QUEERING WITCHES: A QUEER FEMINIST EXPLORATION OF WITCHES IN MEDIA

by

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This thesis is an exploration of witches, as depicted in entertainment media. "Queering Witches: A Queer Feminist Exploration of Witches in Media" analyzes the way history has contributed to the reinforcement of stereotypes about witches using queer theory and feminist analysis. "Queering Witches" also offers a broad view of the intersectionality inherent to the way witches are presented in media, specifically delving into definitions of witches, Satanists, witches of color, and the intersection of witches and the queer/LGBTQIA+ community. The introduction of feminist analysis and queer theory emphasizes the way stereotypes about witches and performance of power have been demonized by society in much the same way as the performance of gender and sexuality have been demonized.

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"Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn and cauldron bubble."
William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*[1]

William Shakespeare introduced the Weird Sisters in *Macbeth,* but he was not the first to

capitalize on the concept of witches or witchcraft. Witches are some of the most iconic

characters throughout folklore and exist in tales around the world. The witch is a common

monster in horror movies and supernatural shows, though not all depictions of witches are

monstrous. Witches tend to get a bad rap in most stories, typically depicted as women living

outside of society, often as someone to fear and respect, lest they find out and curse you for your

impudence. However, witches in contemporary media can fit solidly in two camps: the

bewitching young woman, bursting with sex appeal and desirable because of the good she does;

and the evil sorceress, who can be beautiful and young or hideous and old, but is always

essentialized as evil. Throughout my podcast episode, "Witches" from *Legendary: A Folklore*

Podcast[2], I emphasized folklore, particularly the urban legend of the Blair Witch, and other

media depictions of witches from film. But in this paper, I intend to delve further into stereotypes

of witches in popular culture, particularly in the films *Hocus Pocus, The Witch: A New England*

Folktale and the television shows *Charmed (1998)* and *Charmed (2018), The Vampire Diaries,*

and *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*. My exploration of witches in the podcast is colored by my

interview with Mads Whitmarsh-Jones, a local Washington witch, who self-identifies as a witch

and a member of the queer community[3]. The podcast offers a small snapshot of the overall

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[1] Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth*. Edited by Stephen Orgel, Penguin Books, 2016.
[2] This podcast can be found at: http://legendarypodcast.libsyn.com/website
[3] Note: Mads Whitmarsh-Jones uses the pronouns they, them, their and prefers to be referenced by name as Mads. Their name and pronouns will be honored accordingly in this paper.

interview process, but unfortunately, due to time constraints, does not showcase the extensive

exploration of witches and queer theory that Mads and I explored. This paper intends to offer a

broader scope of the intersection between witches and queer theory, primarily emphasizing the

stereotypes of witches and how performance of power and belief as a witch is demonized by

society in much the same way as performance of gender and sexuality have been.

I set out to discover what media imply when it frames witches within a binary,

particularly its emphasis on women as witches; but in my exploration, I encountered my real

source of concern: *why* are witches usually women in media? This question brings me to the

intersection of witches in folklore and queer theory, framed within a feminist lens. In the podcast

I quote the following:

> The female ontological self exists within systems of power (e.g., patriarchal,
>
> heterosexual, etc.) and is judged and classified within these external systems and
>
> perception is central when it comes to woman's "performance" of self. This affiliation to
>
> the larger communal body requires, intrinsically, that woman sacrifice an innate sense of
>
> self or part of self to concede to the dominant normative discourse. (Santos xiii)

It is patriarchy, heteronormativity, and social constructions of what "woman" means that are

important. These norms are reinforced throughout media and "what emerges is a dominant

tendency of the demonizing of female empowerment and agency by the dominant (male)

culture," which essentially means that, "female monstrosity is buried within cultural constructs"

(Santos xxii).

Given the feminist lens necessary to analyze witches, I will be bringing queer theory and

feminism together by utilizing queer feminism, as detailed in *Feminism is Queer: The Intimate*

Connection Between Queer and Feminist Theory by Mimi Marinucci. Marinucci describes queer feminism as:

> The application of queer notions of gender, sex, and sexuality to the subject matter of feminist theory, and the simultaneous application of feminist notions of gender, sex, and sexuality to the subject matter of queer theory. Although the word 'queer' is commonly associated with sex and sexuality, queer theory is a way of understanding not just sex and sexuality but also gender. Specifically, queer theory avoids the binary and hierarchical reasoning usually associated with these concepts. Precisely what it is that constitutes the subject matter of feminism varies from one form of feminism to the next. Despite this diversity, however, almost every form of feminism addresses at least gender and sex, and sometimes sexuality as well. There is thus an implicit connection between queer theory and feminist theory, and queer feminism makes this connection more explicit. (Marinucci 105)

A queer feminist reading will allow for the intersection between the obvious binary that the concept of "witch" forces, and the way in which media representations (particularly stereotypes) essentialize and villainize women.

Queer theory is an important element of the arguments I set forth in this paper because it has nestled itself within academia comfortably; however, its origins and the intention behind its inception is what makes it such a valuable framework to employ. David M. Halperin writes in the "The Normalization of Queer Theory" that queer theory began as a joke, by Theresa de Lauretis, who utilized the phrase "queer theory" to act as her conference title. She used the term because it had been "tossed about in a gay-affirmative sense by activists, street kids, and members of the art world in New York during the late 1980s" (Halperin 339). These groups

3

made the word queer into something for themselves, but it was definitely outside of academia and so its use in that arena was quite a maverick move. T. de Lauretis' use of the term was considered offensive by those within academia at the time, yet Halperin argues that it was "deliberately disruptive" and the intention was to:

> [u]nsettle the complacency of "lesbian and gay studies" (that "by not established an often convenient formula," as she called it) which implied that the relation of lesbian studies and gay male topics in this emerging field was equitable, perfectly balanced, and completely understood—as if everyone knew exactly how lesbian studies and gay male studies connected to each other and why it was necessary or important that they should evolve together. (Halperin 340)

Ultimately, Halperin argues that queer theory is useful not because of what it does from a theoretical standpoint, burrowed safely within academia, but in fact its radical origin is its ultimate potential. It provides for us a way "to startle, to surprise, to help us think what has not yet been thought" (Halperin 343). It is that definition which I am utilizing in my arguments here; I hope to utilize media portrayal of witches, and the social implications of these portrayals from a queer perspective. This is not necessarily being utilized to address sexuality, gender expression, etc. (though it will and can), but is instead incorporated as a framework to address the *action* of queering in media. These queer actions are where meaning is derived, and the implications of these actions can be called to question and analyzed using queer theoretical approaches established by Sara Ahmed, Judith Butler, Elizabeth Freeman, Michel Foucault, David M. Halperin, Theresa de Lauretis, José Esteban Muñoz and Susan Sontag.

Media representation of witches is of special interest to me as both a witch and a feminist for rather obvious reasons; witches in media are very often powerful women, who are often

demonized for their power. I consume a lot of witch-related media, and as such, I've wondered, what is the impact of witches being depicted as either the hag or the buxom beauty and why does media rely so heavily on such representations? I view both depictions as rather limiting and problematic. Characters of power should not be essentialized in such a way. So, if these two depictions are limiting and problematic, why then are some of these representations so relatable and iconic? I theorize that certain interpretations of witches in media represent women trying to throw off the shackles of societal pressure. In this way, these characters often explore sexuality (either as an identity, or in a pleasure-seeking capacity), confront power dynamics and the inequality between genders within society, and actively subvert stereotypical heteronormative behavior and social constructs in favor of a more authentic lived experience—all while practicing witchcraft and engaging in supernatural power. Furthermore, negative or evil representations of witches in media have often been an attempt to suppress or demonize women within society, in part due to socio-cultural fears of female sexuality, reproductive power, and to uphold patriarchal social hierarchies.

CHAPTER 1: **What Is A Witch? — Classification, Definition, and Gendered Language**

"ARE YOU A WITCH OR NOT?"
J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*4

"This was dangerous talk—in these enlightened times,
a wise woman would never be too clever.
The accusation of witchcraft had rid many men of an ugly wife
and yet more women of an attractive rival."
Joss Alexander, *Tainted Innocence*5

Witches in History: Good vs. Evil; Right Vs. Wrong

Witches have a long history, both through fictional folktales and in a non-fiction reality. People throughout history have been accused of witchcraft for various reasons, most of which has been hinged on culture and society. However, despite the sociocultural setting, most of it boils down to one thing—fear (Santos 91). Linda McGuire explains:

> . . . in 1484, Pope Innocent VIII issued a papal bull declaring the existence of a new
>
> enemy who become known as witches. A mere two years later, the monks Kramer and
>
> Sprenger, in their work entitled the Malleus Maleficarum (The Hammer of Witches), in
>
> no uncertain terms gave the witch the form of a woman and soon the image of a witch
>
> became that of an old and threatening woman. (qtd. in Santos 91)

Witch-hunts ravaged through Europe and early America, the most well-known case being the horrible treatment of those tried for witchcraft in Salem, Massachusetts. The witch was labeled the enemy and by correlation, women were further marginalized and curtailed within society. In *Lewd Women and Wicked Witches*, Marianne Hester argues that:

> Relying on the social construction of sexuality in terms of women's inferiority, the witch
>
> trials were part of the ongoing attempt by men to maintain their power over women. The

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4 Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. Scholastic, 1997.
5 Alexander, Joss. *Tainted Innocence*. Carina Press, 2012.

book reviews and develops revolutionary feminist thinking to show how witches—almost

exclusively women—can be seen as victims of the oppression of a male-dominated

society. (Hester i)

She also notes that the majority of people accused, prosecuted, imprisoned, and executed due to a

witchcraft conviction were women. In addition, they "tended to be a particular group of women:

age, marital status, kin relation to other 'witches', economic status, liaison with the Devil and

sexual 'deviance' all being important factors" (Hester 3). Despite men having historically and

currently practiced witchcraft and identified as witches (or various permutations/gendered terms

for the word), women have taken the brunt of the accusations and repercussions. This is entirely

due to the inequality within society, which generally puts men above women as far as

trustworthiness, protection under the law, and standards of behavior. Men are simply afforded

more leeway than women within society.

During witch-hunts, standards for right vs. wrong were conflated with good vs. evil, and

depictions of witches have followed suit. The Sanderson sisters in *Hocus Pocus* are an excellent

example of witches being conflated with Satanism (a concept which is woefully misunderstood

and misrepresented). In Lila Shapiro's article, "What Pop Culture Gets Right and Wrong about

Witches, According to a Real Coven" she interviews several witches. One of the witches, Brielle,

says that the Sanderson sisters are "'fun and whimsical, but the one thing that really bothered me

was the idea that there's a devil behind a coven of witches and it's got to be some type of

masculine evil presence. I mean, that trope – it's old and boring, and it's just not true. We're so

incredibly far removed from that'" (Shapiro). Another witch, Yema Rose replies, "the idea that

we're dependent on the patriarchy,' to which Haleigh chimes in, "'Witches as just a servant for a

man, doing a man's bidding…'" (Shapiro). The idea that women are evil because and for men is

yet another controlling mechanism from society, which implies that even in their subversive behavior as witches, women can be controlled by men and therefore held under the thumb of the patriarchy.

Granted, assuming a witch is evil in reality is a ridiculous assertion. Witches both historically and currently are peaceful and are generally practicing "alternative" methods of existence, one which is generally grounded in nature (though certainly not a necessary requirement). Witchcraft is all about intent and will being projected. The Hollywoodized hocus-pocus we run across on screen is hardly realistic. That being said, witches being conflated with Satanism is a significant problem, but they have also been believed to be "the scapegoat for natural disaster, failing crops, illness and other unexplainable evils, but there is also the idea of the female witch as doubly guilty because she is both a bad woman and evil" (Santos 139). Ultimately, good vs. evil is an effective framing technique for media, but it is an unrealistic and stereotypical depiction of a witch—one which has no basis on reality. It has been conflated by religious extremism, which led to the witch-hunts from history, and has resulted in witches throughout popular media taking on the burden of centuries of religious hysteria.

Classification of the Witch

To explore witches and witchcraft requires some classification. Thus, to define someone as a witch requires an understanding of where witchcraft comes from, so looking toward faith systems and definitions of witchcraft is essential. In my podcast episode "Witches" from *Legendary: A Folklore Podcast,* Mads defined witchcraft as "the action of asserting your will on the universe to effect a change" ("Witches" 20:17-20:23). They also explained that witches believe in many things. A witch's faith and/or belief system can range from Pagan, Wiccan, Christian, Atheist, Jewish, Buddhist, Agnostic, and more. Witchcraft is not defined by the belief

system (or lack thereof) of the user, though it can be influenced or shaped. Ultimately, if you want to determine whether someone is a witch or not, you'll have to ask. That being said, "Wicca is a Pagan witchcraft tradition" (Lutwyche) and so by definition, all Wiccans are witches, though it is important to note that not all witches follow Wicca. Witches can follow any faith system (or none at all), though many seem to fall under or within the Pagan umbrella.

The term Pagan has a long history of meaning, which has changed several times. Prior to the neo-pagan movement, Pagan "was used to describe the polytheistic […] pre-Christian folk religions of Europe and the Middle East" and "as an insult and a catch-all term for those who did not follow the three main Abrahamic faiths […] throughout the medieval and renaissance periods" (Lutwyche). Currently, Paganism is "best described as a group of religions and spiritual traditions based on a reverence for nature" (Lutwyche). Given that Paganism has been used as an insult and catch-all term, it's not hard to believe that anyone practicing and following this system of belief, or even using this system to structure one's practice of witchcraft, can cause ire and condemnation from a society that doesn't find these practices palatable. Christine Hoff Kraemer in her essay "Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Paganism" writes that "Pagans are an extremely diverse group in terms of belief and practice, however, many Pagans actively resist efforts to define the term "Pagan," feeling that such definitions are inherently at odds with their individualistic and highly personal spirituality" (Kraemer 390). There is a great deal of diversity within Paganism, but despite this diversity, there are certain common attitudes, beliefs, and practices (Kraemer 391). Kraemer notes that "gender and sexuality are central theological issues for many contemporary Pagans; in fact, many Pagans came to the movement due to issues with gender or sexuality in the religions of their birth or in the wider culture" (391). Issues with gender or sexuality are common themes for those struggling to deal with non-normative or

deviant expressions, particularly when society, culture, and/or religion have proscriptive

definitions of "right" versus "wrong." As such, it is no shock that Berger, Leach, and Shaffer

found that "as of 2003, 28.3% of the American Pagan community self-identified as gay, lesbian,

or bisexual – a percentage far higher than the population at large" (qtd. in Kraemer 397). From

this snapshot alone, the intersection of queer theory and witchcraft is rife with possibility, simply

due to the desire to throw off the constraints of the dominant discourse.

Defining the Witch

Many texts about witches start with the same questions—What is a witch? What defining

quality or belief makes someone a witch? Where does the word "witch" come from? Pam

Grossman explains in *Waking the Witch* that sources vary, and the etymology of the word is

difficult to pinpoint; however, "Most sources say it's derived from the Old English *wicca* or

wicce, meaning "male or female magic-worker," respectively. […] Or that it's a permutation of

older words for "wisdom" or "wise." And so, they often conclude, the witch is someone who has

knowledge about how to shape reality, to make changes happen at will" (Grossman 15).

I would argue that definitions make very little difference here from a practical

perspective; modern witches define themselves much in the same way anyone else might self-

identify with their religion, gender identity, sexuality, etc. The label itself is self-identified and

self-defined. There are witches around the world who utilize other terminology or are more

specific with their self-definition. For example, some witches I have interviewed describe

themselves as the following: water witch, eclectic secular witch, technomancer, green witch, and

traditional witch. These are only some of the ways in which witches may describe or define

themselves for others.

That said, understanding the way in which *society* understands the term "witch" does hold bearing on the way witches are portrayed in media. In Ronald Hutton's book *The Witch: A History of Fear, from Ancient Times to the Present*, he explains that there are four common interpretations (or meanings) for the witch term/label. Grossman paraphrases these definitions succinctly and explains that a witch is:

> […] someone who uses magic for malevolent means; any person who uses magic at all (whether good, bad, or neutral); a follower of nature-based Paganism, such as Wicca; and a figure of transgressive female power. Many historical books like his tend to focus on the first definition. After all, witches have been associated with evil since they first appeared on the scene.
>
> But today these definitions blur together, informing and influencing each other. The witch wouldn't now be a feminist icon, for example, without that primary malevolent meaning to riff off of and rail against. (Grossman 15-16)

Grossman brings up an important and interesting point when she defines the witch as a feminist icon. This is something that crops up in entertainment media about witches time and again, either by accident or by design. Whether this association is derived from societal perceptions of witches as feminist and is then reinforced in media or is the other way around is undetermined; nevertheless, there is much scholarship that claims feminism as a distinguishing characteristic of the witch. In Kristen J. Solée's *Witches, Sluts, Feminists*, she interviews Jex Blackmore from The Satanic Temple. In their conversation, Soleée asks Blackmore about what connections she sees between witches and feminism. Blackmore explains:

> The idea of the witch has always been about subversive feminine power that doesn't align with conventional norms. It has been used to control and demonize women consistently:

women who had privileged economic positions, women who were smart, women who

had expertise in medicine, women who were outspoken, women who were sexually

promiscuous. Female independence and sexual independence is still frightening because

it liberates us from oppressive structures and having to rely on a patriarchal system to

grant us power. (56)

Blackmore's interpretation emphasizes how tightly bound the witch character or identity is tied

to women. This association begs the question *why* terminology about witches is gendered and

what that means in media portrayals of witches.

Social Constructions of the Witch Through Gendered Language

Given the definition of "witch" and its origins, it's interesting to look at the way the word

is now understood. More recent dictionary searches will tell you that the word "witch" is

primarily considered a gendered term and is most often associated with women. This association

is a misunderstanding of the way witches view themselves. Witches are not defined by their

gender identity or assigned sex at birth, despite what some witches may claim. One controversial

author and witch, Lisa Lister, writes in her book *Witch: Unleashed. Untamed. Unapologitic.*

about feminine power and what she believes to be the inherent woman-ness that is witchcraft.

She blithely acknowledges that she doesn't speak for or write for witches in the trans community

or men who are witches. Yet throughout her work, she continues to define witchcraft as

something inherently feminine, something inherently associated with cis-female sexuality,

reproduction, and bodies. She ignores the way in which witches have avoided this kind of

identity politics or the way in which many within the queer witch community have worked to

disassociate themselves from gendered expectations.

While most of her arguments are narrowly focused, exclusionary, and incredibly specific, she does acknowledge the ways that witches have been vilified and demonized throughout history. This fact is irrefutable. She is also accurate in her portrayal of women as scapegoats for misfortune throughout history. History shows that women have been othered as witches by society time and again as a way to make them appear violent, aggressive, and dangerous. It has also been used as a way to other women and set them apart from society, and (of course) to control them. The Salem Witch Hunts of 1692-93 serve as a chilling example of the way women living outside of social norms were vilified for their otherness. Witch is a word of power now, for those who choose to claim it. It is a signal of intentional otherness and a refusal to conform to social norms and expectations.

"Dominant discourse" is the word of the day when it comes to witches. Witches by definition live outside of dominant society, simply by utilizing and accessing powers which move beyond what is perceived as possible, rational, or acceptable. Even those who believe in power beyond the physical have historically condemned use of this power, which has led to the death of thousands of people accused of witchcraft throughout history. Beyond metaphysical power lies an exploration of patriarchal power and heteronormativity. Witches are generally described as women in media and historically, have been documented as women. However, demographics for witches are extremely varied and are not at all accurately depicted in popular media. The inaccuracy of these depictions are problematic for several reasons; however, a particularly important concept to bear in mind is that women are not the only individuals who identify as witches or practice witchcraft. The name "witch" is not necessarily a gendered term, despite the assertion of works of fantasy throughout popular media. However, it is important to analyze the binary position the term "witch" has been saddled with. In media, a witch connotes

several different things, but mostly it relies on stereotypes—signs and symbols which serve to define a person (usually a woman) as a witch. Cristina Santos writes in *Unbecoming Female Monsters: Witches, Vampires, and Virgins* that women are labeled and signified as monstrous whenever they refuse to bend to the will of the dominant discourse:

> Simone de Beauvoir declared in her seminal *The Second Sex* that "One is not *born*, but rather *becomes*, woman" (283). The same can be said when investigating the factors affecting a monstrous female "anatomy"—woman is not *born* monstrous but is *constructed* as such. These causes can come in the shape of institutionalized ideologies and values just as much as noninstitutionalized modes of social, cultural, religious and political expression, to name a few, that define a "norm" to which women are expected to adhere as members of their larger community. […] What happens to women when they are not willing to compromise their authenticity and uniqueness in order to affiliate themselves with this collectivized gender-based uniformity and sociocultural organization that demands from woman a subjugation of not only the self but also of individual power and agency? What happens when woman does not "perform" for the comfort level of those around her but rather for own authenticity? (Santos xiii).

Santos' point holds true when compared to the way witches have been labeled and structured both in media and throughout history. Mads explained in the podcast interview that women living in liminal spaces, such as the Blair Witch, Baba Yaga, and any other female character living on the outskirts of society (but still within its confines) are vilified for their difference ("Witches" 26:50-30:30). As such, women who loved women, women who practiced spirituality or folk medicine (i.e., witchcraft) in defiance of the dominant religion, and women who refused to conform and marry—or better yet, left their spouses—are all women who must be demonized

for their choices. I'd argue that a witch by this definition, is simply a woman queering her lived experience; however, this could be said of *any witch* of *any identity* or *sexuality*. Any reading of witches as female should thus be replaced by the term queer, not necessarily as an identity, but principally as an *action*. Witches are queer, and by that, I mean they *queer* things. By refusing to conform, a witch challenges the idea of essential identities, resists conventional categorization, and questions prevailing binaries and stereotypes—in short, witches queer themselves (Barker and Scheele 7, 10, 13-16).

Terminology in Media—What's in A Name?

Fictional media surrounding witches involves some definition for terminology. In many cases, classifying language for magic users changes, depending upon the source material. Each universe from each piece of media has its own conceptualization of how magic performs, what it looks like, how magic is achieved, where that magic comes from, and what magic users are called. Beyond the visual effects utilized for television and film representations of magic and magic users, there is also the issue of self-definition. How these characters identify is defined by the universe that they operate in and no two pieces of media share the same concept. Comparing magic users across media types allows us to see ways in which the term *witch* has been understood in cultures around the world, but particularly in Western media.

Quite often, the term comes with a negative stain, setting it apart from other types of magic users, who very often are labeled differently and as such, are understood as "good" in the face of their stereotypical and assumed evilness. There are a few notable exceptions to this general rule, and I would argue that this difference is usually due to a desire to set these characters apart from the audience's general understanding of witches. An excellent example of this comes from the *Charmed* witches. The original *Charmed* series began in 1998 and ran until

2006. It was revived again with new cast, characters, and lore in 2018. For the purposes of this paper and to ensure ease of reading, when referencing each series, I will use its start date— *Charmed* (1998) and *Charmed* (2018).

The three sisters are called the "Charmed ones" and are prophesized to be the three witches who are meant to be the most powerful *good* witches of all time, who use their powers to protect people from the evils of the world, such as demons and warlocks. Interestingly, in the 1998 series, warlocks were defined as evil magical beings. Their origin is tied tightly to the origin of witches themselves, but both are set down in terms of good vs. evil. This is particularly compelling because it defies most other pieces of media, which often put witches down as the inherent evil amongst magic users. This is also compelling because it seems to place gendered terminology typically associated with women above that of terminology of men. This choice is rather telling and lends itself to the argument that witches in media are associated with feminism and/or being feminist is a defining trait of the witch identity.

The general understanding of these terms seems to hinge on our exposure to media. A dictionary search will show that the term "witch" is generally appointed as a female term, while "warlock" is assigned as male. Interestingly, "wizard" appears to be gender neutral, but its associated terms go back to "sorcerer" or "magician", which I would argue are intended to be gender neutral, but which are more commonly associated and understood as male-identifying terms. Malcolm Gaskill writes in *Witchcraft: A Very Short Introduction* that gender complicates any analysis of the witch. He remarks that it's far more common to think of witches as female, while warlocks or wizards would be their male counterparts. He goes on to explain:

> But originally 'warlock' meant 'oath-breaker' and only acquired a diabolic twist in 16th-
> century Scotland; wizards were wise women and men, then high magicians, before they

became witches. The term 'witch', meanwhile, comes from the Old English verb wiccian, meaning to cast spells, without preference for gender. A male practitioner was a wicca, the female wicce. In early modern England, 'witch' applied to both men and women, although by then it had taken on a fiercely negative meaning, closer to the Latin term maleficus. Most people called white witches 'cunning folk', or wise women and men; to them a 'witch' was exclusively a hate-filled maleficent woman or, as in one case in five, a man. (Gaskill 37)

Gendered terminology for the witch complicates conversations about literal and figurative witches, from our communities to those splashed across entertainment media.

Examples of terminology for witches in media can be found in shows like *The Magicians,* based on the novels by Lev Grossman. In this show the majority of magic users refer to themselves as "magicians." This classification seems to come from the idea that their magic is controlled and better taught, because it is only done so through an academy. People who have potential for magic but operate outside of this formal institution are called "hedge witches." Their way of learning magic is unlike that taught at the academy, though the source of their magic seems to be much the same. Hedge witches in this universe don't have a lot of access to spells, so they guard their information and share it reluctantly. As a result, their powers are limited to what they can find on their own, trade for, or learn from someone else. Becoming a proficient magician is quite difficult for self-taught individuals who weren't given a formal education. It is interesting to note that level of education is the defining factor for titles within this show. Magicians are *educated*, but they can be any gender. They also do not have to have grown up with magicians in their family. Anyone is capable of learning magic; they simply have to have an aptitude for it.

Hedge witches are often self-taught and a portion of them are individuals who have been expelled from a magical university or simply weren't able to pass their entrance exam to a magical university. It's noteworthy that magician is a respected term within this universe, but 'witch' is a lesser-term. To be a hedge witch is to live outside of the norm. A hedge witch is defined by their limited access to power and thus their value is diminished. As such, their title reflects this lesser status amongst magic users in this universe.

Similarly, the Netflix series *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, also utilizes the term hedge witch. Though their status as "other" remains much the same, their social status and power base are slightly different than the hedge witches in *The Magicians*. In *Chilling Adventures*, hedge witches are defined as witches whose circumstances leaves them outside of a coven. They may have not been given formal schooling, could have been banished from their covens or never been a part of one, or could have become disenfranchised. It seems that only female-identifying individuals are hedge witches in this series; however, this may change as the series develops. *The Magicians* hedge witches are of every gender identity and expression. This difference is important to bear in mind, because it brings us to the idea of substitute titles and gendered titles for magic practitioners. It is also important to bear in mind the concept presented here—there is a definition of hedge witches as lesser than the other witches or magicians in both of these shows. This is a classification of power as defined by education. This is a social hierarchy of power, defined by access, but which most actually associate as *power* and *ability*.

This presumption of skill and power is a false equivalency, especially when considering characters from both series. The hedge witches in *The Magicians* are extremely powerful, but their magic is learned and shared and thus limited by their ability to gather and disseminate information. It's a far more egalitarian sourcing of information than the way magic is taught in

the universities to "real" magicians. The hedge witches from the *Chilling Adventures* series are not in any way lesser than the witches from the Church of Night coven. They are powerful individuals who utilize magic that the coven does not. Their magic comes from various places and is not provided or regulated by the "Dark Lord," as the witches and warlocks from the Church of Night are. In the *Chilling Adventures* series, this begs the question of where power is attained and who has access to it and why. This is still up in the air as of season three, so I cannot make a determination here; however, I would argue that the emphasis of season three on the power of the Dark Lord being stripped from the Church of Night coven is actually representing male power vs. female power. Further analysis on this subject can be found in chapter three, "Satanism".

Finally, in the *Harry Potter* series, both the books and films present magic users under a single term—wizard, which is defined as a person capable of doing magic. Wizard is an interesting term within this universe because it functions as a common, general term for all, like "mankind" is used as gender neutral, despite the fact that it seems to be gendered (and many have argued it to be so). That said, wizard is also used to mean male-identifying magic user, with witch as the female counterpoint. Additionally, sorcerer and sorceress are also gendered terms used within the series, though sparingly. The gendered terms do not carry into *The Magicians*. In *Charmed* (2018), the title of witch is general term for all people who use magic and is not necessarily gendered. The same is true in *The Vampire Diaries* TV series, which shows "witch" as a primarily gender-neutral label, though there are occasionally male-identifying practitioners who prefer the term "warlock" instead, though rather cheekily. In the *Chilling Adventures* series, witch and warlock are the preferred term for magic users and are obviously gendered. Though it

appears as if "witch" can also be utilized as a universal, gender-free term for magic users within the series, perhaps in an effort to solidify the feminist tone of the series.

CHAPTER 2: **The Satanism Setback**

"There were people who called themselves Satanists who made Crowley squirm. It wasn't just the things they did, it was the way they blamed it all on Hell. They'd come up with some stomach-churning idea that no demon could have thought of in a thousand years, some dark and mindless unpleasantness that only a fully-functioning human brain could conceive, then shout "The Devil Made Me Do It" and get the sympathy of the court when the whole point was that the Devil hardly ever made anyone do anything. He didn't have to. That was what some humans found hard to understand. Hell wasn't a major reservoir of evil, any more than Heaven, in Crowley's opinion, was a fountain of goodness; they were just sides in the great cosmic chess game. Where you found the real McCoy, the real grace and the real heart-stopping evil, was right inside the human mind."
Terry Pratchett, *Good Omens*[6]

Any exploration and analysis of witches must at some point reconcile itself with Satanism—specifically, society's beliefs about Satanists and how that has shaped perceptions of witches. Much like witches, Satanists have often been misrepresented in entertainment media as well as in reporting media. To understand how Satanism became so conflated with witches and witchcraft, it's important to understand how Satanism itself was brought into the forefront of the social consciousness around the world. However, this understanding does not come from Satanists themselves, but from major Judeo-Christian religious leaders throughout history. It is their (mis)understanding of Satanism, and the resultant religious scholarship, which holds the most sway over the ways in which societies have understood, reacted to, and treated those who they marked as witches. This is a misrepresentation of practicing Satanists and witches in all their various permutations.

It is important to understand that while it is possible that there are Satanist witches, nevertheless, some Satanists may or may not think that magic(k) and Satanism are compatible. The two are not correlated by design but could be combined if someone chose to do so; however, as with all religious practices, individual users understand these beliefs in their own way. Like witches, there is not a consistent understanding or performance of satanism, it is unique to each

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[6] Pratchett, Terry, and Neil Gaiman. *Good Omens: The Nice and Accurate Prophecies of Agnes Nutter, Witch*. Gollancz, 2015.

user. Witches behave in much the same way—their practice, beliefs, and understanding of magic and the way it affects the world around them vary across practitioners.

A Note on Terminology

In discussing Satanism and Satanists, the figure or symbol of Satan requires some clarification. Satan is also referred to as the Devil (capitalized), which is defined as a separate entity from devils (lowercase), which are not the singular entity from Judeo-Christian texts. Synonyms for Satan as a figure include but are not limited to; the Devil, Lucifer, the Morningstar, the Dark Lord, and the Prince of Darkness. Satanism is used here in the modern sense and how it is being presented within this thesis is not to be conflated with historical Satanism, which is "also called devil worship, consists of belief in and worship of the Judeo-Christian Devil and the explicit rejection of his antithesis, God, and (in Christianity) God's Incarnation, Jesus Christ" ("Satanism"). This thesis will not refer to Satanism or Satanists in the historical sense; that will be referred to as devil worship and devil worshipers, in order to keep the two concepts separate; and avoid further conflating the two with the same meaning. On that same note, this thesis also denies the conflation of Satanism with Satanic cults, as imagined in popular culture

This is also in line with the explanation of Satanism being used in two ways, as described in the book *Satanic Feminism: Lucifer as the Liberator of Woman in Nineteenth-Century Culture* by Per Faxneld. Faxneld explains that Satanism is used as a label in two ways—*sensu stricto* and *sensu lato*. *Sensu stricto* is defined as "a system in which Satan is celebrated in a prominent position" while *sensu lato* "entails celebrations of the Devil used as a discursive strategy in a fairly demarcated and restricted manner" (Faxneld 25). The line between the two is drawn between (1) worship and belief in a figure (here, it being Satan/the Devil as a being of power)

and (2) a figure used as a symbol or referent to an understood meaning. This thesis will juxtapose *sensu lato* Satanism against *sensu stricto* Satanism. Satanism for the purposes of this analysis is as much a countercultural practice and movement as it is a religion.

Satanism in History

These distortions of magic practitioners and Satanists began with the history of the Devil, which was subject to interpretation and is not strictly biblical but is instead "the products of subsequent interpretations of the Bible formulated primarily by the early Fathers of the Church." (Faxneld 30). In *Satanic Feminism*, Faxneld explains that "[e]ven if the core, or at least the seeds, of the later view of the figure of Satan are present in the New Testament, a complete doctrine was developed only eventually—gradually and over a long period of time" (30). Essentially, any beliefs of Satan as a figure within the text are interpretations and are not explicitly stated in the Old or New Testament. Faxneld explains that Satanism likely wasn't a religion or philosophy until around 1900. Przybyszewski and Kadosh are credited with pioneering these ideas "as a more or less fixed and distinct strategy for cultural critique—a colourful form of drastic counter-discourse organized around Satan as the central metaphor and utilized by socialists, radical individualists, feminists, and others—it has been around for at least twice as long" (Faxneld 35). Ultimately, Satanism as an organization or belief system has been one of resistance. This aligns quite well with modern Satanism, especially the tenets and practices of The Satanic Temple.

The Fall of Man: Christian Misogyny

The fall of man is a universally well-known facet of Christian theology. The symbols associated with this scripture alone have lent themselves to various interpretations of this section of text. The most commonly understood and asserted interpretation is steeped in misogyny and

begins with the ambiguity of the section. God tells Adam that he may not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil and warns him that if he does, he would die. Eve in conversation with the serpent hears a different story and decides to act otherwise:

> Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable to gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.
>
> (*The New Scofield Study Bible (NIV)* Gen. 3:1-7)

Given the language of this section, it's interesting to see how a serpent, described as the craftiest creature God had created could then later be interpreted as the Devil in disguise. Even more interesting is Faxneld's assertion that at a distance, this section could be understood in a rather subversive manner—if you take these events as the serpent speaking truth (36). Neither Adam nor Eve died once they ate from the tree of knowledge and now God is painted as a liar. The serpent's words call to question the reasoning for God's lie and what that means about his character, as a figure of power. Some interpretations of this section have led some to believe that God was being controlling and despotic. From this perspective, the serpent isn't particularly malevolent or misleading—his words are true, it's God's that are fabrications. The serpent as a

figure is important here, because it is this character that is positioned as the crux of man's fall and ultimately is charged by Eve as the one who deceived her (Gen. 3:13).

Genesis 3 is a curious aspect of scripture because it assumes a lot that is not literally within the text. It has been *interpreted* that the serpent is Satan in disguise. Many religious individuals now believe serpents to be figures of evil, representative of Satan's power. This is especially true when analyzing the Old Testament where snakes are consistently represented negatively (Faxneld 36). This interpretation of the serpent has since been adopted by Satanists since it paints Satan as a liberating figure. Rather than malevolence, he is instead understood as a figure who encourages knowledge and the inherent power of knowledge. It is with this interpretation of Satan as a symbol, not a figure, that The Satanic Temple bases much of its tenets related to knowledge.

A similar interpretation of the same scripture paints Eve as a temptress, even if that is not explicitly stated within the text. This assumption has led to poor treatment of women throughout history, as Faxneld explains:

> The inferences by the authors of the New Testament from the interpretation of Eve as a temptress can quite often be rather disquieting. For example, In Paul's letter to Timothy, Eve's actions in Genesis 3 are used as a justification for why women must remain silent and submissive. "'Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression,'" Paul […] informs us. Therefore, he says, "'I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence'" (I Tim. 2:12-14). (Faxneld 37)

This reading is incredibly sexist and presents women as feeble-minded creatures incapable of making their own decisions or leading their own lives. It also relegates them to a second-class status socially and religiously, as if their value as a being is lesser than that of men.

This misogynist mindset is part of the issue with women assumed to be witches; many believed that they were weak-willed and reckless and would fall under the influence of Satan unless curtailed and controlled. Augustine (354-430) took this concept even further, expanding upon the idea of women as proud and rebellious from the outset. In interpreting Augustine, Charles Ess believes that Augustine "is the foremost architect of the image of Eve as a temptress and cause of sin, a "chaos agent" who threatens male hierarchies. The teaching, by highlighting disobedience as the principle sin, makes obedience to (patriarchal) authority the highest good, no matter if said authority happens to be God, king, or husband" (Faxneld 40). These interpretations have had consequences throughout history for women and certainly bled into the witch panic during the Salem Witch Trials and the Satanic Panic in the 80s-90s. These beliefs have also brought about a wildly inaccurate view of Satanism in modern times, which have saturated the social consciousness and continues to be renewed in entertainment media today.

Modern Satanism

Church of Satan vs. The Satanic Temple

Without delving too deep into the histories of The Satanic Temple (TST) and the Church of Satan (CoS), I would like to address the perspectives of these two primary satanic organizations in order to later juxtapose them against historic and entertainment media representations of Satanists. CoS, founded in 1966, does not celebrate Satan as a deity, but as a symbol. TST, founded in 2013, also does not celebrate Satan as a deity, but as a symbol. That said, these two institutions are vastly different in operation and belief, even if they do occasionally share similar perspectives. In fact, these two groups would not like to be conflated with one another, as their core beliefs and practices are distinct and unconnected. In fact, Reverend Joel Ethan of the Church of Satan writes in his article:

The Satanic Temple is a self described "Yes Men" styled satire/activist group that uses

satanic-themed imagery and language to get media and public attention. They are not

Satanists, do not have shared "deeply held beliefs" and are unrelated to Satanism, a

globally recognized religion founded in 1966 by Anton Szandor LaVey. (Ethan)

The article goes on to present some "facts" for consideration, marking the path of TST from

2013 and onward, explaining that from their perspective, TST is not a Satanist organization, but

instead using the term Satanism and commonly connected imagery as a way to get media

attention. Finally, the article covers Satanism as a recognized religion and claims that they are

the first to codify and establish Satanism as a religion and philosophy.

CoS beliefs and practices are based off of the works of their founder, LaVey. They

primarily rely upon *The Satanic Bible* and his other writings. A quick perusal of their website

answers questions about stereotypical assumptions of Satanists, such as; whether they worship

The Devil, perform sacrifices, engage in pedophilia, ritually abuse people, etc. The answer to all

of these is a resounding negative. CoS does not believe in The Devil and in fact describe

themselves as atheists. They explain that "Satan to us is a symbol of pride, liberty and

individualism, and it serves as an external metaphorical projection of our highest personal

potential. We do not believe in Satan as a being or person" ("F.A.Q. Fundamental Beliefs"). CoS

also does not endorse the various actions they have been accused of throughout history—they are

not pedophilic or participate in bestiality; they do not murder children or sacrifice animals; they

do not ritually abuse people (though some members may perform rituals for themselves, it is not

violent or abusive and the practice itself is described as a "self-transformational psychodrama");

nor do they believe in supernatural powers ("F.A.Q. Ritual and Ceremony").

In juxtaposition, TST is a much younger institution than CoS and sets itself in opposition

to some of their practices. Like CoS, TST provides quick information on their website for

anyone curious about their practices and beliefs. They also address common questions associated

with superstitions and stereotypes about Satanists, as portrayed and perpetuated in the media.

They make it very clear that they do not worship Satan or promote evil. In fact, they do not

"believe in the existence of Satan or the supernatural" and "do not believe in symbolic 'evil'"

("FAQ"). For TST, Satan is a symbol "of the Eternal Rebel in opposition to arbitrary authority,

forever defending personal sovereignty even in the face of insurmountable odds. Satan is an icon

for the unbowed will of the unsilenced inquirer – the heretic who questions sacred laws and

rejects all tyrannical imposters" ("FAQ"). They believe in "reason, empathy, the pursuit of

knowledge" and their seven tenets, which merely reinforce their belief in the first three. It is

important to note that TST emphasizes the belief in a scientific understanding of the world. Their

mission is to "encourage benevolence and empathy among all people, reject tyrannical authority,

advocate practical common sense, oppose injustice, and undertake noble pursuits" ("FAQ").

They deny accusations that their media coverage is a hoax or stunt, as CoS has intimated. They

also set themselves apart from CoS, explaining that they are not the only Satanic organization

and that they do not believe there is only one "true" arbiter of Satanism.

<center>**Interviews with Satanists**</center>

Disclaimer: Names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of

interviewees.

In interviews with two different Satanists (both of TST), emphasis was placed on the

activism of TST and the importance of the seven tenets. Please note that all pronouns and

identifying names have been excluded from citations. In an effort to protect interviewees, names

are represented as initials and pronouns are expressed in the gender neutral "they". My first interviewee, MLS, a new member of The Satanic Temple, explained that they believe strongly in the tenets of TST and its emphasis on compassion but note that "I don't think the Church of Satan really cares about compassion" (MLS). For my second interviewee, CMC, being a Satanist has a lot of meaning; they explain:

> To me it boils down to atheistic religious libertarianism. No Gods, no masters. I am beholden to no one except myself. No structured teachings beyond the seven tenets that say I should act in a certain way, or how I should practice. The entire idea of modern Satanism is focused on the archetype of Lucifer as the original rebel and rebelling against what may be law or common occurrence but isn't necessarily just or moral. Just because it is law or society says it is normal doesn't mean it is. Sort of like a "think for yourself" way of thinking, though I hate to use that cliché. (CMC)

This understanding seems to follow closely to the seven tenets published on TST's website. In conversation about the way fictional media has portrayed Satanists, CMC explains, "I think it's silly. Satanism is used as a modern-day boogeyman. Lots of games and books portray Satanists as evil blood magic wielding, child-eating, hedonistic cults bent on infiltrating high society and changing the course of history á la the Illuminati" (CMC). Meanwhile, when asked how they feel about the way media portrays Satanists, MLS joked, "Oh great. Love it. All for it" and goes on to explain that they don't find it to be an accurate portrayal and in fact, the stereotypical depictions of Satanists don't "exist at all. I don't think anyone really worships Satan" (MLS). This is quite an interesting assertion and begs the question—how much has entertainment media and historic religious panic imbedded the idea of evil, witchcraft, Satanism, and devil worship into our social consciousness?

Some further conversation with CMC highlights some of the ways that Satanism has been misrepresented and how real TST Satanists believe and practice:

KGR: How do you view/what is your opinion on the conflation of Satanism with evil/inherent badness?

CMC: I don't think Satanists are bad or evil. I think Satanism has been used as a scapegoat for "evil" by both Christianity and the media. Modern Satanism is highly active in charitable contributions. Next week there is a Satanic blood drive via NW Bloodworks. I know the Dallas chapter is running another Menstratin' with Satan drive to get donated menstruation products to women in need.

KGR: Yes. There's a lot of misunderstanding and misdirection coming from the media and religious "authority" that paints Satanism in a very negative light. It's a very inflammatory buzzword when it comes to the Christian right.

These assertions from MLS and CMC aptly showcase the ways that historical, *senso stricto* Satanism has misled and misrepresented Satanism throughout history, by using entertainment media and religious doctrine interchangeably. I argue that these distortions are then easily applied to witches, as they have had their own stereotypes thrust upon them by religion and then codified in entertainment media.

Satanism and Witches—Stereotypes and Representation in Entertainment Media

As with witches, much of what we see in entertainment media about Satanists is a fabrication. As with the witch hunts in Salem, stories about Satanists are a by-product of the church's fears of Satanism and the subversive, demonic power of the Devil. Stereotypes about Satanists are extremely disturbing. They are portrayed in our media as cannibalistic; interested in sexual sadism (BDSM), orgies, and various other forms of sexual expression which may be

defined as perverse from the dominant sociocultural perspective (especially given Judeo-Christian morality); they have also been described to perform ritual sacrifice of people and animals; participate in necrophilia or bestiality; are believed to use "demonic magic"; and are believed to be infanticidal, by either eating or sacrificing infants and children. These beliefs have been pigeonholed into entertainment media and passed around as urban legends for as long as beliefs about Satanists have been believed to be a cult (which is also a rather inaccurate sentiment). Satanists as portrayed in entertainment media are not really Satanists—they are devil worshipers. The difference is important to understand here, because to continue to refer to them as Satanists does a disservice to those that utilize the term.

Media often display devil worshipers as violent and outside of the social norm. Their sexuality and/or sexual choices mark them as other, by the hegemonic values of the dominant culture. The term hegemony has a lot of meaning when we discuss Satanism or witches because it is the dominant Judeo-Christian culture, which has adapted over time in such a way that stereotypes and beliefs about certain religious figures/entities are believed to be true and aren't questioned. We must always assume that whenever meaning is ascribed to these terms in popular culture, they are meant to other and essentialize an identity down to specific qualities. They are most likely qualities or beliefs that are not held by those they are ascribed to—it's a false narrative, essentially.

A prime example of this is the way that the television series *Lucifer* presents the title character. Lucifer is constantly fighting against presumed perceptions of Lucifer, the religious figure everyone believes to be evil. As the actual entity, he is not evil, nor does he seek out evil or hope to perform evil. His character is presented as deeply emotional, invested in humanity and the human experience, and not at all connected to demon-worshippers. In an episode devoted to a

cult performing human sacrifice, Lucifer was incensed that his name was being thrown around so flippantly. Lucifer constantly fights against the suppositions of the predominantly Judeo-Christian culture of America, where negative stereotypes abound.

Interestingly, Lucifer is also presented as a rather free spirit; he is open with his sexuality and unashamed of his pursuit of pleasure. In this way, he is presented as somewhat amoral, by average human standards. His investment in perceived debauchery humanizes him in a way that perhaps no other character trait could. That said, this behavior is also utilized as a way to continue to other Lucifer; he remains outside of the dominant discourse by behaving in a way that doesn't align with common sociocultural morality. In effect, Lucifer queers himself, much like witches have done throughout history.

As I have explained, witches queer themselves because they refuse to conform and challenge the idea of essential identities, resist conventional categorization, and question prevailing binaries and stereotypes. Lucifer does the same. He refuses to be essentialized as evil simply because he is placed in binary opposition against his father, God. Lucifer himself challenges the notion of good vs. evil and right vs. wrong throughout the series. Lucifer is shown struggling to combat his perceived identity versus his lived reality. His presentation in *Lucifer* shows the way entertainment media bleeds into our social consciousness and trickles down into the cracks, feeding into other social issues like racism, sexism, xenophobia, and beyond.

Satanism in *The Witch: A New England Folktale*—A Feminist Analysis

The film, *The Witch: A New England Folktale* received a lot of critical acclaim upon its release. Critiques of this film vacillate between two camps; the first argues it is a film that captures the trials and tribulations of young women in America during a time of superstition and fear about the power and control of Satan and evil. In these interpretations, it is framed as a

feminist film; however, some from the second camp disagree with this assessment and feel that the film leans into false perceptions of Satanism entirely. Critics who question the Satanic connection believe that *The Witch* fails its audience by continuing to perpetuate false stereotypes of Satanism and is not as feminist as it is purported to be. This is also troublesome because "conflating witchcraft and feminism is a misapplication of a contemporary idea onto the historical worldview depicted in the film" (Zweissler 1). The worldview of the film is extremely important to bear in mind when looking at the presentation of witches in the film because the time period and culture feed off of and into stereotypes about witches. It's important to note that *The Witch* presents the fears and beliefs of the time period in a way that seems to align very closely with the remaining records available to us from this time. The stereotypes about witches, Satanists, and various other non-Christian practitioners derive from this time and have continued to be perpetuated throughout our media. Building on these stereotypes, the film also conflates witches with Satanists, melding stereotypes about both together into a monstrous witch figure capable of nothing but evil and harm. Laurel Zweissler describes the witches in the film as Satanic witches and explains that:

> The resulting early modern witchcraft stereotype is the Satanic witch, interchangeably called the diabolical witch, a malicious, female magic user who derives her power from her voluntary enslavement to Satan and who practices the three abominations of heresy; infanticide, cannibalism, and indiscriminate sex. It is this stereotype which drove the witch hunts of the early modern period in Europe and its colonies to their fevered pitch, a scale unprecedented both trans-historically and cross-culturally. Contemporary Western culture continues to encounter this stereotype in the form of the fairytale Halloween witch stereotype. (2)

These stereotypes abound in entertainment media. The conflation of Satanism and witchcraft is a common duality; yet neither group has ever laid claim to one another explicitly. As explained before, a Satanist could be a witch, but they're two mutually exclusive terms and neither necessarily correlate to one another, either in practice or belief. There is simply too much variety and individuality amongst practitioners to be defined as one and the same.

Thinking critically about the film using queer feminist theory, I see the film as more of a failing than a resounding success. The main character, Thomasin, is presented as intelligent but held under the thumb of her father. She comes from a very rigid background and is a part of a family with such tight religious beliefs and morals, that they no longer live in town nor attend the Puritan church services with the rest of the community. They have ostracized themselves and are of the opinion that their practices and lifestyle are the only right way to perform faith. Queer feminism tells us that the intersection between obvious binaries and the way those binaries are presented in media are worthy of criticism. For that reason, I argue that *The Witch* fails to deliver on a truly feminist ideology.

Thomasin exists within a liminal space throughout the film, caught between accusations of witchcraft and the desire to keep her family unit safe and whole. She is unable to actualize her own power against the power her father represents. He is both a father figure and the head of the house, upholding traditional beliefs about men's power over women. In addition, Thomasin's father represents a religious figure, in charge of interpreting and passing down religious information. Thomasin lives in a world of repression and suspicion. While many who found the film to be feminist argued that she makes the choice to sign the Devil's book and join the witches in their bacchanal, I contend that her choice was coerced, which makes it not much of a choice at all. The overwhelming patriarchal tone of the film keeps Thomasin isolated from choice and sets

her up "between two patriarchal power structures: the Christian family (as represented by her father) and Satanism. Whichever one she chooses, she is allied with repression" (Zweissler 7). While I agree with Zweissler here, I would argue that it's not necessarily Satanism that is the patriarchal power structure, it's Satan, or the Devil, himself as a figure of power. Essentially, Thomasin is pulled between two male figures of power, both of whom want to control her actions and force her to comply with their worldview.

When looking at *The Witch* from a queer feminist perspective, the concept of "witch" that the film presents is incredibly limiting and proscriptive. It relies upon the way the dominant discourse defines the witch, playing into stereotypes to essentialize and villainize women. It reinforces false equivalences and once that seeps into the social consciousness, it can then be adopted by those it denigrates, which only serves to lend more power to the oppressor. This leads the oppressed to internalize their own domination and reinforce it against themselves, doing the work of the oppressor and fortifying hegemonic cultural values and beliefs which keep the oppressed subject to their oppressor. In the text *Supernatural Forces*, Bonnie Winsboro explains that oppression does not necessarily have to come from those who other you, though it is common to "think of the oppression of one culture, class, or gender by another" (21). She goes on to explain that "[n]ot all ethnic individuals, however, experience the dominant culture as the most damaging source of oppression. Some suffer more from oppression within their own families and communities, which insist on conformity to group values to assure group cohesion, strength, and oppression" (Winsboro 21). In the case of Thomasin, it is not her ethnic identity that is in question, but her gender. I argue that this same meaning can be taken from Winsboro's analysis and applied to *The Witch* because of the extreme oppression Thomasin experiences at

the hands of her own family, which is her only human interaction throughout the film. Winsboro also explains:

> Like all oppressive groups, families and communities maintain the status quo through a process of social reward and punishment. Those individuals who most closely meet established familial and community mores and goals are praised and rewarded while those who do not are punished, usually through exclusion and ostracism. As a result, those ethnics whose individuality is stifled or whose difference is cause for ostracism by the community may actually welcome contact with other cultures, finding such contact both liberating and invigorating. (21-22)

In Thomasin's case, the other culture she welcomes is that of the Devil and his Satanic witches presented at the end of the film. Thomasin signs the Devil's book, consummates her pact with him, and walks off into the forest, stripping herself so that she may join the other witches at the sabbath. She watches as the witches chant and writhe on the ground around a fire. They prostrate themselves and screech until they rise from the forest floor into the air. Watching this, Thomasin begins to rise as well and a mixed expression of relief and exultation crosses her face—she's found her community with these women and appears to feel liberated from the oppressive forces which once dominated her existence.

At a glance, this ending certainly *feels* feminist. It has all of the markings of feminism; it seems that she makes a choice and follows through; and it seems that she is delighted with her choice and the power that it seems to bring her. Yet, there is no such thing as *choice* when the options are sign the Devil's book or die. That is not choice, that is coercion. One that is not too uncommon a theme when analyzing media that conflates Satanism and witches.

Satanism in *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*—A Feminist Analysis

The *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* series on Netflix has quickly become a cult classic. It is a darker reincarnation of the Sabrina character, well known because of the 60s comic book, 90s live action TV and films, and 2000s children's cartoon. Sabrina Spellman is back, but she's not quite as she once was. She's still a clever, quirky, and endearing young woman trying to navigate her experiences as a young woman while also being a witch. But she's also involved in a world that is far more violent, sexual, and dangerous than viewers have ever seen her before. In analyzing the Sabrina character and stories, this thesis will focus on the *Chilling Adventures* series, as it is the one which most heavily leans into stereotypical depictions of witches, witchcraft, and Satanism. In addition, the series is quite heavy-handed with its allusions to feminism.

Chilling Adventures begins its series by introducing the main character as half-witch, half-mortal. Sabrina straddles the line between two worlds, as a result. Her entire existence is defined by her liminality. Liminality is defined as a transitional phase or period. In the case of Sabrina, she occupies a liminal space, which feels like a between state. She is two things, a young human girl in love with a human boy, attending an average high school in a small town. But she is also a young witch in training, tasked with the choice between choosing her human existence with her friends and boyfriend, Harvey Kinkle; or she has the opportunity to follow in the footsteps of her family and finally embrace her magical abilities in earnest. By doing so, she is told she gains great power and would be afforded a longer life, freedom from common illnesses, and immeasurable power. To do so, she must sign the Dark Lord's book and pledge herself as a follower. Once she has done so, she would be brought into the fold of the Church of Night and begin her training as a witch.

Without delving too far into the minutia of the interconnected storylines series season by season, I will be analyzing specific aspects of the show that lend itself to the overall interpretation of witches and how culturally understood Satanism has influenced the development of these witches and warlocks as characters. The show has developed characters and built on its lore quickly throughout its three seasons. In season one, Sabrina is introduced as a half-witch, the offspring of a warlock and a human mother. Both of her parents are dead; however, her father was once an important member of the Church of Night, and so despite her birth status, she still has some level of power within the magical realm. Sabrina's treatment by other witches is an indication of her liminality. She exists in both the mortal world and the witch world. Season one showcases the difficulty of liminality and results in Sabrina not only making grievous magical mistakes while trying to help her human boyfriend Harvey, but it also ends with her losing him entirely. By the end of the season, her loss of Harvey indicates a few things. At first blush, it seems like a logical conclusion to an abuse of power; yet I would argue that it also showcases fear of power in and of itself. This fear of power comes from a long history of not only magic, but magical *women* who utilize power. This is further driven home when presented in juxtaposition to her experience in the magical world.

Sabrina's experience with the Church of Night in season one presents a magical world that purports itself to be a world filled with endless opportunity and power. The Church of Night is presented as a pseudo-religious magical coven. Thematically, it seems a lot like Catholicism, but in reverse. In my interview with Satanists, CMC remarked that "I think the [Church] of Night within the Netflix Sabrina series can be summed up as dark Catholicism or inverted Catholicism" and goes on to explain "I would say it's not near the school of Luciferian Satanism that I adhere to"(CMC). This observation aligns well with the way the Church of Night behaves. *Chilling*

Adventures presents the Church of Night as a denomination of the Churches of Darkness, which fall under the power of an Anti-Pope. The constant references to Catholic power structures and religious rites brings to the forefront the inherently patriarchal bent of the Church of Night.

In season one, the Church of Night is presented to Sabrina by the High Priest, Faustus Blackwood. In episode two, Sabrina and Blackwood to discuss her questions about the Church of Night's practices and beliefs. Blackwood describes the practices of the Church of Night in such a way that it seems as if their entire system of faith could be construed as modern Satanism:

BLACKWOOD: A witch's dark baptism is our most sacred unholy sacrament. The oldest of our rites. We've been performing them for centuries. Our Dark Lord's book, the Book of the Beast, is the most ancient tome in existence.

SABRINA: About that. If I sign my name in the Book of the Beast, does that mean I'm giving the Dark Lord dominion over my soul?

BLACKWOOD: That's one interpretation, but it's largely a symbolic gesture, as rituals in most religions are. What else?

SABRINA: Let's say I do sign my name in his book. Doesn't that mean he can call on me? To do his bidding?

BLACKWOOD: All religions demand some sacrifice. But signing your name is more like… a pledge, let's say. That you'll abide by his commandments. Do you know your Thirteen Commandments?

[…]

SABRINA: I'm not an evil person, Father.

BLACKWOOD: I am glad to hear it. Neither am I. Neither are your aunts.

SABRINA: But the Devil…

BLACKWOOD: The Dark Lord, yes?

SABRINA: …he's the embodiment of evil.

BLACKWOOD: Incorrect. He is the embodiment of free will. Good. Evil. Those words matter to the False God, but the Dark Lord is beyond such precepts.

SABRINA: What about Hell? I don't want to go there when I die.

BLACKWOOD: First of all, if you accept the Dark Lord's gifts, you won't die, not for a very long time. Second of all, Hell is for mortals. In exchange for their service and devotion, witches are exempt from the eternal flames of damnation. Really, what's needed here is a fundamental shift in thinking.

[…]

BLACKWOOD: It's right that you have so many questions. My advice? Take your baptism. Come to the Academy of Unseen Arts. Learn our history. Find answers to your questions. Challenge them. Make better answers. Make us stronger. Will you try, at least? And should it not be to your liking—

SABRINA: You'll let me leave the Church?

BLACKWOOD: Free choice, child. That is the bedrock on which our Church is built.

(0:02:07-0:05:43 "Chapter Two: The Dark Baptism" *Chilling Adventures*)

Blackwood presents the Church of Night's practices as religious performance. Despite the characters' belief in the Dark Lord's gift of power, much of Blackwood's explanation of the Dark Lord is reflected in modern Satanism. Particularly, the belief that the Dark Lord is a symbol of free will and that the Dark Lord is not the embodiment of evil. Even Blackwood's positive response to her questioning the institution seems to reflect modern Satanist perspectives.

However, as the show develops, these promises are quickly revealed to be false. Sabrina at first refuses to sign the Book of the Beast and the ramifications for her actions lead to nearly devastating results. Eventually, Sabrina is coerced into signing the book and fully joins the Church of Night. This coercion is quite similar to Thomasin's in *The Witch*. Again, we must ask the question—if the choices are do or die, is it really a choice at all?

In season two, Sabrina is revealed to be not half-witch, but actually half-celestial. She is not a Spellman but is in fact the product of her mortal mother and the Dark Lord. When he returns at the end of the season and attempts to make her the Queen of Hell, she devises a plan to defy him and avoid his dominion over her. In the process, Sabrina's position within witch and mortal society continues to vacillate and shift as she gets more and more embroiled in the inner-workings of the magical world. Her position within both communities (human and magical) is constantly evolving and shifting and as such, so is her autonomy and agency.

At first, Sabrina is shown fighting against patriarchal control over her person as she seeks information, power, and agency. She is a particularly independent and forward-thinking individual and fights against structures of power and inequality in all aspects of her life. At her human school, she begins a support group for girls called Women's Intersectional Cultural and Creative Association, or WICCA. The no-so-subtle reference to Wicca is tongue in cheek, but the goal of the group is intended to provide a space for the women at Baxter High to regain control in a space that doesn't seem to respect their autonomy. In all aspects of her life Sabrina fights against patriarchal control. Unlike Thomasin in *The Witch*, Sabrina fights against patriarchal systems of power that attempt to impact her agency. She questions the Church of Night and Blackwood at every turn.

As the show develops, the audience is shown that Blackwood doesn't believe in the equality he seems to preach at the start of the series. He is instead building up an army of warlocks into a faction called the Judas Society. The Judas society was established by Blackwood in an attempt to bring the Church back to the old ways, where witches were subservient to warlocks. In other words, women subservient to men. The rules of the Judas Society are the Five Facets of Judas, which are:

1. The Sons of Satan are the heirs of the Earth. Take what thou wilt, as is your right, by fire, blood, or deceit.

2. Mortals are the swine of the Earth. We must not lay with them.

3. The Sons of Satan are the swineherds of men.

4. As Lilith served Satan, as must witches serve warlocks.

5. Warlocks shall claim dominion in the Church of Night just as their Father rules over Hell. (00:20-18-00:21:00 "Chapter Sixteen: Blackwood" *Chilling Adventures*)

In season 2, Blackwood attempts to bring the Judas Society into the forefront of the Church of Night and temporarily renames their coven the Church of Judas and begins the work of teaching the witches their place and the warlocks their place above them. In a rather telling scene, he reveals a statue of himself, which replaces the statue of the Dark Lord which had once sat in the center of the Academy of Unseen Arts. He continues to call upon the Dark Lord as a figure of power but utilizes his own visage as a symbol of power and by extension, worship. He is equating himself as equal to the Dark Lord and as a result, is performing a blasphemy against Satan.

In this manner, Blackwood seems to reflect the views of religious leaders from history who believed a woman's place was in service to men. The relation of Lilith serving Satan is

much like how religious scholars once positioned Eve as an intended servant of Adam. The show uses much Christian religious concepts and twists them into the reverse. As CMC stated, the practices of the Church of Night are much like a dark Catholicism, a version of Catholicism, but inverted. Blackwood seems to reflect religious scholars from history who sought to settle their position within society through religion. Blackwood has no basis for the tenets of the Judas Society/Church of Judas and by placing himself at the center of the Church of Judas as an emblematic figure, he directly defies the wishes of the Dark Lord entirely. This becomes clearer when the Dark Lord returns to Earth, after Sabrina is bamboozled into committing a series of Satanic perversions that mock the Nazarene's path on Earth. These perversions are described as Satanic versions of the miracles Jesus performed in the Bible.

The set of events that led to Sabrina inadvertently opening the door for the Dark Lord to return to the mortal realm is the result of the oppressed working for the oppressor. Lilith, posing as Ms. Wardwell, is a key figure throughout the early part of the series and acts as a mentor of sorts. She had been tasked with guiding Sabrina through these perversions all in an effort to corrupt Sabrina so that she could complete a prophecy. The prophecy states, "And a half-shadow girl shall be born of witch and mortal. And in mockery of the Nazarene, she shall perform Satanic miracles and profane acts. Her final perversion will allow the Dark Lord to return to Earth in His true form and open the Gates of Hell and enslave the tribes of witch and mortal. And once he walks on Earth, the girl will rule at His side, and the new Dawn will begin" (00:46:19-00:47:31 "Chapter Nineteen: The Mandrake" *Chilling Adventures*). This prophecy, previously unknown to Lilith rocks her to her very core. She had been working under the assumption that she would one day be made Queen of Hell and rule alongside Lucifer. When she finally attends

to the Dark Lord upon his arrival, they have a small discussion about the promises he had made

her:

> LUCIFER: How are you, Lilith? You seem… perturbed.
>
> LILITH: Oh… perhaps it's the fact that the throne you promised me, the crown you
>
> assured me I'd be wearing, and soon, that… those things are going to Sabrina Spellman
>
> and not me.
>
> LUCIFER: It's not your turn yet, Lilith.
>
> LILITH: Not ever, I'm beginning to think.
>
> LUCIFER: You will be leading the armies of Hell when the Gates are open.
>
> LILITH: Supporting role. Begging the question why her, not me?
>
> (00:08:42-00:09:19 "The Mephisto Waltz" *Chilling Adventures*)

The conversation between Lilith and Lucifer shows that she, like Sabrina, was manipulated and

lied to by the Dark Lord. The path Lilith had taken Sabrina on was the result of internalized

oppression and the belief that by acting in the interests of the oppressor, the oppressed may be

exempt from oppression. As Lilith learns, she shall not be rewarded for serving the Dark Lord

faithfully, she will continue to be subject to him and subject to the patriarchal forces that he

represents.

By the conclusion of the season, both Blackwood and Lucifer are dethroned in their own

way. Blackwood attempts to murder everyone within the Church of Judas (Church of Night)

once the Dark Lord explains that he will have to serve Sabrina and accept her as the new Queen

of Hell, once she has been coronated. Blackwood, unable to accept the reality where a young

woman holds more power than he, poisons the remaining coven members and tries to flee with

his children. This moment fully reveals Blackwood to be the extraordinarily self-involved

misogynist that he has been since the show's inception. Lucifer on the other hand, is subjected to a far more confining conclusion. Lilith and Sabrina work together, with the help of the other witches from the Church of Night, and trap Lucifer in Sabrina's current boyfriend, and powerful warlock, Nick Scratch. This was done in an effort to save Sabrina from having to rule over Hell as Queen, while also giving Lilith the position since it was both what she had wanted and had worked so hard to earn.

The finale for the second season was incredibly powerful, as it displayed two women of power fighting to take back their agency against a man in an extremely powerful position (the symbol of patriarchal oppression, in this case). This was a powerfully female-centric conclusion to the season and was far more satisfying a conclusion than that of *The Witch*. The two witches overcame the Dark Lord's sway and control over their lives, which is easily understood as women fighting against patriarchal power and control and regaining their agency and autonomy.

Unfortunately, the rather satisfying feminist ending of season two is overridden as season three begins. In this most recent season (as of Jan. 2020), Sabrina is back to fighting patriarchal forces attempting to control her and take back her agency. This is also true of Lilith in Hell, who has assumed the role of Madame Satan in the Dark Lord's absence (read: confinement). In the first episode of the third season, Sabrina and her friends travel through Hell in an effort to seek out Sabrina's boyfriend and rescue him from Pandemonium, the capital of Hell. Once they meet again, Sabrina is made aware that Lilith's rule isn't going according to plan.

From all sides, Lilith and Sabrina are forced to work together once more to maintain their control of Hell as the Infernal Kings refuse to recognize Madame Satan as an authority figure because she isn't a Morningstar. I would argue that it has very little to do with Lilith's lack of celestial blood. She is both demon and the first witch, and far more powerful, knowledgeable,

and ancient than the Infernal Kings. This is proven as the show devolves into a battle for the

throne as even Sabrina's authority, as Morningstar offspring, is called to question by the Plague

Kings Beelzebub, Asmodeus, and Purson. They argue that she is mortal, a child, and incapable of

being the Queen of Hell. They question her loyalties and her ability to act like a denizen of

Hell—she's too *human,* they think, too *moral.* Instead they put forth Caliban, the Prince of Hell

and argue that he should be the one to take over Hell so that they may conquer Earth. In the

absence of Blackwood and the Dark Lord, the Infernal Kings serve as yet another symbol of

patriarchy. They represent the belief that "[i]f humanity is weak, then how much more so are the

'weakest' humans: women" (Zweissler 8). Sabrina is both, and her intersectionality as a female

half-witch is precisely what makes them think that they can regain control over her and

reestablish a male figurehead once more.

Sabrina is forced to *prove* her worthiness to the throne in a series of trials against

Caliban. Ultimately, the season ends with Sabrina once again proving herself as superior to

Caliban but along the way creates a time loop and decides against all better judgement to leave

the loop open. In doing so, she's allowed to fully embrace her liminality and get everything that

she wants in one fell swoop. She saves her friends, her family, her remaining coven, and the

whole of Earth. She and everyone around her work together to overthrow the newest threat

against them, the Pagans. They massacre the Pagans before the Pagans can massacre their coven

and everyone else on Earth (something which was proven to occur if Caliban had won the throne

in the alternate timeline). Instead, Sabrina takes back control, beats back the threat of the Old

Gods, and resumes her half-witch, half-mortal existence. However, she also allows her time loop

self to remain and instead suggests that they have it *both ways*—the original Sabrina will live out

her youth and embrace her liminal existence with pride, while the second Sabrina goes to Hell

and joins Lucifer and Lilith so that she can be crowned Queen of Hell. Sabrina ultimately

chooses to subvert all power structures and take power for herself, however she sees fit. This is

quite a powerful, though tenuous, conclusion to the season. It presents Sabrina as not only a

monarch and figurehead of power, but also as an average young woman who simply wants her

agency and the opportunity to decide her own fate. Sabrina's choices are incredibly feminist

here, though it remains to be seen if the show will continue to develop these themes.

<p align="center">**Queering *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*—A Queer Theory Approach**</p>

While I have taken the time to outline the ways that the *Chilling Adventures* series deals

with feminism and witches, I would also like to address and highlight the successes and failings

of representation within the series. Given the belief systems as outlined in the "Modern

Satanism" section above, it's rather obvious that the Satanic witches in the series are *not* accurate

representations of Satanists. Likely in an effort to set a macabre and *chilling* tone, the show relies

on viewer beliefs about Satanism such as cannibalism, sexual promiscuity and perversion, and

devotion to Satan, just to name a few. On the one hand, I could argue that by doing so, *Chilling*

Adventures reinforces these stereotypes and further conflates witches and Satanists in a way that

is simultaneously inaccurate and to some, insulting. A prime example of this is the warning from

The Satanic Temple, which has sued Netflix because of their use of the Baphomet statue featured

in the series. In an article by Jacob Oller on SyfyWire, he explains that "[w]hile the organization

says that the issue isn't the show's misrepresentation of Satanism, but the show's

appropriation—co-founder Lucien Greaves alleges—of a monument designed and commissioned

by the Temple" (Oller). The lawsuit claims, "copyright infringement and defamation of its deity"

and specifically describes "multiple points of originality that break with more common

depictions of the deity that directly tie the show's image with that designed by the Temple"

(Oller). The complaint, which is public record, asserts that the *Chilling Adventures* uses the

Baphomet statue as a unifying symbol for the members of the Church of Night, more specifically

arguing that the show has "used the TST Baphomet with Children in ways that falsely designate

its origin and are misleading and false to the extent that the Sabrina Series indicates, impliedly

and expressly, that the TST Baphomet with Children is a symbol of evil, associated with forced

devil-worship, cannibalism, and murder" (TST vs. Netflix). Whether Netflix or the WB took the

legal threat seriously is uncertain; however, they have since removed the statue from their show

since the end of its second season and have not returned it to the series since. That said, the

appropriation of the statue and the misleading association of this particular statue, with the rather

violent and inaccurate depiction of Satanist witches, has likely already done its harm.

In addition to the misrepresentation of Satanists, the magic users in *Chilling Adventures*

are also not accurate representations of witches. While the show may occasionally stumble

across a practice, belief, or methodology that resembles something a witch might do, as a whole

the series fails to deliver authentic representation and simply reinforces cultural beliefs about

witches, witchcraft, and Satanists alike. The third season goes even further to classify a new set

of witches and labels them Pagans, all the while picking and choosing from various mythologies,

folklore, religions, etc. In fact, in the third season the Pagans are set in direct opposition to the

Satanic witches of the now-defunct Church of Night, who are losing their power since

dethroning their past deity, the Dark Lord. The depiction of the Pagans is not much better than

the depictions of the Satanic witches in earlier seasons. As I've argued that the Satanism used in

the show behaves as if it is reverse Catholicism, I will also argue that the Paganism the show

incorporates in season three is not an accurate representation in the slightest—it too is an

inversion. The Pagans in *Chilling Adventures* are a Romani caricature, represented as nomadic

and deeply interested in bringing the Green Man back into power, to the point of extreme violence and subjugation of others in the name of nature. This is a severe perversion of Paganism and the way the show blends and melds different figures, creatures, and gods from varying mythologies is entirely misleading. It also in a weird twist of fate, seems to conflate stereotypes typically associated with Satanic witches with these new Pagan witches—namely their performance of a virgin sacrifice.

This all said, there is a second interpretation of the series as a whole, which while it acknowledges the problematic elements I've already discussed, leaves room for these problems to be understood as intentional and not the result of negligence. I would argue that *Chilling Adventures* is a campy thrill ride meant to destabilize these stereotypes by using them as a form of commentary. Camp is an important aspect of the queer experience and its usefulness in queer theory is invaluable. Camp is described in *Queer: A Graphic History* as follows, "Camp often involves explicit parody, exaggeration, theatricality, irony, and humor. In this way, camp representations have the potential to demonstrate the performativity of gender and sexuality, and to disrupt normative representations" (Barker and Scheele 104). From the outset, *Chilling Adventures* has been tinged with camp. The theatricality of the Satanic witches' practices to the tongue-in-cheek blasphemous epithets that pepper the show like "Praise be Satan," "for the love of Lucifer," and "Unholy shit!" These twisted phrases are meant to both mock common parlances, but also create a sense of culture inherent to their witchy existence.

A more explicit example of camp in the latest season of *Chilling Adventures* is the trailer for the season, which Netflix chose to release in a rather uncommon way. They made a music video and spliced new scenes from the show into the background while Sabrina and her crew dance and sing. The campy nature of their advertisement for the third season has nothing on the

first episode of the season, which comes in like a freight train. The visual imagery of this episode is incredibly telling. The show presents Hell as a bastardized, horrific Oz, complete with a bloody path, which serves as a yellow brick road made hellish. Even Sabrina's choice to gather three friends with her and bring her cat Salem strikes an obvious corollary to Dorothy on her way to speak to the Wizard and find her way home; or in Sabrina's case, bring Nick back home with her. The group of friends are told that to get through Hell, they have to wear special shoes, like Dorothy and her ruby slippers—though again the show subverts expectations and has them wear shoes of the dead. Lilith is shown speaking to a demonic minion whose dress and behavior is very similar to that of the flying monkeys from *The Wizard of Oz* film. As they journey through hell, they run across a field of crucified people eaten by crows, a twisted reference to the scarecrow; and run across an evil tin man, all to finally land themselves in front of Lilith and perform a Latin version of the iconic phrase "there's no place like home." To take the already campy free-for-all that is *The Wizard of Oz* and make it hellish is parody at its finest.

Parody, in this case, is the name of the game for *Chilling Adventures* every time they take a religion (or its practices) and flip it upside down. It's not a malicious inversion, it's a way to perform these stereotypes and call out their place in the social consciousness. In reference to Susan Sontag, Barker and Scheele explain that "camp is a way of consuming or performing culture 'in quotation marks'" (104). *Chilling Adventures* does that in spades, from costume choice to set design—everything is performance. The performance of these stereotypes is reminiscent of how gender is often performed by the drag community. Drag itself is inherently campy, in that it takes socio-cultural perceptions of gender and performs it as parody and exaggeration. When we "do gender" we are in fact operating within "strong cultural discourses of what it is to be "a man" or "a woman" (which are produced by, and produce, certain power

relations). We take these on and repeat them over and over so they feel very "real", as if these discourses were who we actually are. And in repeating them we also sustain gender norms" (Barker Scheele 80). So while a drag queen's performance may look similar to a normative model of femininity, it's also a way to make a statement about the way femininity is perceived within a culture.

This is a commonality in other types of media where witches appear and is often done by coding characters as queer using visual means. Queer-coding utilizes exaggerated mannerisms, stereotypes, and aesthetic visual cues to assign a character as queer without explicitly stating the fact. Characters throughout Disney films are queer-coded in their stylization, behavior, and position within society. Examples of this include Ursula from Disney's *The Little Mermaid* (modeled after the drag queen Divine), Yzma from *The Emperor's New Groove*, Jafar from *Aladdin*, Maleficent from *Sleeping Beauty,* Tamatoa in *Moana*, Hades from *Hercules*, and many others. In fact, villains in Disney films are more often than not, queer-coded.

Chilling Adventures is coded queerly in its use of camp, but also in its consistent utilization—and inversion—of conventional perceptions of good vs. evil and right vs. wrong. These references, and the show's penchant for over-the-top drama and spectacle, is camp in action. This third season is the most violent and graphic season thus far, and yet it is also the most dramatic, silly, and funny. *Chilling Adventures* straddles the line between not enough and too much so brilliantly that it's most defining aesthetic descriptor is *camp*.

CHAPTER 3: **Showcasing Sexuality, Stereotypes, and Subversion**

"Most books on witchcraft will tell you that witches work naked.
This is because most books on witchcraft were written by men."
Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett, *Good Omens*[7]

The buxom beauty can be a positive or negative type of witch, depending on how she is

defined. In the introduction of *Unbecoming Female Monsters: Witches, Vampires, and Virgins*,

Figure 1.1 details archetypal monstrous representations of women. The crone, the witch, and the

hag are defined as ugly, old, overtly intelligent women. This description fits well with most

negative or evil depictions of witches. In the figure, beautiful, young, expressive women are

sirens or mermaids, while sexually powerful or promiscuous women are vampires, succubi,

whores, and prostitutes (Santos xvii). Following the figure, Santos explains that "each of these

women are "archetypal" insofar as they are recurring images that are encountered throughout

history; examples of this can be found in our earliest oral traditions and mythologies" (Santos

xvii). Stereotypical physical attributes of witches range from good to bad depictions. A good

witch is a conventionally attractive, slim, and delicately featured woman with an alluring, but

demure kind of beauty. A bad (evil or even just mischievous) witch is a haggard, sallow, and

elderly witch with moles, crooked and/or missing teeth, and often a hunched or bowed body.

Lila Shapiro interviewed several members of a coven, all of whom are in their 20s, for

her article "What Pop Culture Gets Right and Wrong About Witches, According to a Real

Coven." The girls were asked to describe witches in media and "historically, they pointed out,

representations have fallen into two basic categories: the ugly decrepit hag and the young

hypersexualized woman who exists for male consumption" (Shapiro). The girls identified two of

the most iconic witches from popular culture: "Probably one of the most popular early witches

[7] Pratchett, Terry, and Neil Gaiman. *Good Omens: The Nice and Accurate Prophecies of Agnes Nutter, Witch*.
Gollancz, 2015.

would be the Wicked Witch of the West," said Haleigh. "She's very ugly especially in comparison to her sister, Glinda the Good Witch, who is very innocent and beautiful." The witches from *The Wizard of Oz* are easily identifiable as good and evil based off of their physical appearance. These visual stereotypes have bled into other media versions of witches over time.

It is interesting how Santos frames various monstrous women as the crone, the witch, and the hag, because popular media has taken to incorporating young, beautiful, sexually powerful or promiscuous women as witches, who can be either good or bad. For example, in the TV series *Charmed* (1998), the three Halliwell sisters are all fashionable, sexy, and are designed to represent and capture an audience of modern women in their early teens to thirties. Despite the attention paid to their sexuality and physical attractiveness, the charmed ones aren't reduced to their physical attributes in an effort to stereotype and essentialize them as objects (though admittedly, production does play up their assets through wardrobe). These women are good witches who use their powers together, known as the power of three, to fight evil and keep good in the world. Each sister is intelligent and capable in her own way and viewers are shown time and again that these women are more than eye candy—they're heroes.

The Charmed Effect

Throughout the series viewers watch these women go through difficult work experiences, both due to their constant demon fighting and their position as women in a workplace. *Charmed* (1998) showcases the stratification of the sexes within society and the sisters' attempts to not only thwart supernatural evil, but to subvert patriarchal control. The witches also question the Elders and their Whitelighters, who act as a kind of guardian angel order, which in its own way is responsible for controlling the actions and choices of the sisters. Time and again, the sisters question the power Whitelighters hold and rail against being controlled or handled.

In Lila Shapiro's article, her exploration begins by asking the coven to name their favorite witches in media. *Charmed* (1998) is identified as a "very formative" representation for Haleigh, who says "'Alyssa Milano's character Phoebe was definitely the one who I gravitated towards, because she was the troublemaker, she didn't do things by the book, and she was also a little slutty.' The girls all laughed. 'Actually, she was really slutty,' Haleigh conceded" (Shapiro). Haleigh is not wrong—Phoebe was a sexually adventurous individual for much of the series, seeking pleasure without hesitation—though I'd argue that "slut" is an unnecessary pejorative which vilifies female sexuality and plays its own role in the way women have historically been slandered and labeled "witch". Regardless, Phoebe is not alone in this behavior, as every Halliwell sister seeks out sex and romance in their own way. Emphasis is placed on romantic entanglements, one-night encounters, and various other moments of female sexuality. Many have read these sisters as hypersexualized, but I'd argue that they're simply showcasing a healthy sexuality, one which shouldn't be disgraced or condemned, simply because it's exuberant and talked about without shame. In this way, the show subverts traditional expectations for female sexuality.

Cristina Santos argues in *Unbecoming Female Monsters* that "women who chose to rebel against the acquiescent and desexualized role society has proscribed for them are promptly labeled as deviant" (Santos xvi). As such, the Halliwell sisters as unashamed, sexually active women are deviant by default. But to further their deviance is the fact that each sister engages in sex and/or romantic relationships with "questionable" (read: morally ambiguous) men. Phoebe (the youngest) beds and weds a demon; Piper (the middle sister) beds and weds her Whitelighter against the Elders orders; Prue (the eldest) undergoes an accidental magic mishap and is temporarily reassigned as a male, and nearly beds a succubus; and Paige (the youngest half-sister

who comes into her powers after Prue's death) dates and beds a 'dark' magic junkie. Every sister has had relationships (romantic and sexual) with dubious men, but it is the subtle way *Charmed* (1998) frames these moments that sets it apart.

In all moments of weakness, the sisters band together and remind each other that their mistakes do not define their person. Their choices to trust and love are acts of power and a sign of their good nature, not a sign of weakness or powerlessness. This is an important distinction because most other examples of female sexuality, particularly with powerful women such as witches, it is expected that they "know better" and "do better" than any other average person betrayed by someone they trusted.

Beyond their sexuality, the Halliwell sisters dominate the screen as woman warriors by fighting demons and questioning the social order of the material realm and that of the Elders. They do not conform or bend to the will of others, but instead choose to forge their own path. Ultimately, the Halliwell sisters are engaging and relatable because their appeal is equally split between their goodness and their attractiveness.

Stereotypes in <u>Hocus Pocus</u>

Like *Charmed* (1998)*,* Disney's cult classic from 1993, *Hocus Pocus,* showcases its own power of three. The film follows three villainous sister witches who exemplify many different stereotypes and presentations of witches. There is Sarah Jessica Parker's character, Sarah Sanderson, the youngest sister who plays up her good looks and siren-like voice. She is a hypersexualized character, and easily the most conventionally attractive sister of the three, with long blonde hair, pale skin, and fashion that purposefully shows off her cleavage and legs. Sarah is the most risqué dresser amongst the Sanderson sisters and uses her physical appearance and flirtatious personality to play with men, and it is implied, to use them for sexual gratification.

Her overt physical beauty aside, Sarah is an airhead, embodying the "dumb blonde" stereotype to a T. Sarah's greatest power derives from her ability to enchant and lure children—even great numbers of them—through song. This is a powerful talent because the three sisters can capture children and steal their youth and vitality.

The other two sisters are equally stereotypical in their presentation; the middle sister Mary Sanderson is a large, plump woman, who is quick to please her elder, more intelligent sister Winifred Sanderson. Mary is the most conventional looking sister, as she is plump, dark haired and rather non-descript. She neither draws the eye for her shocking beauty or alarming looks. Some of her power comes from her keen sense of smell and she can track children with it; a special skill which can be related to a blood hound or a truffle pig (something her size seems to suggest). She is smarter than Sarah and is a far more competent witch, but she is far too submissive and obsequious to be a leader. That role falls to Winifred, the eldest sister. Winifred, played by Bette Midler, is the brains of the operation. Described as a hag and setting the film's events into motion, Winifred is a cruel, vain, and extremely intelligent witch, capable of keeping her two airhead sisters under control while seeking her desires and practicing dark magic. She is the least attractive witch of them all, with exaggerated features such as wild red hair, buck teeth, claw-like fingernails, and an eyebrow-less face. She is a startling creature to behold and her inherent meanness is codified by her appearance.

> Each sister represents a very obvious physical stereotype. These stereotypes are of great importance, because "monstrous perception of women is esoteric in that it is both the virgin/angel and the whore; the "air-head" and the "excessively intelligent"; it is the lack of and the excess of; but all determined by binary oppositions based on gendered difference and deviance from a socioculturally proscribed norm" (Santos xvi-xvii).

Essentially, no matter how these characters were to present themselves or perform within society, it is the "excess of" their performance which marks them as witches. Winifred is incredibly vain and reacts violently when mocked for her appearance. The backstory behind her decision to sell her soul, gain dark magic powers, and turn to stealing life essence from children is never shown in the film; however, one could wager that perhaps her desire for power is rooted in her insecurities and experience as a liminal figure in society—perhaps it wasn't so much that she sought out darkness, but that darkness embraced her, and she willingly went where she felt desired.

CHAPTER 4: **Witches of Color—Queer(ing) Moments in Witchy Media**

"People see what they expect to see," he says sharply. "Through a filter of their own hatred and prejudice."
Laurie Forest, *The Black Witch* 8

Witches of Color in History—Tituba's Story

The history of the Salem witch trials in 1692 began with a woman of color, Tituba. Various accounts have framed her as a Black slave woman; however, most of these accounts have been proven inaccurate by historians, as the court documents themselves refer to her as an "'Indian woman, servant'" (Brooks). There is not much about Tituba that is known, other than the fact that she was purchased in Barbados by Samuel Parris. She was brought to Boston in 1680 and then moved again with the Parris family in 1689 to Salem. During the witchcraft hysteria in 1692, Tituba was the first person in Salem accused of witchcraft. In a Smithsonian magazine article, the event is described as the "deadliest witchcraft epidemic" and explains that the event started with several young girls who were contorting violently, complaining of bites and pinches, and sporadically going mute. The 'symptoms' the girls displayed quickly spread to the rest of the community and within several months, "between 144 and 185 witches and wizards had been named" (Schiff). Of those numbers, 19 men and women had been hung.

The origin, or spark for the Salem witch trials is still undetermined. Hard facts about these trials are lost amidst the clamor and hysteria of the time. Various studies on the subject have come up with numerous reasons as to why the Salem Village fell prey to such hysteria, though there have been no definitive answers. Many scholars have argued that the Salem witch trials—any witch hunt from history, actually—is a side effect of the patriarchy. In *Satanic Feminism*, Faxneld argues that, "[…]at least one simple fact […] is difficult to argue against, no

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8 Forest, Laurie. *The Black Witch.* Harlequin Teen, 2017.

matter which one of the multitude theories about the complex causes of the early modern witch hunts one might subscribe to, named that [i]t was men who stood to gain by the linking of witchcraft and "the female" because it provided them with a greater moral and social status than women" (Faxneld 68).

Intersectionality: Witches of Color

Tituba's experience is important because it begins a long saga of not only *women* being vilified and othered in society due to suspicions of witchcraft, but a long and complicated history of people of color being painted negatively, stereotyped, and pigeonholed in a liminal space. When examining witches in entertainment media, it's easy to find women of all ages, but more often than not the most popular depictions of witches are young white women. This is especially true if the witches are presented as *good*. For example, Glenda the Good Witch is presented as not only beautiful, but as white. Her foil, the Wicked Witch of the West, is green-skinned and hideous. The color contrast between the two is obvious, the Wicked Witch is meant to represent a woman of color. Her green skin serves as a sign of difference and that difference is then interpreted as part of what makes her wicked. The two witches are placed in binary opposition to one another, as with many other witches in media.

These binary states are problematic for the very reason that gender identity, sexuality, and race cannot be essentialized in such a way, especially since this ignores intersectionality. Intersectionality forces a kind of liminality on someone, based on identity as a conceptual category, which is why queer theory is so useful when examining witches in media because it provides a groundwork to question, analyze, and challenge the hegemonic cultural perception of witches that haunt presentations of witches in entertainment media.

Returning to the concept of intersectionality, I'd like to discuss the difference between media's presentation of witches of color versus white witches. Upon examination, people of color are incorporated into stories of witches infrequently. When they are incorporated, their magic is often set apart as uniquely different from the magic typically seen from witches who are white, for example. Instead, as a person of color, their magic is often stereotyped as some form of voodoo, which is commonly portrayed as an African practice. A short note on history— voodoo (or voudon), like witches and Satanism, is vastly misrepresented in media. The stereotypes of the practice would paint it as a type of "black magic" which is meant to mean evil, and not an identifier of ethnic identity. This terminology is rife with its own issues. First, it identifies white magic vs. black magic and puts them in binary opposition to each other. Second, it places ethical value on both forms of magic and associates them with color. And finally, third, color association based on ethical value simply reinforces negative stereotypes about race/ethnicity.

Voudon originated in Haiti and is an Afro-Caribbean religion. Followers can also come from Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, Brazil, the United States and various other locations (Radford). In his article "Voodoo: Facts About Misunderstood Religion" Benjamin Radford references Leslie Desmangles in *The Encyclopedia of the Paranormal* and explains that "voudon refers to 'a whole assortment of cultural elements: personal creeds and practices, including an elaborate system of folk medical practices; a system of ethics transmitted across generations [including] proverbs, stories, songs, and folklore… voudon is more than belief; it is a way of life'" (Radford). He goes on to explain that voudon is nothing like what we see in entertainment media. A consistent pattern with magic in media, of any kind, is the misrepresentation of it at every turn. At times it isn't acknowledged as religious when it should be and in other cases, it is

defined as primarily religious and leaves no room for other interpretation. Again and again media boils down magic and magic users as either/or. There is no room for nuance, they either are or are not, and the binary reinforces the liminality of their existence, even within the unique universes of each source.

Witches of Color in Media

Witches of color in media are often produced in such a way that separates them even further from white witches in media. In some of the most popular series, witches are far more expendable than their white counterparts. If not expendable, they are constantly fighting for agency beyond that of other witches who are not witches of color. Their race is always in the way of their progress. Examples of this include Prudence and Ambrose from *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, Bonnie and several other witches from *The Vampire Diaries,* Lafayette from *True Blood,* and the sisters from *Charmed* (2018). I'll point out here that witches utilized in shows with other supernatural beings and forces, witches of color are often set aside as those with the least agency, despite their overwhelming power. In *True Blood* and *The Vampire Diaries*, the witches in these shows are constantly forced to perform magic for the benefit of others who are physically stronger than they are. Despite any offensive power, their personal connections and desire to help their loved ones is often used against them as a bargaining chip when physical power comes into play.

A prime example of this is Bonnie's character in *Vampire Diaries*. Bonnie is an incredibly powerful witch, but as she comes into her power and learns to use it to protect herself and her friends, she is also used as a pawn in very dangerous games. The vampires that surround her and infiltrate her friends' lives leave her vulnerable and cause her great loss throughout the series. Bonnie may be extremely powerful and come from a long line of witches with great

power, but that doesn't stop her from being coerced into performing magic against her will, all in an effort to save those she loves. Lafayette's situation (in *True Blood*) with magic is similar, though not as predatory as Bonnie's. Perhaps his cis-male status affords him more agency than Bonnie. Regardless, both individuals are often used as tools for those with power already. Vampires have physical prowess that can overwhelm a witch. Witches may be powerful and have access to magic that can sustain their lives far longer than that of an average human but they are still human at the end of the day. Their frailties aren't lessened because of their power, their power simply becomes an easily consumable commodity in the face of overwhelming physical force and power.

I would also argue that Bonnie and Lafayette are relegated to forced practices because of their blackness. Despite their powers, they lack a lot of agency. In the case of Lafayette, some of his agency could be reduced due to his queerness, as he is an out gay man in the South. However, he wields his gay identity like a mace and often doesn't allow others to take his agency simply because he exists outside of the narrow-minded hegemonic social order of the American South. Yet he does allow himself to be sucked into the magical world when his friends get pulled into the tangled web of vampires. Much the same can be said of Bonnie in *Vampire Diaries* whenever she is forced to perform magic against her will. She doesn't associate herself with vampires by choice, it is her friends who do so. She later learns to love and care for many of the vampires in her life, but it doesn't stop them from coming to her for magic that she otherwise wouldn't choose to perform and get involved in situations that could put her at extreme risk.

Bonnie is constantly compromised and left to put the pieces back together once the main characters cause chaos. She is relegated to a magical clean-up crew, essentially. Bonnie's character is interesting for the purposes of this study because she is so peripheral to so many

events within the series, yet without her involvement, plot points wouldn't have moved forward. The way her character is presented leaves her firmly outside of the central crowd, with only limited connections that keep her moored to her friends and family. For example, Bonnie's grandmother was a lifelong witch who began to teach Bonnie about her powers. Together they performed magic that would benefit the vampires, but the magic was so strong and severe that it cost Bonnie's grandmother her life. This was the first point where Bonnie's existence as a witch of color separated her from the realities of her friends who were not people of color.

Instances of this happened again and again as the show developed, even resulting in the loss of Bonnie's own life as she performed magic for her friends that was so powerful that it overwhelmed her physical body and she passed. For months she is able to hide her death from her friends and family and somehow, they believe her, because she is always so periphery to their lives. Her value as both a being of power and as a human is clearly displayed in these scenes. So easily her friends believe that she is away because they are involved in their own lives and experiences. They don't *need her*, so they don't go *looking for her* and go for months without realizing she has died. While the choice to keep her death a secret was Bonnie's own, it does display a rather blatant lack of respect for her person. I would argue that his is largely in part to the way that witches are othered, even by those who embrace their powers. She is later brought back to life, but the loss of Bonnie seemed but a footnote in the overall storyline.

The intersections of Bonnie's identity as female, black, and a witch combine together and place her firmly outside of the dominant social structure even within her friend group. Her friends are white and powerful, literally and metaphorically. They don't understand the limitations of her power and in times of trouble they rely on her to be the solution, even if one is not possible. In these scenarios, she is often forced to adapt or die, because when her magic

doesn't suit their purposes, she suddenly becomes a pawn and a liability. Time and again, the vampires take control of Bonnie and use her both as bait and as a weapon. She is never afforded a solid experience as a being of power as a result—her agency is constantly compromised.

Bonnie and Lafayette are prime examples of how witches of color consistently fight with their essential identities, so that their struggles become queer-coded in a way, because they are othered so frequently due to their race and magical powers. Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology*, argues the value of intersectionality. In this analysis, she explains that disorientation is an important aspect of understanding the intersection of queer theory and phenomenology and emphasizes that phenomenology is rife with moments of disorientation, and while those moments may feel like an "unmooring," they are in fact "moments that "point" towards becoming orientated" (Ahmed). This disorientation can be found in characters like Bonnie and Lafayette, whose magic impacts their physical and emotional well-being. Their magic is an essential element of their lived experience and I would argue, that their experiences as witches of color becomes a point of stress for them because they are placed even further outside of socio-cultural expectations.

Ahmed goes on to explain that disorientation for people of color comes from a place when "the body of color might disturb the picture—and do so simply as a result of being in spaces that are lived as white, spaces into which white bodies can sink" (Ahmed). She goes on to explain this concept of sinking which I will summarize as another form of liminality—a feeling of in-between that comes from experiencing one's position within society from a totally different perspective. Ahmed goes on to argue that "to make things queer is certainly to disturb the order of things" and that, I argue, is inherently tied to the concept of a witch. Witches are disruptive by design, because they are *believed* to be so. Their disruption is both something that can be claimed

by witches in an empowering manner, and a way to vilify and other witches to the point that their existence is considered a disruption to the hegemonic social order. Witches live a queer existence not necessarily by definition, but in action. Their entire existence is queer because they continue to disrupt and challenge society at every turn.

Queer(ing) Witches of Color in Media

Willow and Tara from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* are some of the most iconic representations of queer-identifying witches in entertainment media, but the new *Charmed* (2018) series has done a rather decent job of crossing the intersectional divide and bring in a trio of witches who are not only women of color (of varying ethnic identities), but they are also unique in their sexual identity. Though the rebooted show has only had one season air thus far, it has presented a very different group of sisters than the original series. Two of the sisters are Latina and share the same parents but the story introduces a third half-sister who is Black and Latina. The three of them learn magic as they learn to love and trust one another after the loss of their mother. The new series plays into the way popular media is attempting to bridge the gap and bring more people of color into the forefront of shows. While the impetus for this may not be completely selfless, the show does touch on modern issues affecting young women today. For example, the oldest sister is a feminist and fights for the rights of women as she tries to navigate a world around her that doesn't always accept her for the color of her skin or her sexuality.

The original series seemed to heavily veer toward the way the individual witches' magical ability was defined by their personality. Their choices as people and as witches played a large part in how their powers developed. A major point of contention in the original series was the presentation of the witches as women within society. These characters often fit into stereotypical roles and could be defined by their sexuality and how they utilized that sexual

power. The same can be said for the new series, which features much younger women than the original series. The show is also unique in that it features queer relationships, whereas the original series was predominantly white, cis-normative, and made little no mention of queer identities. That aside, the women are still called out for the expression of their sexuality on several occasions throughout the course of the show. In the new series, sexuality, identity, and personal definition for these labels, are as important to these young women as the discovery of their power is.

There is an argument to be made that a show trying to modernize and bring in more elements that are circulating the social consciousness is merely virtue signaling. That said, I don't think either *Charmed* series can be too closely compared against the other, considering the 1998 series is eight seasons long, while the 2018 series has only released its first season. The breadth of material available for analysis in the original series dwarfs that of the newest. The shows begin in drastically different ways and bring the sisters together in ways that are similar, but still wholly unique. The characters themselves are also unique and do not share names with their origin, which I believe is the 2018 series' attempt to separate any impression that these stories or witches will inhabit the same experiences. I would argue that since race, gender, and sexual identity are at the forefront of the new series, the 2018 *Charmed* is trying to dig into the intersectionality of the lived experiences of these young women. These women already exist in a world where they are othered, whereas in the original they were only othered due to their magical abilities, not their race, gender identity, or sexual orientation. The dynamics of the two shows are entirely different.

The intention behind making the witches women of color is one that is interesting and worth exploration, particularly when considering the way in which women of color are often

represented in media. These women are not performing magic in a way that is very similar to the original series, which had the witches somewhat subject to the whims and needs of a higher power—something they constantly fought against. These modern witches, while working in concert with the same force, are also establishing their identities outside of their powers and outside of the concept of the power of three. They are individuals as much as they are a unit of force and power. The modern series presents the witches as younger, less experienced in the world, and developing into adults. The original series presented the witches as slightly older and more established in the world, though still developing and finding themselves. The choice to present the witches in the 2018 series as younger is interesting because it also continues to force them into a liminal space. They are in a point of transition in their lives for various reasons. The loss of their mother, the introduction to a new learning environment, the introduction of a new sister, and the unveiling of their powers leaves each young woman struggling to find their footing as they develop. In addition, social constructions of power are working against them as well.

As a finale note on *Charmed* (2018), I would like to address the queerness of the oldest sister, Mel. Of the three, she is (thus far), the only main character who is a queer-identifying woman. In the series, she is shown to struggle with her identity as a witch in a way that is relevant to the queer experience today. Mel's character mentions that she had never been "in the closet" and has always been openly out about her sexuality. Her mother loved her and gave her the space and the confidence to be out, which in American society is not always a common experience. However, the charmed ones are forced to keep their magic a secret and Mel talks about how this impacts her with her Whitelighter, Harry:

MEL: I don't think you understand how painful this is.

HARRY: Painful?

MEL: Our mother raised us without judgements. She knew I was gay before I even

figured it out. And she made sure I was always proud of who I was. So… I have never

been in the closed. I've never had to hide who I am from the people I love. It was the

biggest gift she gave me. And now, here I am, in the closet.

(00:29:25-00:30:01 "Sweet Tooth" *Charmed*)

Mel makes it painfully clear that this secret weighs on her. It weighs on her in a way that is

relevant to her queer identity. I argue that this relation is often folded into media about witches,

though is rarely (if ever), explicitly addressed in a way similar to this scene. Secrecy is a

common reality in stories about witches, often as a way to protect them against the beliefs of

society around them. Secrecy is also a common reality for queer individuals around the world,

who by choice or for their own safety, keep their identities secret from the larger world around

them. *Charmed* (2018) does a rather beautiful job of bridging the gap between queer identity and

witch identity, enmeshing them in a way which was subtly obvious in other media, but is

explicitly obvious now.

CHAPTER 5: **Queer(ing) Witches: A (Non-)Fictional Feminism**

"The first time I called myself a 'Witch' was the most magical moment of my life."
Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*[9]

When I set out to research witches, I was particularly interested in the intersection between witches and the queer community. A great number of people I know who are practicing witches identify somewhere within the queer community, and as such I've wondered if there is something about witchcraft that is inherently alluring. Interestingly, there are very few canonically queer identifying witches in media. The witches from Shapiro's interview identified two specific instances, Willow and Tara from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, who meet in college and fall in love. Much of their magic is connected to their emotional bond and serves as a plot point during several episodes and leads to one of the "big bad" moments in the series. The second was Lafayette from *True Blood*. Interestingly, both series are mainly about vampires, but feature queer witches. Lafayette is of particular interest because as Haleigh notes in the interview, "'You don't see male witches that frequently, so it was pretty cool that he was not only a male witch, but also a person of color and openly queer. That's a rarity'" (Santos).

The rareness of a male witch in media is something to stress because as Mads told us, people of all gender identities and expressions practice witchcraft. In Moira Donovan's article "How Witchcraft is Empowering Queer and Trans Young People", she interviews several individuals who identify as queer and who practice witchcraft. She asserts that "witchcraft is seeing a resurgence among queer-identified young people seeking a powerful identity that celebrates the freedom to choose who you are" (Donovan). This assertion aligns well with what Mads said during the podcast interview. Though of course, being a witch does not necessarily

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[9] Adler, Margot. *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America*. Penguin Books, 2006.

mean being queer, it does as Mads put it, require being "woke" (12:10-12:12). Donovan's interview with Gaudet details their feeling that "the capacity for witchcraft to accommodate alternative expressions of gender is what makes it appealing to a new generation of witches," while her interview with Jared Russell emphasizes that "dressing as a witch helps him find strength in the spiritual side of witchcraft—which he says includes spells, celebrating eight annual equinoxes, and devising his own witchcraft tradition—and in challenging dominant expectations of gender" (Donovan). Her interview focuses primarily on individuals assigned male at birth, who perform gender outside of stereotypical binary gender expression. This is a compelling interview simply due to the demographics being represented. Witches in media are stereotypically women, but Donovan's piece demonstrates that gender has little to do with the practice or performance of witchcraft. In her closing paragraph, Donovan makes an interesting claim:

> In Medieval Europe, the idea of the witch was used as a weapon against the marginalized people, and the person most likely to be accused of witchcraft was the old crone at the edge of the village.
>
> But those roles have been reversed, and what was once used as a weapon against marginalized people is now working to defend them. Witches might still be on the edge, but they're claiming that place for themselves, and drawing power from an identity that celebrates defiance while embracing difference. After all, what is being a witch if not owning the right to be yourself? (Donovan)

Donovan's assertion is compelling for many reasons but is of special interest here because it sees witchcraft in such a positive light—one that defies typical representations of witchcraft in media, which is overwhelmingly fraught with judgement and panic over right vs. wrong/good vs. evil.

The prevalence of queer-identifying witches is also increasing, likely in response to the queer community clamoring for representation in their media. The fact that they are being presented as witches as well is incredibly compelling. Instances of queer witches in media were quite few and far between and up until recently, the only openly queer-identifying witches in entertainment media were white women like Tara and Willow from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer.* However, I believe that even though Tara and Willow were a beloved couple and their relationship was transformative at the time of its airing, Tara's character was used as a plot device to further Willow's expansion of powers and later with Tara's death, the loss of her person was used as a turning point for the show. While it did showcase the intensity of Willow's love for Tara, the overall purpose behind Tara's loss seemed to be an effort to push Willow so far that she became a source of violence and evil without intending to. It showed that witches can be overcome by their emotions and that their power is as much of a liability as it is a help.

This plot point in the show, whether intentional or not, pushes witches even further into an othered space and sets them apart once again. Their queer identities are, rather than a powerful difference against a heteronormative society and a way to resist conventional categorization, used as a vehicle for plot progression. While this may not be extraordinarily problematic, it does identify the way that entertainment media feeds off of stereotypes and then reinforces them; in this case, witches are *dangerous* and *volatile*. Their power can easily consume them if they are overcome. And in the case of Willow, being cis female is working against her as well. She reacted with extreme emotion to an event and because she was shown to be overcome by her emotions, she allowed her powers to take over and lead her down a path of darkness.

Queer witches in media may be few and far between, but queer witches in actuality are abundant. Folktales, legends, and visual media that depict witches as women are prolific and admittedly successful, because they emphasize power in ways that fulfill and reinforce the gender binary, heteronormativity, and the patriarchy. Witches certainly seem to be yet another byproduct of the male/female binary, where anyone who doesn't necessarily fit the ideal framework for gender expression and/or gendered behavior is marginalized and liminal—in other words, a witch. However, research and my interview with witches implies otherwise. In fact, it proves that the practice of witchcraft counters all stereotypes and symbols of witches and witchcraft, subverts expectations, and defies categorization. I began my podcast and paper with Shakespeare's Weird Sisters poem. Allow me to end in much the same way, but with one small change:

Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn and cauldron bubble.
Subvert the "normal" and move beyond
Gendered binaries are just *overdone*.

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IRB Approval Letter

EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
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Notification of Exempt Certification

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: Kaitlyn Ricks
CC:
      Andrea Kitta
Date: 10/7/2019
Re: UMCIRB 19-002330
      Queering Witches Thesis

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 10/7/2019. This study is eligible for Exempt Certification under category #2ab.

It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted in the manner reported in your application and/or protocol, as well as being consistent with the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and your profession.

This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIRB unless there are proposed changes to this study. Any change, prior to implementing that change, must be submitted to the UMCIRB for review and approval. The UMCIRB will determine if the change impacts the eligibility of the research for exempt status. If more substantive review is required, you will be notified within five business days.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.