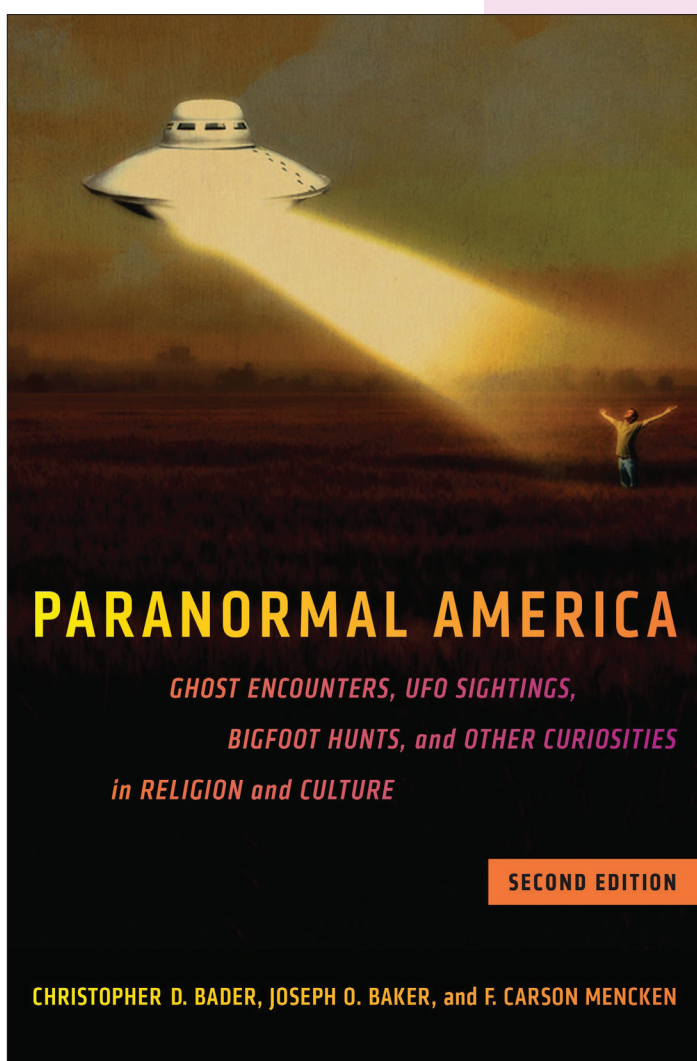


PARANORMAL AMERICA

INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE



The untold account of the countless Americans who believe in, or personally experience, paranormal phenomena such as ghosts, Bigfoot, UFOs and psychics

Given the popularity of television shows such as *Finding Bigfoot*, *Ghost Hunters*, *Supernatural*, and *American Horror Story*, there seems to be an insatiable public hunger for mystical happenings. But who believes in the paranormal? Based on extensive research and their own unique personal experiences, Christopher Bader, Joseph Baker and Carson Mencken reveal that a significant number of Americans hold these beliefs, and that for better or worse, we undoubtedly live in a paranormal America.

Readers will join the authors as they participate in psychic and palm readings, and have their auras photographed, join a Bigfoot hunt, follow a group of celebrity ghost hunters as they investigate claims of a haunted classroom, and visit a support group for alien abductees.

The second edition includes new and updated research based on findings from the Baylor Religion survey regarding America's relationship with the paranormal. Drawing on these diverse and compelling sources of data, the book offers an engaging account of the social, personal, and statistical stories of American paranormal beliefs and experiences. It examines topics such as the popularity of paranormal beliefs in the United States, the ways in which these beliefs relate to each other, whether paranormal beliefs will give rise to a new religion, and how believers in the paranormal differ from "average" Americans.

Brimming with fascinating anecdotes and provocative new findings, *Paranormal America* offers an entertaining yet authoritative examination of a growing segment of American religious culture.

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CHAPTER ONE: THE INTERRUPTED LECTURE

SUMMARY

This chapter provides an introduction to the book, beginning with the lead author's involvement in a ghost hunt undertaken to investigate a haunting experience reported by a professor and college students during a class. Moving from the specific story to general trends, the chapter discusses the ubiquity of paranormal beliefs and experiences in the United States, noting that social scientists often have little understanding of the people who claim such beliefs and experiences. The authors outline a cultural and sociological perspective to paranormalism, which involves understanding paranormal claims and the people who make them without attempting to judge the objective "truth" of said claims. The chapter concludes with an overview and outline of each chapter of the book.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How has the prevalence of paranormal-themed media changed over time? Why has this change occurred?
2. How do the authors describe their perspective on studying the paranormal? How does it differ from other perspectives on the paranormal common in both popular culture and academia?

CHAPTER TWO: THE TRUTH IS WITHIN

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SUMMARY

People use an astounding array of terms to refer to beliefs about UFOs, astrology, psychic phenomena, ghosts, and the like. Chapter 2 tackles the difficult issue of defining the paranormal and distinguishing it from both science and religion. The chapter further outlines two distinct types of beliefs that fall under the broader rubric of the paranormal. First, there are beliefs and experiences focused on personal enlightenment: a sense of internal, spiritual exploration and growth. Second, others become involved in the paranormal as a form of discovery; they hope to find compelling evidence for the existence of a phenomenon not currently recognized by institutional science, such as ghosts, Bigfoot, or UFOs. This chapter provides a qualitative description of a psychic fair, where people can sample a wide array of paranormal “products” in one easy shopping experience. The chapter also presents data from recent national surveys documenting levels of belief in astrology and communication with the dead among the American public.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do the three ghost stories from Auxerre, France, New York City, and Seattle, Washington illustrate? In particular, how is the story of John Edmonds informative about how the paranormal is perceived as unconventional?
2. Who was Charles Fort? Why is he important today?
3. How do the authors define the “paranormal”? How is their definition different from ones that have been used in previous studies of the paranormal?
4. What do the authors theorize about the relationship between conventional religion and the paranormal?
5. How are “psychic fairs” like a “spiritual cafeteria”? What does this tell us about the way people may combine paranormal beliefs and interests?
6. What percentage of Americans believe in psychics, astrology, communicating with the dead, and prophetic dreams?
7. What are some differences between “enlightenment” and “discovery” types of paranormalism? How is this distinction related to the new definition of the paranormal proposed by the authors?

CHAPTER THREE: THE TRUTH IS OUT THERE

SUMMARY

Chapter 3 critically addresses common stereotypes about people who hold paranormal beliefs or have paranormal experiences. Unfortunately, information about the people who believe in or claim to have experienced the paranormal rarely goes beyond the anecdotal and sensational. To aid in understanding the paranormal, the chapter explores an example in depth: beliefs about UFOs and how they have evolved over time into experiences of and folklore about alien abduction. The chapter also details some of the patterns of paranormalism by examining how such beliefs and experiences vary across social and demographic characteristics such as gender, race, education, age, and marital status. These data partially support a marginalization thesis: that people occupying relatively disempowered social statuses are more likely to believe in the paranormal. In no cases are American society's most privileged demographic of highly educated, high-income white males the predominant believers in a paranormal phenomenon. But it is also clear that the marginalization hypothesis is not a complete explanation for paranormal beliefs, as illustrated through ethnographic field work and survey data about a support group for people believe they have been abducted by aliens. The chapter concludes with a detailed demographic portraits of typical paranormal experiencers.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How have stories about UFO encounters changed over time? What are some of the general themes found in narratives of UFO abduction?
2. What does the "marginalization hypothesis" propose regarding patterns of paranormal beliefs and experiences? In what ways do statistical analyses support the hypothesis? What are some examples where the marginalization hypothesis does not adequately explain paranormalism?
3. Who was most likely to be a member of the UFO Contact Center International? What does this example tell us about participation in activities that verge on being "new religious movements?"
4. How do the authors respond to the question of whether paranormal believers are "crazy?"

CHAPTER FOUR: THE THRILL OF THE HAUNT

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SUMMARY

Chapter 4 focuses on ghost beliefs and experiences, providing comparative ethnographic accounts of different ghost hunting groups in the U.S., as well as analyses of patterns of ghost beliefs, experiences, and media consumption among the public. We return to the haunted classroom with a team of celebrity ghost hunters who attempt to investigate the occurrence, pay an overnight visit to a haunted coffee shop run by a self-identified warlock, and learn about using dowsing as a means of spirit communication. The chapter then discusses cultural themes identified through these comparative examples, such as the use of technology, magical rites, folklore about death, and personal narratives of hauntings. The chapter concludes by showing that ghost beliefs and experiences are much more common among younger generations of Americans.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the similarities and differences between the ghost hunting groups described from California, Texas, and Tennessee?
2. What do the authors identify as primary themes shared across different ghost hunting groups?
3. How is age related to ghost beliefs, experiences, and media consumption among the American public? What does this indicate about changing patterns of religion and spirituality across recent generations of Americans?

CHAPTER FIVE: ROUND TRIP TO HELL IN A FLYING SAUCER?

SUMMARY

This chapter explores the connection between supernatural beliefs available in organized religion and those of the paranormal, beginning with the stories of George Adamski, a UFO contactee and would-be religious prophet, and Laura Cyr, a UFO contactee who combines multiple religious traditions and the paranormal into an eclectic syncretism. Paranormalism generally lacks the stability and organization that characterize successful religious groups, operating on the periphery of American religion, and spreading through conferences, the media, and the Internet rather than through sermons and encyclicals. Using surveys and building upon previous research, we determine which religious traditions and groups in the United States are the most and the least receptive to paranormal ideas. A careful, nuanced approach is necessary to understand the relationship between conventional religion and paranormalism. There can be different connections between these spheres depending on the type of beliefs (both religious and paranormal) in question. Statistical analyses identify how different aspects of religiosity relate to paranormalism, showing that, in general, the relationship can be best described as curvilinear.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Who was George Adamski? What kind of philosophy did he espouse?
2. How does Laura view her contact with aliens? What does she report doing with the aliens? How would you characterize Laura's religious views?
3. How are religious beliefs like economic investments? Under what circumstances will people "diversify their portfolios" of religious and paranormal beliefs?
4. How do some fundamentalist religious groups understand the paranormal?
5. In general, what is the best way to describe the relationship between conventional religiosity and paranormalism? What causes this relationship and how does it inform the revised definition of the paranormal from Chapter 2?

CHAPTER SIX: PARANORMAL SUBCULTURES

CHAPTER SIX PARANORMAL SUBCULTURES

SUMMARY

This chapter discusses the people who are most deeply interested in the paranormal. For most, the paranormal is a relatively small part of life. For others, a paranormal topic (if not the paranormal in general) becomes an intense interest, a hobby, and for some, even an obsession. The chapter explores the world of people who devote themselves to paranormal “quests” by examining survey data on paranormal research and researchers. These data are contextualized by ethnographic descriptions of two different paranormal conferences in Washington State and Texas, as well as the Sasquatch hunting practices of the North American Wood Ape Conservancy.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the five dimensions of religion outlined by Glock and Stark’s typology of religiosity? How is this model applicable to studying the paranormal?
2. What are some of the most famous stories related to Bigfoot lore? How has Sasquatch been represented in popular culture?
3. What are some of the patterns of who is more likely to become invested in researching the paranormal?
4. Why do some paranormal researchers use scientific-sounding argot?
5. How does the North American Wood Ape Conservancy approach Bigfoot hunting? How does the group frame their pursuit and practices?

CHAPTER SEVEN: PARANORMAL PEOPLE

SUMMARY

This chapter discusses the diversity of styles in which paranormal beliefs are maintained. Some paranormal enthusiasts are passionate about one subject, but express great skepticism about others. For example, many Bigfoot enthusiasts who are convinced of the reality of an undiscovered primate lurking in North American forests have no patience for claims of UFOs or ghost stories. Other people are true paranormalists, believing in and sometimes experiencing a multitude of different paranormal phenomena—such as a Bigfoot witness who believes she lives in a haunted house and has had a UFO abduction. Applying Hirschi’s social control theory, the chapter examines how holding a diverse set of paranormal beliefs is strongly related to stakes in conformity. People who live very conventional lives outside of their paranormal interests will tend to confine those interests to fewer phenomena. Those who live generally unconventional lives are comparatively free to express their paranormal interests more widely.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What percentage of Americans hold at least one paranormal belief? What does this tell us about levels of belief in the paranormal relative to the perceived cultural deviance of paranormalism?
2. Describe Laura’s and David’s different styles of paranormal belief. What are some of the differences in how paranormal particularists and generalists approach paranormalism?
3. What are “stakes in conformity?” What is the relationship between stakes in conformity and paranormalism? How are the different elements of the bond to the social order related to paranormalism?

CHAPTER EIGHT: DARKNESS AND LIGHT

CHAPTER EIGHT DARKNESS AND LIGHT

SUMMARY

This chapter explores beliefs and experiences that are closely connected to Christianity, yet not fully accepted in many Christian settings, such as those involving Satan and demons. Sometimes beliefs about evil coalesce into widespread moral panics, as occurred in the 1980s when the FBI began to receive reports from therapists across the country that their patients had “recovered” memories of hideous ritual abuse perpetrated by secretive, underground cults of Satanists. We profile and interview Paul Ingram, who was accused and criminally convicted of being the ringleader of a secretive, underground Satanic cult. Conversely to claims of supernatural evil, who claims to speak in tongues, experience miraculous healings, and have been saved from harm by guardian angels? And how does this relate to belief in religious evil? While guardian angel experiences are flexible and occurs across social categories, other intensive religious experiences are much more common among individuals with lower levels of income, who are more likely to believe in intensive forms of both darkness and light offered by religion. Further, sophisticated data analyses show that claiming intense religious experiences and believing in the power of supernatural evil are related to higher levels of paranormal experiences—particularly for those without strong connections to an organized religious group—providing an important piece of the puzzle linking religion and the paranormal. Demonology and angelology represent the cultural borderland between religion and the paranormal.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How are views of religious evil informative for understanding broader moral worldviews?
2. What are the sociodemographic and religious patterns of belief in supernatural religious evil?
3. What is a moral panic? How is the concept applicable to the Salem Witch Trials and the “Satanic Panic?”
4. Who is Paul Ingram? What does his story say about the broader issue of the Satanic Panic that occurred in the 1980s and 90s?
5. How common are intensive religious experiences in the U.S.? What are some of the patterns of claiming such experiences?
6. How common are claims of angelic intervention experiences? What are some of the primary themes in such narratives? How are the narratives “flexible?”
7. What is the relationship between belief in supernatural religious evil and claiming intensive religious experiences?

CHAPTER NINE: OUT ON A LIMB

SUMMARY

The final chapter begins with the story of Bigfoot enthusiast Datus Perry, then summarizes some of the main findings of *Paranormal America*, before attempting to answer the question: What will happen to paranormal beliefs and experiences in the future? Data on the demographics of paranormalism provide a key tool in this regard. Analyzing data on which societal groups are growing and receding, and which religious groups are facing growth or decline, the book ends by predicting likely trends in paranormal beliefs and experiences.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Who is Datus Perry? How has paranormalism in the U.S. changed since the first author spent time with Perry in the 1980s?
2. What do the authors predict for future levels of paranormalism in the U.S.?

TEST BANK QUESTIONS

Which of the following best represents the perspective taken in the book on the existence of the paranormal?

- A) The argument is made that certain paranormal phenomena are real
- B) The argument is made that no paranormal phenomena really exist
- C) The argument is made that the objective reality of paranormal phenomena is irrelevant to the purposes of the study

Chapter 1 ends with the authors of the book experience traumatic and frightening ghost encounters.

- A) True
- B) False

Which of the following is a conceptual distinction made between different types of paranormal beliefs and experiences?

- A) Factual vs. hoaxed
- B) Scientific vs. pseudo-scientific
- C) Purposive vs. spontaneous
- D) Enlightenment vs. discovery
- E) Organized vs. disorganized

In Chapter 2, the authors visit a psychic fair in California. In describing the scene, they compare the beliefs offered there to:

- A) A fundamentalist religious group
- B) A "spiritual cafeteria"
- C) The views of people who sit on a board of directors for powerful organizations
- D) The views of people who suffer from delusional disorders
- E) The views of those swept up in moral panics about Satanic ritual abuse

Chapter 3 tells the story of Betty and Barney Hill, as well as Budd Hopkins, people who claim to have:

- A) Seen a horde of chupacabra feasting on sheep
- B) Had a face-to-face encounter with Bigfoot
- C) Been possessed by demons
- D) Been abducted by aliens
- E) Lived previous lives as rulers in the Middle East

TEST BANK QUESTIONS

In Chapter 3 reports findings from a survey of a support group for what?

- A) Satanic ritual abuse
- B) Alien abduction
- C) People who seen Bigfoot
- D) Demon possession
- E) All of the above

Regarding "enlightenment" paranormal beliefs such as psychics, astrology, and the "New Age," who is more likely to believe?

- A) Women
- B) Men

The strongest predictor of belief in ghosts is:

- A) Age, with younger people being more likely to believe
- B) Political identity, with conservatives more likely to believe
- C) Church attendance, with high attenders more likely to believe
- D) Intelligence, with people of lower IQ more likely to believe
- E) Income, with poor people more likely to believe

Which of the following is not one of the themes of ghost hunting groups we discussed in class?

- A) The use of rituals for conjuring or protection
- B) The role of psychic projections in reported ghost experiences
- C) The use of technology to generate large amounts of data, which are read as evidence of ghosts
- D) The use of narratives about untimely deaths (a.k.a. "deathlore")
- E) The use of beliefs and symbols borrowed from established religious traditions

What is the title of Chapter 5, which is named after a famous book on the paranormal?

- A) Celebrities and the Paranormal
- B) Stop the Madness!
- C) Irrational Beliefs and Real Experiences
- D) Ghosts: Fact or Fiction?
- E) Round Trip to Hell in a Flying Saucer?

TEST BANK QUESTIONS

Chapter 5 begins with which of the following stories?

- A) Shirley MacLaine, an actress who claimed she was Bathsheba in a previous life
- B) Nancy Reagan's regular consultations with an astrologer
- C) Kyle Dunlap, a British military pilot who claimed he shot down a UFO
- D) George Adamski, a "contactee" who claimed he met Jesus on a UFO
- E) Chauncey Gardner, a man committed to an asylum for his belief in demons

Chapter 5 contains multiple drawings done by:

- A) Laura, a woman who claims to have been aboard a spaceship
- B) Stanley, a man who talks regularly to ghosts
- C) Jon, a man who asserts that Bigfoot travels through "wormholes"
- D) Nick, a man who believes in a variety of cryptids
- E) Meredith, a woman who talks to dead relatives for clients

The highest level of paranormal belief and experience occur among Americans who attend religious services:

- A) Never
- B) Once a month
- C) Every week
- D) Multiple times a week

Which of the following people is most likely to have high levels of paranormal belief?

- A) An atheist
- B) An agnostic
- C) A person who is moderately religious
- D) A committed Catholic
- E) A fundamentalist Protestant

Overall, Evangelical Protestants tend to have _____ levels of paranormal belief compared to members of other religious groups.

- A) Higher
- B) Lower
- C) The same

TEST BANK QUESTIONS

The beginning of chapter 6 introduces a typology of subculture participation developed to study:

- A) Romantic relationships
- B) Familial relationships
- C) Business organizations
- D) Religious groups
- E) Criminal gangs

Which of the following happened on the Bigfoot hunt the authors went on in chapter 6?

- A) One of the hunters saw Bigfoot
- B) Motion cameras captured a picture of what the hunters believe was Bigfoot
- C) The hunters found a track and made a cast
- D) One the hunters found hair he believed was from Bigfoot and sent it to a genetics lab
- E) The hunters found no evidence they deemed relevant

In order to gain legitimacy, many Bigfoot hunters use:

- A) Double-blind, scientific tests
- B) Arguments about environmental conservation
- C) The language of science
- D) Arguments about Bigfoot consistent with belief in ghosts
- E) The methods of wildlife biologists

Which of the following best represents the feelings of members of the North American Wood Ape Conservancy group toward those who hold different beliefs about Bigfoot?

- A) Strong comradery over their mutual belief in the creature
- B) Quiet support of supernatural Bigfoot believers' ideas
- C) Public support for multiple views of Bigfoot
- D) Strong dislike of anyone who holds different views of Bigfoot
- E) Indifference toward those who hold different views of the creature

TEST BANK QUESTIONS

“David” and “Laura” are profiled in order to illustrate which conceptual distinction?

- A) Differential association vs. strain theory
- B) Paranormal particularists vs. generalists
- C) “Normal” vs. pathological paranormalism
- D) Religious vs. secular paranormal
- E) Lifelong vs. convert paranormalists

All of the following are considered bonds to social order in control theory except:

- A) Attachment
- B) Belief
- C) Commitment
- D) Restrictions
- E) Involvement

On average, as “stakes in conformity” increase, paranormal beliefs _____.

- A) Increase
- B) Decrease
- C) Stay the same

In Chapter 8 profiles the story of Paul Ingram, who:

- A) Admitted sexually abusing his children as part of Satanic rituals
- B) Left the Church of Satan and became a televangelist
- C) Stopped being a televangelist and joined the Church of Satan
- D) Was a police officer who uncovered evidence of extensive Satanic Ritual Abuse in California
- E) Used social scientific research to debunk claims of Satanic Ritual Abuse

TEST BANK QUESTIONS

Americans who believe strongly in supernatural evil are more likely to:

- A) Have high levels of education and income
- B) Have low levels of education and income
- C) Be older
- D) Be younger
- E) Be male