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Appropriation of the 'Witch' Stigma as White Women's Self-Empowerment

Anna S. Rogers

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APPROPRIATION OF THE 'WITCH' STIGMA AS WHITE WOMEN'S SELF-EMPOWERMENT

by

Anna S. Rogers

Bachelor of Arts
University of South Carolina, 2012

Masters of Arts
University of South Carolina, 2015

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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Sociology

College of Arts and Sciences

University of South Carolina

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Accepted by:

Mathieu Deflem, Major Professor

Andrea Henderson-Platt, Committee Member

Carla Pfeffer, Committee Member

Dawn K. Cecil, Committee Member

Cheryl L. Addy, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my life partner Evan, my mother, my father, my brother Matthew, my two cats Gremlin and Marshmallow, and to my mentor Professor Mathieu Deflem.

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I would like to thank several people for providing support and guidance over the last several years while I completed my PhD and this dissertation. I would first like to thank Dr. Andrea Henderson, my second committee member, for her requiring me to read the article that sparked the idea for this dissertation, for her helpful guidance on the project, and for always providing a laugh when I needed it. I would also like to thank my second committee member, Dr. Carla Pfeffer for helping me with qualitative theory, feminist theory, and her support throughout this project. I would also like to thank Dr. Dawn K. Cecil for her support and expertise in popular culture studies.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation uses a grounded theory perspective to uncover the process of white women who find self-empowerment in the appropriation of historically stigmatized identities and rhetoric surrounding a self-described witch identity. The sample in this study included 13 white women who self-identified as witches across varying socio-economic and geographical lines. The four main research questions that guide this research study are: 1) what sociologically relevant factors lead women choosing to self-identify as a witch?; 2) what components does the process of choosing to identify as a witch entail?; 3) what meanings do self-identified witches attach to their and others' depictions of witches in popular culture?; and, finally, 4) what experiences do self-identified witches have with agents of social control?

Of the 13 respondents, 10 were interviewed via Zoom, a video and audio recording app, and then professionally transcribed. The remaining 3 interviews were conducted via email, with follow up emails for clarification and more detail. The interview findings were analyzed following the logic of grounded theory, which included a journal for notes throughout the entire research process, memo writing, initial coding, thematic coding, and some axial coding.

The main findings of this dissertation are discussed focusing on the following findings based on the self-reported experiences of self-identified witches: 1) self-identified witches create self-empowerment from being able to control their bodies and

the environment around them; 2) this self-empowerment can be strengthened significantly through the development and understanding of their own non-conformity, particularly in politics; 3) in some cases (particularly those with lower status in education and socio-economic status), comparing themselves with others, and ultimately ranking themselves as “better” than these others, makes respondents feel stronger and gain status back.; 4) popular culture depictions of witches does not necessarily play a role in self-identified witches own construction of their identity, but it plays a strong role in their view of how other’s view them (Mead’s “generalized-other”); 5) they respond to their construction of the generalized other and ultimately adjust their own behaviors in based on their perceptions’ of how others view them due to a fear of social control such as, rejection, being laughed at, being viewed as dangerous or scary, and the negative impact it could have on their jobs.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this dissertation is to explore how self-identified witches describe their process of becoming a witch, their encounters with social control based on their deviant status, and how depictions of witches in popular culture impact their lives. The four main research questions of this study are: 1) what sociologically-relevant factors led to individuals choosing to self-identify as a witch?; 2) what is the process of choosing to identify as a witch entail?; 3) what meanings do self-identified witches attach to depictions of witches in popular culture?; and, finally, 4) what experiences do self-identified witches have with agents of social control?

The broad question that led to this dissertation is: How do individuals appropriate a historically stigmatized identity in a way that leads to their own self-empowerment? Self-identified witches were chosen as the population to study because of the unique attributes of this group, particularly the historical context of the Salem Witch Trials and how both academia and broader society have inaccurate understandings of what self-identified do and who they are. Self-identified witches in America today are easily associated to the Salem Witch Trials of 1692 by most individuals (Latner 2008; Reed 2007 and 2015). Most Americans are aware of this event from American history, even if they know nothing else about self-identified witches,

which gives witches a unique historical context (Reed 2007). Even though most of society today knows that the men and individuals killed at the Salem Witch Trials were not “real” witches, there is still a tendency to associate negative attributes to the people who do choose to identify as witches today (Ginzburg 1985).

Part of the reason for the tendency to associate negativity with self-identified witches is because of the dominant narrative in popular culture that constructs witches as “evil”, “satanic”, “scary”, or “monsters”. Having such a strong presence in popular culture is another sociological factor that makes the self-identified witch population of today unique and a useful population to study for this dissertation. Thus, popular culture depictions of witches were an important piece of the puzzle for this dissertation to analyze.

Given the strong negative stereotypes of witches in popular culture and their historical significance as perpetrators of evil, self-identified witches also have interesting experiences with different agents of social control. Historically, the Salem Witch Trials sentenced men and women who were suspected of witchcraft *legally* to death, a formal sanction (Latner 2008). In today’s society it is more common to see informal sanctions from agents of social control on self-identified witches. This formal vs. informal sanctioning is another reason that this population was a good group for the study at hand.

The following chapter, Chapter 2, provides an overview of contemporary studies of self-identified witches and a discussion of the sample of self-described witches who are participants in this study. Chapter 2 also details the historical relevance of the Salem

Witch Trials of 1692 to today. The most important research to inform the present study is work done by Ezzy (2006), which explores modern day 'white witches' and 'white consumerist witches', which are predominant in the study at hand.

Chapter 3 lays out the theoretical foundation that guided this research. To guide this study, a grounded theory approach was most useful. Scholars who originated the grounded theory, such as Glaser and Strauss (1967), argued that an inductive approach to research was needed because most of the scholarly research at the time was deductive in nature. Grounded theory allows the theory to emerge directly from the data, rather than creating a research design that has a preset theory and, thus, preset hypotheses. Grounded theory argues that there is not one objective truth, but rather multiple truths that exist because each individual has a unique subjective perspective that is their truth of specific circumstances and situations (Charmaz 2006).

Grounded theory, specifically a social constructivist grounded theory, was most useful for this study for many reasons. First, one of the main research questions in this study is: What is the *process* of choosing to self-identify as a witch? Grounded theory is excellent for uncovering the process that each participant in this study describes in their own words. Secondly, there are to be no preconceived notions going into the data collection phase, which is very useful when studying a group known to be stigmatized based on preexisting stereotypes in society. Finally, this study focused on deviant identity formation, which is most easily understood through symbolic interactionism. Grounded theory and symbolic interactionism go hand in hand because both aim to interpret human interaction through symbols, images, language, and other behaviors or

gestures, as explained by the participants themselves (Clarke 2012).

Chapter 3 begins with a brief overview of classical and modern scholars' work in the broad areas of culture and deviance. Next, a discussion on the perspective of cultural criminology is included because it establishes the need for understanding the role of popular culture in how deviants are viewed and understood by both themselves and others. In order to fully understand the role it plays, scholars must dissect popular culture to understand the narratives and messages that are portrayed, which is why this study includes a content analysis of a popular television show centered around a modern day coven of witches. The chapter ends with an overview of relevant feminist literature that helps explain and understand the 9 themes found in this study.

The methodology for this study is discussed in detail in chapter 4 and included semi-structured interviews with 13 self-identified witches. Ten of these interviews were video-recorded via the Zoom app and later professionally transcribed. The remaining 3 interviews were conducted via email, with follow up emails to gather additional detail and provide clarification. All participants were white, lower to middle class, cisgender individuals.

Data analysis began immediately after the first interview was conducted and continued to develop with each new interview conducted. The interview guide was adapted based on salient themes that were most relevant to participants, which ended up leading to some surprise findings. The data was analyzed through multiple rounds of memo writing, thematic coding, line-by-line coding and some axial coding focused on socio-economic status and political affiliation. Ultimately, the findings in this study lead

to a theory constructed from the data, as grounded theory suggests.

Based on the findings in this study, the following theory emerged: self-identified witches create self-empowerment from the self-reported belief they are able to control their bodies and the environment around them. This self-empowerment can be strengthened significantly through the development and understanding of their own non-conformity. In some cases (particularly among those with lower status when it comes to education and economic resources), comparing themselves with others, and ultimately describing themselves as “better” than these others, makes them reportedly feel stronger and gain status back. Popular culture depictions of witches reportedly does not necessarily play a role in their own construction of their identity, but they play a strong role in their view of how others view them (Mead’s “generalized-other”) (1934). They respond to their construction of the generalized other and ultimately adjust their own behaviors in view of this construction.

The following chapters explore and explain this phenomenon in further detail and show how this theory emerged from the data. Chapter 5 explores theme 1: the process of becoming a witch and how participants describe coming into their self-identified witch identity. Most participants report knowing they are “different” around the age of puberty and describe the process of becoming a witch as “lifelong”, something they will continue to develop until their life ends, and some even argue it will continue in the afterlife.

Chapter 5 also explores themes 2 and 3 on the intersections of race and socio-economic status. The following two themes were not initially expected to emerge,

because there was not a direct question about these topics. However, following grounded theory rigor they were added to the latter interviews, given their high salience to participants who brought the topics up on their own. The first theme that emerged directly from the data, not based on initially specific questioning, was that the majority of the participants in the study do not report feeling their political identity is directly connected to their self-described witch identity. However, after the initial question brief question of political identity was mentioned (see Appendix A, question 57), they went on to discuss their politics in detail. Participants with lower levels of education and lower social class reported support for traditional values and conservative politics. Early on in the interviews a participant mentioned recent gatherings of witches to hex President Donald Trump and their opinion about it.

The participant felt so strongly about this issue that I added it to the interviews that followed. The responses to this issue varied, but the question did bring about a surprise finding. Specifically, a large minority of the participants described themselves as politically conservative and supportive of Donald Trump, which goes against the idea that witches/witchcraft are rooted in feminism. This finding was also striking because the participants who fit this category used this as an example of their non-conformity to other witches, which made them feel more empowered and confident in themselves. This particular finding could have possible selection issues given the heterogeneity of the sample, specifically in regards to their white race and lower socio-economic status. Simultaneously, the participants who voiced liberal political identity also seemed to feel empowered and confident because they reported viewing themselves as non-

conformists when compared to the rest of what they labeled a “conservative society”.

Chapter 5 also includes a discussion on theme 3: on voodoo, which was initially not a focus of the study. However, a trend developed where many participants stated that voodoo was dangerous, uncontrollable, and full of negativity, which was in direct conflict with their self-described witchcraft (which was described as positive, healing, and safe). The participants who reported this view of voodoo also reported not to know much about voodoo other than it is dangerous. These participants also viewed voodoo as something for witches of color, which then created a racial divide where white witches were good and brown witches were bad.

Chapter 5 then focuses on theme 4: how the participants in this study describe their self-empowerment through witchcraft and their self-described witch identity. Chapter 5 then explores the negative effects of self-identifying as a witch because it focuses on the experiences of social control these participants describe as a direct result of their witch identity. Followed by a discussion on theme 5, the majority of participants in this study report being proud of their witch identity, but also report not advertising their witch identity in an effort to avoid social control. The end of chapter 5 discusses theme 6: participants experiences of social control and the impact those experiences have had on their lives. While some of the experiences are reportedly quick and fleeting (ultimately not having a reported big impact on their daily lives), there are also some that had major consequences in their day-to-day lives.

Chapter 6 discusses recent trends in popular culture depictions of witches and how modern trends compare with older depictions. It also includes a content analysis of

the show *American Horror Story: Coven* (2013), which is centered on a modern-day coven of teen witches. The content analysis is included to provide detailed examples of how newer narratives in popular culture include diversifying the cast and ultimately showing unique characters that vary across race, gender, sexual orientation, social class, and age.

The second half of Chapter 6 describes how participants in this study view depictions of witches in popular culture that they have seen throughout their lives. Ultimately, the participants in this study do not describe popular culture directly playing a large role in their decision to self-identify as a witch. However, they report these depictions as very important to how non self-identified witches in society view them. They describe the rest of society in line with Mead's theory of the generalized other, and ultimately report changing their behaviors and physical appearances around how they interpret the way they think others' views of them. Theme 7 is: there are self-reported consequences in reality that stem from fictional narratives in popular culture. Thus, in a non-direct way it can be argued the depictions in popular culture do play a role in their socialization process. Theme 8 focuses on: the binary constructs that arise from popular culture between 'good' and 'evil'. Finally, theme 9 highlights how: every witch is unique.

The last chapter, Chapter 7, offers a conclusion and summary of the dissertation. It highlights the significance of the study, both for academia and broad society. It also discusses future directions that this research could take in order to offer a clearer picture of the relevant sociological factors that lead individuals to self-identify as a

witch. It also highlights future work I intend to do with newly found participants who are not heterosexual white women that identify as witches.

CHAPTER 2

WITCH IDENTITY

Introduction

This chapter focuses on witch identity. It will begin with a brief overview of the Salem Witch Trials of 1692. Next witches of the 20th and 21st century are discussed in terms of their demographics, beliefs, and ethics. This chapter ends with an overview of the self-identified witches that were interviewed for this study. The 13 participants in this study fall into one of three categories that emerged from the data based on their unique self-described witch identity and the views they shared on what that identity means. The three categories are white women who define themselves as 1) Wiccan (adhere to the Wiccan religion), 2) Born Witches (no choice in the identity), and 3) Witch-ish (Witches who are flexible, and sometimes question, the label of 'witch').

Historical Relevance: Salem Witch Trials of 1692

The Salem Witch Trials of 1692 were not the first accusations of witchcraft towards women that lead to legalized murder (Hoak 1983). In fact, there were European Witch Trials that dated back to the 14th century (Ben-Yehuda 1980; Currie 1968; Kounine 2013; Sharpe 1990; Wailinski-Kiehl 1996; Anderson and Gordon 1978.; Elmer 2016; Erikson 2004). These cases focused more on women than men as perpetrators of witchcraft,

leading to moral panic (Reed 2007 and 2015; Latner 2008; Bovenschen 1978) The geographical and time period differences in these two cases demonstrate the intriguing link between women and witchcraft across different cultures.

The witch has been a popular topic in media for centuries. Historically speaking, the hysteria surrounding the danger believed to be prevalent if witches were present in a society dates all the way back to ancient Babylonia, re-emerging during the heyday of Ancient Greece and following into the Roman Empire (Hoak 1983). As Christianity rose in power and influence, witch hunts continued to be common throughout the world, especially when those in power needed a scapegoat to blame for challenges related to lost harvests or natural disasters (Hoak 1983).

In the United States, the Salem Witch Trials happened after a wave of witch-hunts, a time in which thousands upon thousands of accused witches were executed, in Europe from the 1300s to the 1600s. In the Colonies, political power struggles were intense following the war between the English and French, and war refugees flocked to Salem Village in Massachusetts. The burden of caring for these war refugees was a cause of conflict that intensified rivalries between the wealthy families in the area. Further, when a highly unpopular, rigid fundamentalist named Samuel Parris became the first ordained minister in the colony, the colonists began to fear that all of the controversy in the area was being caused by the Devil himself (Hansen 1974).

The rising tensions exploded when Parris' daughter Elizabeth and her friend Abigail Williams began having unexplained fits. Reverend Parris insisted that the Devil was cursing the girls and causing their behavior. When another local girl began having

fits, Parris and his local magistrates pushed the girls to name the people who were causing them to have these episodes. The girls accused Tituba, a slave of the Parris family, and two other women – a homeless woman named Sarah Good and a poverty-stricken, elderly woman called Sarah Osborne.

While Good and Osborne pleaded their innocence, Tituba claimed the Devil did come to her and cause her to curse the girls. Additionally, she claimed that there were numerous other witches in the Puritan community. All three women were then imprisoned, and hysteria ensued in the Puritan community. Martha Corey, an elderly member of the church, was also accused of witchcraft. At this point, the magistrates appointed a special court to investigate all accusations of witchcraft. Ultimately, Corey was the first accused witch hanged at the spot came to be known as Gallows Hill. Eventually, as the accusations continued, 19 women would die at Gallows Hill. And Marth Corey's 71 year-old husband was pressed to death with heavy stones near the gallows where his wife died. In total, roughly 200 people were accused of witchcraft during the Salem Witch Trials (Latner 2008).

Tituba's case is important because she became a symbol of demonic power for a long time in American media. She was often pictured as a monster who "terrorized" children. One has to wonder why she pled guilty and claimed to have been in contact with Satan. One theory is that perhaps claiming the witch identity was a means by which Tituba, a slave taken from the Caribbean islands and forced to work for the Parris family, was able to enact some small form of vengeance on her masters in the Puritan colony by speaking the words that provoked the hysteria that led to the trials (Hansen

1974). Tituba's proclamation meant that other witches were present, and, therefore, all accusations must be taken seriously by the magistrates.

Modern Day Witches

The witch has been a symbol in many cultures all over the world well before the modern day witches of the 21st century (Sempruch 2004). Modern day witches often describe being misunderstood by the society they live in, frequently due to stereotypes that exist in mass media, particularly popular culture (Berger and Ezzy 2009 and Ezzy 2006). This section will highlight what modern day self-described witches think, do, and believe within their witch lifestyles.

Witches that identify their witch lifestyles as a religion call themselves Wiccan and practice Wicca. The practice of Wicca has been around roughly since the 1940s and is rooted in feminist beliefs at its core (Ezzy 2006, Griffin 1993, Sempurch 2004). Wicca is unique to other religions because it advocates the worship of a female deity, or specifically Goddess, rather than a God or male deity. Some of the core tenets of Wicca advocate for the environment, women's rights (particularly to their bodies), and promoting positive energies (Ezzy 2006). Traditional witches, as defined by Ezzy (2006), are witches who emerged around the same time as Wicca. Traditional witches typically belonged to covens and in order to find or join a coven, the women had to know someone or hear about it through word of mouth.

This type of recruiting drastically changed however in the 1990s. The 90s were a unique time for self-described witches (or anyone interested in becoming a witch)

because of the rise of the internet, positive depictions of witches in popular culture, and access to somewhat mainstream books on how to become a witch (Ezzy 2006). Very young women were drawn in at very high rates during this time and the number of self-described witches rose drastically (Berger and Ezzy 2009).

During this time there also was a rise in the diversity of the type of witches women (and some men) described themselves as, with a particular shift to people identifying as just witches, rather than adhering to the more traditional Wicca religion. This transformation was ultimately what led to a distancing from core Wiccan tenets of some self-identified witches (Ezzy 2006).

One of the leading witch experts in the social sciences, Douglas Ezzy, has spent his entire career uncovering modern day witch practices through interviewing self-identified witches and doing in-depth content analyses of the most popular witch texts that are used to teach individuals how to become witches. His findings support that there are different types of self-identified witches and that these different subsets of witches have significantly different practices and beliefs. The section below will highlight four of the types of witches that Ezzy and his colleagues have categorized.

'White Witches'

The term 'white witch' was constructed by Ezzy and is meant to describe witches that emerged in the 1990s and are prevalent today. A 'white witch' is a self-described witch that describes herself as a 'good' witch (Ezzy 2006). While the self-described witches themselves do not use the term 'white witch', it is a useful term for scholars to use to categorize a very specific type of witch. The term 'white witch' is not to be

confused with self-described witches who are racially white, although it is worth noting that almost all 'white witches' are Caucasian.

'White witches' are self-described witches that focus solely on doing witchcraft that is morally good and only uses positive forces. Books written for other women hoping to become 'white witches' are authored by some of the leading 'white witches' in the media. They advocate for a better understanding of 'good' witches and witchcraft that helps foster self-improvement, and ultimately, self-empowerment (Ezzy 2006: 19). Specifically, these books promote ways to control the environment around you, find love, have more power, and get rich quick. These books are, "manuals for self-empowerment to live out the American dream" (Ezzy 2006: 19).

Ezzy is quick to point out the books contain nothing related to saving/appreciating the environment, gender equality, or the ethics of practicing magic that could impact others around you. In essence, a 'white witch' describes herself as morally good, while being able to reap all the benefits from witchcraft and attain the American dream. The 'white witch' ultimately can have it all according to their books, but they are not doing anything to acknowledge their white privilege and ultimately privileges that come from having access to higher degrees and excessive wealth.

'Consumerist White Witches'

The concept of the 'white witch' can be expanded into Ezzy's described 'consumerist white witch' category. It is possible to be a 'white witch' without promoting consumerism, but it is not likely (Ezzy 2006: 20). 'White witches' are typified by their extremely individualistic focus on self-gain through positive means, which is not

typical of other types of witchcraft (which are focused on communal issues, equality, feminism, and environmentalism) (Ezzy 2006). The 'consumerist white witch' is also individualistic and focused on blatantly advocating a morally 'good' witchcraft, but she also advocates capitalistic consumerism as a means to achieve these goals (Ezzy 2006: 21). The authors of the books that help individuals become a witch must be purchased, an act of consumerism that also leads to high profits for the author. Many of the authors promote spending money, such as only buying organic food, and arguing that doing so makes a woman a morally better witch.

Ezzy (2009) argues that 'white witches' in general are, "not feminist, do not question contemporary attitudes towards sexuality and the body, do not raise concerns about the environment, and support consumerism....magic worked personal ends of profit" (Ezzy 2006: 23). However, 'white witches' do claim to follow the traditional form of feminist ethics that is typified in almost all witchcraft, even if they do not actually practice those ethical considerations themselves. The section below highlights how being a 'white witch' is rooted in contexts that are explicitly not feminist and ignore traditional tenets of early witchcraft and Wicca.

Black Magic

In order for a morally 'good' witch to exist, there is an inexplicit implication that morally 'bad' witches exist. This juxtaposition is evident in both fictional and nonfictional accounts of witches. Black magic is the universal term that most subsets of witches use to describe magic that is used for negative consequences and causes harm. 'White witches' that have a voice in the media or to the general public are very quick to

promote a mainstream message to non-witches that 'good' witches should be accepted by society because they are practicing a positive magic that only leads to self-improvement and involves no harm. They vocally advocate against witches who perform black magic and say those are the witches that mainstream society should be afraid of (Ezzy 2006).

While black magic is commonly referred to in both modern and historical literature of witchcraft, there is virtually no reference to 'black witches' or witches who practice black magic or magic that is harmful (Ezzy 2006: 23). It then follows that black magic is a concept that exists to promote 'white witches' by presenting them as the antithesis to black magic and ultimately othering any type of witchcraft that could be *perceived* as black magic.

The use of the phrase black magic is ultimately what has connected modern witchcraft with Satanism (Ezzy 2006: 24). The idea that harmful magic is used for explicitly criminal acts of harm and torture and the deity Satan allows 'white witches' to create a dichotomy for mainstream society to more easily differentiate 'good' witches from 'bad' witches through the use of mainstream Christian constructs. The majority of witches, and all Wiccans, do not recognize Satan as a deity and ultimately do not acknowledge the existence of Satan, which is why the connection between witchcraft and Satan is inaccurate and useless. The connection still occurs however, and when self-described witches, particularly the 'white witches', use it and promote it they are presenting inaccurate information to the mainstream public that is harmful to witches. Ultimately, the 'white witches' can use the concept of black magic to promote

themselves and exclaim their, “virtuousness” (Ezzy 2006: 23). Finally, the descriptions of black magic in literature talk about magic that is solely focused on obtaining selfish gains and profits and self empowerment, which is arguably the same goals the ‘white witches’ describe for themselves.

Teen Witches

Self-described witches in their teenage years have been very popular in popular culture and often promote a positive message about being yourself and engaging in some teenage rebellion (Aloi and Johnston 2007, Berger and Ezzy 2009). During the 1990s there was a massive increase in teenagers who described themselves as witches for their religious identities, which made the group particularly interesting to sociology of religion scholars (Berger and Ezzy 2009). One of the unique attributes of self-described witches in their teen years is that they report coming into the religion without being recruited and are able to learn about and become a witch on their own (Ezzy 2006, Berger and Ezzy 2009).

The interest in teenage self-described witches arose in the late 90s and 2000s for sociology scholars (Aloi and Johnston 2007). Studies done on teen self-described witches during the last 2 decades focused on how women felt empowerment through becoming a self-described witch and speculated on how important the role of popular culture was in their process (Aloi and Johnston 2007).

Teen self-described witches play an important role for the study at hand for multiple reasons. First, there has been speculation that identifying as a witch for a teenager is “just a phase” they can go through, along with other deviant phases

teenagers look for when trying to rebel. My study includes interviews with witches that were in their teens in the 2000s and is able to uncover how long the witch identity lasts and what was the lasting impact for some of the teenagers. Secondly, teen witches are important to the study at hand because of the unique role that popular culture played in their decision to become a witch. In 2019, there are many more mainstream popular culture depictions of teenage witches and those depictions include witches with very diverse demographics. Many of the interview questions in this study ask about the new depictions of witches in popular culture and what role they play for both the new, young self-described witches of today and the older self-described witches who were teens in the 90s and 2000s.

Feminist and Activist Witches

The majority of this chapter has focused on ‘white witches’, which are unique for not following the core tenets of Wicca or other types of witchcraft. However, there are still many individual witches and covens that do continue to focus on feminism, equality, environmentalism, and all types of activism (Griffin 1995).

Many feminist witches identify as part of the “Goddess Movement”, which can include Wiccans but also includes women who just identify as witch (and some who do not take on any label) (Griffin 1995). The Goddess Movement includes public rituals and focuses on the female body. These groups include women of differing races, although most are still white. There is also diversity in education levels, income levels, commitment levels, and the covens or groups themselves range in how structured and organized they are (Griffin 1995).

The section below details the three types of self-described witches that were interviewed for this study. While there were a handful who described themselves as cultural competent and focused on the traditional tenets of Wicca and witchcraft, the majority of the participants fit into Ezzy's 'white witch category'. The discussions on how they portray themselves as 'white witches' (even though they do not use the term themselves) is in the chapters on the findings in this study.

Self-Identified Witches in this Study

This study included interviews with 13 self-identified white, women witches. They come from various geographic regions in the United States and one from Spain. Having a participant from Spain does not diversify the sample much because other studies show that self-described witches from around the world have very similar views and beliefs and also enjoy the same types of witch popular culture (Ezzy 2006). The education levels varied among participants, but the majority of them had a high school degree and/or some college. All of the participants in this study are white, even though one participant prefers to be defined as Arab. They range in ages from teens to fifties. Almost all are heterosexual. Almost all of them are individualistic witches and did not describe belonging to a coven or having face-to-face interactions with other self-described witches.

I found that the self-identified witches in my study evenly dispersed among three types of witches. I would argue that the majority of them also fit Ezzy's construct of the 'white witch'. The first type of self-identified witch in my study was **Wiccan**. They

viewed their witch identity has religious, or at least “spiritual”. They were more likely to reference daily rituals, prayers, cleanses, and were more disciplined in their commitment to being a witch. They were very well versed on the history of Wicca and often suggested books I could read to better understand their practices and beliefs.

The second type of self-identified witch in this study was categorized under **Born Witch**. The women who fit into this category varied in their beliefs and practices, but ultimately felt they had no choice in becoming a witch, because they were born a witch. For some, this was due to ancestral bloodlines that gave all descendants from strong, powerful witches a chance at being born with the abilities. These abilities were often described as healing powers, heightened senses, ability to see the future, and having a natural inclination at spell work.

Other women that fit into the category of ‘born witch’, were those who had no familial or ancestral link to witchcraft, but were still born with the unique abilities that make someone a witch. These women described knowing they were different from others at a young age and many of them experienced an encounter with another self-described witch who explicitly told them they were a witch, and often helped to facilitate them into their witch identity.

The third category of self-identified witch in this study was the most abstract and included the most diversity of the three categories. The third category is **Witch-Ish** and includes women who view themselves as witches based on the way they dress/aesthetics, women who do not want any type of religious label (which includes ‘witch’), women who have hid their witch identity and never publicly called themselves

a witch before, and women who say they dabble in witchcraft. These women are not as devoted to learning more about witch history, doing rituals, and making witchcraft a core focus of their life. They range in their commitment to witchcraft and also range in their beliefs on issues related to spell work, magic, and abilities. The experiences of all 13 women and their witch identity are discussed in-depth in the findings at the end of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

This chapter explains the theoretical framework for this study. The main overarching theory that guides this project is grounded theory. Before going into the details of grounded theory, the broad sociological approach to this study is explained, and includes literature reviews that are essential in guiding the project. The first section in this chapter highlights the classical scholars', Weber and Durkheim, work on culture and deviance (as they are the main broad topics of this study), followed by more contemporary scholar's work in the same areas. A brief literature review on the social control of women is also included.

The next section of this chapter provides an overview of Cultural Criminology, which is a newer perspective in the criminology field. This perspective is crucial to this study, because it calls for, and highlights, the significance of popular culture depictions of crime and deviance in understanding how meaning is made by individuals in regards to these topics. For the study at hand this perspective is important because it situates the need for an analysis of depictions of deviant women (witches) in popular culture and explores how these depictions influence self-identified witches.

The next section offers an overview of symbolic interactionism, which is the best perspective to use when focusing on how meaning is made, identity formation, and the process of understanding key symbols in culture. For this project, George Mead's work on the 'self' and 'the generalized other' is key in understanding how participants in this study came to their self-identified witch identity and they how perceive non-self-identified witches to view them. The self-reported views of perceptions of non-self-identified witches is directly reported to depictions of witches in popular culture, according to the participants in this study. Thus, a section on the role popular culture plays in socialization, particularly gender socialization, follows.

Following that section, a section on grounded theory is presented. Grounded theory is the over-arching theory of this project. Grounded theory calls for the data to speak for itself, with no initial specific theory guiding the project before data collection begins. However, grounded theory does require going back to the literature after the data is collected to find theories that do help explain the findings. This chapter ends with an overview of feminist literature that helps provide context and explain the findings from this study.

Classical and Contemporary Scholars on Culture and Deviance

Classical Scholars on Culture and Deviance

While this research utilizes grounded theory, it is also important to align this study with classical studies of deviance, particularly when it pertains to culture. On the basis of the notion of social control related to crime and/or deviance, societies can be

considered most functional when stable and harmonized. Deviance and/or crime can cause chaos that can threaten social stability. Social control acts an effort to keep social harmony in society (Deflem 2008, 2015; Chriss 2007). Studies of social control date back to Ross (1901) who studied social control in societies with high levels of individualism (Deflem 2008). Individuals' norms are rooted in the individuals' unique culture. Culture is defined as beliefs, values, morals, and materials that are important to a society. Culture is omnipresent and is inescapable for members of a society.

Culture can act as a mechanism of social control. The sociology of social control has a long history of scholarly work dating back to both Durkheim and Weber. Durkheim explored religion, a very important type of culture that dictates morals and values to members of a society and can act as a mechanism of social control for societies (1893). Durkheim studied how norms related to morals come to exist and how new norms impact society. Weber developed an interpretive sociology based on actions that have symbolic meanings attached to them – he developed his theory to understand how subjective meanings are connected to motivations to action (1905 and 1922).

Durkheim and Weber: Culture and Deviance

Durkheim was a cultural idealist, which can be seen in his work on the division of labor where he highlighted a change in the type or kind of a society (Durkheim 1893). This specific piece is important to this paper because it creates a direct link between social control and culture. A mechanical society is characterized by a high collective conscience and individuals who are very similar to each other, especially with regards to their daily tasks. The collective conscience is a set of shared beliefs, morals, and values

members of a society share. (The collective conscience is part of culture and is important later in sociology when the 'generalized other' is discussed in symbolic interactionism). There is a shift to an organic society after two conditions are met to create the division of labor. The first condition is material and is necessary for the change, but not a sufficient cause by itself. This condition is an increase in population. The second condition is ideal and is both necessary and sufficient (Durkheim 1893: 302). This condition is more individualism among the group and more independence overall. The organic society is still cohesive because society functions through the different types of specialized jobs. As such, there is a qualitative change in the type of society. *Culture is the driving force behind all social institutions and patterns in society according Durkheim.*

Anomie essentially refers to the normless in society. It is not unique to sociology and existed before Durkheim used the concept in his work (Deflem 2015). Deflem highlights the historical context of the concept of anomie and how Durkheim applied it, as well as how Robert Merton clarified and tweaked the concept for his own work on deviance. For Durkheim, anomie was used in two his most critical works, *Suicide* and *The Division of Labor in Society* (Deflem 2015). Anomie in a society occurs at times when there is much *cultural* change occurring, which leads to a sense of normlessness. This exemplifies Durkheim's argument that society is driven by culture.

In conclusion, Durkheim was very important for both the sociology of culture and the sociology of social control. His description and use of social facts as being coercive demonstrate how culture can have external social control over individuals. His works

demonstrate how the collective conscience leads to social cohesion, even if there is a shift towards mechanical solidarity.

Weber is also an important classical scholar when looking at scholars who made an important impact on the sociology of social control and culture. Weber argued that people's actions are rooted in motives (1905 and 1922). Weber's work was focused on understanding. In order to understand what something means to individuals in society the scholar's approach is focused on the subjective. This key theory of society is important to culture because it recognizes that culture exists external to the subjective individual. Even though Weber argues for a subjective approach to understanding, it is important to note that Weber advocated for an interpretive sociology that still was based on rigorous scientific methods.

Weber's most famous work called *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* uses religion as an example to understand human actions (1905). Weber's interpretive sociology is empirically applied to the religion of Calvinism. In this case, Calvinism teaches morals and values (that act as mechanisms of social control on those who follow this belief) and the outcome of people holding these beliefs lead to the development of a capitalist economy. Even though the *motives for the Calvinist's actions* were based on their *subjective* views on their religion, the empirical outcome is the economic system of Capitalism, which has no direct link to the teachings of Calvinism. Weber demonstrates how the moral teachings of Protestantism argue that its followers work hard at their jobs and live frugal lives. In an effort to follow these teachings, which are clearly acting as a mechanism of social control, they do not spend their money on

themselves and instead invest it. These actions lead to a capitalist economy. Thus, religion (which is part of culture) leads to specific behaviors for its followers, who are striving to follow their religion as strictly as possible – demonstrating how religion simultaneously can be a mechanism of social control and lead to empirical outcomes that can be studied sociologically.

Contemporary Scholars on Culture and Deviance

Members of society can learn whether behaviors are acceptable or not through having interactions and witnessing interactions within their culture. For example, if someone is arrested for shoplifting, everyone who hears/witnesses this event learns that shoplifting is not acceptable behavior because it is *formal* deviance. The law was applied to the shoplifter. Another example using *informal* deviance could be a situation where someone chooses to dress in gothic attire and go out into the general public. They may experience sanctions as well such as being laughed at or stared at, but no legal sanction will occur because a law was not broken.

In both examples above people broke cultural norms and received sanctions, which demonstrates clear boundaries on what is acceptable and what not is acceptable for that society for every member that bore witness to these events. Being arrested and being laughed at are both examples of social control that will possibly deter others from these deviant behaviors. This section will explore key developments in theoretical perspectives of social control and themes within social control related to gender and offer some recent insights into the future of social control studies.

For studies on social control and culture such as this one, it is useful to rely on the foundational work of symbolic interactionism. Herbert Blumer (1969) created what is referred to as the Chicago School of symbolic interactionism by pulling from the social philosophy of Mead (1934) a perspective that demonstrates how a sense of self will develop for an individual based on meaningful symbolic interactions with others (Blumer 1969; Carter and Fuller 2016). Blumer favored a subjectivist methodology as, he argued, “an understanding of social life requires an understanding of the processes individuals use to interpret situations and experiences, and they construct their actions among other individuals in society” (Carter and Fuller 2016 934-935). This central idea is reminiscent of the methodology of Max Weber’s (1922) interpretive sociology.

Erving Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgy perspective also embraced the need of a subjectivist methodology to uncover how individuals “perform” their social actions, as if they are playing roles on a theater stage. Each individual creates his or her actions in a way that will demonstrate the self or identity that the individual wants others to see, with one strong example thereof being gender performance (Goffman 1976; West and Zimmerman 1987). Other scholars have recently worked to use symbolic interactionism in direct connection with cultural studies (see Denzin 1992). The sociology of social control and the sociology of culture are brought together in a newer area of research: cultural criminology. Cultural Criminology is a theoretical perspective that places crime and deviance precisely at the center of the culture of a society (Ferrell 1999).

Social Control of Deviant Women

More contemporary studies of social control have been critiqued by feminist scholars for not studying women as perpetrators of deviance (Booth, Farrell, and Varano 2008). The majority of social control studies do not differentiate between women and men and have ignored the impact that gender can have on individuals who deviate (Booth, Farrell, and Varano 2008). Social Control Theory argues that strong ties to communities will lessen the likelihood of an individual turning to deviance. However, this theory typically encompasses both genders as following the same trajectory.

Scholars critical of this theory have done studies that do highlight gender differences and have found that gender does matter, particularly among teens (Booth, Farrell, and Varano 2008). Young women tend to have very different types of ties to community that lessen their likelihood to commit deviant acts that boys do. This particular study focuses on illegal deviant acts and not informal acts of deviance. This chapter on the social control of self-identified witches is unique and adds to current literature on deviant women by focusing solely on women (rather than men, as seen in previous studies) and it focuses on informal acts of deviance rather than legal issues.

Cultural Criminology

As clarified by Ferrell and Sanders (1995), the perspective of cultural criminology can be applied and used in many different disciplines, but this chapter will focus on its use in sociology. Essentially cultural criminology represents an area that connects popular culture and criminality (Ferrell 1999: 395). In recent years popular culture has become

an important unit of analysis for all areas of sociology, and in the case of cultural criminology the focus is on crime. This perspective allows a researcher to take images and narratives that emerge in popular culture related to crime and social control and analyze them in an effort to understand how meanings are attached to images and narratives, which could impact societal views on these images and narratives (Ferrell 1999). This perspective is achieved by integrating cultural studies into criminology. Cultural criminology also has roots in sociological theory, specifically symbolic interactionism and constructivist approaches.

Some earlier studies sought to uncover symbolism and meanings incorporated into deviant subcultures, such as deviant youth subcultures (Hall and Jefferson 1976), subcultures and feminism (McRobbie 1980), and kids getting working class jobs (Willis 1977). There are also studies that have focused on how the mass media socially constructed new meanings of deviance, leading to new types of social control (Ferrell 1999; Cohen 1972; Cohen and Young 1973; and Hall and Jefferson 1976). This work directly connects with social control, as most of the deviant and marginalized subcultures attempt to resist forms of social control (Ferrell 1999: 398).

The methodologies most frequently used by cultural criminologists are ethnography and textual analysis, which allows for a content analysis of popular culture paired with ethnographic or interview data that reveals subjective understandings of the images and narratives depicted in popular culture. This methodology also calls for reflexivity on part of the researcher so that audiences can also understand the role of the researcher in the construction of meanings made by the researcher, especially in the

content analysis portion of data collection (Ferrell 1995: 400). Scholars have recently began implementing both of these methods in their research design in an effort to provide a more holistic picture of the role of popular culture on deviance and vice versa (Ferrell 1995: 402-410). Two areas that are increasingly being studied within cultural criminology are how the media impacts the broad culture of policing and how there are conflicts over cultural spaces, which connects back to issues related to race, gender, class, and identity formation (Ferrell 1999: 412; Altheide 2000).

For the proposed study it is important to note that popular culture narratives of witches could lead to both formal and informal social control responses. As such, it can be that 'fictional' popular culture narratives have serious, 'real' consequences at a social level (Ferrell 1999) and must therefore be studied sociologically (Monahan 2008) (See Chapter 3). The women who are connected to the witch subculture have experienced sanctions from as serious as death to being marginalized and viewed as weird (Berger 1999; Berger and Ezzy 2007).

Symbolic Interactionism and Socialization

Symbolic Interactionism is a sociological perspective that focuses on the importance of micro-level, face-to-face interactions between members of a society and how those interactions lead to patterned meanings often based on the representation of symbols, with the most important symbol being language. Thus, culture is a key component of symbolic interactionism, as these symbols and meanings arise based on culture. Social control is also seen in micro-level interactions, whether it be a response by police to

formal types of deviance and crime, or a response from an individual such as a laugh when they see someone commit an informal type of deviance (which is further explored in Chapter 3). Charles H. Cooley (1902), Herbert Blumer (1969), Manford Kuhn (1964), Sheldon Stryker (2008), Erving Goffman (1959, 1976), and Glaser and Strauss (1964) all contributed to key developments in the scholarship of symbolic interactionism.

Symbolic interactionism provides a framework for how to study both formal deviance (with legal sanctions) and informal deviance (with non-legal sanctions) (Carter and Fuller 2016).

For studies of social control and culture, such as this one, it is useful to rely on the foundational work of symbolic interactionism. Herbert Blumer (1969) created what is referred to as the Chicago School of symbolic interactionism by pulling from the social philosophy of Mead (1934) (which is further discussed in Chapter 4), a perspective that demonstrates how a sense of self will develop for an individual based on meaningful symbolic interactions with others (Blumer 1969; Carter and Fuller 2016). Blumer favored a subjectivist methodology as, he argued, “an understanding of social life requires an understanding of the processes individuals use to interpret situations and experiences, and they construct their actions among other individuals in society” (Carter and Fuller 2016 934-935). This central idea is reminiscent of the methodology of Max Weber’s (1922) interpretive sociology.

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way that will demonstrate the self or identity that the individual wants others to see, with one strong example thereof being gender performance (Goffman 1976; West and Zimmerman 1987). Other scholars have recently worked to use symbolic interactionism in direct connection with cultural studies (see Denzin 1992) (further discussed in Chapter 4).

The 'Self' and the 'Generalized Other'

George H. Mead's work was and remains a hallmark of symbolic interactionism within sociology. For this chapter, the most useful components of Mead's work are the development of the "Self" and the concepts of the "I" and the "Me" (Mead 1934). The first critical assumption of Mead's work is that the social precedes the individual, contrary to other theories and perspectives of his time. He argued that the social world is already in place when an individual is born into a society. For example, there is already a legal system, gender norms, education system, and other social institutions in place that will immediately begin to play a role in that individual's socialization process. Therefore, an individual's development of their sense of 'self' and overall identity formation is rooted in the society's pre-existing socially constructed conditions and ultimately culture.

Building on the idea of the influence of culture, it is important to consider that, as children's minds develop during their formative years, they start to mimic behaviors of others, frequently modeling their behaviors after their caretakers, and eventually learn that they, as an individual, exist in society. They learn the language of their society (the most important significant symbol), the norms, and other relevant social

information needed to begin to develop what Mead refers to as their 'I' and their 'Me' (Mead 1934).

Over time, the individual begins to internalize what Mead refers to as the "generalized other." The generalized other is part of the mind and represents the members of the individual's society. It allows individuals to assess themselves by others' standards. An important component of this process is that individuals base that assessment on what they assume other members of society would think about them, which may or may not be an accurate representation (Mead 1934).

The next component of the self is based on the generalized other. Mead refers to the "Me" in individuals as the consensus of the generalized other. When an individual behaves, interacts, or gestures on the basis of pleasing the generalized other, then that individual's "Me" has come out and is at the forefront of the mind. The "Me" can also be associated with people who tend to have high levels of conformity in a society (Mead 1934). On the other hand, the "I" is the part of an individual that is unique. It is the creative part of the individual and can sometimes be defiant to the "Me" and want to rebel against the generalized other. Both components make up the self, and both exist in all individuals (Mead 1934).

Mead's work also discusses the role of the most significant symbol, which is language (1934). Language is a response we make to those around, "our community," and we plan out our responses to others through ideas that emerge internally in our mind and after considering how that response will portray us as an individual to the other, we are able to finally make the verbal response (Mead 1934: 180). While language is

one of the ways we are able to present ourselves to other, there is also physical presentation of the self. How a person dresses and behaves also gives immediate symbols to others about how to interpret that individual.

In this chapter, the physical appearance presented to others will be as important as the language the participants speak. Particularly of interest is the discussion on choosing to present oneself as deviant through physical symbols on the body, such as tattoos, piercings, dark clothing, and other common alternative forms of fashion. In the case of modern witches, there is a unique disjunction between the physical appearance of self-identified witches and the language they use to describe their identity and, ultimately, their own sense of self. Another interesting component of this process is that the participants in this study also discuss how they themselves internalize and make sense of witches who present themselves physically and verbalize their identity in different ways than they do.

The generalized other is very strong in the participants in this study. A later section will go into detail on how almost every participant discusses how “society” views them and how their interpretation of how society views them impacts how they view themselves and, ultimately, how they will respond the way they believe they are seen. This process is cyclical though, and as the individual changes so does society and, “It may seem to be a molding of the individual of the individual by the forces about him, but the society likewise changes in this process, and becomes to some degree a different society. The change may desirable or it may be undesirable, but it inevitably takes place” (Mead 1934: 216).

Some individuals are more likely to change a society or at least have a bigger impact on society based on their own personal qualities. People who have bigger impacts on society are often known as leaders. Their charisma or perhaps their circumstances leave a mark on society (Mead 1934: 317). This phenomenon is unique to modern societies, because more primitive societies were typified by conformity by all, such as in hunter-gatherer societies where everyone was expected to play the same social role. In modern societies however, the individual can be more unique and creative change their society through the use of their “I,” but this all still exists within a pre-formed society and those unique individuals must follow their “Me” in order to still fit into the pre-organized structure of that society (Mead 1934: 221).

Popular Culture’s Influence on Gender Socialization

The choice to include popular culture as the main agent of socialization to focus on was made after careful deliberation of modern witch culture and the work of Berger and Ezzy (2009), which found that young women who are choosing to identify as a witch do not actually know any other witches in their daily lives. The authors’ finding gives less validity to the possibility of peer, family, or school being the key agents of socialization. Given the recent spike in witches depicted in popular cultures as strong heroines rather than villains I think this is a logical starting place for understanding the socialization of witches.

This chapter includes a content analysis of narratives and depictions of witches in popular culture (followed by an analysis from interviews with participants about their views on these depictions). I will seek to argue that there is a new ‘witch’ narrative in

popular culture today that could create an environment where women who internalize these new narratives begin to feel confident and “sexy,” all while breaking traditional gender norms related to sexuality. Ultimately this will go against the historical narrative that women who are “beautiful” (the “princess” narrative) are morally good and women who are “ugly” (the old “witch” narrative) are morally bad, or evil. This section will also demonstrate how popular culture can act as an agent of socialization, particularly with regards to gender and sexuality norms.

In an effort to highlight some of the many studies of popular culture related to gender socialization, the following paragraphs briefly summarize studies that demonstrate: 1) the gendered narratives and scripts related to identity formation; 2) the internalization of these gendered narratives derived from popular culture in the individual; or 3) the integration of findings from both types of studies, which is what the current proposed study aims to do overall. These studies highlight how important it is to deconstruct narratives related to gender in the media, because individuals internalize these symbols with their meanings and messages to audiences.

The goal of this brief literature review is to start broadly with a demonstration of how popular culture is traditionally gendered, with a discussion on how children internalize popular culture, specifically Disney films. Then there will be a section that highlights adult popular culture. This study cannot claim to say how women’s self-esteem can be impacted by the new narratives of witches in popular culture, however this section will demonstrate how previous studies have found popular culture and media plays a heavy role in socialization, especially gender socialization. These previous

studies call for content analyses of current popular culture in an effort to understand what narratives are being displayed and consumed currently in society. Only after sociologists are able to deconstruct these narratives can the process of *how* society is internalizing these messages take place.

Some studies that have broadly looked at gender portrayals in children's popular culture found that traditional gender norms are heavily enforced (Murnen et al 2016; Cunningham 1993; Meischke 1995). These studies covered everything from Halloween costumes to children's toys. It is important to study these types of popular culture because it demonstrates how the role of play in socialization is facilitated through children's merchandise. These studies lay a foundation for how children's socialization is impacted not only by the visual media, but also physical objects that are representative of the visual media. Also, these physical objects are reinforcing traditional gender norms of masculinity and femininity (Murnen et al. 2016). Similar findings were found in a study of video games also found that traditional gender norms were depicted in video games, specifically women being hyper-sexualized and men being more aggressive and violent (Dill and Thill 2007).

One study looked at how children interpreted the Disney story *Cinderella* and how they reproduced those messages in play with their peers (Baker-Sperry 2007). The study explored how children actually interpreted, internalized, and incorporated the meanings into their play through interpretive reproduction. Baker-Sperry found that girls knew the story before she even read it to them and had internalized the main characteristics of the female characters, such as Cinderella is beautiful and nice, the

Stepmother is old, mean, and ugly and the two Stepsisters are ugly and mean (Baker-Sperry 2007). This finding is important because it demonstrates how strongly Disney can socialize children, and also how the gender roles are internalized.

Another study explores how Disney has kept the same binary color symbolism in all of their movies, even though seven decades have passed since the first Disney princess movie *Snow White* (Hurley 2005). In early Disney movies and texts such as *Snow White* and *Sleeping Beauty*, there is a clear binary color symbolism between black and white. Throughout the both movies there are countless references to the good side as being white and having white features and the bad side as being black and having black features (Hurley 2005). This article is important because it demonstrates how Disney has portrayed race in their films, which could impact children of color's self-esteem and body image.

A study by Lacroix (2004) examines five heroines from Disney's most popular movies in the 1990s, finding that the heroines become increasingly more sexualized in each new movie and that the women of color are subject to orientalizing. Their orientalizing can be seen through their comparison with white heroines and how the white princesses' "whiteness" becomes invisible, i.e., Belle and Ariel. This article is important because it gives the best descriptions of physical appearance, gender norms, and sexuality.

All of the studies that connect back to princesses, specifically Disney princesses, lead to the proposed study focusing on the "witch" narrative juxtaposed against the "princess" narrative. In this section of the proposed study, I will argue that in recent

years, a new “witch” narrative has emerged, which has the potential to impact women’s self-esteem in a positive manner because it allows for a new narrative to emerge that challenges the historical dichotomy in popular culture that juxtaposes witches with princesses. The juxtaposition of witches and princesses in these various forms of visual media over the last 70 years demonstrates a socially constructed, dominant narrative that connects women’s physical appearance with their morality. Essentially, these narratives have depicted stereotypically “beautiful” women who are morally good and pure (i.e. the “princess” narrative) and stereotypically “ugly” women are morally bad and self-centered (i.e. the older “witch” narrative).

Traditional gender norms also permeate adult popular culture (Montemurro and Siefken 2014; Kaestle and Allen 2011; Feltmate and Brackett 2014; Heldman et al 2016). A study on popular films found that not only are women extremely outnumbered in major roles, but that their age impacts their leadership abilities and goal orientations (Lauzen and Dozier 2005). Specifically, as actors age, they become more likely to be cast in roles of leadership as characters who are more goal- oriented. For women, the opposite is true. As actresses, they are less likely to be cast in leadership or powerful roles and have fewer goals (Lauzen and Dozier 2005). This study demonstrates a narrative where women become less important in their careers with age, and that men become more important. Witch-themed movies, television shows, music albums, and styles of dress have skyrocketed over the last decade in popular culture. This cultural phenomenon is important because the majority of these new types of popular culture

are targeted at adult women rather than children like the older types of witch popular culture.

Grounded Theory

The perspective of grounded theory has been a trusted way to analyze qualitative data since the late sixties when Glaser and Strauss (1967) introduced the method. Grounded theory encourages suggestions for all phases of the research process. First, grounded theory is used as an inductive approach to research. Empirical data are collected without the guidance of hypotheses, as the data are meant to inform theory, rather than the other way around. Upon gathering the data and finding the relevant themes that emerge from them, the researcher then goes back and looks for specific theories from the literature that fit with the empirical data (Clarke 2012: 390).

Another unique aspect of this approach is that the data analysis phase begins as soon as there are data to analyze (Clarke 2012: 390). Analysis and data collection occur simultaneously and the researcher works with the data throughout the entire methodological process. Grounded theory is also believed to be a logical fit with a symbolic interactionist theoretical framework because grounded theory is meant to speak directly from the participants' own subjective views and experiences better understand how they make meaning of those experiences (Clarke 2012: 392). Grounded theory advocates for situated knowledge, or knowledge that is grounded in the explanations given by participants' and their specific life circumstances, which ultimately fits in with George H. Mead's concept of perspective, which was discussed in detail in

the section above (Clarke 2012: 392). As such, grounded theory was a logical choice for this study.

This project specifically pulled from a *social constructivist* type of grounded theory, rather than an objectivist grounded theory. The social constructivist approach allows for more innovative research that allows, “novel theoretical interpretations of studied life” (Charmaz 2006 and 2008: 398). The social constructivist grounded theory differs from Glaser and Strauss’s 1967 type of grounded theory, which was ultimately very positivistic in nature. One important component of a social constructivist approach is including researcher reflexivity and consideration for the researcher’s positionality, life experiences, and identity could impact the entire study (Charmaz 2008: 402).

Social constructivist strategies of grounded theory do not assume a singular objective truth, but rather an interpretive understanding based on the voices and experiences of the participants themselves. These strategies ultimately allow researchers to answer *why* questions. Instead of trying to force data to fit an objectivist framework (which was common in earlier grounded theory work), the social constructivist approach allows for an exploration of differences in the data and the ability to go more in-depth with understandings.

Feminist Literature

This section was written after the data collection and data analysis process began and after the main 9 themes of this study emerged. This section highlights feminist literature that contextualizes and explains the findings from this study. The focus of this section

will be on 1) intersections of race, class, and gender, 2) white femininity and 'white witches' simultaneous expression of being 'edgy' while also having the safety of white privilege and not challenging the patriarchal status quo, and 3) the body as a project. This literature is explained in more detail in chapters 5 and 6 in the explanation and exploration of each theme.

This study included interviews with 13 white women who self-identify as witches. It became clear very early on in the interviews that while the women in this study had many differing views and opinions on being a witch, they all experienced white privilege, which seemed to lessen the severity of social control they received. While some participants were aware of this privilege, the majority was not, even though they described experiences of privileges in some cases. It is also worth noting that many participants that identified as heterosexual were overly-affirming in their self-identified heterosexuality through the use of phrases like, "I'm super straight," "very straight," and, "definitely straight." These participants easily fit into what Ezzy (2006) described as 'white consumerist witches', which was further discussed in chapter 2.

Traditionally, witchcraft, and Wicca, was founded on principles of feminism, activism for equality, and environmentalism (Ezzy 2009, Griffin 1995). The majority of participants in this study did not advocate for these ideals, but instead focused on advocating that their witchcraft was positive and safe and was all about self-improvement through self-empowerment. Ultimately, this finding demonstrates that the category of 'white witch' is still relevant and needed in scholarly research (Ezzy 2009). None of the participants in this study had higher-level college degrees or mass

amounts of wealth, so they were not privileged in that way. However, their race and sexual orientations did give them more status.

Race became one of the most important social constructs of this study because the participants used race as a binary to break down the difference between morally 'good and 'bad' witches, which is common practice for 'white witches' who wish to profess their virtuousness to the mainstream media (Ezzy 2009). 'Bad' witches were reported to dabble in voodoo, something dark and uncontrollable and voodoo was simultaneously connected with women of color.

This finding was not surprising given the racial stereotypes that have existed throughout American history, including the Salem Witch Trials, to today. An interesting case to explore that demonstrates how important race constructs in witchcraft are dates back to the Salem Witch Trials and the individual known as Tituba (Hansen: 1974). Tituba is a famous "witch" (as described by others) who played a big role in the Witch Trials of 1692. Tituba was a slave to one of the most powerful men in Salem and she was accused of being a witch (Hansen 1974). Earliest court documents clearly describe her of being Indian, but over time her race shifted from Indian, to half black, to black (Hansen 1974).

It was believed that she practiced voodoo and brought witchcraft to the young girls and women of Salem, and ultimately that she was to blame for the "outbreak" of witchcraft. However, there is no solid proof that she practiced voodoo or witchcraft. She did confess to practicing witchcraft (most likely to save her own life after being severely tortured), but recanted later on while in jail (Hansen 1974).

Hansen (1974) was quick to point out that even academic scholars did not accurately report her race, because they relied on stories and research done by others rather than going back to the original court documents that held the truth. Finally, Tituba was portrayed as a black slave in *The Crucible*, whose magic became, “blacker as did her race” (Hansen 1974: 10). The narrative of blaming the black slave for “superstitious” and dangerous magic has carried on ever since, which is based in nothing factual as Tituba was not black and the witchcraft at Salem most likely originated from European traditions, not Indian or African traditions (Hansen 1974). This inaccurate narrative of the dangerous black woman’s magic is reiterated by some of the participants in this study, as seen in chapter 5.

This section concludes with a brief discussion of the role of the body in studies of feminism and witchcraft. As stated before, ‘white witches’ tend to focus on a self-described witchcraft that facilitates self-improvement, which in many cases is related to the making the body more attractive, in many cases because it will help find ‘true love’ (Sempruch 2004). However, when discussing the body in the context of self-described witches it is important to remember the historical context of the body to witches and witchcraft. Earlier a discussion on how the female body is a core tenet of early witchcraft and Wicca. The female body is praised for it’s ability to create life and how the creation of life parallels with nature and a love and appreciate of the earth. In patriarchal societies, and religions, that so often praise the male body, the Goddess movement arises to shift the focus to wonders of the female body (1995).

However when witch-hunts began, the tests to find if someone was a witch involved harsh tortures of the body and, sometimes, even death (Sempruch 119). The irony of torturing female bodies seeking out a group who praised the female body cannot be missed. It is also important to note that women who were tortured and killed were not self-described witches and only were able to show their 'innocence' through the destruction of their bodies and sometimes the death of their body. The body became a site of fear for those accused (Sempruch 119).

Another evident finding from this study was that self-identified witches feel empowerment through the ability to control their own bodies. In some cases, controlling their bodies refers to feminist politics, such as the right to have a legal abortion, which is not surprising to find from self-identified witches who advocate for feminist political rights and view that advocating as crucial to their self-described witch identity. Another self-reported attempt to control the body however, focused on the ability to *improve* the body in an effort to make it fit in with societal norms of beauty, such as being overly-thin. This finding is reminiscent of a finding related to modern-day "manscaping". Historically, the societal construction of attractiveness for male bodies included lots of body hair and wearing outfits that displayed excessive body hair (Immergut 2010).

However, that social norm has changed in the 1970s and now there is push for heterosexual men to remove excess hair below the face, or at least shape it up, and the term for this is manscaping. The term can be broken down into "man" and "landscaping," which suggests that men can landscape their bodies to look 'attractive' in

the same manner they landscape their yard. They can buy tools to do it and when the job is finished they can take pride in the job they have done and display it to be admired by others (Immergut 2010). Ultimately, the acts of manscaping and landscaping are about having control over body and land (Immergut 2010).

For the present study, this literature is useful because it highlights a trend where bodies (and the environment) can be controlled in an effort to fit in with a heterosexist and patriarchal beauty norm in society. In a very similar fashion to manscaping, 'white consumerist witches' can buy tools (such as books and spell work ingredients) to help them achieve a standard of beauty that exists in a heterosexist and patriarchal society (Ezzy 2006; Immergut 2010).

All of the findings and theories in the above section are highlighted and examined more in-depth in chapters 5 and 6 that focus on the findings of this study.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this study included interviewing (and a content analysis exclusively for Chapter 6), informed by grounded theory and guided by principles of qualitative research to both collect and analyze the data.

Research Questions

This study aimed to answer the four research questions outlined in the introduction: 1) what sociologically relevant factors lead women choosing to self-identify as a witch?; 2) what components does the process of choosing to identify as a witch entail?; 3) what meanings do self-identified witches attach to their and others' depictions of witches in popular culture?; and, finally, 4) what experiences do self-identified witches have with agents of social control? This entire project utilized insights from grounded theory, which means the data gathered illuminated themes throughout in-depth interviews with self-identified witches that were designed to answer the four research questions that guide the entire larger project. Therefore, there were no predetermined hypotheses (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

Even though there was not an explicit hypothesis within this study, there were some speculations presented by other researchers in their own studies of self-identified witches. The most important and influential for this study was the study that provided

speculation by Berger and Ezzy that young witches were drawn to the witch identity via modern popular culture portrayals of witches (2009).

The first research question this study aimed to answer is what sociologically relevant factors led to individuals choosing to self-identify as a witch and appropriate the witch stigma in a positive manner. This question was meant to be broad in nature because there could be a multitude of factors that impact individuals' decision to identify as a witch. Other scholars have found that modern individuals who identify as witches do not actually know another witch in their day-to-day lives, specifically someone they can communicate with face to face (Berger and Ezzy 2009).

Given the historical significance of the Salem Witch Trials and the emergence of the stigmatized identity of "the witch," the third research question aimed to uncover how modern witches experience social control in their daily lives. The interview questions written to answer this question are very broad and will hopefully allow participants to explore many different agents of social control, from the formal legal system in our country to the informal interactions with laypeople.

Research Design

This grounded theory research project used qualitative methodology to uncover the sociological factors that led to participants' interest in being a witch, the process of starting to identify themselves as a self-described witch, their views on depictions of witches in popular culture and the participants' experiences with social control after appropriating the historically stigmatized identity of "witch." This project included in-

depth, semi-structured interviews with individuals who identify as witches. I allowed the term “witch” to encompass many different meanings and interpretations. Specifically, there appears to be a trend in society where individuals take on the label of “witch,” even though they would not describe themselves as Wiccan, Pagan, or Neo-Pagan. While historically the label of “witch” was associated with a religious or spiritual identity, there have been modern internalizations of the term for individuals who enjoy deviant aesthetics, deviant labels of empowerment, and, most recently, use the term as part of their political label, which is later discussed in this chapter as it was very important to the participants. The latter can be seen, for instance, in the slogan, “We are the granddaughters of the witches you couldn’t burn,” which advocates for gender, sexual, and racial equality through the opposition of political policies that aim to control women’s bodies or support structural barriers for racial and economic equality (Unknown author, quote appeared in Thawer, 2015).

The one requirement for participants to be included in the proposed study is that they self-identify as “witch.” I wanted to obtain as diverse as possible group of participants, but that that proved be difficult given the demographics of the group as a whole (see below, section on Sample and Data Collection).

An interesting finding was that some of the participants were hesitant (or completely refused) to do an interview that recorded their image or voice. I was surprised at this finding because it became much more difficult to find participants to interview. After doing the first 10 interviews I made the decision to allow email interviews (that contained follow up questions for clarity) to allow the project to be

completed in a timely manner for this dissertation project. I continued until data saturation was achieved, which occurred at 10 participants for white, cisgender women.

After selecting participants, I conducted in-depth interviews using an 18-question interview guide, which can be found in Appendix A. This guide was used for interviews conducted via Zoom. For those participants completing email interviews, there was an extended questionnaire initially sent to participants, which can be found in Appendix B.

Following the research questions, the interview questions can be grouped into four categories: 1) Identifying as a Witch; 2) Process of Becoming a Witch; 3) Witches in Popular Culture; and 4) the Social Control of Witches. There may be some overlap in the categories and questions, which was purposeful to make sure as much information was gathered from the participants as possible. The interviews are semi-structured because I wanted each participant to be able to discuss information that they viewed as most salient to their identities and experiences that may not fit the outlined question sequence (Clarke 2012). Each interview lasted around one hour, with the shortest interview lasting 48 minutes and the longest 90 minutes. Participants who were interviewed via Zoom were not informed of the categories for each set of questions because that could possibly have led their answers towards the topics I was trying to discover organically in the interview.

Most sociological research projects involving interviewing includes three steps: 1) gaining access to the population; 2) knowing the language and the culture of the

participants; and 3) gaining trust of the participants through developing rapport (Hesse-biber 2012). Details of this process will be discussed below.

After each interview was completed, I wrote down overall thoughts and key points in a journal to help process the information and to start to develop themes immediately. Relying on a grounded theory strategy that does not recommend using testable hypotheses (Clarke 2012), the data was analyzed qualitatively for themes that emerge in order to answer the four main research questions for the study. After all interviews were completed and I achieved data saturation based on the thematic key points in my journal, I had each interview professionally transcribed. During the analysis phase of this project, I printed hard copies of transcriptions and then manually went through and color-coded the data based on themes that emerged (which is further discussed in detail in the following section on Data Analysis).

Self-Reflexivity

Another critical part of qualitative methodology is reflexivity throughout the entire research process. My journal was not only utilized for summaries after interviews, but also to keep my personal biases in check. As my own background and life experiences could impact the research process, I was consistently attentive to my role as a central part of the research instrument (Hesse-Biber 2012). My journal started developing at the beginning of this project and continued through the writing process.

Some participants in this study made comments during their interview that made it clear they assumed I was also a self-described witch and others asked if I was a

witch. I am not a self-described witch and was always honest with participants when they asked. This sentiment was never met with hostility or distrust (as best as I could tell) by any of my participants. They seemed to view this interview as a learning opportunity for me. I do have an alternative fashion look, commonly referred to as a goth aesthetic. My visual appearance of being alternative may have helped me connect and build rapport with my participants due to their similar self-described alternative lifestyle choices, such as their own fashion or their self-described witch identity. Many participants were found on Instagram and some participants commented that they liked my Instagram page, which I again assume is based on alternative rhetoric, such as goth images, I have displayed there. I think my Instagram page helped me find participants, which is discussed in the section below.

When discussing the participants' negative life experiences that they linked with their witch identity I had to have a strong rapport and often hear some disturbing stories, particularly those that dealt with sexual violence. I made sure that my participants were not in distress and continually made let them know they did not have to continue if they did not want to do so and made sure they were aware of the confidentiality of their narratives.

I was initially drawn to the topic of witches because of my overall professional interests in social control, popular culture, and gender, as well as my personal interest in deviant women, alternative fashion, and self-empowerment. Social control was my main interest coming into this project and I expected to hear stories from women that would be sad and upsetting, but I was not expecting to hear stories of sexual assault. I

think I should have been prepared for studies of sexual assault, because given the national statistics for sexual violence against women, *any* study with women has a strong chance of including multiple women who are victims of sexual assault.

However, I think my background and professional training as an advocate for women who are survivors of domestic violence and sexual violence prepared me to handle these stories very well from my participants. I feel like I am able to maintain a professional demeanor, while also being supportive and a good active listener to these women. I feel like one of my strengths in this project was my ability to handle personal and sensitive stories of all kinds from my participants by first being a listener and then a researcher who is able to present her voice in this chapter. It was also very useful to use my journal to reflect broadly on the social control of deviant women after each interview, particularly those that dealt with violence, allowing myself time to react emotionally to what I had heard after the interview was completed.

Sample and Data Collection

The sample for the data in this research project was selected from self-identified witches. Given the population of self-described witches in the United States I was not surprised to find that most participants were white, lower to middle class individuals. I tried to include participants who not adhere to these demographics, which was difficult and ultimately did not occur. I was able to find individuals from all over America and one in Spain. I also had participants from very poor backgrounds. The participant from Spain was included because of her time spend in the United States and her interest in

American popular culture. I was surprised to find that my sample included individuals of very differing political affiliations, given the notion that witches and witchcraft have heavy roots in feminism.

I started looking for participants on social media. Instagram became my main location for searching for participants. Given my goal of finding a wide range of self-described witches, I believed this was the best place to start. Instagram was my initial starting point because I felt confident I could find varying types of witches, given the common use of specific hashtags that people use to self-identify. I sent messages to people seeking participants who identify as "witch" to varying degrees. For example, I looked for individuals who identify as witches in an aesthetic sense, political sense (such as the @witchboston, which focuses almost exclusively on political issues), or religious sense. To find individuals who fit into the aesthetic category I contacted the following Instagram accounts: @witchworldwide, @witchbabysoap, @killstarco, and @dollskill. All four of these accounts are run by Indie stores that sell products targeted to "witches." I also messaged similar accounts as well, such as those with any type of witch rhetoric. What is most interesting about these stores is that they all promote and sell clothing and accessory items with the label of "witch" or phrases about being a "witch" on them. While Wiccans may also shop from these sites, I have found from following the pages for the last two or three years that individuals who use "witch" as a label for a deviant, and often Gothic, aesthetic shop heavily from these sites.

Most of these accounts did not respond to my messages, which was not shocking given the number of messages these accounts receive on a daily basis. Two did respond

to me and agreed to do email interviews. One did agree to an interview but after receiving the questions said that they did not think that they had anyone who worked there who was, “actually a witch.” Another account initially seemed eager to participate but never responded to multiple emails.

I wanted to interview people running those accounts because they have useful experiences and insights as promoters of items that had the label of "witch" for people to display on their bodies. I asked these big accounts to post my interview flyer on their pages, but that was not successful.

Next, I privately messaged individuals who used hashtags: #iamawitch #witchlife and #witch. Individuals who use these hashtags were much more responsive, and I found the majority of respondents following this route. I did either email or Zoom interviews with these participants because they were from all over the country, which made face-to-face interviews impossible. I worked to obtain participants through snowball sampling and offered participants an additional \$5 if they referred someone to me that completed an interview. I obtained three participants following this strategy, but it ultimately proved to be unsuccessful given the fact that most of my participants identify as solitary witches, and they reported that they did not actually know other witches. Each participant received \$10 for completing the interview.

I also reached out to a makeup influencer on Instagram who does very alternative and goth looks and has occasionally used the word “witch” to describe herself. I was not sure if she actually identified as a witch outside of social media. She indicated that she does not identify as a witch. However, she was able to put me into

contact with four other individuals who identified as witches. Three of those four agreed to be interviewed, while the fourth one did not.

I also posted a listing on *WitchVox: The Witches' Voice*, a website that focuses on connecting witches both at a global level and local level. While my listing had many views, I did not have anyone come forth to do an interview with me from that site. I had high hopes to find local witches in South Carolina because I was missing witches from my own area. The closest I came to South Carolina was Charlotte, North Carolina.

I went back to my literature review on modern self-described witches and found that a common place for witches to meet up is at Renaissance Festivals, even if it is not openly advertised. An acquaintance of mine had attended a Renaissance Faire in Charlotte, NC with a friend who attends with her family every year. I reached out to her to see if she knew of anyone who self-identified as a witch. She told me that she used to dabble in it herself and had a good friend from years ago who was a very prominent and vocal self-described witch. My acquaintance's friend connected with this prominent witch, and she agreed to do an interview. She connected me with more self-identified witches.

Data Analysis

I followed the grounded theory perspective to analyze my data and began analyzing as soon as the first interview was completed. It was important to look at the data as I proceeded through the entire interviewing process so that I would know when data saturation was achieved. I also found that questions needed to be added to my

interview guide as I conducted more interviews and found salient discussions that my original research questions did not delve into.

I allowed my data to speak for themselves, as it were, and let the themes emerge based on what my participants revealed during the interviews (Clarke 2012). Each participant was given a pseudonym in the following chapters in order to maintain confidentiality. I did thematic coding on the transcriptions of the interviews to find the common themes that emerged. While themes emerged that did answer my research questions, other themes emerged that my research questions did not intentionally intend to discover. An essential goal of this type of methodology was to precisely allow the themes that are salient to my participants to emerge, rather than I, as the researcher, pushing them towards certain answers based on predetermined hypotheses.

In the first stage of data analysis, I did memo writing based on the journal I had been keeping. Initial coding occurred next, where I looked for overarching themes in the interview data. Following that, I did line-by-line coding for sections that had important quotes or a lot of information to process. This process required taking each line from the interview at a time and dissecting what is occurring in that specific phrase.

The process was very detail oriented and ensured no themes were missed and found ways to expand and connect themes I had already found. I looked for comparing incidents, and sought times where participants have had similar experiences, thoughts, or meaning-making moments. I also focused on differing experiences and uncovered what might lead to differing experiences for each participant. Each theme had

properties that defined and, in some cases, expanded it. I was not able to do line coding for every line of every interview due to time restraints. I was able to focus on the most important quotes and expanded on the most important themes.

I did all coding following a coloring scheme using highlighters, colored post-its, and drawing webs of each theme to see how they interacted with and incorporated each other. I was able to do some axial coding for the participants in this study, and found that socio-economic statuses and education levels created a pattern for political identity, specifically those with lower SES and lower education levels were more likely to have conservative political identities.

Once data saturation was achieved, I began writing up my findings categorized by each theme uncovered. After all themes were solidified, I went back to the literature to see which theories fit best with my findings. Symbolic interactionist theories proved to be the most useful for framing other specific theories (discussed in the Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework).

Scope and Limitations

The scope of this project is focused on a small subculture in society. This study is not meant to be generalizable to all self-identified witches or to be representative of what it means to a modern self-described witch around the world today. The focus of this project is on self-identified witches and uncovering very detailed information on their identify formation, the process of becoming a witch in modern society, the role of relevant sociological factors in that process and formation, how popular culture

depictions of witches impacted their identity formation. This study fills a gap in the sociological literature on how and why individuals choose to become witches, as well as the literature on identity formation, self-empowerment, symbols of self-empowerment, and the meanings attached to those identities and symbols.

As a limitation to this study, the findings cannot be used to make generalizations about the entire population of self-identified witches today. The study has a small n and most participants were drawn from Instagram. The individuals selected to be in this study were initially contacted because they had used a witch hashtag recently at the time I searched for participants. Followed by the use of snowball sampling for later participants.

This scope is practical and these limitations expected given the type of study and difficulty of locating participants. The participants in this study were not paid much (\$10), so they chose to participate and give up their time to speak, or write, with me mostly because they wanted their voices to be heard.

Content Analysis

Chapter 4 included a content analysis of the television show *American Horror Story: Coven* (2013). Below are the details on how that content analysis was conducted. This portion of the study aimed to answer central research questions related to: the role of popular culture in identity formation. I viewed each episode of the season of *Coven* 6 times, and took notes on each character's development the first 3 viewings, and focused

on the plot and intersections of characters the last 3 viewings. I did qualitative thematic coding on my notes.

Even though there was not an explicit hypothesis within this study, there were some hypotheses presented by other researchers. The most important and influential for this study was the previously mentioned speculation by Berger and Ezzy that young witches were drawn to the witch identity via modern popular culture portrayals of witches (2009).

This section of the study aimed to answer concerned the meanings self-identified witches attached to depictions of witches in popular culture. Berger and Ezzy (2009) speculate that popular culture could be the leading sociological factor in a young woman's decision to become a witch, given the lack of a face-to-face community of witches in their daily lives. Recent depictions of witches in popular culture show strong, self-empowered witches who are in control of their sexuality, gender, and have high levels of agency (see, e.g., *American Horror Story: Coven*). Modern depictions of witches have flipped the script and show witches who are heroines in stories rather than the historically identified villains. This portion of the research aimed to uncover how self-identified witches view these depictions in popular culture and make meaning out of them, while also further investigating the role that popular culture could play as an agent of gender socialization.

The research design of this chapter incorporated depictions and images of witches in popular culture, as well as interview. To strengthen my data on witches in popular culture based on interviews, I used detailed examples from some of the visual

media that incorporate witches. This part of my data is exclusively used to provide explicit examples to back up pieces of popular culture mentioned in the interviews. The most important visual I will use is an intersectional analysis of the contemporary show *American Horror Story: Coven* (2013) using Lynn Weber's intersectional framework (2010). The second most important visual will be the film version of *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) and a brief mention of the updated version in the form of a musical, *Wicked* (1995). The third visual used is *The Craft* (1996). The final visual used is the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018).

The *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* was not initially one of the media sources I planned to use. However, it was mentioned so frequently by the participants that I included it during my analysis phase, which follows the guidelines of grounded theory. These four media depictions were chosen because: 1) they show a shift in the character of the witch over eight decades; 2) they demonstrate a moral connection between princesses and witches – specifically that witches are morally bad and princesses are morally good; 3) the more recent depictions of witches ambiguously move the witch from the evil character to possibly the heroine; and 4) show modern day depictions of diverse women who are witches (specifically, *American Horror Story: Coven*).

Other visual demonstrations were used for the purpose of examples including *Charmed* (1998) and its reboot, as well as other visuals that were used by participants themselves. This technique was used to provide context for scholars or readers who may not be familiar with these visual media sources and also to help us understand the symbol of the witch in popular culture and the meanings attached to that symbol given

the symbolic interactionist framework that is incorporated into the entire project
(Ferrell and Sanders 1995).

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS: WITCH IDENTITY

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the first six main findings of this dissertation. The first main finding in this chapter is that most self-identified witches describe the process of becoming a witch as a “lifelong process” that typically started around the age of puberty and will continue for their entire lives. The second theme is on political identity. Initially, political identity was only the scope of one research question, and not relevant to the study when compared to other questions. However, given the grounded theory framework for this dissertation, this theme became a dominant and relevant theme because it was so salient to the participants in the study. The participants in this study do not discuss their political identity as connected to their witch identity. In fact, some of the participants stated that their witch identity is completely disconnected from their political identity. Some of them are even vocal supporters of conservative politics and current President Donald Trump. This finding was unexpected given the general assumption that witchcraft (and anything associated with it) has roots in feminism.

The third theme of this chapter focuses on how a minority of the participants in this study describe Voodoo as negative and dangerous in comparison with their self-described witchcraft, which they describe as positive and focused on helping others.

During this association of voodoo and negativity racial implications are made. Some participants seem to connect individuals of color to negative witchcraft, while also associating white individuals with positive witchcraft.

Findings four, five, and six depict the experiences and processes of women who choose a deviant identity and find self-empowerment through that subversive appropriation. Theme four demonstrated that becoming a witch is a form of self-empowerment that most participants view as a unique attribute about themselves, based on their deviant status. Theme five highlights how even though self-reported witches feel empowered, they also feel they have to sometimes “come out” as a witch, and other times it is safer for them “to stay in the closet” with their witch identity. Finally, theme 6 helps illuminate the paradox of themes four and five by revealing specific instances of social control they have received and the fear that develops after those run-ins.

Theme 1: The Process of Becoming a Witch

Almost every participant agreed that becoming a self-described witch was a process and not just something that happened overnight. The amount of time participants had officially been a witch varied, but most participants say that the process began around the age of 11 or 12. It was surprising that so many specifically said the ages “11 or 12”. For example, Sarah said, *“Probably when like, you know, 11, 12. When you really start coming into your own.”* This age is also generally when puberty begins, which it is striking, because this small detail was abundant among almost all participants. Many

participants discussed their heightened connections with the moon and its phases. A small group of participants equated that with their menstrual cycles and blood moons.

While many of the participants described a similar process of *choosing* to become a witch, a small minority said they were born witches and did not have a choice in their identity, which is very similar to contemporary stories of gender and sexual identity. The participants who reported being a 'born witch' also reported having feelings similar to those of the LGBTQ community as far fear as what others would think of their identity and having to go through a 'coming to terms' moment and acceptance of their identity.

Calley described herself as an "ancestral witch," which means that she carries witchcraft in her bloodlines. She said she knew she was different from around the age of 6, specifically she had heightened abilities with seeing spirits of her ancestors. She recently found out that her dead grandmother had been a strong witch with healing powers. She also learned that no one in her family ever really talked about her grandmother's power, and two of her aunts were also witches. She was shocked because she had already become a witch on her own. She had had a conversation recently with an old man who identified as a witch who also claimed to know she was a witch on the spot. They were discussing the life long journey that witches travel. Calley was proud of this moment because she felt it gave her authenticity, recognition for her identity, and ultimately belonging to a group and having her membership immediately accepted.

Calley described it saying, *"I actually spoke to someone recently, um, who was a Wiccan, who, who practiced and everything. And they said something funny to me, and I honestly, you know what? Spirit, spiritually, you're on a journey. You know what I mean? So, you're gonna, you're gonna go through a lot of things. Like I bet you I won't be, um, I'm trying to like, uh, I don't know how to explain it. Like, I'm trying to build my abilities more. But that probably won't take me until another 20 years. You know what I mean? It's a lot of dedication, repetition, reading. A lot of reading. I have a lot of books on it."*

Similarly to Calley, Michelle described her process as knowing she was always into darker things in life, but a witch who ran a witchcraft shop told her she was a witch. Michelle began officially identifying as a witch at that moment. She said the shop owner was holding a cup of tea and said, *"I've been waiting on you to come."* She described herself as, *"Um, I've always been kind of on the side of this is where I feel most comfortable. But never really in high school did I like embrace it and I mean, college, I was always the person that people were like, "oh, I wanna go. I wanna go and like do a Ouija board in the- the graveyard!"*

Sarah echoed these sentiments when she talked about always being into "creepy" things as a child. This is how Sarah described her process of becoming a witch, *"I think it was gradual. Like, I've just been so raised on spiritual aspects. And even like, I was always brought up on like, Fleetwood Mac, and like, Stevie Nicks and all that kind of stuff. And I always loved really creepy things too. I always actually really admire dark aspects of things, you know? I feel like the more you learn about dark things, the more you can learn how to avoid it and not become it... I would say people would think that*

it's edgy, but I don't, at all. I almost consider myself like, the opposite. Like, I'm ... I feel like I'm very boring, and just like, "Thanks. Thanks, tree."

Another common theme that emerged was that many participants were raised in a religious household growing up, but when they hit the age of 11 or 12 they began to question the authority figures in their religious life, which made them start to explore other religions. Courtney, was raised Catholic and had a much older sister who introduced her to a metaphysical shop when she was in middle school. She talked about her sister and her brother-in-law by saying, *"Her husband was Catholic. We were all raised Catholic. But she kind of branched out like I did, just trying to find better answers than what the Bible told us. So she kind of actually took me to this place in Milford, which unfortunately isn't there anymore. I'm so sad about that. But I want to say I was going into high school and I skipped a grade. I skipped third grade So I was 12 or 13. It was really hard for me. I, being bullied a lot in public school, my parents actually sent me to a private academy because my grades allowed me to. It was actually a Christian academy and I really, really liked the sense of community within the church feeling. So it was really hard for me. Spiritually, I felt really pulled because I loved the metaphysical world and I loved that energy, but I also really loved my school family. There was (sic) only 30 of us in a class, and they all prayed with each other. So at that time, it was really hard for me to figure out what I was. I went to a lot of different churches of different denominations, trying to just find the right answer, and it really wasn't until after I graduated that I really explored the Wiccan path more.... Actually, yeah. When I went to that metaphysical shop for that first time. It was when, like I said, I had been having a*

hard time in my life. I was bullied a lot and I just wanted to be loved, so I actually bought a love satchel pouch thing and it said to keep it under your pillow and then in the full moon, put it out in the moonlight so it can recharge. Three months later, I actually met my first boyfriend and we were together for four years.”

Courtney also said that she felt so welcomed into witchcraft when she went back to the shop months later for the second time and the woman who owned the shop had remembered her name. After being bullied and not accepted by her peers she was so happy to finally find a place of belonging and membership – her school academy. She described the girls in her new school as welcoming and non-judgmental. The only issue with the school was its Catholic religious stance, which Courtney did not feel morally right about. She was seeking a place to belong and a community that coincided with her new interest in the metaphysical, which she found in both the physical structure and emotional structure of the metaphysical shop her sister took her too.

Vanessa was also raised Catholic. She described the process of becoming a witch as a lifelong journey and was so excited to discover reincarnation as part of her new spiritual identity. For example, she said, *“And then reincarnation, that, Oh my God, that blew my mind. Now I'm a 100% believer. I've had regressions in everything. I totally believe. It was years of developing it over time, and then meditating really helps a lot. It helps you to really discover yourself and the world and universe around you. Of course, I mean you can't get all the answers. You're not supposed to anyway because otherwise you can't learn. It was definitely a process. I feel like it's a lifelong process for everybody.”*

One of the most interesting stories for why participants became a witch was that of Samantha, who entirely credits her witch identity to her psychiatrist. She very excitedly told me the following story with a big smile on her face the entire time, “So, I have, um, a severe generalized anxiety disorder. And, I do not like taking meds for it. That's kind of a trigger for me, taking my meds and then it's a whole like cycle of, it doesn't really fix anything because it's triggering me to even take them. So, I talked to my doctor, and, um, he, like just kind of chatted a bit and he found out I was like, you know, looking at different religions just being in town, and, uh, he thought that would like be something that would help me. So, he recommended looking into Catho- Catholicism, because Catholicism has a lot of ritual within their religion. And so, he thought if I had something that was important to me that involved a lot of ritual, that that would help calm my anxiety. It would be something that my brain would focus on every day. And, I really loved that idea, but, um, Catholicism was not for me. (laughs)...So, I, I started but I, I really liked the idea and the more I thought about it, the more I just kind of wanted to have a spiritual connection. It just made sense to me that that was something I was missing in my life. And so, I started just doing a bunch of research, started looking at different religions, started with Christian religions. Um, my dad's from the Middle East, so I looked at Islam. Um, and then I started looking at some of the non-Christian religions starting with, um, Buddhism and Hindu, and that path sort of just led, (laughs) to Wicca...Yeah it just, and that's just where I landed. And, it, it really just, as soon as I started reading about it, it just, I don't know, it just made sense to me, it clicked. And then adding the rituals with witchcraft on to that, and becoming a witch, it just, it felt so right

and it, I don't know if that was, you know, it probably was partially because the ritual helped with my anxiety, (laughs) that it felt so right.”

Samantha’s story is unique because a health provider, someone she viewed as an authority figure and someone to be trusted guided her down the path to finding witchcraft. She was also looking for a sense of belonging and having an authentic membership in a group in an effort to have a more ritualized daily process and support system. She did not feel comfortable with other mainstream religions. Her choice to be a self-described witch was practical in the sense it provided relief to her anxiety, but it also gave her a unique outlet to express her diversity.

Theme 2: Political Identity and Hexing Donald Trump

Perhaps the most unexpected finding in this study was related to political identity and current President Donald Trump. The interview guide originally did have one political question, specifically asking if witch identity was directly connected with their political identity. This question was added to the study based on findings in prior research and the general assumption that Wicca, witchcraft, and witches have deep roots in feminism. I expected this question would verify that most of the participants were indeed very liberal-leaning, feminists. However, that was not the case for all participants, which is why this theme is discussed below.

I found that a large minority of participants, specifically 5, are supportive of conservative values, Republican politics, and some even support controversial President Donald Trump. Another surprising finding was that most self-identified witches in this

study do not believe their witch identity and political identities are connected, even those who describe themselves as liberal and/or feminist.

One idea that every participant consistently repeated from beginning to end of their interviews is that the biggest and most important thing that could come from this study is to let society know that self-identified witches of today do not do anything that would cause harm to another individual.

In response to this statement, I began bringing up the recent gatherings of witches to hex Donald Trump. These events were common all over the country (two occurred locally in Columbia, SC). While some people viewed these events, usually bars, as a funny joke during a tense political climate, there were also self-identified witches who were reportedly really hexing Donald Trump. There was arguably a rise in individuals who began identifying as “witches” as a political identity in a defiant response to Trump’s election. Images began to arise of protest signs that had the slogan, “We are the granddaughters of the witches you couldn’t burn.”

This study uncovered what actual self-identified witches thought of hexing Donald Trump. The vast majority of participants were immediately against this idea because of the fact that hexing is always negative and will cause harm, even if they openly did not like Donald Trump. This was particularly true of participants who identified as Wiccan. Samantha said, *“So, since I'm specifically Wiccan, um, I, I do not do any hexing. Negative energy is just not something that I ever want in my life, or to even deal with or put out...Um, so I, I, I mean spiritually and religiously, I don't agree with it. I don't think it's okay. I think if you have not- that negative energy or if somebody like*

Donald Trump (laughs) is affecting you in a negative way, I think the responsible thing to do is to, um, meditate and ground that energy and get it out of you, rather than to try and direct it at a specific person."

Sarah, for example, stated, *"I think it's ... I still think it's negative. You know? It's also like seeking revenge on a bad boyfriend. Just like, we'll just let him catch ... Like, you know, let him get himself. Like, harm will-will come and get him. Like, don't."* She summed up others' opinions that there was no need to hex him, because karma will come to him. Even if participants did not use the word "karma," they insinuated the same sentiment. Similarly Maria said, *"I don't believe in spells to control or bind the free will of others. So regardless of my feelings about Donald Trump, I did not support those spell groups."*

Sarah, who was against hexing Trump, was one of the few that did say her political identity was connected to her witch identity. She was part of the minority on that thought, and summarized others' views very nicely. She said, *"I think so (identities are connected). Because I feel like when you're ... you are a witch, you're very open minded to things, because you know there's like ... I think the universe takes a lot of part of it, and there's like, you know, there's a spirit realm. And you believe in all the other things that are like, more ... it's not like, tangible to a lot of people. So I feel like when you, in a sense, that, you're also very open minded. As in like, you're not very strict. You're not, you know, "These people can't have rights. And you can't do this, and you can't do that."*

Other participants expressed concern about individuals who had no prior interest or understanding of practicing witchcraft trying to hex someone to make a political statement. They could cause harm to the wrong person or throw off natural balances in the environment. This view was best summarized by Angela, who said, *"Huh. Well, I did see something going around about all the witches getting together and hexing Donald Trump. I didn't. I don't think I would ever hex anybody. I just don't use my energies for that. My energies are to help people, and help them go through things that they're going through using their own strength, I guess sort of a sounding board. That's what I do, and I read tarot. That's what I do, I just sit and talk with people...It's basically therapy without a degree. Not great, but I only do that for my friends who ask me to listen. Legal disclaimer. No, I remember seeing that about how some individuals were deciding they were gonna be witches because they wanted to hex Donald Trump. My initial reaction is that, aw that's cute...I'm not gonna waste energy getting angry at them if it's something they really want to pursue, and this is the avenue that starts them there then, I mean, whatever dude. Whatever works for you. If they're touting themselves as a someone who really practices these things, and saying that they have knowledge that they have not learned, that's the thing that bothers me. If they're going to go to other people, seeking help, saying, "Well, I'm a witch, I can help you," and they started from this place of hatred, in the simplest terms, then they're only going to do damage...While I appreciate their sentiment, and I understand their motivation, acting on those things in a way that affects other people, is irresponsible. If they do want to go down this path, with the intention of learning the wisdom, practicing the ritual, all of those things, that's*

fine. But if they're dipping their toe in and calling themselves an Olympic swimmer it's not gonna end well. Not for them, not for the people they're trying to help."

Mentioning Donald Trump also elicited emotional responses from individuals who were quick to support him. This finding was most shocking because Trump is known for being against feminists and vice versa. There were four participants in this study who were very open in their support of Donald Trump. Calley said, *"It depends how you use it, but if people are, like, he ha- he's so controversial, like with everything, everything's like, everyone's like coming down on, on him. I would probably say like if they're gonna hex him, it's gonna be something bad. So, I would, I feel like that is negative, you know? He is our, um, President, like, I don't know. Uh, people ... If you think about it too, before him...But like I never, I never heard of anyone, of all the, all the crap he's getting, you know what I mean? Like people are just coming down on him and, uh, I don't get it. Like, they never, people never showed that much disrespect to any other President. And, now you have witches that are coming out of nowhere, that are hexing him. Yeah. It just doesn't look good for us, honestly. You know what I mean? There's no need for that. If anything, pray for something good to happen to America, you know what I mean? I'm not trying to shit on it. Sorry, sorry if I curse. (nervous laughs)"*

Calley's quote was striking because the conversation leading up to this had been light-hearted and included a lot of smiling and giggling. When I first asked the question she continued giggling but became gravely serious in the middle of the above quote when she began talking about the people who are disrespecting Trump. She also swore

for the first time during this comment and then quickly ended it with nervous laughter and an apology for cursing.

It is not surprising that the four participants who were vocally supportive of Donald Trump and conservative politics were also white, of lower socioeconomic status, and had the lowest levels of education. What was surprising is that none of them were geographically located in areas that are known for being politically conservative. They all came from very liberal states and cities. They also vocalized their belief in traditional gender norms. This sentiment was best captured by Courtney, who went as far as to equate witches who hex Trump to being as bad as the people who hung the “witches” of the Salem Witch Trials. She said, *“As far as the political one, that goes along with my whole negativity. That's just adding. We have tried so hard to grow from the negativity. We're one of the oldest religion and belief systems, but there's so much negativity tied to our very, very light and beautiful belief. I think that now, we've grown so much and these people are pulling us back again. They're making us look like these people that ... The people that hung witches, what they claimed. They claimed that we were horrible and terrible and we're sitting here trying to tell people no, we're not. Then these individuals who are claiming they're witches are doing exactly that. They're being terrible... No. I think they're completely separate. Not to sound politically correct, but I personally try to create a separation between church and state. We're entitled to our religion, but we also are entitled to our political views, and I think that traditionally speaking, I'm not a traditional witch, really. I have a gun permit and I hunt and I live on my old property where we farm. I don't know. I feel like the stigma around especially witches now is that*

they're very more conservative and they have more beliefs. I know a lot of witches are very extreme feminists and such. So I know that there's more or less a connection, but I don't feel like I follow it. I don't think I fit in that category...Not necessarily [consider herself a feminist]. I'm a bit more old fashioned. My boyfriend and I live together and we both work, but I cook and I'll clean and he cuts the wood, brings it in, he's out fixing the pipes. We have a very traditional relationship, kind of that old school. Yeah. And I have no problem with that. I have no problem taking care of him because I know that financially, he makes more than me. So I know he's taking care of me financially. He pays more on our mortgage. He does the grunt work around the house. Yeah, I might cook and clean, but I'm not underneath the house getting soaked by nasty pipes. Yeah. So I think that I don't necessarily think I identify as feminist, especially not the ones nowadays that are a bit more extreme.” It is worth noting that these individuals also viewed themselves heavily as non-conformists for not fitting into the supposed conformity of most self-identified witches, while the more liberal self-identified witches viewed themselves as non-conformists because they did not adhere with what they viewed as a conservative society.

Courtney's comment above is very reminiscent of the 'white witch' category discussed in the prior sections on witch identity and the feminist literature (Ezzy 2006). Courtney views herself as edgy because of her witch identity, but is also quick to point out that she does not identify as a feminist, believes in traditional gender norms, and ultimately does not do anything to challenge the patriarchal status quo (Ezzy 2006). She wants to be accepted by broader society as a morally 'good' witch and demonstrates

how she is different from self-described feminist witches. The othering of feminist witches elevates her “virtue” by positioning herself as better than the witches who do challenge the patriarchal status quo (Ezzy 2006).

Finally, Vanessa was an interesting case because she consistently went back and forth on saying she was not politically conservative, but spoke favorably of conservative and liberal values simultaneously. She said, *“I think everything I believe is connected. I'm really centered. If you look at the political quadrant thing, I'm like almost right in the center. I'm a little smidge over to the right. Smidge. I'm like so almost center. I would say ... I would say that there's some things that are definitely close. I mean, witches are big into protection a lot. They're big in protection. I'm very protective of myself, my family, our country. To me, that's a big thing I'm protective of. But at the same time, witches are ... For Heaven's sake, they worship the earth. Some of them. The environment is a huge thing to me. Animals, like I said I'm a vegan, so animals are a big deal to me. I mean, I'm not going to go protesting in the streets covered in blood running naked or anything. I'm not like those people, but I try to do my part to make the world a better place for the animals, the plants, the earth itself, the people. That's why I'm like right in the center pretty much.”* Grounded theory only method that would have uncovered these political findings, as politics was not originally a major focus of this study.

Vanessa reiterates the othering of liberal leaning individuals in the same way that Courtney did above. Again, Vanessa is able to elevate her own status by comparing herself, and ultimately positioning herself as better than others, through language that fits into the ‘white witch’ rhetoric (Ezzy 2006). In this specific instance Vanessa says, “I’m

not like *those people*” referring to activists who publicly advocate for animals rights. She also is quick to comment that she does care about, “the earth itself” even though her interview never discussed ways in which she advocates for environmentalism, which is again, one of the traditional core tenets of Wicca and earlier witchcraft (Ezzy 2006).

Theme 3: The ‘Dark’ Side of Magic: Voodoo and Racial Implications

The final finding for the first chapter focuses on the theme of Voodoo being, arguably, the antithesis of Wicca, some participants simultaneously argued that witches who are people of color are more likely to perform dangerous, harmful witchcraft (Voodoo) when compared to white women’s witchcraft (Wicca). It is important to immediately note that this theme was not dominant in all of the interviews, but did emerge in around half of the interviews, although in varying degrees.

The other important factor in the interviews that had this theme emerge is that some of these individuals report actually knowing nothing about Voodoo other than individuals of color practice it and that it is perceived as negative. These statements were more nuanced and found in subtle statements from multiple parts of each interview. The first case worth noting is Angela’s. Angela spoke early on in her interview about Voodoo and said she had studied it, but never practiced it. She said, *“I have met a woman who called herself a bruja. That was when I was traveling, so it's not in my home base community. I also met a gal who was very much into Voodoo because her mother and grandmother were. I suppose right now where I am I don't have as many as would be enjoyable to me, because I would love that. I guess right now not really, maybe one or*

two...I've studied it (Voodoo). I haven't enacted any of it, basically. Well, the thing about it is, is that we're using the same mechanics in our brain when we do those things. When a Voodoo priestess is using a dead crow and a jackal skull, she's doing a ritual. It's all ritualistic, and the components of each ritual is dependent on the tree that this branch comes from. I would never do any kind of life sacrifice of any sort. I feel that that would be throwing something out of balance, and that's not for me, but I do know that with very specific demands, a Voodoo priestess will do that and the heightened stakes, because an actual life was ending, it makes that need will manifest in that ritual. Because of that added element, it takes less effort I feel, yet I'm not in Voodoo so I'm not 100%, but I feel it would take less effort on the part of the priestess herself, and put more on the client or the ... I don't know what other word we use. The client asking for this...Because just the spectacle itself is very shocking, and we all know that humans have amazing abilities hidden in their brain. Aboriginal people, if they are rejected by their tribe, they can walk out into the desert healthy, perfectly fine, lay down and decide to die, and do it. That control, I think, it all stems in the same direction. With that added element of sacrifice, the client's brain does something, and it somehow helps them make manifest the thing that they're asking for. Do I think that the death of the crow had anything to do with them earning a bigger paycheck? No. I think that crow should not have died.”

This response was prompted after I asked her what she thought of Voodoo and to tell me about her experiences. It is worth noting that I was unable to find any proof of aboriginal people walking into the desert and choosing to die, which is an odd act of

self-harm to attach to a group, and in this case, a group of people who have darker skin tones. The othering of those with darker skin to demonstrate the virtue of the participant is again present in this quote (Ezzy 2006). After this quote, I said that other people had also equated Voodoo with negativity and something that they would stay away from, she immediately responded with positives of Voodoo, almost like I had accused her of something negative (perhaps some type of racism). This time she said, *"It's not all dark. If it was all dark and evil, it wouldn't provide comfort for anyone, and it does provide comfort for people. It would be impossible for an entire following to be made up of fundamentally evil people. That is something that Hitler would think, and because everybody follows this practice, that means they're all fundamentally evil and that's not real. That's not true. People are different. I think the witches, as my understanding in our culture, are frightened of some of the rituals that Voodoo folk do because they don't understand it, and because there's an added element of blood, and screaming, and self flagellation. All of that stuff that we as upright, cognizant people would probably refrain from. They immediately jump to this idea that it's bad and it's all used for dark stuff. If you look at some rituals that they do that are less spoken about, you can see that it's not all used to put hexes and curses on people...Some of it is used for making sure that a sick baby stays alive through the night until the next day. Some of it is used for a laboring mother to have some pain relief. It's not all used for this horror show that people have this idea about. That's true of most Pagan practices. Druids would be looked down on for chanting late into the day when Catholic monks would do*

the same thing, and would be looked down for talking to trees when we now know, scientifically, talking to plants makes them grow.”

Again, Angela is othering people of color, the, “voodoo folk,” by commenting that they do, “stuff that we as upright, cognizant people would probably refrain from”. It is implied that the, “upright, cognizant people,” are white like Angela. Angela also fits into the category of the ‘white witch’ (Ezzy 2006).

Sarah was similarly an interesting case because she mentioned actually knowing and having friends who practice Voodoo and she says she consistently tells them what they are doing is dangerous. When I asked her what broad society thinks of when they hear the term witch she said, *“Like hexes, and Voodoo, and all those negative things....I try to stay away from that (Voodoo), just because you don't wanna mess with something that you can't control. You know? I've seen a lot of people who dabble into very dark aspects of it, and I'm just like, "That's opening too many doors." I would never wanna try to invite anything terrible like that in.”*

In response, I asked her if there was a certain type of woman that practiced Voodoo. She said, *“Not really. 'Cause Voodoo is so across all cultures. I've realized that there's so many different kinds of Voodoo. I'm ... I have a lot Spanish friends. And a lot of my Spanish friends, like, they're grandmas do Bruja. And it's just, "Ooh, that's so risky, guys." Or then I have like, West Indian friends, or like ... And they have some kind of Voodoo as well. It's just ... Oof. No Voodoo.... I'll always say something small so I don't like, impose on like, what they're doing. 'Cause I don't wanna be like, you know, that guy. But, I'll just be like, "Ooh, that's no bueno. Sometimes you'll open like a door or*

something, then you can't close that door. It's very risky, 'cause oof." Some things we can't just control in this world...I feel like it's a lot cultural as well. 'Cause every single friend that I've had that is Spanish is just like, "Yeah Brujeria." And I'm just like, "No. No, don't do that. That's so bad." I then asked her what made Voodoo "so bad".

She then described an experience and said, "You know, one of my best friends, she's half Puerto Rican. And I remember one time like, this guy dumped me, and she's just like, "Let's like, hex him and get him back." And I'm just like, "Let's not do that. But thank you." She's just like, "No. Like, I'll light a candle. I'll do this. I'll get like, a chicken bone." I'm just like, "No chicken bones. No chicken bones." And then, I'll be like, "Yeah, I'm trying to like, get more into like, card reading." She's like, "Am I being more of like, a witch?" "Don't do that. That's so ... " Like, you know, "Don't do it. It's bad." I'm just like, "You literally wanted to hex my-my ex with a chicken bone."

She went on to speak about black women and said, "I feel like there has to be, but I haven't seen anything on like, Instagram or any ... or anything like that. But I feel that's-that's also like, cultural too. 'Cause a lot of African American individuals are like, they're raised very religious. Every one I've ... Everyone I've spoken to is very, very, very religious. It's like they're Christian or Baptist. And it's very ... Even mentioning the word to them would probably be like, Oof...That's a big no-no." Overall, Sarah stressed that all of the, "African-American individuals...(are) very, very, very religious. It's like they are Christian or Baptist," which is not an accurate representation of all Black American's religious identity.

Calley described Voodoo as more of “gray magic.” It could be good or bad, and she had practiced it herself once. She said, “Voodoo? No. No, I really, actually, um, I don't. The only thing I could say that I don't, I don't know if it's Voodoo or not, but, um, the weight loss spell I did.. I had to cut out like a little person that looked like me. Well, that not looked like me but like kind of like, um, a silhouette, just some paper and then write how many pounds I wanted to lose...Kinda I guess. I, I don't really practice Voodoo, but I know what was a part of the spell, and it was like a chant that you, you said...I feel like it's, um, I feel like it's a different road of witchcraft, you know what I mean? I feel like that's something, I don't know. It could either be good or bad, I feel like that might be gray magic, you know what I mean? 'Cause it, it could go either way...I feel like whoever could do that though, is very powerful and spiritual, because that's, that's someone you wouldn't wanna mess with. (laughs)...You know what I mean? Someone that just pull out a doll and break your arm, like you never know. People are nuts.”

Calley was the only participant who thought she may have practiced voodoo. She refers to voodoo as being, “gray magic,” which is interesting because she is one of the few participants who allow a middle ground in the binary of ‘good’ versus ‘bad’ magic. Allowing for a middle ground is not a common belief held by ‘white witches’ (Ezzy 2006). However, it is possible that Calley referred to voodoo as possibly being used for good because she believed that she had used it herself, and she said she would never do a harmful or ‘bad’ magic.

It is also worth noting that Calley only reported using voodoo to help her lose weight, which actually does fit into the self-improvement goals of the ‘white witch’ (Ezzy

2006). Being thinner, particularly for a woman who is already overly thin, fits in with the patriarchal beauty norm that women should be very thin and that it is acceptable for them to continuously be striving to lose weight. Calley also fits into Immergut's (2010) theory of the body being a project and something that should be controlled and maintained by a heterosexist and patriarchal society.

Similarly, Michelle reported making Voodoo dolls, but never using them herself. She was concerned about the dangers of Voodoo, even though she enjoyed making the dolls. She said, *"Um, but I make them for people and what they do with them is beyond their own control. I put- I put no energy into it for negativity. Um, but because I do make costumes and such, um, I've been asked on numerous occasions to make Voodoo dolls of people and I let them put the energy into it afterwards. I just provide the doll... It's meant to be negative. I do not think there's anything positive about a Voodoo doll. I'm gonna- I have technically a Voodoo doll quote unquote in my car at all times, but I just think it's cute.... I don't know much about it (Voodoo). Um, I don't think that there's anything positive about it. And if- if you know how to use it and use it correctly, then I'd probably be a little afraid of you."*

Other participants were open and honest and gave very short responses when asked about Voodoo, such as Julia who said, *"Yes, I'm familiar with Voodoo. It's a practice of worshipping spirits...Mostly I know of the Haitians. I know others do as well (practice Voodoo), but I'm not familiar with them."* These participants made it clear that they did not feel comfortable discussing a type of witchcraft that they knew nothing about.

Samantha echoed this, and also described how Wicca is different from Voodoo. She said, *“Um, I don't. For me personally, I think that Voodoo is very much, um, embedded in African American culture. And I, I wouldn't presume to, um, study it or to know it without the, you know, that someone who has that family lineage, 'cause Voodoo is very, very ancestral, and it's so connected far back to ancestors that I just personally feel if you don't have that lineage, it's not something that you can or should practice.... I would say it's (Wicca) different. Um, Wicca specifically, you know, it was, it was created by Gardner in the 50s, like you know exactly where the religion came from. Um, and whether or not, you know, you, you believe that he got that from the, the tribe as described but, um, you know that he's the one that put out the book and set the rules and that it's very recent. Um, and I think the, the Salem witch trials, I mean, that's, I, I don't know that would even honestly connect the Salem witch trials to actual witchcraft. Um, it was more of a, just a, an insane like historical thing to kill a bunch of individuals, like, (laughs) I don't, I don't know if I even believe any of those individuals were witches. I don't think it really had anything to do with witchcraft, more I think it was just a horrible historical like murder fest. (laughs)”*

Samantha, who self-describes her race as Arab, also voiced her concern that Wicca had been culturally appropriating other new age religions. She was culturally conscious and competent demonstrated when she said, *“You know, honestly I think it's kind of the opposite. I think Wiccans accidentally culturally appropriate way more than they should. And I think that, you know, we have enough of our own ritual and our own beliefs that we don't need to do that. Um, but you get a lot of stuff like, um, like the term*

smudging, um, or using sage. That's very, that's very embedded in Native American culture. Um, or calling to your spirit animal. I think it's okay to, you know, try and connect with the spirit plane, but I don't think it's okay to use traditional Native American, you know, rituals to do so. Um, and then we have like Voodoo dolls. I don't think it's okay to use Voodoo dolls or anything with Hoodoo or Voodoo unless you have that ancestral link. And I think that unfortunately because, um, you have pop culture with witches, um, and that there's, Wicca is not a huge well known thing, um, I think unfortunately because of that, people get confused, and, you know, they accidentally appropriate where they shouldn't."

Samantha also recognized the added stress from discrimination that people of color face, which she was concerned would make them not want to then also choose a deviant 'religious' identity because it would be added stigma. She said, *Um, I would love to, um, I mean I'm like, I'm something tiny, like an eighth Native American, and, um, I, I would love to meet more people, even if they're not, um, Wiccan or Pagan. Um, I would love to meet more people of color who just have any non-Christian religion. Um, but it's, it's tough 'cause, you know, people of color already have so much to deal with and so much discrimination, it's not surprising to me that I don't know very ma- like any open witches. So, that would just be another thing, you know?"* Samantha was very cognizant of others during her entire interview.

Empowerment: From Popular Culture to Self-Empowerment

This section discusses how self-identified witches view and create empowerment for themselves based on their self-described witch identity.

Popular Culture and Empowerment

Popular culture depictions of witches and participants' views on those depictions is discussed in the following chapter (Chapter 3). However, a discussion on cultural criminology is more fitting in this chapter because of the connection to social control and criminology that is the dominant theme for this chapter. Cultural criminology typically focuses on popular culture's depictions of social control after a formal law is broken and how those depictions can have real world impacts on future responses by the legal system (and citizens views on those responses) (Ferrell: 1999). I argue that cultural criminology should be expanded to include analyses on *informal* social control and not just *formal* social control.

Perhaps the biggest trend throughout all of the interviews was the need for participants to clearly distinguish between depictions of witches in popular culture and what they do in "real" life as self-identified witches. Each participant in this study acknowledged and exhibited everything from distress to anger about how witches are portrayed in popular culture. The reason for this strong emotional reaction is that almost every participant described their experiences with informal social control and stigma as a result of a misconception that they were like the witches portrayed in fictional narratives in popular culture.

In the following chapter (Chapter 4), the key theme is that most of the participants in this study do not believe that popular culture played a huge role in their socialization process of becoming a witch. However, it is extremely important to note that all participants in this study believe the stigma attached to them from outsiders and the informal sanctions they receive because of that, come directly from these fictional narratives. The irony in this statement is that the participants also report feeling self-empowerment from many of the depictions of witches in popular culture (see Chapter 4 for further discussion). This finding suggests future studies should be done following the same theoretical framework and methodology utilized in current cultural criminology studies should be extended to include informal social control depictions as well due to the real life consequences that follow.

Theme 4: Self-Empowerment

The mass majority of participants in this study describe a unique form of self-empowerment that arises directly from their choice to identify as witches. This type of power described by participants is unique and special to them because it arises solely from within themselves, thus individualistic. Some attribute this empowerment to magic, while others attribute it to their complete understanding of who they are as a person. They describe a self-empowerment that comes from non-conformity, which is another salient part of identity for almost every participant in this study. This finding is most interesting because it occurred with participants who appeared to be polar opposites in their political views and overall life views.

Finding self-empowerment was a typical part of the process of becoming a witch. I spent a lot of time discussing what the process of becoming a witch was like for each of my participants. Many participants described the process as part of a life long journey they are on. The process would never end because they could always find new things about themselves, witchcraft, and life in general until their death. A rewarding part of the process was discovering their self-empowerment. For example, Sarah said, *“You honestly, like for lack of better term, you kind of just feel like a bad bitch. You-you feel like ... You just feel stronger. But not in an arrogant way. Just in a very like... empowered kind of way.”* The phrases *“badass,” “bad bitch,”* and *“head bitch in charge”* were used by multiple participants, and they always had a very distinct look of pride, with a slight smile, when they used these terms to refer to themselves.

Sometimes the ability to do magic or discovering heightened spiritual abilities was when the self-empowerment was most noticeable. For example, Sarah said, *“And when you see yourself like, “Oh my god, I can do this. This is awesome.” And you know, it's kind of like your own magic... you really focus on trying to enhance your abilities, and it works, it's just ... it's such an empowering thing. Any time it works, it's just so empowering.”* Similarly, Julie was straight to the point when she described being a witch as something that made her, *“Definitely strong-willed, definitely empowered.”* In most cases I did not use the word “empower” before the participants did. However, if they had not used it themselves, I did ask about it explicitly at the end of the interview, and they all agreed that being a self-identified witch was empowering.

Perhaps the best quote to summarize how all participants felt when it came to being strong independent women, that did not need another person to give them a sense of self or worth was said by Michelle. She said, *“It makes me feel a little more confident in my day. Um, kind of like if something comes my way that I didn't expect, I can- not that I ever see it coming, that's not my kind of thing. Um, but like I can handle it. Um, it doesn't matter if I'm having a bad day, like, I have the power within me to just make it better. Um, I think since real- like, since coming to terms with the fact that I'm- I'm a witch, that like I can be as badass as I want. I don't have to like answer to anyone. I answer to myself. Um, I love the feeling. Not many people probably in my circle of non-witch friends would go with it, but that's me and I- I love it.”*

Michelle reiterates the notion that she was born a witch, and ultimately had no choice in self-identifying as a witch. She says, *“since coming to terms with the fact that I'm a witch, that like I can be as badass as I want.”* She feels empowerment from being a witch, but she does consider it something she had to accept about herself and ultimately come to terms with, which is similar to reports of identity acceptance by those in the LGBTQ community (Adams 2010).

Theme 5: 'In the Closet?' – Hiding Witch Identity

One of most surprising findings in this project is that the self-identified witches in this study talk about hiding their witch identity, while at the same time, insisting they are proud to be a witch and that they are not ashamed of it. The main reason for hiding their witch identity is to avoid the stigma it brings and ultimately an attempt to avoid

social control mechanisms. There appeared to be a general pattern that if they did not have physical markers that showed their witch identity then they would not have as many stories of discrimination, or in some cases, no self-reported discrimination.

Most participants who were hiding their identity in some way (whether it be to family, co-workers, or romantic partners) did so because they simply do not want to be judged. For example, Vanessa said, *“I feel like I keep everything that’s sacred inside...a small bit of it is because I don’t want to be judged. I mean everybody cares to an extent what other people think. No one doesn’t care all the way.”* On the other hand, a few participants described not hiding it, but also not advertising it, such as Calley who said, *“So, it’s like I’m out here, I don’t tell people, you know. I wear my earrings or whatever and you know, if people notice, then whatever...I don’t care.”*

Some participants described hiding their witch identity because of the fact that they lived in a conservative location geographically. For example, Michelle said, *“Um, I’m very relaxed with my witchcraft because I live in Charlotte, North Carolina, and people in this area are real skeptical of things like that. Um, so if asked, I’m very vocal about yes, I’m a witch, but I don’t rub it in people’s faces much like people in this area do religion. (laughs).”* Michelle was very light-hearted about not advertising her witch identity, but it would be important to note that Michelle has a very alternative physical appearance regardless of her self-described witch identity. She is covered in tattoos from head to toe, shaves her head, and has many piercings. She seems to be very comfortable living an “alternative lifestyle,” which would explain why she was more carefree in her discussion of her identity.

Most participants did not share the carefree attitude that Michelle portrayed, and instead described themselves as proud witches, but witches who did not go out of their way to advertise their identity to others. For example, Maria said, *“If the subject comes up naturally. I don’t go out of my way to announce my spirituality. I don’t try to push people’s buttons or to make anyone uncomfortable. I don’t hide who I am either.”* It was very important for the women who do not “advertise” their witch identity to go out of their way to make it clear that they also would never lie about it and are very upfront when asked about it. Michelle’s feelings about, “coming to terms,” with being a witch and Maria’s method of not advertising her witch identity are similar to the reported feelings of LGBTQ individuals who go through times of acceptance of their identity and then go through the process of ‘coming out’ with their identity (Adams 2010).

There was a general mix of participants who were open about it to their parents and others who were not open with family/friends. However, the one group of people that most participants in this study said that they adamantly did not want to know their identity were co-workers. Co-workers pose a unique pressure on self-identified witches because they are people that the witches see daily, can impact their ability to make money (and thus live. Food, shelter, etc.), and ultimately make their days tolerable (or intolerable). When asked if she was open to her co-workers about her witch identity, Julie said, *“absolutely not”*.

Angela went as far as to say, *“I hope I’m not negating your qualifiers for these interviews by saying, I really don’t call myself a witch. In every job that I’ve had except*

for my current one, I've had customers, members of the public come up to me and ask me directly if I was a witch, or make a statement like, you're definitely a witch. The thing that confused me about the frequency of this was that I really wasn't wearing any identifying jewelry, clothing, or anything...Well, I really don't call myself a witch really. Just for brevity in day to day encounters. But I suppose, if I were to do that, I think the thing that would bother me, not about the philosophies or principles or the universal understanding or any of that, I would probably be concerned about my family's perception. Because they don't understand my journey. They don't know a lot of my journey. If they were to see or hear that I was considering myself a witch, they would have a really deep disappointment."

Angela's story and decision to never call herself a witch out loud (until this interview) described a strict, Fundamentalist Southern Baptist upbringing. She was taught that witches were evil, and anyone even associated with them would go to Hell. She said, *"I've never described myself as a witch to anyone. I have been called that and classified that in broad terms in social gatherings and events. Whenever someone asks me specifically about my, I guess, spiritual leanings, I have to preface it with I was raised fundamentalist Southern Baptist. Now that I am an adult, I have been in the world and understood many things, I'm really far away from that now. I subscribe to in a broad term, a Pagan philosophy."*

Courtney, who was in a similar situation with her family, describes coming out as a witch as similar to coming out as gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual. She said, *"So, for me, I feel like I'm still in the process of trying to...it's kind of like coming out to your*

parents. It feels like that in a religion and it shouldn't be that way." As discussed earlier in chapter 1, Courtney identifies as politically conservative and someone who adheres to traditional gender roles and traditional family values. Her use of the phrase "coming out" was intriguing because her comments made it sound like it was morally okay to have to "come out" as gay, but that it should never be something that is tolerated when it comes to religion. Her comments fit with her overall view that she should not be viewed as a deviant when other there are other "worse" deviants.

Another common theme was hiding their identity early on in their process of becoming a witch because someone close to them had a negative reaction to it. Calley discussed how she lost a relationship with her boyfriend after they had been together for almost two years. She said, *"Um, at first. At first, I was hiding it. Um, my, my ex actually like, when I started like reading books about it, like at the very beginning, pre-well the beginning's like when I was three, but like when I started getting into witch-with books and everything, he saw I bought a couple of books and he like flipped out over it. And, yeah, it, it, it's just like, and then I started hiding 'em, you know what I mean I'm like, "Fine, you know what I mean, if it's gonna make you upset I'll just hide it."* Calley describes it being hard on her early on in her process of becoming a self-identified witch, but later tells a story where a co-worker accosted her after seeing a pentagram necklace.

In this situation Calley was more confident in her beliefs and challenged her co-worker back by saying, *"And, I asked her too, I'm like, "What's your religion?" 'Cause like, I'm like, "You're coming at me, what's your religion?" She's just like, "Oh I'm regular."*

Like, what the hell does that mean? Hey, I know, once you said that to me, I was like, "I can't talk to you anymore, like you're not listening." One interesting theme in almost every interview was that each participant, whether they described themselves as dressing super alternative or dressing very conservative and modest, wore some type of jewelry to represent their witch identity. Most commonly they wore pentagrams (upright, not connected with Satanism) or pentacles. Ironically, it was frequently these small tokens of jewelry that lead to some of the participants discussions on social control and how they had been discriminated against.

Theme 6: Social Control of Modern Day Self-Identified Witches

The symbolism and meaning behind the term “witch” has a gendered and violent history that has changed and adapted over time in American society since at least the Salem Witch Trials of 1692 (Reed 2007). The notion of a “witch” has, and continues to be, a label applied to women who are viewed as deviant in some way. Since the Salem incidents, women identified as a witch receive negative sanctions for their deviance, both formally and informally. During the Witch Trials some women were sentenced to death by a formal court ruling. In the centuries since then, women who are labeled as witches experience more informal negative sanctions for being viewed as evil or wicked (Ezzy 2014). Historically, there has been a push to control such women. Social control is hereby defined as, the “definition of and response to crime and/or deviance” (Deflem 2008, 2015). Institutional responses to witches in American society have seen drastic

changes over the last centuries, but the constant in all of these responses is that witches are women who need to be disempowered and controlled.

The types of social control (response to their deviance) ranged drastically as would be expected. American society has come a long way since the Salem Witch Trials, where women could legally be sanctioned to death for being found guilty of witchcraft. However, there are still some heavy consequences for the women who identify as witches today.

Responses from Strangers

One unique aspect of self-identified witches and their deviance is that they are typically able to hide their deviance. Not all forms of deviance can be hidden this way. While most participants talked about not advertising their witch identity (as discussed above), the majority of them did describe at least wearing a small piece of jewelry as an identifying factor of their witch status. Frequently, these pendants were the cause of informal social control from strangers. For example, Maria said, *“My new neighbor left some tomatoes on my door step. I went over to introduce myself and say thank you but was meet (sic) much ire and disdain when she saw the pentacle around my neck. She looked at it and simply told me that I was evil and a devil worshipper. I politely tried to explain that I was not associated with Satanism whose followers do over where (sic) a pentacle but upside down. And that I reached my higher power through the elements around me. She refused to look at me. Told me she worked at the penitentiary and knew from watching the inmates EXACTLY what I was and never spoke to me again.”*

Similarly, Courtney described a time where she was in public and having a very friendly conversation with a stranger who eventually saw her necklace and become standoffish. Courtney said, *“I don’t know what was going on in her mind, but I immediately saw a complete 180 in her personality when she saw my pendant.”* Most participants described distress from these situations, but ultimately, they were able to shake it off, because they were just strangers.

Responses from Co-Workers

Similar themes emerged when participants described their encounters with co-workers, which had a much more profound effect on the participants. When there were issues with co-workers, many participants described leaving their jobs over the bullying and stress caused from these interactions. It is important to note that none of the participants were fired from a job due to their self-identified witch status, but a large minority did have to leave jobs over it. For example, Samantha described this encounter, *“I had a co-worker who was very Christian who found out I was Pagan because I think I was wearing a pentacle one day, just a necklace, and it had come out of my shirt. And, oh man, from that point on it was all, ‘God bless you, I’ll pray for you,’ you know?”* Sarah knew of a friend who was also a self-described witch who had a horrible experience with her long time co-workers. She told her story, *“Actually, my friend had a super negative experience about it. So, she was working somewhere, and she said that she identified as a Wiccan more than anything. They like, they ... no one would talk to her. They just thought that she was like, crazy, or like, dangerous, I guess would be the word. They like ... everyone stopped talking to her. And she was texting me. She was like,*

"No one wants to talk to me. Like, I told them I'm like, a Wiccan. And like, I overheard them. Like, they were saying like, really negative things." And I was like, "Oh my god. Like, it's-it's not a big deal, guys...I think she worked in the hospital."

In this case, Sarah describes minimalizing witch identity by saying, "it's not a big deal guys." She wants to portray that being a witch is not a shocking or scary identity for others to encounter. She creates an interesting juxtaposition in her interview where in some cases she wants her identity to shocking (in a cool, edgy way), but when met with forms of social control she wants it be viewed as almost boring and expected.

Another theme that emerged were instances of co-workers pretending to be supportive of their witch identities, until someone else was present in the situation. This theme is best described by Samantha, who said, *"Um, there was one time I, I was excited because I had a co-worker who wanted me to read his tarot cards. And I was like, 'Cool.' Yeah, like he found out that I did that and that I was Pagan, and he's like, 'Oh I wanna know.' I was like, 'Okay, let's do it. Like this'll be fun.'" And I worked night shift at the time. And, um, I had my cards out on the counter, and someone buzzed the door to get in, 'cause after hours it was secured. And he just like freaked out, he's like, 'Oh we gotta, we gotta cover this, we gotta cover this. They're gonna think we're like trying to summon the devil.'"*

Another story from Angela details what happened when a customer came in and began harassing her while she was on the job. Her detailed description of her thoughts and feelings during this upsetting encounter echoes many of the experiences described participants during any time they were called out in public for their self-described witch

identity. She sets the scene by saying a man came up to her register as soon as he walked in, she continues, *“And he doesn't put anything on the counter, he doesn't ask me where something is. He just looks at me and he goes, ‘You look like a witch.’ And I go, ‘I beg your pardon?’ Again, I wasn't wearing anything. I was wearing a bright red shirt. I think I wasn't even wearing a necklace that day. My hair was down. I had makeup on. I didn't look like this leper that I do now. I looked like I worked there. I looked like a clerk that worked at a hardware store. And there was nothing telling about me at all. And he goes, ‘No, you just look like a witch.’ And I was like, ‘Was there a question in there somewhere, Sir?’ It was really bizarre. And then when he went and found whatever piece of crap hardware he was looking for and he comes back, he, even though I had a customer and one of my coworkers was free at her till behind me, he came to my till. And he slaps down his socket set or whatever it was. And he says, ‘So, you're going to put a hex on me?’ And I was really battling in my head, should I make it a joke, should I ignore it? Should I tell him what's up? I don't know. I don't know what to do. I don't want to lose my job.”* Then, he spoke to her supervisor. *“He's like, ‘Did you know that you're employing a witch? Is that in your application form?’”* And my boss looks at me, and you could tell he was apologizing with his eyes like, *Yeah. I put in my two weeks' notice immediately after that experience.”* Angela had multiple encounters where she was accosted on the job. She ultimately described her experiences of discrimination as a combination of sexism and hatred of witches because she typically held jobs in male-dominated industries, specifically hardware and home improvement stores.

Responses from Romantic Partners

A small group of participants discussed discrimination they had experienced while in romantic relationships. In all of these cases the relationships ended due to the participants' self-described witch identity (sometimes divorce, even). Samantha's high school boyfriend left her at the end of their senior year because he could not marry her because she was not a Christian. Samantha describes this in her own words by saying, *"Uh, my high school boyfriend, I remember very specifically, you know, I was never, I was never very Christian. I would just call myself agnostic because I didn't have anything else at the time. And, um, I remember he once told me that, um, we couldn't be together after high school because he wanted, he needed to marry someone who believed in Jesus, because if I didn't believe in Jesus, I was going to Hell. And, he wanted to spend the rest of his life with someone was going to go to Heaven with him. ...And, and we broke up senior year because of that, because he, he couldn't marry me. Yeah. (laughs)."*

Samantha was light-hearted and laughing during this story but became much more serious and somber when describing a marriage that ended years after the high school experience. In this case her husband did not have a problem with witch status, but his mother did. Samantha said, *"Um, I would say, you know, not openly, but my, so I, my ex-husband, um,...You know, his family's Adventist. And, he was never discriminatory for- towards me. Like he's a very open minded person. Um, but his parents were definitely not. So, he would always, you know, have to remind me to take off my pentacle if I was wearing one, and, you know, he would kind of nudge me nicely during like praying before supper, to put my head down."* It was repeated dinners like this that

eventually lead to their divorce. While these stories were not common among all participants in this study, it is still alarming that there were as many instances as reported.

Sexual Assault's Impact on Witch Identity

In the final section of this chapter I would like to disclose two stories of sexual assault and how it impacted the self-identified witches and their lives. While only three participants disclosed a story of explicit sexual assault, their stories were so strong that they emerged as one an important themes This section is not meant to imply that self-identified witches experience sexual assault at a higher rate than the national average. It is not surprising that in a study of 13 participants there were 3 reports of sexual assault, which is not surprising, The decision to include these 2 stories was based on the participants' nuanced and round about way of connecting these stories to their witch identity, even though they initially prefaced the stories by saying they were not connect to their witch identity. Both participants reported that I could not fully understand their witch identity and process of becoming a witch without including these stories. What is interesting is that there was no direct question about sexual assault in my interview guides. These stories emerged organically in the interviews, and it can be speculated that there would be more stories like these if I had explicitly asked about them.

As with many stories about sexual violence against women, these stories included a common feeling alone and not knowing what to do after the assault occurred. I would argue this is reminiscent of Durkheim's theory of anomie. There is a described sense of normless in women who have been sexually assaulted, and in their

anomic state there can be many different paths to deal with it (Durkheim 1897). It is possible that the decision to turn to a 'religion' that is self-empowering is a way of reacting to this anomie that allows survivors of sexual assault to find a positive to come out of a negative and traumatic experience. I found this to be a strong possibility for the women in this study who spoke with me about sexual assault. I asked all of them if their witch identity had anything to do with the sexual assault, or vice versa, and they all explicitly said no to that question. However, they ultimately make connections between the two throughout other parts of their interviews.

I am choosing to share long segments of two interviews to give the full description of these experiences in the exact, direct words of the participants (Charmaz: 2008). Remember that Angela was raised Southern Baptist and had a hard time coming of age in that religion. She referenced sexual assault multiple times throughout her interview but was never explicit about what she was referring to, and I did not probe on such a sensitive issue.

At the very end of her interview, I asked her if there was anything else she would like to share with me and this is what she said, *"So, I was about 14, 15, and my mother was hosting a Bible study group at our home. My father was away at work, and he wasn't here for this event. But at the end of the evening, all of the other church members had gone home until it was just myself, my mother, and our preacher, pastor, fellow, guy, whatever. He had always expressed a marked interest in the young ladies of the flock. Do they still call that that? I don't know. The church family, or whatever. And he wanted to see my room. So, somehow permission's given. And he walked in and he's like,*

'You really need to clean your room.' And I'm like, *'Mm-hmm (affirmative).'*' And he starts picking things up that he doesn't like and throwing them in the garbage. My music, books, articles of clothing were on the floor that he didn't think were godly. I leave the room for a minute to understand what was happening. And when I come back, he'd gone through my sock and underwear drawer and had found my diary. My pre-teen adolescent diary. And I'm a girl who likes boys, and so I had written some things about a boy in my class that I had a crush on. And it wasn't anything exciting even or deviant or descriptive, but it was enough for him. And he showed me the pages that I had written, and he said, *'Did you write this?'* And I mean, obviously it's in my handwriting, it's got my name on it. There's no getting around that. So, I go, *'Yeah.'* And he goes, *'Is this what you really think? Is this what you really think?'* And I go, *'I don't know. I just want to talk to him sometimes.'* And he starts to go into this litany of how my feelings were wrong and how I was bad for having them and how Jesus is upset because I like a boy when I'm 15. And just goes into a very long, involved, personal sermon about why I'm a terrible person. And I realize that 14, 15, you're mostly developed. I mean, a vast majority at least. But it was early enough that it did a lot of damage for a long time when I approached everything with this understanding that my thoughts and feelings are bad, that I'm a bad person It led to a lot of self-harming behavior.... And I know that he manipulated my mother, who, at her core, was afraid. She was afraid if she didn't let him, something bad would happen to us. Not maybe physically, but we would somehow be ostracized and looked down upon. The last thing I want is for someone to be like, *'Well, obviously. If she was treated like that by someone in authority, then she's*

obviously going to go as far away from that as possible and be as insane as she wants. That's not it, Anna." She went on to say that was not the whole story, but that should explain her comments from earlier. She wanted to be clear that she did not identify as a witch solely because of her sexual assault by an authority figure in her previous religion.

In a similar fashion, Vanessa described being "molested" as a teen and how that experience is what makes her uncomfortable as identifying as a "witch." From the beginning of her interview Vanessa asked me to call her "witch-ish" and not a witch. She told me about her experience and said, *"I was molested when I was a teenager by somebody else. He was one of those people who did the dark ... He didn't say he was a witch, but he was like goth and it was like the outer fan type of ... I don't know. What did you call them before? You had the good word for it? [Anna: I said witch poser] That's it. Yeah. Like that. Without calling himself a witch. That kind of made me turn into myself a lot as opposed to being more outgoing about being witchy or witch-ish. I guess those are the only experiences I've had because I mean I'm boring. I found the love of my life when I was 18...Oh, my God. It's (discrimination) daily pretty much, you know? Starting back in high school I used to get made fun of because before I got molested like I said I was outward about, "I'm a witch. I'm a witch. I'm a witch." Really trying to embrace it and learn and all that stuff and not trying to be the poser. Okay. I was really into it and people would make fun of me for it. At the time, I didn't care. But then after all that stuff (molestation) happened, I just went inside myself and shut up. Now that I'm I guess better, I feel good now, I'm more vocal but not shouting from mountaintops kind of a thing."*

Vanessa's story explained one example of the struggle between choosing to disclose witch status with the urge to hide witch status because of the judgements that could be received. She went on to describe that it was empowering to have had something metaphorical taken from inside her (the molestation) to then find a new identity (similar to her proud witch identity from before) that made her feel metaphorically self-empowered from the same place that lost something in the molestation. Ultimately, she fulfilled what was taken from within her by finding her true self and becoming a strong woman.

Discussion on Social Control Findings

This section highlighted findings related to social control and culture. Social control and culture are topics that have always been relevant to sociologists, including all three of the classical scholars (Marx, Weber, and Durkheim). While the classical scholars and their work are dated, they still provide very useful insights for today's society, which is argued in in this chapter.

The argument can be made that culture acts as a mechanism of social control. This is supported by the findings in this entire dissertation. When an individual goes out into society they immediately begin interacting with culture, whether that be through interactions with others or through interactions with symbols in culture. Durkheim wrote about this phenomenon when he detailed the shift from societies with mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity (1893).

The small detail of this theory that is useful in understanding the experiences of the participants in this study is that organic societies have a trait of high levels of

individuality. Individuality highlights the uniqueness of each person in a society. The findings of this study demonstrate that self-identified witches report feeling empowerment in their non-conformity as they continue on their process of becoming witches. The empowerment of non-conformity could only result from an organic society with highly unique individuals. (Non-conformity as a finding was further discussed back in Chapter 2).

More modern theories of symbolic interactionism describe how meaningful interactions lead to individuals forming views of themselves as well as how they will construct their views of others (Mead 1934; Blumer 1969; Carter and Fuller 2016). It is very clear from the responses of the participants in this study that they have all had “meaningful interactions” that they constructed as imperative to their witch identity. For example, many participants discussed having to leave jobs, relationships, and even cut family ties after negative interactions. All of the responses discussed in the sections above demonstrate different, and varying degrees, of social control.

The participants also internalized these negative experiences of social control and ultimately that made the majority of them become fearful, which is why so many of them report not “advertising” their witch identity, and, in some cases, hiding it all together. Popular culture also acts of an agent of social control, as predicted by cultural criminologists. The role of popular culture in the socialization of self-identified witches is the focus of the following chapter (Chapter 6).

Conclusion

The goal of this chapter was to discuss six of the pertinent findings from the research. While a number of important findings emerged from the 13 participants in this study, the six major findings discussed in this chapter were 1) the process of becoming a witch; 2) political identity and hexing Donald Trump; and 3) Voodoo and racial implications. This chapter also includes themes on: 4) the self-empowerment that comes from a deviant identity status (specifically being a self-reported witch); 5) hiding witch identity; and 6) experiences of self-identified witches with agents of social control. The individuals' discussions on these topics revealed a number of important issues.

In the section detailing the process of becoming a self-described witch, a variety of pathways to "witch" identity were explored. While one participant described finding Wiccan ritual as a means by which she could assuage her struggles with anxiety, other participants described being drawn to witchcraft as children. Ancestral blood was described by one participant as being the means by which she found her witch identity. Others described knowing they were different as children and being called out as witches by other self-described witches.

In the discussion on the second major theme discussed in this chapter, participants described their feelings regarding their political beliefs and whether or not they felt their witch identity was connected to their political identity. Most participants believed that the two are not connected. In terms of recent witch gatherings to hex Donald Trump most participants felt that doing so was a negative act that they would not like to pursue. Other participants, those who tended to identify as more

conservative, were offended by the idea of hexing a president whom they support, despite the obvious contradictions Trump's policies might have when laid alongside their Wiccan beliefs, such as loving the Earth. Not surprisingly, Trump-supporting participants were white and less educated than the other participants.

When discussing Voodoo, participants revealed that they see this version of witchcraft as negative and associated with people of color. While they did not openly argue that the practice of Voodoo is always negative, they made remarks that indicated they do perceive the practice as dangerous and bad and went on to describe people of color participating in the practice. Other participants indicated that they did not feel it would be right for them to comment on the practice of Voodoo since they were white and did not want to engage in cultural appropriation. The findings of this study are

important as individuals and other oppressed individuals, such as gender fluid individuals, are more openly using the identity of witch in today's society. Understanding how and why individuals claim the witch identity helps researchers be conscious of the means by which individuals who claim alternative identities, often those seen as deviant by mainstream society, to empower themselves and to attempt to live self-fulfilling lives. As more and more individuals embrace the label of witch, it is crucial to understand why and to explore what claiming this label actually means in the lives of the people who self-identify as witches.

While it is obvious from this study that self-identified witches of today still experience discrimination from their stigma, there was an overall hope from participants that it would be better in the future. Perhaps the best way to summarize

this hope for the future is with a synopsis from a story Angela told about one of experiences of discrimination on the job. At the time Angela was working at a bakery as a cashier. She had a customer come in who saw a piece of jewelry that identified her as a witch. He began simultaneously flirting and harassing her and continually asked if she was going to put a hex on him and if she was a “real” witch. She tried to remain calm and never disclosed her witch identity and get him to leave the store, and this spectacle went on for about 10 minutes, all in front of a little boy who looked terrified. When the little boy and his mother came up to the cash register to pay, Angela tried to be extra nice to him and talked to him about what happened and smiled and gave him a free cookie. On their way out of the bakery, the little boy turned to his mother and proclaimed, *“Mom, I think I like witches!”*

The last three themes were situated within the historical context of witch culture throughout the world and specifically in the United States. A summary of the events leading to the Salem Witch Trials in chapter 2 explained the precipitating events leading to the persecution and othering of the “witch” in American culture. A discussion of the means by which culture can act as an agent of social control, thereby keeping societies harmonious (Deflem 2008; Chriss 2007) outlined the ways in which the “witch” has been seen as a destabilizing, dangerous factor in society.

Finally, the last three themes that emerged fell under the major topics of empowerment and hiding Witch Identity, and a fear of social control. An unexpected theme relating to sexual assault and witchcraft emerged in the interviews without this topic having been part of the interview question.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS: POPULAR CULTURE DEPICTIONS OF WITCHES AND SELF-IDENTIFIED WITCHES' RESPONSES

Introduction

This chapter aims to discuss the role of depictions of witches in popular culture on self-identified witches based on comments from participants. Based on the cultural criminology perspective that highlights the importance of uncovering messages in narratives of popular culture to understand the impact it has on non-fiction acts of deviance, this cultural includes a content analysis of a popular witch television. The last three themes of this dissertation are discussed in detail in the following sections: 7) self-reported consequences of popular culture; 8) Binary Constructs of Witches in Culture in the 1990s; and 9) every witch is different and so are modern women. This chapter discusses the role of the witch in popular culture and provides detailed descriptions from four popular films and television shows to provide context for the discussion on how the participants in this study viewed this depictions and reports on how those depictions impact their lives. *American Horror Story: Coven (2013)* is analyzed in detail for its content to provide a basis of how the show explains the lives and identity formation of diverse witches in modern day, which is used as a backdrop for the comments made about popular culture depictions by self-identified witches. Interview

questions on *Coven* brought out emotional and detailed responses from participants and was generally viewed in a positive manner.

In popular culture, there has been a dramatic increase in films and television shows that focus on a witch character or have witches as characters in the last few years (Teen Vogue 2018). This finding demonstrates the increasing level of American interest in witch stories and narratives. While some of the films and shows depict the witch as the classic monster character, many are depicted as witches living fairly normal lives. They are not green, do not dress in long black cloaks, or are covered with warts. They look like everyday people, other than the fact that they identify as witches and practice what they themselves refer to as witchcraft. Some of these shows and films are remakes of classic witch movies with a new twist, such as having the traditional 'white witches' recast as witches of color.

For example, a 2018 reboot of the television show *Charmed* (1998) will portray the three protagonists as people of color. Initially news broke that the three sisters would all be Latina, but some were disappointed to see that only one actress is Latina, while the other two are Afro Caribbean and Black (Entertainment Weekly 2018). However most feminist fans of the show are happy to see a more diverse cast and to have a main character who is lesbian. There are many other films and shows centered around witches who are not white. The main reason that *American Horror Story: Coven* was selected for the intersectional content analysis for this chapter was their extremely diverse cast choices to portray the witches in the coven.

Berger and Ezzy (2009) theorized the dramatic increase in real life witches could come from recent depictions of witches in popular culture that made witches look trendy and powerful. Most young Wiccan women do not report choosing the Wiccan religion because someone in their life introduced them to it, which is a shocking finding, given that the process for most people to find a religious organization to join is through a peer. While Berger and Ezzy's work suggests an interesting concept, as religion scholars, they did not follow with any subsequent studies on the connection between popular culture and witchcraft.

Therefore, this chapter will explore the connections between narratives depicted by witches in popular culture and self-identified witches' thoughts, experiences, and interpretations of those depictions and narratives of witches in popular culture through a content analysis of the popular television show *American Horror Story: Coven* (2013) and 13 in-depth interviews with self-identified witches.

This chapter also explores three other films and television shows with witches as the main characters. The earliest film to be discussed will be *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), which is arguably the most famous witch movie of all time. This film was selected given the clear juxtaposition of the evil Wicked Witch of the West and the nice witch, Glinda the Good. A moral narrative is woven around these two women that connects physical beauty with their personalities and moralities. *Wicked* (2003), the Broadway musical, will also be briefly discussed as an updated version of *The Wizard of Oz* that focuses on Elphaba (the Wicked Witch of the West) as the main character.

The second film explored will be *The Craft* (1996), which centers around four teen witches attending high school and developing their friendships along with their magical powers. *The Craft* is an interesting film because it includes very young witches who are popular, attractive, and leading mostly normal teenage lives. It depicts strong women who are empowered through their own personal talents. It is also unique for having a black witch, which breaks the stereotype of all witches being white (unless Voodoo is involved). Race will be an important factor in the discussion that follows comments made by the self-identified witch participants.

Finally, the last television show discussed is the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018), which is a remake of the classic television show *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (1996). Initially this show was not on the list of media to discuss for this chapter, but following grounded theory guidelines, it was added in after conducting interviews with my participants and discovering their interest in and thoughts on the show.

The Identity of the Witch in Popular Culture

The interview questions listed in Appendix A explicitly include questions that target how popular culture could impact the decision to take on the label of “witch” today. The goal of these interview questions is to see if there is a connection between women who take on the label of “witch” and the rise in witches in popular culture. The focus will be specifically on those self-declared witches in popular culture that demonstrate the possible new witch narrative of a strong, powerful woman who 1) does not need a man in her life and 2) adopts a new definition of sexiness that is based on internal and

physical characteristics rather than just physical characteristics as seen in past narratives.

The focus of this chapter is to explore the connection between identifying as a witch and visual portrayals of witches in popular culture (Berger and Ezzy 2009). Through interviewing, I was able to uncover if and how a woman's decision to become an official witch, or Wiccan, is facilitated by their interest in the current witch in popular culture. It also helps establish a possible cultural shift, particularly when *The Craft* came out in the mid 1990s. Most people who identify as a witch have never actually met another witch, so popular culture becomes the facilitator in this process (Berger and Ezzy 2009). The connection of "witch" as a religious identity is crucial to this section because it helps show how internalized these images are and if and how identities are being formed around the witch narrative in popular culture.

Recent sociological studies on witches and witchcraft show that modern women who identify with the witch subculture are drawn to it for its assumed positive qualities, rather than any negative or evil attributes (Bovenschen 1978; Garrett 1977; Griffin 2003; Kruse and Prettyman 2008; Maluf 1992). This section will not aim to represent all self-identified witches in 2019, but rather give in-depth description and details on how interviewed modern witches formed their identities, developed a sense of self in this subculture and how popular culture could have facilitated these processes.

Another significant study on witches in popular culture comes from a very dated source, occurring before *The Wizard of Oz* even, and centers on the film *The Häxan (The Witches)* (1922). This film by Benjamin Christensen was centered on how the hysteria

surrounding witches and witchcraft in medieval times came from the popular culture of that time, which includes paintings and stories attached to images that many people at the time viewed as demonic. Ultimately, Christensen wanted to demonstrate that scientifically society in 1922 could see that hysteria from witches and rhetoric associated with witchcraft most likely were simply misunderstandings around the mentally ill. He argued that the people accused of witchcraft in very early times would be labeled as mentally ill (something treatable) rather than witchcraft which at that time was “treated” with torture and sometimes death.

Baxstorm and Meyers take on a recent anthropological approach to dissecting Christensen’s film (2016). They argue it was an important film, and a very early version of an ethnography. They situate their book in the same format as the film – part one) a breakdown of popular culture images and part two) a scientific discussion around mental illness and they hysteria that can surround it. This study is of particular importance for my study because it discusses a very early attempt to try and connect fictional popular culture narratives with real life results that impacted entire societies.

My study focuses on popular culture that occurred about a decade after film *The Häxan (The Witches)* (1922) debuted. This film was banned in many countries, including in the United States, when it first came out due to its graphic nature. This section argues that a similar, but much more modern and scientific, study of witches in popular culture over the last century is crucial to understanding the often fictional stereotypes of modern day witches that impact how they are viewed and, thus, treated by society at large. (This discussion was discussed in more depth in Chapter 3).

Popular Culture's Depiction of the Witch

The following sections are a discussion on plots, characters, and character development for *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Craft*, and the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*. These sections are not in-depth content analyses. These sections provide key details of the narratives seen in these depictions of witches that are important for understanding if they play a role in participants' socialization of becoming a self-identified witch and their understanding of how society views these narratives of witches.

Most participants in this study do not describe being influenced by popular culture's depictions of witches as part of their decision and process to become a self-identified witch. However, they do have many thoughts on these depictions with regards to stereotypes and how broader society views real self-identified witches with lenses that are, in the participants' eyes, heavily influenced by what they see on television and at theaters.

Thus, the following sections should provide information on the relevance of these films and shows by discussing key components of the plots and characters. Many of the details provided in the following sections will provide useful and necessary for the discussion on participants' views on the overall depiction of witches in popular culture over the last century.

The Wizard of Oz (1939)

The Wizard of Oz (1939) is based on Frank L. Baum's 1900 novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. The movie centers on the plight of protagonist, Dorothy Gale and her dog Toto, who are swept away by a tornado, from their Kansas farm to the land of Oz, where

magic, wizards, and witches are commonplace. The movie uses the same actors to play similar roles in each world. For example, Dorothy's travel companions in Oz -- the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Cowardly Lion, are played by the same actors who are introduced as farmhands on Dorothy's farm back in Kansas. The most famous witch in the movie is also based on a person Dorothy knows back in Kansas. Played by Margaret Hamilton, Dorothy's grumpy, dog-hating neighbor Almira Gulch re-appears in Oz as the Wicked Witch of the West. While Hamilton's two characters share an unpleasant personality in each land, the transformation of the character in Oz is especially interesting in examining one of the earliest and longest-lived portrayals of a witch in American popular culture. The Wicked Witch of the West wears a long black matronly dress, a tall pointy black hat, and has green skin (see Figure 6.1, all figures at the end of the chapter).

Upon arriving in Oz, Dorothy learns that her house has fallen on the Wicked Witch of the East. All that viewers see of this character is her feet, which sport long striped socks and shiny ruby slippers. Dorothy is quickly made aware that this witch was a tyrant who terrorized the people of Munchkinland. Dorothy and Toto are now heroes to the Munchkins, who greet them with song and celebration, jumping to the conclusion that she too must be a powerful witch. At this point, Glinda, the Good Witch of the North, played by Billie Burke, arrives to greet Dorothy. Glinda, who has no counterpart back in Oz, travels in a bubble that floats through the air. She has light-colored hair and is dressed in a sparkling pink gown. She wears a shimmering crown on her head (see Figure 6.2). She is young and beautiful, and she speaks with a high-pitched, soft voice

that is reminiscent of the voice of Snow White in Disney's class movie (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, 1937).

At this point, Hamilton's Wicked Witch of the North arrives and demands her dead sister's ruby slippers, which contain powerful magic. The Wicked Witch of the North travels on a raggedy broomstick, and the munchkins shrink back in terror at the sight of her. Glinda the Good uses her magic wand to transfer the ruby slippers to Dorothy's feet instead. The Wicked Witch of the North vows to get revenge on Dorothy and leaves in a cloud of dark, ominous smoke.

Glinda informs Dorothy that to get back home to Kansas, she will need to see the Wizard of Oz and must follow the Yellow Brick Road, which will lead her to the Emerald City where Oz lives. As Dorothy travels on the Yellow Brick Road, she meets the Scarecrow, Tin Man, and Cowardly Lion. The four travelers encounter the Wicked Witch of the West on several occasions, and she attempts to use her black magic to stop them from completing their quest. Each of her efforts fails, with the occasional intervention of Glinda the Good Witch.

When Dorothy and her friends finally arrive in Oz, the Great Wizard tells them that in order to get his help, they will need to first defeat the Wicked Witch of the West. The friends go to the Wicked Witch's castle, and, through a series of challenges in which only Dorothy is left to defeat the witch by throwing water on her and causing her to melt, the friends return to Oz with the Witch's broomstick to prove that they have defeated her.

Upon their return to the Emerald City, Dorothy is informed that the Wizard is, in fact, no wizard at all. He is merely a traveler from her world who accidentally landed his hot air balloon in Oz. He attempts to take Dorothy back to Kansas in his hot air balloon, but Dorothy's dog Toto jumps out of the balloon at the last minute, causing Dorothy to run after her dog. Just when Dorothy thinks that she will never return to Kansas, Glinda the Good Witch appears to save the day. Unlike the male Wizard, she and her sisters possess real magic. She informs Dorothy that the ruby slippers actually had the magic to take her back home the entire time. Dorothy clicks her heels together, saying, "There's no place like home!" three times, and she finds herself back in her bed in Kansas.

The Craft (1996)

Over the half a century that followed *The Wizard of Oz*, there were numerous portrayals of witches that were reminiscent of the Wicked Witch of the West. In 1996, an entirely new type of portrayal of the witch emerged during the heyday of 90s goth culture. *The Craft* presented this new type of witch to American viewers. Unlike Margaret Hamilton's green-skinned, spinster or Billie Burke's doll-like Glinda the Good Witch, the four young witches in *The Craft* are young, strong, outspoken, and intent on using their power to get revenge on those who have wronged them (see Figure 6.3). In this movie, viewers witness the young witches embrace magic as an effort to gain control and power in a world that offers them none (*The Craft*, 1996).

In *The Craft*, protagonist Sarah Bailey, played by Robin Tunney, moves with her family to a new school in San Francisco. She befriends a group of unpopular girls who are all outcasts. Bonnie, played by Neve Campbell, has physical scars from a terrible

accident. Rochelle, played by Rachel True, is one of a handful of African Americans in almost exclusively Caucasian school. Nancy, played by Fairuza Balk, comes from a poor family, which makes it challenging for her to fit in at a school where almost everyone is upper middle class.

After Sarah is slut-shamed by students when Chris (Skeet Ulrich), a popular boy, claims to have had sex with her, the friends embrace the worship of a deity they refer to as Manon to exact their revenge. While Sarah appears to have natural magical abilities, it is the coming together of the four girls that awakens a magic in all of them. When Sarah is harassed by a homeless man, he is later hit by a car, and the girls believe that the four of them together caused this to happen. While they discuss The Rule of Three, the Wiccan/Pagan law that states whatever a witch casts into the world will come back to her threefold, they do not seem to feel they are beholden to this law.

In order to take revenge on Chris, Sarah casts a love spell on him. He becomes so enamored of her, he cannot resist her at school and makes a fool of himself in front of all the other students. Rochelle uses her magic to strike fear into a racist bully who has terrorized her. Meanwhile, Bonnie uses her magic to remove the scars that have plagued her for so long.

Little by little, the Law of Three begins to manifest in the girls' lives. Each girl begins to face consequences for the magic she has used. Bonnie becomes so concerned with her appearance, she can hardly function. Rochelle's bully loses her hair and sobs hysterically. Nancy is the most impacted by the girls' use of magic. She becomes increasingly power-hungry and uses a spell called "The Invocation of the Spirit," which

increases her power but leaves her without empathy for others. Nancy resents that Sarah seems to possess natural magic. She uses a glamour spell to make herself appear to be Sarah and lures Chris into having sex with her. When the real Sarah shows up, the girls argue. Nancy then murders Chris by throwing him out of a window.

At this point, Sarah begins to break away from the group. She casts a binding spell on Nancy to try to prevent her from harming anyone else. In retaliation, the other three girls begin to terrorize Nancy, coming to her in her dreams and trying to persuade her to kill herself. Nancy eventually cuts Sarah's wrists, but to save her own life, Sarah also casts the "Invocation of the Spirit" spell. At this point, she becomes more powerful than the other three girls combined. Sarah scares Rochelle and Bonnie away by using their deepest fears against them. After a confrontation between Nancy and Sarah, Nancy loses her sanity and must be committed to an institution. As the movie ends, viewers learn that Manon has taken power away from Nancy, Rochelle, and Bonnie because they abused their magic. Meanwhile, Nancy has kept her powers.

Chilling Adventures of Sabrina (2018)

Following *The Craft* in 1996, media portrayals of the witch fell in a similar vein, with a focus on female empowerment being tied with embracing magic. Of course, not all representations were as dark as the one portrayed in *The Craft*. ABC introduced *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* in 1998. The television series presented a mostly benign witch family operating in secret among non-magical members of society. In this ABC version, Sabrina rarely deals with the type of disempowerment experienced by her predecessors in *The Craft*. Nonetheless, nearly two decades later, a completely

different version of Sabrina was created for a Netflix series that premiered in 2018. In the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, the young witch struggles with a number of challenges not seen by her ABC counterpart and faces a much darker world.

Based on the comic book series from 2014 of the same name, Netflix's the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* features Kiernan Shipka as Sabrina (see Figure 6.4). Shipka's Sabrina is part human and part witch. The series begins when Sabrina is almost 16 and is planning her dark baptism. At this point, she will pledge her loyalty to Satan and fully embrace her magical side, letting her mortal side go. She does not want to leave behind her mortal friends, and especially not her boyfriend Harvey, played by Ross Lynch.

The ritual will take place at the "The Hanging Tree," a place in the forest near Greendale, where 13 witches were hung. The witches had fled persecution in Scotland, coming to Greendale with the dream of being able to practice their religion and live in safety. Sadly, witch hunters found them, and they were killed.

Sabrina lives with her two aunts, who are also witches. Set in the fictional city of Greendale, they fully expect that Sabrina will pledge allegiance to Satan and do not anticipate her unwillingness to let her mortal connections end. When Sabrina's mortal teacher is killed and possessed by "Madam Satan," Sabrina becomes less and less sure about the ritual. Despite numerous attempts to encourage her to pledge her allegiance to the Dark Lord on her sixteenth birthday, Sabrina eventually refuses to sign the pledge, thus ending the ritual.

As a result of her refusal to complete the ritual, Sabrina is put on trial. Her aunts lose their magic for the duration of the trial. The court attempts to force Sabrina to sign her pledge, but eventually her aunt reveals that Sabrina had a Christian baptism and, therefore, cannot sign the pledge to serve Satan. Eventually, Sabrina is allowed to live in the mortal world, as long as she also attends classes at The Academy of Unseen Arts.

Throughout the rest of the first season of this television series, which has been renewed for a second season, Sabrina must face continual challenges brought on by Madam Satan, who continues to pretend to be a teacher at Sabrina's mortal school. As she learns to use her magic, Sabrina uses her powers to try to help others. While Madam Satan functions as an antagonist to Sabrina's protagonist, she is hardly reminiscent of the Wicked Witch of the West portrayed by Margaret Hamilton in 1939. Played by Michelle Gomez, Madam Satan is middle-aged but attractive with long dark hair (see Figure 6.5). When playing Sabrina's teacher, Madam Satan wore little makeup and matronly clothing, but after her possession, she began wearing red lipstick and form fitting, often low-cut black clothing. She can be described as a sexy character, whom audiences of the television showed love. During the season finale, viewers learn that the Coven could have saved the original 13 witches who were hung in Greendale, but they chose not to. Instead, they used the 13 as a sacrifice to appease mortals with the hope of the rest of the witches being able to live in peace among them (*Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, 2018).

Though the series received praise from critics, the Netflix drama has not been without controversy. In November of 2018, the Satanic Temple sued Netflix, alleging

that the series used its statue of Baphomet inappropriately. Netflix settled with the Satanic Temple out of court (Geek.com 2018).

In addition to this lawsuit, some would be viewers have eschewed watching the show due to the normalizing of Satanism. While some wiccans criticize the overlap of Satanism and witchcraft, other viewers find the darker, edgier Sabrina to be far too mature for teens. Melissa Joan Hart, who played Sabrina in ABC's 1998 version, feels that the show is too old for her sons (MSN Entertainment 2018).

Intersectionality and American Horror Story: Coven (2013)

In this section, I argue that a new witch narrative in popular culture has the potential to impact women's self-esteem in a positive manner because it challenges the historical dichotomy in popular culture that juxtaposes witches with princesses. The juxtaposition of witches and princesses in these various forms of visual media over the last 70 years demonstrates a socially constructed, dominant narrative that connects women's physical appearance with their morality. Essentially, these narratives have depicted stereotypically "beautiful" women who are morally good and pure (i.e. the princess narrative) and stereotypically "ugly" women are morally bad and self-centered (i.e. the old witch narrative).

The section includes a content analysis of a form of visual media that has the new narrative. I selected FX's horror anthology *American Horror Story*, specifically their third season *American Horror Story: Coven* (2013), which is centered on two different covens of witches in modern day New Orleans. This show depicts, through various

characters, the new narrative. I viewed each episode in this season 8 times, and took notes focusing on each character and their development throughout the show. I then coded those notes to highlight themes that emerged for each character. After finding themes for each character I did an intersectional analysis of the show on the basis of these characters.

This section specifically uses Lynn Weber's (2010) conceptual model for intersectionality to highlight exactly what the new narrative is in popular culture today. I will argue that the old narrative depicted women who were morally bad, self-centered, ugly, old, sometimes sexually deviant or promiscuous, having an extreme weight (overly thin or overly obese), having stigmatized facial markers (such as warts, large noses, or wearing too much make up), and ultimately women who use their powers to do morally bad things. This narrative is seen in both cartoon and human form across various visual forms of popular media, such as the Wicked Witch from *The Wizard of Oz*.

The new narrative challenges many of these traditional stereotypes. The new narrative, as depicted in *American Horror Story: Coven*, challenges norms of sexuality and beauty for race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. It depicts a new witch that allows a woman to break some traditional gender norms, such as being more open about sexuality, expressing non-conventional forms of appearance, and being more self-reliant, rather than focusing on the importance of a relationship with a male – all while still being a new “type” of sexy.

Social and Historical Context

Situating the new narrative within its social and historical context is extremely important for this content analysis. The most important historical event that occurred in relation to the new narrative is the infamous Salem Witch Trials that occurred in Massachusetts in the 1690s. While some of the people who were executed at this time were men, the vast majority were women – specifically 14 out of 20. The women who went on trial for accusations of witchcraft, and ultimately were found guilty were hung on Gallows Hill. The accusations of witchcraft led to an overall moral panic at the time where women were constantly being scrutinized and their behaviors heavily monitored. This event was a clear example of the policing of women’s behaviors based on socially constructed “acceptable” gender norms. However, to deviate from these norms in that time period and social location could have severe negative sanctions, specifically death.

The concept of gender norms that can act as a mechanism for social control of women is important to the study at hand (see Chapter 3). While the Salem Witch Trials had a much more detrimental end result for women found guilty of witchcraft, the gender norms that come from narratives in popular culture today are still relevant to study because of the current impact they could have on women’s self-esteem. The Salem Witch Trials provide the backdrop in American culture that the new narrative and the old narrative have both emerged from. We know that the women who were hung for witchcraft were innocent of their charged crimes, but the narrative of the conniving, selfish, satanic witch still exists today. Again, the old narrative emerged from some of the stagnant, yet lingering, hysteria related to the Salem Witch Trials. This narrative

even went a step further by socially constructing physical appearance with morality concretely, where a morally bad witch was also physically unattractive by typical societal standards.

Another arguably important event in the historical and social context that led to the new narrative is the development of the Internet. Around the same time that the movie *The Craft* was released, the everyday person was gradually gaining regular access to the Internet. Today, most Americans log in to the World Wide Web in some shape or form more than once per day. The Internet is important to the new narrative because it has provided a concrete platform for women who identify as witches to have access to merchandise that more easily allows for an alternative lifestyle, provides communication opportunities for witches who may not know another witch in their face-to-face interactions. Additionally, it can also make visual media, such as television shows and movies, more easily accessible. Through these avenues, the Internet has facilitated the de-stigmatization of witch culture and even Wiccan practices. It can be argued that the Internet paved the way for the new narrative to firmly take roots and grow into the social phenomena that exists today.

Socially Constructed Images

An analysis of popular culture must include a discussion on socially constructed images because those are the narratives and visual portrayals that are deconstructed in an effort to understand what messages, stereotypes, and behavioral scripts are being produced. *American Horror Story: Coven* challenges many of the previous narratives and stereotypes that have been produced in the past, specifically the ones from the old

narrative. The following paragraphs will highlight how some characters challenge these old socially constructed images and narratives and ultimately replace them with new, more women friendly images and narratives. The rise in these constructed images and narratives could mean messages to women that are better for their self-esteem, and ultimately society, because they are more fluid. This fluidity of gender and sexuality heavily challenges the socially constructed gender and sexuality binaries that exist broadly in popular culture, which helps break up the belief that gender and sexuality dichotomies are “biologically normal.”

In *American Horror Story/The Coven*, Fiona is the “Supreme” witch her coven. She is a white, cisgender woman who is played by actress Jessica Lange, who was 64 during the season of *Coven* (see Figure 6.6). She appears to be heterosexual, but there is some fluidity in her sexuality, and she is very accepting of gender fluidity, as seen in her interactions with other characters in the show. She is powerful, independent, and speaks her mind. She challenges racism and sexism throughout the entire season on the show. Some might argue she fits the traditional stereotype of a “bitch.” Perhaps this sentiment is solidified by the writers on the show who titled the first episode of the season “Bitchcraft.” However, rather than interpreting her “bitchy” attitude as a negative personality characteristic for a woman, it can be argued that the show demonstrates this as a powerful personality characteristic for a woman. She is the protagonist of the entire series (until she left after the fourth season). By situating the protagonist with this personality type, it makes it likable and more relatable. This image alone challenges the dominant narrative of how a woman’s demeanor should be.

The base plot line of the show is that the coven is about to have a new Supreme witch and that Fiona will have to give up her leadership role in the coven. The new Supreme will take over as the most powerful witch. Fiona does not want to give up her leadership position and wants to remain the most powerful. She will do almost anything to keep her power and she develops more goals throughout the season, such as uniting her coven with the Voodoo coven in town. This narrative completely contradicts the finds in the Lauzen and Dozier study of 2005 that found as women age, they are less likely to have goals and seek leadership positions. Fiona is the oldest character on the show, but she also shows the most drive and dedication. She is also sexy in her demeanor and statements related to sex. Her lines in the show depict an older woman teaching younger women that being sexy is about being independent, loving yourself, and remaining true to who you are as a unique individual. This type of narrative could lead to better self-esteem in women because the definition of “sexy” is no longer limited to the narrative of youth, but rather, it expands the narrative of sexiness to loving yourself and the body you have at any age.

Another character that breaks up previous socially constructed images that are arguably controlling to women is the character of Nan the Clairvoyant. Jamie Brewer, an actress with Down syndrome, plays Nan (see Figure 6.7). There was controversy in this season of the show because Nan’s character openly talks about sex. Some argued that making Down syndrome “sexy” could have negative impacts. One of her most famous lines in the show is, “Boys find me hot.” Nan is a white, cisgender, woman, who is heterosexual and has a physical relationship with the boy who lives next door. Nan’s

character challenges the norms around who is “allowed” to be sexy. She also breaks up another popular gender and sexuality norm because in the show she dies as “an innocent” – she is morally pure. So, there is a character who is viewed as the most morally sound one in the group, but she is also vocal about her sexuality and she is proud of it. Normally, “promiscuity” would be viewed as morally impure in many popular culture narratives, which can be seen in many studies of Disney princess films (Lacroix 2004).

The last character to note that challenges prior socially constructed gender and sexuality characters is Zoe. Zoe is portrayed in the opening episodes as the epitome of the socially constructed “girl next door” stereotype. She is reserved, demure, sweet, pretty (but not in a sexualized way), and always wants to follow the rules (see 6.8). However, her magical power is that she kills men who have vaginal sex with her. She cannot control this power, and any man who sleeps with her dies after penetration. By juxtaposing the “girl next door” stereotype with the “femme fatale” or “black widow” stereotype, the writers of this show challenge another dichotomy of connecting beauty to morality. Zoe’s character represents both the bad and the good simultaneously. Her quote from the show, “I’ve got a killer vagina. I’m so sorry. please don’t send her to jail,” demonstrates her openness to her magical power, which literally kills men, while simultaneously demonstrating her “girl next door” need to follow rules and take responsibility. She is also open with her sexuality because she has sex with both men and women. The men she had sex with all die, except Kyle who cannot die because he is

a zombie. She also has sex with Madison, and Madison does not die, ultimately because there is no vaginal penetration.

Power Hierarchies

Power hierarchies are imperative to doing an intersectional analysis because they demonstrate who has power and, as a result, who is being oppressed or exploited by the person or group with the power. *American Horror Story: Coven* has two characters that challenge prior dominant narratives of power relationships. One of the most interesting things about *Coven* is that it has a clear power hierarchy in the show because the coven has very established rules on roles and leadership positions in the coven. It is very similar to governmental structures, but positions are filled based on magical power rather than voting. So, exploring power hierarchies is interesting. The witches who are in leadership positions have those spots because of their magic, which is only strengthened through being themselves and by loving themselves, the powers can become stronger. By depicting power relationships in this way, this show challenges, specifically for women, the idea of conforming into accepted gender and sexuality norms in an effort to have a better position in society.

Queenie is a black, cisgender woman (see 6.9). Her sexual orientation appears to be heterosexual, but she has sex with a centaur (who is half man and half goat). Queenie's power is that she is a "human voodoo doll," which means any harm she inflicts on her body can be transferred onto anyone of her choice. She has blood from

both covens on the show, which means she has Salem witch blood and voodoo witch blood. She has a larger body size than many of the other witches, which some would argue is “unattractive” by societal standards. However, she is still considered sexy because she is an independent woman who owns her magical powers.

She is the only black witch in the main coven of the show, which depicts two covens – one is comprised of all white women (Salem witches) and the other all black women (voodoo coven). Queenie acts a bridge character between the two by the end of the season, but at some points she switches over to the voodoo coven explicitly. However, she does climb the ranks of the power hierarchy in the Salem Witch coven and ultimately holds a seat on the witch’s council. Some characters on the show disagree with this because they view Queenie as an outsider because of her race, but ultimately, she still takes charge because she is so powerful.

Madison is the bully character of the show. Madison is the stereotypically beautiful woman, but she is also the meanest character. She challenges the old narrative that morality is connected to beauty because she is the most “beautiful,” but ultimately, she is the meanest (see 6.10). She is a cisgender woman who is bisexual. She is very open with her sexuality, and she openly discusses how she enjoys having sex. Her character creates a new narrative for victims of sexual assault. There are not characters in the old narrative who are openly victims of sexual assault, but there is a dominant narrative of sexual assault victims in other forms of popular culture that depict victims of sexual assault as weak, needing help (usually from a male), and unable to fend for themselves. While some other visual media has challenged this, Madison’s character

challenges this narrative in the first episode. She is gang raped at a college party, and Zoe tries to help her, but she does not really know what to do.

Madison uses her telekinesis to kill all the boys who raped her in a scene that is very reminiscent of the movie adaptation of Stephen King's *Carrie*. She uses her powers to take control of the situation immediately and refuses to accept help from anyone else. It is debatable to portray this as a "good" narrative for survivors of sexual assault, however, because it seems to argue that women should play an active role in revenge or stopping a sexual assault. Nonetheless, this scene does depict an independent woman who does not need help from anyone else to achieve a goal she has laid out for herself.

Micro and Macro Implications

The micro and macro implications that this new narrative could have on society are quite impressive. The examples from the prior three sections demonstrate that this new narrative, which is also depicted in many other visual forms of popular culture, challenge many of the negative narratives that exist historically, and even currently, in popular culture. Having alternative narratives such as this is useful because, by challenging the dominant narrative, this newly emerging narrative of the witch presents empowered women who view gender and sexuality as more fluid, which ultimately breaks up the myth that certain behaviors, traits, and orientations are "normal" or "biological." Popular culture reinforces these myths, which makes them seem even more "natural."

At the micro level, this new narrative of the witch has the potential to improve women's self-esteem for the same reasons listed above. These women of all ages,

shapes, and ethnicities who become more powerful just by loving themselves tell viewers that narratives it is okay to be different and that being oneself is the best thing one can do. This promotes independence in women and asserts that independence is not a negative thing for a woman to have.

Simultaneous Experience

American Horror Story: Coven depicts how all components of identity are simultaneously experienced. The show delves into the back stories of each character and explores how their race, class, gender, and sexuality impacted their lives and lived experiences. It purposefully includes a diverse cast in an effort to bring up current social problems and controversies in society, particularly related to race and gender. The show also elucidates the historical context of racism and sexism, making it clear that this context should not be ignored in current debates. This conversation is done through references to the Salem Witch Trials and through the use of Kathy Bates' character, an Immortal who was buried alive for torturing her slaves during the antebellum south. By bringing her character into the modern day and allowing her to interact with the characters of modern times, it demonstrates how the racism of today is rooted in its historical context.

Theme 7: Self-Reported Consequences of Popular Culture

The majority of participants in my study surprised me by saying that they did not feel that depictions of witches in popular culture impacted their decision to become a witch. However, most of them are very aware of *how* witches are depicted in popular culture

and feel like that depiction impacts how *others* view them. It became clear very early on in the interviews that Mead's concept of the "generalized other" was highly evident in the participants' interpretations of how non-self-identified witches view witches in popular culture, and, ultimately, misunderstand those who identify as witches in modern society (Mead 1934). For example, Michelle said, *"Then I started really delving into it and finding that like there are different types of witches and there are different things to do and like being a witch doesn't mean everything that like movies and TV make it out to be."* Michelle described that images of popular culture made her have a misunderstanding what it meant to be a witch in real life and possibly slowed down her process of becoming one. Similarly, Courtney blatantly stated, *"in fact, I think it (witches in popular culture) might have hindered my decision because I didn't want to have that stigma on me."*

This finding did not come as a surprise, particularly after hearing how most of my participants assumed others, "the generalized other," viewed them. They felt non-self-identified witches had negative ideas about self-identified witches based on images from popular culture such as Courtney who said, *"I don't think that we're very well portrayed or respected or understood, especially in the media. Obviously, movies are gonna (sic) always show the finger goes, and there's something that explodes or something or we have a big cauldron with frogeyes in it or something. It's just I feel like we might not ever get the accuracy that we deserve."* Similarly, Sarah says, *"I feel like a lot of them were so stereotypical witches. It's like, the witches I remember, it's just like, The Wizard of Oz and you know...or like that movie, Witches, when they like took off like*

their human skin and were all like gross underneath.” Some participants, mostly those who described strict Christian upbringing, talked about how they were taught at a very early age to avoid witches at all costs, based on how their parents had interpreted witches from religious texts and depictions in popular culture. Angela summarized this sentiment best by saying, *“Well, I think my exposure to the idea of witches was basically limited to Wizard of Oz, Halloween masks, there’s a little of King Lear, and Macbeth, they were always depicted as ugly, scary, old women back then. I was taught, under no uncertain terms, that witches, and anybody who can be described as a witch, who has been accused of being a witch, is evil and should be avoided.”* At the same time, some participants seemed to just accept that these negative portrayals were just part of their lives and something to get used to such as Vanessa who said, *“It would be nice if someone depicted them to not be bad, but I really don’t care that much.”*

Some participants were concerned that the depictions of witches in popular culture were influencing some women to become “witch wannabes” (a term co-constructed with my participants – briefly discussed in prior chapters). “Witch wannabes” are women who are currently claiming to be a witch, but it’s very possible it is just a phase for them and not a permanent part of their identity. All of my participants said they were witches for life, and it was a permanent part of their identity. The participants ranged from being cautious about these women to outright hatred of the ‘witch wannabes.” There was concern that popular culture made witchcraft look “badass” and would draw in the “witch wannabes” to describe themselves as full-fledged witches. Michelle summarized her view on this issue by saying, *“I think popular*

culture has a big thing to with it (rise in number of self-identifying witches). Um, things like I think, a bunch... I would say that like a good portion of people who probably have only recently identified themselves as witch probably pulled a lot of it from things like American Horror Story. They're like, 'oh yeah, I could do that. Jessica Lange does it, so I can...but I also think in the same sense that something like Coven would help some people realize, 'oh this is a lot like me' um, but I would say a bunch of people who have just come out of the woodwork and like don't appear to really be witches, they're probably just pulling it from like American Horror Story or like the new Charmed reboot."

Samantha similarly stated, "It's annoying or whatever for the, the people who are just in it for a phase, I would say pop culture witchcraft annoys me (laugh)."

There was an agreement amongst almost all participants that recent popular cultural portrayals of witches are much better than the older portrayals. There is also hope that it will continue to get better over time. Michelle advocated this by saying, "*I think a lot of the newer stuff is actually more accurate than the older. The older is very much like, this is what witches do and this is what they're all about, and that's not really what a lot of people (witches) do... I think the stuff in movies and TV are now a lot more accurate just because they are starting to portray witches as just normal people who have these heightened abilities... I think things kind of gradually turned (in pop culture). Um, things like Charmed kind of took it both directions, like they were kind of very much what you expect witches to be, but then they also show that like they did things privately...they tried to keep things to themselves, but still help each other, like help people out."*

There was acknowledgment that some of the depictions in popular culture are positive, even though the negative heavily outweighs it. Vanessa says, *“I guess I liked how they go against society...I don’t like to follow the crowd at all because I feel like...You know that phrase? ‘Be careful when you follow the masses, the end might be silent’. Yeah. When I see in movies or something, they’re always off somewhere doing their own thing, they’re the weird person, the weird girl usually, and they like to dress dark. They do their magic things. Everybody’s afraid of them and talk bad about them behind their backs. That was me, okay? I guess seeing that would make me feel a little bit more comfortable because it’s like, okay, I don’t know why. I know it’s fiction, but I could see it on the TV or something and know that I guess seeing it from third person made me more comfortable with dealing with it first person...Not because they are the main character, I would feel empowered because they’re different that I guess than the jerks in the movies, you know?”* This quote summarizes what other participants described as positive from specific portrayals in popular culture, specifically that witches can be empowered from within and be strong, even if they are different, weird, or outcasts in society.

Theme 8: Binary Constructs of Witches in Culture in the 1900s

Glinda Vs. Wicked Witch of the West

Essentially every participant in my study had seen *The Wizard of Oz* and knew its storyline very well. While none of my participants initially said that the Wizard of Oz had an impact on their decision to identify as a witch, most of them reported having

thoughts and opinions on the film and the characters in the film. There was an interesting difference on opinions when it came to Glinda and the Wicked Witch of the West. Almost all participants sided with one witch over the other, and the majority sided with the Wicked Witch of the West. I think this finding would be flipped for non-self-identified witches, which is not surprising.

Participants who sided with the Wicked Witch of the West were quick to point out her strength. Michelle said, *“Um, I hated that movie (The Wizard of Oz) growing up (laughs)...it had nothing to do with the witches in it. It was just not my cup of tea....well, at least in my vision, probably started as the Wicked Witch of the West probably was like willing to actually go out and fight for things, whereas Glinda wanted to be good and wanted to be the one that everyone liked.”* Michelle was quick to draw attention to Glinda’s conformity, which as noted in both this chapter and the previous chapters, is something most participants do not like and something they try to avoid in their lives.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, *The Wizard of Oz* includes two witches – the princess-esque Glinda and the evil Wicked Witch of the West. The morality of these two characters is connected directly with their physical appearance – the ugly, evil Wicked Witch of the West and the beautiful, good Glinda. Participants in this study were also very aware of this connection, such as Angela who said, *“I thought that the Wicked Witch of the West was perfectly justified in wanting her sister’s shoes. They weren’t Glinda’s to give away, and I thought that was really unfair. Nobody cared about the witches, the Wicked Witch of the West’s journey because she was green, and had an ugly nose, and an annoying voice. Nobody cared what she felt, or was going through, or*

how she was fundamentally human, and another living soul that needed to be listened to and understood...because she was ugly, she was automatically evil, and Glinda was pretty, she's automatically good. That's bothered me all through all the Disney movies forever, and ever."

Similarly, Samantha said, *"I think it's kind of funny (laughs) The Wizard of Oz is kind of funny. I wouldn't say I thought anything of it as a kid...but now that you bring it up, it's kind of interesting that, you know, you have the Wicked Witch of the West, and even though Glinda's the good witch, they don't really, I don't think people really think of her as a witch. I think people think of her as more of a fairy, you know, or the fairy godmother, which (laughs) you know is interesting, it kind of again keeps with the evil witch, Satan kind of thing (laughs)."*

There was a small number of participants who did connect more with Glinda the Good witch, precisely because she was a witch that did good things to help people. Courtney describes the same juxtaposition between good and evil but thinks that is fitting of how the real world actually is by saying, *"I like the fact that they (The Wizard of Oz) show the differences between the good witch and bad witch. Which is kind of true, because there are people that might be portrayed as witches or say that they're witches that do have the negative stuff. But then it also shows the light and good and they only want to help and they're just trying to be there...so I'm on the fence about it. I think it's a little bit better than most things I've seen."*

Sarah reiterated Courtney's thoughts when she said, *"I liked that, because it just showed that it's not, you know, not the only like, not only the dark side. Just darkness is*

not like, you know, evil. It's good too. We can be good people to help people out and do good spells and stuff...(Glinda) she's a witch too! And she's good!...It made me happy."

Sarah's discussion on popular culture was an interesting paradox, because she tended to focus on the light, happy aspects of witches in popular culture over the darker ones, but she was a fan the new *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, even though that show very strongly connects witchcraft with Satan, who most would argue is very dark, scary, and even violent. (Sarah's paradoxical view of Sabrina is discussed more in depth below in the section on the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*.)

90s Cliché but So Powerful: *The Craft*

The *Craft* was the least watched film/show out of the four heavily discussed in this study. Almost every participant had heard of it and possibly seen it once, but it appeared to not have a profound effect on the participants, and if it had an impact many of them did not remember it well enough to make solid comments on it. For participants who were teens during the premiere of *The Craft*, they looked back on it fondly, while the youngest participants in the study commented on how a lot it seemed dated. This finding is not surprising because *The Craft* was considered groundbreaking for self-identified teen witches of the 90s (Berger and Ezzy 2009).

Those who have seen and remember it, tended to enjoy it and feel like it is a good example of how witches in popular culture are slowly starting to become more normalized and include more accurate depictions of self-identified witches.

Michelle did an excellent job of summarizing this sentiment by saying, "*I love The Craft. I love it. Um, it's not so much practical. They do a lot of the stuff that I'm*

interested in, but like they did make it very 90s cliché, and I think that like some of the spells that they do aren't practical in just like actuality. Like, I don't know of many people who could do a spell that was going to make all the scars go away like the girl in the film...but...it portrays what most people think witches are, but it also shows what they did and how like for the most part, yes, they did things for evil reasons, but they also, I guess they were super proud to be witches and didn't care what people thought, but also they're portrayed as like the bad asses and the punk girls or the girls with deformities and stuff like that...but I love it...I love The Craft (laughs)." Similarly, Samantha said, *"The Craft...Yes I actually love that movie (laughs) I just think it's super entertaining. It's so good. I do actually like the Pagan and witchcraft elements they have in The Craft are surprisingly like pretty close...like I appreciate they have the athame and they like, when they, they set up their little altar in the woods, it like has everything an altar should have on it. And, it's I don't know, it's interesting in that sense, but, then, it kind of goes off the rails (laughs)."* It was interesting that the participants who said they enjoyed *The Craft* seemed to be embarrassed about it, almost like it was a guilty pleasure film for them. The other three films and television shows explored in this chapter did not illicit that type of embarrassed response.

Theme 9: Every Witch is Different, and so are Modern Women

Stevie Nicks - The Unofficial Witch of the Masses

Some of my interview questions focused on witch icons or role models (see Appendices A and B). These questions were initially part of a funnel sequence of

questions that aimed to get the participants talking about witches in popular culture before I explicitly asked them about it in later questions. Most of the participants did not bring up the witches I had initially thought they would (the ones described in earlier sections and the following sections of this chapter- where they were explicitly asked about each film or TV show). While some participants discussed things such as *Harry Potter*, occult fictional book series, and even historical documents for difference religions around the world, the most common response was Fleetwood Mac's lead singer, Stevie Nicks.

Stevie Nicks is a fascinating case in this study because Stevie Nicks is almost synonymous with witch culture, even though she has never identified as witch herself (see 6.11). Perhaps this is why so many participants hesitated before stating she was their biggest witch role model or icon. ADD AESTHETIC? It was common for participants to hesitate, laugh nervously, or even ask permission to say Stevie Nicks is their inspiration. For example, Samantha said *"Um, I mean would it be terrible to say Stevie Nicks (laughs)...I mean you can just feel it, and she's never like publicly come out and said, 'I'm a witch,' but...just how can you not feel that energy and feel that expression and just know (laughs)."*

The fact that Stevie Nicks has never openly come out and said she was a witch, which is very interesting when compared to the findings in Chapter 3 that many of the witches in this study also describe "hiding" or "not advertising" their witch identity. This view on Stevie Nicks goes along with the sentiment that some people just are witches, and everyone knows it without them having to say it officially. For example, Calley said,

“Um, I don’t know if she’s fully a witch, but I, I do love Stevie Nicks...I do relate to a lot of the Fleetwood Mac songs, you know what I mean? Um, a lot of her music you know I, I feel like she is a witch, you know what I mean? A lot of her music pretty much says it...she kind of covers it up, you know what I mean? She doesn’t, you know, publicly say that, ‘cause she would be judged. A lot of people judge us. So, I kinda (sic) understand where she’s coming from. But, uh I, really do in my heart feel like she is a part of the community, you know?” Stevie Nicks furthered the idea that she was a “real life” witch after playing one in *American Horror Story: Coven*.

Stevie Nicks is also associated with the women’s movement by many of the participants, which they felt also aligned her with witchcraft from a feminist standpoint, such as Sarah who said, *“Definitely Stevie Nicks...she is the queen. I’m seeing her in March...she’s so otherworldly, and she owns it. And she was such a pioneer, a forefront pioneer, you know? And just like, a woman’s a little bit, in general, not even in the witch movement. She wrote her own songs, and they were all beautiful, and she was like, the lead singer. You know, she really presented herself. She made...She was the band. She’s the one person everyone remembers from Fleetwood Mac.”*

American Horror Story: Coven

American Horror Story: Coven seemed to be well liked by all participants. Even the ones who had not seen it knew enough about the characters and plot to have a positive opinion on it. For example, Michelle (hasn’t seen all of it because she doesn’t have cable) said, *“I love the concept, I love the way that they’re portrayed. I love that*

they're portrayed pretty much as normal humans on the outside but once they're in the house, it all disappears and they become exactly who they are."

Only a few participants did not like it, including Sarah, who describes not liking anything "too dark" and loved Glinda from Oz. She commented that *Coven* was, "a little too dark" because, "people were killed in it." Similarly, Angela, when asked about American Horror Story said, "I tend to avoid those. I'm not much for horror films. I get sick at violence...I was coerced into watching an episode. It was one where one of the witches was dying, I think, or blind or something...but I remember sitting there and thinking, if I had my own coven, we would not talk to each other like this. The way they spoke to each other, I think that the thing that struck me the most. They were very short and accusatory in pretty much everything they said."

Most participants described "loving" *Coven* though. I was excited that many participants discussed the diversity of the witches as one of the best things about the show, which perfectly fit in with the content analyses of the show discussed above. For example, Samantha said, "I liked how they you know, they had a very diverse cast. So, they had women, who I mean you know, they had, um, that actress that has Down Syndrome as a witch and felt very self-empowered. They have a black woman as a witch...especially with the hoodoo and voodoo side of it. It was African American women you know who had the ancestral link, so even when they made it their own, they still, you know stayed true to, um, to not culturally appropriating any existing religions, which was I think awesome." It was very insightful of Samantha, who identifies her race as

Arab, to put so much focus on avoiding things in all of witch culture that she finds to be cultural appropriation. Her comments were previously discussed in-depth in Chapter 2.

Calley not only liked the diversity of the cast, but also the diversity of powers among the witches in the show, because, *“I think they did a good job, because everybody, you know, they pretty much show that every witch is, has a different power. Everyone’s different, you know what I mean? Diversity. So, that was good...I love Jessica Lange (‘Fiona).”* Similarly, Courtney said, *“Yeah. In all honesty, I really like it (AHS: Coven), only because not necessarily being as a witch, but I thought it was just so powerful. It almost made me proud because it’s like year, look how powerful they are, whereas it’s not as real because they’re saying that every person has a power and that makes them a witch, which isn’t true. We all have our own power in and of itself, it doesn’t have to be a super power. But I think it’s really cool how they all ended up banding together and trying to really...I thought it was cool. It’s a sense of community and the just the differences...That’s another thing too. It showed how every witch is different. Everyone has a different style, different everything, but you can still all effectively be in a community together.”* Ultimately, *American Horror Story: Coven* was reportedly a great representation that witches are powerful and unique in their own ways, but ultimately are stronger when they come together to work for the betterment of all women/witches.

The Role of Satan in Witchcraft: *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*

The choice to include the reboot of Sabrina the Teenage witch, 2018’s *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, was entirely due to the amount of importance the participants in

this study put on it. Many participants referenced it because they were big fans of the show. The quote that best summarizes this point comes from Michelle who said, *“As cheesy as it probably sounds, the New Sabrina is probably pretty close to like how a lot of modern witches react to things. Like, a lot of my friends don’t do – like I have a couple friends that do like spell work and stuff but like I think the stuff in movies and TV are now a lot more accurate just because they are starting to portray witches as just normal people who have these heightened abilities, willingness to like look beyond the surface, not just take the cover for what it is and be like nope, there’s something else there.”*

Similarly, Calley is happy with the amount of attention the show is getting and thus, giving a voice to witches. She said, *“I think it’s (Chilling Adventures of Sabrina) is good, like the increase of shows and everything, cause (sic) you know what I mean? So, it’s kind of like we’ve, I don’t know, like the, I guess the religion has been very quiet for a while, so now it’s kind of like coming up. But I feel like it’s also gonna (sic) draw a lot of people that aren’t (witches), you know what I mean? Or aren’t like into it. I don’t know, kinda (sic) like those phase witches [self-identified witches that are only identifying as a phase to “feel cool”] (laughing).”*

From a researcher standpoint one of the most interesting things about this show is that it blurs the lines between Satanism, Wicca, Witchcraft, Paganism, and Neo-Paganism. Almost all participants agreed in some part of their interviews that they hated the stereotype that associates Satan with witchcraft. They argue the connection to Satan is what gives them a negative connotation to non-self-identified witches and that if they could shake that connection it would help people respect and understand

them better. As mentioned previously, The Satanic Church sued Netflix for using their deity in the show, arguing it was misused and taken out of context. It would appear that both “religions” do not like being associated with others.

Samantha summarized this problem when she said, “...*pop culture witchcraft annoys me (laugh)*” because...*you know just look at um, Sabrina the Teenage Witch, the remake that just came out on Netflix. I mean it’s cute that they mixed a bunch of different Pagan traditions together to create her tradition, but also, it’s super annoying that they just right out the gate associated it with Satan, which is a Christian construct (laugh)...it’s just that part frustrates me. Just about any pop culture depiction of witchcraft involves Satan, which, if you are a witch, there’s no Satan.*” Even though other participants seemed to share this sentiment, many of them talked about enjoying the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, which is a puzzling paradox.

Another interesting paradox is that of Sarah, who described hating things that were “too dark”, wished that popular culture depictions of witches would focus on the positives, and loved Glinda of Oz. However, Sarah went on to say that this new reboot of Sabrina was her favorite, because, “*You know they don’t make it as like, you know, someone who’s dressing up in like, head to toe black with the hat. And you know I love Sabrina (2018 version) the Teenage Witch. I think it’s adorable. And it’s just so cool, cause (sic) like she just goes to school and she does her own thing. It’s not like controlling every aspect of her life. She doesn’t dress any differently, she just dresses in like her little sweaters and stuff.*” While Sabrina may not be wearing all black, she still does work associated with Satan, which most would say is dark. It also worth noting that Sarah

bears a shocking resemblance (both in physical features and style of dress) to the new Sabrina. There were 2 self-described witches in the study who did follow the, “all black,” aesthetic that Sarah was not a fan of. I referred to these witches as aesthetic witches because their witch identity was very closely tied to their physical appearance and the portrayal of an edgy, goth look.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the ways in which self-identified witches view popular depictions of witches in contemporary media and the ways in which they feel they are or are not influenced by these depictions. Using a theoretical framework of Mead’s theory of the “self” and the “generalized other” alongside a social constructivist approach to grounded theory, this chapter provides a discussion of well-known depictions of the witch over the last eighty years – The Wicked Witch of the West and Glinda the Good in *The Wizard of Oz*, the teenage witches in *The Craft*, and Sabrina and Madam Satan in *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, *American Horror Story: Coven* and 13 in-depth interviews with self-identified witches demonstrated that the media’s narrative of the witch has changed drastically since Margaret Hamilton’s green-skinned Wicked Witch of the West. Today’s witch in popular culture comes from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and ranges in age and body size. She is confident in her sexuality, and she is not limited to the cisgender identity.

The 13 interviews conducted in this study show that popular depictions of the witch are important to the participants. While some were concerned that particularly

dark stories could further non-self-identified witches' belief that all witches are dark or even satanic, most of the participants were delighted with the diverse portrayals of witches in the television shows and movies that were discussed, and they were especially pleased that witches were being shown as normal people who try to help others. While some participants spoke of *The Craft* or *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* as a guilty pleasure, commonalities such as a love for Stevie Nicks emerged across the set of interviews. It is interesting to note that participants identified with a variety of types of witches in popular media, and even though more of them preferred the Wicked Witch of the West, some of them did favor Glinda the Good.

Above all, the concept of the "other" emerged clearly in the words of the participants in this study through the ways in which the women discussed non-self-identified witches. A number of participants expressed concern that media depictions of the witch could influence the ways in which non-self-identified witches see them, and they more appreciate media portrayals that show witches as people who live fairly normal lives, except for the fact that they practice witchcraft. Through this idea, it is also clear that the idea of the "self" is an important part of how the participants see these media depictions. They identify with media witches who exhibit characteristics that they see themselves as having.

Figures



Figure 6.1 Wicked Witch of the West



Figure 6.2 Glinda the Good



Figure 6.3 *The Craft*



Figure 6.4 *Sabrina from The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina/Netflix*



Figure 6.5 Madam Satan from The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina/Netflix



Figure 6.6 Fiona from American Horror Story: Coven



Figure 6.7 Nan from American Horror Story: Coven



Figure 6.8 Zoe from American Horror Story: Coven



Figure 6.9 Queenie from American Horror Story: Coven



Figure 6.10 Madison from American Horror Story: Coven



Figure 6.11 Stevie Nicks from Fleetwood Mac

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION: SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In conclusion, this dissertation explored self-identified witches' experiences and the meanings they constructed behind their self-described witch identity. The focus of this study can be broken down into four main areas: 1) the process of becoming a witch; 2) the self-empowerment that comes from being a witch; 3) the influence of popular culture depictions of witches on how they view themselves, as well as how they perceive other non-self-identified witches view them; and 4) the experiences they have had with mechanisms of social control.

This study used a grounded theory approach to uncover the experiences of self-identified witches. Grounded theory was the best approach to this study for multiple reasons. First, it called for no hypotheses, or any preconceived notions, about being a self-identified witch. This concept was crucial in the data-gathering phase because there are abundant myths and non-truths about self-identified witches that date back to the Salem Witch Trials of 1692. In order to fully understand the participants' voices and their truths, it was imperative to go into this study with an open mind. Grounded theory advocates for the use of a personal journal for the researcher throughout the entire research process, which was imperative.

As the researcher for this study I had to keep own my thoughts and understandings of modern witches in check in order to make sure I was allowing as little bias as possible into this study. The journal helped to keep me grounded and also allowed me to have themes and findings begin to emerge as early as the first interview I conducted.

The second reason that grounded theory was so useful was that it called for an understanding that there is no universal, singular objective truth. Instead, each person has their own life experiences and processes of understanding and meaning-making that are ultimately what lead to the construction of truths for them. My job as researcher was to present their truths, in their own words, and allow their unique voices to be heard. This reasoning is why I generally used such long, direct quotes throughout the dissertation.

Finally, grounded theory was the best option for this dissertation because it involved semi-structured interviews that allowed participants the option to lead the discussion and spend time on the stories and experiences of their lives that they viewed as most relevant. Some of the most interesting findings in this study came directly from the participants themselves, specifically meaning that I did not initially plan to ask about or focus on certain aspects, but after seeing how salient they were to participants I adapted my interview guide to include them. Chapter 5's findings on politics and voodoo would never have been discovered if I had had a strict interview guide with a very structured interview.

After completing data collection and data analysis it was crucial to go back to the literature and find theoretical context that helped define and explain the findings of this study. A review of feminist literature related to this topic helped uncover the prevalence of 'white witches' in my study and situated their beliefs that they were morally 'good' witches, did not challenge the patriarchal status quo, and were able to elevate themselves through the othering of witches who did morally 'bad' black magic (Ezzy 2006).

The only portion of the study that arguably had preconceived speculations was Chapter 6, which focused on popular culture. This chapter was initially the first component of the study and where the initial idea for the entire study came about. Based on prior sociological research I expected to find that recent, "cooler," depictions of witches in popular culture led to the high rise in modern self-identified witches. While this might be somewhat true for very young witches in their teens or early 20s, it certainly was not the case for witches who have been practicing for decades among participants in this study. Clearly, those older participants made decisions to become self-identified witches when the depictions of witches in popular culture were almost entirely negative. While the older witches did see the promise of more modern depictions of witches in popular culture, they still categorized it as "just entertainment" for the most part.

By far the most important thing to the participants in this study was that their voices be heard, specifically they want others (non-self-identified witches) to know they do nothing negative or evil, they are not associated with Satan or Satanism, and that

their main goal of being a witch (no matter how strong the witch identity is to them) is to help others and make the world a positive place. This finding is better explained through the lens of the Ezzy's (2006) 'white witch', which shows how these women focus on self-empowerment through self-improvement with a general lack of interest in traditional witchcraft and Wicca tenets such as equality for all, environmentalism, and the importance of community and helping others. The idea of self-improvement frequently focused on making the body better, but only 'better' as the norm of a patriarchal and heterosexist society dictates (Immergut 2010).

The scholarly significance of this study is that it contributes to a small literature currently available on self-identified witches. The majority of the literature on modern witches lies within religious studies of Wicca for the most part, which excludes a large majority of people who identify as a witch, but not for religious reasons. Something very unique about self-identified witches today is that they tend to not only be misunderstood and stereotyped by broad society, but also by academia as well.

While it was initially hard to find participants who were not white individuals, it was very easy to find individuals who were of low social class and low education levels. I would predict that a larger, quantitative study of witches in America would reveal that one of the newer trends and reasons for the rise in self-identified witches of today is that it has expanded to include individuals who are not highly educated or wealthy. Also, after navigating different avenues of finding participants for this study, I think it would be relatively expected to find a trend that self-identified witches are self-identifying as gender fluid and non-heterosexual.

This study did have limitations. Given the small N of 13 participants, generalizations about all modern witches cannot be made. However, this study did highlight possible new trends that are emerging in self-identified witches and give many fruitful options for future research in this area. Also, some of the interviews were done via email and did not allow for me to see body language and immediately ask participants to expand or provide clarification on certain issues.

The main strength of this style of interviewing is that certain participants in this study would not have agreed to an interview if it were face-to-face, video recorded, or even a phone call. Some of the self-identified witches in this study preferred that their social media accounts and their own descriptions of their experiences be as confidential as possible. In these cases the participants usually had photos of nature on their social media accounts, almost always having wolves as profile pictures, which unfortunately makes it impossible to know anything physical about them.

The next step to expand this research project will include interviews with non-white, non-heterosexual self-identified witches. I already have a sample of two men, three gender fluid individuals, a trans woman, and a biracial gender fluid individual, all of whom self-identify as witches. I will ask them the same interview questions, and adjust the interview guide as needed based on their comments, as I did in this study. I will then compare and contrast the new findings from those interviews with those of this study. I am most interested to see how these new witch identities compare to the prevalent 'witch witches' in this study. I would also like to do content analyses on popular culture portrayals of non-white witches, such as *The Wiz*.

In future research I plan to conduct follow up interviews with some of the participants in this study to further explore issues related to their identities and experiences with social control. I would like to do more content analyses on more of the modern depictions of witches in popular culture. First, I would like to start with the *Chilling New Adventures of Sabrina* and then follow up with the new shows that are remakes of older shows that include characters of color, such as the new *Charmed* reboot with Latina individuals. These content analyses are very important in understanding why younger individuals and teens are drawn to the Occult in general.

It would also be important to further explore some of the themes that emerged from this data set that were not used in this study due to the lack of in-depth discussions with participants on these topics. Of most interest is the finding that many self-identified witches do not like the new trend they are seeing of individuals who identify as witches for aesthetic reasons, or what they described as “trivial” reasons such as wanting to be edgy or badass without having to put the work in that “real” witches do. This finding resulted in the discussion of “wannabe witches”, a term that was co-constructed with multiple participants. In these cases, there is clear defensive othering occurring, specifically where the “real” witches in my study wanted to distance themselves as much as possible from the “wannabe witches”. I was only able to interview 2 participants who fit the “wannabe witch” category and I would like to conduct further interviews with more self-identified witches that fit into that category.

Finally, I would like to conduct interviews in an additional study with self-identified voodoo practitioners and find out how they respond to some of the

comments made by the white participants in this study. I am curious if they also feel that they are stereotyped by white self-identified witches in the same way that self-identified white women witches describe being misunderstood by society. It would be an ironic finding if the white women witches were guilty of doing the same thing that they are so concerned about broader society doing to them. It is worth noting that not all of the participants in this study had such strong opinions on voodoo, but a large enough minority did that it is certainly worth delving into in another study.

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APPENDIX A:

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR ZOOM INTERVIEW

Demographics:

- Age
- Race
- Gender
- Occupation
- Sexual orientation
- Social Class
- Location (Be as broad or specific as you like)

Section 1: Identifying as a Witch

1. Do you identify as a witch?
2. How long have you identified as a witch?
3. What does the term 'witch' mean to you?
4. What do you think the term 'witch' means to broader society?

Section 2: Process of Becoming a Witch

5. Describe the YOUR process of becoming a witch.
 - a. What were some of the most memorable moments during your identity formation of being a witch?
 - b. Were there moments when you doubted accepting this label?
6. Do you know other self-identified witches?
7. Did you know other self-identified witches before becoming one yourself?
8. Can you describe the witch community as a whole – what do they look like? Are certain demographics missing?
9. Do you feel you are part of the witch community? If no, is it something you want to be a part of?
10. Is there a connection between your sense of fashion and aesthetics and your witch identity?

Section 3: Witches in Popular Culture

11. Do you have a witch icon or a witch role model?
 - a. What do those icons or role models mean to you?
 - b. Do those icons or role models impact how you view yourself as a witch?
How?
12. Would you say the depictions of witches in popular culture played a role in your decision to identify as a witch?
 - a. If so, how?
 - b. If not, how would situate the depiction of witches in popular culture and your identity as a witch together? Or do they not go together?

Section 4: Social Control of Witches

13. How does being a witch impact your sexuality and sexual experiences with others? IS THERE A LINK BETWEEN WITCH IDENTITY AND SEXUALITY – MORE OPEN
14. Is identifying as a witch a permanent part of your identity or is it more of a phase?

Section 5: Add Questions After Initial Interviews:

15. Are you familiar with voodoo?
16. Describe the people who practice voodoo.
17. Does your political identity directly connect to your witch identity?
 - a. Did you hear about the gatherings (usually in dive bars) where witches came together to hex Donald Trump? What are your thoughts on these gatherings?
18. Is there any other information you would like to share with me about being a witch, how you are treated as a witch, or anything else that may come to mind?

APPENDIX B:

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR EMAIL INTERVIEWS

Demographics:

- Age
- Race
- Gender
- Occupation
- Sexual orientation
- Social Class
- Location (Be as broad or specific as you like)

Section 1: Identifying as a Witch

1. Do you identify as a witch?
2. How long have you identified as a witch?
3. How would you categorize the witch part of your identity?
 - a. Would you use it in a spiritual or religious way to describe yourself?
 - b. Would you use the term to describe your physical appearance at all?
4. What does the term 'witch' mean to you?
5. During your childhood what memories do you have of witches?
6. As a child what did you associate witches with?
7. Do you have any memories of witches in popular culture at that time?
8. As a teenager what memories do you have of witches?
9. Do you have any memories of witches in popular culture at that time?
10. How do those memories impact your sense of self today as a witch?
11. What do you think the term 'witch' means to broader society?
12. Do you openly use the term witch with friends and family?
13. Do you openly use the term witch with acquaintances or coworkers?
14. How does identifying as a witch make you feel about yourself?
15. How does identifying as a witch make others feel about you?

Section 2: Process of Becoming a Witch

16. Describe the entire process of becoming a witch.
 - a. What were some of the most memorable moments during your identity formation of being a witch?
 - b. Were there moments when you doubted accepting this label?
 - i. If so, why?
17. Do you know other self-identified witches?
18. Did you know other self-identified witches before becoming one yourself?
19. How would you describe the witch community of today?
20. Does the Internet play a role in modern witch communities?
 - a. If so, can you describe that role?
21. Do you think self-identifying as a witch has different meanings for different people?
 - a. If so, why?
22. What do you know about the Salem Witch Trials?
23. How does the history of the Salem Witch Trials impact your understanding of what it means to be a witch in today's society?
24. Do you think the meaning of witches and identifying as a witch has changed over time?
 - a. If so, how has it changed?
25. Is there a connection between your sense of fashion and aesthetics and your witch identity?
26. Do you own any clothing or items that have the label 'witch' on them?
27. Do you seek out companies that promote Wiccan or Witch products?
 - a. Why or Why not?

Section 3: Witches in Popular Culture

28. Do you have a witch icon or a witch role model?
 - a. What do those icons or role models mean to you?
 - b. Do those icons or role models impact how you view yourself as a witch? How?
29. How are witches depicted in popular culture today?
30. Are you a fan of witches in popular culture today?
31. Do you think representations of witches in popular culture are accurate based on your experiences as a witch?
32. If you think about some of the most famous witches (fictional or nonfictional) in all of popular culture throughout history who comes to mind?
33. How have these icons stayed the same?
34. How have they changed?
35. What are your thoughts and interpretations on classic fairy tales that involve both a witch and a princess?
36. Are princesses' morally good characters in these stories?
 - a. Why?

37. Are witches' morally bad characters in these stories?
 - a. Why?
38. Would you say the depictions of witches in popular culture played a role in your decision to identify as a witch?
 - a. If so, how?
 - b. If not, how would situate the depiction of witches in popular culture and your identity as a witch together? Or do they not go together?
39. Have you seen *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) film?
 - a. If so what are your thoughts on it and reactions to the depictions of witches from this source?
40. Have you seen *The Craft* (1996) film?
 - a. If so what are your thoughts on it and reactions to the depictions of witches from this source?
41. Have you seen *American Horror Story: Coven* (2013) show?
 - a. If so what are your thoughts on it and reactions to the depictions of witches from this source?
42. Have you seen *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018) show?
 - a. If so what are your thoughts on it and reactions to the depictions of witches from this source?

Section 4: Social Control of Witches

43. Have you had negative experiences with other people because you identify as a witch?
 - a. What experiences come to mind?
44. Do you think being a witch is looked down upon in our society?
 - a. Why?
45. Has being a witch ever impacted your career or job in a negative way?
 - a. If so, how?
46. Has being a witch ever impacted your family life in a negative way?
 - a. If so, how?
47. Has being a witch ever impacted your social life, whether that be with friends or romantic partners?
 - a. If so, how?
48. Have you had any run ins with authority figures in your life that were negatively influenced due to your identity as a witch?
 - a. If so, how?
49. How does being a witch impact your gender and gendered experiences with others?
50. How does being a witch impact your sexuality and sexual experiences with others?
51. Would you encourage others to be a witch?
 - a. Why or why not?

52. Is identifying as a witch a permanent part of your identity or is it more of a phase?
- Why?

Section 5: Added Questions After Initial Interviews:

53. Are you familiar with voodoo?
- What do you know about it?
54. Describe the people who practice voodoo.
55. Do you practice voodoo or have an interest in practicing in the future? Please go into as much detail as possible
56. 55. Does your political identity directly connect to your witch identity?
57. Did you hear about the gatherings (usually in dive bars) where witches came together to hex Donald Trump? These were popular last fall and continue now.
- What are your thoughts on these gatherings?
58. Is there any other information you would like to share with me about being a witch, how you are treated as a witch, or anything else that may come to mind?