FROM THE ACCUSED TO THE EMPOWERED: A CULTURAL MODEL OF IDENTITY AND WITCHCRAFT IN NEW ORLEANS

by

SARAH EMILY SMITH

CHRISTOPHER LYNN, COMMITTEE CHAIR
COURTNEY HELFRECHT
KATHRYN OTHS
SONYA PRITZKER
JENNIFER PURVIS

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ABSTRACT

Historically, being accused of witchcraft meant death (Baker, 2015; Demos, 2008; Ehrenreich & English, 2010). More recently, identifying as a witch means living with a stigmatized and often concealed identity (Reece, 2016; Tejeda, 2015). Despite the deleterious effects of stigmatization, such as discrimination in the workplace, isolation from one's family, and increased subjective anxiety (Reece, 2016; Tejeda, 2015), individuals are increasingly identifying as witches in the United States. The most current estimate is that upwards of 1.5 million North Americans identify as such— though there is no official census to know for sure (Bosker, 2020; Fearnow, 2018). The motivations driving the increase remain unclear due to the narrower inquiry of extant research in which witches are often styled as white, suburbanite, middle-class, college-educated, "nature-worshipping" individuals who are predominately female. This description stems from feminist and religious studies which explore the sociopolitical underpinnings of "witch" as a politically oriented identity, the psychosocial benefits of witchcraft as a "feminist spirituality," and on more bounded, ethnographic accounts of European-rooted pagan or "Neopagan" sects, such as Gardnerian Wicca.

However, while partly true, this portrait of identity, beliefs, and practices does not accurately represent the majority, nor the diversity, of currently practicing witches as it largely excludes the specific perspectives of witches of color, male, and gender-fluid witches in addition to witches who do not identify as pagan. In the summer of 2020, I interviewed a diverse group of witches in New Orleans, Louisiana to explore what motivates individuals to adopt the identifier "witch" as part of their identity. In this thesis, I apply a cultural model approach to both explore

the question of motivation and provide a more temporally appropriate, finer-grained understanding of witches as a diverse group

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CHAPTER 1

OUTLINE OF THESIS

Historically, being accused of witchcraft meant death (Baker, 2015; Demos, 2008; Ehrenreich & English, 2010). More recently, being a witch means living with an often concealed and stigmatized identity (Tejeda, 2015; Reece, 2016). Despite persistent stigmatization, individuals are increasingly self-identifying as witches (Fearnow, 2018; U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Reasons for this remain unclear, though many contemporary witches claim witchcraft is a pathway to self-empowerment through spiritual practices, such as magic and ritual (Burton, 2018; Cyr, 2019; Starhawk, 1997). However, few studies explore these practices in depth to examine how they may result in self-empowerment, or how self-empowerment is conceptualized.

While there are numerous ways to identify as a witch, academic studies have either subsumed all witchcraft identities under an umbrella of paganism or constructed intimate portraits of a particular sect. Furthermore, whether broad or intimate, these studies have focused primarily on European-rooted traditions, such as Wicca, Druidism, and Asatru. Because of this narrow inquiry, the academic portrait of American witches pigeonholes them as white, middle-class, suburbanite, and mostly female (Adler, 1986; Cyr, 2019; Lewis and Tollefesen, 2013; Magliocco, 2004; Scarboro, Staves, and Campbell, 1996). While this description is partly true, many who self-identify as witches today draw from traditions as diverse as America itself, such as *brujería* from Latin America (Garcia, 2007), *Santeria* from Cuba and Africa (Beliso-de

Jesus, 2015), hoodoo from the American Deep South (Hazzard-Donald, 2013), and *Stregheria* from Italy (Magliocco, 2009) to name a few. However, the more bounded nature and official religious status of Wicca gives insight into the increase of possible witches. For instance, in 1990, 8,000 individuals identified as Wiccan on the American Religious Identification Study. By 2008, this number increased to 340,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Yet, a more holistic approach is needed to determine how modern witches in the U.S., as an eclectic group, perceive of themselves to better understand what is driving increased interest despite the adverse effects of stigmatization (Fearnow, 2018; Reece, 2016; Tejeda, 2015; U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

In this thesis, I first synthesize research on witchcraft from feminist and religious studies and then trace the development of the concepts of witchcraft and magic in the discipline of anthropology from its inception. I then present the theoretical framework I used to design a project aimed towards addressing the question of motivation and for further examining the process of constructing identity- namely the concepts of cultural models from cognitive anthropology and tactics of intersubjectivity from linguistic anthropology. I then present a rationale for conducting research in New Orleans followed by an explanation of the methods I used to conduct exploratory ethnographic interviews while there. In this section, I also outline how I extracted a possible cultural model of both witchcraft and identity. After outlining my methods, I then present my results. Specifically, I reconstructed personal narratives from interviews to explore a prototypical narrative of "becoming" a witch which illustrates how the model of "being" a witch is cognitively employed (Seligman, 2005). I then expand on the models of "being" a witch and "doing witchcraft." Finally, in the discussion section, I revisit my research question of motivation and explore how I interpret my results to help answer it.

Specifically, I apply the concepts of agency and hybridity to explain the increased interest in identifying as a witch and practicing witchcraft. In this, I present that adhering to the models of identity and witchcraft, or increased cultural consonance (Dressler, 2018), may result in increased subjective well-being for individuals who feel otherwise marginalized, oppressed, and outcast in society, which may be another underlying motivation which future studies may explore.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

While there are numerous ways to identify as a witch, academic studies have either focused on witches as feminists with political motivations for reclaiming the term, as a goddess-centric spirituality, or subsumed all witchcraft identities under an umbrella of paganism, or more recently under "Neopaganism." Paganism is generally understood to denote religions existing before the dominance of Abrahamic faiths and is described by some religious scholars as involving polytheism, animism, worshipping a pantheon of deities, nature worship, folk and ceremonial magic, divination, reincarnation, and an emphasis on the Divine Feminine, as well as being marked by a lack of sacred texts and dogma (De Gaia, 2019). Paganism, or "pagan," are often "catch-all" terms with varied and ambiguous meanings. These terms are often translated by scholars of witchcraft to mean "country dweller" or "peasant" and describe people who worship a pantheon of deities (Hutton, 2019).

Neopaganism is a term used to depict the revival of pre-Christian religions, typically European rooted traditions, as current practitioners perceive them to have been in the past. Practitioners often draw from archaeological interpretations of rituals from days past. Of these Neopagan sects, Gardnerian Wicca has received the most attention followed by associated offshoots, such as Dianic witchcraft (female only), Alexandrian Wicca, and Reclaiming Witchcraft. Further, Celtic Druidism and Scandinavian traditions such as Asatru and Odinism

(sometimes called heathenry) have also been discussed to some extent (Adler, 1986; Berger, 2003, 2013; De Gaia, 2019, Magliocco, 2004). Here, I present the perspectives from feminist, religious, and anthropological research concerning witches and their crafts.

Witches in Feminist and Religious Studies Scholarship

Historians estimate that nearly 500,000 individuals were executed for witchcraft during the international witch trials spanning the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, the majority of which were women (Demos, 2008; Ehrenreich and English, 2010; Moro, et. al., 2008). While much less dramatic in terms of numbers, the Salem witch trials in early America led to the death of nineteen people, fourteen of which were women (Baker, 2015). As a result, discussions of witches tend to describe them as female, though contemporary witches hold more fluid ideas of gender (Lewis and Tollefsen, 2013). As a result, witchcraft became a gendered issue taken up by feminist scholars.

Ehrenreich and English (2010) describe three central reasons why women were historically accused of witchcraft and subsequently executed. First, witches were believed to be unable to control their sexuality, which contributed to the sinful corruption of men. This perceived waywardness led to men's inadequate ability to perform their political and economic roles. Second, witches were accused of being organized, meaning they met in regular groups to discuss and share knowledge of various subjects, such as herblore and domestic pursuits. Their ability to gather without male supervision seemed to mean that they were capable of collusion against male-dominated organizations. Further, these meetings were described as clandestine, conducted in secret under the cover of night, which aligned witches with darkness and danger. Third, and arguably the most egregious reason, was the assertion that witches were believed to

use magic to affect the health of others. In other words, witches had medical knowledge of healing and the body. This knowledge was considered to be dangerous because so-called witches could harm as well as heal (Ehrenreich and English, 2010). It is estimated that as many as one in three women who were executed for witchcraft in Europe were lay healers, mostly servicing the rural poor, with varying degrees of medical knowledge (Demos, 2008). Likewise, many of the women executed during the Salem Witch Trials were also associated with folk healing (Baker, 2015). Thus, witches were conceptualized as overtly sexual women who met secretly to plot against men and had the ability to harm and heal with magicomedical knowledge. In some capacity, these issues remain relevant to the public understanding of witches today in the sense that witches are understood by many as sexually deviant individuals who are often in league with the "Devil" (Sollee, 2017; Tejeda, 2015).

Feminist theory is marked by three major waves with some asserting a fourth is occurring in the present day (Parry et. al., 2019). While the theoretical framework of waves is useful for understanding key moments and issues in feminist thought, as well as the historical development of contemporary witchcraft, it is important to note that the waves often overlap and are contested (Hewitt, 2012; Purvis, 2004). Beyond particulars, feminist scholars writing during each wave upbraid male-governed, patriarchal religious, political, medical, and economic entities, namely Christianity and capitalism, for the suppression of women (Ehrenreich and English, 2010; Parry et. al., 2019; Merchant, 1980; Starhawk, 1982; Woodhead, 2003; Zwissler, 2016).

The first wave of feminism began in the late 19th century and is characterized by the women's suffrage movement. Important Feminist texts written in the 1890s by Americans Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Matilda Joselyn Gage posited that the major world religions, especially but not limited to Christianity, were formulated and upheld by men to keep

women submissive (Woodhead, 2003; Griffin, 2015). Gage and Stanton claimed this was the root cause of the European witch trials and subsequent massacres of women (Woodhead, 2003; Griffin, 2015).

The suffragette and African American trailblazer Sojourner Truth, active during the first wave, was called a witch by the media, possibly because of her traditional African spirituality in tandem with her strong female presence. However, Truth refused the term (Sollee, 2017). Later, Gage was among the first to reclaim and redefine the symbolism of the witch in a more positive, powerful light. She inspired Frank L. Baum, her son-in-law and author of *The Wizard of Oz,* who introduced the idea of a "good witch" into popular culture in the early 1900s (Sollee, 2017). This was a major landmark in changing the witch archetype in the American imagination.

The second wave began in the 1960s and is characterized by movements for liberation from male patriarchal economic, political, and medical control. Feminist scholars continued Stanton and Gage's critique of Christianity as a tool for domination (Woodhead, 2003; Zwissler, 2016), but feminists during this time focused their critique of patriarchy to include medical, economic, and political control of women's bodies and employment. For example, feminists rallied to have females employed in the male-dominated medical field, a lack of which suggests a holdover in cultural beliefs from the eradication of female healers during the witch craze (Ehrenreich and English, 2010). Moreover, feminists argued to make federally outlawed abortions legal, arguing that the government should not mandate what women can do with their bodies (Norsigian, 2019), which can also be argued to be a similar holdover of religious beliefs that female sexuality needs to be controlled by male powers. Also during the second wave, feminist anthropologists, philosophers, and witches alike supported the idea that women were universally devalued in many societies because their biological processes were associated with

nature, which was seen as something to dominate, as opposed to culture, which belonged to the realm of men. In this view, men, with their inability to create life, created "culture" instead of through their transcendence and domination of nature— which included women (Ortner, 1974; Starhawk, 1982).

It was during this wave that women began to seek a female-inclusive spirituality, or what became known as modern western witchcraft (Woodhead, 2003). Self-proclaimed feminist witches, such as Z Budapest and Starhawk, took up the mission. Some, like Z Budapest, asserted that witchcraft was only for women and men should be barred from participation. She took the stance that political and spiritual are one and the same (Adler, 1986). Thus, it was also during this time that a rift between witchcraft as spiritual path and witchcraft as a political ideology began to occur (Adler, 1986). Parallel, the infamous organization WITCH, which stands for Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell, sprang up during the second wave. The organized group took a political route rallying behind the historically controversial symbolism of the witch as a totem of rebellion and anti-authoritarianism exemplified by their hosting political demonstrations in which they wore all black and picketed corporate businesses (Griffin, 2005; Sollee, 2017). Members of the organization tended to focus less on the spiritual side of witchcraft and more on the historical and political significance of the figure of the witch (Sollee, 2017).

Concurrently, Wicca, an officially recognized religion, entered the American religious landscape during the second wave via Raymond and Rosemary Buckland. The couple traveled to the United Kingdom in the 1960s to learn the Wiccan rites from Gerald Gardner, a man who claimed to have been initiated into a witch cult whose rites had survived since ancient times (Clifton, 2006; Griffin, 2005; Luhrmann, 1989). Gardner was inspired by the work of feminist

archaeologist, Margaret Murray, who claimed that witchcraft was the "Old Religion" of persecuted peoples (the ancestors of executed witches), who learned from a pre-Indo-European "fairy" pygmy race how to sacrifice humans, cause illness with poisoned arrows, and conduct fertility rites with broomsticks. Her work is contested as many archaeologists now understand that the documents elicited of witches' confessions used to construct her case were extracted from accused and tortured women under extreme duress (Card, 2019). Regardless, many witches claim that the belief that witchcraft is an ancient religion practiced by their ancestors is important to the identity and gives them an opportunity to meaningfully reconstruct and connect to a sense of distinct cultural heritage they feel was lost during migration and subsequent acculturation to American life (Magliocco, 2004).

Wicca, now the largest and most well-known bounded sect of witchcraft in the United States, became synonymous with "witchcraft," though the 1950s and 1960s saw the growth of many pagan sects with similar themes. These various traditions were, and still are, similar in that they include following The Wheel of the Year, which is a festival calendar that marks ritual celebration days, known as *sabbats*, based on seasonal equinoxes and solstices. Smaller ritual ceremonies, known as *esbats*, are held on full moons. Such sects also place an emphasis on the Divine Feminine and goddess worship by acknowledging the "triple goddess"— the Maiden, Mother, and Crone— and the Divine Masculine as the Horned God (Clifton, 2006). These pagan movements, popular during the second wave, place more emphasis on witchcraft as a spiritual path rather than as a political movement, though feminist issues are relevant in the sense that many understand the original practitioners to have been suppressed by the spread of patriarchal Christianity. Today, the rift between witchcraft as a feminist identity or as a spiritual one is still

relevant, yet witches from many traditions are combining the two in new ways (Figueroa & Ruffin, 2008).

Finally, the third and fourth waves, beginning in the 1990s and continuing until today, critiqued previous feminist scholarship as being too narrow in scope, specifically concerning gender and race (Hewitt, 2012). Yet, the majority of data derived from studies of American witchcraft, whether as a political identity or as a feminist spirituality, comes from largely white samples, specifically from peoples practicing European-rooted, Neopagan traditions. These narrower academic studies tend to pigeonhole witches as white, middle-class, educated, suburbanite, females (Adler, 1986; Berger 2003; Magliocco 2004). This is not to say that studies have not had a diverse sample in terms of traditions practiced or individuals who practice them, but that much has changed in the time elapsed between then and now. For example, *brujeria* is rarely mentioned in discussions of North American witchcraft while many Latinx witches, such as groundbreaking *bruja,* Bri Luna, the "Hoodwitch," currently practice *brujeria* as an act of reclaiming their heritage (Garcia, 2007; Yang, 2018; Yu, 2018). However, it is possible that these traditions have been left out of such considerations as many who practiced them in the past may not have identified as witches and were wrongfully accused of witchcraft as it has been historically and anthropologically understood (Estes, 1998). In other words, "witch" was used as a way to "other" immigrant peoples in North America who maintained traditional practices.

Berger (2003) conducted the most ambitious census of pagans in the United States to date and, still, 90 percent of her sample was white. Beyond *brujeria,* individuals who self-identify as witches today draw from a multitude of ethnic, cultural and spiritual traditions, such as *Santeria* from Cuba and Africa (Beliso-de Jesus, 2015), hoodoo from the American Deep South (Hazzard-Donald, 2013), and *stregheria* from Italy (Magliocco, 2009) to name a few. While the extant

research on witches as members of pagan groups is important, the fact that the data comes from predominantly white samples is problematic when trying to understand witchcraft in its modern form. Further, many witches practicing these traditions, particularly African Traditional Religions (ATRs), do not identify as pagan (Rasbold, 2019). As an additional example, witches who practice African derived folk traditions such as hoodoo, conjure, or "rootwork" (popular traditions in New Orleans and the Deep South), rely heavily on the Christian Bible (Casas, 2017; Rasbold, 2019; Richards, 2019).

Those writing in the third and fourth waves seek to push feminism beyond a dichotomous understanding of biological sex and focus on issues of gender fluidity (Woodhead, 2003), queer, intersectional, and transgender theory (Long, 2019), as well as "ecofeminism," issues of sexual violence, questions of sexual autonomy, and considerations of race and globalization (Parry et. al., 2019). While women are no longer executed for the belief that they cannot control their sexuality, the link between sexuality and witchcraft is still pertinent in modern times. Sollee (2017) asserts that the word "witch" has been historically used similarly to the word "slut" in order to police those who do not conform to cultural norms of sexuality and purity. Likewise, Valenti (2008) stresses that the idea of "purity," i.e., virginity, as the source of a woman's worth has been promulgated not only by the Christian church, but by government funded, "abstinence-only" sexual education programs in public schools in which women are dissuaded from engaging in sexual activity until marriage (i.e., legally taking the last name of a male). It is also worth noting that for this understanding of purity, sex is defined as male to female penetration; thus the idea of purity is only attainable by straight, cisgender women (Valenti, 2008). Sollee (2017) posits that owning the historically vilified witch identity is an empowering way to reclaim and

assert one's sexual autonomy. Similar to this theory is what film theorist, Creed (1993), calls the "monstrous feminine."

Creed (1993) asserts that popular culture films often dehumanize women because of their reproductive functions, turning them into monsters and witches. However, in this view, the depiction of witches as lethal and fearsome is in direct contrast to the common depiction of women as submissive heroines who must be saved by a male lead role. Thus, the witch may be a depiction which dehumanizes women, but it also allows her to oppose patriarchal norms reified in film narratives. Long (2019) extends this to transgender theory by asserting that most discussions of intersex and transgender individuals arise from "treatises on monsters and the monstrous other" (Long, 2019: 123). Though not the topic of this thesis, more research is needed concerning witchcraft, queer spirituality, and the possible implications for identity as a significant percentage of witches are queer (Lepage, 2017; Lewis and Tollefsen, 2013). However, the image of the witch is one which has been relegated to "others" and associated with inciting fear and strong reactions.

Subsequently, witchcraft is often represented by religious scholars as "Deep Ecology," which maps onto witchcraft as an ecofeminist spirituality, or "Eco-Paganism" (De Gaia, 2019; Young, 2005). In the ecofeminist approach, the oppression of marginalized peoples and the destruction of the environment are caused by the same systems of power (Santamaria-Davila, 2019; Starhawk, 1989). During the 1970s, "Deep Ecology" was coined to refer to the "spiritual dimension of the modern environmental movement" (Young 2005: 262). Young (2005: 262) defines ecology as "the study of the interconnectedness of all living things in the environment."

Deep Ecologists believe in the right of all living things to be able to "be," regardless of their worth to human production and consumption. In this view, the majority religions of the

west, specifically Abrahamic faiths, are described as placing humans at the pinnacle of creation with divine dominion over the natural world. This view fundamentally sets them above and apart from nature, as opposed to existing as part of it. Some refer to this as "anthropocentrism," while others, such as witch and activist Starhawk, refer to it as "power over" rather than "power from within." Interestingly, Deep Ecologists maintain that seeing the earth as pictured from space during the 1940s gave many people a different perspective of earth, meaning that earth was seen without political boundaries and as an entire, cohesive "thing" where all life on it is connected. Biogeochemist James Lovelock bolstered the Deep Ecology movement with his scholarly position when he echoed this sentiment stating that the earth is itself a living thing with a spirit of its own, akin to a deity, which he named *Gaia* after the Greek name for Earth Goddess (Young, 2005). Deep Ecologists often view environmental activism as a form of "worship" (Fisher, 2011). Because Wicca and other pagan faiths emphasize nature and natural cycles in rituals, witchcraft, understood as a part of paganism, became akin to "nature worship." However, it is unclear if witches outside of Wicca and other pagan traditions emphasize nature in similar ways, such as following the Wheel of the Year and engaging in environmental activism.

While witchcraft may provide individuals a way to blend spiritual beliefs with environmental activism and possibly facilitates a deeper connection to the natural world, Burton (2018) suggests that interest in witchcraft is increasing because the magical and ritual practices involved function as a means of self-care used to combat the stresses of widespread sexual violence in society, which has been brought to light by the controversial Kavanaugh case, the #MeToo movement (Battaglia, Edley, and Newsome, 2019), as well as former President Trump's lurid comments about women (Darweesh and Abdullah, 2016). Yet, it is not clear if self-empowerment is an important factor in witches' decision to adopt the identity, and it is less clear

what ritual and magical actions are performed and how they result in embodied empowerment. Thus, in summary, considering the ambiguous categorization of witches as pagans and Neopagans, the evolving nature of feminist studies, and the focus on a select few sects, a holistic approach to the study of witchcraft is needed in order to better understand its growing appeal. In other words, though witches may differ in political beliefs and in what traditions they are influenced by and practice, are aspects of the identity shared despite race, ethnicity, and gender? Does adherence to such an identity that possibly emphasizes methods of self-empowerment have positive physical and mental outcomes that may help to explain motivations for adopting a stigmatized identity?

The Concepts of Magic and Witchcraft in Anthropology

The purpose of this section is to further complicate the current understanding of witchcraft, namely as paganism and Neopaganism and as politically oriented by tracing the anthropological concepts of witchcraft and magic among both Western and non-Western cultures. As mentioned, many witches in North America draw from numerous cultural traditions that span both space and time. While precise definitions of witchcraft and magic are difficult to come by due to cross-cultural variance, anthropologists find similarities among cultures across time and space that link women (or possibly feminine *energy*), witchcraft, and magic with discussions of health— including wellness, illness, and disease. I will first discuss the anthropological concept of magic in order to introduce the concept of witchcraft as the two concepts, generally speaking, exist alongside each other, yet magic is the foundational concept (Moro, 2018). By this, I mean that magic can be the antidote to witchcraft, or it may be the witches' tool. Sometimes, it is both, and sometimes the two terms are interchangeable. Other

times, the terms are separated entirely. Regardless, a witch must have a foundational knowledge of magic to perform witchcraft and so an explanation of magic best precedes that of witchcraft.

Magic in Anthropology:

Contemporary scholars who trace the concept of magic often begin with Edward Burnett Tylor, Sir James Frazer, Bronislaw Malinowski, and Emile Durkheim (Magliocco, 2004; Moro et. al., 2008; Moro, 2018, Stein & Stein, 2017). Tylor is frequently quoted as the father of anthropology, and as he sought to explain the existence and proliferation of magic in various cultural contexts, it can be said that the anthropological inquiry of magic is as old as the discipline itself (Magliocco, 2004; Moro, 2018). During the 19th and early 20th centuries, Tylor was a proponent for the concepts of unilineal cultural evolution and the "psychic unity of man." He theorized that humans share similar mental processes which result in a similar trajectory of evolution through a set of stages from "primitive" to "civilized." He intimated that this pattern applied to all aspects of culture, which he defined as:

> Culture, or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. The condition of culture among the various societies of mankind, in so far as it is capable of being investigated on general principles, is a subject apt for the study of laws of human thought and action. (Tylor, 1874: 7)

From this definition, it can be inferred that Tylor considers "culture" proper to be in the realm of Civilization as opposed to primitive societies. Tylor relegates beliefs in magic to "primitive societies," which practiced what he called "animism," or the belief that all objects, inanimate and animate, are imbued with a life force. In his view, magic is as a flawed and fallacious system of

laws of logic (thought) and misguided *action* used by primitive peoples to explain causality and stems from the need to explain the natural world, or a precursor to "science" (Moro, 2018).

For Tylor, as people learn more about the world, the irrational, magical, and animistic beliefs of primitive societies evolve into monotheistic religions and eventually into the rational, objective laws of science that prevail in Civilization (Bailey, 2006; Khajegir, 2015; Moro, 2018; Stein & Stein, 2017). Alongside this, it can be inferred that as societies evolve, the need for magic and religion become obsolete (Khajegir, 2015). Tylor maintained that if beliefs in magic are upheld by individuals in civilized societies, they are practiced among lower status peoples and can be understood as what he calls "survivals" (Magliocco, 2004). While Tylor's views set an ethnocentric tone that tinged subsequent studies of magic, Tylor's portrayal of magic as a matter of mental processes and as a set of logical principles inspired many theorists and continues to influence contemporary studies of magic (Tambiah, 1990).

Inspired by Tylor's view of magic as a set of rules used by peoples to explain causal relationships, Sir James Frazer further described magic as the "bastard sister of science" (Cunningham, 1999: 19), as well as a fallacious system for misguided behavior and action (Magliocco, 2004). Yet, Frazer delved deeper into the laws of magic and developed the idea of "sympathetic magic," which can be summarized by two main principles: magic as the Law of Similarity and magic as the Law of Contagion. The Law of Similarity, or homeopathic or imitative magic, posits that "the magician infers that he can produce any effect he desires merely by imitating it" (Frazer, 1993 [1890]: 11). For instance, he cited the use of yellow plants and substances to cure jaundice, or the yellowing of the skin caused by liver dysfunction, in India. The Law of Contagion states "that whatever he does to a material object will affect equally the person with whom the object was once in contact, whether it formed part of his body or not"

(Frazer, 1993 [1890]: 11). For example, in Melanesia, Frazer asserted that if a wounded man's friend should obtain the arrow which struck him, his friend may put it in cooling substances to heal the inflammation. Thus, while this theory of magic motivated further inquiry into the possible cognitive functions of magical practitioners, Frazer asserts that a magician never analyzes the mental processes he uses for magic (Frazer, 1993 [1890]: 11). Contrary to Frazer, contemporary inquiries into magic belie this assertion and contribute that magicians have a deep understanding of their own psychological processes, as well as those of others (Rountree, 2008). Further, it is worth noting that interest in magic is on the rise in the U.S., a society Tylor may consider the height of civilization.

Beyond Tylor and Frazer's intellectualist inquiries (Moro, 2018), both Durkheim and Malinowski describe the social functions of religion and magic. Like Frazer and Tylor, Durkheim and Malinowski describe magic as more or less distinct from religion. Durkheim explains religion as a set of shared beliefs to create community and structure, whereas magic is enacted on the individual level to achieve practical outcomes, such as curing an illness or producing rain for failing crops (Cunningham, 1999; Magliocco, 2004; Stein & Stein, 2017). Malinowski echoes this but adds that magic is a linguistic *performative* act that involves the ritual manipulation of objects, language, and the body to create practical change, psychologically and socially, and to achieve immediate, tangible results (Bailey, 2006). For Malinowski, both magic and religion, while separate entities, uphold the same purpose in that they are used by peoples to reduce the anxiety of the unknown when their technology fails them, or has reached its limits (Magliocco, 2004; Tambiah, 1990).

The narrative of magic becomes less ethnocentric with Leonard Glick's (1967) research among the Gimi of New Guinea. Glick was the first to link magic, power, and healing in his

work, “Medicine as an Ethnographic Category.” In this, Glick gave serious attention to the illnesses and diseases attributed to sorcery and witchcraft and explored the social aspects of causation. For instance, he introduces that “men of power” in Gimi society have the ability to extract disease through magical rites. Tambiah (1990) is also critical of the ethnocentric approach of early anthropologists’ description of magic as ill-informed science while building on Malinowski’s theories of magic as performative acts used to incite social change, which he calls “rhetorical art” (Cunningham, 1999). Tambiah introduces that inquiries of magic reveal power relations in society in the sense that accredited individuals, or those with authority, perform magical utterances, using language associated with power, to transfer some type of property to a person who does not currently possess such (Cunningham, 1999; Moro, 2018; Tambiah, 1990), health (Glick, 1967) or wealth for example. Definitions of power are numerous in the anthropological literature, but here I refer to social structures that grant authority to certain peoples who in turn can affect individuals’ agency (Ortner, 1984). In her discussion of magic, Lindquist (2009) uses the definition of agency as “the strive to accumulate being,” or to “have a hand in creating the world one lives in,” (pg. 6-7). Lindquist is careful to include that agency is affected by both the intention to act, as well as entities that constrain one’s ability to enact intention. Thus, she describes magic as a means to agentively “craft hope” in response to oppression, such as that exerted by both Communist and post-Communist Russian institutions.

Malinowski noted that the Trobriand Islanders performed magic rites not for everyday fishing endeavors, but for dangerous deep-sea fishing voyages. While Tambiah (1990) asserts that this could also be explained by the economic and social value attributed to the spoils of deep-sea fishing, namely shark, the implication remains that the greater the unknown and its anxieties, the greater the presence of magic. As Lindquist (2009) states, “Magic practices thrive

where power is brutal and overwhelming, where the rational channels of agency are insufficient or of limited value, and where the uncertainty of life calls for methods of existential reassurance and control that rational and technical means cannot offer" (pg. 2). With regard to present day North America, interest in witchcraft, intrinsic to anthropological discussions of magic, is steadily increasing in the United States (Fearnow, 2008; Mar, 2015; U.S. Census Bureau 2008). Thus, this quote begs deeper inquiry into the possible reasons why.

Witchcraft in Anthropology:

Like magic, witchcraft has an illustrious, and often ethnocentric, history in anthropology (Kapferer, 2002). Before Edward Evans-Pritchard's work on witchcraft among the Azande in the 1930s, the terms witchcraft and sorcery were often used interchangeably (Moro et. al., 2008). However, the majority of discussions concerning witchcraft after Evans-Pritchard build on his distinctions. Specifically, George P. Murdock (1978) extended Evans-Pritchard's findings and clearly distinguished between witchcraft and sorcery concerning magical disease causation. Generally speaking, scholars assert that witchcraft is an innate, psychic power existing within an individual that is either genetically inherited or gifted by a higher power and is either consciously or unconsciously used through mental acts to harm or afflict another person. Witches are individuals who have a special power and a propensity for evil (Murdock, 1978). On the other hand, sorcery is learned and is the conscious, aggressive use of baneful magic intended to harm another person, often using objects, spells, verbal prayers, curses, or certain formulas (Murdock, 1978; Moro et. al., 2008). A sorcerer may not have an innate psychic gift but may seek out the services of a skilled magician or shaman (Murdock, 1978). According to Murdock, sorcery is more often cited as a cause of disease.

Obviously, witchcraft, sorcery, and magic do not exist only in "primitive societies" with animistic beliefs as Tylor and Frazer asserted, but in societies spanning nearly every level of social, economic, and political complexity from hunter-gatherers in Africa (Brain, 1989) to post-industrial Neopagans in contemporary England and the U.S. (Adler, 1986; Luhrmann, 1989). Because descriptions are so greatly distributed, anthropologists tend to categorize discussions of witchcraft among small scale societies versus larger scale or industrialized societies (mainly early modern Europe and the "West") (Moro et. al., 2008; Stein & Stein, 2017). Yet, some contribute that universals exist linking cross-cultural beliefs in witchcraft across time and space.

Fiona Bowie (2006) describes two core concepts connecting beliefs in witchcraft. First, a belief in a life force that connects all things. Second, a belief in limited good, or the idea that there is only so much wealth and health to go around, implying that those who have too much of either may have obtained it at the expense of another, or possibly from accusing another as Brain contends (Moro, 2018). Bowie goes on to explain that while these universals exist, the criteria and language used, by both the general public and scholars alike, to explain and describe witchcraft are too disparate and must be understood as distinct. Bowie describes four divergent phenomena: "the idea of maleficence, or harmful supernatural action, developed in medieval and early modern Europe; those identified as adversaries by Christian church reformers; African witchcraft and sorcery as documented by Evans-Pritchard; and the present-day Wiccan or contemporary pagan movement" (2006, 201–2). These categories are useful for introducing that there are in fact important distinctions. However, in this particular case, I argue that the present state of North American witchcraft does not fit neatly into any of these categories. In other words, descriptions of witchcraft among African and "small-scale" societies often overlap with

practices of contemporary witches in North America who are not part of the "contemporary pagan movement" and derive their craft from ancestral, indigenous practices not related to the pre- or post-Christian description associated with "paganism."

Most descriptions of witchcraft in small-scale societies come from African cultures and tend to typify witches as beings with psychic supernatural powers, which they use for harm (Stein & Stein, 2017). While witchcraft is often used to explain illness and disease among various indigenous or small-scale societies, magic exists to right the wrongs of witchcraft (Evans-Pritchard, 1976), or as a system of healing. Here, magic is best understood as the use of rituals, objects, divination, or spells to discern or counteract mystical causation (Moro, 2018). Contemporary examples of magic as a remedy for malintent can be found in Tanzania (Murchison, 2017), Morocco (McPhee 2012), post-Soviet Russia (Lindquist, 2009), and Greece (Moro et. al. 2008). Means of magical diagnosis in Russia involve using an egg to "roll off" bad energy from an afflicted person. Once cracked open, patterns in the yolks are used to divine causes of issues. Spells and rituals involving Biblical passages and icons are prescribed as treatment (Lindquist, 2009). Some witchdoctors, or traditional healers, such as those in contemporary Tanzania (Murchinson, 2018), throw animal bones, use scriptures from holy books specific to a patient's religion, create herbal remedies, embody spirits via possession, negotiate with spirits, and use mirrors or screens to discern the cause of illness (Murchison, 2017).

While these practices may seem foreign and as exotic to many Westerners, many of these diagnostic tools, treatments, and practices can be found among individuals in the present day who identify as witches in the United States (Adler 1989; Casas 2017; Richards 2019; Starhawk, 1979). To this point, it may be that contemporary witchcraft in North America involves more of what is described as witchcraft in "small-scale societies" than what Bowie refers to as the

"contemporary pagan movement." For example, "rolling off" with eggs and spells using the Christian bible are common among the "granny witches" of Appalachian folk magic and Deep South hoodoo practitioners (Richards, 2019). Yet, in relative contrast to Tanzanians, Moroccans, and Russians, individuals in the U.S. who participate in or seek magical treatment, such as energy healing or divination, often feel that their beliefs are stigmatized by Western biomedical professionals, which often results in their not seeking help when needed. In fact, many feel that their beliefs in magic become labeled as symptoms of mental illness (Kirner, 2011). Westerners do not espouse supernatural or spiritual causation with the same level of normality, though alternative healing is growing in popularity in various Western cultures (Barcan, 2011) alongside growing interest in witchcraft. Yet, it is unclear how relevant these practices are to contemporary witches in general considering the diversity of practitioners and the narrower focus on witchcraft as Neopaganism.

Further, notions of witchcraft have been used cross-culturally throughout time and space to provide a framework for moral and appropriate behavior. Individuals' failure to adhere to this framework results in, and rationalizes, misfortune, illness, and disease (Moro et. al., 2008). In this regard, the common anthropological understanding of witches is that they represent the reversal of societal norms, or the antithesis of good behavior. For example, witches are described as being associated with nighttime or darkness, evil, supernatural forces, the ability to morph into non-human forms (not natural) and with harm, sexuality, greed, and a quest for power. In other words, witches represent the deepest, culturally influenced fears of society (Brain, 1989; Moro et. al. 2008; Moro 2018; Murchison, 2017; Stein & Stein, 2017). As such, does the increased appearance of witches in western culture map onto an increase in collective fears?

Among smaller scale societies, this reversal of norms can manifest more or less in both men and women, as both can be witches (Evans-Pritchard, 1976; Stein & Stein, 2017). Yet, in early modern Europe, the reversal of societal norms and the antithesis of accepted morality associated with witches manifested *primarily* in women as they were the majority gender among those executed during the trials (Brain, 1989; Moro et. al., 2008). The European notion of witchcraft evolved during a time of immense social, political, economic, and religious upheaval as the Catholic Church, an entity which wielded politicoreligious authority, rose to supremacy. Thus, the image of the witch was the reversal of what the Catholic Church deemed beneficent. As the Church supported both a patriarchal religious divinity and political authority, the woman became the enemy of both the Church and state and was associated with the Devil (Brain, 1989; Darst, 1979). (Though, I think one can easily see the overlap between Catholicism and witchcraft, i.e., exorcisms, the Eucharist, etc.) In places like New Orleans, many European settlers brought their Catholic beliefs and the European notion of witches with them, though these beliefs melded with the "small scale" description of witchcraft observed by anthropologists in Africa and beyond via the trans-Atlantic slave trade and globalization.

Like in many small-scale societies, Darst (1979) portends that witchcraft was believed to be *inherited* from the devil by mothers who then pass it on to the female offspring. Lamphere (1974) asserts that this is attributed to patrilineal descent common in Europe at the time, meaning that "good" qualities were products of the male line. As a counter example, Lamphere cites the positive image of women in Navajo society, a matrilocal and matrilineal people (Brain 1989). Rosaldo (1974) adds that those who are denied authority use what power they do have to subvert authority. Thus, paradoxically, women in early modern Europe had an incredible amount of influence and represented the fears of, and threats to, a patriarchal society. Women who wielded

this influence in particular ways, such as withholding nurture, sex, and food, became accused witches and were executed (Brain, 1989). As healing had also been women's work, this fed into the movement by men to actively gain control over medicine and healing, as it was understood that healing came from God, which was within the realm of men and rationality, rather than the empirical endeavors of witches' magical healing (Ehrenreich and English, 2010).

To tie all of this together, one can begin to see how the historical and cross-cultural, anthropological understandings of the witch may reveal possible reasons why one may choose to identify as a witch in the present. For instance, the witch is portrayed as a powerful individual who can withhold social and economic capital and incite fear, but also has the knowledge and ability to heal. This ability to harm or heal may be understood as being inherited from the maternal line which may bolster feelings of feminism and ancestral bonds. Further, it may be that interest in witchcraft is increasing as people look for alternative disease etiologies beyond biomedical explanations or for ways to practice what their ancestors did. Finally, one can see that contemporary practices deemed as witchcraft in the U.S. blend together many cross-cultural elements across space and time with deep ties to health and feminism. If the identifier "witch" packages all of these ideas into one, it is reasonable that the term is one associated with personal empowerment. However, considering the numerous different ways one can use the term, are there certain elements and practices that are specifically blended together that are important for adopting the particular identifier of "witch?" Further, how might these shared elements relate to empowerment?

Linking Religion, Magic, Witchcraft, Feminism, and Health in North America

While various witches in today's cultural moment claim that witchcraft is a path to self-empowerment (Cyr, 2019; Grossman, 2019; Sollee, 2017), it is unclear how empowerment itself is defined and achieved. Many contribute that it is through the use of magic and ritual for self-care and self-actualization (Burton, 2018; Cyr, 2019). According to more recent accounts of Neopaganism and paganism, magic is not understood as something outside of the laws of physics. Magic is an intense concentration of the will to bring about desired outcomes in one's life, often focusing on drawing energy from a deity or "supernatural" entity (Adler 1986, Cyr 2019, Luhrmann 1989, Magliocco 2004, Starhawk 1979). While not all witches consider themselves religious, or as Neopagans, the practice of magic as witches define it here is consistent with Dengah's (2017) definition of religion as "a set of shared beliefs and behaviors for interacting with divine forces and orienting one's self to following the teachings or dictates of a particular worldview" (pg. 105).

In his work among Brazilian Pentecostals, Dengah showed that adherence to a cultural model of religiosity is significantly related to lowered rates of depression. Dengah suggested that these findings apply especially to those who feel they are marginalized in society; a category of which witches belong to (Tejeda, 2015). To this point, stigmatized individuals often experience social isolation, which is a known risk factor for poor health outcomes (Cassel, 1976; Dressler and Oths, 1997). Green and Elliott (2009) contribute that psychological benefits from religious dedication are achieved independent of specific affiliation. These findings suggest that witchcraft does not have to be understood as an official religious denomination, such as Pentecostalism or Wicca, for individuals to experience increased well-being. Put differently, if a shared model of witchcraft includes practicing magic in a way similar to Dengah's definition of religion, it is

plausible that greater dedication to the model could incite health benefits. For instance, if magic includes following a generally accepted guideline for interacting with the divine, praying or meditating, and being part of a community with shared beliefs. This is important as overall religious dedication is decreasing in America (Jones & Cox, 2017), yet paganism and witchcraft are increasing (Fearnow, 2018; U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

Magic can be practiced individually, in which a person independently writes and recites spells focusing on achieving a specific result, or magic can be done in groups in which the aggregate "raises energy" through ritual action, such as chanting, dancing, or other synchronized behavior. Magic can also involve going into a trance state to connect to one's own inner spirit, one's self as a child, or an external source of energy, often training the imagination to visualize and connect with a particular deity or energy (Magliocco, 2004; Luhrmann, 1989; Starhawk, 1979, 1997). Magliocco (2004) describes magic as a set of principles that organizes the universe or an underlying pattern that connects all life. She also describes it as the use of the imagination and "internal imaging" as a "traditional way of knowing." She explains it as a means for the logic of the imagination to be expressed through ritual and as a "vehicle for achieving personal wholeness" (pg. 97).

This description of magic is similar to less stigmatized religious practices, such as prayer and meditation, which are both linked to increased psychological and physiological well-being. Khalsa et. al. (2015) state that Kirtan Kriya, a form of meditation involving chanting, "has been shown to improve sleep, decrease depression, reduce anxiety, down regulate inflammatory genes, upregulate immune system genes, improve insulin and glucose regulatory genes, and increase telomerase by 43%" (pg. 1). Starhawk (1997) discusses the importance of communal chanting in magical practice and witchcraft rituals used to raise energy. Further, magic defined as

focused intention, especially the use of spells as mantras, mirrors definitions of transcendental meditation (TM), or mantra-based meditation. TM has been shown to improve cognition, reduce cardiovascular risk, body mass index, blood pressure, and diabetes (Balaji, Varne, & Ali, 2012). Hussain and Bhushain (2010) support these findings while also contributing that meditation provides relief from anxiety and psychosomatic disorders, neurosis, stress, pain, and even corporate (or academic) burnout.

Ochs and Capps (2001) define prayer as a dyadic or multiparty interaction between the divine and one or more individuals. Luhrmann (2013) determined that those with intense prayer practices alter their cognitive processing and report an increased ability to focus attention on tasks outside of prayer. Corwin (2012) found in her research on language use and embodiment that retired Catholic nuns who changed their prayer narratives to envision and speak to God as an entity within themselves, as a mother figure, and as an intimate companion reported less loneliness, increased subjective mental well-being, and decreased symptoms of pain. Many witches report that perceiving god as an entity residing within, or as an energy (often female) to work alongside with, rather than beneath or for, is often reported as a draw to practicing witchcraft (Magliocco, 2004; Starhawk, 1997).

In her work on ecofeminist spirituality, which includes witchcraft, Santamaria Davila (2019) suggests that the opportunity to not only envision, understand, and speak to the divine as a caring, female, deity, but the possibility to embody this energy in ritual performance has positive psychotherapeutic applications, especially for women (Santamaria Devila et. al., 2019). However, it is important to note that studies of New Religious Movements (NRM) have paid unequal attention to feminine spiritualities, place greater importance on feminine energy, and are often conducted from the understanding of gender as biologically dichotomous. In general,

research among pagans reveals that they understand gender as fluid, as energy, and not as biologically determined, though it seems this notion is not as common among Wiccans (Lepage, 2017). In addition, pagans generally hold ideas of sexuality as fluid (Lepage, 2017), and a considerable portion of the pagan community also identify as LGBTQ (Lewis and Tollefsen, 2013). Though not the direct topic of this thesis, less is known about the possibility of psychological benefits for queer, male, and gender fluid pagans and witches. Also, it is worth noting here again that not all witches identify as pagan. Thus, less is known about how *witches* feel about issues of gender and sexuality, or what practices employed by witches are considered "magic." To return to the possibility of empowerment, it could be that this is achieved through practices of magic, but it could be also that identifying as a witch results in a community of like-minded individuals and a sense of social support for peoples who feel outcast in some way.

In *Living Witchcraft*, an ethnography of a Wiccan coven, the central tenets of modern witchcraft are the practices of reading the tarot, moon circles, chants, spells, and amulets (Scarboro, Campbell, and Stave 1994). Another definition of a witch is "a person who uses one set of tools— gods, rituals, and objects— to do the same things other Pagans do" (Adler, 1986: 117). Again, "[Witchcraft] is something you practice, thus gaining skills and strength -spiritual and personal empowerment. It is an artistic expression of being human" (Cyr, 2019: 2). Of the 8,000 pagans who reported to Berger's 2009 survey, only 20.6 percent said they practice magic rarely or never (Lewis and Tollefsen, 2013). These studies suggest that being a witch involves the practice of magic.

Yet, some claim that one can be a witch by aligning with the powerful archetype of the witch alone, or that the identity can be used a means to assert that one maintains a certain set of spiritual beliefs, without being a practicing pagan (Grossman, 2019). It has become increasingly

trendy in America to identify as a witch and some fear that the history and meaning behind practices are being lost (Garrett, 2019). Historically, interest in witchcraft has mapped onto increased interest in feminist ideals (Woodhead, 2003). Thus, when many say they are a witch, they may mean that they align with feminist social and political ideologies meaning that the identity may not be indicative of performing spiritual practices of witchcraft but as a way to index certain social values to others. These various ways of being a witch that do not necessarily include magic suggest that while many witches may claim self-empowerment as a reason for identifying with the term, it is unclear how empowerment becomes embodied without practice. What is known is that both females (assumed here to be cisgender) and LGBTQ individuals comprise a large percentage of the pagan community, with possibly more males identifying as queer (Lewis and Tollefsen, 2013). Both females and LGBTQ individuals are twice as likely to be diagnosed with depression (APA, 2017; NAMI, 2019; Nolen-Hoeksema, 2001). It is also established that those who publicly identify as pagans (including witches) experience greater stigma at work and in their social lives resulting in lower job satisfaction and higher subjective anxiety, which leads many witches to "stay in the broom closet," or conceal their identities (Reece, 2016; Tejeda, 2017). Yet, interest in witchcraft is growing despite these findings and so, in summary, I intend to 1) determine why individuals are drawn to witchcraft, 2) establish if self-empowerment and practicing witchcraft and magic is important to witches in New Orleans, 3) better understand what practicing magic looks like in order to 4) determine if witchcraft, despite the diversity of traditions practiced, functions in a way similar to religion as this has been shown to improve health, specifically psychological well-being (Dengah, 2017; Green and Elliot, 2009) and may be explored in future studies.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Cultural Models, Identity, and Prototypical Narratives

To explore what is important among contemporary witches who adopt the term, I draw from developed theories of identity (Bucholtz and Hall, 2010) and cultural models (Dressler, 2018; Holland and Quinn, 1987), specifically how cognitive models are revealed in prototypical narratives (Seligman, 2005). The concept of cultural models developed out of cognitive anthropology as a means to fulfill the primary aim of anthropology- to understand the world as others perceive it (Blount, 2011). In this approach, culture is defined as the shared knowledge or beliefs an individual must possess in order to function within a given society (Blount, 2011; Dressler, 2018; Goodenough, 1957). From this definition, it can be inferred that culture is the shared knowledge that motivates behavior (D'Andrade and Strauss, 1992). This knowledge exists within cultural domains. A cultural domain is formally defined as an organized sphere of discourse within society (Weller & Romney, 1988). Basically, a domain is a subject of culture that people frequently talk about, such as national identity or lifestyle, and is made up of smaller units of knowledge, or cultural models (Dressler, 2018), which come to have directive force (D'Andrade and Strauss, 1992; Holland 1992). In other words, the shared knowledge one possesses determines how one acts in certain social and cultural situations and this knowledge is cognitively organized as cultural models.

A cultural model is constructed from the terms a group uses to talk about a domain.

It is a stripped-down representation of the knowledge encoded within a particular domain of culture as well as the causal, functional relationships between the semantic elements used to describe it. For a model to be shared, the knowledge it includes must be variably agreed upon by both individuals and society (Dressler, 2018). Models are not a reflection of idiosyncratic understandings of a domain, but rather they represent the collective interpretations of both individuals and the broader society to which they belong. A model is a collection of schemas, or mental representations that allow for inferences to be made with minimal cues and are small enough to be held in working memory (D'Andrade, 1992). While models are more complex than schemas and are too large to be held in memory, they are *shared*. Thus, they can still be incited in the mind by minimal clues. Put differently, a model is a blueprint that informs behavior. The model itself cannot be seen, but what can be observed is how individuals employ them to navigate life (Dressler, 2018).

While models are largely shared, they are variably internalized, which helps to explain individual and intracultural variation within an overall shared context. Internalization requires that an individual learn, understand, believe, and see themselves as actors within a cultural model. Those who find the model to be most true, or salient, are most motivated to moderate behavior according to the elements encoded in it (Holland, 1992). Thus, it is not only the degree of particular knowledge individuals may have, but the extent to which individuals internalize a model of knowledge that dictates behavior (Cain, 1991; Holland, 1992). In other words, within an overall shared model, individuals vary in both what they know and find to be important for personal and cultural reasons and this determines their behavior.

Through this process of learning and internalizing, individuals develop thoughts, feelings, and opinions. Put differently, individuals construct and negotiate their identities. Here, identity is

understood as "the way an individual understands and perceives herself, as well as the way she is viewed by her social group" (Seligman, 2005: 276). Thus, like culture, identity is understood as a process and emerges through internalization of culture and cultural models, as well as through the interactions between an individual and members of the broader society.

In her work on adopting the stigmatized identity of an alcoholic, Cain (1991) asserts that alcoholics are labeled as an alcoholic when their behavior becomes problematic to others, but they only accept the identity when it becomes relevant to themselves. In other words, there is an interaction between a person and his or her society that incites a change of identity, or sense of self. They must understand the model of alcoholism, internalize the various elements (such as hitting "rock bottom"), see themselves as an actor within it, and experience a diffusion of their current identity in order to renegotiate and adopt the identity of a non-drinking alcoholic. Cain (1991) argues that this is accomplished through interacting with other self-identified alcoholics and internalizing and employing a "prototypical narrative" structure implicit in the Alcoholics Anonymous Twelve Step framework. In cognitive anthropology, a prototype is the focal representation of a cultural model (Blount, 2011; Dressler, 2018), or the closest example of some specific combination of elements within a model that represents a central theme.

The narrative process, both the act of listening and telling, is not only therapeutic in and of itself, but also allows a person to cognitively reorganize and reframe his or her life experiences in a different way. In this process, individuals distance their new sense of self from their old and adopt a new pattern of behavior inspired by what is encoded in the new model of identity, depending on the level of internalization of course. I use the example of the alcoholic identity because, like the witch identity, it is generally stigmatized by the public (Cain, 1991; Reece, 2016; Tejeda, 2015). In addition, there is not an agreed upon, clear definition of an

alcoholic (Cain, 1991), as is the case with the ever-changing definition of the witch (Purkiss, 1996). Further, Cain's work focuses on the importance and therapeutic implications of personal narratives and interaction in renegotiating and adopting a stigmatized identity, which I argue could be relevant to explaining the increase of witchcraft understood as a path to improving well-being.

Like Cain, Seligman's (2005) work on Brazilian *Candomblé* mediums (an Afro-Caribbean religion from which many modern witches claim an ancestral link to) synthesizes the cultural model approach with personal narratives to explore individual internalization. More precisely, Seligman explored the existence of a cultural model through eliciting personal narratives, which she then found shared a prototypical structure, both in content and order of events. While there is no direct measure for internalization and it is beyond the scope of my project to investigate behavior, Seligman (2005) suggests that narrative analysis can be a means of understanding internalization as those who understand and absorb the model to a greater extent often share a prototypical narrative structure when relaying how and why they came to adopt a new identity. This negotiation process is true whether the identity is stigmatized, like many North American witches and alcoholics (Cain, 1991), or socially sanctioned in local contexts, such as Candomblé mediums in Brazil (Seligman, 2005).

Tactics of Intersubjectivity

Cultural models and prototypical narratives are useful for understanding what may be shared and involved in the process of identifying as a witch, as well as insight into internalization, but I also draw from the concept of tactics of intersubjectivity developed by Bucholtz and Hall (2010) as it applies to understanding identity. Bucholtz and Hall (2004)

describe identity as a result of interaction between individuals and the larger social group, rather than as merely belonging to individuals alone. In their view, identities are constantly shifting to meet new circumstances, such as changing political climates per se. They contribute that studies of identity contain two main orientations, that of sameness and difference. In other words, identity results simultaneously from perceived similarities among a group of people, which bring them closer together, while perceived differences between individuals and groups distance them from those that they understand to not share similar ideals.

Linguistic studies reveal how identities are negotiated through examinations of performance, indexicality, ideology, and practice in interaction. It is not enough to conclude *how* identity is achieved, but *why* individuals come think of themselves in a certain way. The framework of tactics of intersubjectivity reveals the underlying social relationships involved in negotiating identity, which reveal who or what individuals are trying to distance themselves from or closer to. Examining *how* individuals talk about such relationships helps to ascertain *why* identities arise and how they are adopted to situate oneself within intracultural diversity (Bucholtz and Hall, 2004).

The term "tactics" is used to describe actions that people use to achieve their social goals despite structures of power that limit action, such as *performing* being a witch through ritual manipulation of language. Intersubjectivity is used to refer to how this agency and the negotiation of identity are interactive processes between individuals rather than just of individuals. Bucholtz and Hall (2004) discuss three pairs of tactics of intersubjectivity. I draw from the first pair— adequation and distinction— which refers to the sameness and difference already discussed. Witches often see themselves as existing outside of cultural norms (Adler, 1989), meaning that the identity possibly results from drawing on perceived similarities that

witches believe bring them together, such as potentially shared beliefs in magic. Concurrently, witches may also draw on the differences they assume outsiders uphold that set witches apart, such as the values of "marked" groups discussed by Bucholtz and Hall (2004). I aim to understand what relationships to beliefs, objects, events, and people witches situate themselves closer to as well as who and what they mention that sets them apart, as well as how this is accomplished via language.

In summary, the concept of cultural models is useful for answering a question that concerns motivation in the sense that models reveal how knowledge, which informs behavior, is broken down into smaller bits of knowledge that are variably shared and internalized. Prototypical narratives can reveal how models are cognitively used to reframe one's past and can give insight into how identity is navigated through interaction, as well as the degree to which a model is internalized, which has implications for how motivating a model may be. The concept of tactics of intersubjectivity sheds further light on identity by providing a framework for examining what and how individuals situate their perceptions of self closer to and farther away from in discourse.

CHAPTER 4

POPULATION AND SETTING

When developing this project, I first contacted individuals who identify as witches in my home state of Alabama. I found that many individuals reported experiencing a level of stigmatization that led them to conceal their identities from their coworkers and families alike. Members of one group I visited reported being recently threatened by neighbors at their home for performing rituals nearby. I sat around their coffee table that night while they passed around a blood pressure cuff and listened as they discussed their increased reports. Further, beyond the challenge of befriending a hidden population, I did not find quite as diverse of a group of witches in Alabama that I felt would represent a cross-section of North American witches as a whole. I could have possibly gained further insight into the effects of stigmatization, but my research question is focused more on exploring what motivates individuals to adopt a stigmatized identity despite the documented effects of stigma. Thus, to more effectively answer this question, I turned my attention towards New Orleans, Louisiana where I felt there might be greater access to witches who could speak more openly due to the city's illustrious history of and reputation for all things "supernatural."

Many displaced peoples from Africa and the Caribbean were brought to the port city of New Orleans, Louisiana, by colonizers via the trans-Atlantic slave trade and forced to survive in new, unknown, swamp-bogged lands. They brought their religions, beliefs, and traditional medical knowledge with them, but they were forced to conceal such practices behind existing

traditions. For example, slaves recognized similarities between the *Orishas,* or the deities of various African religions, and Catholic saints and so hid their own divinities behind those of colonizers. This amalgamation of influences developed into New Orleans Voodoo, which is often confused with Haitian *Vodou*. Further, these ways of being melded with French, Spanish, Italian, and Native American cultural practices forming new folk traditions, such as "hoodoo," "conjure," and "rootwork." These practices have long been established across the Deep South, but they can now be increasingly found across the U.S. and the globe.

In addition to folk traditions, New Orleans is home to a host of initiatory religious traditions including European-rooted and Egyptian influenced Gardnerian and Alexandrian Wicca, but also to "closed" African Traditional Religions (ATRs) such as Haitian *Vodou,* Afro-Brazilian *Candomblé,* Afro-Cuban *Santeria*, *Shango* from Trinidad, and West African *Ifa*. Haitian Vodou has often been misconstrued in popular culture throughout time as New Orleans Voodoo and both continue to be depicted as "primitive" religions conjuring up nefarious "voodoo dolls" and curses (Ward, 2006). The main difference is that Haitian Vodou is a distinct, bounded, initiatory religion with rules and an authoritative hierarchy that focuses on ancestor veneration while New Orleans Voodoo is an amalgamation of various ATR's, Catholicism, and other influences that, according to my informants, focuses more on cursing and hexing.

It is impossible to discuss these traditions without emphasizing the importance and resilience of slaves. Slavery in New Orleans was indeed deplorable, but it often looked different than slavery in the rest of the country in key ways. These differences contributed to the present tolerance and diversity of witchcraft practices. As Ward (2006) says, "Slaves were not always black, and blacks were not always slaves." African and American Indian peoples outnumbered the French and Spanish colonizers and for fear of uprisings, the colonial powers put in place

liberal policies allowing dances and public rituals. In addition, free women of color outnumbered both white women and slave women (Ward, 2006). They were leaders in both the community and the Catholic church because of their economic prowess, spiritual knowledge, and effective home healthcare practices (Estes, 1998; Ward, 2006). Women who held such prestigious positions within the Voodoo realms became known as "queens" and "doctors," such as the infamous Marie Laveau. Regardless of whether she was loved as a healer or feared as a sorceress, documents from her time period give her mythical status as the most powerful woman in the city. She is often quoted as being even more powerful than the white, male political leaders of her time (Fandrich, 1996).

Today, Laveau's gravesite is a popular tourist attraction visited by thousands of loyal followers who seek her blessing. In fact, local legend decrees that Laveau will grant a wish to anyone who marks her grave with an "X" and spins around three times. As such, the city of New Orleans remains in a constant struggle to protect the integrity of her resting place (Boyd, 2018), but it also remains a place open to and accepting of the spiritual, mystical, and the occult. Evidence for this can be found in the exhaustive list of metaphysical occult shops dispersed throughout the city, especially concentrated in the "French Quarter." Further, the city is home to 130 colorful, inclusive, diverse festivals including Mardi Gras, the Greater New Orleans Pagan Pride Festival, Voodoo Fest music and arts festival, and HexFest for the more witchy inclined. It is also worth noting that as New Orleans has a reputation for celebrating what some may consider abnormal, it is a city that boasts a thriving queer community to which many witches belong.

In conclusion, the seemingly exotic practices of peoples who settled in New Orleans helped to give it legendary status in the American imagination, even if grossly misunderstood at

times. Because of this, New Orleans continues to be a place associated with magic, the occult, and the supernatural. Even during a pandemic, I witnessed nightly ghost tours and walked past countless stores marketing “voodoo dolls,” crystals, and divination services. This reputation results in a booming tourist industry but also in decreased stigmatization of occult practitioners that allows for individuals to be gainfully employed as working witches. This dynamic also breeds considerable competition and as a result, it is essential for working witches to be knowledgeable of their trade to maintain a competitive edge. As such, I not only had access to witches who could speak openly but also to what some may consider as “key informants.”

CHAPTER 5

METHODS

Sampling Procedures

To locate informants, I used a combination of convenience and snowball sampling. The only inclusion criteria I required was that participants identify specifically as a witch. To finesse my way into the community, I relied on interpersonal skills that I have developed over numerous years of bartending, waitressing, and traveling. I also relied on social media platforms. However, it is also worth noting the role of dumb luck that aided my endeavors concerning a preliminary trip I took to New Orleans to assess the feasibility of carrying out this project.

In December of 2019, I visited New Orleans to try and establish contacts in the community. Upon first arriving, I asked a local to point me to her favorite restaurant in which I sat down and pulled out a book *Culture and the Individual* by William Dressler. My server inquired about the book and, as chance would have it, he had been an anthropology student himself. What's more, he had connections to both the author, Dr. Dressler, and his wife, Dr. Kathy Oths, who also happens to be on my thesis committee. Furthermore, he had connections to witches in the community. I told him about my research, and he returned with a list of individuals for me to contact. My project was off to an auspicious start. The list included employees at the popular occult supply store, Hex, on Decatur Street in the French Quarter, and so I had a place to start my search. New Orleans is built around the crescent-shaped curve of the Mississippi River giving it the moniker of "The Crescent City." Hugging this very curve is the

French Quarter, the heart of the city. Here, I located Hex, dropped off my information, and secured an interview with an Alexandrian witch from my new friend's list. Afterwards, I meandered through the cobbled, tourist-laden streets of the Quarter underneath balconies strewn with all sorts of eccentricities from beads to costumed skeletons and I searched for shops that catered to witchy interests. In one such shop, I purchased some Palo Santo and began explaining my research to two young attendants who read tarot but did not identify as witches themselves. As I was writing down my information for them to pass along, a fellow shopper approached me and asked, "Did you say you're looking for witches? I am a Muslim witch." She gave me her contact information and I told her I would be in touch, thus securing a second interview. Bolstered by these occurrences, I decided it would be fruitful to conduct my research in New Orleans over the summer.

However, in the early months of 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic made its way to North America. This meant that the in-person interviews I could conduct would be limited, but not impossible, and it also meant that the shops where I may find informants would be compromised. Yet, in the age of social media and with the help of Zoom, I felt I could work around these unique challenges. However, I also felt it was important to contextualize my research and my informants' lived experiences by being in the city.

After receiving approval from the Internal Review Board at the University of Alabama to conduct research safely and responsibly, I contacted a New Orleans-based witch on Instagram to ascertain if the route of socially distanced interviews would be a possibility. I chose this particular witch after following her Instagram live series titled "Ask a Witch," during which she invites other witches, usually those from New Orleans, to answer viewer questions about various witchy topics such as necromancy, tarot, spell casting, and constructing altars. She agreed to a

socially distanced interview and to help me locate more informants. After this, I decided it was worth relocating to see what might shake out.

From mid-June to mid-July, I took up residence just outside of New Orleans in Jefferson Parish with an older woman whom I had met at a spiritual "Crone's" retreat in Valley Head, Alabama. She did not subscribe to an internet package (and limited air conditioning), so I split my time between a local café and a nearby kava bar to conduct virtual interviews. I posted notecards in these locations with my name, email, phone number, and information about my research to attract participants.

Interviewing Process

First, I informed each participant that I expected the interview to take about an hour to an hour and a half and relayed that they would receive a handwritten thank you card and a tea selection from the local Tea Witch Café on Magazine Street. After they agreed, I set an interview date with them either over email or text. I created a separate email account to organize appointments as an added layer of confidentiality. Before the interview, either over email or in person, I presented each informant with an outline of my project and provided access to a consent form. I then received verbal consent to conduct the interview as well as permission to record it. I asked each informant whether they would like to use an alternative name, to which most declined. However, where names are used in this thesis, they have been changed in the event that they change their minds in the future.

I first interviewed the witch whom I had met in December at the jewelry store over Zoom. Next, I interviewed the witch from Instagram at one of the establishments where she reads tarot for clients and tourists, Bloody Mary's, in downtown New Orleans. Following the

U.S. Center for Disease Control guidelines, we sat about six to ten feet from each other in an iconic New Orleans courtyard in the sweltering heat. A third chair hosted my phone as a recording device. The format of these initial interviews mirrored those that came after them.

I then used snowball sampling by asking these two informants to connect me to others they knew who would be willing to be interviewed by passing along my information. I also used convenience sampling by visiting occult stores and *botanicas*, or shops that cater more to *brujxs*, where I spoke with shop owners and sometimes with peoples visiting the shops who showed interest in my project. Using these sampling methods, I conducted semi-structured interviews with a total of 16 participants and presented the same set of questions to each individual (Appendix B), albeit in varying order dictated by the flow of the interview.

One interview was conducted over email at the informant's request. In this instance, I attached a Word document with all of the questions presented during the more traditional interviews in the same order. I also included instructions and information about the types of questions, such as what I was looking for with the free-listing questions. Additional data was collected, with permission, during a recorded group conversation with two co-owners and one employee of the authentic hoodoo shop, Crescent City Conjure (while one owner hand crafted a magic poppet, or voodoo doll). All parties involved were masked. I did not obtain demographic information from these former three informants, so they have not been included in my official sample (n=17). However, I did use the qualitative data obtained to further contextualize the interviews included in my official sample and I have noted when this has been done.

Each interview consisted of two main parts. In the first part, I included more ethnographic questions aimed at understanding individual, personal, idiosyncratic experiences. I also obtained demographic data including variables such as age, gender identification, political

affiliation, sexual orientation, and income. Questions concerned whether or not they feel interest in witchcraft has been increasing in recent years, when they became interested in witchcraft, what brought them to the path, how they define witchcraft, and what it means to them to be a witch. I also included questions concerning their religious backgrounds and why they chose the term "witch" as opposed to, or in addition to, other terms.

In the second part of the interview, I included 9 open-ended freelisting questions (Appendix B) in order to target the more collective understanding of witches in general rather than personal experience (Borgatti, 1999). Before voicing my questions, I asked each informant to think broadly about witches in general rather than their personal experience. I then asked them to list as many terms as came to their minds for each question. These questions concerned shared social values, personality traits, actions, reasons for identifying as a witch, qualities of the "ideal" witch, and how witches perceive that they are understood by peoples who do not identify as witches. I combined these methods in order to investigate both the implicit and explicit aspects of being a witch. Put differently, I combined these methods to capture how witches perceive the group that they are a part of as well as what implicit aspects of this shared identity are most important, or motivating, to them personally that may not be included in the explicit description of being a witch.

I maintained a notebook for field notes and kept it in a locked backpack. I uploaded recorded interviews to the double-encrypted Box platform hosted by the University of Alabama. I also kept a diary of my impressions after each interview.

CHAPTER 6

PROCESSES OF DATA ANALYSIS

Transcription and Descriptive Statistics

After leaving the field site, I fully transcribed the first part of the 16 recorded interviews using NVivo software and entered all demographic data into the SPSS software package. First, I ran descriptive statistics on my sample to determine median age, the proportion of individuals who also identified as pagan or Neopagan, gender distribution, average income, and descriptions of race, ethnicity, and political affiliation. I chose median age as opposed to average because there was an outlier. I then turned my attention to analyzing the freelisting data in order to determine salient themes which I could then use to code my transcribed interview data.

Salience, or the degree to which ideas are shared, is generally determined by pinpointing terms that are listed by at least ten percent of the sample (Romney, Weller, and Batchelder, 1986). Thus, I retained terms listed by 3 or more. In cultural consensus analysis, salient terms are often used for tasks such as pile-sorting and ranking with a separate sample to explore the structure of cultural models via multidimensional scaling and statistical measures such as correlation coefficients, similarity matrices, and competence scores (Dressler, 2018). However, I explored the structure of the model via collaborative sorting and coding with the help of two undergraduate research assistants from the Human Behavioral Ecology Research Group at the University of Alabama. I chose to do this for several reasons including time constraints and lack of informants, but more so because my target population described being particularly

emotionally drained due to both the pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement, which were both occurring at the time. Further, this process provided interrater reliability as a means to check my potential biases.

Collaborative Pile Sorting and Coding

To do collaborative pile sorts, I first compiled all terms and phrases listed by all informants. I then used my best judgment to consolidate those that were similar in meaning. For example, phrases like "several self-generated sources of income," "can always provide for themselves," and "always have what they need" were consolidated into "self-reliant." After doing this, I wrote down each term or phrase on an index card. I then organized a meeting with my two research assistants. I shuffled the deck containing all salient terms, split it into thirds, and then distributed the deck among all three of us. We then sorted the cards we received according to how we understood them to be related to each other. I then asked each of my two volunteers to explain their piles and I, in turn, explained my own. From there, we worked together to merge all of our piles by communicating our thought processes. It is worth noting that I did not reveal to them the question prompts I had used, and I instructed them to explain their piles first to diminish my own influence.

Once we established piles, we then assigned a color to each pile for the purposes of highlighting transcripts. In the end, we constructed piles for "Identity/ Personality" (Pink), "The Ideal Witch" (Purple), "Internal Energy" (Green), "External Energy" (Blue), "Labels from Outside" (Orange), and "Reasons to Identify" (Yellow). I then gave my two research assistants three transcripts: 1) from a witch of color, 2) a male witch, and 3) a white female witch for a total

of six transcripts. I did this as an added objective measure to explore whether aspects of a model of identity are shared despite race, ethnicity, and gender.

I then instructed my volunteers to color code important statements according to which theme they felt it best belonged to. For example, a statement such as "It means forging my own path, never letting anyone tell me what to do or try to control me or tell me what it is I have to do or the way I should be living my life. It is a life free of influence of society and culture," was coded as Identity/Personality (Pink) as this statement reflects several salient terms such as individualism, making decisions free of societal influence, and being rebellious. This process allowed me to better understand how salient elements are cognitively organized in a similar manner to pile sorts and multidimensional scaling as statements often fell into multiple categories.

I then counted which colors appeared the most in my own coding as well as in my assistants' to get an idea of what was most talked about or what was most "important." I then looked at which statements overlapped most often in my own coding compared to my volunteers in order to better understand what ideas and concepts are cognitively related. Our overlapping statements were similar in nature, so I then isolated, counted, and examined which color combinations appeared the most in my own coding compared to theirs. For example, I made a list of pink/yellow, pink/green, pink/ blue, and so on for all color combinations. It is worth noting that many statements were colored purple, but I counted them as pink for reasons that are forthcoming.

Becoming, Being, and Doing Analysis

This process of color coding produced a wealth of statements, but I needed to winnow them further. By analyzing which themes both appeared and overlapped most frequently, here specifically Reasons to Identify, Personality/Identity, and Internal Energy, I began to see a model for "being a witch," and a model for "doing witchcraft." Further, I began to see evidence of a potentially shared prototypical narrative of "becoming" a witch in which I could observe the model of "being" being cognitively employed. I then used the NVivo software to create nodes for *becoming*, *being*, and *doing.* Next, I coded the statements that I had highlighted accordingly, which gave me an opportunity to review the original codes. I also created a node for *Others/ Not me* which mapped onto the "Labels from Outside" statements to a certain degree. I created this last node in order to get a better sense of tactics of intersubjectivity in forming identity, or what beliefs, ideologies, or groups of people individuals mentally situate themselves away from and closer to.

Coding for Becoming Narrative

Finally, I analyzed the statements within each node in various ways to get at the variably shared content of each model in order to answer my research question about motivation. First, I analyzed the statements that I had coded as "becoming a witch" because it was the most direct way to answer my question concerning what motivates individuals to identify with the stigmatized "witch" label. My informants often relayed a cohesive, personal narrative regarding important life history events that led up to their seeing themselves and identifying as a witch, though sometimes these narratives were not stated outright in response to one particular question. By this, I mean that sometimes other questions sparked memories, which were then connected to

previous statements about one's past and so parts of an informant's narrative of becoming were dispersed throughout the interview. Thus, I decided that I could patch together such statements and employ Seligman's (2001) "prototypical narrative" approach to explore how the model of "being" a witch manifests in personal narratives of becoming one. Put differently, this approach allowed me to better understand how my informants use the mental model of being a witch to reframe life experiences in a different way that might be shared or follow a similar trajectory.

First, I isolated all of the personal "I" statements coded as "becoming" within all of my informants' interviews. Examples of such statements are, "When I was fifteen, I bought a pack of tarot cards to try and train my intuition" and "I can't remember a time in my life when I wasn't attracted to the image of the witch." Next, I put the personal statements from each informant's interview in chronological order as best as I could to produce an outline of each person's journey. I then used the same measure for salience to determine what I considered to be "prototypical," namely a theme or occurrence had to appear three or more times in these personal statements to be included in the overall narrative. I also paid special attention to the "turning point" regarding when individuals decided to adopt the term as part of their identity, or from being a "baby witch" to being a witch.

After analyzing for salience, I isolated two narratives that contained the greatest number of themes and occurrences regarding the narrative of becoming. I then dissected these narratives to bring attention to what aspects and events are shared across my informants' stories. Note, while many of these themes of "becoming" are mentioned in other places in interviews, I only counted those that were coded as "becoming" for these prototypical narratives. I did this to try and remain as close to the question of what motivates someone to specifically adopt the term "witch" rather than as being "spiritual," a "magician," or some other identifier. For instance, at

the beginning of each interview, I asked my informants if they grew up in a specific religion. As such, someone may have mentioned that they grew up in a strict Baptist family in response to this question, but I only coded such responses as "becoming" if it was mentioned as part of what led them to studying witchcraft or deepening their relationship to the identity in some way. Finally, while comprehensive, these narratives do omit some important salient aspects of both "becoming" and "being" a witch. This is to be expected as individuals vary in their internalization of models. To address this variability, I noted what was missing in "becoming" and then turned my attention to the statements coded as "being" to flesh out the model.

Coding for Model of Being a Witch

I started my analysis of the statements coded as "being" by isolating explicit statements that specifically related to what "being" a witch means. I included statements such as, "Being a witch means being a wise woman," or "I don't think I've ever met a witch who wasn't very committed to diversity and to ecological concerns and ecological justice, social justice, and racial justice- those are traits that I see a lot in the witchcraft community." I also included statements where "being a witch" was implied but not explicit. For example, "I think the main thing is to come at your work from a place of authenticity and sincerity and ask yourself the difficult questions about why you're doing this." Finally, I isolated "I am," "I feel," and "I think" statements that related to being a witch such as, "I think that a spiritual worker would have definitely been an essential employee. In the sense of like, we're serving the community, the parts of the community that can't be serviced by the regular government," and "I am very much a 50% real world and 50% spiritual person. I'm very levelheaded when it comes to this. I believe in science." Following Quinn (2005), I then searched these statements for repetitions, or key

words, that could illuminate possible dimensions of the model, or categories that reveal the relationships between salient elements of being a witch.

Here, it is important to note that I treated "being a witch" and "doing witchcraft" as two separate models due to the fact that the majority of my informants told me that one does not have to "do" witchcraft to be a witch. However, statements about what is important to *being* a witch often included practicing magic and witchcraft. Further, after the preceding analyses, it became clear that interest in learning and doing activities described as witchcraft and magic connected the narrative of becoming a witch to the overall model of being a witch. Considering this, I added an analysis of what was coded as "doing witchcraft" to better understand what activities are associated with being a witch that motivate individuals to adopt the term, even if not required to be a witch.

Coding for the Model of "Doing" Witchcraft

I started my analysis by unpacking the terms "witchcraft" and "magic." Though these terms were listed by nearly every informant in response to, "What do witches do that make them witches?" these are very broad umbrella terms, and it is not agreed upon whether they are interchangeable (though they are often used interchangeably). Therefore, I first isolated how individuals define witchcraft versus magic in order to better analyze statements that I coded as doing such. In other words, when individuals say that witches do witchcraft, what do they mean and why do they do it? I used the same rule of salience, namely elements mentioned by three or more, to construct a definition of witchcraft.

After determining the difference between the terms, I revisited my raw freelisting data and counted which terms in the Internal/ External Energy pile were stated the most in the

freelisting portions of my interviews. After determining these elements and ranking them from most mentions to least, I then narrowed the list to elements that did not relate to the more concrete actions of performing witchcraft as it is saliently defined. For example, I excluded "understanding, believing in, and incorporating science into witchcraft/magic" as it is more in line with beliefs about how magic works. I then started with the most mentioned category and searched within the statements coded as "doing" for the most comprehensive examples that illustrated each element to get a better idea of how the cognitive model of doing witchcraft is employed in discourse and how elements are mentally understood as connected.

Within these statements, I also pulled out the more implicit actions of doing witchcraft that were not mentioned during freelisting. For example, "spell casting" is a salient element of doing witchcraft but the actions associated with spell casting, such as using herbs and candle magic, are not common knowledge. Thus, after finding an example of how spell casting is done, I noted down associated actions and the reasons given for casting a spell and returned to the statements coded as "doing" to determine which of these more implicit elements were mentioned by three or more people as being part of their practice.

After I isolated statements that illustrated each salient element and pulled out the more implicit terms, I noticed that, for the purposes of analysis, both the salient elements of freelisting and the coded statements were best categorized as *personal witchcraft* (Internal Energy) with the act of keeping altars as a central, connecting theme, and as *service work* (External Energy) with energy healing and divination as the central, connecting themes. These acts connected the majority of the salient elements together in some way. To analyze personal witchcraft, I further winnowed the statements coded as "doing" to those that discussed how individuals interact with their altars. I set altars as the center of the model in order explore how the various elements tied

to personal witchcraft are connected to this central action directly or indirectly. Likewise, I analyzed statements in which energy work and divination were discussed in the context of service work, or witchcraft done for other peoples besides the self.

Coding for Tactics of Intersubjectivity

Finally, to further explore the process of adopting the identifier "witch," I analyzed the statements coded as "Others/ Not me" according to a framework of tactics of intersubjectivity, specifically regarding those of adequation and distinction (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). To do this, I isolated statements in which informants explicitly separated themselves from something and then closer to something else. For example, statements such as:

> The only reason that I don't identify as pagan is because I come from an African culture where this is our main religion. Most pagans, they're termed to be pagans because it outdates another religion or it's the opposite of another existing religion whereas with my culture, it's always been what we do and so there's nothing to compare it to. So, I don't label myself a pagan because I think pagans are definitely more nature based whereas we appreciate nature, but we don't necessarily worship it like some forms of witchcraft do.

This statement is extracted from an interview with a Vodou priestess and illustrates how she distances herself from "pagans" and from other non-African witchcraft traditions, which emphasize nature worship. Moreover, she situates herself closer to her ancestral, African-derived, pre-colonial religious tradition. I did not delve into this as deeply, but I wanted to explore an overview of what witches consider themselves *not* to be, including the opinions and actions of others that they distance themselves from, such as from the common beliefs that witchcraft involves nature worship and that witches are pagans. Within this, I wanted to present and explore the intracultural diversity among witches and get an idea of potential "residual agreement" in a more qualitative, ethnographic way (Dressler, Balieiro, and Dos Santos, 2015).

Finally, I wanted to better understand how witches feel they are viewed by non-witches regarding what brings them closer to relating to the term.

CHAPTER 7

RESULTS

Sample Descriptive Statistics

Gender identification, education, income, sexual orientation, and political identification are summarized in Table 1. My informants' ages range from 27 to 77 with a median age of 34. Eleven identify as female, three as male, and three as non-binary/ gender fluid. The three individuals in the group conversation all identify as male. Two informants reported that they are registered Democrats while the remaining 15 reported supporting no political party. However, my informants reported that they understand most witches to be "left-leaning" politically, and none supported the current, Republican president— Donald Trump. Several of my informants contributed that witchcraft is not political while others felt that one should use their magic to ensure equality for all.

Regarding race and ethnicity, I did not provide answer choices choosing instead to let my informants self-describe their ethnicity. Seven identified as white (41.2%) and one as African American (5.9%). All other informants included various descriptors (Table 2). The answers are as follows: one as Creole/ mixed (African and Irish), one as Irish, German, English, one as Mexican American/ Chicana, one as Mixed: African, Italian, Lumbee Cherokee, one as Mixed: Palestinian, one as Native American (Narragansett and Oneida), Italian (Sicilian), White, two as White/Jewish, and one as White, some Native American, and Viking. I include these descriptions

in order to introduce the forthcoming importance of ancestry and globalization in identifying as a witch.

Table 1: Sample Demographics .

	Frequency	Percentage
Gender Identification		
1. Female	11	64.7%
2. Male	3	17.6%
3. Non-binary	3	17.6%
Education		
1. High School	1	5.9%
2. Some college	4	23.5%
3. Associate's	2	11.8%
4. Bachelor's	5	29.4%
5. Post-Grad	4	23.5%
6. Trade Certification	1	5.9%
Income		
1. > 20,000	2	12.5%
2. 20-34,999	3	18.8%
3. 35,000-49,999	2	12.5%
4. 50,000- 74,999	4	25%
5. <75,000	1	6.3%
6. Not answered	4	25%
Sexual Orientation		
1. Heteronormative	2	11.8%
2. Bisexual	8	47.1%
3. Gay	2	11.8%
4. Queer	2	11.8%
5. Pansexual	2	11.8%
6. Not answered	1	5.9%
Political Affiliation		
1. None	16	94.1%
2. Registered Democrat	1	5.9%

Table 2: Self-Identified Ethnicity

Ethnic Identity:	**Frequency**	**Percent**
White	7	41.2%
African-American	1	5.9%
Creole: African/Irish	1	5.9%
Irish/ German/ English	1	5.9%
Jewish/ White	2	11.8%
Mexican American/ Chicana	1	5.9%
Mixed: African/ Italian/ Lumbee Cherokee	1	5.9%
Mixed: Palestinian/ White	1	5.9%
Native American, Italian, White	1	5.9%
Native American, Viking, White	1	5.9%

The majority of my sample are childless (n=13), 53% are coupled, and 47% are single. Zero are married though two have since become engaged (to each other). Choosing to drop out and become a musician, one informant never finished high school while four reported some college, two an associate degree, five a bachelor's degree, four a postgraduate degree, and one a trade certification. Only two (11.8%) reported a heteronormative sexual orientation and eight (47.1%) identified as bisexual, two as gay, two as queer, and two as pansexual. One declined to answer. Due to the fickle nature of my informant's incomes, which often rely on tourism and word of mouth, several declined to answer the income question. Among those who did, about 70% reported making around $50,000 a year or less. One outlier reported grossing more than $100,000 from her online spiritual consulting business. Of my sample (n=17), 16 of my informants have been or are currently employed in some sort of occult work whether owning their own businesses and/or are employed in brick-and-mortar locations where they work as witches. One, while included in this camp, is employed outside of the occult as an elementary

school teacher, though he reports reading Tarot for his principal and fellow faculty members. He is also a part time employee at Hex where he reads tarot professionally. The informant who dropped out of grade school is also the only one of my informants who is not employed in an occult related profession. He is still an artist and a musician at 77. (He plays the keys on the 1972 international hit record "Too Late to Turn Back Now" by the Cornelius Brothers and Sister Rose.)

All of my informants (n=17) asserted that they believe interest in witchcraft has been increasing in the last 3-5 years. Fourteen reported not being from New Orleans and of the 3 that are native to New Orleans, one now lives in Charleston, South Carolina. She claims the culture of South Carolina is not as accepting of her beliefs. Of the 14 not from New Orleans, 7 chose to move there because of the tolerant culture regarding witchcraft and 6 moved for different reasons but decided to stay for this reason. Fourteen grew up in a specific religion and within this 14, 4 report still identifying with their childhood religion, 5 somewhat do, 5 do not, and 3 declined to answer. Three are initiated into specific traditions: 1 into Alexandrian Wicca, 1 into Haitian Vodou, and 1 into both Ifa and Vodou. One is in the process of being initiated into Ifa (interrupted by Covid at the time) and one seeks initiation into Santeria. The other 12 are "solitary" and "eclectic" witches meaning they belong to no official groups and pull from numerous traditions and practices. The majority of my sample (n=10; 58.8%) do not identify as pagan or Neopagan while 5 (29.4%) do. One declined to answer and the remaining individual responded that they somewhat identify as pagan but that they understand the term to generally relate to European traditions, which relates to part of his heritage, but not that which he practices most often and is initiated into. This sentiment was supported by several of my informants who were of mixed, non-European ancestry and reported not espousing the label of pagan or

Neopagan because it is Eurocentric. Other reasons for not identifying with the term included not considering themselves polytheistic, understanding the term as outdated and "frumpy," and because it feels like a "costume."

Freelisting Results

The pile for Identity/ Personality contained the terms: rebellious/ anti-authoritarian, curious/ always learning, individualistic, intuitive, independent, open-minded/ accepting, empathetic/ an empath, highly sensitive/ heightened senses, kind, compassionate/caring, outcasts/ socially awkward, concerned with nature/ appreciation for all living things, healers, givers, confident/ fierce, unruly/ loud women, creative/ artistic in some way, and well-researched individuals who make decisions free of dictates of society. The pile for the Ideal Witch contained: Stevie Nicks, has natural spiritual gifts, a person who is completely oneself, resourceful, powerful, self-reliant, selfless, extremely knowledgeable, wise, intimidating but kind, and maintains a constant magical mindset. A common sentiment was, "You know they're a witch even if they never tell you." Interestingly my informants often answered that someone whom they consider to be the ideal witch was often a person who do not identify as a witch but possessed many of the qualities listed here. Later, I merged the Ideal Witch pile with Personality/ Identity as they often overlapped during coding.

The pile for Internal Energy contained the terms (from most mentions to least): doing magic or witchcraft, intentionally interacting with or manipulating energies/ harnessing elemental energies to manipulate reality, aligning with natural cycles/ connecting to natural world, constantly seeking knowledge/ wisdom, constant magical mindset/ every daily action has intention/ daily practice, spell work, listening to inner knowing/ intuition, using psychic gifts (the

"clairs," mediumship, etc.), honoring the Divine Feminine, female/ self-empowerment via seizing power for oneself, ability to communicate with non-human (the "dead," ancestors, "Spirit") believing in, understanding, and incorporating science into practice, ways of holding the self-accountable for actions/ knowing "thyself" (this is called shadow work), and providing for oneself/ able to know and obtain what one needs.

This pile also contained the various types of witchcraft and magic. The main ones mentioned are initiatory traditions of witchcraft such as Alexandrian and Gardnerian Wicca, Ifa, Santeria, Vodou, Voodoo, Druidism, and the Ordo Templi Orientis. There is also solitary and "eclectic" witchcraft which means a person combines elements of whatever "speaks" to or works for them. Types of magic include chaos, Disney, ceremonial, high, folk, personal, and natural. However, my informants said that anything can be magic and there are too many types to name.

The pile for External Energy contained the terms: performing magic to actively improve the world/ ensure equality for all peoples and for the environment, caring about/ tending the earth, healing, helping, teaching, and empowering others to reach their goals, engagement in community service, and fighting oppression/ capitalism/ the "elite."

The pile for Reasons to Identify included: coming from deep pain/ rejection/ ostracism, currently trendy, "cool" to be an outsider, "what I've always been," or "I don't know what else to call myself," unexplainable psychic or supernatural experiences in life, shock factor, family tradition, label that "feels right," closest term in English to describe spiritual path/ practice, personal/ female empowerment, to find community, some evidence that magic works, and appeals to a darker "aesthetic." Finally, the Outside Labels/ Identifiers include: the Hollywood stereotype (pointy hat, green face, broom, warts, Harry Potter), Satanists, evil, goths, hippies,

weirdos, people dancing naked under a full moon in the woods, people who reject science, and silly people who are "going through a phase" or living in imaginary worlds.

Coding Results

In my coding, the frequency of statements from most to least were: Internal Energy, Personality/Identity, Reasons to Identify, Outside Labels, and External Energy. My volunteers' coding differed slightly in that Personality/Identity and Reasons to Identify appeared more frequently than Internal Energy. However, I noticed that in both of our coding, statements often similarly fit into two or more themes with Personality and Reasons overlapping most often followed by both of these themes overlapping with Internal/External Energy, particularly Internal Energy. There was also noteworthy overlap between Reasons to Identify and Outside Labels.

Salient Themes of Prototypical Narrative of "Becoming" a Witch

Salient themes of these narratives (appear in 3 or more narratives):

1. Interest in witchcraft/ the occult from a young age
2. Growing up in a monotheistic religion and breaking away
3. Having psychic, intuitive, healing gifts and important dreams as a child that continue past adolescence
4. Psychic or healing gifts inherited via maternal, hereditary line
5. Lack of family support to understand and develop gifts
6. Feeling like an outcast in family and society, troubled family relationships
7. Trauma that deepens or awakens gifts and interest, coming from deep pain (sexual abuse, physical abuse, medical trauma)

8. First discovering books about Wicca
9. Reading tarot as teenager to harness and practice spiritual gifts
10. Introduction to and keen interest in world religions via school or self-study
11. Connection to ancestry/ ancestors
12. Drawn to mythology and narrative of particular ancient deities
13. Potential to combine numerous, meaningful belief systems
14. Emphasis on the Divine Feminine
15. Co-occurrence with understanding and adopting queer identity
16. Struggle with particular term for various reasons such as mixed ancestry, European context, or current cultural usage, or it's "trendy" rather than serious.
17. Eventually settling on witch because easiest term to use, term that fits, and conveys spiritual beliefs and practices in best way

Results of "Being" Coding

I combined "I am," "I think," and "I feel" statements with those explicitly discussed what it means to be a witch. In doing this, I found that statements fit into five broad categories: awareness, responsibility, flexibility, ancestry, and "other ways of knowing."

Results of "doing" coding

Salient elements of personal witchcraft from freelisting (most mentioned to least):

1. Following natural cycles/ connecting to the natural world
2. Intentionally interacting with energies/ harnessing natural elements (which is technically the definition of "witchcraft")

3. Developing/ using intuition/ psychic gifts
    a. The “clairs”- clairvoyance, clairaudience, clairsentience/ claircognizance
    b. Mediumship
    c. Intuitive gifts- hypersensitive to energies of others/ being an “empath”
4. “Constant magical mindset”/ magic in daily action
5. Casting spells
6. Honoring the Divine Feminine
7. Seizing personal power/ self-empowerment
8. Holding the self-accountable / “knowing thyself”
9. Interacting with non-human (the “dead,” ancestors, Spirit)

Salient elements of service work:

1. Actively trying to improve the world
    a. Using magic to work towards equality for all peoples/ social justice
        i. Dismantling capitalism/ patriarchy, decolonization
    b. Tending to the earth/ ecological justice
2. Helping/ healing others

CHAPTER 8

BECOMING A WITCH

The Model of Being a Witch as a Prototypical Narrative of Becoming

The following two narratives, when taken together, encapsulate the model of becoming a witch as they contain various salient elements of the model. The first narrative is that of 28-year-old Genevieve who identifies as female, African American, bisexual, and as a hoodoo practitioner. I interviewed Genevieve over the phone right before she was set to become a reiki master. The second narrative is that of 29-year-old Solina who identifies as female, Native American (Oneida & Narragansett), white, and Sicilian, pansexual/ bisexual. I interviewed Solina surrounded by tapestried walls and clouds of frankincense at the Hands of Fate metaphysical shop where she reads tarot.

Genevieve's Story:

As a child, Genevieve was always interested in anything to do with witchcraft and magic. She grew up in New Orleans, so she was surrounded by both on a daily basis. However, she grew up in a strict Christian household and her grandmother urged her not to pursue anything that resembled New Orleans "Voodoo." However, she was obsessed with shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Charmed*, and *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*, as well as movies such as *The Craft* and *Harry Potter*. She stated that she always wanted magic to be real. Genevieve is especially close to her grandmother who taught her, her brothers, and her sisters how to spiritually protect

themselves via prayer. She always warned them about the evils that existed all around them. Her mother scolded her about the shows she was watching and told her to be mindful of what she was allowing into her subconscious. As it goes, Genevieve felt like the oddball in her family because she struggled to believe in the same things that her family accepted as correct.

When she was 15, Hurricane Katrina uprooted her family and she relocated to Houston. After this traumatic experience, she began to experience incredibly vivid and meaningful dreams that sometimes came true in waking life, as well as frequent Deja vu. She connects this phenomenon to other "psychic" encounters during her childhood in which she could feel the energies of others around her, whether they were sad or anxious, and she tried to make them happy- though she didn't know why she felt compelled so strongly to do so. As she grew up, she learned that her grandmother, and other women in her family, are also intuitive psychics and "seers," meaning they get visions and have "ways of knowing" beyond the usual. However, neither her grandmother nor her mom supported her learning or developing these gifts. Genevieve feels her matriarchs did this to protect her from the envy and manipulation of others who may be able to sense these gifts about her and use them against her, in addition to conflicting religious beliefs.

Genevieve bounced back and forth between Houston and New Orleans while in college. During this time, she took a sociology of religions course where she was exposed to various world religions and alternative spiritualities. She refers to this as her "spiritual awakening," as she started to apply concepts she was learning into her own life and began to see changes in her mindset and worldview. However, she fell in love with a Christian man and returned to that path for a while. After she got pregnant, she split from the man and vowed to herself that she would

clear the “karmic debt” within her family line to provide the best life for her son. It was at this point that she “got into her spiritual journey like heavy heavy.”

Part of what she means is that she was turned onto the practices of ancestor veneration. She coupled this practice with the previous concepts she had learned as well as listening to her “spirit guides.” She states that it was the incorporation of her ancestors that “opened door after door after door” for her and changed her life. She learned more about the practice of hoodoo which developed among her ancestors who were brought to America via the slave trade in which they masked their indigenous practices behind Christianity. In this respect, she felt she was able to honor both her Christian ancestors and those who were forced to assimilate to survive. She also formed a connection to the goddess Isis because she feels she was Egyptian in another life. Along her path, she got Isis tattooed on her as dedication to what she feels she represents.

Around the age of 27, Genevieve began to identify as a witch after her friends began to call her that. She says she found she did not mind because it gave her a thrill. She realized the beliefs she held and the things she was doing fell in line with what is considered “witchcraft.” When she joined Instagram, she set her name to “@lababybruja,” but quickly discovered that this was problematic because it was “Spanglish” and she was not Latinx, though she feels she was such in a past life. She states that the turning point for her from being a “baby witch” to being a witch was realizing that she didn’t need any of the “tools,” such as crystals, herbs, candles, parchment paper, etcetera in order to manifest her reality. Rather, all a real witch needs is meditation and to recognize that “we’re made in God’s consciousness” and “God created light from darkness with just words.” Thus, a real witch is not persuaded by the opinions and information provided by others but recognizes within his or herself that the power he or she needs to create change is within him or her at all times.

Solina's Story:

Solina grew up in a small, rural, conservative town. Her family is Catholic, so she attended Mass as a child. She describes the experience as nostalgic for her because the saints, the incense, and the flickering candles made her feel connected to her ancestors. Solina is of mixed heritage being part Native American, part white, and part Italian- Sicilian specifically. She feels there is a lot of toxicity in her family, and they have not always been supportive of her.

Growing up, Solina's family told her stories about her Sicilian great-great-grandmother who reportedly made a living by using "black magic" against certain Mafia members. She was renowned for being able to make events occur by praying to certain saints, lighting candles, or by giving people the "evil eye." These acts are associated with witchcraft today, but Solina does not think her great-great grandmother would have identified as a witch, or as a *strega*, because she was a devout Catholic. In reflecting on these stories from her childhood, Solina feels that her grandmother wasn't intending to harm others as "black magic" implies but was rather using her gifts and skills as an agent of social justice. She views her ancestor as a woman who used what she possessed to get by and survive.

Solina remembers having intuitive gifts of her own at a young age. She had dreams that would come to fruition in waking life, and she would have visions of spirits. Often these gifts manifested at times of distress, such as experiencing trauma and abuse in her family life. In one instance, Solina told me about having a vision of a black man with a hammer before starting middle school, which she was incredibly nervous about. This was one of the few times she saw a vision as a physical manifestation rather than in dreams or in her "third eye." In distressing situations, this spirit guide appeared to assure her that she was safe and that she would be okay. Other occurrences, such as knowing a person was going to pass away before they did, continued

to occur as she entered her teenage years and she felt that conventional religion could not answer her questions or explain her experiences, so she began to search elsewhere.

Concurrently, during the process of figuring out what she believed in spiritually, Solina was also coming to terms with her bisexuality in a small, rural town where it was not considered socially acceptable to be such. This meant it wasn't easy to locate or connect to others like her. She describes her younger self as a tomboy and a goth who didn't fit in. She was still drawn to the spiritual aspects of religion but felt disconnected from the religion she was brought up in because of its rules and exclusiveness. This worked to make her feel estranged from her family, but also from her community. Thus, she felt like an outcast.

However, Solina found a way to make some sense of her family relationships, her outcasted-ness, and her place in the world through mythology, astrology, and magic. Again, looking to her Sicilian ancestry, Solina has always felt a connection to the Mediterranean region and the deities once worshipped therein that are somewhat forgotten today. She was particularly drawn to the narrative of the ancient Egyptian goddess, Sekhmet. In summary, Sekhmet is not the typical nurturing, motherly goddess but rather a bit murderous. After a period of destruction, Sekhmet learns that her power to destroy is equally as powerful as her ability to heal. In reflecting on Sekhmet's story, Solina had the revelation that she could channel her more aggressive, tomboy tendencies that had made her an outcast, as well as the angst that resulted from being such, into magical practice to heal herself and others. Further, Solina describes her relationship with her own mother as less-than-nurturing and Sekhmet revealed to her a different dimension of understanding the Divine Feminine beyond that of a mother figure. For Solina, Sekhmet represents the more masculine qualities of the Divine Feminine, which, as an Aries ruled by masculine Mars energy, she also sees within herself.

To harness this energy into magic, Solina needed to learn to control her inherent psychic gifts. This journey led her to the bookstore where she discovered classic New Age books about Wicca, such as those written by Silver Ravenwolf and Scott Cunningham. These texts discussed nature worship and developing intuition and psychic ability. Throughout high school, she thought of herself as a Wiccan. She bought a tarot deck at 15 and began to train herself how to work with her intuition. When people in high school asked her if she was a witch, she'd say she guessed so because she "practiced little love spells and stood under the moon and said stuff." However, once she got to college, she was exposed to literature about various spiritual traditions and occult philosophies. Her practice and dedication became more serious, and she had a bit of an identity crisis upon learning that Wicca is an organized religion with a hierarchy and rules rather than a way to describe that one works with nature and believes in elemental spirits. She realized she didn't mesh with Wicca, but she wanted to figure out what she did mesh with. She wanted a term for herself, and it made her sad that she didn't have one, so she kept searching.

She relates to the term *mestiza* in the sense that she has both colonizer blood and that of peoples who have been colonized. For a short time, Solina identified as a *bruja* but received backlash on social media because she is not Latinx. She says she understands why now and feels she was in the wrong, but she still didn't have a word for herself. She struggled with the term "witch" because though it related to her European ancestry, it also represented her colonizer ancestry. She donned the title "priestess" for a while, but she was also condemned for this because she is not initiated into a tradition. Priestess indexes a certain rank in initiatory traditions. Thus, she used witch because she didn't know what else to call herself.

When she moved to New Orleans in her twenties, Solina found a like-minded community to belong to and was exposed to even more spiritual traditions, as well as practitioners of those

traditions. Her practice became even more serious, and this exposure helped her solidify her beliefs and identity as a witch. In addition, she saw images of the black man with the hammer which had appeared to her since childhood and identified him as Ogun, one of the Orishas featured in various West African religious traditions. She took this to mean that she was on the right path and was where she was meant to be. This understanding was bolstered by intuitive readings in which she was told that she was meant to be in New Orleans because of past life connections and soul contracts that she needed to fulfill. Thus, when the boyfriend who had led her to New Orleans decided to move, she broke up with him and stayed.

Specifically, she was introduced to and inspired by Santeria, a tradition prominent in New Orleans, which blends elements of Catholicism with Orisha-centered practices indigenous to Africa and the Caribbean. She finds much overlap between Santeria and her own upbringing as the indigenous cosmologies from part of her heritage became blended with aspects of Catholicism from another, such as working with the saints. However, she, like most witches, is incredibly aware of the dangers of appropriating cultural practices and closed traditions, such as Santeria, and thus seeks to find the right teacher and space to honor the tradition.

In the end, Solina chooses to identify as a witch because it is a word that represents her beliefs and the practices that go along with them. For instance, she works with herbs in a way she learned from her Native American grandmother, and she is concerned with honoring nature. She works with the saints from her Catholic upbringing and relates to her Catholic great-great grandmother's legacy with "dark" magic. She is dedicated to honoring old religions and deities. She believes in harnessing elements, particularly fire, and cosmic energies to alter and control her own reality, as well as to empower herself. She believes that in the end, many cultures use different terms to discuss similar ways of being and the word "witch" is the easiest, least

offensive term for her to convey what she believes in and what she does. She feels like the ancestors and the elements of the universe are here for all to utilize as a source of empowerment and as a means to manifest one's desires. For Solina, tuning into and developing this ability is what makes a witch.

What is Missing from These Narratives?

1. The path to "becoming" for initiatory traditions is quite different
2. "Not playing well with others" as a reason for not pursuing an initiatory tradition
3. Exploring atheism before returning to or finding spirituality
4. Alternative "turning points" from not being a witch, also known as being a "baby witch," to self-identifying as a witch
    a. For some, the turning point is dedicating and maintaining an altar in one's home
    b. For others, it means that one has acquired enough knowledge and wisdom to take care of oneself in any kind of way
5. During childhood, parents or family members labelled "witchy" habits, particularly psychic gifts or talking to nature, as form of mental illness

CHAPTER 9

DIMENSIONS OF BEING A WITCH

Five Dimensions of the Model of "Being" a Witch

In reading these two "prototypical" narratives, one can begin to see a shared cultural model of identity in the sense that the actors in these two narratives emphasize similar life events, such as trauma, as well as responses to such events that led them to identifying as witches. Here again, identity is understood as not only one's perception of the self, but also how one feels he or she is perceived by others, which influences or reinforces his or her perceptions of self. Again, cultural models represent the ways in which items of knowledge are cognitively organized and understood as related, which informs behavior.

For instance, Genevieve and Solina were both interested in witchcraft as children though the dominant religions practiced by their families discouraged such interests, which relates to the salient element of witches as being "rebellious" types. Both individuals have psychic abilities that they inherited from females in their family lines. These gifts were either discouraged by their families or discredited as not being real, though both individuals pursued developing them. Because of the tension between their own beliefs and those of their families, they feel like outcasts in both their families and in society. They value individuality and reject organized religion in the broad sense, namely Christianity, but do not condemn it and even incorporate it into their individual practices. They both read tarot cards and practice other forms of divination such as astrology, which they relate to developing intuition. They both view their practices as

ways to honor their ancestors even if such practices are at odds with their present families' beliefs. Both individuals identify with the mythological narratives of ancient deities whose experiences allow them to view their own in a different way. Further, they feel that they can use what makes them outcasts in some social circles, such as their spiritual beliefs and gifts, to empower and heal themselves and others who may be ostracized or "othered" in some way. In this, they understand that they are responsible on some level for what happens to them and can employ a level of control over their own realities which relates to the salient elements of witches as "self-reliant." These salient elements in the narrative of becoming a witch illustrate how the forthcoming model of being a witch is brought up in the mind and used to reframe past experiences regarding how one negotiates adopting the identifier "witch."

However, the becoming narratives alone leave out much of the nuance of what is important to "being" a witch considering the diversity of witches across the board. By coding for both explicit statements about being a witch and personal "I feel," "I think," "I am," statements, I expanded on the salient elements of the model to explore the dimensions of the model, or features of a model that form a continuum among elements (Dressler, 2018: 56). In other words, there are dichotomies in the model of being a witch, such as individualism versus collectivism, pagan versus non-pagan, political versus "magic is not political" and so on, but there are often elements in between such dichotomies that map onto larger categories. I found that the statements I isolated within those coded as "being" and "becoming" fell into five general dimensions: awareness, responsibility, flexibility, ancestry, and "other ways of knowing."

Being: Awareness

Statements in the awareness category explore both internal and external awareness. First, witches become aware of themselves. This process requires deep internal inquiry and is often referred to as the concept of "shadow work" related to Carl Jung's concept of the "shadow self" (Zweig and Abrams, 1991). One informant relayed a popular saying in witchcraft philosophy is to "Know thyself." What this means is that witches come to know, understand, and accept the "darker" sides of themselves regarding their thoughts processes, actions and habits, and their personalities. This uncovering of the shadow self also relates to the "darker aesthetic" that is an initial draw to being a witch for many and a salient reason to identify. For instance, when one finds themselves feeling jealous or wrathful, one traces the feeling to its root via meditation and activities such as journaling prompts. An example would be: "In what instances have I felt jealous and what do these instances have in common? Who is most affected by my jealousy? What is my first memory of being jealous? Is this jealously me, or is it influenced by something I have experienced and not dealt with?" Finally, statements of internal awareness also concern the salient elements of "constantly seeking knowledge" and "curiosity" in order to make well informed decisions that align with the self as one comes to know it. For many, being a witch means being a "wise one" with a little bit of knowledge about everything.

External awareness requires an acknowledgement of one's place within systems and structures of power. These statements describe the importance of making decisions as free from social, political, and cultural influence as possible. This aspect of awareness requires cognizance of how overarching influences and structures are involved in one's actions and daily life. Thus, awareness involves one becoming aware of how they may be taken advantage of by others or institutions such as media and medical institutions. This aspect requires a process of analyzing

the impetuses of one's actions and questioning whether one is acting on what they know about themselves or what they may have been told is appropriate via socialization or outside influences.

Related to this aspect of external awareness, witches become mindful of the appropriation of cultural practices that he or she may incorporate into his or her belief system and craft but are not his or her own. This awareness includes that witches become aware of how their beliefs may be built on those of subjugated peoples. They become aware of how their actions are both built on and potentially affect others' experiences. Further, they become aware of the potential role of their ancestors in the subjugation of others' beliefs that they may incorporate. For witches of color, one becomes aware of the suffering of their ancestors and the subjugation of their practices upon arriving in America. In both accounts, the suffering of others must be externally and internally acknowledged and mediated. In other words, one must engage in meaningful analysis of the beliefs and practices he or she adopts. As an example, two of my informants shared a narrative in which they experienced synchronicities with deities outside of their ancestral cultures. They both struggled with whether they were participating in appropriation by keeping an altar to these deities and eventually dismantled them. Shortly after taking them down, the deities began to frequently appear in their lives again, such as in dreams or images in daily life; therefore, they reconstructed their altars.

Further, one develops an awareness of cosmic, non-human, or universal influences. This awareness manifests via theories of how one understands the universe to work and what his or her role is within it, including awareness of "spiritual gifts" and synchronicities. Once a witch is aware of his or her individual self and his or her individual place within collective social structures, he or she becomes aware of divine, universal, or cosmic influences that connect the

individual self to external factors. One develops relationships with spirit "guides," with deities, or with ancestors. One may become aware that the negative tendencies or habits they have may be inherited from past lives or from unhealed ancestral trauma. One becomes aware of the opportunity to alter or change his or her place or circumstances within reality using the energies they come to understand via internal inquiry and the relationships they develop with universal energies.

At the core of statements that fall into the awareness category is the sentiment that once one knows themselves outside of imposed influences and as part of a "larger organism," as well as a part of his or her ancestral line and connected to universal energy, one can then be more in control of their own reality. Alongside this, one becomes mindful of their own responses to events outside of their control and in turn, they may understand, relate to, or influence the actions of others more clearly, meaningfully, and effectively. Also, by becoming aware of one's place in the world and within his or her own culture, one also comes to analyze his or her self-understanding of being "other" or as "outcast." The archetype of the witch often depicts her as "set apart," as someone who exists on the fringes, and one becomes aware of the similarities between themselves and the archetype. Within this, one becomes aware of the history of witchcraft and the reasons for the witch trials, namely that witches were once healers, midwives, astrologers, and pillars of the community though they were often set aside from the people they helped. One may come to accept his or her position as an outcast, but this may allow them to also feel connected to humanity as a whole in a different way. Here are key statements from interviews that sum up those that fall into the dimension of "awareness:"

> So, being a witch, there is a phrase, 'Know thyself,' that is very prominent in witchcraft and even Satanism. It is about knowing who you are, knowing what you are, and not lying to yourself and not lying to those around you and not being one of those people that is in conflict with themselves all of the time. It requires continuous awareness because if

you are not aware then you slip right back into your old behaviors and you just come off like an asshole… I'm just talking about being honest with yourself, even when you do dishonest things to others. It means forging my own path, never letting anyone tell me or try to control me or tell me what it is I have to do or the way I should be living my life. It is a life free of influence of society and culture. Now when I say that I don't mean, that's not necessarily 100% true, you're always going to be influenced by outside forces but at least now I can see how those things tried to influence me and I can stop and say I'm not going to let this dictate how I think and how I feel, or sometimes I might quite enjoy what society and culture gives me, I love going to see Marvel movies just as much as anyone else, you know? But, when you are a witch or a pagan or any name you want to give it, I do think that it is a responsibility to yourself not to fall victim to, uh, I guess, conformity. -Braxton

Whether they've had a so-called witch in their family line or not... they're gonna be like, 'Oh, those are people who went through something like what I went through.' People who get bullied, who feel excluded from the religion or the culture that they grew up in. I think people especially, this day and age, especially see it a lot in Gen Z... people are outraged at the systems and rightfully so. Like everything is gross. The political system, the Church, the wealth inequality... like everyone just you know, the millennial and Gen Z are like really? This is the society that we're expected to exist within and make this work for us? This is fucked up and they're seeing just the massive injustices in the world and also witchcraft gets you, like once you start identifying with that label of the witch, witchcraft gives you a solution. It doesn't say like... oh you need to go find someone else who can fix this for you, it's like you have all the tools within you to do it yourself. To help your community, to help your friends, to help you get out of a toxic situation. I think that's a lot of what it has been for me over the years. Like you're not telling me to put my faith in someone else, you're telling me to put my faith in me to get out of this situation and that's really appealing. Especially to people who have been traditionally marginalized: women, people of color, queer, transgender. -Solina

To be a witch it to be a wise one. When I say wise one, I'm not just saying about the magical side of wise, the spiritual side of wise. A wise one allows you to be awakened enough to know when you're being taken advantage of; when you are being appreciated, when the government is screwing us over. It's being wise enough to know, don't drink the Kool-Aid kind of thing. That's what "witch" means, being wise enough to understand that this is just the physical body but that your spirit is multidimensional and because you are multidimensional, we still are learning and so this is kind of the classroom. This body that we're in is our classroom in a way. -Magnolia

Being a witch means.... Relentless and continuing education. It means intense observation and being careful to not get distracted by things that don't matter. And I know this is a parallel in most spiritual practices, but for me, the big thing I think is service. -Katerina

It's about your own self-empowerment and how you use not only your own energy, but the energies around you and it's kind of like the type of witch you are is determined by how you use all that. The kind of person you are determines the kind of witch you are…

> like if you promote negativity all the time, if all of your magic is done with the intent to harm then you're probably spending a lot of your free time and in your life thinking harmful thoughts because you're trying to manifest harmful outcomes so you're basically going to have this cloud of grossness all around you that is going to attract more grossness to you because like all the systems at play in the universe are going to think that's what you want because that's what you're thinking about and manifesting all the time… -Solina

> I guess like for me, to be a witch is just like, it's literally, it's so liberating. It's so liberating, it's so freeing, and it's the ability to wake up and go after anything I want in life. You know? But like, also accompanied with this journey to like self-mastery and self-awareness, you know? It's like incorporating the lessons I've learned through self-mastery and I'm able to apply those to my life and then harness that energy to manifest what I want. -Genevieve

Being: Responsibility

This last statement is an appropriate segue into statements that concern "responsibility." These statements explore responsibility to self, others, and to the Divine. Responsibility statements are often related to or follow statements about awareness, but such sentiments differ slightly in that once one identifies as a witch, part of solidifying this particular identity implies a responsibility to act on one's awareness of the self and beliefs in order to better the lives of others and to assist the Divine, or "Spirit," or ancestors that require bodies to deliver messages. Responsibility requires undertaking actions to hold oneself accountable for his or her own "negative" tendencies, but there is also an implied responsibility to understand where others may be coming from. Once witches become aware of why and how they are existing within and contributing to the community and world around them, they feel an obligation to use their unique perspectives, understandings, and spiritual gifts to improve the lives of others and to take actions to actively improve the world. In this, once one becomes aware of their ancestral connection, one may feel a responsibility to work towards making right the wrongs of certain ancestors. Colloquially, this is known in witchcraft/ spirituality as "breaking generational curses."

Statements such as these involve using magic and witchcraft to try and ensure equality for all oppressed peoples, as well as those who are working towards confronting issues of social injustice, and to heal, help, and educate others via divinatory readings, herbalism, protection spells, classes on certain topics, or offering services for barter or affordable prices. In addition, many in my sample often participate in community service outside of witchcraft. For instance, Solina contributes that whether it is animal rights or some other cause, witches seem to be connected by an emphasis on some sort of service work. In essence, a significant part of being a witch is to be in service to others, one's community, and to the Universe as a whole. However, it is important to note that many witches admit to not liking people, per se, and choose to keep to themselves but still feel an obligation to assist humanity as part of their calling to be a witch. An interesting dichotomy exists of wanting to be in and support community, but also choosing to practice alone and keep to oneself, or a level of secrecy and seclusion. For example, in one interview, my informant described her struggle to find a group to practice with because she has found that most witches seem to be more introverted. Here are key statements that sum up the category of responsibility:

> **Me**: What does it mean to you to BE a witch?
> **Nadia**: "Freedom for all because if your witchcraft does not include freedom for all, then it is *sahib* (bad magic) and it is hurting people, whether that's intentional or not. It's really important to have conscious intention in this work otherwise your energy could be used for whatever, who knows what. As witches our energy is powerful and it is valuable, even if we don't value it, there are people and entities who do value it and will use it for their own purposes if they can. We always have to call all of our energy into us and specifically set an intention for how it will be used and so that's why I'm so adamant about intending to use my energy and my spiritual gifts for freedom from oppression for all people and all of my reiki healers, every single one of them signs an oath to say the same- that they'll use their spiritual gifts for freedom for all and to end all forms of oppression and violence, including spiritual and sexual violence and oppression."
>
> I think for me, actively being a witch, like choosing that path and living that life, I think it does involve a level of responsibility. Like, I take it very seriously. For me, it's not an

aesthetic particularly. It's not really even like a lifestyle though it does touch every area of my life… It's not that I don't think I chose it, but I think it's a calling and I think it's a path and because I chose to do it and because particularly, I chose to step into it professionally, I think there's a level of responsibility. I think it's community work really, it's service work. -Selene

I think that spiritual worker would have definitely been an essential employee. In the sense of like, we're serving the community, the parts of the community that can't be serviced by the regular government. The amount of people who get a reading from me, often people who need counseling services but they cannot afford them but can afford an hour talk with me a week, or a half hours or whatever the case it. You know, it's a lot of responsibility because it's like, I have to know where the acceptable place where my boundaries end and another begins. Because I'm not a medical professional, you know? I have to be like aware of that as I'm assisting people. So, you know, you ask some meaningful questions, you give somebody a spiritual solution but sometimes tell people like maybe you should also check out this thing, because I'm serving the community not myself. -Jemison

I keep saying steward of service. Being there to be a giver and a healer in our community. I think one of the biggest callings and responsibilities of a witch is to be there for Spirit. Especially if you are a medium. There are our ancestors or people that have passed on, maybe even just entities that need our help as well. So, it's not just for the living, to be a steward of service. -Kathleen

I did a protection rite for the protestors who were going to be in the French Quarter when they were protesting for Black Lives Matter. I was not able to attend because I was going to be at work, but I was like I want to do a protection rite to make sure there's no police interference. It was important and even though I had low energy, it needs to be done, it's important. So that's when I try to visualize energy from the Sun and from the planets also going in and bringing in those things that are aligned with Mars or the sun or aligned with those celestial bodies that I'm already close to because it's kind of like filling in the gaps because those things are continuously generating energy so I'm just bringing it in, which is what a lot of witches do with the moon. It's a supplement or an add on to super charge it. -Solina

Being: Flexibility

Moving on, statements that fell into the "flexibility" dimension involve the permeable boundaries surrounding identity, beliefs, and practices. In terms of dichotomies, there is solo versus collective practice, initiated versus non-initiated witchcraft, and monotheism versus

polytheism or animism to name a few. In essence, witches acknowledge that as the world is always in flux, so too are their identities, beliefs, and practices.

For witches, at least in New Orleans, what is considered "normal" in almost any arena of life is flexible, or seen as relative, on a spectrum, or contextual. This includes certain mental health "disorders," gender, sexuality, and the very laws of nature, or at least our current understanding of what science can explain. To draw one's attention back to the sample description statistics, three informants identify as non-binary and nearly every informant identifies as queer whether pansexual, bisexual, or gay. When I asked about sexual orientation, one informant responded, "Girl, it's a buffet!" Another just shrugged in response to my questions regarding both gender and sexual orientation.

Statements categorized as flexibility also encapsulate the highly salient element of individuality as witches do not feel bound to be one way or another but consider their spiritual journey as completely unique and one which they construct from various influences that "speak" to them (sometimes literally.) Many statements refer to what is known as "eclectic" witchcraft, meaning one draws from numerous traditions and philosophies, and "chaos" magic, meaning one takes what "speaks" to them or works for them- even if it does not make sense in the moment. Chaos magic has no rules and is "results driven," meaning one does whatever magic or approach he or she needs to in order to achieve desired results or one does whatever intuitively comes to them in any given circumstance. Chaos magic is based on the idea that there is an organization to the Universe, but it seems chaotic as the timing of the universe does not always match up to timing in reality, yet there is a logic to it. For instance, several informants told me about being drawn to objects but that they did not understand why. They acquired the object anyways and

later they needed the object for some very important purpose, and it made sense why. However, no one defines chaos magic in the same way, and many say it is ineffable.

Within this, witches, generally speaking, do not see an issue with incorporating the seemingly exclusive, monotheistic religions of their childhoods into their current witchcraft practices, which may also espouse a pantheon, nor do witches adhere to a duality between religion and science. Rather, they incorporate aspects of both religion and current scientific findings, such as that of quantum physics, into their worldviews and explanations of how magic "works." Moreover, witches hold interesting ideologies about what constitutes the "self" meaning that the boundaries of the self are flexible as the soul and one's essence is not bound to the "meat suit," a title several of my informants attributed to the body, which suggests there is a shared lingo. For instance, witches acknowledge that influences in their present life may stem from the experience of the self in past lives. Further, the present self is connected to and influenced by the lives of ancestors who are both past and present. Building on this, statements of flexibility illustrate witches' perceptions of space and time which they do not see as linear, bounded, or constrained by the rational rules of logic. Here are key statements that elucidate the category of flexibility:

> My ebb and flow with that term [witch] depends on how its currently being defined by the culture at large, so there have been times and even like currently I would say that because it's so unwieldy, no one's quite sure what you mean when you say "witch," which makes it both less attractive and more attractive simultaneously. So, whether or not I choose to use that term for myself depends on the day and how I'm feeling. I mean I think it's in my Instagram bio so I definitely identify with it enough that it's in there but again, it's more of a marketing tool. -Selene

> You will know I am a witch by everything that I do and how I live my life. The self-identification is not that important to me, a lot of times it's been helpful for me not to outwardly identify as a witch because I can go into different spaces and work my magic without having to announce it so then it is like a little bit of an infiltration in environments where it might not be openly accepted. Sometimes I really do like

identifying as a witch and specifically identifying as a Muslim witch because people don't expect it. -Nadia

Some of the most famous witches were also devout Catholics. So, people think of it as like, "Oh it's like Wicca or paganism," and you're like, "No, much like Buddhism, you can marry it with other things without destroying it. Just don't be a dick about it. -Katerina

To me, it really heavily had to do with having something [an altar] in my house, which had always for my adult life been a very Jewish house. That would horrify my Rabbi. That is honestly my definition [of witchcraft], things that would horrify my Rabbi. Not because, not all of them would, there's an awful lot of folk magic that is built into Judaism and I think that's why I feel comfortable in it. -Layla

I definitely incorporate Christianity, for sure. For sure. One, because I would be a liar if I said that when I get scared that I don't call to Jesus or pray to God or pray to Jesus. I absolutely do, you know? However, in the same regard, I don't identify Jesus Christ as my lord and savior, it's different. But, for me, I consider myself a hoodoo practitioner. Hoodoo is a combination of African traditional religion, which is the African traditional religion that my ancestors practice you know, before they got to America and it's a combination of Christianity. I just love it because I grew up in a Christian household and it's like I get the honor, you know, like my grandmother, my immediate ancestors who were Christians and my ancient ancestors who practiced African Traditional Religions, everyone is honored. I'm very comfortable, it makes me feel empowered and liberated. It's a win win for everybody, in my opinion. -Genevieve

And even with the symbolism, I wear pentacles and I wear an ankh and for some people, that's two different cultures but for me, this pentacle represents the elements, and this ankh represents life, a human a female reproductive system— which nobody can exist without it— and so I definitely think that it's kind of... it crosses paths.... That all paths kind of meet up at some point and share some beliefs and share some symbols but for the most part, it's more cultural when it comes to witchcraft. -Blanco

I interpret being a chaos magician to mean basically I have the free for all to develop my own system and to figure out what works for me. It doesn't just mean do whatever I want willy nilly. I studied Thelema, Golden Dawn, John D, but I've also studied Buddhism and Taoism and yoga... like not asana practice but like, yoga. And I will incorporate whatever feels right into what I do, but I spend lots of time thinking about it. I don't just do things willy nilly. I have a rhyme and reason to everything I do, but it's all, I'm not just going to do it a specific way because someone told me so, if that makes sense…. I am such a techno witch. I believe in emoji spells. I love science. I love technology. I think that they are magic. Technology is magic. You know the old adage, God created us in his image? God is a creator. We are creators. I don't think it's wrong for us to try to replicate consciousness. My concern becomes the military's control of that research; it is very scary. -Saturn

> So, if I have an inclination one day to take a spirit journey and I go on a walk and I find materials that speak to me, so I pick them up and I use those materials in my bath and then the next day I have an experience where I'm like now I know why I used those materials and why I needed them for my bath because this experience necessitated me to prepare in this way. I don't have to follow a protocol because what is needed becomes naturally apparent to me and is abundant for me. -Nadia

Being: Ancestry

One of the most salient but implicit dimensions of the model is that of ancestry, which was mentioned by every informant in some way. Statements that fall into this category nod to the importance of one's ancestry in developing his or her identity and practice. These statements often center around venerating ancestors, but also on learning about one's genealogy in order to practice "ancestral magic." Some refer to ancestral traditions as a "power battery" meaning that traditions that span across time and space and have been practiced since ancient times carry a considerable amount of energy. One can draw from this energy, especially if they are connected by blood to such past peoples who practiced them. Blood holds significant power in witchcraft. Inherent in these statements is a nod towards mitigating the dangers of cultural appropriation. If one can find out what is in their "blood," they can validly claim a certain way of practicing and more meaningfully connect to such a practice, as well as keep past traditions and ancestral stories alive which may otherwise be forgotten.

However, it is incredibly important to note the controversy of potential white supremacy and separatist nationalism within this, which many of my informants addressed, as well. Usually, these statements addressed the controversy of white supremacist ideologies present among a small portion of individuals who practice conservative forms of heathenry, such as Odinism and Asatru (Berger, 2003). However, in veneration practices, there is also the opportunity to "elevate" ancestors who committed crimes against humanity. Veneration practices will be

discussed in the following “doing witchcraft” section. Further, inherent in some of these statements is a certain belief that ancestors belong to everyone because at some point, one’s soul may have been various races and ethnicities in a past life and if one traces human history far enough, human beings share a common ancestor. Here again, there exists an idea of universal oneness in witchcraft that exists alongside an emphasis on particularity, such as one trying to find what is in his or her particular DNA at this point in time. However, it is also worth including that the lone Wiccan of the group contributed that he was very leery of any path where people begin to mention blood ties. Here are key statements that underscore the ancestry category:

> …but it’s trying to get back to what were the ancestral practices that are in my DNA? So, learning more about Druidism, Learning more about Celtic healings arts. Learning more about the stuff that I know was part of the daily life of my ancestors whether they knew they were witchy or not *laughs* feels like the biggest influence. Then, just trying to be respectful of, as an American, my understanding of witchcraft or certain rituals might not be correct. Let me fact check and dive in before I’m like, "Here’s how we do this. Here’s the herb that you have to use. Do you have to use that herb? Did that even grow where you were, Katerina, before you start insisting upon that?!” Then researching things that grew in, you know, cold ass, nasty ass Ireland in the 1600's. I’m like, ‘No! We would not have used that!’ My ancestors had zero access this. So, I don’t follow a specific practice. I do feel like I’m a baby witch in that way as far as I’ve only been practicing this and pulling away from where it overlaps with Christianity and white washing history in the last couple of years. -Katerina

> I’ve been doing more ancestor veneration and for that reason when you start doing that kind of work, often you do incorporate the deities or cultural religious symbols that your dead would have honored. I do a little bit of Virgin Mary work but not a lot. My conception of what God means is so broad and I think it does include the Christian god…I had a lot of ancestry and lineage with Celtic stuff. My mom’s family are from New Zealand a couple of generations back, but if you go three or four, not too far back, they’re all from County Cork. So, we have a very strong Irish lineage there. I’ve always felt very drawn to Irish folk music, I did Irish dancing as a child. There’s something there on a kind of soul level that has always resonated…There is this focus right now on following your lineage when it comes to spirituality and this idea that you shouldn’t be practicing West African traditions if you don’t have that ancestry and I think for some white people, there is this sense of like, “Oh I’m following my heritage and I’m doing the Norse work or I’m doing the Celtic work because that’s where I come from,” and there’s a fine line there between I’m honoring my people and I’m proud of my heritage versus becoming a white nationalist. I’m not sure all those people are setting out to be racially separatist but it definitely seems to come off that way and it’s hard because the other half

of my heritage is largely very Norse and Balkan and stuff like that and I have started working in those traditions a little bit but you can't tattoo a rune on yourself these days without looking like you're part of a white supremacist biker gang, so it's difficult. -Selene

There are, for instance, white women who are initiated into Haitian Vodou, but they have to go through a lot of shadow work in order to do so because the main thing that you work with in Haitian Vodou is your ancestors. So, if you are in a circle full of black priestesses and you're calling on an ancestor who hates black people... that's going to put everybody in danger and for those reasons, definitely you kind of have to identify those people and do what we call elevate those people— meaning you let them know that that behavior was not okay and that you're not going to continue it and you move forward and you learn from their mistakes." -Blanco

I think for a while it was constantly changing and then as I've grown into my practice, especially as I've developed further connection to my ancestors, and just doing a weekly ancestor worship, my practice has been becoming more Kabbalistic and Catholic. -Saturn

The closest approximation that I can give people without having to do it line by line is what I am doing is probably a lot like hoodoo, but if I took, obviously I'm not of African American descent, so I don't want to claim hoodoo, but I think it's similar because that took religion and then tribal religion and went *smacks hands together* and this is what we can do because someone is watching us. For me, it's okay but I like this. I like witchcraft and this part of it works for me but also this is a really serious part of who I am, and who my ancestors are. This is my ancestral magic. -Layla

I practice a lot of sorceress traditions, things that are designed to pull the rug out from under people that are oppressors, or like trying to destroy the goodness of the world around us, I practice… basically like what my shirt says today, "I swear by the gods my ancestors swore by." So, I practice, I'm a mixed-race person so I practice my Irish/ Scottish/ Celtic stuff and I do a lot of African stuff. -Jemison

I feel like ancestors are collectively everybody's ancestors for whatever reason are really frustrated because they're not, and I guess I can only speak for contemporary American culture here, I know there are other cultures where honoring the dead and honoring ancestors is way more prominent, but people are here are not doing it and it's not a big part of our culture, like respecting elders is not a big part of our culture. It's like a spiritual anger, especially as people start... one of the reasons is people are worried about appropriation, they think, "If I find out exactly where I come from then I can practice...." For the most part it's way less political, I think there is a love. You wanna find the power, you wanna find the energy of your family, you got into witchcraft and you see all these different... you realize that witch can mean so many different things and you realize that there are magical traditions in every country and every culture in the world so of course you wanna know what yours is. Of course, you wanna know what you are... you're looking for that box that you fit in, that identifier. You're gonna wanna find that and when people do that, and they start finding that research and practicing, I do think there is

> a stir in the ancestors where they're like, “Wait a minute.... You’re like doing our stuff but you’re not acknowledging where it came from,” so people kinda get stirred more to like, the ancestors. It kinda wakes them up I think, for better or for worse. -Solina

Being: “Other Ways of Knowing”

Finally, the last category of statements concern “other ways of knowing,” which is similar to what Luhrmann (1989), in her work on British witches, refers to as “speaking with a different rhythm” and “new ways to pay attention to the world.” However, unlike Luhrmann’s work, these statements are drawn from a sample of informant’s that do not all identify as pagan or with British forms of witchcraft, yet there is some overlap. These statements refer to different ways one may become aware of the self and “folk models” (Bernard, Wutich, and Ryan, 2010) of how magic, witchcraft, and universal energies “work” regarding personal experience, oral histories, and philosophies from occult and esoteric texts. For instance, in theories of magic, practitioners assert that magic has its limits— only personal problems can be solved by personal magic, but large-scale changes and issues that have gained power over time are no match for a single witch’s power. In other statements, informants discussed different levels of vibrational frequencies that one can tap into through meditation to make specific changes. Put differently, emotions, moods, mental states, etcetera all carry different vibrations and to make a change on a specific level, one has to be able to match that vibration. Several informants explain this with theories of quantum physics and epigenetics.

Moreover, the nature of these statements concerns the intake of information from more than the five senses, such as from intuition, empathic ability, extrasensory perception, dreams, and from divination practices such as tarot, astrology, and runes. For instance, using astrology as a form of introspection or making decisions based off of synchronicities, which are seemingly unrelated occurrences that are understood as important and related, yet unexplainable (Bishop,

2014). For some, following the movement of the planets is used to elucidate one's present emotional state. For instance, if one is feeling particularly aggressive, he or she may look to the current position of Mars or the moon for an explanation.

Most often, statements concerning "other ways of knowing" concern psychic ability, which is also referred to as "the clairs," and different forms of mediumship. One can be clairvoyant (clear seeing), clairsentient (clear feeling), clairaudient (clear hearing), or claircognizant (clear knowing). One can also be a trance medium, meaning they become a container for a spirit, a spiritualist medium, meaning they can channel messages from spirits, or a psychic medium, meaning they can pick up on messages when in the presence of a person who has spirits connected to them. Per my informants, Spirit speaks in numinous ways, such as through symbolism and imagery so "other ways of knowing" also refers to the "collective unconscious," and universal symbolism (such as that in the tarot imagery). Here, Spirit is understood as a catch-all term for all non-human entities. Further, "other ways of knowing" refers to idiosyncratic understandings of reincarnation and karma. These statements also set one up to understand the ensuing model of "doing" witchcraft but refer more to how individuals believe such things work rather than, or in addition to, how they perform them. Here are key statements that illustrate "other ways of knowing:"

> For me personally, as a human being, I am easily overwhelmed by noises. So, I think that it starts with that. I think that's why that's the strongest for me out of all the possible Clair traits because I'm extremely sensitive to sound. I don't want to tell you that I hear dead people, but I do. Like I don't like saying things like that because it's like well, she's crazy, but it's things like that. -Layla

> I identify as a Mars witch, so obviously I believe strongly in astrology. My chart ruler is Aries, which is ruled by Mars, so basically like most of the planets were in this like Mars alignment when I was born so I have carried a lot of those traits my whole life. I'm one of those people who was always like, "Wow, I am my horoscope to a T. So, Mars and the Sun were the planets I felt really connected to whereas a lot of witches say they feel

really connected to the moon. I feel like I have so much excess energy that in the past I would use that in like negative ways. I would bring out the really aggressive traits of my sign. I was always trying to fight people and I decided I didn't wanna be like that but I felt like I had all this energy surging through me and I was like I need an outlet for this so I decided to kind of directly infuse that into my magic. Energy from Mars is directly affecting me at any given time, especially in times like now where Mars is in Aries, or when its Aries season/ the sun is in Aries I feel like well I have all this... I don't wanna say power but like, everybody has their amplified time throughout the year. For some people, it's whenever their chart ruler is going through a moment like I was saying before, people don't question how much the sun and the moon affect us but get really weird when you start talking about the other planets. -Solina

I do feel like I am a reincarnation of a lot of our old goddesses and I feel that we all are. We are embodying the goddesses and these primordial energies that have existed for a long time. We don't have to necessarily call on these deities. They're already in us and a part of us. -Nadia

Braxton: "Like I said, I wasn't a religious person but suddenly I saw the world differently and I can see that there was a spiritual side underneath everything. The spirit realm influences the physical realm and vice versa and they just, you know, they kind of swirl and mesh together.

Braxton: "You know all those things are his [Baron Samedi] favorite because again, you can feel that influence all over the city. Such a rich, rich history with things like prostitution and alcohol and folk magic and I think a lot of that is because of him. So, I try to keep that in mind and respect the spiritual sphere of influence that I'm living in."
Emi: "Right, so you mean like if you feel like you have urges to go overboard with those things, do you feel like it's his influence on you?"
Braxton: "Possibly, I feel like a lot of time entities will wanna take a ride on you and just experience the same things that a human would experience."

I was looking a lot into quantum physics and a lot of it was sounding very similar to things like, things that were happening in alien abduction and UFO lore, because I was really into that too. Then that also led me down a path of modern day UFO experiences are very similar to like, ancient experiences with what people would call faeries, or you know any number of other names you've heard for creatures, um so I went down that rabbit hole and saw that oh my god! like this, maybe these aren't aliens maybe these, there's these things from other dimensions that are here all the time, they've been interacting with us throughout human history we just don't understand enough of the world to piece it all together. And then all that is tangentially related to witchcraft because a lot of what you consider witchcraft came from, you know, the Medieval era along the same time as a lot of what we would call fairy tales and things like that. So, then I kind of had this new perspective on things like faeries, and magic and bigfoot and ghosts and aliens. These are all not separate things, they all kind of come from the same place and we just have different words to describe them based on what we are experiencing. And um, that's where a lot of the powers of witchcraft come from. You are

manipulating energies that are underneath the five-sense reality. Um, sort of just kind of switch things around and make things work out for you. Mind over matter, or mind before matter rather. That's kind of a mantra I know they use in the military to help strengthen people, weightlifters use it, but it's also a philosophy that exists in a lot of religions that look heavily into the cosmos and oneness and inner beings and all that. They always talk about mind before matter. Nothing can happen unless you think of it first. So, what you are thinking is going to dictate what happens in your world. -Braxton

I think that supernatural is natural, it's in the world. I think we're at a point in human history where we don't understand certain things and why certain things happen. We haven't found a way to test scientifically for them with the tools that we have at our disposal and so we put them in a separate category called supernatural which low-key kinda means it's not real. I think if you have enough evidence, even if its anecdotal, of people are experiencing a certain thing sometimes for hundreds of thousands of years, you have to ask yourself... I don't do curse work. And that's not because I have some fear of a big karmic kick in the ass, it's just that I do believe that what we put out, we inevitably attract in some way and I don't want to be in a space being fueled by hate and anger and jealousy and aggression and shame. I don't want to ignore those things either because they're important emotions and we don't want to like spiritually bypass that part of the process of whatever you're dealing with, but I don't want to put so much attention there that it continues to be what I reap. So my personal practice doesn't involve a whole lot of cursing, I have a lot of protective work that I do because people do do bad horrible things to other people and that is the nature of reality. I think you have to have tools in your wheelhouse that can take care of that kind of stuff, but to me that doesn't involve, I just I don't know I've had a lot of bad things happen to me in life but I can't think of anybody in my life that I would wish harm upon. The harm is, the karma for them is dealing with what they've done and going on that journey psychologically and emotionally. I don't need to be like throwing anything additional their way. I think that’s definitely not why I’m not like a love and light practitioner, I hate that shit. -Selene

Then, ideally, I don’t always get this far into it, it really is not, I don’t think it’s, you want to get into a slight meditation, like a slight light gnosis, because that’s when your subconscious and your subconscious mind are in unison and that’s when you have the ability to actually, really manipulate outside energetic frequencies. You don’t have to slip into a complete gnosis, like I’ve had spells work out just fine when I was just sitting there trying to meditate, you know? But of course, I think going into gnosis is the key to making the most of a vibration. It’s that state of meditation, like in Zen meditation you’re trying to like totally get rid of your ego, get rid of the “I” entirely. In a magician’s gnosis, what you’re trying to do is get in contact with your Holy Guardian Angel. Which, in my mind, is your higher self. So, it’s trying to combine my subconscious and my conscious mind and getting in contact with that middle way, the part of me that is whole and can give me the best advice and also, I think actually does manipulate things on a fourth dimensional level. I have a whole slew of scientific thoughts that go into my magic beliefs, so it’s basically there’s an extension of my energy that exists in the fourth

dimensional realm and gnosis is just me allowing that fourth dimensional version of me to vibrate. -Saturn

CHAPTER 10

THE MODEL OF DOING WITCHCRAFT

Defining Magic and Witchcraft

It may be clear to some that "doing" witchcraft is very much a part of "being" a witch, yet it is also a salient notion that one does not have to do witchcraft to be a witch. For instance, one can be a witch by sharing qualities with the archetypal and historical witch, such as being a knowledgeable, powerful woman. This was specifically discussed by the group of men I interviewed who seemed to assert that it is more so women who may identify as a witch without practicing witchcraft considering the history of the witch trials and persecution of women. It seems that, in this conversation, men who identify as a witch tend to be practitioners and value the hierarchy of initiatory traditions. In my official sample, 2 of 4 men were initiated yet all practiced witchcraft, so further research should address this issue. Further, some argue that what distinguishes being a witch from being a pagan is the act of practicing magic and witchcraft. Then again, related to "other ways of knowing," there is disagreement whether witchcraft and magic are the same thing with regard to how either "work." This disagreement is not surprising considering that witches are highly individualistic. Take this statement from one such informant, Saturn, for example:

> I think they are the same thing, personally. I've heard some people say that witches are just more religious and don't do any spell work and I would argue that then they would just be pagan. I would argue that you have to actually be involved with spell work and trying to do magic to call yourself a witch. I will say that when you pray, no matter what religion you are, even Christian or Jewish, you know, it doesn't matter... when you pray

> you can go into gnosis. And that is magic. So sometimes people can actually be doing magic and not even realizing it. I think more often than not when people talk about, you know, the "secret"... there is a reason why some peoples' vision boards work, and some peoples don't. I think it's because it's the one's who's worked, it's because they go into gnosis when they meditate on their vision board. They are focusing their intent, whether they call it magic or not, to me they're doing witchcraft.

Now, compare this statement to that of Eli, the lone Wiccan of the group:

> Magic is just the attempt through concentrated will or effort to change reality— that's Crowley's definition— but I think you'll find it is popular in all the different schools, but magic is something that is common to all religions. I actually am not a huge fan of attempts to separate it from words or prayer. I think it is sort of an anthropological dead end, historically. I think differentiating between pre-Christian prayer practices and pre-Christian magic practices is going to be almost impossible. However, witchcraft is something that is a strictly Christian phenomenon. Like witchcraft is a system of magic that only exists in Christendom. So, before the rise of Christianity, nobody would have called it witchcraft; they would have just called it whatever. They would have called it magic, or whatever sort of cognate they had for that in their language, but witchcraft and magic, I think, are radically separate and I think they always have been until recently, linguistically especially. In every major Western European language, the two terms are entirely different. I think witchcraft was always something that involved being in league with familiar spirits that were seen as contrary to the church. Whereas magic could be any practice, including horoscopes and stuff like that.

My personal favorite definition of magic came from Elliot at Crescent City Conjure via the recorded group conversation among shop owners. He identifies as African American, a witch, and as a hoodoo practitioner. He is also initiated into Alexandrian Wicca and Ifa:

> I like to use the metaphor of water a lot because that's very much what it feels like. I look at the role of water in the evolution of humanity that we evolved out of the ocean, grew feet, and began to walk the Earth. We are still born out of water, out of a womb. Before we got to see ourselves in the reflection of a pool of water, we are a part of water. Water does play, it is the majority of what our bodies are made of, it is integral and very spiritual in a strong sense. It is life. If everything in the physical is a mirror of the spiritual... because we believe this is the densest level of existence, so we are a reflection of many things that we came from before. Human beings are so self-centered. Some people are born with the gift to be able to see, to be able to hear, to be able to interact with it (Source) but it's always around us and I think 9 times out of 10, people aren't able to see it because we are too busy climbing the corporate latter or raising our children or going to school or worrying about how we look or if we're smart or strong enough instead of taking a beating and seeing what's moving around us— the Ocean. A lot of traditions have a name for this Ocean... so magic is the ability to be able to communicate with this

> invisible Ocean in one way or another to the degree that you have a modicum of understanding of it, which gives you the ability to manipulate it. Like throwing a stone and knowing how the ripples are going to affect us on the surface.

The discussion following this definition outlined that a witch is a person who interacts with this Source, be they Christian, Muslim, or any other religious affiliation or faith. If there are differences between magic and witchcraft, it appears to be that magic exists whether one believes in it or not, but witchcraft is a way of, or system for, using and interacting with magic. For instance, prayer is a form of magic as one seeks to communicate with and ask for assistance from the Divine, but witchcraft is more so a way of trying to interact directly with the Divine or this Source power. Oftentimes, whether or not one calls what they do witchcraft comes down to cultural context. In various parts of the world, witchcraft still holds negative and nefarious connotations. For others, such as Blanco, witch means the same as doctor in various African traditions she studies. Here, my point is that whether or not one calls what they do witchcraft is contingent upon their social and cultural context, even within the United States. For instance, Blanco stated that people she knows do not call what they do witchcraft, but it is still witchcraft nonetheless. This was a sentiment shared by many when discussing one's "witchy" friends and personal influences. For example, it was often the case that my informants began their descriptions of the "ideal witch" with "this person does not consider themselves a witch, but…"

Moving on, for most of my informants, it appears that trying to separate magic from witchcraft, as it exists in the U.S., is splitting hairs and it ultimately comes down to specific intention and linguistic differences. Thus, the salient definition of witchcraft for the purposes of this thesis is "intentionally harnessing, directing, or manipulating elemental, natural, and universal energies in order to alter one's circumstances in the material world or achieve or manifest a particular desire or goal." It is worth acknowledging that this definition of witchcraft

is somewhat in line with Murdock's (1978) definition of sorcery. Further, it is worth mentioning that definitions of witchcraft often veered into more poetic understandings rather than direct actions, such as witchcraft is "being the wise woman." Yet, one often needs to operationalize the ineffable in order to penetrate its complexities.

In the remainder of this section, I unpack what the model of "doing witchcraft" entails by separating the salient freelisting terms from the Internal/ External Energy piles into "personal magic" and "service work." I then explore how all aspects of performing personal witchcraft can be connected to the central action of keeping altars by providing examples of how altars are used and by pulling out the implicit elements from the examples I provide. I then explore how witchcraft is performed as service work via divination and energy work.

The Model of Doing: Personal Witchcraft at the Altar

I previously mentioned that an alternative "turning point" in the "becoming" narrative from not being a witch to identifying as one involves keeping an altar. Altars were mentioned by the majority (n=14) of my informants in the first part of interviews, though they were only explicitly mentioned in freelisting by two informants. Altars are a beneficial starting point for understanding how the salient elements of the model are connected as it is at these altars that the actions connected to other aspects of witchcraft are performed (Figure 1). It is the place where an individual comes to know themselves and their spiritual gifts, develops their intuition, builds relationships with his or her ancestors or guides, and casts spells. Here are examples of how altars are used:

> Everyone's altar is different, but mine did start out with a center piece that I still use today. It is made out of a faux crystal skull and it sits in the middle of my altar. I've used that since day 1 and it is still there today. It was there to represent me. The hidden, the spiritual side of me, the inner side of me. It's a skull— it's clear, it's see through, and you

know, it also represents death. Death representing the underworld, the other side, the other place, mystery, all that is very important in witchcraft. Then everything else I collected over time. Any witchcraft altar will usually have candles on it, candles are a big part of magic. Natural items from minerals, like stones, gemstones, different pieces of wood, herbs, parts of nature. Usually some pretty scary statues…When I perform magic or let's just say cast a spell, I will sit in front of my altar, I will close my eyes and I will meditate, and I will try to center myself and I will shut out the entire physical world. Then I will try to focus the entirety of my being onto what I am trying to accomplish and just bring that in from the outside to the real world. It's almost like trying to play out a very long and complicated scenario in your own mind without having any kind of break in concentration or logic… I will try to take a few minutes out of every day to be at least be in front of my altar and meditate. Focus on what I want to get out of it. To me, that is performing magic. -Braxton

I have separate altars for elements. I don't really work with deities. Like my water altar is in the bathroom. I have one in the kitchen for fire and stuff like that. The one right here is the big one, it's sort of like the catch all I guess, but this one it's for my ancestors and spirit guides. Every day I practice. There is morning and evening meditation. I do readings every morning and evening. I study daily. One of my altars, every morning when I make coffee, I make coffee for my ancestors. Everyday there's something. -Kathleen

For me, practicing the craft is a matter of just simple things. I create money molds and oils and if I need to manifest something, I work with that energy of manifesting whatever I need through visualization and through affirmations and... it's weird but I think when you've practiced as long as I have, I don't need to set up a ritual for a focus. I can go right here at the altar and go, "I need to bring in more money. Here's a money oil. Here's some more herbs. I need this, I trust you to bring it to me. Thanks in advance." And it happens. So, I think that it's just, you have to get to that level. -Magnolia

I started to notice; I didn't realize how many witches I knew because I didn't know the iconography. I wasn't paying attention to that stuff. All of a sudden, I'd walk into a house and be like, this house has three altars in it, and one is clearly a working altar with a fresh offering on it. Like, this bitch is a witch!... But witchcraft means having a conscious relationship with natural rhythms and natural orders of things... I'm trying to think of a good example. How do I elaborate on that? Presentational-ly, I have altars in my house. One is just for show with all the nick-tacky things I've collected over the years and one is working altar where I do my work- where I sit and meditate and talk to my grandmother, where I keep my dog's ashes, where I keep talismans that friends have given or made me. I have presentational aspects of how I live, and I have functional aspects of how I live. I think that's one good example of that. But I think practicing it more has a lot more to do with when I feel chaotic, or when I see patterns of disfunction or illness in my clients, or friends, or in my partner, trying to look towards natural order first before I make a judgement if something is well or unwell, whether that's normal or abnormal. -Katerina

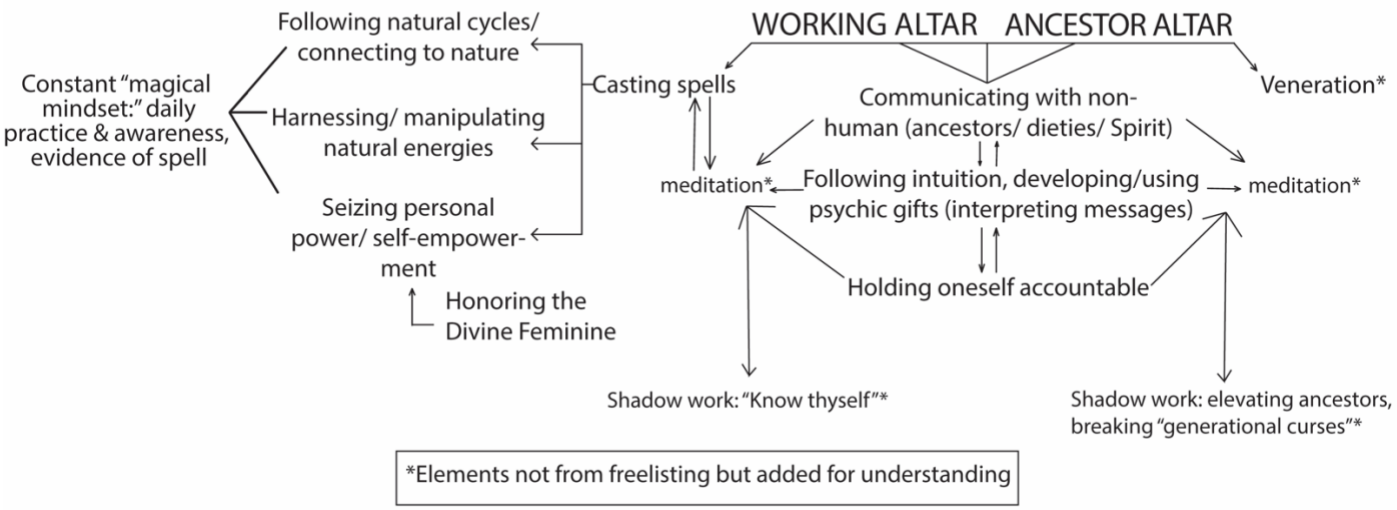
I basically had this dream where Hecate, who I had probably seen her name on the internet, but I wasn't actively researching witchcraft at that time. I hadn't even been researching anything about it probably since I had been in high school, so maybe I saw her name before and maybe I didn't but in my dream, I was very aware that that's who she was. And she read my tarot cards and I don't remember what they were but after the reading she basically was like you're a witch. You're meant to be worshipping and like devoting yourself to me and I'm really pissed off that you're not doing it, so basically do it now or bad things will happen. So, it was like okay. I set up an altar for her and never really looked back after that. I usually keep an altar at home, usually more than one. Right now, I have three. -Saturn

Practicing witchcraft, I mean I do it on a daily basis anyways, but I get up. I say certain prayers while I'm getting ready, cause that's what you're supposed to do. Morning prayers are very important in Ifa, so I do that. And depending on what day it is, like if it's Sunday or Monday, I usually go around and clean up my altars, put new water, put new offerings up there, talk to my spirits and stuff like that— say hello, sit with them for a little bit, then I will kind of go about my day on a regular basis. Then, you know, depending on if I have some work for a client, I might be doing candle work, I might be making an herbal tincture, I might be making a little charm bag for them to use. I might be doing a specific type of reading, privately, or I might be doing one over the phone for Hex, you know whatever that might be, and really witchcraft is just kind of like in my everyday stuff. It's not like I, setting a certain time to do things, it's more of like in every little thing that I'm doing, I put a little big of magic in it. My food, whenever I'm walking places I have like you know oils that I use to bring certain things. It's just kind of like… it's little tiny things like that. So, it's less ritualistic and more holistic, I guess is the way you can describe it. *laughs* -Miriam

So, the way I do things and I do it very old fashioned or like folksy way, but if anybody wants to get in touch with their ancestors, all you need is a white cloth, a glass of water that you change out weekly, a white candle that you light up whenever you're going to go talk to them, and a holy object. If you grew up Christian, use a cross. If you grew up, you know, in like a Muslim household, maybe use the Quran, or whatever you wanna do. If you want to add anything else up there, you can add something green, add flowers, maybe some tobacco if anybody in your family smoked, whatever it might be. Food offerings every so often, whatever. But, it's mainly water, fire, holy object, white cloth, you're good. And you go up to that, you knock *knocks bench* three times, and you announce what your name is, say that you would like to speak to your ancestors known and unknown, and you just kind of sit there and you meditate or pray or whatever you wanna do. And you do that on a regular basis and if you keep doing it, you're gonna start getting messages whether that's hearing things, seeing things in the water or the fire, seeing things in your dreams, seeing certain spirits or numbers or having this certain song that comes on the radio, you're gonna start noticing patterns. That's when you know that your stuff is opening up. -Miriam on setting up ancestor altars

I have altars in my house. I feel really grateful to be dating someone right now whose also occult affiliated, so I don't have to hide that stuff like other people I've dated or family when I had to hide it because it was weird. So, I have altars openly. I try to leave, like I have an ancestral altar and I'll try to refresh it with a traditional offering like tobacco or sweetgrass at certain times, especially if it's like somebody's birthday or death anniversary or something. Every morning when I wake up, I try to do a sun blessing where I thank the sun, basically, for like I don't know, me being alive and me being there in the morning. I ask the sun's energy, I'll be like, "Father Sun, thank you for keeping me alive, give me strength throughout the day." Kind of like a prayer. I try to remember that I'm a spiritual being and the things that I think and say, I've already told the universe. When I say things, it means I want them. So, if I go back and you know, like align myself with things that I don't want to bring in my life then I'm sending a mixed message. I have crystals all over my house and herbs. I wear jewelry based on work I'm trying to do. -Solina

Figure 1. Connecting Altars to Freelisting Elements



Breakdown of Explicit and Implicit Elements of Altar Activities:

Most of my informants keep two separate altars: an ancestor altar and a working altar (Figure 1). Personal, working altars are typically adorned with statues of deities, often of the Divine Feminine, such as Hecate in Saturn's story. There are often objects to represent the self, candles, natural objects such as crystals, and found natural items, such as stones and feathers.

One may also leave offerings for Spirit on altars, such as Florida water (a spiritual cologne) or foods associated with certain deities. Daily prayers to deities, God, or however one personally defines "Spirit" are conducted and spells are cast at personal altars. Spirit is a term used by many of my informants as somewhat of a "catch all" for the non-human realms and Universal energy.

The act of casting spells at altars brings together many salient implicit elements of the model such as meditation, visualization, affirmations, manifestation, and shadow work, as well as the more explicit elements such as communicating with the non-human in some way, intentionally seizing personal power, aligning with natural cycles/ harnessing energies, and maintaining a "constant magical mindset," or magic in daily actions and constant awareness for changes in reality (Figure 1). Spells are done most commonly for protection from harm or spiritual/ magical attack, which includes banishing spells. Spells are also cast to "manifest" such things as money (second most common), a job, and love. However, my informants made it abundantly clear and were very adamant that one should never infringe upon another's free will with love spells. Love spells are usually done to attract self-love or a partner with particular qualities.

There are countless ways to perform spells. Spells may include ritually "charging" objects, such as crystal jewelry, "*gris gris*" charm bags, or sigils which are charged at and worn beyond the altar space. Spells are commonly done as candle magic, so I will use such an example here. As an example of candle magic, say one wishes to manifest a romantic partner. One may wish to do this on Friday as Fridays are associated with Venus, which is the planetary energy associated with harmonious relationships. For extra emphasis, one may also choose the time of the day associated with Venus. One picks a candle in a color that aligns with a particular intention, such as pink in this example. First, one "grounds" themselves, meaning they focus

their energy in the present moment and create a calm space. Next, one charges the candle with intention, meaning that they channel their energy into the object. Then, one dresses it with an oil that one has either created oneself or purchased from an experienced practitioner. Following this, the candle is rolled in herbs that correlate to the elements, deities, or other aspects that link to the particular spell being cast. For instance, rose petals in a love spell. The candle is then prayed over, lit, and then the practitioner meditates on the flame while envisioning his or her intention coming into being. One may recite a mantra of sorts, either verbally or internally, to enhance focus and intention. However, one may do these steps in a different order than what I describe- witchcraft is creative and individual. As with any action in witchcraft, intention and focus is more important than the particular "tools," such as herbs and oils, or set of directions. As Magnolia states, a witch should eventually get to a point where all they need to successfully manifest a goal is intention alone. This example is but one illustration of a spell as one can make almost any action into a spell by adding focused intention.

Spell work also is similar to "root work" and "conjure" in hoodoo and *brujeria*. As Blanco told me, she feels that brujeria places more emphasis on spell work rather than aligning with the natural world via the Wiccan Wheel of the Year or pagan "nature worship." In hoodoo "workings," roots and herbs are used intentionally for certain purposes such as floor washes, ritual baths, and *gris-gris* charm bags. In addition, dirt is gathered from places to be used in specific workings. For instance, if someone seeks assistance in legal matters, they may gather dirt from a courthouse. In Ifa or Santeria, animals may be sacrificed for certain workings as discussed by Miriam, though she includes that the animals are raised and killed as humanely as possible. Finally, in hoodoo and other forms of eclectic witchcraft, witches look to religious texts, such as the Quran, Torah, or the Bible, specifically the book of Psalms, for "spells" which

outline certain prayers and herbs to use for healing in specific instances. These are additional examples of the implicit ways one may harness natural energies in magic.

Charging objects is done in a similar fashion in that a witch meditates on imbuing a certain object with an intention, such as on a rose quartz crystal with the intention to attract love, and then carries or wears the object. Objects, such as water or crystals, can also be charged by natural processes, such as leaving them under the full moon, or cleansed by exposing them to incense or smoke. Spells such as charm bags are "fed" oils that carry certain intentions periodically to ensure that they remain effective; these may also be worn, placed in certain locations, or kept on the altar. For instance, a charm bag to ensure a happy home may be hung in a corner of one's house. Further, certain spell objects, such as candles that have been meditated on or "jar" spells, may be buried in a ritual fashion to "ground" the working.

Often, the timing of casting a spell and the type of spell cast is determined by natural and astrological/ planetary cycles, which links the explicit salient elements of "spell casting" and "following natural cycles." For instance, each day of the week coordinates to a particular number, color, element, and planetary ruler. So, if one wishes to manifest increased psychic powers, he or she may wear silver on Mondays or he or she may perform a spell with a silver candle dressed in lavender on a Monday because of the associations with the moon. Further, each phase of the moon is associated with particular ways to work with energy. For example, new moons are for introspection, setting new intentions and banishing old traumas, as seen in Katerina's story. Every phase until the full moon is a call to recall and remember one's intention and if one has cast a spell, he or she may take actions to strengthen the spell at significant waxing times. The full moon is for manifesting and revisiting intentions set at the new moon and the proceeding waning phases are for releasing what one has been gathering during the cycle in

order to discover what one should intend to work on during the new moon. These aspects of spell casting bring in the salient freelisting elements of connecting to natural cycles/ harnessing energy from nature and "constant magical mindset"/ magic in daily action. Further, many keep journals of this process as a record of their lives and progress. These journals are sometimes referred to as a "Book of Shadows."

This process of journaling is related to the dimension of "awareness" and ties into the salient element of "knowing thyself"/ holding the self-accountable and relates to many implicit elements of the process of doing, such as meditation and deep internal inquiry, or "shadow work." The shadow self relates to the darker, "negative" aspects of the psyche that can result in harmful behaviors if not understood and dealt with. For instance, one may often feel jealousy or rage, which causes them to get in fights, or one may have a habit of lying, or someone may turn to vices such as sex and alcohol as coping mechanisms. Shadow work is the process of analyzing such instances for the underlying reasons why one does them. This process requires deep, psychological inquiry of the self via analysis of family histories and childhood experiences, but also of daily patterns, habits, and emotional states, as well as paying attention to what one's ancestors may have done during their lifetimes.

Some witches contend that once these darker emotions are understood within the self, they can be channeled into witchcraft practices such as hexes— which are like spells but done to harm or cause discord in the lives of others (in the anthropological sense, hexes are more in line with sorcery). My informants stated that they rarely if ever perform hexes. Other witches assert that shadow work allows for a means to reframe negative experiences and thought patterns into positive ones, which is important for magic to work. In other words, through the process of shadow work, one can clear away negative energies that attract negative events and occurrences

in this way. In this sense, one has a level of control over what happens to them, but they also hold themselves accountable for what may come to them. Meditation is used in shadow work to come to know and understand the shadow self, but meditation and shadow work are also used to understand what aspects of the self one has inherited. In this way, shadow work is done to clear up "karmic debts" and break "generational curses" which result from inheriting the negative patterns and karma of one's ancestors or one's past self that were not dealt with during that time. These debts, blocked energies, and curses, in addition to socialization that occurred in childhood, may impede one's ability to access their spiritual, psychic gifts. The majority (n=13) of my informants relayed to me that meditation is the key to reclaiming one's gifts.

Alongside meditation practices, the most discussed element of the model of doing witchcraft that was rarely mentioned in the freelisting portion of interviews is the practice of ancestor veneration, or honoring and developing relationships with one's ancestors, which was mentioned as a dimension of the "being" model. This practice was mentioned explicitly by the majority of my sample (n=13), though the importance of ancestry was mentioned by all (n=17). In addition to a personal altar, witches often keep an ancestor altar. These altars are adorned with pictures of one's deceased loved ones, items that belonged to them, a white candle, a glass of water, and a white tablecloth. As mentioned in the above examples, witches use these altars to leave offerings for their ancestors, pray to them, ask them for guidance, and as a place to meditate in order to seek contact and receive messages from them. In other words, ancestor altars are a location in which witches develop a relationship with their dead. As witches develop and deepen this practice, they describe that their particular witchcraft practices increasingly begin to incorporate their "ancestral magic," or particular divinatory, healing, prayer, and other practices linked to their past blood relatives. This deepening of one's practice includes developing the

psychic gifts they inherited from their maternal lineage mentioned in the becoming narrative. Further, one may work towards "elevating" one's ancestors by directly discussing with them the potentially harmful acts they may have committed during their lifetimes. Alongside such discussions, one works towards remediating such actions in one's own life by choosing to do the opposite (see Blanco's statement in the "ancestry" section.)

Thus, after one performs these actions that typically begin at the altar, whether spells or veneration, one begins to look for evidence of it "working" in their lives vis-a-vis "other ways of knowing." For instance, synchronicities are interpreted as signs to make certain decisions or as messages from one's guides. For example, one casts a spell for clarity in order to make a decision about whether or not to move to Hawaii, or one may ask his or her ancestors for a sign. The next day one receives an email for a discounted plane ticket to Hawaii, receives a post card from an old friend who is in Hawaii, and turns on the radio at the exact time a commercial mentions Hawaii. Thus, this person receives their answer and makes the decision to move to Hawaii. Acknowledging these synchronicities relates to "other ways of knowing," but also to the salient elements of "interacting with the Divine," "developing intuition," and tangentially to "constant magical mindset" considering that looking for synchronicities requires sharpened focus and attention on one's surroundings.

In summary, personal magic often begins at altars. Thus, the actions associated with altars connects many other implicit and explicit aspects of "doing" witchcraft. While actions certainly take place away from altars, it is at the altar that many witches create and perform rituals, cast spells, meditate, set intentions for what they want to manifest, come to know themselves and their ancestors, honor their dead, and connect to deities, Spirit, and the Universe. The self that one finds at the altar may then be extended beyond it in service to others.

The Model of Doing: Witchcraft as Service Work

Overall, the most frequently mentioned element of "doing" witchcraft was following natural cycles- part of personal magic. The second most common themes were helping/healing others and actively trying to improve the world, which includes using witchcraft to ensure freedom and equality for peoples and the environment. Both of the latter are most often manifested through community-oriented service work in the form of energy healing and divination done for clients. Related to the dimensions of "awareness," "responsibility," and "other ways of knowing," as well as personal witchcraft, both energy healing and divination require that individuals learn, understand, and master their particular psychic and/or mediumship abilities. In this way, witches learn to recognize what is their own energy, thoughts, or feelings versus what does not seem to belong to them but is rather an aspect of the collective unconscious or messages from someone else's spirits or guides.

Energy Healing as Service:

Energy healing can mean a number of things. Some witches perform energy healing directly— such as reiki. Others participate in collective meditations wherein a set time is established to raise energy and channel it towards a certain goal. For some, energy work looks like community service for a cause they are passionate about in the sense that "attention is the currency of the Universe," meaning that energy is something that can be exchanged and has value. Some witches, such as Kathleen, perform energy work in novel ways by combining it with other approaches- such as doing hair. Kathleen, the "Hair Witch," focuses her energy towards helping her clients by using particular herbs in hair washes (depending on their goal), throwing runes or reading tarot to provide insight into personal questions, performing ancestor readings,

and utilizing certain crystals in her services. Her goal is to use her own energy and gifts to improve the mental, physical, and spiritual well-being of her clients by raising their energies. In this, she gives them a new look, which boosts their energy, but also emphasizes their spiritual and mental health as well. Here, I will use the narrative of Nadia to illustrate how energy work, psychic gifts, healing and helping others, and actively improving the world are related:

Nadia's story

Nadia grew up in a Muslim family and while she doesn't associate with her family anymore, she still draws from the Quran and Islamic mysticism, or Sufism, by summoning and working with *jinns*. She describes jinns as a spirit race of people who belong to the land and were here long before humans. Each human has a personal jinn. As a child, she read a children's' book in which the main character befriends a ghost. She related to this character because she was also talking to her jinn and was able to communicate with unseen realms. Because of these beliefs, she believes she was targeted for child abuse and later sexual abuse. As a result, Nadia repressed such painful memories which she states eventually impeded her ability to channel from other dimensions and use her spiritual gifts because her energy channels became blocked.

To recall her memories and resolve the embodied trauma, Nadia attended a ten-day silent meditation known as a *vipassana*. She was successful in the sense that after she completed this intensive meditation practice, she was able to communicate with her jinn again, but she was also able to better communicate with other peoples' jinns. She studied the Islamic healing method *ruqyah*, which is linguistically and methodologically similar to reiki. In addition, she became a reiki master. However, she feels that most people who do reiki do not realize that they are communicating with other people's spirit guides, as is taught in ruqyah, and are unaware of the

role that their ancestors play in assisting healing. In other words, they are unaware of their ancestral magic, which she feels is a direct result of colonization and patriarchal systems of power. Thus, she began her own energy healing business in which she uses reiki to heal clients, but she also trains others- specifically sex workers, queer and non-binary individuals- to tap into their ancestral magic and open up clear communication with their ancestors, recall their repressed memories from childhood and past lives, and work with their own spirit guides and energy fields to protect themselves and perform energy work on their own. Nadia believes that if a witch, or anyone born with spiritual gifts, does not use their magic to work towards freedom for all oppressed peoples and to dismantle harmful power structures, then they are doing *sahib*-bad magic.

Within this narrative are several salient elements of the model at work. Nadia is using her spiritual gifts to interact with spirits, energies, and her ancestral magic to heal and empower others, as well as to protect herself via energy healing. She also illustrates how witches use magic in a political sense, though the majority of my sample claimed to not be politically active. Other witches in my sample, some who were also practitioners of reiki, shared similar experiences. For example, Magnolia's husband tried to kill her and some tourists requested her to channel a spirit who happened to be a cannibalistic death metal musician who had committed suicide. In both of these instances, Magnolia claims her spirit guides and her ability to communicate with them protected her. Magnolia provides energy healing from a distance and explains that she does so by interpreting the messages of her guides which she receives from her client's guides. Furthermore, energetic healing does not always look like reiki, as is the case with Katerina, a functional medicine practitioner. Here I summarize Katerina's story to illustrate.

Katerina's story

In 2014, Katerina had a near death experience (NDE) when she went into multiple organ failure as a result of a rare disease which doctors had failed to diagnose. She dwindled to 80 pounds and was being kept alive by machines at the Cleveland Clinic as well as by her community, who started a GoFundMe initiative to pay her hospital bills. She refers to these peoples as the "larger organism" which she now understands all humans to belong to. This idea of the "larger organism" partially stems from encountering "the veil" during the apex of her NDE in which she left her body and saw the threads of energy that run through and connect all things in the universe. She made the decision to return to her body, but she consciously acknowledged that she would never be able to see the world in the same way again. As a very "grounded" individual, Katerina is a skeptic. Before her NDE, she was a journalist obsessed with fact checking. After her NDE, she developed an interest in medical anthropology and found a progressive doctor who specialized in the gut-brain connection. Both of these interests led her to "witchery" via the "back door of science."

For one, she contributes that the capitalistic nature of the Western medical system is set up to service the wealthy (particularly white men) and two, that women with knowledge of healing have historically been called witches and three, turning to "natural" remedies, such as focusing on the microbiome and food as medicine, falls under the pop culture notion of "witchy" things. Further, she stated that she found no descriptions of her experience in science books, but she did in those that discussed witchcraft and the occult. Moreover, she learned that all of the women in her mother's family have been healers in some capacity. Katerina, though still slightly skeptical, admitted that she would never be able to forget what she saw when she was dying and related it to the states of being that many people take large amounts of psychedelic drugs to

achieve. In a podcast she co-hosts, called Hottest Hell Presents, she discusses her NDE and comically states that, “Dammit, the cheesy hippies were right.” Thus, Katerina felt obligated to give back to the community that saved her life and did so by becoming a functional medicine practitioner. She combines evidence-based medical research with “witchy” healing modalities, such as following natural cycles as a gauge for health, such as regular menstrual cycles, and as prompts to release traumas and emotions that become biological realities. For example, she looks to nature for examples of “dysfunction” before deeming such things her patients experience as abnormal and encourages them to understand their bodies in different ways. In her own life, she uses such rituals and tools of witchcraft, such as intentionally setting times to release trauma, to mindfully regulate her dysregulated nervous system and in the lives of others, she offers affordable healthcare options to those who are failed by the overarching medical system. Though she states that it’s a cliché, her mantra is “where focus goes, energy flows.” About herself, Katerina stated that being a witch is about constant observation and sharing knowledge and thus, she stated that if she makes her services unavailable by charging exorbitant fees, she “is no longer doing witchcraft, [she’s] practicing medicine.”

In this example of healing, helping, and actively trying to improve the world, Katerina focuses less on the more “spiritual” aspects of energy healing, such as reiki healing and communicating with spirits, and more on the practical tools of witchcraft that are used to understand and use one’s own energy to heal the self. Katerina looks to combine Western science with spirituality to treat her clients. For instance, she looks to current scientific research concerning functional nutrition, the role of the microbiome in mental health, and studies which show that trauma is stored in the body and combines such findings with the rituals of witchcraft, such as setting times to release trauma and recognizing natural rhythms to better understand

"chaos" to rewire the nervous system. Rather than denouncing spirituality or current medicine, she asserts they should be used synergistically to achieve optimal well-being.

Divination as Service:

When I asked my very first informant, Layla, how she defined witchcraft, she inquired whether I thought that reading and understanding tarot was enough to call oneself a witch, because that is a sentiment she has often encountered. Reading tarot is a form of divination that is popularly practiced among witches across the country, as well as the globe. Historically, it has often been understood as dubious "fortune telling." However, my informants seem to consider it more as a tool to develop intuition while they're learning to train their psychic or spiritual gifts. In addition, tarot, and divination in general, provides a source of income and a way to easily communicate intuitive messages to those seeking answers.

There are many forms of divination, and while tarot is arguably the most well-known, witches also throw bones, read runes, interpret natal astrology charts, read palms, and practice various other forms. Pulling again from Carl Jung (1990), Solina describes the tarot as a system of universal symbols which illustrate the collective unconscious and human experience. Witches, and other spiritualists, learn these symbols and their meanings in order to translate messages to others. In an earlier quote from my informant, Jemison, he considers witches as an "essential employee" because they function in a similar way to counselors. Individuals, including witches, who cannot afford clinical therapy or feel uncomfortable in such settings, as shown by Kirner (2011) in her work on pagan models of health beliefs, may seek out divination services to get clarity about certain life problems and inner conflicts.

All of my informants relayed that every human is born with psychic abilities, but they are usually socialized out of them during childhood because of the western emphasis on logic and reason. I was told that one can get these gifts back through meditation, but divination is a way to practice such gifts. For witches who become adept at divination, they may also identify as a medium— meaning they can communicate directly with or channel supernatural energies or beings, or as psychic— meaning they are either clairvoyant, clairaudient, claircognizant, or clairsentient. If they are clairvoyant or clairaudient, one may receive visions or hear voices, respectively, that are distinguished from reality. If they are claircognizant or clairsentient, they may know certain things intuitively that seem to have no source or know about events before they happen via precognitive dreams or thoughts. It is important to note that many of my informants self-stigmatize due to these practices and labels' association with fraud and mental illness. It seems that using the term "psychic" has been more contentious and controversial for my informants than the term "witch."

As with statements related to responsibility, witches feel obligated to train and provide their services for community purposes. In some cases, this is because such gifts have a divine source and there is a belief that sequestering them diminishes one's power to some degree. Obviously, witches must make money to survive, but many of my informants offer free classes and do activities such as Instagram live shows to pull cards and answer questions for viewers, or they may provide astrological updates about the week ahead to help people check in with their emotions.

In some cases, divination is a precursor for other services. Here, it functions as a "peek" into a client's current circumstances and areas of blockage. Witches can use this knowledge to develop meaningful, individual rituals and spells for their clients. For instance, if one performs a

natal chart reading for a client and determines that Saturn, associated with discipline and restriction, is currently transiting through the client's 5th house, which is associated with self-expression, then one may inquire whether the client is currently struggling with such endeavors and if they are, one may create an individual spell for the client to help them be able to express themselves more effectively. Thus, in summary, witches first come to know themselves, including the various entities and energies that are always with them, and then they set forth to assist their communities with the full knowledge that they are outsiders in it. Yet, as my informants contribute, it is often this aspect of being "other" that is a draw to becoming a witch in the first place.

CHAPTER 11

TACTICS OF INTERSUBJECTIVITY

In forming identity, one tallies up the qualities, values, morals, beliefs, and even the aesthetics of certain individuals and groups of people and sees oneself as either closer to such things, or farther away, or what Bucholtz and Hall (2010) refer to as adequation and distinction. In general, albeit with a few exceptions, my informants set themselves apart from three major groups of people and ideas:

1. Authority- Government, capitalism, and the "elite"
2. Neopagans and in some cases, pagans
3. "Instawitches"- or what I call the "witchy aesthetic"

Authority: Hex the Patriarchy

I do not think it is altogether necessary to expand on this point as it is deeply ingrained in both the model of being a witch and doing witchcraft. Witches do not like to be told what to do and are opposed to structures and systems that oppress women, people of color, and the environment. Witches, at least in this sample, tend to espouse egalitarian ideologies.

Pagans and Neopagans:

Only one person in my sample somewhat identified with the term Neopagan, one had an ambiguous relationship with it, and the rest opposed it— sometimes vehemently. The reasons for

this are that Neopaganism, as a term, was created in western academic scholarship and most often applied to European traditions, specifically those diminished by the spread of Christianity, and invokes the idea of "recreating" practices of past peoples. Take this quote from Nadia for example:

> It's funny because my practices are classified as Arab pagan practices, but pagan and Neopagan, those terms scream white European magic to me, so I never really identify with them too much.

For witches of color, they do not view their religions and practices as being recreations, but as continuous traditions their ancestors have maintained outside of a context of Christianity. Thus, they do not identify as pagan or Neopagan. However, many witches of color are of mixed heritage and some feel that "pagan" may relate to their European ancestry, but not the other branches of their family trees. However, one of my informants of mixed heritage, Jemison, contributed that if it was not for the "goofy Neopagany people," then witches in general may still be feared and demonized to a greater extent in the United States. Another informant stated that the term Neopagan brings up images with "too much velvet," meaning that there is a certain stereotypical type of dress and level of pomp and circumstance associated with the label.

Wicca, more so Gardnerian Wicca, is often the prototype of Neopagan religions. This is a special point of contention for most of my informants who wish to make it clear that they are not associated with Wicca in any way as Wicca has become synonymous with "witch," but they are not initiated into or affiliated with the religion. However, the lone Wiccan of my sample denounced the labels as well saying that many Alexandrian Wiccans have a "nasty opinion" of the word. Here is a quote from his interview:

> **Me**: "Do you also identify as a pagan or a Neopagan?"
> **Eli**: "No. Alexandrians usually have a nasty opinion of that word. The main reason is because, like I said before, witchcraft is something that developed in a Christian context.

> The word "pagan," I just think it gives an image that does not match what I do. So, if I tell people that I'm a pagan, they are going to make assumptions that I worship the polytheistic gods, that I am connected to a pre-Christian culture ethnically that I am not, that I am trying to reconstruct something that I'm not, so I think using the term pagan strips the sort of power, the spiritual power behind a term like witch. You know, witch still has a certain sting to it and the word pagan has a, I mean I hate to be mean here, but it has a certain paltry kind of... frumpiness to it.

As mentioned earlier, this sentiment of the term "pagan" being outdated and "frumpy" was shared by a few witches in my sample, as was the sentiment that the term does not convey how they practice. For instance, pagans are described as "nature worshipping" and many witches feel that nature is an important aspect of practicing, but they do not worship it. For instance, a highly salient sentiment was that "we're not all out here in the woods dancing naked under a full moon." In addition, "pagan" indexes a certain aversion to monotheistic religions, which many witches still drawn from. In this sense, God has many names and faces, but is still one God. For others, they may believe their "theological" beliefs are different from pagans. For instance, one may worship a pantheon of gods and goddesses as pagans do, but he or she interprets them as entities that become conscious because of increased levels of human attention funneled towards them rather than as literal deities. However, the more senior women in my sample as well as individuals who follow the Wheel of the Year but are not Wiccan, proudly employ the term "pagan" in addition to "witch." I do not mean to diminish the importance of the term for those who find it meaningful. I mean only to contribute that witches do not necessarily identify as pagans though they have been repeatedly described as such.

Instawitches and the Witchy Aesthetic:

It is first important to note that those in my sample welcomed the increased interest in witchcraft. Reasons listed for the increased interested often map onto the uptick in witches represented in popular culture via shows like *American Horror Story*, the revamped series of

Sabrina the Teenage Witch and *Charmed*, and so forth which depict a Hollywood version of witchcraft. Witches are open to people learning more about witches and witchcraft, but there is a sense that the increased attention also results in increased misinformation as "clickbait" becomes a way to increase followers on social media and sell products. Some admonish the "performative" aspect of currently identifying as a witch. In other words, individuals may wear the articles of clothing that index being a witch, but they are not aware of the philosophical, theoretical, or historical study behind witchcraft nor have they done the intense inner work required to make magic and witchcraft work. As Selene says, it is more of a "here is my hashtag #witchyvibe altar," or what Saturn calls "Witchtagram."

However, many of my informants stated that once people become interested or are exposed, they welcome such exposure if it turns into genuine interest. In this way, there is a sense of being a "real" witch and a "trendy" witch. Using crystals, cleansing energy with sage, and the "dark" aesthetic have become popular and often times are a gateway to becoming a witch, but my informants claim that these practices do not necessarily make one a witch. Further, many of my informants decry the consumerist and appropriative aspects of such things, which they link to capitalism. For instance, Solina cited the international cosmetics company, Sephora, who packaged and sold a "witch kit" which contained sage, crystals, and tarot cards for $40. Using sage is a practice traced to indigenous peoples, such as Solina's family, and doing such involves a level of appropriation of which "real" witches should be aware of because, according to Nadia, if one is not working to demolish these structures, they are unknowingly or knowingly reproducing them and practicing sahib, or bad magic. However, my informants feel that those who are genuinely interested in learning are welcome and they do not "gatekeep" the term from others. Especially women who are using it for their own empowerment.

CHAPTER 12

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Identity and Empowerment via Becoming, Being, and Doing

The main, overarching question driving this research was "What motivates a diverse group of individuals to identify as witches despite stigmatization?" As with any big question, several more stemmed from this central inquiry. Is self-empowerment a reason to identify? If so, what does that look like? Is this a shared idea? What actions are included in achieving such empowerment? Is meditation important in this endeavor? If so, could there be implications for improved subjective well-being in aligning with the lifestyle of a witch? What is the lifestyle of a witch? Despite the diversity of traditions, practices, and peoples who identify, is there a shared model of identity? What are the traditions and influences that are involved? Is North American witchcraft best understood as paganism, Neopaganism, or similar to witchcraft in "small scale" societies? Do motivations reflect the aims of feminism? In past studies of culture and human motivation, investigating shared cultural models, or a collection of mental schemas that inform behavior, has proven to be a productive place to begin (D'Andrade & Strauss, 1992; de Munck, 2013).

As a result of this research, I determined that there are certain elements of being a witch and doing witchcraft that are shared despite tradition, ethnicity, and gender. I was not surprised to find that the diagnostic and divinatory methods of magic described by anthropologists studying small-scale societies are indeed popular among many in my sample, nor that there is an

important emphasis on connecting to the natural world even if one does not worship it as is described in studies of paganism and Neopaganism. However, I was surprised to find that psychic and healing abilities are described as being inherited via the maternal line, an aspect similar to the medieval European and African notions of witchcraft described by anthropologists. Though I did not extensively focus on feminism as reason to identify as a witch in this thesis, I was not surprised to learn that many witches view the increased interest in witchcraft to align with increased interest in feminist ideologies. However, I did find that many of my informants view witchcraft as a tool for social transformation as well as personal transformation, which is in line with feminist literature of witchcraft.

Moreover, I was not surprised to find that there is a salient element of self-empowerment in both the models of being a witch and doing witchcraft that is a draw to identifying as a witch. The actions involved in achieving self-empowerment may look different for each witch depending on their unique path, personal history, ancestry, and spiritual beliefs, yet many of my informants emphasize the importance of meditation, which has been repeatedly shown to result in increased subjective well-being (Balaji et al., 2012; Chu, 2010; Khalsa, 2015). Further, the emphasis on "shadow work," which involves journaling and analyzing narratives of personal experience, may contribute to empowerment as writing about emotions has been shown, cross-culturally, to help individuals link and process thoughts and feelings which has implications for immune health (Kirmayer, 2003). Yet, to answer the central question of motivation, self-empowerment, meditation, and shadow work are among just three elements in a shared model of identity that can be explored to explain why witches decide to adopt the identifier of "witch."

As de Munck states, "The primary function of the self is to bestow self-consciousness onto an identity" (2013:1). In the model of being a witch, there is an emphasis on awareness of

and responsibility for the self and what happens to oneself. Further, there is an element of flexibility in adopting this identifier which allows individuals the freedom to change as the world, and their understanding of their self in it, changes. When one becomes a witch, they may no longer see themselves as alone in the world, or as a single self, but as a continuation of and supported by their ancestral line. In other words, with greater internalization of a model of identity comes greater motivation to act according to the model and in this case, a witch becomes ever more conscious that they can be aware of themselves, responsible for themselves, and have the freedom to change how they perceive of themselves and what they believe in. Finally, when one becomes a witch, they come to trust "other" ways of knowing that possibly help alleviate some of the uncertainty that persists in a rational, rigidly scientific, and logical dominant culture. In summary, *being* a witch, which includes a template for reframing one's past experiences via the narrative of becoming a witch, and performing witchcraft gives individuals, who are predominately people of color, women, and queer, a sense of empowerment in the form of agency and community in an otherwise oppressive world.

In her ethnography of magicians, or *magu*, in post-Soviet Russia, Lindquist (2009) states, "Magic practices thrive where power is brutal and overwhelming, where the rational channels of agency are insufficient or of limited value, and where the uncertainty of life calls for methods of existential reassurance and control that rational and technical means cannot offer" (pg. 2). Lindquist (2009) defines agency as "the strive to accumulate being," or to "have a hand in creating the world one lives in," (pg. 6-7). She is careful to include that agency is affected by both the intention to act, as well as entities that constrain one's ability to enact intention. Thus, she describes magic as a means to agentively "craft hope" in response to oppression, such as that exerted by both Communist and post-Communist Russian institutions. For Lindquist, hope is

akin to Bourdieu's *illusio,* or the notion that if life is akin to a game, *illusio* is the stake one has in one's future, or outcome (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). In other words, magic can be used as a means to accrue agency and craft hope as a way to exert a sense of control over one's future sense of security. In this sense, identity and witchcraft are employed in the same way in the contemporary United States where interest in using magic as self-empowerment continues to increase. It may be that individuals in the United States are experiencing a cultural moment akin to that of post-Soviet Russia where the rational channels of agency are so insufficient that individuals are increasingly turning to magic.

Becoming, Being, and Doing as Agency

To illustrate further and flesh out how the agency aspect of identifying as a witch may become empowering, Bandura (2001) discusses four aspects of agency that map on, somewhat strikingly, to the processes of spellcasting, working with energy, shadow work, and conjure. "The first is intentionality: to have agency is to intend to do something. The second is forethought. The active agent has a set of expectations for what action is intended and likely to produce. The third is self- reactiveness; we actively engage in strategies intended to achieve the ends sought, and we monitor ourselves and our success along the way. The fourth core component of agency is self-reflection; the agent is aware of his or her negotiating potential constraints" (Dressler, 2019: 149). In his research on the relationship between cultural consonance, agency, and health outcomes in Brazil, Dressler (2019) determines that one's sense of agency is significantly related to the severity of depressive symptoms.

To measure agency, Dressler utilized Bandura's (2001) dimensions of intentionality and self-reflection and created a scale by combining Coreil and Marshall's (1982) 14-item locus of

control in health scale with Harrington's (2005) 21-item scale to assess frustration tolerance. Dressler determined that consonance, or the degree to which one actualizes a shared model in his or her life, mediates socioeconomic status and a sense of agency. In other words, if one is consonant with a model of being a witch and doing witchcraft that emphasizes personal agency and forms of meditation, one may be able to mitigate the depressive symptoms that accompany stigmatization and possibly lower economic status. Further, being a witch and learning witchcraft may improve well-being as it may act as a form of social support (Dressler and Oths, 1997) for individuals who have felt otherwise outcast considering that many witches belong to online "covens" and use the identity as a way to index certain social values and find like-minded others. However, it is important to note that these results may be more of a possibility in New Orleans where being a witch is a socially sanctioned role similar to Candomblé mediums in Brazil, where individuals do experience greater subjective well-being (Seligman, 2005).

In this way, being a witch somewhere it is safe to do so, such as New Orleans, allows individuals who may feel outcast in other ways to connect to, serve, and help their communities in a way that feels meaningful to them. This acceptance also provides them the opportunity to provide for themselves financially. In addition, practicing witchcraft may provide individuals with ordered rituals that help to mitigate "neurodivergence." For instance, generalized anxiety, ADHD, OCD, etcetera, were somewhat common themes among my informants and future studies may explore if the rituals of witchcraft help to mitigate these experiences. Finally, I do not wish to make the case that simply being a witch and performing witchcraft may eradicate the multitude of challenges and mental health disparities faced by witches in their lives outside of witchcraft. I mean to suggest that aligning with an identity that involves awareness, responsibility, flexibility, a socially sanctioned outlet to be of service to others, and the

opportunity to exert a sense of agency over one's life via witchcraft, may provide multiple avenues to moderate the severity of feeling like an outcast, being "othered" in some way, and experiencing trauma, all of which I found to be salient reasons to identify as a witch.

Becoming, Being, and Doing as Hybridity

Another draw to witchcraft may be related to something that Magliocco (2009) touched upon briefly in her study of folklore in Neopaganism. She stated that many are drawn to Wicca and witchcraft as a way to meaningfully connect to some distinct sense of cultural heritage that individuals feel has been lost via the spread of Christianity, migration, and subsequent acculturation to the general "whiteness" of many North Americans. In this way, a religion assumed to be a revitalization of ancient European practices allows one to feel connected to the culture and beliefs of one's pre-Christian ancestors before they came to America. However, these practices are ambiguous, and their "authenticity" is often a concern. Further, this idea falls apart when considering my informants' relationships to the term Neopagan, or the idea of reconstructed practices, particularly for witches of color. Yet, the high salience of interest in practicing one's ancestral magic, sometimes referred to as a "power battery," and active veneration practices suggests there is something to this theory.

Alongside highly salient elements, such as following natural cycles and having a dedicated meditation practice, ancestor veneration and interest in incorporating ancestral magic were among the most salient elements in both the models of being and doing, though no one explicitly mentioned it in the freelisting portion of interviews (though some mentioned "family tradition"). I interpret these results to possibly mean that while individuals do not directly

associate interest in incorporating ancestral magic or veneration practices with witchcraft, individuals are drawn to adding this element to their practices as a way to ameliorate what Appadurai (1990) refers to as "rootlessness," or a sense of lost identity that has manifested as a result of increased globalization. Put differently, he means that as peoples become increasingly more dispersed and displaced via globalization, their sense of self, place, and identity becomes ever more fragmented and schizophrenic. In addition, the beliefs, stories, and customs that peoples set out with become de-territorialized from their original context and the environment which they were created in response to, meaning there is a further sense of separation from where one comes from. Further, many individuals' ancestors were forced out of their homelands for various reasons meaning that they brought with them pain and suffering; hybridity may provide an avenue through which to honor and make sense of such suffering and to keep practices relevant as a form of respect.

With increased globalization, what results is a feeling of being lost in space and time without any real traditions or collective identity to appeal to. In response to my question in which I asked individuals to identify their ethnicity, less than half identified as being white, Caucasian, or African American- as on generalized census forms— but rather as "part German, part Irish, part Scottish, part Native American" or something similar. Interestingly, an informant who migrated to America from Australia stated that she's found this phenomenon to be uniquely American, though more research is needed to investigate this claim. What is important, though, is that many feel that they are made up of many different "parts." As Geertz states, "we live in a world where there exists a "gradual spectrum of mixed-up differences" (1988; 148).

In this regard, Appadurai discusses hybridity, or the blending of cultural elements from different cultural "scapes" across geographical space and time, as a means to appease rootlessness. The opportunity to blend different religious philosophies together, or syncretism, is not a new idea, as religious scholars have touted this phenomenon as a reason for the success of the "spiritual, but not religious" movement and for the popularity of New Religious Movements (Parsons, 2018; Roof, 1999). However, it appears that witchcraft provides individuals the opportunity to blend together aspects of these different "parts" of themselves into a cohesive practice and identity. For instance, one can blend together the monotheistic religious traditions of their childhood, or those practiced by their current or recently passed family members that they may feel somewhat disconnected from, with the polytheistic or more mystical practices of their ancestors, which they may feel more connected to.

This hybridity creates a meaningful connection to both one's present and past senses of self, as well as to a sense of family support that they may not have otherwise. Further, incorporating ancestral practices gives witches the opportunity to grapple with the issues that their ancestors faced and to either honor their family history or make attempts to neutralize the harm their ancestors may have caused others. In this way, hybridity of ancestral practices also allows individuals to navigate the potential appropriation of closed traditions that is rife in North American spirituality in the sense that in every culture there exists some sort of magical beliefs and if one knows what their ancestors practiced, they better know what is appropriate and respectful for them to connect to. Though, this line must be trod very careful so as not to result in separatist and supremacist beliefs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, witches form identity through becoming, being, and doing. With regard to the feminist roots of witchcraft, certain elements of past studies, such as an aversion to capitalism and the oppression it incites, remains a central theme of witchcraft. Regarding religious studies, witches, at least many of those in New Orleans, are not always keen to be regarded as Neopagans, Wiccans, or pagans. However, the practice of witchcraft, akin to that of magic, is important and is quite in line with Dengah's definition of religion. As magic, as well as empowerment, are important in the models of being and doing, it could be argued that witchcraft functions in a similar way to religion. Further, when combined, the past findings of religiosity and health, alongside those which explore agency and health, suggest that one could experience heightened psychological and physiological well-being through increased consonance with a model of either being or doing witchcraft. Additionally, the emphasis on ancestral magic could help mitigate feelings of "rootlessness," which are incited by increased globalization. Finally, contemporary witchcraft in the United States complicates both the distinctions of witchcraft as "small scale" versus "industrialized" societies as well as Bowie's four categories of witchcraft even further, though all four categories may be seen as present if not distinct.

Limitations

This research was conducted during a global pandemic. The protocols to reduce the spread of the virus restricted my access to peoples whom I may have found in shops as many shops had been forced to shut down and others maintained unique hours. In addition, people were tired. As should now be clear, witches often view themselves as counselors and energy workers; and during a time of increased anxiety and energy overload, many felt drained and

reclusive. As far as previous studies of cultural models, my sample was small in terms of numbers though rich in qualitative data. While my sample in New Orleans consisted of many peoples from all over the country, my results may differ considering the accepting nature of witchcraft and the occult in New Orleans compared to rural areas. Thus, comparative studies are needed.

Future Directions

Beyond comparative studies, future studies may explore the hypothesis that increased consonance could decrease depressive symptoms. Further, studies may explore the therapeutic implications of ancestor veneration practices combined with witchcraft, namely whether this leads to improved relationships with current family near and far, which could increase feelings of social support (Foor, 2017). In other instances, studies may explore whether veneration practices may function as a substitute for individuals who have become estranged from family members due to their spiritual beliefs or lifestyles. Alongside this, future studies may explore whether feminist covens or witchcraft communities function as alternative forms of kinship outside of consanguinity (Hwahng, Allen, Zadoretzky, 2019).

As I did not focus as much attention on the political aspects of witchcraft that is often found in feminist literature on witchcraft, but rather on individual, identity transformation, future studies may explore witches' political motivations and how certain groups focus on systematic transformation beyond the individual. Alongside this, those interested in contemporary witchcraft may choose to explore how the "personal is political" regarding the "affective turn" in feminist studies (Boler and Zembylas, 2016; Gorton, 2007; Pedwell and Whitehead, 2012). In other words, how are emotions and affect socially constructed and formulated in response to

power? Finally, in traditions where ancestor veneration is well established and practiced, many initiates are required to learn the names and stories of several generations of ancestors in a very personal way (Foor, 2017). Combining this with what we know about the nature of inherited, bodily trauma and epigenetics, future studies may explore whether ancestor veneration may provide an ethnography of epigenetic changes (Conching and Thayer, 2019; Warin, Kowal, Meloni, 2020).

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Consent Form

Informed Consent

Please read this informed consent carefully before you decide to participate in the study.

Consent Form Key Information:

- Participate in a 1- 1.5 hour interview about your life experience as a witch
  - If participating in life history interview, additional 1 hour
- Involvement in a general interview, life history interview, or "pile-sorting" interview
- No information collected that will connect identity with responses
- Receive tea from the Tea Witch Café as a token of gratitude

Purpose of the research study: The purpose of the study is to explore the diversity of individuals in America who identify as a witch including reasons for choosing the label "witch" and what it means to you, personally.

What you will do in the study:

In this study, you will participate in an interview concerning your experience as a witch, your perceptions of witchcraft in general, and why you have chosen to relate to the word "witch." I will be asking you for demographic information such as your income, sexual orientation, ethnicity, members of household, etc. I will audio record the interview to transcribe on with computer software to ensure I get details correct.

If you are participating in a life history interview, I will ask you questions about your upbringing, childhood, and personal questions about your life experiences, as well as how you feel about yourself and your past.

If you are participating in a "pile-sorting" interview, I will be asking you to sort terms from previous interviews into different piles by how you feel terms are related. I will interview you about your piles and why you put certain terms together.

****With your permission, all of these interviews will be recorded in order to be transcribed.****

****You have the right to skip or refuse to answer ANY question in ANY interview with no penalties.****

****You may stop any interview at any time you wish.****

Time required: The study will require about 1-1.5 hours of your time with an additional 1-1.5 hours for those participating in a life history interview.

Risks: There are no anticipated risks associated with this study. Some questions may bring up personal memories, but you have the right to refuse to answer or end the interview.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you from participating in this study. However, you will contribute to a better understanding of witchcraft in the United States.

Confidentiality:
To maintain confidentiality of your answers, I will ask you for a codename in lieu of your real name. I will ask you for verbal consent as opposed to written consent so that there is no identifying information linked to your name. Your data will also be assigned a Case ID number with no name attached. I may possibly use your codename or Case ID number in my thesis reporting, but never your name.
Your name will not appear on any documents.
I will transcribe your recorded interview into a computer mp3 file which I will keep on the University of Alabama's Box account, which is encrypted and requires dual identification for security purposes.
Only my advising committee and I will be able to access interview data.
My written notes will be double locked; they will be kept in a locked backpack in a locked house or car.
Transcriptions will be deleted completely in May 2026.

***Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed if interview participants discuss interview responses with each other. I will not discuss interview material with anyone besides my advising committee.**

Voluntary participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary.

Right to withdraw from the study: You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

How to withdraw from the study: If you wish to withdraw from this study during your interview, all you need to do is tell me that you wish to stop the interview. You will still receive your complimentary tea. If you wish to withdraw after the fact, simply email me or contact my cell phone number, which I will give to you.

Compensation/Reimbursement: For your time, you will receive a tea selection from the local Tea Witch Café. Please note the ingredients for allergy information. Please note that some herbs can interact with prescription medications, so please take care.

If you have questions about the study or need to report a study related issue please contact, contact:

Name of Principal Investigator: Emi Smith
Title: Master's student
Department Name: Anthropology
Telephone: 205-908-1902
Email address: all.the.witches.2020@gmail.com

Faculty Advisor's Name: Dr. C.D. Lynn
Department Name: Anthropology
Telephone: 205-348-4162
Email address: cdlynn@ua.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in a research study, would like to make suggestions or file complaints and concerns about the research study, please contact:
Ms. Tanta Myles, the University of Alabama Research Compliance Officer at (205)-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066. You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach Website at http://ovpred.ua.edu/research-compliance/prco/. You may email the Office for Research Compliance at rscompliance@research.ua.edu.

Agreement:
As many like to remain confidential, I am asking you for verbal consent.

Do I have your consent?
Yes / No

Appendix B: Interview Schedule

From the Accused to the Empowered?
Exploring a Cultural Model of Modern American Witchcraft

Case ID#: ___ Location:_____ Date: _____ Age: _____
Over 18? (yes / no) Gender ID: _____ [If not, STOP interview]

1. What pronouns do you prefer?

2. How do you describe your relationship status? Are you:

Single Coupled Divorced Separated Married

3. Do you have children?

If so, how many and what are their ages?

4. Who do you call your family? Who does it include? What is your relationship to them?

5. What is your household income? (per month/ year/ week)

6. Do you work? What do you do?

7. Are you from New Orleans?
If not, where are you from?
How long have you lived here?

8. How do you describe your ethnicity?

9. What's the highest level of education you completed?

8th HS GED 2 yr degree 4 yr degree Graduate PhD

10. How do you describe your sexual orientation?

11. Did you grow up in a specific religion?

If so, which one?

12. Do you still identify with that tradition?

If not, when did you stop?

13. Do you feel like interest in witchcraft has been increasing over the last few years?
    a. Yes
    b. No

14. If yes, why do you think it's happening?

15. How do you personally define witchcraft?

16. When did you become interested in witchcraft (as you define it) and why? (For those not in life history interview)

17. What does it mean to you to BE a witch?

18. When did you begin to identify as a witch, either to yourself or to other people? (Same as above).

19. Do you practice a particular tradition or kind of witchcraft?
    If so, which one?
    If not, what influences or kinds of things do you incorporate into your practice?

20. Can you please tell me what practicing witchcraft looks like for you?

    How often would you say that you practice?

    Do you practice alone or with other people?
    Do you belong to a group, such as an online group or a local coven?
    If in person group, how often do you meet with them?
    If online group, how often do you interact with them?

21. What are some reasons why someone may decide to identify as a witch?

22. What social values do witches believe to be important?

23. What is it like to be a witch in New Orleans?

24. Do you feel like you experience stigmatization for being a witch here?
    If so, can you tell me about that?

    Was the reputation of New Orleans a draw for you to move here? (if not from)
    Do you think being in New Orleans makes it easier or harder to be a witch? Why?

25. Do you also identify as a pagan or Neopagan, or something else?
If so, what does this term mean to you and why do you choose it?

26. Why do you think you or other witches you know choose the term witch as opposed to other terms?

27. What other terms do you use to describe yourself in addition to being a witch?

28. What other terms might people who practice things similar to witchcraft choose instead of witch? Why?

29. Do you think that you can become a witch or do you think you have to be born one?

Free-list questions for cultural model:

1. What personality traits or characteristics do you think witches share?
2. What words do people who aren't witches use to describe them (witches)?
3. What does a witch *do* that makes them a witch?
4. What are some reasons that a person comes to think of themselves as a witch?
5. What different traditions do witches practice? What are the different ways someone can be a witch?
6. Describe someone who you consider to be the ideal witch. What is he or she like?
7. With so many different ways to be a witch, do you think there are some commonalities among witches? Like what?

Is there anything else you'd like to add about being a witch that you want other people to understand better?

Appendix C: IRB Approval

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA | *Office of the Vice President for* Research & Economic Development
Office for Research Compliance

June 1, 2020

Sarah Smith
Department of Anthropology
College of Arts & Sciences
Box 870210

Re: IRB # 20-05-3592: "From the Accused to the Empowered? Exploring a Cultural Model of Identity among Modern American Witches"

Dear Ms. Smith:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research. Your application has been given exempt approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under exempt review category 2 as outlined below:

(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

(iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

The approval for your application will lapse on May 31, 2021. If your research will continue beyond this date, please submit the annual report to the IRB as required by University policy before the lapse. Please note, any modifications made in research design, methodology, or procedures must be submitted to and approved by the IRB before implementation. Please submit a final report form when the study is complete.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved informed consent form to obtain consent from your participants.

Sincerely,

Jessup Building | Box 870127 | Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0127
205-348-8461 | Fax 205-348-7189 | Toll Free 1-877-820-3066