this subchapter with a couple of examples. Two of the other attendees who took part in the mediumistic training program failed to divine the identity of my maternal grandmother when presented with a concealed envelope containing her photograph. Both identified her as a proper and elegant upper middle-class woman from an affluent part of Stockholm, not as the Finnish working-class person that she was. A tempting inference was that both of them were misled by my demeanor and sociolect which, together with the fact that I was present as a researcher from Uppsala University, falsely gave the impression that my heritage is firmly rooted in the urban middle-class, which is far from the case. My maternal grandmother also figured in the closing sequence of the training program as well. As the program was being wrapped up and we got ready to go our separate ways, one participant sought eye contact with me. He had someone "on the line for me," he said. It was a female energy, someone elderly who used to be close to me and was now on the other side. He asked if I recognized who it was, and I told him the truth: I was not sure. My paternal grandmother died before I was born, I said, and my maternal grandmother, who indeed was close to me, was still alive at the time, eventually passing away from Covid-19 later that same year. Her mental state was gradually descending into dementia, I told him. The participant suggested that it could be my maternal grandmother anyway, as people affected by dementia may be able to leave their bodies and communicate through the spirit world instead. He furthermore told me that the message that she wanted to

pass on was that I needed to do some more "advanced stuff" in order to find evidence of the existence of a spiritual realm and life after death. I was a bit taken aback and felt disillusioned by this. Looking back, I think that one motivation behind the message – whether or not a spirit *really* was involved in its communication – was that the participant himself viewed the current mediumistic training program as too basic. I hence wonder if the message was perhaps his own recommendation, but one that he was more comfortable delivering through spiritual intermediaries.

Earlier that same afternoon, I was struck by doubts for completely different reasons. During our last group séance, one of the attendees established contact with another participant's deceased father with a precision that took me by surprise, describing the man in great detail, including his appearance, personality, and health situation. How could she possibly know all of this? Could she sense this spirit, or had she somehow overheard the person talking about her father earlier, or could they even have conspired together? Even though it is beyond my aim and intent to evaluate the truth-claims behind the statements in the paranormal paraculture, the episode stuck with me.

There was hence a plentitude of instances where critique and doubts were made salient during my time spent in the paranormal paraculture, ranging from the scrutiny of bias and source criticism to the venting of doubts, including some of my own. Coupled with the former section on the establishment of rules of conduct and the examples of sanctions, this subchapter has demonstrated that there were elements of social control and regulation present in otherwise highly subjective and individualized practices.

6.6. Summary and concluding remarks

This chapter has presented results on relationships and paranormal practice, ranging from the importance (and unimportance) of others, including the epistemic institutions science and religion, to processes conducive to creating a sense of community and social regulations. Relationships to others (e.g., spouses, family and friends) were ascribed varying degrees of importance throughout the interviews. Some participants were the paranormal black sheep in their respective family settings, while others had backing from partners, family and friends. Experiences of communications with spirits of the dead, especially deceased kin, were fairly common among interviewees, and I argue that these experiences testify in favor of a continued sense of belonging and communion after bodily death. Examples of forums perceived as disinterested in or even hostile to paranormal practice included social relations and settings such as the workplace, academia and the company of skeptics. In spite of this, some participants took an active stance to willingly and explicitly talk about paranormal practice in most or all contexts, while others were strategic. Shar-

ing practice with others was put forth by some participants as central in keeping their interest alive. Other processes contributing to a sense of community included peer confirmation and the use of humor. A multitude of views on the relationships between paranormal practices and the surrounding society were expressed throughout the interviews, ranging from stigmatization to a sense of growing acceptance regarding paranormal phenomena among the public at large. Most participants were decidedly negative towards conspiracy theories, while other instances of rejected and stigmatized knowledge such as alternative medicine, an integrated feature of mediumistic practice, and esotericism were embraced by a few. I furthermore discerned some social processes that I argue acted as social regulations, ranging from medium "house rules" to sanctions against bad conduct and the use of critique and doubts.

This concludes the presentation of the empirical results, which started with the introduction to and analyses of the survey *Paranormal Sweden* in the fourth chapter. While the fifth chapter was devoted to classifications of the main types of paranormal practices, assessments of levels of engagement and the application of the practice-in-dimensions typology, the sixth and present chapter was devoted to an exploration of paranormal practice in light of social relationships. Next, the empirical data are placed next to each other as it is time to apply the theoretical framework proper. The seventh chapter is thus dedicated to analyses of the results.

Chapter 7. Analysis of the results: Theorizing occultural paranormal practice

In this chapter, the results presented in the last three chapters are revisited and reviewed in light of the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 2. The analyses are grouped into two main sections on how occulture and epistemic authority, respectively, may help interpret and explain tendencies in the data.

7.1. Occulture-as-plausibility and occulture in paranormal practice

In this subchapter, I first assess how well occulture-as-plausibility fares in light of the quantitative data and then I explore occulture by presenting the main ways in which occultural resources are employed by actors within paranormal paraculture(s).

7.1.1. Occulture-as-plausibility as hypothesis

As stated, occulture-as-plausibility may be understood as a hypothesis that predicts a positive relationship between occultural contact points and paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences. Occultural contact points significantly predicted the number of paranormal beliefs respondents affirmed, the number of activities and experiences that they self-reported and their scores on active searches for information about both paranormal enlightenment and discovery. In other words, the number of occultural contact points covaried positively with all measurements on paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences, and the effects were moderate to large. In short, this means that occulture-as-plausibility was corroborated to the same extent. Turning to respondent profiles on paranormal variables, as derived from cluster analysis, the number of occultural contact points affected the likelihood of respondents being open-minded rather than dismissive of paranormal phenomena in general. The regression analysis of the total paranormalism scale furthermore confirmed a positive relationship to occultural contact points. Succinctly put, the number

of occultural contact points had, next to gender (i.e., being female), the strongest effect on affirming paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences.

So, what do these results imply for occulture-as-plausibility? In short, the claim is as strong as the relationship between occultural contact points and the variables on paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences. As the findings have made clear, the positive associations were statistically significant, with moderate to large amounts of the variance accounted for. Occultural contact points are hence a predictor to be reckoned with.

The relationship between occultural contact points and paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences may naturally be unpacked and problematized. An alternative interpretation, reversing the variables assumed to be independent and dependent, respectively, is that paranormal believers, practitioners and experiencers are more inclined to seek out or be aware of representations of the paranormal in media, popular culture and conversations with peers. According to this interpretation, paranormal believers, practitioners and experiencers may prove to be a driving force behind the dissemination and growth of occulture, rather than the other way around. Both of these interpretations are warranted in light of the data. It is furthermore possible to reason that the casual relationship implied by both of these interpretations in reality may prove to be interdependent, possibly mutually reinforcing. Whatever may be the case falls outside of the scope of this analysis, as we are faced with covariation and correlation rather than causation.

After this appraisal of occulture-as-plausibility based on the survey *Paranormal Sweden*, I next turn to the use of and relationships to occulture among participants in the paranormal paraculture.

7.1.2. Occulture in the paraculture

Among the interviewees, representations of paranormal phenomena in media and popular culture were often mentioned. As suggested in the second and third chapters, references to such representations are viewed as instances of occulture at play in the paraculture, or the use of occultural resources. This analysis mainly contributes by pinpointing the main ways, based on a set of analytical themes, in which occultural resources are brought into play by the participants. Occulture is also implied by some of the relationships to other people, whenever these were assessed as conducive to paranormal practice, that emerged throughout the interviews. These relationships were not quite as salient as representations of the paranormal in media and popular culture, and for this reason the analysis will mainly focus on the latter.

The main aggregate themes on the participants' use of occulture were eight in total, out of which seven concern representations in media and popular culture and the eight involve occulture as engaged with through or with other

people (e.g., family, friends, other peers). Separate paragraphs in the subchapter are devoted to each of these areas. First, some participants mainly approached occulture as a source of entertainment. Second, source criticism applied towards occulture was a recurrent feature across the interviews. In common for the first two themes on use of occultural resources is that they do not imply an acceptance of the occultural contents (i.e., which paranormal phenomena are in fact represented by the particular occultural resource). For instance, some participants may watch paranormal reality TV purely for the sake of amusement, while other participants are skeptical, sometimes even negative to occultural contents. The remaining themes, by contrast, may all entail some consequences for occulture-as-plausibility, as they testify to the influence of occulture upon the paranormal practices in question. The third theme concerns occultural resources when invoked as memorable features of participants' childhoods and teenage years. For some participants, these early contacts further informed their current paranormal practice. Fourth, occulture featured prominently in habitual consumption of media for several participants. Fifth, some participants mentioned occulture as crucial for their transition from skepticism to belief or from disinterest to engagement. Sixth, occulture was mentioned as a direct source of inspiration for the participants' own paranormal practice. Seventh, some participants identified occulture, such as paranormal reality TV, as a driving force behind a greater acceptance of paranormal claims in the culture at large. In the eighth paragraph, I reassess some of the participants' statements regarding the importance of other people to their paranormal practice.

Several participants described paranormal media as mainly entertaining in nature. Examples include ufologists Kjell's and Wilma's appreciation of shows such as *Ancient Aliens*. Parapsychologist Miriam admitted that she found ghost-hunting paranormal reality TV amusing, as did Wilma, who, however, added that she did not take the contents "that seriously." This tendency highlights that there is no self-evident link between consuming occultural goods and accepting the reality behind the phenomena that they represent. Indeed, several participants approached both forms and contents of the paranormal in media and popular culture with skepticism, which the next paragraph makes clear.

Participants frequently approached media sources and popular culture in a critical way, explicitly and implicitly advocating source criticism. As we have seen, medium Johannes and ufologist Marcus applied a cui bono approach towards representations of the paranormal, according to which occultural resources with distinctly economic incentives were viewed with suspicion. Source criticism seemed integral to the ufological association's self-image, as exemplified by ufologist Allan's statements, presented in the sixth chapter, regarding the importance of transparency when reporting sources. By contrast, Allan depicted many media portrayals of UFOs and other paranormal phe-

nomena as noise that distorts them. Source criticism was occasionally extended to authorities within the paraculture as well, for instance, in ufologist Carl and Marcus' bashing of Dr. Steven Greer and ghost hunter Sebastian's rebuke of LaxTon as being "sell outs." The theme and the invoked examples all illustrate that participants do not necessarily find occultural resources beneficial to paranormal practice. For some, representations of the paranormal in media and popular culture may in fact distort valid interpretations of paranormal phenomena due to motives such as sensationalism and the desire for financial rewards.

Several participants' interest in the paranormal was took shape during their childhood or adolescence, often prompted by encounters with it in media and popular culture. Such encounters were exemplified by ufologists Allan's scrapbooks containing newspaper items on UFOs, Mattias' little "green book" on mysteries and Malin's dread prompted just by hearing *The X-Files* theme song. These and other participants regarded their early encounters with occultural resources as important factors that led to their current engagement in paranormal paraculture(s). The role of media and popular culture as first entry points to paranormal practice was, however, not exclusive to childhood or adolescence. Ghost hunter Charlotte, for instance, explained that her recent interest in ghost hunting was directly prompted by encounters with ghost-hunting media, online and on TV, while medium Johannes' mediumistic interest was linked to watching paranormal reality shows. Taken together, media and popular culture therefore played a key role for several participants' interest in paranormal phenomena. The theme indicates that at least some people may be deeply influenced by occulture, especially in their early years, to the extent that paranormal phenomena may seem more plausible.

To some, media consumption such as watching YouTube, listening to podcasts or reading magazines was an integral way to keep an interest in paranormal phenomena alive. For instance, although Kenneth did not describe ufology as occupying much of his leisure time, he nevertheless admitted to listening to podcasts and watching documentaries on the subject on a daily basis, as did fellow ufologist James. The ghost-hunting spouses Tommy and Jeanette described themselves as more prone to streaming the latest ghost-hunting reels than to watching a movie. The theme implies that various media outlets may prove conducive to maintaining paranormal practice, although this argument does not necessitate media and popular culture as decisive to how plausible paranormal phenomena are perceived as being.

A few participants described encounters with media as catalysts or turning points. Ufologist Carl, for instance, described himself as a previous skeptic, who, after listening to *The Joe Rogan Experience*, inferred that "the [UFO] phenomenon is real." After watching the mediumistic reality TV show *A Night at the Castle*, medium Johannes was inspired to try out healing for himself, resulting in his self-professed "conversion" from skeptic to believer. This

theme, akin to the third theme on childhood and adolescent contacts with occulture, was one of the strongest indications that occulture may indeed prime people in favor of the plausibility of paranormal phenomena.

Popular culture and media were described as sources of inspiration for practice among participants from several settings. For Anders and Sebastian's ghost-hunting team, content published on social media platforms was integral to the team finding new investigatory techniques to try out. Ghost hunters Tommy and Jeanette also underscored the importance of learning by watching others, especially LaxTon's productions. Ufologist Carl recognized websites, podcasts and books as important influences on his own theorizations of the UFO phenomenon. Hence, for some participants, occultural resources were not only conducive to finding paranormal phenomena plausible or maintaining paranormal practice over time but also as cues for developing these practices further.

Several participants regarded representations of paranormal phenomena in media and popular culture not only as an expression of popular interest but also as a driving force behind an increased acceptance of the reality of these phenomena. Ufologist Wilma argued for such a development by referring to the success of paranormal reality TV shows such as *The Unknown*: "It's not as taboo as it used to be." In a similar way, ghost hunter Tommy mentioned the fact that *Ghost Hunt* had won the Crystal Award as evidence of the growing popularity and acceptance of the paranormal. In a sense, then, occulture was emically recognized by participants as a driving force towards a climate of greater acceptance for paranormal phenomena in the culture at large.

Although contact points with occultural resources via media and popular culture dominated the participants' statements, several attested to the importance of contact points. As stated in Chapter 2, paranormal practice and engagement in the paraculture, including discussions about paranormal topics, denote a form of occulture. This entails that all participants are self-evidently occulturally engaged. Some participants furthermore attested to paranormal interests being shared with family members, spouses and friends, which makes these settings and relationships occultural as well. A few, such as medium Miranda and ufologist Stefan, reported that their first contact with occulture and paranormal phenomena was prompted by family members. More participants attested to the importance of their respective organizations as settings that helped them form and uphold their paranormal practice. As put by ufologist Mattias, concerning the ufological field investigators' course: "This is when the interest really comes to life, for real."

One reason that the importance of direct personal relationships (e.g., family, friends) for paranormal practice was overshadowed by engagement with occultural resources in media and popular culture may follow from the format of the paranormal practices in themselves. For most participants, these practices were, albeit recurring, intermittent. For instance, although the ghost hunters may generally be on the lookout for new places to investigate, the logistics

of the paranormal investigations make these occasional rather than daily. Although I interviewed some participants with active careers as mediums, they all worked only part-time as such. Reading books and magazines, watching paranormal reality TV or listening to podcasts on the paranormal may hence be the most available option for keeping the interest going in everyday life. An inference indicated by the results is that secondary socialization (e.g., media and popular culture, like-minded friends) outweighs primary socialization (e.g., family). An adjacent issue, which would require another study, is whether the gravitation towards media and popular culture as more important than kin and friends also holds for agents outside of the paraculture.

To sum up, occultural resources, here understood as all representations of paranormal phenomena and their dissemination, were generally recognized as important for paranormal practice. Occulture both constituted first points of contact and resources for maintaining or developing paranormal practice further. Occultural resources were furthermore regarded as beneficial for public acceptance of claims of paranormal phenomena. However, occultural resources were not unequivocally embraced, as many of the participants addressed the need to navigate between credible and non-credible sources as well as differentiate between lighthearted sources of entertainment and serious inspiration for practice.

This may serve to highlight that the social processes of the dissemination of occulture, or how occultural resources "become influential in societies and in the lives of individuals" (Partridge 2013, 116), are non-linear and opaque. Partridge (2004, 84-85) is hardly unfamiliar with such tendencies and admitted as much in the first volume of *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, in which he stated:

> Consumers of occulture may be witting or unwitting; they may engage with it at a relatively superficial level or they may have strong religious commitments; they may themselves contribute to the pool of occultural knowledge or they may simply drink from it.

My point is that the interviewees in this study, all recruited from paranormal paraculture and a group that by default may be described as "occulturally curious" (Partridge 2006, 2), relate to occulture in diverse, possibly contradictory ways. Even among the occulturally curious, then, consuming occulture comes with few, if any, strings attached, although it is clear that such resources are viewed as conducive to developing the participants' current paranormal practice. The latter are furthermore self-evidently occultural as well. An engagement with purportedly paranormal phenomena becomes, in and of itself, occultural. Besides this tautological point, however, I hope that this subchapter has demonstrated that paranormal practices, or the kinds of activities the group of paranormal enthusiasts are in fact *doing*, to a high degree involves

occulture in the sense of *representations* of paranormal phenomena, mainly through various media technologies. The latter become, so to speak, important mediums as well as settings for conversations about the paranormal, and being engaged in the paraculture entails relating to these conversations. The form and contents of the latter are consumed, reproduced, discussed, emulated, integrated, and, not that rarely, discarded.

So, for what ends are occultural resources employed, and why engage with paranormal practice and discourse in the first place? One answer is that at least some agents desire ways of discerning which methods and people to trust in regard to contested and alluring claims, such as claims of paranormal phenomena. And this brings us to issues of knowledge and authority, which the next subchapter engages head-on.

7.2. Epistemic authority and paranormal practice

In this subchapter, strategies of epistemic capital and boundary-work, both derived from a conjoined theory of epistemic authority, are applied to the qualitative results. The analysis explicates the main ways in which paranormal practice works as a distinctly knowledge-making venture, both in terms of pathways to knowledge (i.e., strategies of epistemic capital) acknowledged by participants, and which agents they claim to either trust (i.e., alignment) or distrust (i.e., out-defining).

7.2.1. Strategies of epistemic capital in the paraculture

First, I turn to empirical cases that I identify as indicative of strategies of epistemic capital, that is, appeals to different forms of knowledge. One of the main inferences is that various forms of strategies tend to co-exist, including those that Robertson (e.g., 2014) suggested as conventional and counter-epistemic.

7.2.1.1. Strategies of science-like epistemic capital
Appeals to strategies of science-like epistemic capital were common throughout the interviews, and I will present the main tendencies in which they were brought into play. As I argued in the second chapter, the word science-*like* is intended to capture resemblances to scientific procedures. I hence do not argue that any of the examples qualify *as* scientific by any conventional definition. In the data, I found five main ways through which participants appealed to strategies of science-like epistemic capital, namely the use of science-like vocabularies; the application and emulation of scientific methods; an acknowledgement of the limits of science; mentions of scientific studies of paranormal phenomena; and the use of technology.

The first discernable theme is the use of language and terminology reminiscent of science. For instance, medium Lars-Åke referred to verifiable "facts" that he was confronted with during his first encounter with a medium, while ghost hunter Tommy spoke of "energies" of various kinds. While "energy" does not necessitate any relation to science, Tommy suggested that the future ghost hunter may in fact "see" the energies through new equipment, thereby identifying a possible bridge between paranormal practice and science. The ghost hunters' reliance on registering and measuring ghostly activity with their equipment, as well as medium Miranda's suggestion to create a mediumistic "database," can also be interpreted as an indication of science-like language.

Others sought to reproduce scientific methods in paranormal practice. This was especially salient among the ufologists. As Carl put it, "the more scientific ufology is, the better," an assessment that most of his ufologist peers certainly would agree with. Strategies of science-like epistemic capital were hence present as a set of normative, heuristic ideals. For the ufologists, these ideals were reflected in data collecting procedures and documentation as well as in analyses and publications. Ulf's description of the cryptozoological organization's reception, documentation and dissemination of eyewitness reports of the Great Lake Monster resembled the ufologists' methodological approach, but unlike the ufologists, the cryptozoologists did not investigate or try to explain the reports themselves.

Although most interviewees were positive to scientific knowledge, others pointed to its limitations. These participants appealed to the authority of science by recognizing its merits while clearly delimiting its scope. Parapsychologist Miriam and medium Miranda expressed doubts about the possibility of being able to measure and quantify paranormal phenomena through scientific methods, and parapsychologist Mats stressed that many subjectively and socially meaningful events in life fall outside of the scope of scientific explanation. Ufologists Carl and Marcus returned to the importance of investigatory techniques including anecdotal and indirect evidence as complementary to scientific approaches.

The fourth discernable theme is references made to scientific data or evidence in support of paranormal phenomena. For parapsychologists such as Svante, the plausibility of these phenomena was demonstrated by recent research on consciousness. Mediums Miranda and Lars-Åke happily referred to quantum physics as a potential ally to paranormal practice. Ufologists such as Allan, Kenneth and James discussed scientific projects that involve studies of UFOs and UAPs (e.g., SETI, the Galileo Project) as indicators of a growing acceptance of ufology.

Due to its resemblance to scientific procedures, the use of technology also qualifies as a strategy of science-like epistemic capital. Technologies such as flight radars and star maps were utilized in the ufological organization's field investigations. While being applied outside of their original area of use (e.g.,

electronics, radio and video games), the use of and reliance on technological instruments such as EMF readers, spirit boxes and the Kinect in ghost-hunting practice also qualifies as a strategy of science-like epistemic capital.

This attests to how appeals to science were common and salient in the paraculture throughout all settings, albeit in different ways.

7.2.1.2 Strategies of traditional epistemic capital

Strategies of traditional epistemic capital, or appeals to a "people like us do things like this" ethos as Robertson (2020, 29) puts it, at first struck me as one of the less salient strategies among the statements of the interviewees. However, I argue that strategies of traditional epistemic capital are often implicitly present in the empirical materials in three main ways, namely as attempts at regulations, as credible testimonies, and as appeals to popularity.

First, social regulations indicated strategies of traditional epistemic capital, as they are conducive in creating and upholding norms and rules of conduct in practice. Social regulations thereby structure how a community of practitioners de facto "*does* these things," to paraphrase Robertson (ibid.). Such regulations, especially prominent in the setting of the mediumistic training program, included the establishment of "house rules" as well as the sanctions imposed against those who transgressed acceptable standards. The mediumistic instructors' acknowledgement of syncretism and the importance of the individual medium's choice of which traditions and concepts to engage with can be interpreted in a similar light, as they not only acknowledged the importance of a plurality of traditions but also acted as a safeguard against hubris and grandiosity among mediumistic candidates. The annoyance that some ghost hunters expressed regarding the "tourists" at the first ghost hunt also qualifies as an implicit strategy: not being serious enough was made the subject of scorn, as it contradicted implicit community norms. Put differently, the tourists' lack of seriousness was assessed as a potential hindrance to how ghost hunters "do these things." Appeals to institutions, such as medium Lars-Åke's recurrent references to the British Arthur Findlay College, can also be interpreted as strategies of traditional epistemic capital, as they attempt to regulate by making appeals to authorities within the field.

As I see it, certain forms of testimony, especially sharing narratives of one's own paranormal experiences or those of others, qualify as strategies of traditional epistemic capital. These stories contribute to making paranormal phenomena plausible by invoking a community of experiencers. Paraphrasing Robertson (ibid.), the underlying function of this form of storytelling is that "people like us experience things like this, therefore we must take these things seriously." In this respect, stories about paranormal experiences that were considered to be reliable, credible and trustworthy acted as a form of ethos argumentation. Not all stories of paranormal experiences qualify as this form of traditional epistemic capital, but I argue that stories that frame paranormal

phenomena as plausible, such as those involving conversion-like processes from disbelief to belief, do.

Lastly, I argue that appeals to the popular interest in paranormal phenomena, and portrayals of paranormal experience as being both common and neglected, also functioned as a strategy of traditional epistemic capital. Medium Miranda's assessment of mediumistic and paranormal phenomena as simultaneously stigmatized and attractive to people from all walks of life and ufologist Allan's appeal to the "thousands of people" who have reported UFO sightings to the organization serve as examples of this tendency. These participants appealed to the popular fascination with and common occurrence of experiences related to the paranormal as a compelling reason to take it seriously.

To summarize, the first type of strategies of traditional epistemic capital concerns the establishment of social regulations of practice by a "people like us do things like this" ethos. The two other types of strategies of traditional epistemic capital involve referring to a community of experiencers, the first by reference to credible witnesses, the second by reference to a common interest in the paranormal.

7.2.1.3. Strategies of experiential epistemic capital

One could argue that *all* references to paranormal experience, be they personal experiences or the experiences of others, qualify as experiential strategies. However, in this analysis I reserve the identification of strategies of experiential epistemic capital for those that highlight the importance of experience to knowledge-making.

First, many of my own field observations were steeped in experiential aspects of practice and are possible to interpret as indicative of strategies of experiential epistemic capital. During my time spent with the mediums-in-training, I was taught to decipher inner and outer sensations as expressions of the spiritual realm. Similar approaches were evident among the ghost hunters. While I was rarely instructed to actively "sense" ghostly phenomena, the other ghost hunters were immersed in a world of paranormal experience with distinctly emotional, embodied and material aspects. In both of these settings, various sensory input became part of the attainment of paranormal experience and, accordingly, knowledge. Sensory input included states of calm, unease and fear, sensations of heat and cold, tingling sensations in the limbs, and intense bodily discomfort, such as sudden feelings of suffocation. All of these sensations can be placed within the category of strategies of experiential epistemic capital. In a fundamental sense, these experiences *were* the pathways to knowledge about another world.

Several participants explicitly attested to the importance of experience in relation to learning or gaining knowledge. As evidenced by the fifth chapter in particular, the mediums and ghost hunters were especially prone to embracing personal experience as a pathway to knowledge about the paranormal. The

ufologists were, by contrast, the group least prone to making these forms of statements. At the same time, the ufological organization was very concerned with experiences in the form of UFO reports, and accounts of Great Lake Monster sightings were the cryptozoological association's raison d'être. In these settings, however, personal experience was for the most part indirect in the form of paranormal phenomena claimed by other people.

Taken together, the empirical material contains abundant examples of events and statements that concern the attainment of knowledge through personal experience. These instances are indicative of the use of strategies of experiential epistemic capital.

7.2.1.4. Strategies of channeled epistemic capital

Strategies of channeled epistemic capital, or appeals to "claims of the direct transmission of information to an individual from a postulated, non-falsifiable[71] source" (Robertson 2014, 56), were especially salient within the mediumistic training program and, to a lesser extent, among ghost hunters. Cases identified as instances of strategies of channeled epistemic capital involve appeals to knowledge gained by supra- or other-than-human means, such as mediumistic communication and extrasensory perception. To some participants, namely mediums Miranda, Lars-Åke, Anna and Ernst as well as ufologist-and-medium Karin, strategies of channeled epistemic capital were central to their professional roles, as all of them were engaged professionally as mediums. The participants' stories about foretelling the future by premonitions or experiences of ESP (e.g., telepathy) can also be viewed as cases involving strategies of channeled epistemic capital. Although UFO observations and cryptid sightings refer to entities that are purportedly paranormal (i.e., hitherto unexplained), they do not qualify as examples of strategies of channeled epistemic capital as they do not necessarily involve the "direct transmission of information" from a non-falsifiable source. Indeed, ufologists considered UFO reports to be testimonies that should be assessed critically in order to explain away most claims as the misidentification of known phenomena.

During my time training as a medium, the activities involved supra- and other-than-human sources of knowledge by default. Accordingly, the mediumistic training program involved strategies of channeled epistemic capital. According to Miranda, mediumistic practice involves transcendent sources of

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[71] Some of the claims regarding paranormal phenomena that I encountered during my time in the field were arguably impossible to corroborate or falsify through procedures of institutional and academic science. However, the ufologists that I met were very interested in falsifying, or explaining away, UFO reports. Indeed, this is quintessential to the organization's work. Furthermore, since parapsychology is in part conducted at academic institutions and employs experimental research design in these settings, falsification is arguably implied. However, it should also be noted that even among paranormal practices placed at a greater distance to mainstream science (e.g., mediumistic practice and ghost hunts,) attempts were made to disprove paranormal truth-claims and find sources of error.

knowledge, while Ernst and Anna viewed prior knowledge as a hindrance rather than a resource in gleaning the knowledge that mediumistic communication could convey. The ritual ghost hunter Anders carried out to cleanse the haunted stall, something he claimed to have no prior knowledge of how to perform, can also be classified as an instance of the strategy of channeled epistemic capital. The source of inspiration, I take it, was either the spirit world itself or Anders' psychic abilities, both of which go beyond mundane experience.

It is hardly surprising that paranormal practices involved strategies of channeled epistemic capital, as all of these practices involve claims of "other than" everyday (Ammerman 2020, 17-18) realities to some extent. Yet while strategies of channeled epistemic capital were integral to mediumistic practice and ghost hunts, the ufological field investigations instead critically assessed or even "explained away" the claims of other people. The latter illustrates that non-ordinary realities were not accepted at face value throughout the paraculture.

7.2.1.5. Strategies of synthetic epistemic capital

Strategies of synthetic epistemic capital denote "structural-level analyses through piecing together many smaller pieces of information to reveal the 'bigger picture'" (Robertson 2014, 55). A mere combination of other forms of epistemic capital is not enough for something to qualify as a synthetic strategy: these must lead to a big reveal or some other form of a "highly suggestive narrative" (Robertson 2014, 55). Robertson (2014, 55) has argued that conspiracy theories are prime examples of synthetic strategies. While the endorsement of conspiracy theories was rare in the paraculture, I suggest syncretism, parapsychological research on consciousness and ufological field investigations to be instances of synthetic strategies.

Some interviewees drew parallels between their paranormal practice and religion. Participants who endorsed syncretism and esotericism and argued for a juxtaposition of separate and seemingly conflicting traditions scattered all across the globe and history into a perceived whole can be likened to strategies of synthetic epistemic capital. Medium Lars-Åke's "higher esoteric doctrine" presents one such example. Parapsychologists such as Svante argued that the expanded idea of human consciousness implied by parapsychology would have consequences for most aspects of culture and knowledge and lead to a profound "paradigm shift." Research on the relations between consciousness and extraordinary powers of the mind was described as a research frontier that could turn our current understanding of the world upside down. Such statements, I argue, qualify as strategies of synthetic epistemic capital as well, since it is implied that the paradigm shift will involve different aspects of culture and society, with consequences for all of them.

Ufologists Carl and Marcus advocated investigations of UFO phenomena that combine many different approaches, such as scientific methods, criminal

and forensic investigations and journalism. This approach entails piecing together disparate strands of evidence, thereby finding a cause (e.g., extraterrestrials) behind UFO phenomena. Since the intent of this approach is to reveal a bigger picture underlying UFO reports, it qualifies as a strategy of synthetic epistemic capital. At the same time, due to its proximity to criminal investigations and the emulation of scientific methods, and thereby, its partial reliance on conventional strategies of knowledge-making, I argue that it could be understood as a distinct subtype of synthetic strategy that can be contrasted with, for instance, conspiracism and astro-archeology. Provisionally, the suggested approach can be denoted as *investigatory synthetic epistemic capital*.

7.2.1.6. Strategies of epistemic capital: a summary

The analysis suggests a multitude of appeals to different forms of knowledge, here described as strategies of epistemic capital, but also that some featured more prominently than others in certain settings. Strategies of science-like epistemic capital were common for all paranormal prototypes, including those that may seem farthest away from scientific approaches at first sight. Even if some participants emphasized the limits of scientific methods, all acknowledged the authority of science to some extent. Furthermore, I have argued that strategies of traditional epistemic capital were implicitly present in several ways. Strategies of experiential epistemic capital were especially salient in mediumistic practice and at ghost hunts, where personal experience was considered to be one of the main pathways to reliable knowledge. Strategies of channeled epistemic capital were also prominent among mediums and ghost hunters. Strategies of synthetic epistemic capital, aimed at revealing a "bigger picture," were scattered across the milieus.

Out of the five main types of epistemic capital, Robertson (2014, 51) suggested that strategies of experiential, channeling and synthetic epistemic capital are counter-epistemic, as they are not widely acknowledged by epistemic authorities (e.g., scientists, academia, institutional religion). While it is true that the paranormal paraculture is concerned with unexplained and unrecognized phenomena and therefore has a counter-epistemic character, strategies of science-like epistemic capital were more common and prominent than the counter-epistemic strategies suggested by Robertson (ibid.). Most participants in paranormal paraculture(s) hence appeal to scientific methods and some (e.g., parapsychologists and ufologists) even go to great lengths to emulate scientific procedures within their own practices. In other words, science is an important source of legitimation that few would discard, even in distinctly counter-epistemic milieus.

This subchapter has illustrated that different forms of epistemic capital were varyingly salient in different settings. In order to illustrate this, Figure 14 shows how the paranormal milieus gravitate towards different forms of epistemic capital in the form of relative proportions. The proportions are based

on the coding of the transcribed interviews. For each setting, references to different forms of epistemic capital are calculated by comparing them to the total number of appeals to epistemic capital in the given setting. While the quantification of qualitative data runs the risk of confusing frequencies of topics and themes with their significance, the figure nevertheless sketches the broad pattern of the overall use of strategies of epistemic capital. As Figure 14 is intended to be a visual aid rather than a precise quantification, the exact percentages are left out.

Figure 14. Strategies of epistemic capital per paranormal prototype in proportion (by percent of total appeals within prototype).
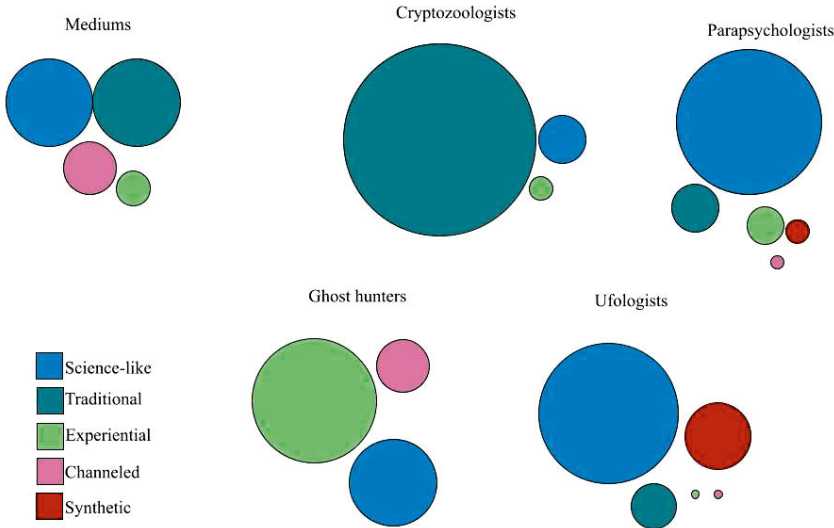
Figure 14 also summarizes my own recollections from the field as well, as it points to the dominant use of science-like strategies of epistemic capital throughout the settings. At the same time, it illustrates that this form of capital was clearly dominant among parapsychologists and ufologists, who also gravitated towards synthetic strategies. Appeals to traditional strategies of epistemic capital were especially predominant among the cryptozoologists. The ghost hunters gravitated towards appeals to experiential strategies of epistemic capital, while the mediums appealed to all main strategies. The latter can be problematized, since mediumistic practice builds on channeling messages from spirits and, accordingly, appeals to channeled strategies of epistemic capital. Yet this aspect was not emphasized in the interviews.

Although all of the paranormal prototypes are concerned with fringe topics largely rejected by the epistemic authorities of the modern West, they

acknowledge different pathways to knowledge. This suggests that in terms of epistemic capital, there are subtypes within the paraculture that point to where the main foci of authority are to be found. While the ufologists and parapsychologists mainly turned to appeals akin to science, local testimonies and lore were most central to the cryptozoologists. By contrast, the ghost hunters, albeit heavily influenced by paranormal reality TV and YouTube streamers, gravitated to the importance of personally trying out various techniques of investigation. The next subchapter concerns evaluations of other agents in terms of knowledge-making, which analyzes the results through the concept of boundary-work.

7.2.2. Boundary-work among participants in the paraculture

As outlined in the second chapter, the operationalization of boundary-work focuses on the use of alignment and out-defining strategies among participants. Applying boundary-work to the participants' statements directs attention to those the participants trust in knowledge-making procedures and, conversely, those they do not trust.

7.2.2.1. Strategies of alignment

Most examples I identify as strategies of alignment were aimed at *opening up* the boundaries between paranormal practice and science or scientific investigation, placing paranormal phenomena at least partially within the purview of the latter. It is worth noting that many examples of statements previously identified as strategies of science-like epistemic capital can also be interpreted as alignment. The other two domains that became the subject of alignment, albeit less frequently, were religion and the combination of investigatory techniques suggested by a couple of the ufologists.

For some participants, such as Svante, parapsychology is in no formal need of alignment with science as it already qualifies as science. Svante's framing of parapsychology nevertheless employs certain arguments that qualify as alignment, for example, his view of phenomena such as telepathy and healing as being scientifically corroborated. Although fellow parapsychologist Mats discussed the shortcomings of scientific knowledge, he nevertheless described science as "the best tool we have," advocating its use in the study of anomalous phenomena. As recurrently demonstrated, ufologists such as Carl and Allan advocated interdisciplinary scientific approaches towards UFO phenomena. These ufologists also viewed the ufological organization as aspiring to scientific standards. Ufologist Daniel suggested that scientific studies of UFO phenomena could contribute to an innovation of science, a view akin to parapsychologist Svante's anticipation of a paradigm shift. These participants therefore suggested that relationships between paranormal practice and science may prove mutually beneficial, which illustrates boundary-work as alignment in an apt way.

A few participants, such as mediums Lars-Åke and Johannes, sought to align paranormal practice with religion by pointing to commonalities and a shared core of truth underlying otherwise separate traditions. Alignment with religion was otherwise uncommon among participants: as I will demonstrate in the next subchapter, religion was more frequently out-defined.

The investigatory approach towards UFOs suggested by Carl and Marcus may also be regarded as a process of alignment. The UFO phenomenon's trickster nature warrants more than a scientific approach. Carl and Marcus drew upon the approaches of, for instance, criminal investigators and investigatory journalists as pertinent for ufology. Although these professional roles included scientific elements (e.g., forensics), they were not restricted to them. These ufologists acknowledged a coexistence of many idealized others to emulate and be inspired by.

To conclude, alignment with science and scientists was by far the most common form of alignment in the empirical data, while only a few sought alignments with religion in the form of syncretism and esotericism. The approach that a couple of ufologists endorsed in relation to UFOs, previously analyzed as an example of strategies of synthetic epistemic capital, involved alignment with professions such as criminal investigators and journalists. The main idealized others in terms of knowledge-making have thus been introduced, while the upcoming subchapter is devoted to agents that by contrast were out-defined from the purview of reliable knowledge.

7.2.2.1. Strategies of out-defining

Implied in the interviewees' views on legitimate ways of gaining knowledge about paranormal phenomena were the shadow images of how *not to* approach these subjects: in this respect, participants (per)formed and expressed their practices in relation to other, inferior alternatives. Inferior alternatives were represented as gullible or irrational, or *too* rational and closed-minded. This subchapter presents a set of ideal types that I identified in the materials, namely the religious; skeptics and debunkers; agents within media and popular culture; conspiracy theories and theorists; and charlatans and frauds. In terms of epistemic authority, these actors share being out-defined due to their lack of epistemic authority.

Views about religious people mainly emerged in statements concerning religion and belief, and the views expressed were often negative and pejorative. Some, such as medium Ernst, viewed religion as a malignant system of control, while parapsychologist Miriam associated religion and religiosity with dogmatism and close-mindedness. For ufologists such as Allan and Daniel, religion and new religious movements, including the New Age movement, obfuscated real UFO phenomena, making the latter more difficult to investigate. As put by Daniel, belief was viewed as directly "*harmful* to ufology."

The main tendency was thus to view religion as either being too rigid and dogmatic or actively distorting the reality of paranormal phenomena.

Turning to unideal others that were viewed as *too* rational, out-defining strategies were mainly directed at skeptics and debunkers. Parapsychologist Miriam's aversion to dogmatism was not reserved for the religious or believers but also included proponents of mainstream science and debunkers, who, from her point of view, refuse to even consider the reality of any paranormal phenomena. For parapsychologist Mats, these were in fact understood as "false skeptics" due to their dismissal of paranormal claims at face value. As we have seen previously, skeptics were also mentioned as constituting one of the main hostile environments in which the participants were hesitant to discuss their paranormal interests. For a few participants, such as parapsychologist Svante, skeptics and debunkers were akin to conspiracy theorists as they "refuse at any cost to accept [paranormal phenomena]."

Although many participants referred to media and popular culture as sources of inspiration and knowledge, several also distanced themselves from such sources. Ufologist Allan was generally dismissive of the potential to gain knowledge about paranormal phenomena through media and popular culture. To Allan, trendy topics such as UFOs create "noise" that makes his own practice more difficult. The participants' advocacy of source criticism overlaps with the out-defining of agents within media and popular culture, such as ufologist Marcus' dismissal of paranormal YouTubers as being dependent on economic incentives. Cryptozoologist Bror's resentment of media and popular culture specifically concerned the mascot Birger, the offspring of the Great Lake Monster. Although he willingly admitted that the mascot most likely promotes the region and benefits tourism, he was certain that frivolous representations harm the credibility of the Great Lake Monster as a cryptozoological phenomenon.

The participants' assessments of conspiracy theories and conspiracy theorists were generally unfavorable: they were described as incomprehensible, irrational and nonsensical. With the exception of the conspiracy theory surrounding the Roswell incident, which ufologist Carl found convincing, only ghost hunter Olivia expressed positive views on conspiracy theories in general, as she found them to be both exciting and plausible. Negative views of conspiracy theories and their theorists were abundant, as exemplified by dismissals such as medium Ernst's exclamation "knock it off!" and Lars-Åke's "calm down!" While participants such as ufologist Allan recurrently debated conspiracy theorists and their followers, and parapsychologist Jesper happily followed their online existences for the sake of amusement, the boundaries towards conspiracy theories in relation to knowledge-making about paranormal phenomena were for the most part firmly *shut*. Hence, conspiracy theories were out-defined from the purview of reliable knowledge-production.

Some interviewees also mentioned agents in the paraculture who had been suspected or convicted of fraud and charlatanry. Some were named, as was

the case with Sebastian's rejection of influencer Joakim Lundell and his entourage in the paranormal reality show *Ghost Hunt*, and Carl and Marcus' dismissal of ufologist Dr. Steven Greer. Among the unnamed was the medium with a ghost trumpet tied to strings mentioned by Ernst and Anna and the Spiritualist teacher who committed insurance fraud mentioned by Lars-Åke. All of these portrayals qualify as instances of out-defining boundary-work, as the agents in question were considered to represent unreliable or non-permissible approaches to knowledge-making about paranormal phenomena.

In summary, there was an abundance of shadow images of how not to attempt to gain knowledge about paranormal phenomena, which included the religious, skeptics, sources in media and popular culture, and conspiracy theorists.

7.3. Summary and concluding remarks

In this chapter, the results have been revisited with certain theoretical perspectives in mind. The quantitative data was analyzed with respect to the hypothesis occulture-as-plausibility, while occulture together with epistemic authority were used to interpret the qualitative data theoretically.

Occulture-as-plausibility was largely corroborated by the quantitative analysis, with the effect of occulture on the formation of paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences assessed as moderate to large. Among participants in the paranormal paraculture, occulture functioned as a source and resource in a multitude of ways, ranging from entertainment to inspiring and informing practice. The latter, together with participants' assessments of occulture as conducive to a greater acceptance of paranormal phenomena more generally, can also be viewed as indicative of occulture-as-plausibility among participants in the paraculture(s). The results provide support for the sub-thesis occulture-as-plausibility: occulture emerged as an independent variable positively predicting higher levels of paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences in the population at large, and the qualitative data implies occultural resources as integral to the formation of paranormal practice.

The point of departure for the analysis was the assumption that for those engaged in paranormal practices, epistemic authority in the form of an advantageous position within the paracultural field in relation to knowledge claims on paranormal phenomena is a desired outcome. The concepts epistemic capital and boundary-work were used in the analysis in order to recognize pathways to or criteria for knowledge as well as assessments of who is seen as being in possession of epistemic capital. All five main strategies of epistemic capital suggested by Robertson were identified in the materials, albeit to different extents within the paranormal prototypes, respectively. Science-like strategies were, however, especially common and prominent. A conclusion is thus that few are willing to part with the epistemic authority associated with

science, even among those engaged in counter-epistemic milieus. Furthermore, science and scientists came across as idealized others that participants sought alignment with. The religious and skeptics were instead frequently outdefined from the purview of legitimate knowledge about paranormal phenomena, as were conspiracy theorists and their advocates.

Taken together and conjoined with the metatheory of practice-in-dimensions, the findings analyzed in light of occulture and epistemic authority demonstrate that paranormal practices are distinctly *epistemic* practices. The practices' teleo-affective structures (Schatzki 2001, 56; Afdal 2022, 81) are, so to speak, *aimed* at making sense and knowledge out of claims of paranormal phenomena. In many cases, the teleo-affective structures entail certain responses, for example, feelings of awe and puzzlement, thrills and kicks, or the attunement to certain sensations as indicative of spirit activity, the latter especially prominent among mediums and ghost hunters. The use of technological instruments among ghost hunters, the pendulums and cards among mediums, and the use of flight radar among ufologists furthermore points to the distinctly material aspects of these practices. Occulture, mainly denoting representations of paranormal phenomena through media and popular culture, was furthermore one of the main resources available to those enacting paranormal practices, and the interactions with these resources entail embodied, emotional and material responses among the practitioners.

Chapter 8. Discussion, conclusions and impetus for future research

In this chapter, I broaden the reflections and insights gained from the previous three chapters. First, some reflections on the empirical results beyond their presentation and analyses through the theoretical framework are warranted. I start with a reassessment of the results pertaining to various demographic characteristics, most notably gender, a background variable that has prompted clear, statistically significant results. I also discuss which predictions may be attempted concerning the distribution of paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences based on the results from the survey *Paranormal Sweden* by placing them in relief against some prior studies. Second, I discuss and problematize the findings from both target populations from a methodological and heuristic perspective. These reflections may be conducive to assessing the reliability and validity of the study. Third, I assess the contribution of the theoretical framework, coupled with some reflections and suggestions prompted by the social theory implied by practice theory. Impetus and suggestions for future research are included throughout the chapter.

First, however, I turn to the research questions. The first research question - *To what extent are paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences found in contemporary Sweden, and how are they distributed in different strata of the population?* - was answered by the survey *Paranormal Sweden*. About 41 percent of adult Swedes affirmed at least one paranormal belief, while 66 percent self-reported paranormal activities and experiences of some kind. Additionally, 72 percent reported having actively searched for information about a paranormal topic. Women were overrepresented in their affirmation of the paranormal on nearly all measurements. Furthermore, occultural contact points were demonstrated to positively impact the levels on all paranormal dependent variables. A higher degree of trust regarding official versions of contested events negatively predicted the levels of paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences, albeit to a lesser extent than the aforementioned predictors.

The second research question - *How are paranormal practices enacted in the studied paraculture(s), and how are these practices intertwined with participants' paranormal beliefs and experiences?* - was answered by the qualitative results, especially in the fifth chapter.

The third research question - *How are attitudes to paranormal phenomena related to different social settings and relationships, both in the population at*

large and in the studied paraculture? – was answered on the basis of both quantitative and qualitative materials. In the quantitative results, the hypothesis occulture-as-plausibility was demonstrated as warranted, from a moderate to large extent. The influence of others (e.g., family and friends, media and popular culture) on paranormal practice in the paraculture, and the latter's implicit social order, was also explored as indicative of occulture. The analysis pointed to a multitude of uses of occultural resources, ranging from entertainment purposes to inspiration and instruction for paranormal practice.

Lastly, the fourth research question - *How are paranormal practices related to participants' understandings of reliable sources of knowledge?* - was answered by analyzing the qualitative findings by applying the joint theory to epistemic authority. The strategies of epistemic capital helped demonstrate which pathways to knowledge the participants trusted or appealed to, while boundary-work made clear which agents the participants viewed as trustworthy and untrustworthy, respectively. The findings indicate that, while participants and organizations appealed to the different forms of epistemic capital to various extents, all sought some legitimation of paranormal practice by referring to science, both in terms of science-like strategies of epistemic capital and alignment with science as an epistemic institution.

8.1. Revisiting the empirical results

8.1.1. Demographics of the paranormal

The previous section revealed that most background variables included in the survey *Paranormal Sweden* only affected the likelihood of respondents affirming paranormal beliefs, activities or experiences to a small extent or not at all. Variables such as income and education, proxies of socioeconomic class, hence proved poor indicators of affinities with the paranormal. The urban-rural variable, aimed at testing whether the cityscapes of urban centers or starry nights of the countryside predict paranormal beliefs, activities and experience, was largely inconsequential: residing outside of the city, however, proved favorable to reading up on topics like UFOs and Yetis (i.e., active searches for information about paranormal discovery), albeit mildly. The complex and unsystematic relationships between demographics and the paranormal found by Bader et al. (2011, 73) were hence largely corroborated. Conspiracism, measured as a decreasing level of trust regarding official versions of contested events, proved to covary with paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences, although mildly. There is hence some, albeit limited, support for the idea that embracing one form of rejected or stigmatized knowledge may be conducive to accepting others as well.

There were some statistically significant group differences between age and the paranormal dependent variables, with the exception of the total paranormalism scale.[72] Those in their 30s scored the highest on most of the paranormal dependent variables, with the exception of activities and practices related to Spiritualism. In all cases, however, age only accounted for a small proportion of the change within the paranormal variables. As suggested by Heelas and Woodhead (2005, 107-110), approaching a certain age may be conducive to engagement with alternative spirituality: entering middle age is especially important, as this may lead to a reconsideration of what is important in life and imply a change of priorities. In *Paranormal Sweden*, such an effect was largely absent. If there is an affinity between alternative spirituality and the paranormal, it does not leave a mark based on age. Furthermore, several studies (Greeley 1975; Orenstein 2002; Torgler 2007; Mencken et al. 2009; Bader et al. 2012; Baker & Bader 2014; Bergquist & Lundmark 2023) have noted negative relationships between paranormal beliefs and age, with the youngest age groups most prone to accept such beliefs. This pattern was not evident in *Paranormal Sweden*. As suggested in the fourth chapter, age effects may, however, also be attributed to generation. Such an effect has previously been suggested for the baby boomers' affinity with alternative spirituality (cf. Roof 1999). It is, however, impossible to draw any conclusive inferences pertaining to age vs. generation on the basis of *Paranormal Sweden*. Further studies are thus required. Here, I will simply suffice by posing the question: Do millennials share certain social and cultural experiences that affect them more at a critical juncture in or time of life than those who came before or will follow after? A general culture that to an unprecedented degree is filled with representations of the magical and the paranormal (e.g., Gierzynski with Eddy 2013, cf. Visuri 2018), or occulture, in other words (Partridge 2004, 2006), suggests such an interpretation.

Turning back to the scale measuring paranormalism, the regression model accounted for more than a quarter of the variance. A fairly large proportion of the variance is hence captured by the included independent variables, yet the majority of variance remains unaccounted for. One interpretation is that major effects deciding the likelihood of whether or not someone is a paranormal believer, practitioner or experiencer cannot be nailed down sociologically. There may be several reasons for this. For instance, an affinity with the paranormal may to a large extent be the subject of random variation. Psychological and cognitive predispositions, which were not included among the background variables, may also affect the levels of paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences. These suggested interpretations may seem averse to each other.

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[72] As age becomes a continuous variable in the regression model, the beta coefficient corresponding to each older group, it is not surprising since the highest scores are found in intermediate groups.

However, it may be the case that an affinity with the paranormal simultaneously is affected by sociological predictors, by random variations, *and* by psychological and cognitive factors. It is, however, impossible to ascertain the degree to which the latter two explanations hold on the basis of *Paranormal Sweden*. Here, I will suffice with suggesting future studies that employ sociological as well as psychological explanatory variables.

Turning to the qualitative data, it proves difficult to generalize about the demographics of the paranormal paraculture, as the sample was convenient and strategic rather than representative. Here, I will simply reiterate some of my observations on the demographic profile of the organizations during the time of study. In all groups besides the ghost hunters, I noted that the boards and lay members were most often middle-aged or older. With the exception of the mediumistic training program, I noted a male overrepresentation. This clearly deviates from the population-level gender patterns, in which women are clearly overrepresented as paranormal believers, practitioners and experiencers. It is to the topic of gender that I now turn.

8.1.2. The gendered paranormal

As previously stated, being female positively predicted affinity with the paranormal on most measurements. By contrast, my time spent in the field suggested the emergence of mixed gendered patterns in the paranormal paraculture. Medium Miranda intimated that there was a general female preponderance at her mediumistic training center. The equal distribution that characterized the particular program I attended was something she found unusual. Although one ghost-hunting team was all male, the larger Facebook-based group was mixed in terms of gender. The boards of the cryptozoological, ufological and parapsychological associations were largely male. At the ufological field investigators' course, there were also more male than female participants. In a sense, there seems to be a mismatch between the pull of gender within the general population and the paraculture, as the latter attracts more men.

How can the gender mismatch between the general population and the paraculture be explained? First, it may be attributed to the fact that most of the organizations under study resemble Bader et al.'s (2011) ideal type of paranormal discovery rather than paranormal enlightenment. Most groups aimed to investigate and document paranormal claims as something "out there." Paranormal discovery is not restricted to nuts-and-bolts approaches, but science-like vocabularies, technology and designs featured prominently among ghost hunters, parapsychologists and ufologists, while paranormal enlightenment, of which the mediums can be understood to be part, resembles alternative and holistic spirituality. Accordingly, this mismatch can partially be explained by

the resemblance of the organizations with the ideal types of paranormal discovery and enlightenment, respectively.

Other potential explanations for the female overrepresentation among paranormal believers, practitioners and experiencers within the population at large can be found within a neighboring research field, namely religion and spirituality. With few exceptions, women are more religious and spiritual than men according to most indicators, and sociological explanations usually point to "feminine qualities acquired through socialization and women's structural location in society" (Bruce & Trzebiatowska 2012, 115). Historically, a feminization of religion, that is, "women's numerical predominance in the sphere of religion and […] qualitative changes in religious ideas and practices" (e.g., Keinänen 2016, 62), has occurred in tandem with the privatization of religion (cf. Woodhead 2008; Aune, Sharma & Vincett 2016; Bruce & Trzebiatowska 2012, 147). Furthermore, some modes of religion and spirituality distinctly promote certain emotional programs within emotional regimes,[73] Riis and Woodhead (2010) have argued. These forms of religion and spirituality cater more to women as they promote feminine subjectivities oriented towards "love, care, chastity, humility, and self-sacrifice" (Riis & Woodhead 2010, 161). The gist of the arguments is that women are more drawn to religion and spirituality as they, at least for the last few centuries, cater more to feminine characteristics and gender roles.

Alternative and New Age spiritualities, which overlap with the paranormal, are prominent examples of female overrepresentation (e.g., Heelas & Woodhead 2005, 94-95), as is CAM (Heelas & Woodhead 2005, 99). Sointu and Woodhead (2008, 268) have argued that New Age spiritualities are especially compatible with modern femininity due to their "ability both to legitimate and subvert traditional practices and discourses of femininity." This argument is essentially the same as the one presented in the previous section on the feminization of religion. In other words, alternative spirituality caters to subjectivities that are associated with women's gender roles, for instance, highlighting the importance of providing care and nurturing (for oneself and others) and the importance of relationality.

In light of these perspectives on women, religion and spirituality, a warranted question is therefore: Is a feminization of the paranormal evident in this study as well? Turning back to the findings, the quantitative data indeed supports a corresponding feminization of the paranormal in the sense of numerical preponderance. The qualitative findings, however, do not suggest a development of feminization, due to the paranormal prototype's either equal gender distributions or male predominance. Returning to Riis and Woodhead's

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[73] The term is used to denote cultural formations that promote subject positions and emotions on a scale, where certain emotions (e.g., fear, competitiveness, envy, excitement, joy, fun) are especially prominent as "dominant notes," following a musical analogy (Riis & Woodhead, 48).

(2010) theorization of emotions, the emotional programs and regimes discernable in the paraculture were not distinctly feminized. For instance, the turning to emotions and sensory experience among ghost hunters was not interlinked with traditional femininity in an obvious way. Most affects and emotions vented, performed and addressed were rather stark, sometimes even violent. These included fears, anxiety and aggression from malevolent spirits through bodily sensations such as suffocation. Kicks and thrills were highlighted as important motivations for these participants.

At the same time, I would be hesitant to ascribe the gender distribution of the paraculture as evidence of a distinct *masculinization* of the paranormal. Rather, I am tempted to view the subjectivities implied by the display of emotions in the paraculture as ambiguous and inconclusive in terms of their connections to gender roles.

The mediumistic training program is the setting most akin to Bader et al.'s (2011) paranormal enlightenment, and it may be that this represents the only setting that is feminized to an extent equal to that of alternative, holistic spirituality. Self-care, care of others, attunement to emotions and sensations were all integral to the mediumistic practice that I was trained in, which seems to fit the niche laid out by Sointu and Woodhead (2008). The bifurcation of paranormal culture into discovery and enlightenment (Bader et al. 2011) may hence remain a well-founded explanation for the gender mismatch.

8.1.3. Plateau rather than growth?

Without access to time series analyses, it is difficult to ascertain whether paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences are characterized by growth. However, even without such data, it is interesting to compare available numbers, as these at least hint at change over time. I will therefore recapitulate Sjödin's (2001) and Morhed's (2000) studies of paranormal beliefs in Sweden and compare them with my own.

Morhed (2000, 119) inferred that the proportions affirming paranormal beliefs, as well as those self-reporting paranormal experiences, have only changed marginally since 1978. By comparing results of survey questions used between 1963 and 1997, Sjödin (2001), however, argued that paranormal beliefs were on the rise. Belief in the possibility of predicting the future had indeed increased, from 28 to 50 percent during the time interval. Items measuring belief in astrology also pointed to growth, from 10 to about 20 percent. Belief in ghosts spiked to 29 percent in the 1994 sample and dropped to 18 in the 1997 sample, entailing growth from the 10 and 14 percent of 1963 and 1978, respectively. Related belief in superstition and reincarnation had also increased in 1978 as well as in the sample of adolescents. It is, however, worth noting that the 1994 survey presented by Sjödin (2001, 41) is based on a sample of Swedish youth in upper-secondary school. Sjödin nevertheless inferred

a general increase in belief in parascientific statements, which has been suggested in regard to paranormal beliefs globally as well (e.g., Goode 2000, 1-2). Sjödin (2001, 40-42) asked if the numbers represent a genuine increase in paranormal belief in the population or rather an increased acceptance and exposure to them yet settled for the former interpretation.

Turning back to the survey *Paranormal Sweden*, I juxtapose my findings with those presented by both Morhed (2000) and Sjödin (2001) in Table 13. For the sake of brevity, I restrict myself to statements pertaining to paranormal beliefs. It is worth noting that the questionnaire items and questions encompassing them have varied, yet they are similar enough for us to assume at least an overlap. To connect back to my use of the term, the variables measured certain paranormal prototypes, although the differentiation between them can be problematized. For instance, questions on premonitions and other forms of predictions (e.g., dreams coming true) as well as telepathy and clairvoyance, are grouped together as predictions and ESP, as are various instances of communication with spirits of the dead in the form of ghosts, while questions on the effects of celestial bodies are approached as astrology. Nevertheless, it gives us an indication of longitudinal change or constancy.

Table 13. Paranormal beliefs from 1963 to 2021. Numbers from Sjödin, Morhed and *Paranormal Sweden*. Percentage (no decimals).

	1963 a	1978 a	1994 a	1997 a	1998 b	2021 c/PS
Predictions and ESP	28	39	48	50	10[74]/18[75]	14[76]/11[77]/11[78]
Astrology	10	15	21	20	19	10
Ghosts	10	14	29	18	17[79]/32[80]	17[81]/12[82]

a - included in Sjödin (2001)
b - included in Morhed (2000, 112-114)
c/PS – included in the survey *Paranormal Sweden*

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[74] This denotes proportions affirming clairvoyance or remote viewing.
[75] This denotes proportions affirming telepathy.
[76] This denotes proportions affirming predictions through dreams.
[77] This denotes proportions affirming psycho- or telekinesis.
[78] This denotes proportions affirming predictions through psychics.
[79] This denotes proportions affirming the possibility of hauntings.
[80] This denotes proportions affirming communication with spirits of the dead.
[81] This denotes proportions affirming the possibility of hauntings.
[82] This denotes proportions affirming communication with spirits of the dead.

The percentages separated by a slash cannot easily be added together, as the same respondents might be found among the affirmative proportions for all of these items. My suggested interpretation is thus, for instance, that predictions and ESP in *Paranormal Sweden* ranges between 11 and 14 percent rather than adding all of them together to 36 percent.

Table 13 suggests that the 1990s entailed a spike for all of the included items: for example, the proportions that believed in ESP in Sjödin's studies in 1994 and 1997 are unparalleled. These studies from the 1990s also yielded higher scores for belief in astrology and ghosts, but the differences compared to the other years is smaller. This is in line with Stise et al.'s (2023) description of a "mid-1990s paranormal media boom." In terms of affirmative proportions, *Paranormal Sweden* is more in line with results prior to the 90s: there is no discernable current boom in paranormal beliefs. Furthermore, although Morhed (2000) singled out the youngest age group as most positive to the paranormal, *Paranormal Sweden* instead points out 30-year-olds as the group scoring the highest on most indicators. This may imply that cohort or generation rather than age effects are at play, although more research is warranted for any inferences to be made. To sum up, if there has ever been a boom in paranormal belief among Swedes, it took place in the 1990s, after which the levels of paranormal belief have either plateaued or decreased.

8.2. Methodological reflections

Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods warrants some methodological reflections. In this subchapter, I address methodological insights and suggestions pertaining to the survey, the qualitative methods and their combination.

Throughout the study, I have come in contact with participants having varying degrees of involvement in the respective paranormal prototypes, ranging from the occasional hobby to paranormal practice as a lifestyle. Although participants were asked to assess their levels of engagement and how often they immerse themselves in paranormal topics, the centrality of the practices as part of the everyday lives of the participants remains partially tacit. After all, articulated thoughts can only express so much. I would therefore suggest more in-depth fieldwork in the paranormal paraculture, over longer periods of time, in order to get a better grasp on how central or peripheral paranormal practices are in the lives of the practitioners. The approach of lived religion (e.g., McGuire 2008; Ammerman 2007, 2020), which I have engaged with lightly as a taxonomy, could guide the researchers into new terrain and more thick descriptions of paranormal practice in the everyday lives of practitioners. That said, other forms of engagement in paranormal paraculture deserve the attention of future sociological research, such as the participants' engagement

online and in-depth explorations of how they grapple with occultural resources. Netnography (e.g., Costello et al. 2017), to mention but one approach, could prove fruitful.

This project has been dedicated to two different target populations, which required separate research methods. On the one hand, I wanted to map paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences in the general adult population of Sweden, and on the other I intended to study individuals and groups engaged with paranormal phenomena socially through paranormal paraculture. Taken together, the two main types of materials provide a snapshot of the status of the paranormal in Sweden today. The implicit question of whether or not the general population and the paraculture of enthusiasts engage with paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences *differently* is, however, mainly left unanswered. The qualitative study of paranormal practices brought forth the participants' interpretations and assessments of their respective beliefs, activities and experiences, but the equivalents in the general population remain unclear. Nevertheless, the accounts of how people engaged in paracultures engage with paranormal phenomena may guide future population-level studies as well, for instance, when exploring how occultural resources are brought into play. Even among the occulturally curious enthusiasts, occulture was far from accepted at face value, and future operationalizations of occulture and media consumption ought to take this into account. Further studies, for instance, interviews outside of the paraculture, are, however, necessary in order to study how people within the social and cultural mainstream view paranormal phenomena in order to discern if these views align with or deviate from the patterns detected in the paraculture. The initial plan of the current study was to include such a substudy, but due to the large size of the already collected materials, this task proved impossible.

By comparing the data collected through the survey with that of the fieldwork in the paraculture, I noticed another lacuna. Although I have noted some demographic characteristics of the respective organizations (e.g., middle-aged to older members, male predominance), these characteristics deserve to be mapped more systematically. More time spent in the field and detailed accounts of the participants' demographic characteristics could contribute to a clearer picture regarding whether or not the paranormal enthusiasts come from all walks of life, as medium Miranda suggested. Distributing a survey to members of the paraculture, recruited from a larger set of organizations, could be helpful for such a task. Besides sociological characterizations such as gender, age and socio-economic characteristics, the number of independent variables could be broadened to capture, for instance, occupational background and, widening the scope to other social and behavioral sciences, the psychological and cognitive profiles of participants in the paraculture. In other words, in order to gain a better and more accurate understanding of the status of paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences, qualitative studies on the viewpoints

of the general population are warranted, while the exploration of the paraculture may benefit from more consistent and systematic quantifications.

The operationalization of occulture-as-plausibility through occultural contact points deserves a comment. In the survey question, the respondents were prompted to affirm the number of occultural contact points *during the last six months*. Earlier contacts thus fall under the radar. As demonstrated in the fifth chapter, several participants in the paraculture(s) mentioned early childhood and adolescent encounters with representations of the paranormal as key for their current paranormal practices, and this tendency may hold for the general population as well. However, the likely outcome is that the results *underestimate rather than overestimate* the effect of occultural contact points on paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences. In reality, the statistical relationship may prove stronger if a more generous scale on occultural contact points is applied. For this reason, I suggest the construction of more refined measurements of occulture as a task for future research.

It is furthermore possible that social desirability among respondents may affect their affirmation and rejection of statements related to paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences as well as conspiracism. If theorizations such as rejected and stigmatized knowledge are not amiss, respondents may be prone to, in spite of being cloaked in anonymity, understate their affinity with the paranormal as well as tendencies to conspiracist ideation, as these may be viewed as controversial, undesirable or stigmatized. Social desirability may have affected the qualitative results too. As mentioned in the sixth chapter, I suspect that some of the participants downplayed their relationship to conspiracy theories, something that most of them dismissed emphatically. To engage in wordplay, conspiracy theories are the rejected among the rejected knowledges within the paraculture and hence become a phenomenon that few dare engage with – at least openly.

8.3. Theorizing paranormal culture

Next, I share insights and reflections related to: the application of the theoretical framework built on occulture, practice and epistemic authority; possible secondary functions of paranormal practice; a reassessment of the results in light of the overarching theoretical presuppositions introduced in the first chapter; and a problematization of the status of the paranormal as rejected or stigmatized knowledge.

8.3.1. The theoretical framework revisited: Occulture and epistemic paranormal practices

As I have argued throughout this dissertation, occulture-as-plausibility can be derived as a sub-thesis of occulture, according to which occulture enables its own growth by acting as a plausibility structure. The positive associations found between occultural contact points and an affirmation of paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences support this hypothesis. Although it is impossible to study socialization directly through the empirical data, it is nevertheless implied by occulture-as-plausibility, both through secondary socialization agents, such as sources in media and popular culture, and through primary socialization agents, such as family. In the interviews, the impact of primary agents was generally overshadowed by the influence of media and popular culture. This suggests that media and popular culture constitute one of the main arenas in which conversations about the paranormal take place. Studies that focus on the importance of socialization for the formation of paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences are therefore warranted.

Against the backdrop of a general social and cultural epistemic crisis (Harambam 2020; Robertson & Valaskivi 2022), epistemic authority as the focus of analysis has laid bare some of the main pathways to knowledge that participants in the paraculture acknowledge, including which agents and sources they recognize as credible. Epistemic authority, an advantageous position within the field of knowledge-making, has been assumed to be a desired goal for those who grapple with paranormal phenomena. Coupled with the meta-theoretical perspectives of practice theory, the dissertation has demonstrated that paranormal practices in themselves are distinctly *epistemic* practices. Claiming and evaluating knowledge is an integral part of the practices' teleo-affective structures (Schatzki 2001). Occultural resources, be it through conversations with peers or representations of the paranormal in media and popular culture, accordingly become building blocks for the quest of ascertaining epistemic authority.

Although some paranormal practices may be conducted on one's own, they are, as are all practices, distinctly social. Even highly individualized activities involve, to some extent, shared cognitive schemas, and the criteria for the participants' identification of paranormal phenomena rest upon such schemas. For instance, what may elsewhere be viewed as ordinary inner and outer sensations were identified as indicators of spiritual activity among paranormal practitioners. Learning to decipher sensations, affects and emotions as indicative of spiritual communication is part of the practical know-how (Reckwitz 2002) in settings such as mediumistic practice and ghost hunts.

As the qualitative findings have made clear, paranormal practices furthermore testify to attempts to produce knowledge *in different ways* than in epistemic institutions such as science and academia. Accordingly, Robertson (2014) classified the strategies of experiential, channeled and synthetic capital

as counter-epistemic. The analyses have, however, demonstrated that the paranormal organizations rely on the use of both conventional (e.g., science-like epistemic capital) and counter-epistemic pathways to knowledge. Different paranormal prototypes engaged with recognized and counter-epistemic norms in different ways. The ufologists and parapsychologists build much of their fields' credibility on an alignment with science, while the ghost hunters embrace a radically subjectivist and experiential emic epistemology. In all cases, however, the epistemic conventions associated with science are not sufficient: the ufologists' endorsement of strategies of an investigatory type of synthetic epistemic capital presents an example.

While being social, shared and partially routinized, paranormal practices make up fairly unregulated milieus. As I see it, the social practices and organizations I found in the paraculture are not consolidated and standardized to the extent that we can discern paranormal *institutions* (e.g., Glock and Stark 1965; Giddens 1984). According to practice theory approaches, the difference between practices and institutions is found in their level of consolidation. In the words of Giddens (1984, 24), institutions are the practices that "have the greatest time-space extension." This leads me to ask whether any of the paranormal practices I have encountered are moving towards a degree of uniformity and standardization that indicates some degree of institutionalization.

Results from previous research indicate developments in that direction. Bader et al. (2012) observed how Italian paranormal culture is becoming distinctly Americanized, implying that the development of paranormal culture in America may indicate what is to come in other parts of the developed world. While general Swedish and by extension Western culture hardly points to paranormal institutions taking form, there may be tendencies of paracultural or subcultural institutionalization. In his study of the Finnish fringe-knowledge scene, Ramstedt (2018, 59) applied the concept of scenic structure on the milieu, suggesting that the alternative religious scene can have institutions of their own as part of their internal scenic infrastructure. Examples of such scenic institutions include forms that sustain and reproduce practices, such as scenic media (e.g., magazines, podcasts, publishing houses), associations and events.

The concept of scenic institutions can be extended to the paranormal paraculture under study. Indeed, some of the organizations had their own magazines and social media platforms. However, some of the paranormal practices were in themselves characterized by some degree of institutionalization. For example, due to the influence of American, British and Swedish paranormal reality TV, forms and contents of ghost hunts display patterns of uniformity and standardization. Technical gadgets – EMF readers, REM pods, night vision cameras and spirit boxes – were used during all three of the ghost hunts I attended, and those familiar with Swedish and global ghost-hunting streams on social media platforms such as YouTube would recognize most of these gadgets. The assortment of ghost-hunting equipment is readily available for

purchase from Swedish ghost hunters such as LaxTon, and there is a plentitude of shops globally with similar products. In other words, ghost hunters across the globe appear to use similar equipment and may even turn to the same retailers to procure them. This points to an evident commercialization that shapes the form of ghost hunts and sets standards for prospective ghost hunters. Other features of the ghost hunts that were recognizable from paranormal reality TV include the use of mediums during investigations. Mediums seem as common an ingredient as the use of technology. Together, these features govern what prospective ghost hunters may expect from paranormal investigations and how they will carry out these investigations. In other words, the degree of the routinization of the practice of ghost hunting is relatively high. It remains to be seen if the current format of ghost hunts is sustainable across generations, another criterion for institutions (e.g., Glock and Stark 1965). If so, we may indeed be witnessing an emergent paranormal institution, albeit internal to the paraculture.

8.3.2. Functions of paranormal practice

Throughout the dissertation, I have argued that paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences and their equivalent paranormal practices are mainly concerned with issues of knowledge and authority. Indeed, the latter two have been the theoretical foci of the analyses of the empirical results. However, the findings point to several other functions that paranormal practices had for the participants.

First, interlinked with making knowledge, I have argued that paranormal practices are aimed at answering questions of ultimate meaning (Glock & Stark 1965) or ultimate concerns (Tillich 1956): in the foreground are issues of the nature of reality, our place within it, and the question of whether or not we are alone in universe. Chapter 5 included examples of how participants grappled with these questions of ultimate meaning. As Lois Lee (2015, 159) has argued, ultimate questions are not restricted to religion and spirituality but are found within non-religious settings as well, which warrants her use of the more general term existential culture(s). Following Lee (2015), I infer that paranormal practices can rightly be viewed as examples of existential culture and ought to be recognized as such.

Second, paranormal practices assist some practitioners in their coping (e.g., Lazarus 2005) with personal and social stress and hardships. Paranormal practice offers clues, or "keys" as medium Lars-Åke put it, to dilemmas and challenging life situations and alleviates suffering caused by physical or mental illness. By extension, paranormal practice mitigates the fear of death, which was mentioned by some of the mediums and ghost hunters.

Third, paranormal practice may act as a way of *having fun*. The participants' insistence on the importance of kicks and thrills, prompted by paranormal investigations and experiences, may be interpreted in a similar way. The consumption of occulture, such as paranormal reality TV, which several participants mentioned, also points to this function of pleasure and amusement. As demonstrated, the use of humor furthermore seemed integral to the sense of community upheld by the participants. Besides being a matter of having fun and acting as a social lubricant, humor can be viewed as a vehicle for venting tensions and doubts. As Michelle Hanks (2016a) has suggested based on her research among ghost hunters, humor can be utilized by paranormal investigators as a means to negotiate relations to rationality and mitigate conflicts between belief and skepticism.

8.3.3. Broadening the gaze: The paranormal in light of modernization, detraditionalization and epistemic contestation

The tectonic cultural shifts presented in the first chapter have led to a social landscape marked by the concomitants of modernity, which acts as the backdrop against which the paranormal paraculture can be placed in relief. Several paranormal prototypes from Spiritualism onwards hail from the nineteenth century, a period marked by processes such as industrialization and urbanization, during which religion and spirituality became increasingly privatized (Aune, Sharma & Vincett 2016; Bruce & Trzebiatowska 2012; Woodhead 2008). Some key effects of modernization upon society and culture have been captured by concepts such as individualization (e.g., Lassander), detraditionalization (e.g., Heelas 1996a) and, building upon the legacy of Taylor, the subjective turn (Heelas & Woodhead 2005). These theorizations all suggest a turn to subjective rather than collective life as the focus of authority in religion, spirituality and the culture at large. It has been suggested that some of the destabilizing and relativizing effects of an increasingly differentiated, diverse and fragmented society that have impacted religion have impacted science as well (e.g., Sjödin; cf. Berger 1967). The plurality of competing worldviews and the rapidity of scientific progress has, together with particular risks associated with modernization (e.g., Beck 1992), tarnished the halo of science. Sjödin (2001) explicitly placed his understanding of Swedes' engagement with parascience, most notably paranormal beliefs, against such a back-

drop. When the authority of and trust in the Church, the scientific establishment and educational institutions[83] wanes, new[84] approaches to knowledge-making emerge.

Detraditionalization and its correlates may furthermore be placed in relation to the epistemic contestation and epistemic crisis framework suggested by researchers such as Roberson and Valaskivi (2022) and the rise of post-truth culture (e.g., McIntyre 2018). Due to the proliferation of new communication technologies, digital media and hybrid media environments (cf. Chadwick 2017), it is now possible to question and contest epistemic institutions in unprecedented ways (Robertson & Valaskivi 2022, 2-3). Accordingly, truth claims about paranormal phenomena are readily available through media following their own respective logics.

Applied to the results of this study, paranormal belief, activities and experiences, and Swedish paranormal paraculture and occulture, should be understood as the children of detraditionalization. The emergence and suggested growth of the paranormal is, following this view, indicative of underlying social and cultural shifts in late modern society. This view could be problematized. While the authority of religion was nearly non-existent among the participants, few were willing to part with the epistemic appeal of science and scientific methods. Although science currently neglects paranormal phenomena, the participants suggested that this was bound to change. For several of the participants, paranormal practice could in fact contribute to a revolution of science in terms of an unprecedented paradigm shift. I hence infer that science remains in high regard, even among the occulturally curious practitioners of paranormal paraculture.

The preceding discussion entails a question: Is the growth of paranormal paraculture and popular occulture a sign of science retreating as an authority following detraditionalization, or is it rather a sign that science, or elements thereof, are advancing further onto new terrain? To some, especially interviewees recruited from the ufological and parapsychological settings, the use of scientific methods was highlighted as central to any knowledge-making ventures on paranormal phenomena. In light of this tendency, detraditionalization as entailing a decline in trust in science seems farfetched. Rather, these paranormal practitioners' embracing of science can be invoked as evidence of an ongoing dissemination of science into areas previously excluded from its

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[83] We may add other institutions as well, as implied by Harambam's (2020) diagnosis of epistemic crisis and Robertson and Valaskivi's (2022) epistemic contestation, such as media (e.g., journalism).

[84] As the parascience Sjödin had in mind had clear precursors within the currents encompassed by Western esotericism, one may of course argue against the novelty of these phenomena. Although they may not be new, however, the guise and forms are clearly marked by their times. Occultism has been suggested as a term for a particular brand of Western esotericism molded by modernization processes in the nineteenth century (e.g., Hanegraaff 1996).

purview. Accordingly, some aspects of scientific practice are being implemented outside of scientific institutions, admittedly in ways that representatives and gatekeepers of institutions such as academia would protest against.

States of disenchantment as a correlate of modernization or, conversely, enchantment and re-enchantment, are equally difficult to assess in light of the emergent paraculture and popular fascination with paranormal phenomena. As suggested by the title *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, Partridge (2004, 2006) rather straightforwardly suggests that occulture and, accordingly, paranormal culture signify an ongoing sacralization. This claim has been problematized. Historically and genealogically, Hess (1993) has argued, the transfer from psychical research to parapsychology can be viewed as a disenchantment of discourse on the paranormal and supernatural:

> parapsychology represented a skeptical version of psychical research, and it can be viewed as yet one more development in the history of skeptical revisions of religion. In other words, parapsychology stood to psychical research as psychical research to Spiritualism, Spiritualism to Universalism and Swedenborgianism, those religions to conventional Protestantism, and even Protestantism to Catholicism. (Hess 1993, 25)

In a similar vein, Asprem (2011, 634) has argued that parapsychology should be understood as a child of disenchantment, as it "bears testimony to the unparalleled authority of the scientific project around the turn of the 19th century." While it may be argued that parapsychology initially contributed to a general development of disenchantment, he suggested that it later served to enchant purportedly naturalistic phenomena, especially through its portrayals in media and popular culture. Parapsychology and related fields hence fit into an ambiguous niche that concurrently places science on a pedestal as an epistemic authority since it brings the paranormal into the purview of scientific knowledge-production. Arguably, these features characterize the contemporary Swedish paranormal paraculture as well.

It is difficult to discuss modernization, detraditionalization and (dis-/re-)enchantment without returning to secularization, not least as some researchers (e.g., Goode 2000, 177; Emmons & Sobal 1981) have argued that paranormal beliefs ought to be viewed as akin to religious ones or as functional substitutes for religion. As argued by Day (2013), the scope of religion and spirituality has occasionally been stretched to include the paranormal by concepts such as invisible and implicit religion. One would accordingly expect consequences for various positions within the secularization paradigm (Bruce 2002) if paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences are not only common but increasing. My assessment is, however, more hesitant. Alternative spirituality and occulture, including engagement with paranormal phenomena, have been interpreted in contradictory ways. While authors such as Partridge (2004, 2006)

and Heelas and Woodhead (2005) have viewed alternative spirituality as evidence of sacralization, even a spiritual revolution, others (e.g., Voas 2009; Bruce 2006) have interpreted it as a symptom of the decreasing social significance of religion. The fact that about 41 percent of adult Swedes, according to the results of this study, affirm at least one paranormal belief hence gives little insight into future developments. We may witness a fervent paranormal boom just around the corner or the further marginalization of paranormal beliefs and practices.

Although neither science nor religion have completely retired from having a say on fringe subjects, the picture painted by most paranormal practitioners is that of paranormal phenomena being largely left on the sidelines as rejected, ridiculed and stigmatized. Among the participants in the paraculture, there was, however, another clear trend discernable concerning the status of paranormal phenomena, namely that of an increasing public acceptance of them. It is to this status of the paranormal as caught in between the fringe and the mainstream that I lastly turn.

8.3.5. Rejected or mainstream? The status of the paranormal

There are many straightforward examples of the attraction and popularity of so-called rejected knowledge that call into question whether or not these types of knowledge are rejected at all. One man referred to, for instance, the fact that the Swedish TV viewers' award the Crystal had been awarded to the paranormal reality show *Ghost Hunt* twice (Kristallen n.d.) and to the spreading of conspiracy theories such as QAnon from Internet forums to figures of the establishment (Beauchamp 2022). Furthermore, mainstream culture is populated by representations of the paranormal to an unprecedented extent, resulting in a paranormal turn in culture (Hill 2011). The popular in popular occulture (Partridge 2004, 2006, 2013) furthermore underscores the widespread appeal of phenomena associated with alternative religion, spirituality and the paranormal. Does this imply that terms such as rejected or stigmatized knowledge are unwarranted or obsolete? While I have no decisive answer, I want to discuss the question briefly.

As paranormal practices to a great extent rely on what Robertson (2019 calls *counter-epistemic strategies*, they remain largely marginalized, at least in terms of their endorsement by proponents of the epistemic institutions of science and religion. Regardless of whether the knowledge claims are denoted as rejected or stigmatized, they share the status as rejected by the main epistemic institutions of contemporary society. In spite of the fact that 41 percent of the Swedish and 68 percent of the American adult populations (Bader et al. 2011, 75) embrace at least one paranormal belief, these phenomena remain largely dismissed by institutions such as academia and media powerhouses. There are, however, indications that some paranormal phenomena are entering

the domains of epistemic institutions. For instance, Sweden harbors a chair in parapsychology (Lund University Research Portal, n.d..), and the Harvard-based Galileo Project (Harvard University, n.d.) is engaged in the search for extraterrestrial life. At the time of writing, whistle-blower David Grusch's testimony has resulted in a UFO boom that has involved the top echelons of U.S. society, such as members of Congress. The examples point to the relational, comparative and contingent nature of phenomena designated as paranormal and rejected.

One of the main arguments in this subchapter can be condensed into a depiction of the social landscape from which contemporary paranormal practices arise, namely that of a late modern and detraditionalized society in which the authority of epistemic institutions is tarnished. Authority on issues of knowledge claims is accordingly contested to an unprecedented extent. In this study, paranormal practices, distinctly occultural and epistemic, illustrate these developments.

8.4. Summary

This dissertation set out from the aim to study the occurrence of paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences in the general population of Sweden as well as their placement within a paraculture of paranormal enthusiasts. A combination of methods was used in order to gather both quantitative and qualitative materials. The study was placed in relief against academic and popular claims that paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences are not only common but are on the rise as well. Points of departure inferred from previous research were that the paranormal indicates alternative views of knowledge, captured by concepts and theories such as the cultic milieu, rejected and stigmatized knowledge, and occulture. Issues of knowledge and authority remained both empirical and theoretical foci of the study.

A survey was distributed to a representative sample of Swedish adults (n=1101) through an Internet panel. Besides questionnaire items on paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences, the survey and data set contained variables such as demographic characteristics, religion, cultural values and conspiracy theory ideation. Exploratory techniques (principal components analysis, cluster analysis) were conducted as well as statistical tests such as MANOVA and regression analysis. Notable results include a general overrepresentation of women, those who claim more occultural contact points and those more inclined to conspiracy theory ideation among paranormal believers, practitioners and experiencers. Results pertaining to demographics (e.g., socioeconomic class, region and country of origin) were by contrast ambiguous and contained few statistically significant relationships. Although it was more common to reject rather than affirm paranormal beliefs, activities

and experiences, when added together, 41 percent of the Swedish population affirmed at least one belief, while 66 percent self-reported activities and experiences.

The paranormal paraculture was explored by studying groups representing a set of paranormal prototypes, namely mediumistic practice, cryptozoology, ghost hunts, ufology and parapsychology. Participant observation and semi-structured interviews were conducted in these settings. The qualitative materials were thematized into main types of practices, dimensions of practice and social relationships to other people as well as institutions viewed as conducive or inhibitive to paranormal practices.

The data was analyzed by applying a theoretical framework consisting of Christopher Partridge's (2004, 2006, 2013) theory of occulture and epistemic authority, the latter a combination of theorizations proposed by David G. Robertson (e.g., 2014) and Thomas S. Gieryn (e.g., 1999). Occulture-as-plausibility, a hypothesis derived from the theory of occulture that predicts that occulture will contribute to its own growth by acting as a plausibility structure, was partially corroborated by the statistical findings, as occultural contact points positively predicted the levels of paranormal beliefs, activities and experiences. In the paraculture, occultural resources were engaged in a multitude of ways, ranging from acting as entertainment to inspiring and informing practice. Employing the analytical concepts of epistemic capital suggested by Robertson (e.g., 2014), I demonstrated that appeals to all forms of strategies of epistemic capital (i.e., science-like, traditional, experiential, channeled and synthetic) were present, albeit to different extents in the different prototypes. While most participants and groups relied on counter-epistemic strategies, namely experiential, channeled and synthetic epistemic capital, these were combined with the conventional strategies of science-like and traditional epistemic capital. I argue that paranormal practices are distinctly occultural as well as epistemic and may be viewed as cases of how knowledge-making on contested and controversial phenomena may take form in light of tectonic social and cultural shifts such as modernization and detraditionalization.

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Appendix 1. The survey *Paranormal Sweden*

Hur ofta har du under det senaste halvåret stött på skildringar av eller berättelser om det övernaturliga, oförklarliga eller paranormala i följande sammanhang?

	Inte alls det senaste halvåret	Någon eller några gånger det senaste halvåret	En eller ett par gånger i månaden	En eller ett par gånger i veckan	Varje dag	*Inte relevant*
I min familj	○	○	○	○	○	○
Bland vänner	○	○	○	○	○	○
I skolan	○	○	○	○	○	○
På arbetet	○	○	○	○	○	○
I kyrkan eller annan religiös lokal	○	○	○	○	○	○
På TV	○	○	○	○	○	○
På internet	○	○	○	○	○	○
I tidningar (i pappers- och webbformat)	○	○	○	○	○	○
I böcker	○	○	○	○	○	○

Har du någonsin aktivt sökt information om något av följande?

Till exempel genom att ha läst en bok eller besökt en hemsida.

	Nej, aldrig	Ja, en eller ett par gånger	Ja, flera gånger	Ja, regelbundet
Alternativmedicin och komplementära behandlingar (t.ex. homeopati, reiki eller aromaterapi)	○	○	○	○
Medium, spådamer och siare	○	○	○	○
UFO-fenomen	○	○	○	○
Spöken och hemsökelser	○	○	○	○
Mystiska djur/varelser (t.ex. Bigfoot, Loch Ness-odjuret)	○	○	○	○
Astrologi	○	○	○	○
Profetior (t.ex. Nostradamus)	○	○	○	○
Parapsykologi eller psi (t.ex. telepati, clairvoyance)	○	○	○	○

Har du någonsin gjort eller varit med om något av följande?

	Nej, aldrig	Ja, en eller ett par gånger	Ja, flera gånger	Ja, regelbundet
Använt dig av alternativmedicin och komplementära behandlingar (t.ex. homeopati, reiki eller aromaterapi)	○	○	○	○
Kontaktat eller besökt ett medium, en astrolog, spådam eller siare	○	○	○	○
Känt närvaron av något slags ande	○	○	○	○
Fått kontakt med en avliden person	○	○	○	○
Haft en nära döden-upplevelse (t.ex. att ditt liv har passerat i revy)	○	○	○	○
Kommunicerat telepatiskt med någon	○	○	○	○

Har du någonsin gjort eller varit med om något av följande?

	Nej, aldrig	Ja, en eller ett par gånger	Ja, flera gånger	Ja, regelbundet
På ett övernaturligt eller oförklarligt sätt kunnat förutse framtiden	○	○	○	○
På ett övernaturligt eller oförklarligt sätt kunnat se någonting som händer på långt avstånd	○	○	○	○
Upplevt att jag har lämnat min egen kropp	○	○	○	○
Bevittnat ett oförklarligt flygande objekt (UFO)	○	○	○	○
Besökt eller levt på en plats där det spökar	○	○	○	○
Använt anden i glaset, ouijabräde eller andra metoder för att kontakta andar	○	○	○	○

Hur troliga tycker du att följande påståenden är?

	1 Inte alls troligt	2	3	4	5 Mycket troligt	Vet ej
Uråldriga och mer avancerade civilisationer än vår (t.ex. Atlantis) har funnits	○	○	○	○	○	○
Vissa alternativa och komplementära behandlingar är minst lika effektiva som konventionell medicin	○	○	○	○	○	○
Det är möjligt att påverka den fysiska världen enbart genom medvetandet	○	○	○	○	○	○
Vissa astrologer, medier, spådamer och siare kan förutse framtiden	○	○	○	○	○	○
Himlakroppars rörelser och positioner kan påverka mitt liv och min personlighet	○	○	○	○	○	○

Hur troliga tycker du att följande påståenden är?

	1 Inte alls troligt	2	3	4	5 Mycket troligt	*Vet ej*
Det är möjligt att kommunicera med de döda	○	○	○	○	○	○
Platser och personer kan hemsökas (av spöken, andar, energier eller motsvarande)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Drömmar kan avslöja framtiden eller dolda sanningar	○	○	○	○	○	○
Vissa UFO-fenomen (det vill säga hittills oförklarade fenomen på himlen eller i luftrummet) är förmodligen av utomjordiskt ursprung	○	○	○	○	○	○
Beryktade varelser som Bigfoot och Loch Nessodjuret kommer en dag att upptäckas av vetenskapen	○	○	○	○	○	○

En del politiska och sociala händelser är omdiskuterade (t.ex. terrorattackerna 11 september 2001, prinsessan Dianas död och mordet på John F. Kennedy eller Olof Palme).

Vissa personer har föreslagit att de officiella redogörelserna för dessa händelser kan vara ett försök att dölja sanningen för allmänheten. Denna officiella version skulle enligt dessa personer maskera det faktum att händelserna planeras i hemlighet av dolda och mäktiga individer och grupper.

Hur sann eller falsk bild av verkligheten anser du själv att officiella versioner eller redogörelser oftast ger?

1 En fullständigt falsk bild	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9 En fullständig sann bild
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Tillhör du någon kyrka eller religiöst samfund?

	Ja, och jag har varit på gudstjänst/möte de senaste 12 månaderna	Ja, men jag har inte varit på gudstjänst/möte de senaste 12 månaderna	Nej
Svenska kyrkan	○	○	○
En annan kristen kyrka/samfund	○	○	○
En muslimsk församling/förening	○	○	○
En religiös förening/samfund som varken är kristen eller muslimsk, ange vilken:	○	○	○

Vänligen uppskatta hur viktiga följande värden och värderingar är som vägledande principer i ditt liv.

	0 Går helt emot mina principer	1 Inte viktig	2	3	4 Viktig	5	6	7	8 Av yttersta vikt
Makt (socialt inflytande, auktoritet, välstånd/rikedom)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Prestation (framgång, förmåga, ambition, inflytande på personer och händelser)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Hedonism (tillfredsställelse av begär, njutning i livet, njutningslystnad)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Stimulans (djärvhet, ett varierande och utmanande liv, ett spännande liv)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Självständighet (kreativitet, frihet, nyfikenhet, välja sina egna målsättningar)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Vänligen uppskatta hur viktiga följande värden och värderingar är som vägledande principer i ditt liv.

	0 Går helt emot mina principer	1 Inte viktig	2	3	4 Viktig	5	6	7	8 Av yttersta vikt
Universalism (vidsynthet, skönhet i naturen och konst, social rättvisa, fred i världen, jämlikhet, visdom, enhet med naturen, värna om miljön)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Välvilja (hjälpsamhet, ärlighet, överseende, lojalitet, ansvarighet)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Tradition (respekt för tradition, ödmjukhet, acceptera sin lott i livet, hängivenhet, anspråkslöshet)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Följsamhet (lydnad, hedra föräldrar och de äldre, självdisciplin, artighet)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Trygghet (nationell säkerhet, familjens säkerhet, social ordning, renlighet, ömsesidighet)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Stort tack för din medverkan!

Har du några frågor om enkäten kan du mejla oss på info@medborgarpanelen.gu.se eller besöka vår hemsida https://www.gu.se/som-institutet/medborgarpanelen, där du hittar vanliga frågor och svar och övrig information om Medborgarpanelen.

Med vänlig hälsning,

Johan Martinsson, docent i statsvetenskap
Forskningsledare för Medborgarpanelen
Föreståndare för SOM-institutet
Göteborgs universitet

Appendix 2. Quantitative data

2.1. Principal Component Analysis

In this section, pattern and structure matrices together with screeplot are presented for the two PCA's conducted in Chapter 4.2.

Pattern and structure matrices

Table 14. Active searches for information about paranormal topics, pattern and structure matrices.

Item	Pattern coefficients		Structure coefficients		Communalities
Item	Discovery	Enlightenment	Discovery	Enlightenment	
UFO phenomena	0.883	-0.124	0.833	0.229	0.707
Cryptids	0.881	-0.111	0.836	0.241	0.710
Ghosts and hauntings	0.726	0.202	0.807	0.493	0.686
Prophecies	0.625	0.178	0.697	0.429	0.512
Alternative medicine	-0.143	0.819	0.184	0.762	0.598
Mediums, fortune tellers and seers	0.039	0.805	0.361	0.820	0.674
Astrology	0.177	0.652	0.438	0.723	0.549
Parapsychology and psi	0.441	0.456	0.623	0.632	0.563

Table 15. Paranormal activities and experiences, pattern and structure matrices.

Item	Pattern coefficients		Structure coefficients		Communalities
Item	Spiritualism	ESP	Spiritualism	ESP	
Visited a medium etc.	0.740	-0.08	0.713	0.177	0.514
Presence of spirit	0.68	0.226	0.758	0.461	0.620
Contact with spirits of the dead	0.649	0.158	0.703	0.383	0.517
Visited/lived in a haunted place	0.631	0.104	0.667	0.323	0.455
Alternative medicine	0.594	-0.027	0.585	0.179	0.343
Used Ouija-boards	0.566	-0.172	0.506	0.024	0.282
Telepathy	0.411	0.393	0.547	0.535	0.435
Seen a UFO	0.226	0.223	0.303	0.301	0.135
Near death-experience	-0.178	0.816	0.104	0.755	0.597
Out of body-experience	-0.074	0.727	0.178	0.701	0.497
Predict the future/premonition	0.269	0.577	0.469	0.670	0.513
Seeing from	0.241	0.557	0.434	0.640	0.461

afar/re- mote view- ing					

Figure 14. Scree plot, components and scales of the paranormal.
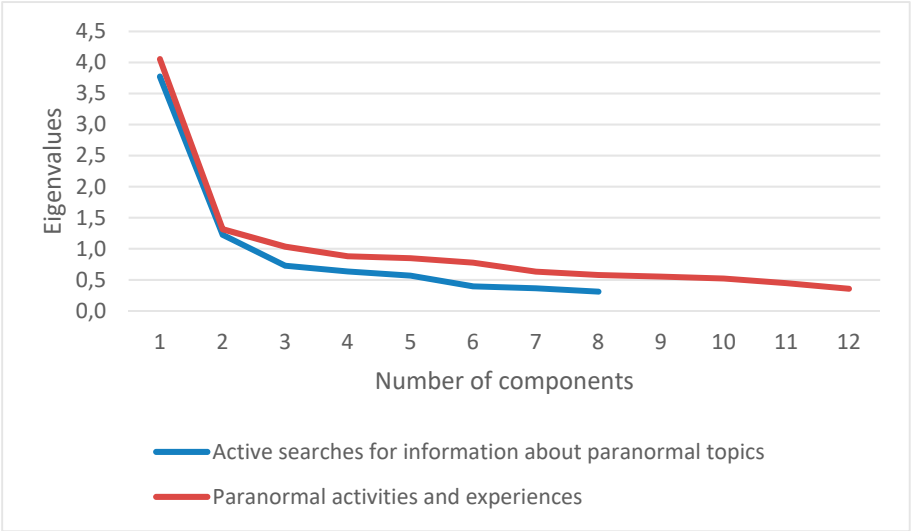
Appendix 3. Consent form

Information till forskningspersonerna

Vi vill fråga dig om du vill delta i ett forskningsprojekt. I det här dokumentet får du information om projektet och om vad det innebär att delta.

Vad är det för projekt och varför vill ni att jag ska delta?

Detta projekt utgör en sociologisk studie av paranormal tro, praktik och erfarenhet i det samtida Sverige. Det paranormala används ibland som synonym till det oförklarliga eller det övernaturliga, och kan beteckna många olika saker: från hemsökelser, andar och spöken till extraordinära medvetandetillstånd vidare till UFO-fenomen och för vetenskapen okända varelser. Syftet med studien är att få kunskap om detta slags trosföreställningar, praktiker och erfarenheters både inom den allmänna befolkningen och grupper som aktivt intresserar sig för detta slags frågor.

Denna del av studien inriktar sig på grupper som aktivt intresserar sig för olika paranormala företeelser. Vi vill därför gärna intervjua dig.

Forskningshuvudman för projektet är Teologiska institutionen vid Uppsala universitet. Med forskningshuvudman menas den organisation som är ansvarig för studien. Huvudansvarig forskare är Maria Klingenberg. Den som intervjuar dig heter Cristoffer Tidelius. Kontaktuppgifter till oss båda finner du längst ner på sida 3.

Hur går studien till?

Vi ber dig delta i en intervju som förväntas ta mellan 45 och 60 minuter. Intervjun kommer uppehålla sig vid frågor som på olika sätt behandlar paranormal tro, praktik och erfarenhet, men även frågor som handlar om sociala relationer, syn på kunskap, tro och vetande.

Möjliga följder och risker med att delta i studien

Intervjun förväntas inte medföra några påtagliga risker. Däremot kan något eller några av de samtalsämnen som behandlas upplevas som privata eller känsliga.

Det finns möjlighet att göra pauser under intervjun. Du kan också välja att avbryta intervjun när du vill. I så fall raderar vi det material som berör dig.

Om intervjun skulle väcka känslor eller reaktioner som du upplever som svåra att hantera rekommenderar vi dig att avbryta intervjun. Vid behov av professionellt samtalsstöd rekommenderar vi dig att kontakta 1177 som kan vägleda dig vidare.

Vad händer med mina uppgifter?

I samband med studiens genomförande kommer vi att samla in information om dig. Dina svar och dina resultat kommer att behandlas så att inte obehöriga kan ta del av dem. Informationen räknas som personuppgifter enligt EU:s dataskyddsförordning 2016/679 (GDPR). Den forskare som genomför studien kommer att ta bort namn och ersätta dem av koder och/eller fingerade namn i fältanteckningar, transkriptioner av intervjuer och övriga material. Fysiska material förvaras i ett låst skåp på Teologiska institutionen, Uppsala universitet och sparas i 10 år enligt Uppsala universitets arkivbestämmelser, därefter för-

störs handlingarna. Digitalt material sparas på servrar skyddade av lösenord och kryptering. Ansvarig för dina personuppgifter är Teologiska institutionen vid Uppsala universitet.

Enligt EU:s dataskyddsförordning har du rätt att kostnadsfritt få ta del av de uppgifter om dig som hanteras i studien, och vid behov få eventuella fel rättade. Du kan också begära att uppgifter om dig raderas samt att behandlingen av dina personuppgifter begränsas.

Dataskyddsombud nås på dataskyddsombud@uu.se. Om du är missnöjd med hur dina personuppgifter behandlas har du rätt att ge in klagomål till Datainspektionen, som är tillsynsmyndighet.

Hur får jag information om resultatet av studien?

Resultat av studien kommer att presenteras i genomförande forskares doktorsavhandling, som förväntas vara färdig hösten 2022. Resultat från studien kan också komma att publiceras i akademiska tidskrifter, på vetenskapliga konferenser eller motsvarande forum.

Om du vill ta del av intervjun med dig (i antecknad, inspelad eller transkriberad form) kan du kontakta huvudansvarig eller genomförande forskare.

Försäkring och ersättning

Inget särskilt försäkringsskydd tillkommer. Deltagande sker på din fritid. Du kan omfattas av privata försäkringsskydd. För medverkan i studien utgår ingen ekonomisk ersättning.

Deltagandet är frivilligt

Ditt deltagande är frivilligt och du kan när som helst välja att avbryta deltagandet. Om du väljer att inte delta eller vill avbryta ditt deltagande behöver du inte uppge varför.

Ansvariga för studien

Huvudansvarig forskare för studien är Maria Klingenberg, lektor i religionsbeteendevetenskap med didaktisk inriktning på Teologiska institutionen, Uppsala universitet. Maria nås på e-post maria.klingenberg@teol.uu.se och telefon 018-471 21 95. Genomförande forskare är Cristoffer Tidelius, doktorand i religionssociologi vid Teologiska institutionen, Uppsala universitet. Cristoffer nås på e-post cristoffer.tidelius@teol.uu.se och telefon 073-593 90 42. Vi ber dig avstå från att inkludera personliga eller känsliga uppgifter om du kontaktar oss över e-post.

Samtycke till att delta i studien

Jag har fått muntlig och skriftlig informationen om studien och har haft möjlighet att ställa frågor. Jag får behålla den skriftliga informationen.

☐ Jag samtycker till att delta i studien Paranormal Sweden

☐ Jag samtycker till att uppgifter om mig behandlas på det sätt som beskrivs i forskningspersonsinformationen.

Plats och datum	Underskrift

Appendix 4. Interview guide

Syftet med intervjun och projektet i stort presenteras inledningsvis i enlighet med bilaga 05 A. Vissa bakgrundsvariabler antecknas (såsom ålder, utbildningsnivå, sysselsättning etc.). Därefter följer en semi-strukturerad intervju enligt nedanstående disposition:

1. *Det oförklarliga*. Har du varit med om något oförklarligt?
    a. Uppföljande till 1, om jakande: Skulle du kunna berätta om en sån upplevelse?
    b. Uppföljande till 1 och 1a: Vem kan du tala med om såna upplevelser?
    c. Uppföljande till 1, 1a och b: Vem kan du *inte* tala med om såna upplevelser?
    d. Har någon du känner varit med om någonting oförklarligt (och berättat det för dig)?
    e. Uppföljande till 1 d: skulle du kunna berätta något om den?
2. *Den aktuella paranormala subkulturen*. Du är engagerad inom organisation Y som intresserar sig för företeelse/aktivitet X [aktuell paranormal tro, praktik eller upplevelse enligt urval].
    a. Kan du berätta om hur du först kom i kontakt med X?
    b. Har ditt förhållande till X förändrats över tid?
    c. Vad med X är det som främst intresserar dig?
    d. Vilken betydelse skulle du säga att X har i ditt liv?
    e. Har några andra personer eller källor – exempelvis anhöriga och vänner, böcker eller hemsidor – påverkat din relation till företeelse X?
    f. Hur tycker du att din omgivning och samhället generellt bemöter X?
        i. Uppföljande till 2g: tycker du att detta har fått några konsekvenser för dig?
3. *Kunskap, vetenskap och tro.* Vinjett: En sak som är typisk för oss människor är att vi tar till oss kunskap på olika sätt, det vill säga vi lär oss på olika sätt. Vissa föredrar att lära sig hur saker hänger ihop

genom att testa sig fram, andra lär sig genom att iaktta och gå bredvid när andra gör saker, eller genom att lyssna på dem som de litar på, andra föredrar att läsa sig till nya saker.

   a. Hur funkar det här för din egen del, vad föredrar du?
   b. Finns det i din mening vissa typer av kunskap som är mer tillförlitliga än andra?
   c. Har du några tankar om hur man bäst får kunskap om företeelse/aktivitet X?
   d. Ibland talas det om att det finns olika domäner eller kategorier av kunskap. Hur skulle du placera aktivitet/företeelse X till:
      i. Vetenskap
      ii. Tro
      iii. Religion

4. *Övriga paranormala företeelser*. Bortsett från X, är du intresserad av någon av företeelserna/aktiviteterna 1, 2, 3 (avser andra paranormala trosföreställningar, praktiker och upplevelser) såsom UFO-fenomen, kryptozoologi, spöken och hemsökelser, medialitet, parapsykologi)? <u>Om jakande</u> kan ett selektivt urval av frågorna 2 a-g. ställas, i mån av tid och utrymme.

5. *Konspirationsteorier*. Kommer du i kontakt med konspirationsteorier? Om så, skulle du kunna ge:
   a. Några exempel på vad de handlar om
   b. När du kommer i kontakt med dem
   c. Vad du tycker/tror om dem?

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