

**Introduction to Part four: Intersectional legacies: identity and representation**

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## Part four

James Fenwick

### Intersectional legacies: identity and representation

David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson were not only transformed into major celebrities as a result of their roles as Fox Mulder and Dana Scully on *The X-Files*, but also iconic, sexualized pop culture objects of desire. Gender and sexuality are central to *The X-Files*, with the human body—in particular, the female body—subjected to probing, assault, rape, and objectification. Similarly, questions of race and racial identity are core to the series' myth-arc, not least through the repeated discussion of alien hybrids and alien colonization, immediately invoking discourse on imperialism and the Western legacy of slavery and colonialism. Elspeth Kydd has discussed how identity in *The X-Files* centralizes a 'white norm' (2001/2002: 73).

Whilst Gillian Anderson as Dana Scully has been celebrated as a feminist icon, *The X-Files* has a much more problematic legacy in terms of identity and representation. The series premiered just a few years after Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the idea of intersectionality. Crenshaw argued for a new analytical framework in which gender, racial, and sexual identities are not mutually exclusive, but rather that an individual's social, political, and cultural identities contribute to both discrimination and privilege (Crenshaw 1989). *The X-Files*, however, centres whiteness and white superiority, with people of colour marginalized and even demonized. As such, the contributors to this section reflect upon the problematic legacy of *The X-Files* with regards to identity and representation.

In chapter sixteen, Lzz Johnk and Gabrielle Miller focus on the representation of racialized disability, specifically of Black veterans in the episode ‘Sleepless’ (S2: E04). Whilst Johnk and Miller argue that *The X-Files* does attempt to challenge hegemonic, Western imperialist narratives through Mulder and Scully’s quest to thwart the plans for colonization by the Syndicate, the series undermines its efforts by drawing on ableist and racist tropes. Johnk and Miller offer a counter analysis of Black veterans in the episode in a bid to reframe the central character’s (Augustus Cole) radical potential.

In chapter seventeen, Erin Siodmak focuses on the representation of violence against women in the series, and in particular the recurrent use of the ‘rape-by-deception’ trope. Siodmak argues that whilst Scully was a defining feminist character, she existed within a television series that remained entrenched in misogynistic portrayals of women. Siodmak analyzes the persistent violence perpetrated on women in the series to argue that a key legacy of *The X-Files* was its normalization of such gendered representational violence.

In chapter eighteen, Klára Feikusová focuses on the male body, specifically on Fox Mulder as a gay icon. Feikusová argues that Mulder is an outsider figure within society that embodies queerness as defined by Queer Theory. Throughout the series, Mulder displays a feminized character that leads various antagonists to possess his body in a bid to ‘un queer’ him. As such, Mulder represents a figure that is against the heteronormative, patriarchal, masculine society and must be repressed at all costs.

In chapter nineteen, Andrew Sydlik returns the focus to representations of disability, but across the series as a whole. Sydlik argues that *The X-Files* has a problematic legacy of reinforcing ableist troupes, demonstrating this by applying a Disability Studies analytical framework to the series’ monster-of-the-week episodes. Sydlik argues that the series is about challenging structures of power within society, but one overlooked structure of power is

ableism. Therefore, Sydlik brings to the fore this particular structure and representation to demonstrate how *The X-Files* consistently explores identities of difference.

In chapter twenty, Jolene Mendel focuses on Scully as a feminist icon, but specifically on the character's lasting legacy on the study of science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) in the USA. Scully's place in scientific laboratories, her role as the logical and reasoning presence in her partnership with Mulder, and her representation of medical science have made her an icon to subsequent generations of women seeking to enter the profession. Mendel focuses on a recent report, 'The Scully Effect', to understand the continuing legacy of Dana Scully on STEM subjects, but also the way in which the series undermines Scully's feminist iconography through misogynistic representations, building on the work of Siodmak in this collection.

Together, the chapters in this section present a critical re-evaluation of identity and representation in *The X-Files* to understand and challenge its much broader intersectional legacy on cultural and television history.