

"SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES": CONSTRUCTING THE WITCH IN
CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

Dr. Angela Nelson, Advisor

What is a Witch? Traditional mainstream media images of Witches tell us they are evil “devil worshipping baby killers,” green-skinned hags who fly on brooms, or flaky tree huggers who dance naked in the woods. A variety of mainstream media has worked to support these notions as well as develop new ones. Contemporary American popular culture shows us images of Witches on television shows and in films vanquishing demons, traveling back and forth in time and from one reality to another, speaking with dead relatives, and attending private schools, among other things. None of these mainstream images acknowledge the very real beliefs and traditions of modern Witches and Pagans, or speak to the depth and variety of social, cultural, political, and environmental work being undertaken by Pagan and Wiccan groups and individuals around the world.

Utilizing social construction theory, this study examines the “historical process” of the construction of stereotypes surrounding Witches in mainstream American society as well as how groups and individuals who call themselves Pagan and/or Wiccan have utilized the only media technology available to them, the internet, to resist and reconstruct these images in order to present more positive images of themselves as well as build community between and among Pagans and nonPagans.

For my parents

And for the people who are still in the broom closet

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INTRODUCTION

Macbeth: Act 4, Scene 1
Shakespeare

Thunder. Enter the three WITCHES.

First Witch □

Thrice the brinded cat hath mew'd.

Second Witch □

Thrice and once the hedge-pig whined.

□ **Third Witch**

Harpier cries "'Tis time, 'tis time."

First Witch □

Round about the cauldron go;
In the poison'd entrails throw. □
Toad, that under cold stone
Days and nights has thirty-one
Swelter'd venom sleeping got,
Boil thou first i' the charmed pot.

All

Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn, and cauldron bubble.

Second Witch

Fillet of fenny snake,
In the cauldron boil and bake;
Eye of newt and toe of frog,
Wool of bat and tongue of dog,
Adder's fork and blind-worm's sting,
Lizard's leg and howlet's wing,
For a charm of powerful trouble,
Like a hell-broth boil and bubble. □

All

Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn and cauldron bubble.

Third Witch

Scale of dragon, tooth of wolf,

Witches' mummy, maw and gulf
 Of the ravin'd salt sea shark,
 Root of hemlock digg'd i' the dark,
 Liver of blaspheming Jew,
 Gall of goat, and slips of yew
 Silver'd in the moon's eclipse,
 Nose of Turk and Tartar's lips,
 Finger of birth-strangled babe
 Ditch-deliver'd by a drab,
 Make the gruel thick and slab.
 Add thereto a tiger's cauldron,
 For the ingredients of our cauldron.

All

Double, double toil and trouble;
 Fire burn and cauldron bubble.

Second Witch

Cool it with a baboon's blood,
 Then the charm is firm and good.

Enter HECATE and the other three WITCHES.

Hecate

Oh well done! I commend your pains;
 And every one shall share i' the gains;
 And now about the cauldron sing;
 Like elves and fairies in a ring;
 Enchanting all that you put in.

[Exit Hecate]

Second Witch

By the pricking of my thumbs,
 Something wicked this way comes.

[knocking]
 Open, locks,
 Whoever knocks!

Enter MACBETH

Macbeth

How now, you secret, black, and midnight hags!
 What is't you do?

All

A deed without a name.

In 1996 I attended the opening weekend showing of the film *The Craft* (Columbia Pictures) with several friends. The film is rife with teen angst, with four very attractive young women playing high school friends who form a “coven” and proceed to cast spells and wreak havoc on their classmates. They change their personal appearance and physical forms, which they call a “glamour,” float in the air, and perform rituals to gain power.

Unfortunately, they use their new found empowerment for personal gain and revenge, and one of them eventually kills a classmate who had tormented her. Trying to be a “good witch,” one of the friends attempts to stop the others, and, in the end, they turn on her and use their powers to try to intimidate her into silence.

The film had received quite a bit of advance attention from the Pagan and Wiccan community due to its story line and its use of allegedly “real witches” as technical advisors (witchvox.com). I had already read many commentaries about the film on various Pagan websites and knew that in some areas Witches had mounted protests against the film because of its portrayal of “Witches.” It is, in essence, a horror film with good winning over evil, and the “bad Witch” is locked safely away in a padded room in an insane asylum at the end. At the conclusion of the film, while watching the credits, knowing my interest and involvement in Paganism, my good friend turned to me and said, “So, that’s what you do!” Well, no. As someone who has studied Paganism and a variety of religions and spiritual movements, and who has met many people over the years who call themselves Pagans or Wiccans/Witches, I have never known any of them

to endorse negative behavior(s), much less have the ability to change their appearance or fly through the air, on or off a broomstick.

In 2006 the remake of *The Wicker Man* was released starring Nicolas Cage. In the original 1973 version, which has become a cult classic, the main character, played by well-known actor Edward Woodward, searches a remote Scottish island for a young girl that has been reported missing. The devoutly Christian Police Sergeant Howie, played by Woodward, is mystified by the island's inhabitants and their strange customs and traditions. After speaking with island residents and their community leader, Lord Summerisle (played by Christopher Lee), it becomes clear that the residents of the island are not traditional mainstream people like Sergeant Howie, and he is increasingly disturbed by what he considers their odd behavior. Throughout the film it is clear that Sergeant Howie is working very hard to maintain his devout Christian beliefs in the face of the temptations offered by island residents. By the end of the film Sergeant Howie, thwarted by the island's residents, has been unable to locate the missing girl, has become convinced that the locals are "Heathens," and that he must report them to the proper "mainland" authorities for a full investigation. At the very end of the film Sergeant Howie discovers that he has been led astray by the islanders, and realizes that the missing girl was simply a ruse to bring him to the island in order for him to be sacrificed to their sun god in order to ensure a good harvest. While the islanders sing a song to their sun god, Sergeant Howie attempts to persuade them that if sacrificing him does not work, their god will want an even larger sacrifice. They will have to sacrifice their leader, Lord Summerisle. Only that large a sacrifice will ensure a large harvest. The very last scenes in the film are of Sergeant Howie being burned alive in a large wicker man structure

along with other sacrifices such as goats, cows, and sheep as he prays for God to release him from his torment.

Throughout both the 1973 and 2006 versions of this film, there is ample evidence that what the films center on is Paganism or, rather, mainstream media's version of Paganism. Both include talk about May Day, fertility festivals, and upcoming planting and harvesting as well as more subtle references to Paganism. Misconceptions about Paganism were in evidence while watching the 2006 version of the film in a theater in Delaware. A man sitting next to me thought the residents must be celebrating Halloween because they were wearing masks despite the fact that throughout the film island residents talked about May Day festivities and the scenery was green and lush as it would be in the spring and summer.

While there are many similarities between the two films and the basic plot is the same, the 2006 version of this film, starring Nicolas Cage in the Sergeant Howie role, is much more a horror movie than the original version. Other significant differences include a matriarchal focus with the majority of the island's residents being female and the few men being subservient, as well as Sister Summerisle (played by Ellen Burstyn) being in charge in the new version instead of Lord Summerisle. Also, Cage's Sergeant Howie is not given to prayer and Christian piety but to misogynistic behavior towards the female residents. Throughout the film Cage's character is condescending towards the female residents and, at one point, he physically assaults one woman by punching her in the face when she does not provide the information he seeks. At the end of the film he screams "You bitches" and curses over and over at the island residents-women and men-in the final moments of the film when he is being burned alive. Completely

understandable quite possibly, but certainly a very different overall feeling than the original film.

During the ten years' from 1996, when *The Craft* debuted, to 2006 several other films and television shows featuring witches also debuted. *Practical Magic* in 1998, *Charmed* in 1998, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in 1997, and *Sabrina the Teenaged Witch* in 1996. Also important in this time frame was the release of the highly popular children's novels featuring young wizard Harry Potter beginning in 1996 with the seventh and last book being released in July 2007. J.K. Rowling's Potter series has now become the best selling children's books of all time. Earlier films and television shows such as *Hocus Pocus*, starring Bette Midler [1993]; *Witches* [1990], starring Anjelica Huston; *The Witches of Eastwick*, [1987], starring Cher, Michelle Pfeiffer and Susan Sarandon; *Bedknobs and Broomsticks* [1971], starring Angela Lansbury; *Bell, Book, and Candle* [1958], starring Kim Novak; and the ever popular television show *Bewitched* which was also made into a feature film in 2005 starring Nicole Kidman, all feature Witches as main characters. Also, various television shows have featured plot lines with Witches: a Halloween episode of *The Simpsons* entitled "Easybake Coven" (1997), *The X-Files* episode "Sanguinarium" [1996], an episode of *Judging Amy* entitled "Witch Hunt" (1999), and a made-for-television film of the well known novel The Mists of Avalon (2001), among many others.

Although some of these current television shows and films such as *Sabrina the Teenaged Witch*, *Charmed*, and *Practical Magic* do present Witches in a more attractive light, they also, in many ways, are just as ill-conceived and stereotypical as the images of wart nosed, green skinned, child eating Witches from our myths and children's stories.

The sisters in *Charmed* are beautiful, intelligent, and fight evil. The sisters and their aunts in *Practical Magic* help and support each other. The women in *Sabrina* are independent, funny, and feisty. However, each of these media products also includes time travel, flying on brooms, talking cats, demons, fairies, elves, and other mystical creatures, as well as “other realms” and alternate realities. It would seem the stereotype(s) of Witches has expanded to include more diverse images while at the same time older stereotypes have been continued.

The image of the Witch has existed in many cultures for centuries. While there are both positive and negative images portrayed in all of these examples, the majority of these images are stereotypical caricatures. However, this particular combination of stereotypes is identifiable and recognized as true because it reflects generalized ideas about Witches and Witchcraft in contemporary culture. The images in these films and television shows were chosen deliberately; they were culled from a socially constructed cultural catalog of ideas about a group of people who call themselves Pagan, Wiccan, Heathen, etc. with the purpose of acquiring air time and selling movie tickets, and a variety of other consumer products by selling the familiar to us. Commercial interests have been combined with stereotypes to sell these images to us. By presenting these images repeatedly to millions of television viewers and movie goers, the films and television shows mentioned earlier, as well as many others, reinforce the validity of the images they portray until they seem to be the only way possible of thinking about these groups and individuals.

A bevy of confusing and conflicting ideas and images of Witches and Pagans exists in our modern society. Even those who call themselves Witches and Pagans struggle to sort through the myriad of culturally

constructed images and build their own identities which take from “fictitious portrayals, ancient archetypes and modern religious reinterpretations” (Tosh, 1).

Even with the myriad of “confusing and conflicting images” of Witches, Wiccans, and Pagans in our culture we continue to find them fascinating even though they may also frighten us. Also, the growth and corresponding increased visibility of Paganism and Wicca around the world has lead to many personal and legal disputes. How do Pagans and Wiccans as a group address these problems? How does a society learn to accept people who are outside the mainstream? By examining several contemporary American films and television shows, this study will examine the ways in which mainstream media has been used to create and uphold stereotypes of a particular group of people who are considered to be outside of mainstream American society. This study will also examine how this group has utilized the media available to them to combat and resist these stereotypes.

DISSERTATION PLAN

As someone who studies American culture and media I can relate what cultural and media scholars have said about this type of misrepresentation and/or misunderstanding of what this particular (subset) group of American society may or may not be like. I know these images- right or wrong- have been “constructed” (Berger and Luckmann) for me by those who control and create various media such as television and film executives, publishers, authors, etc. These individuals and companies/corporations create images based on mainstream culture (or what they think mainstream culture is like), what the “majority” of us believe (Kellner). These images are then shown to us and

we believe or begin to believe them to be accurate. Many times we are simply told they are accurate. We believe the stereotypes to be true and natural. Such misconstruction and misrepresentation can have long lasting, serious consequences. For centuries people who were thought to be Witches have been murdered and, more recently, have been involved in legal cases in which they lost their children, property, and jobs because of the misconceptions about who they are and what they do.

Over the last several years a number of court cases and lawsuits have addressed the discrimination of Pagans and Wiccans in our society. The most recent and widely publicized of these is the use of Pagan symbols on Veteran's headstones. On April 23, 2007 this headline greeted Yahoo.com users, "VA Allows Wiccan Symbols on Headstones." Associated Press writer Scott Bauer reported that the Department of Veterans Affairs had added the "Pentacle" to their "emblems of belief" allowed on veteran's grave markers allowed in national cemeteries and on headstones issued by the government. The agency's National Cemetery Administration (NCA) had refused since the mid-1990s to act on requests by Wiccan families and clergy to approve use of the pentacle (<http://www.aclu.org/religion/frb/29459prs20070423.html>). In the meantime, the agency approved additional emblems of numerous other religions and belief systems as a matter of course, usually in a few months. This settlement between the Department of Veterans Affairs and a group of eleven Wiccan families nationwide "calls for the pentacle, a star whose five points represent earth, air, fire, water, and spirit, to be placed on grave markers within 14 days for those who have pending requests with the VA." The pentacle is now one of 39 symbols the VA permits on headstones for fallen soldiers. Other symbols already used by the VA include commonly recognized symbols for

Christianity, Buddhism, Islam and Judaism, as well as those for smaller religions such as Sufism Reoriented, Eckiankar and the Japanese faith Seicho-No-Ie. Reverend Barry Lynn, Director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, stated, "This settlement has forced the Bush Administration into acknowledging that there are no second class religions in America, including among our nation's veterans" (yahoo.com). Reverend Lynn's group represented the eleven Wiccan families in their lawsuit.

This lawsuit is similar to a lawsuit filed by The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) against the Department of Veterans Affairs in 2006 (<http://www.aclu.org/religion/discrim/26970prs20060929.html>). The ACLU represented two Wiccan groups and three individuals seeking approval from the Department of Veterans Affairs to have Wiccan symbols engraved on veteran's headstones. "The government has no business picking and choosing which personal religious beliefs may be expressed. All veterans, regardless of their religion, deserve to have their faith recognized on an equal basis," said ACLU of Washington staff attorney Aaron Caplan (<http://www.aclu.org/religion/discrim/26970prs20060929.html>). In addition to the constitutional guarantees of religious liberty, expression, and equality, federal agencies are required to abide by the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which provides that the government may "substantially burden" a person's exercise of religion only if it demonstrates "a compelling government interest." According to the ACLU, no such compelling reason or other lawful basis exists for the NCA to refuse Wiccan veterans the ability to display their chosen emblem of belief. The April 2007 ruling settles this 2006 ACLU lawsuit as well (<http://www.aclu.org/index.html>). Featuring legal cases such as these along with other positive media images of Pagans and Wiccans in modern

American society helps to dispel inaccurate ideas and misconceptions about the group, and illustrates how these members of American society involve themselves in current political and social causes.

Modern stereotype construction is dependent on the power of the media for its timely dissemination of ideas and images. For the purposes of this study, I will apply the historical process of stereotype construction to American Pagans, Witches and Wiccans in particular, who have had a great deal of media visibility from 1996 to 2007. Most Pagan individuals and groups do not have access to the same media outlets and money as the creator of *Charmed*, media mogul Aaron Spelling. However, many Pagan individuals and groups actively fight against the images that have been created by others and use some of the same forms of media to combat these stereotypes. Creating representations and images of themselves, many Pagan individuals and groups have specifically used the internet to create more accurate portrayals of their culture. Since the early to mid-1990's when internet use became widespread, Pagans, and other nontraditional groups, have created websites, blogs, online journals, email lists, and web based videos as alternatives to the popular mass media images many of us are familiar with.

Mainstream mass media constructs and distributes many images of Witches and Pagans. Some of these images promote stereotypes of Witches being evil devil worshippers, and other media images are beginning to challenge and reconstruct these older stereotypes. Utilizing my own knowledge of the community as well as textual analysis of films and television shows, research of primary and secondary sources along with web based resources, this project will examine how socially constructed popular media images have been used to create stereotypes of Witches, Wiccans, and Pagans, in

contemporary American society. This study does not offer a complete history of Paganism in the United States or Europe, but does provide some historical background in order to help explain how modern stereotypes developed over time. A thorough historical overview of Paganism and Wicca is outside the scope of this study. However, people interested in historical information can look to the works of Dr. Dennis Carpenter, Dr. Ronald Hutton, Dr. Loretta Orion, Dr. Helen Berger, Dr. Anne Llewellyn Barstow, Dr. Carlo Ginzburg, Dr. Norman Cohn, and Dr. Carol Christ, among others.

In this chapter, I will outline social construction theory and its use in examining and understanding stereotype construction specifically as it pertains to the construction of these media images. Also, in this chapter I will give a brief history of Paganism in the United States, and discuss some important scholarly works, primary and secondary, on Pagans and Wiccans in order to provide a brief historical overview and social context for Witches in American society to illustrate the foundation upon which the media images and stereotypes were built. In Chapter Two I will apply existing social construction theory to the group known as Pagans, Wiccans, and Witches, as well as examine the ideas and images that have constructed an identifying stereotype for this group. This discussion will follow the historical process of stereotype construction as described by Berger and Luckmann in the convergence phase that has helped cement public images and perceptions of the group. One of the questions I will address in Chapter Two of this study is, “What recent examples of media culture have been established which support dominant ideas about Pagans and Paganism?” In Chapter Two I will provide examples of media images of Witches and Pagans in contemporary American media in order to contrast them with the images created by Witches and Pagans that are discussed in

Chapter Three. Chapter Three will provide examples of Witches and Pagans they have created themselves using computer technology as well as examine the ways in which Pagans utilize the internet to counteract mainstream notions and stereotypes about them that have constituted the reinforcement and resistance phase of the construction of stereotypes as discussed by Berger and Luckmann. Chapter Four will discuss resistant images of Pagans and Wiccans in the ongoing political and social justice work being conducted by people who call themselves Pagan and/or Wiccan. Following the social construction process, it will be seen that stereotypes are morphing as Wiccans, Witches, and Pagans, like other groups, have begun to create their own images, and that these new representations are constructing new definitions of these people in mainstream American media and culture.

CHAPTER I

THEORIES OF SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION AND MODERN PAGANISM

Theories of social construction provide a means to investigate the “social and historical roots of phenomena” (Marshall, 609). An outgrowth of phenomenological sociology, which is the study of the “connection between human consciousness and social life,” social construction theory contends that society is “actively and creatively produced by human beings.” These theories are part of a sociology of knowledge, which argues that society not only constructs knowledge, but that information is always “oriented toward particular practical problems,” thus eliminating the possibility of knowing anything objectively (26). This chapter will outline several theories of social construction from a framework for organizing worlds to an affirmation of culture through media. This chapter will also provide a brief history of Paganism in the United States as well as discuss some works, primary and secondary, on Paganism and Wicca in order to provide a brief historical overview of Witches in American society.

The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge, by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, is one of the most well known works on social construction theory. In their groundbreaking study of social construction theory Berger and Luckmann explain how we create institutions, which function based on maxims, myths, wisdom, morals, values, and belief, in order to create habit and routines, which narrows choices and frees energy for deliberation and innovation. These institutions are humanly produced external realities, with the most powerful being the political and religious, and individuals have to “go out” to learn about them. Because of reification, each new generation experiences institutions as tradition rather than as

biographical memory. Institutions enforce their will by sedimentation and tradition, which controls behavior. What is learned constitutes knowledge, which is reaffirmed over time through symbolic objects and symbols, which Berger and Luckmann refer to as “bodies of knowledge” (72-79).

These “bodies of knowledge” become our reality, what we come to believe is the “natural way of looking at the world.” One way we insure the continuance of these “bodies of knowledge,” and thus society, is to “create” social institutions that reinforce these “social facts” even though we do not view it in this way. Berger and Luckmann tell us that we construct our realities, how our world works, and organize social materials into patterns of conduct. They also provide a detailed account of the process through which the social world is constructed, outlining the means by which individual subjective meanings become objective societal facts (Berger and Luckmann, 18), as well as the ways we learn to understand and accept these facts as the contents of their world. Berger and Luckmann tell us that we create our social world as well as the way(s) we interpret this world. We identify patterns of behavior and belief, we take them in and make them part of our world, and these become facts and social institutions. We then pass these patterns and beliefs along to others through socialization. Since 1996 more and different images of Pagans have appeared in the media validating already existing stereotypes, and creating a few new ones. All of these create fictional representations of the group while making us believe them to be accurate portrayals of how “real” Pagans are. The large number of images in the media allows for and reproduces the public’s perception(s) of Pagans, and combines fact with fiction to create a visual and cultural image of the group that is both true and false. Social construction theories provide us with the means to

examine the “social and historical roots of phenomena.” Berger and Luckmann’s theory purports that society in general is “actively and creatively produced by human beings” (Marshall, 609). We create it and it, in turn, influences us in a continual cycle.

Berger and Luckmann explain that we (humans) construct the realities of our world, organizing social materials into patterns of conduct. They provide a detailed account of the process through which the social world is constructed, outlining the means by which individual subjective meanings become objective societal facts (18), as well as the ways individuals learn to understand and accept these facts as the contents of their world.

According to Berger and Luckmann, we create a social world, a means of interpreting the phenomena we experience, by identifying and externalizing specific patterns of behavior or belief; those patterns are made into objective facts, or institutions, which are made legitimate through reification, making them natural, creations of divine will, or the products of inevitable processes (60-61). These new truths are accepted and internalized by us, and then passed on to others through socialization (61).

Language is the system of symbols we use to interpret and assign meaning to the world (Allan Johnson), and is the primary tool of socialization. People accept and internalize the rules of society and learn to become a part of their social world (Berger and Luckmann). Because the world is “inhabited” and interpreted by individuals (Berger and Luckmann, 106), each of whom relates to the whole in his or her own way, socialization is seen as variable within a society (Berger and Luckmann, 79-80). Individual identities are shaped according to people’s interpretations of society; these interpretations can then coalesce into larger beliefs, leading to the formation of societal

groups (Berger and Luckmann, 106-107). People joining with others who believe like them..... Individuals are shaped by their world as they, in turn, shape and build it. Since a number of worlds can exist at any given time, “socially segregated subuniverses of meaning,” social groups which put forth alternate definitions of social reality, can exist alongside groups that follow more widely held beliefs (Berger and Luckmann, 85). These “rival definitions of reality” (Berger and Luckmann, 120) can create new ways to view the world while interacting with more widely accepted societal rules (85).

A “subuniverse” can find itself at odds with the larger society from which it was born; should that happen, the group runs the risk of losing its recognition from the larger society as a legitimate entity, while the beliefs and actions of its members are misinterpreted by the outside world. This is because groups with more widely held beliefs usually also have better access to economic and cultural resources than subuniversal groups; thus, these larger groups have the power to define their own codes of conduct as the norm, occupy positions of authority and decision making, and enforce their rules for social reality (120-121).

Understanding Popular Culture by John Fiske describes the world as one that is characterized by the use of commodities (Fiske, 11). Using a pair of blue jeans as an example, Fiske discusses their use as a commodity or artifact with a number of functions. Blue jeans are inexpensive, and ensure the circulation of wealth through society by their continued production and sale; they provide an additional material or physical function by clothing the wearer. More importantly for Fiske they are cultural in that they circulate meanings and values and act as the ideology that reproduces an economic system. He would ask, “What kinds of people wear blue jeans? Cowboys? Rock Stars?

Housewives?” and “What do you think of when you wear them?” Because commodities are both economic and cultural, they “naturalize” (Fiske, 14) whatever economic system they represent, making it seem as though there is no other possible way to live. This creates a dominant system in which a culture develops both reinforcement and resistance.

For Fiske all members of a culture share basic information about that culture. Individuals can process information in a number of ways, and differing group interests can create a variety of interpretations, or oppositional meanings, of that information by “excorporating” information from society at large (Fiske, 15-18). A single commodity can have several meanings depending on what the individual believes in. He explains that the process of excorporation allows for a partial transfer of power in a society (15), as resistant social groups deliberately oppose larger cultural meanings through their interpretations of various pieces of information. Various and flexible meanings help to maintain social differences; the artifacts of popular culture provide a political negotiation between power structures and people. Dissent comes about through these negotiations. Fiske believes that we react to the dominant system through popular culture’s artifacts, symbols and messages. It is possible for anyone to react individually to this information, constructing his or her own personal interpretations of popular culture. However, the meanings of artifacts can also be controlled and contained by powerful members of society who allow protest through interpretation, but no actual change. When oppositional readings of artifacts become threats, or signs of resistance, they are “incorporated” (18) back into the dominant system; when this happens, the alternate meaning can be shifted, subdued, or misinterpreted, losing its resistance to the norm in the process (15-18). Using blue jeans as an example, we may view them as a sign of

resistance against the status quo of business suits and a person may feel like a rebel when he or she chooses to wear them. However, they had to be purchased somewhere. Money spent on the jeans supports the manufacturer that, in turn, boosts the economic system and negates any oppositional meanings. By containing resistant meanings within those of the norm, incorporation ultimately upholds the community status quo.

Short of revolution, resistant groups are always dominated by those who have the means to reinforce the status quo (18). Domination can be overt, covert, or somewhere in between; resistant groups can peacefully coexist alongside those supporting the dominant system, with all sharing power (albeit unequally) within a society. However, when a resistant group poses a real threat, or the potential thereof, to the balance of power in a society, its threat to the system must be addressed and diffused. The action taken against the real or potential threat must be justified as necessary to the continued function of a society (15). This can be done in a number of ways; by negating and/or undermining the resistant group's message, presenting the naturalized ideology of the dominant system as the only realistic and legitimate system of beliefs for the society, or, even more forcefully, by verbally or physically attacking the resistant group (15).

Media play a very important role in the process of containing resistant groups, individuals, or events in our modern culture. Media interpretations of different groups provide definitions to the larger society; their views tend to reflect dominant social constructions (Aogan Mulcahy, 449-467). Also, media owners and employees can deliberately manipulate data, creating crises or purposely misrepresenting resistant groups, etc. in order to discredit and/or disgrace them. Whether intentional or not, such

misrepresentations of different groups can cause lasting social damage because of the tremendous power media has to shape society.

MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY'S ROLE IN SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

For decades scholars have written about the impact various technological developments have had on our society and culture. From the printing press to the steam engine to televisions and radios, and now computers, cultural critics have had much to say about the effects, both positive and negative, these inventions have had, and continue to have, on our culture. Theorist Warren Sussman discussed the impact of such innovations as radio and film in his book, Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century. The key concept for Sussman is *transformation*. In other words, how did such technological innovations *transform* modern culture?, the way we view the world?, the way we interact with others? Sussman states that,

The concept of cultural change implies transformations in the social, technological, and moral order. They might not occur simultaneously or even in neat sequence. But such transformations indicate as well basic changes in the calculation of needs, wants, and desires. Each culture produces its own pattern of desire. Thus every culture, too, is predicated on a particular and unique psychological model essential to its own definition. All of this proposes a world of continuous transition and constant transformation. (235)

Technological innovations such as radio, film, television, and computers help us define our culture as well as enabling us to communicate these cultural definitions and desires in ways other than face to face interaction. We only have to think of the impact radio and television shows have had on language, fashion, and popular music, among others, to understand the transformative ideas Sussman is putting forth.

In discussing how “culture communicates,” Sussman puts forth several concerns he has regarding the study of popular culture and communication. First, Sussman believes we neglect the ‘larger cultural context’ when we focus on a specific aspect of a particular culture. We miss the effects relationships between and among more specific aspects of a culture have on each other; all are part of the whole.

Unless we have a sensitivity to this fact-for indeed we are all aware that media somehow affect the general culture and that at the same time the general culture shapes the media-we will miss the crucial issue of relationships, perhaps the most essential of all cultural questions. Too often, we have become insistent on thinking in rigid and awkward causal terms; instead we ought to be thinking ‘ecologically,’ in terms of a total, interacting environment. (253)

Sussman also believes we should not assume members of any given society will simply accept technological innovations or what he calls “technological determinism.” Instead, the culture into which the innovation is introduced will have some impact on the technology itself, and, even more important, that the ‘form’ of technology is itself culturally determined and/or shaped. As an example, Sussman points out the way Henry Ford transformed the automobile from a toy for the rich into a necessity for every household regardless of economic status. Computers and computer technology have been “formed” in much the same way.

Another concern for Sussman is the connection between form and content. We are lead to separate “cultural products” into “high, popular, and folk” for example, and to assume that popular culture is “radically different” or separate from high culture. However, his idea of an ecological or interacting environment espouses a relationship if not in both aspects (form and content) at least in one (form or content). The assumption is that not only are “the cultural and social orders transformed, but those transformations

also modernize and improve life” (254). Sussman believes there is no reason to assume that change is necessary or that the basic foundation(s) of a culture will actually change.

It must be noted here that the theories of social construction were created by members of societies, people engaged like all others in the active and creative production of culture. Warren Sussman points out that “investigators are a product of the culture they are investigating.” Researchers must always keep in mind they are as much a product of culture as the cultural product they are studying. While their awareness of the possibility of cultural investigation does set these theorists apart from those who never question the world around them, they still face the same dilemma of determining objective truths as do any other members of society. They/we are just as much influenced by cultural products such as computers and computer technology as the individuals and/or groups being studied. In studying Pagans and Paganism I must walk the fine line between accepting whatever I am told by others in the Pagan community, and getting too close to my subject(s), and, as a researcher, distancing myself so much from the community that I inadvertently affect the data I collect. Because of the interaction and impact of technology on our culture, it is of great importance that as cultural scholars and critics we study computer technology and its effects on our lives and society in general.

One of the reasons we talk so persistently about the impact of media is because thinking and talking about its role, and about the role of technology generally, have become cultural characteristics. In a sense, we are hardly able not to think and talk about the media. And we engage in this enterprise with a particular set of questions and a special language provided for us from the start. All of which we created and continually

recreate. Not only do the media help shape the way we think about the media, but thinking about the media also helps shape the way the media operate within the culture. There is a complex relationship between the way the media are used and the way we think about those uses (Sussman, 257).

One important difference between media such as radio, television, and film and the relatively new media of computer technology is that websites, email, blogs, listservs, newsgroups, etc. are interactive. When watching television or film or listening to the radio, consumers are not able to have a great impact on programming, commercial content, etc. However, because we control our websites, blogs, listservs, etc. we have much more control over who we interact with as well as the content of said media. Consumers using computers can choose to be more active rather than passive in their media consumption. Computer technology can be seen as improving or expanding the ways in which we communicate by allowing us access to more information as well as being able to interact with even more people and expanding our communities to include people who would not have been included beforehand.

In Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity, and Politics Between the Modern and the Postmodern, theorist Douglas Kellner examines the influence of media in the construction of society and culture. Kellner explains that a “culture of the image” has been developed into our common culture for the world, the primary means by which we all know and understand each other (1). He calls this phenomenon “media culture,” and it serves as the dominant means of socializing individuals into society, shaping political views and social behavior by providing visual models for us to emulate (1).

Media culture is made up of “images, sounds, and spectacles” which shape the world and the people in it by manipulating their fears and fantasies. It is a high-tech commercial enterprise (16) that uses commodities to sell not only the pleasurable sights and sounds of consumerism, but also the social and political ideologies that help to reproduce the world’s current hierarchies of power (2-3). Media culture works because consumers rarely question the sights, sounds, and images that are presented to them.

Although the main purpose of media culture is to entice us to conform to society’s status quo, it also allows for resistance. We are able to react to the resources provided by the media culture in order to invent our own meanings, identities, or alternate societies (3), or even sociopolitical critiques of our culture. However, only those social groups in positions of power are able to compete for cultural dominance while struggling to disseminate their political ideologies through the media’s spectacles of sight and sound (16-17). Media culture is both something we as a society create and something it becomes. It can be seen as the “the dominant culture today,” because of its continuously increasing power to socialize (17). Media images have replaced historical role models as, what Kellner calls, “arbiters of taste, value, and thought” (16-17). Families, schools, and churches have been replaced by media in creating new models of identification and behavior.

Media culture constantly reinvents itself and replenishes its image in order to “keep absorbing consumers into its practices and lifestyles” (40). It formulates public opinion by adhering to a strict focus on decontextualized cultural images and stereotypes and denying the possible existence of a reality other than the current image. Media culture’s mass-produced images guide how we present ourselves, how we view others

and relate to them as well as the creation of social values and goals. Contemporary American society has become so inundated by the media culture's images of reality that the explanation or contextualization of those images has almost become irrelevant.

If it is true, as Kellner suggests, that media culture is the dominant form of culture that socializes us, forming our identities, political views and social behavior, then how has the revival of Paganism been affected/shaped/formed by media culture? If we include computers as one form of media culture, albeit different than television, film, and radio; another question is, how have subgroups, such as Pagans, used computer technology as a way to create community with others, socialize, dispense information about their beliefs, as well as a site of resistance to combat stereotypes and misinformation about their community?

Media culture is a contested terrain across which key social groups and competing ideologies struggle for dominance and individuals live these struggles through the images, discourse, myths, and spectacles of media culture. An example of this with regards to Pagans and Paganism is the number of television shows and movies in the last several years that depict mainstream, for the most part, ideas about Pagans (Witches in particular). Pagans have protested these representations in varying degrees and in various ways. Kellner also says that we can and do resist representations of ourselves we find objectionable and create our own readings and appropriations of mass produced culture and use their culture as a resource to empower ourselves as well as to invent our own meanings, identities, and forms of life. One way the Pagan community is doing this is through computer technology. By creating web sites, blogs, and online communities, among other things, Pagans are creating alternatives to the representations being

produced by traditional media culture. Thus, their works become sites of resistance, critique other cultural forms, and empower members of nontraditional groups. Pagans are using “new technologies” to create new/alternate cultural forms. An overview of Paganism in the United States, as well as a clarification of terms, is needed to help understand what Paganism is and what role these beliefs play in contemporary American culture.

WHAT IS A PAGAN? WHAT IS A WITCH?

Paganism is a non-Christian belief system, and, for some, Paganism is the theory and Witchcraft or Wicca, Druidism, and Asatru, among others, are the practice. For many, Paganism is a general term while Witchcraft is more specific in its focus, much like “Methodist” or Baptist” is to “Christian.” Paganism is often considered an umbrella term encompassing Earth- and/or nature-based religious systems with female and male deities. For example, some Witches or Wiccans would say they focus more on the female aspect in order to regain and retain feminine power and independence. Another difference some practitioners would point to is that some Wiccans are, if they so choose, trained and initiated into a closed group called a Coven while some are solitary practitioners, and those who follow the Asatru or Heathen path are chosen for what they call a Kindred or Theod. Both are very similar to familial religious groups like Christian congregations.

Modern Paganism began in large part bound by the written word and not the face to face interaction of its adherents. Even today many people who call themselves Pagan, Witch, Wiccan, etc. will say that they first read novels and then found other nonfiction

books discussing Pagan ideals and traditions prior to finding others who believed as they do. Many Pagans will speak of Marion Zimmer Bradley's famous novel The Mists of Avalon, Sir James Frazer's The Golden Bough or Robert Graves' The White Goddess as books that were influential in their discovering Paganism as a religion. Works by Gerald Gardner and others became the books every person interested in Paganism and Witchcraft has to read. Modern Pagans now look to the internet for source material and community. In her work on identity construction and modern Paganism, Nancy Tosh states, "Part of the importance of books and the internet lies in the lack of acceptance given Paganism by the Christian majority. For adherents who live in conservative areas of the country, contact with Pagan ideas from the safety of the broom closet provides the main building blocks of religious identity." (15)

Still, there seem to be as many ways to define Paganism, Wicca, etc. as there are adherents to these beliefs. Well known Pagan scholar Margot Adler, author of the Pagan classic, Drawing Down the Moon, says about Paganism,

I think the simplest way to explain and demystify earth-centered traditions is to say that they involve ideas and practices that are part of everyone's heritage: most of our great-great-grandparents, and certainly our great-great-great-great-great-grandparents practiced religions that (whether they were nominally Pagan, Christian, Jewish or some other faith) centered on practices that came from the bottom up, from the grass roots, as opposed to revelations from on high; they were traditions formed by the customs of people living on the planet, as opposed to the teachings of prophets and sages. Many people hear the word 'earth-centered' or 'pagan' traditions and immediately think of the traditions of indigenous peoples: the religions of Africa, or of Native American nations. Or they think of modern Witches and New-Pagans. But all our ancestors, if you go far enough back, were part of religious traditions that rose organically from living on the earth and related to the changes of the seasons, the motions of the sun and moon, and the passages and transitions in the lives of human beings--birth, coming of age, death, etc. (quoted in Harrington, 1).

Pagan Academic Network scholar and member of Circle Sanctuary

(<http://www.circlesanctuary.org/index.html>), Dr. Dennis Carpenter defines Paganism

as:

Contemporary Paganism does not represent a solidly unified religious tradition with a universally accepted set of standard texts, beliefs, and practices... Those who use the word 'Pagan' to describe themselves can be generally described as drawing upon religions, philosophies, and mythologies with pre-Christian roots. Difference exist regarding which pre-Christian spiritual traditions and mythologies are used for inspiration and what form current spiritual expression takes. Among the premodern cultures represented in the contemporary Pagan renaissance are Egyptian, Roman, Greek, Celtic, Scandinavian, and Native American (Carpenter in Lewis, 40).

In his 1996 article in Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft, Carpenter utilized the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) to more accurately define his terms as well as to facilitate discussion among practitioners of Paganism and nonPagans. He states that according to the Oxford English Dictionary, "Pagan" is defined as:

(a) derived from the Latin 'paganus' meaning villager, rustic, civilian, nonmilitant; (b) one of a nation or community which does not hold the true religion, or does not worship the true God; (c) worshipping idols, heathen; (d) nature-worshipping and pantheistic reflects how the term Pagan is actually utilized by those who use it to describe their beliefs and practices (Carpenter in Lewis, 375).

Adding the prefix "neo" to Pagan, as in NeoPagan/ism, is used by some scholars and practitioners to denote modern day practices of these religious traditions. Defining the term Witch is more difficult given the negative connotations still associated with both Witches themselves as well as their particular practices and beliefs.

(1) a man who practices witchcraft or magic; a magician, sorcerer, wizard; (2) a female magician, sorceress; in later use, a woman supposed to have dealings with the devil or evil spirits and to be able by their cooperation to perform supernatural acts. ...According to the OED, the term Witch is derived from the Old English terms 'Wicce,' the

feminine form, and 'Wicca,' the masculine form.... Some Witches claim these two words derive from the root 'wit' meaning wisdom. Other Witches claim that the word derives from the Indo-European roots 'wic' and 'weik,' meaning to bend or turn... Despite these differences of interpretation, [Margot] Adler indicates that many practitioners define Witchcraft as the "Craft of the Wise" and view the Witches of previous times as the wise people of the village, often women, who were skilled in healing and practical arts. In line with this viewpoint, many feminists, both female and male, have reclaimed the word Witch to describe themselves as a political statement in recognition of the history, since the Middle Ages, of the oppression of women and folk healing by male-dominated society and medicine. (Carpenter in Lewis, 375-376)

As Paganism is understood by most modern American adherents, the term generally refers to a wide array of religious beliefs and practices not found within the socially dominant Judeo-Christian traditions of Western culture. Characteristics particular to modern Paganism include animism, polytheism, and pantheism. Contemporary Paganism also tends to focus on the classical Paganism of Rome and Greece as well as the pre-Christian traditions of Europe such as Norse, Celtic, Druidic, and Germanic religions (Adler 1986). Practitioners most often possess a pantheistic worldview, viewing deity as immanent and non-transcendent. Concepts of deity include both a Goddess and a God, with primacy generally given to the Goddess. The most important concepts in the Wiccan worldview are immanence, meaning everything is alive (has importance) and connected to everything else in the world, and "the continuous cycle of birth, life, and death, and rebirth" represented by the trinity of the Goddess as Maiden, Mother, and Crone (Lozano and Foltz quoted in Tosh, 18-19). Witchcraft, "with its acceptance of death and emphasis on immanence, the interconnectedness of all things, and the natural cycles rather than polarities, is a joyous, life-affirming religion, even in death" (Lozano and Foltz quoted in Tosh, 18-19). Specific to Wiccan beliefs is the Wiccan Rede which states, "An ye harm none, do as ye will," and the Three Fold Law

which states that the actions and energies, positive or negative, you put out will come back to you three times over. Many practitioners of Witchcraft use the term Wicca or Wiccan to indicate both female and male practitioners as well as in order to avoid the negative reactions and pre-judgements associated with the term Witch or Witchcraft.

Despite these many interpretations of what it means to be Pagan, I use the term(s) to indicate those who follow earth-based spiritual paths although I am not including Native American beliefs in this work. Throughout this work I will use the terms Pagan, Paganism, Witch, Wiccan, Wicca, and Witchcraft, and I will capitalize them as we would capitalize other religious terms such as Christian, Methodist, Baptist, Muslim, Jew, Jewish, Buddhist; etc.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN PAGANISM

Formed in the early 1970's, The Covenant of the Goddess is one of the largest and oldest Wiccan religious organizations in the world (<http://www.cog.org/welcome.html>). The Covenant of the Goddess or CoG was recognized by the federal government as a nonprofit religious organization on October 31, 1975. In 2006 the Covenant of the Goddess reported estimates of over 750,000 Witches and Pagans in the United States based on a 2000 poll. This growth in numbers makes Paganism the fastest growing religion in the United States according to the Institute for the Study of American Religion (<http://www.americanreligion.org/>). CoG's 2006 poll also showed that 46% of Pagans have college degrees, 94% are registered to vote, 74% are female, 25% are male, and 6% have military service records. The Military Pagan Network (<http://www.milpagan.org/>) cites a 2006 *Stars and Stripes* (daily newspaper for the U.S. military) report which states

that 2005 Department of Defense (DOD) statistics show that “more than 1,800 active-duty service members identified themselves as Wiccans” (<http://www.milpagan.org/>). The Military Pagan Network also estimates over 2,000 service members who identify as Wiccan with over 4,300 total service members who state they are Pagan.

The Covenant of the Goddess is like many Pagan groups and organizations in that it was formed in the 1960's and 1970's amid much cultural change and turmoil in response to the antiwar movement, the Civil Rights movement, growing feminist interests, and global environmental concerns. However, Pagan and Wiccan groups and organizations existed prior to the turmoil of the 1960's and 1970's.

Historical and religious scholars note that whereas the oral traditions written down by Christian scribes in Europe had often been tainted by their personal views and the agendas of powerful men, anything published after the invention of printing would most likely also be influenced by the Christian church. A number of laws were passed in Europe that existed for hundred of years which banned not only the practice of but also the discussion of Witchcraft from anything other than the church's point of view, and, therefore, any subsequent written works would also carry the biases of the church. These laws, and the views held by the Christian church, influenced social beliefs about what Paganism and Witchcraft are and were. The spread of Christianity and the growth in population helped to spread misconceptions, and resulted in many people being tortured, murdered, or forced out of their communities.

In his book Buckland's Complete Book of Witchcraft, Raymond Buckland, student of well-known Witch Dr. Gerald Gardner, writes about the Witchcraft laws in England stating,

In 1604 King James I passed his Witchcraft Act, but this was repealed in 1736. It was replaced by an Act that stated that there was no such thing as Witchcraft and to pretend to have occult powers was to face being charged with fraud. By the late seventeenth century the surviving members of the Craft had gone underground; into hiding. (Buckland, 6)

Many books have been written about Paganism and Witchcraft in the last several hundred years. Some authors considered themselves sympathetic to Paganism, but had an amused attitude and portrayed Pagan beliefs and rituals as "curious pastimes." Others highlighted its formula or cookbook aspect with regard to using herbs to heal or spells to attract lovers and dispel enemies. Still others concentrated on its ceremonial aspects and gave instruction on achieving high status within the Pagan community. Some religious scholars changed the basic belief system to such a degree as to ignore or even erase female aspects central to Paganism. In doing so these writers displayed their own biases, sexism, and fear.

However, those opposed to Paganism and Witchcraft were much more focused in their intent. With the invention of the printed word Christian scholars were able to utilize this new technology to spread their beliefs across Europe. The first book to be printed was the Gutenberg Bible in 1456 (wikipedia.com), and in 1484 Pope Innocent VIII produced his papal bull entitled *Summis desiderantes affectibus* recognizing Witchcraft as being real and denouncing Witches (Catholic Encyclopedia online- <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08019b.htm>). This work gave full papal approval to do anything necessary to get rid of them. This work also lead the way for the *Malleus Maleficarum* (the "Witch Hammer," "Hammer of the Witches," or "Hexenhammer") which was written in 1486-87 by two Jesuit priests named Heinrich Institoris Kramer and

Jakob Sprenger (wikipedia.com). Their work had profound impacts on the Witch trials both in Europe and the United States. The work is well known for its misogyny and equates Witchcraft with heresy. It is also perhaps the most well known treatise on prosecuting suspected Witches to have been produced during the European Witch craze which began in the late Middle Ages and reached its peak during the Renaissance. The *Malleus Maleficarum* is divided into three parts with discussion and arguments about the existence of Witchcraft, women's particular role(s) in Witchcraft, the various forms of Witchcraft, detecting and sentencing Witches, and witness accounts.

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page)

In this book definite instructions were given for the prosecution of Witches including torture. However, the book was not specifically ordered by the Pope or the Catholic Church, and "when the book was submitted to the Theological Faculty of the University of Cologne--the appointed censor at that time--the majority of the professors refused to have anything to do with it. Kramer and Sprenger, nothing daunted, forged the approbation of the whole faculty; a forgery that was not discovered until 1898" (Buckland, 5).

With the changes in the way Pagan or "heathen" practices were viewed and the weight Western culture gives to written texts done by "experts" or "learned" people this, book alone had tremendous impact on millions of people across Western Europe. It is believed by a number of scholars such as Raymond Buckland and Margot Adler, among others, that between several hundred thousand and several million women, men, and children were put to death because of what was written in the *Malleus Maleficarum* and other texts. However, it is believed by many that women suffered the most. Buckland

recounts the fate of one hundred twenty women and men who were burned to death on the charge of the Archbishop of Treves in 1586. They were charged with interfering with the elements and causing the severe winter weather. "Confessions" were obtained through torture. Of course, there are many examples of such investigative behavior throughout Europe, and, in America, we can point to the Witch Trials in Salem, Massachusetts (1692) as another example. Fred Pelka, in his article "The Women's Holocaust," lends support to the belief that women suffered the most during the hunts for Witches and states:

As Witchhunts go, Salem's was a relatively modest affair. While the immediate victims at Salem numbered in the hundreds, it is estimated that anywhere from several hundred thousand to nine million people were tortured to death in the massive European Witchhunts of the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries. Eighty-five percent of these victims were female, and the history of the Witchhunts is primarily a history of the oppression of women. (Pelka, 7)

Unfortunately, we will never know the exact number of deaths because records were not always kept. Also, many people were unwilling to come forward and acknowledge someone they knew had been accused of Witchcraft lest they be accused themselves. Today, accusations of Witchcraft have been the cause of legal battles over a variety of issues such as child custody and property ownership (witchvox.com and <http://paganinstitute.org/>).

From these early events until the early Twentieth century things appeared to have remained mostly the same. Those who followed Pagan and Wiccan ways are said to have passed their information, traditions, and beliefs from generation to generation quietly and unobtrusively. They met, worshipped, and held rituals in private. There was the

continual threat of discovery and what would happen to them under the law--cultural and governmental--if they were discovered.

There are several authors whose work has influenced how we view the history of Witchcraft as well as the rediscovery and reemergence of Paganism and Wicca in the twentieth century. These authors are: Charles Godfrey Leland [1897] 1974; Margaret Murray [1921] 1971, [1931] 1970; Robert Graves 1948; Gerald Gardner [1954] 1970 [1959] 1971; Doreen Valiente 1962, 1973; and Sybil Leek [1971] (discussed in Lewis). Although all of these authors have been influential, Dr. Gerald Gardner and Dr. Margaret Murray are most often considered to have had the most influence on contemporary Pagan practices. British anthropologist Dr. Margaret Murray's work, published in 1921, is considered to be one of the first sympathetic books researching the "Old Religion" and which helped unleash a renewed interest in these hidden traditions. Her work, entitled The Witch Cult in Western Europe, examined records of the trials of the Middle-Ages and offered evidence of the existence of a pre-Christian religious system. According to Dr. Dennis Carpenter:

Murray {[1921] 1971} studied the evidence from the witch trials of Britain, including the legal records of the trials, pamphlets giving accounts of individual witches, and the works of inquisitors and other writers that she believed showed the beliefs, organization, and ritual of a previously unrecognized cult. (Carpenter in Lewis, 45)

This religion, which Murray called the "Dianic Cult," centered on a diety which could be embodied in a man, woman, or animal. In one incarnation it took the form of the horned god known to the Romans as Janus or Dianus. The feminine form of Dianus--Diana- was found mentioned throughout Western Europe as the leader of Witches. In 1929, Murray was hired to write the entry on

Witchcraft for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Her entry in the encyclopedia appeared in reprints until 1969, and helped cement her views on the history of Witchcraft into mainstream culture. Murray's second book, The God of the Witches (1931), expanded her ideas about the existence of the Dianic Cult. In this book she asserted that European pre-Christian traditions had survived the Witch Trials and existed in modern society as contemporary Witchcraft.

Dr. Dennis Carpenter writes in his article, "Emergent Nature Spirituality: An Examination of the Major Spiritual Contours of the Contemporary Pagan World View," that despite "considerable debate" concerning Murray's works, her endeavors "helped inspire the rebirth of Paganism by creating a context of alleged historical authenticity and continuity which individuals such as (Aidan) Kelly (1991) believe provided the inspiration for later work by Gerald Gardner" (Carpenter in Lewis, 45). As Dr. Carpenter and others mention (wikipedia.com), although her methods and a number of her conclusions have been criticized in recent years, the primary value of Murray's work is that she understood the prevalence of Pagan beliefs and customs in modern Britain as well as the idea that Witchcraft could not be studied separately from other religious traditions or from the study of folklore and anthropology.

Another body of work considered by many Pagan scholars to be instrumental in the "revival" of Paganism in the twentieth century--more specifically Witchcraft--are the books by Gerald Gardner (1884-1964) entitled High Magic's Aid (1949), Witchcraft Today (1954), and The Meaning of Witchcraft (1959). Gardner's first book, High Magic's Aid, was written before the Witchcraft Acts (from 1735) in England were repealed in 1953, and thus Gardner wrote under the pen name "Scire." After the last of

the Witchcraft Acts was repealed in 1957 Gardner was better able to publish under his own name. In her work on Paganism and identity Nancy Tosh states,

Interestingly, the Witchcraft Act did not outlaw Witchcraft. In 1735, during the reign of George II, this law passed and replaced existing laws outlawing the practice. The Witchcraft Act, reflecting Enlightenment ideas, declared that since Witchcraft did not exist anyone claiming status as a Witch sought to defraud people and thus committed criminal activities. Therefore, England prosecuted people for belief in the existence of Witchcraft, not the religion itself. Primary sources seldom make note of this distinction, reflecting changing public views on Witchcraft throughout the centuries. Nonetheless, the repeal of the act did provide a legal atmosphere favorable to the growth of contemporary Paganism and Witchcraft” (22).

Gardner supported many of Murray’s theories and claimed to be a modern Witch himself. He claimed to have been practicing the “Old Religion” since the 1930’s.

Gardner was a Witch who belonged to a group (known as a coven) that practiced Witchcraft. In coming forward to report that the religion was indeed still alive and being passed from generation to generation, Gardner lent credibility to Murray's work. He reported that despite Christianity's best efforts to extinguish it, the Old Religion still existed, albeit underground. For the first time, an actual Witch was recounting his religion's history, rituals, and beliefs. Gardner said he wrote these books because he felt the Old Religion was dying out, and he wanted to document its existence and beliefs before it did so. However, he was surprised to find that many people throughout Europe had kept these beliefs alive, and had formed groups that had been in existence for many years. Due to the persecution and misunderstandings surrounding their practices, most of these people had never felt free to "go public" in the way that Gardner had done.

Gardner believed that what he had found about Witchcraft was incomplete and inaccurate. Paganism had been a tradition that was passed from person to person orally

for hundreds of years, and it was not until the persecution of witches--which resulted in the separation of organized groups--that the need arose to put these beliefs and practices into writing. Many groups began keeping records, called a "Book of Shadows," of their particular activities, rituals, spells, and deities, and these were passed on from generation to generation, with each successive generation adding to its group's written account.

Because these traditions were passed from group to group and recopied continuously under extremely stressful conditions, Gardner believed that errors had probably been made. He took the rituals of the coven he had been initiated into and rewrote them according to how he felt, based on his years of study, they were supposed to be. These rituals and beliefs became known as "Gardnerian Witchcraft" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gardnerian_Wicca and <http://www.raybuckland.com/>) and although he has been criticized and accused of fabricating his accounts, Gardner is credited for being one impetus behind a large and important twentieth century religious movement (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gardnerian_Wicca and <http://www.raybuckland.com/>).

Followers of the Gardnerian tradition such as Raymond Buckland have gone on to explore and create their own Witchcraft (or Wiccan) traditions, and to speak out on behalf of Witchcraft and Witches all over the world. However, there are numerous and varied traditions in which Gardner plays no part. Much like the various denominations of Christianity, Wiccans and Pagans, both in their rituals and in their beliefs, can be very different. Buckland explains:

Some like lots of ritual, while some are for simplicity. Some are from Celtic backgrounds, others from Saxon, Scots, Irish, Italian, or any

of a number of others. Some favor a matriarchy; others a patriarchy and still others seek a balance. Some prefer to worship in a group (coven), while others are for solitary worship. (Buckland, 8)

After studying with Gardner for some time, Raymond Buckland (<http://www.raybuckland.com/>) came to the United States in 1962 and helped to spread his own (as well as Gardner's) ideas about Paganism and Witchcraft. He credits himself for having introduced Gardnerian Wicca to the United States. Known to some as “The Father of American Wicca,” in 1973, he introduced his own denomination of Wicca--called Seax Wica (his spelling) or Saxon Witchcraft--to Witches in the United States. It has come to be known all over the world. He also wrote the first American book on Wicca written by a Witch entitled Witchcraft From the Inside (1971). Not long after Buckland became one of the first to come "out of the broom closet," others such as Sybil Leek became almost as well known in mainstream society as they were already in the Pagan and Wiccan community. Many of these newly recognized Pagans and Wiccans began to publish books. Sybil Leek wrote over 60 books (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sybil_Leek) and her 1971 book, The Complete Book of Witchcraft, has remained very popular and has been reprinted numerous times. She was dubbed “Britain’s most famous Witch” by the BBC (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sybil_Leek). Also writing about Witchcraft during the 1970’s and 1980’s was well known author Stewart Farrar. Stewart, along with his wife Janet Farrar, wrote and published several books among these were Eight Sabbats for Witches (1981), The Witches Way (1984) and The Witches Goddess (1987). The Farrars have also co-authored two books with Gavin Bone. Prior to his death in 2000, Stewart Farrar is believed by many to have been as influential to the modern Pagan and Wiccan

movement(s) as Gerald Gardner was before him

(<http://www.wicca.utvinternet.com/aboutus.htm> and

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stewart_Farrar). Today, Wiccans and Pagans such as Margot Adler, author of *Drawing Down the Moon* (1979); Starhawk, author of The Spiral Dance (1979); Laurie Cabot of The Witches League for Public Awareness in Salem, Massachusetts; Selena Fox of Circle Sanctuary; and authors Gavin and Yvonne Frost, among others, are just as widely known.

By the time Gerald Gardner died in 1964

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerald_Gardner), several other factors had begun to influence the acceptance and practice of Paganism in the United States. The first, and some feminist scholars such as Mary Daly, Charlene Spretnak, and Gerda Lerner would probably say the largest, was the women's movement. By the mid-1970's when the women's movement had "matured," women had, in increasing numbers, been discovering the ancient religions which believe the Goddess and the feminine are of prime importance. For many women new to feminism and the women's movement, this gave a religious alternative to the dominant ideals which revolved around the males (or men in general) being of prime importance.

Another factor that influenced the rise of acceptance in Paganism and Pagan ideals was the fairly new interest in "Earth Mysteries." The ideas and theories behind such things as Stonehenge and sacred earth mounds were being observed, studied, and written about. "The ancient world was no longer dismissed as merely primitive, and some groups started to take their work to the level of guardianship of their country's sacred sites" (Jones and Matthews, 30)

A third factor in the acceptance of Pagan practices was a shift in the way society, particularly Western society, viewed medicine. Techniques of "alternative" medicine such as hypnosis and meditation created interest in and utilization of the healing powers of the body and mind instead of attacking the problem from "outside" the body as is the way of Western medicine. Along with these ideas about the power of mind and body came ideas about human potential and growth. As Jones and Matthews explain, "The Human Potential movement and its 'growth groups' promoted trust in the potential rightness of all psychological processes, and gave training in methods of releasing their healing power. Such skillful trust in Nature is the essence of the Pagan outlook." (31)

Dominant religious beliefs could not completely encompass the new ideas which came out of the turmoil and search for "self" of the 1960s and 1970s. Jones and Matthews state, "Suddenly the distant past (indigenous Paganism), the recent past (Druidry, Wicca, Oriental mysticism), and the spiritual and philosophical needs of the future were seen as a continuum. They are the Pagan heritage of Europe, indeed of humankind." (Jones and Matthews, 31)

Whether or not modern Paganism and Witchcraft grew out of the ideas and writings of adherents like Gerald Gardner, are rekindled beliefs from our ancestral past, or were created in opposition to church teachings and others, Paganism has become one of the largest growing religious movements in the United States (http://www.religioustolerance.org/wic_nbr1.htm). Some would say that Paganism and Wicca, by "building its past and incorporating historical elements into its self-image," has gained validity as a (new) religion by asserting its claim to be the oldest religion of all (Tosh). Pagans and Wiccans utilize the same historical records used by "real" historians.

However, they also point out that opponents of Paganism use the same information in “demonizing” them. “By using the works of authorities, that is, historians and anthropologists, Pagans weave a legitimization of their religion and provide a context for insisting that their voice(s) be heard.” (Tosh, 25)

Because Paganism, at least in its contemporary form, is created in large part by socially constructed media images which impact our perceptions and beliefs about Pagans and Wiccans as a group, it is necessary to examine some of the contemporary images portrayed on a daily basis. In Chapter Two I will discuss the ways in which modern Paganism has been and continues to be constructed by media such as television and film, as well as some of the debates and discussions about these mainstream identities.

CHAPTER II

MEDIA IMAGES OF CONTEMPORARY WITCHES

The theories of Berger and Luckmann, Fiske, and Kellner discussed in Chapter One will be combined here to create a framework for understanding the process of stereotype construction. This framework is predicated on the belief that theories of social construction are legitimate means of understanding the world. The social construction of stereotypes is a variable historical process, often cyclical in structure/nature, which consists of three successive building phases moving continuously to create and destroy collective beliefs about various groups of people. This chapter will apply existing social construction theory to the group known as Pagans, Wiccans, and Witches, as well as examine the ideas and images that have helped construct an identifying stereotype for this group of people. This chapter will also examine contemporary media images of Witches in American society in order to contrast them with images created by Witches and Pagans themselves that will be discussed in Chapter Three.

The idea of humans being capable of creating their beliefs is not a new one. Berger and Luckmann have stated that reality is constructed through a four-step process of externalization, objectification, internalization, and socialization (60-61), a “continuing dialectical process” in which humans and their social world interact with each other to build society. (61). However, it takes time to complete this process. Only when it is transmitted to a new generation can the constructed “social world” be seen “in its totality” (61).

The construction of stereotypes can be seen as a subprocess of Berger and Luckmann's world (social) construction structure. Like Berger and Luckmann's overall framework, the multi-stepped process of stereotype building turns cyclically through time. However, the pace at which stereotypical information is transmitted is variable. Further, because the information can be affirmed by the current members of a society, this process is not dependent on future acceptance for success.

The framework for stereotype construction includes three phases: foundation, convergence, and reinforcement and resistance (Berger and Luckmann, 60-61). This framework identifies a procedure that is capable of repeating indefinitely through time with the introduction of new materials. Each phase is a process in itself, with one building upon the other toward the creation of a full set of beliefs about a group of people.

The foundation phase is similar to Berger and Luckmann's process of externalization: particular ideas and events are separated from the everyday flow of information in society (60). These distinct ideas and events share a resemblance to each other, though that correlation may not be instantaneous. A stereotype's foundation may actually go unseen during the process of its construction, only becoming visible in retrospect, long after all of the events and ideas within it have been shared with the world.

Information may not be recognized as having formed a foundation until the process of convergence into stereotype has been completed. The convergence process is roughly equivalent to Berger and Luckmann's objectification, in that ideas and events are organized into patterns of belief that form directed structures which then assume the "character of objectivity" (60). A new set of events will take place, but the ideas that

drive them are carried over from the foundation phase. This repetition of ideas may be deliberate, built consciously on earlier examples, or it may be presented as new information; its authors may not recognize the connections they have made to foundational data. In either case, at this time the information converges into patterns of meaning that form stereotypes.

Once a stereotype is constructed, it can enter the sphere of public knowledge, where it is simultaneously affirmed and challenged by members of society. This constitutes the phase of reinforcement and resistance. It is similar to Berger and Luckmann's reification in that the process of construction has been forgotten. (89)

Stereotypes are separated from their human authorship and reinforced through new events that promote their ideas while the information within a stereotype is internalized as truth by members of a society. At the same time, resistance is pursued by those members of a society who refuse to accept a stereotype as truth. The desire to resist a stereotype is not limited to those misrepresented by the stereotype, but is available to all members of a society. Resistant ideas and images have no power when formulated on an individual basis; however, when they are organized into patterns of counter-representation, they may present a challenge to a society's belief systems. For example, the growing numbers of television shows and films featuring Witches in positive ways as a group such as *Charmed*, *Harry Potter*, and *Sabrina the Teenaged Witch* most likely do more to challenge mainstream society's views of Witchcraft than *Bewitched* did as the only popular media image of its time.

Reinforcement and resistance occur simultaneously because, according to Fiske, all the information a culture possesses, including stereotypes, circulates freely to all

members of that culture. Thus, stereotypes are subject to a full spectrum of interpretations, ranging from complete acceptance to total rejection. (Fiske, 15-18) When a stereotype has been accepted by a society, it becomes part of an established belief system; any organized resistance to that stereotype becomes a threat to that society's status quo, as it is tantamount to a rejection of a society's beliefs.

It is possible for a stereotype to outlive its usefulness; if that is the case, it may gradually disappear from the public's perception and enter a period of dormancy. It will remain in this unconscious cultural stasis until, in the future, its pertinent parts are recycled into new foundations. However, it is also possible that resistant ideas, when organized into popular counter-representations, can become powerful enough to displace a society's established beliefs and begin a new process of stereotype construction.

Resistant ideas, either on their own or in combination with ideas reinforced through the original stereotype, can be reformulated into a new foundation that could one day lead to a new stereotype. This process can continue to evolve indefinitely, creating new stereotypes from contemporary cultural data for as long as that information exists.

The circulation of data in a society moves at an incredibly fast pace; this is because cultural materials are displayed primarily through media, which provide instantaneous access to information. Kellner states that media have become primary socialization tools, central to the process of the construction of stereotypes (17). Media images can create stereotypes that uphold a society's status quo, diverting attention away from contextual explanations for difference that could prove stereotypes false (40).

Media images can also counteract stereotypical messages about a particular group and

promote “forces of resistance and progress,” allowing the process of stereotype construction to begin anew (17).

CULTURAL IMAGES: FILM, TELEVISION, AND LITERATURE

As mentioned in Chapter One, the media constructs and distributes many images of Pagan, Wiccans and other nature based belief systems. Image construction incorporates various forms of mass media, spreading from the printed page to the big screen. Some of these images promote stereotypes about Wiccans casting spells on hapless victims and being devil worshippers, among others. These negative stories seem to be especially popular during Halloween. Recently, one television station asked viewers to write in and respond to the question “Halloween, cute children’s holiday or highway to hell?” (Channel 11 News, Toledo, Ohio, October 2007). Other media images challenge these stereotypes. On occasion the media presents a fairly reasonable portrait of Witches and Pagans. At other times, they avoid a story if the Witches and Pagans interviewed do not provide the flair and titillation needed for a “good” story. Oftentimes the reporter will fall back on their own mass produced stereotypes, ignoring the stories and information from real Witches and Pagans. Although many Pagans and Wiccans have experienced a sense of disappointment over the media’s treatment of Paganism, others maintain a sense of optimism and view the current (slow) move away from the portrayal of Witches as invariably evil as a positive thing. In my local community every Halloween, friends of mine are hopeful their hometown newspaper will finally “get it right” and not portray them as “devil worshipping baby eaters” (comment from personal conversation). While many newspapers are now providing more accurate information,

there are local community members who protest Halloween being celebrated in schools because they believe it promotes devil worship and the celebration of evil.

Despite these unfortunate conflicts and the resulting disappointments, the media plays an important role in contemporary Paganism that encompasses not only how Witches and Pagans interact with outsiders but also how they first came to conceptualize Witchcraft and Paganism for themselves. Persecution of Witches and Pagans still exists. Pagans and Witches possess a well-founded fear of this persecution.

Published writings and media images sensationalizing and misrepresenting Witchcraft remain the norm. Even positive press stresses the sensational, the weird, and the unusual aspects of the Craft. Whether they are meant to titillate or to scandalize, these images miss the point of what the Craft has to offer society. Nonetheless, these strong images in media and literature have provided the “frames of meaning” from which Pagans and Witches rebuild themselves (Tosh, 114-115).

Stereotypes and misconceptions about members of the Pagan community are in evidence even within our government and judicial system. Examples of this discrimination can be seen in a variety of political and legal settings, from the trials against the men and women of Salem, Massachusetts in the 1690’s to contemporary American society. Modern attempts to discriminate against Pagans and Wiccans filter into the workplace, child custody decisions, and real estate settlements, among many others (<http://www.religioustolerance.org/>). We see and hear about these attempts to discriminate against Wiccans on the nightly news, in television shows, and in films. These media images, in turn, impact the perception of mainstream Americans and their views of the validity and legality of accepting Wicca as a religion.

For example, a legal case in 2000 was sensational enough to be made into a television film (Lifetime, *Not Like Everyone Else*), and addressed the issues surrounding

the growing number of young people choosing to be Pagan or Wiccan despite mainstream society's prejudice. In October of 2000 the American Civil Liberties Union of Oklahoma filed a federal lawsuit on behalf of then fifteen-year old Brandi Blackbear. The suit charged that Oklahoma school officials violated Ms. Blackbear's civil rights when they accused her of "casting a hex" which resulted in a teacher's illness. Ms. Blackbear had no prior discipline problems and had a perfect attendance record. In December 1999, rumors in the school prompted school officials to suspend Blackbear for fifteen days for supposedly casting spells; violating her rights to religious freedom when they told her she would not be allowed to wear or draw any "symbols related to the Wicca religion" (<http://www.aclu.org/religion/schools/16295prs20001026.html>). Earlier rumors had prompted school officials to suspend Blackbear for nineteen days in the spring of 1999 because of the contents of private writings found in her book bag. Again, student rumors had reported Blackbear was carrying a gun and she was searched. No gun was ever found, and school officials refused to return her personal property.

The ACLU has defended student's religious beliefs previously; however, this is the first case in the United States involving actual accusations of Witchcraft. The suit sought an undisclosed amount of punitive and financial damages on the Blackbear family's behalf, a declaration that the school violated the student's rights, an injunction preventing the school from banning the wearing of any non-Christian religious paraphernalia and an order expunging her school record of the unsubstantiated charges (<http://www.aclu.org/religion/schools/16295prs20001026.html>).

To many Americans, "religion" means having a centrally organized group, going to a recognized church building, having a minister or priest speaking to a congregation

which worships a single male deity, and upholding a written creed or set of spiritual rules or laws. Although Wiccans and Pagans do have beliefs about the way they should live their lives, their belief system is very different from what most Americans have been raised to believe is the “correct” or “accepted” way to be religious. Therefore, because Paganism is different, many conclude it is not a “real” religion and does not deserve the same respect and deference as more mainstream or conventional religions. Also, due to the misconceptions about Paganism, some political and religious leaders actively work to destroy Pagan’s and Wiccan’s (among others) freedom to worship as they wish. For example, in May 1999 Representative Bob Barr of Georgia spoke out publicly against Army officials for allowing Wiccans and other Pagans to hold religious gatherings at the Ft. Hood, Texas Army base. Mr. Barr argued that Wicca and Paganism should not be supported by funds from taxpayers. However, it was found that despite other religious representatives being provided office space and staff paid for by public monies, Wiccan and Pagans on base are not supported in this way. Then Governor of Texas, now President of the United States, Mr. George W. Bush commented on Mr. Barr’s statements by saying, “The military should rethink their position. That’s not a religion.”

(http://www.religioustolerance.org/burn_aw2.htm)

Historically, Hollywood imagery has not been kind to Witches and many of the friendliest Witches in children’s Halloween books and movies appear as green-skinned, disfigured hags. In more traditional tales, a desire to eat children or take their life force such as in the well known Grimm’s children’s story *Hansel and Gretel*, the 1993 film *Hocus Pocus* starring Bette Midler, and famous writer Roald Dahl’s *Witches* (1990), replaces the more “politically correct” cute and friendly green-skinned Witch. Even

Bugs Bunny outwits the wicked Witch Hazel in the cartoon classics “Bewitched Bunny” (1954) ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witch_Hazel_\(Looney_Tunes\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witch_Hazel_(Looney_Tunes))), and “A Witches Tangled Hare” (1959). As ridiculous as these Halloween caricatures of Witches may seem, particularly to those who consider themselves Witches, sadly this image prevails in the consciousness of most people.

Among the many contemporary written works, fiction and nonfiction, with themes focused on Witchcraft, none has had the impact of the very popular Harry Potter series. A recent Google search of Harry Potter found over 67,000,000 entries including the movie trailer for the most recent film *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (release date July 13, 2007, <http://harrypotter.warnerbros.com/>). This newest film is the fifth in the Harry Potter series with the sixth film in production. The seventh and final book, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, was released on July 21, 2007 (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_Potter_and_the_Deathly_Hallows).

In the first book, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, published in June 1997 (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_Potter), we learn that Harry is an orphan living with his muggle (non-magical) aunt and uncle, Vernon and Petunia Dursley, in the English suburbs. The Dursleys do not believe in imagination or magic, and in an attempt to rid him of his magical powers, try to hide his magical heritage from him, and punish him severely after several strange occurrences. Harry’s parents died protecting him from the evil Lord Voldemort, and although baby Harry survived the attack, he received a lightning bolt shaped scar on his forehead. As the story progresses, Harry is about to turn 11 years old and “messenger” owls begin to bring letters to the Dursley’s home. Not wanting Harry to see the letters, but being unable to stop the deliveries, Vernon Dursley

decides to move the family to a remote island which is where Harry is found by Rubeus Hagrid, half giant/half wizard gamekeeper at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Hagrid explains to Harry that he is being invited to attend Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, and Harry readily agrees. Harry is then propelled into the new and exciting world of magic, and an alternate reality consisting of Witches, Wizards, dragons, giant spiders, ogres, a game called Quidditch, and the politics of “half-bloods,” and “pure-bloods,” among many other new and fascinating things.

While the Harry Potter books and films are set in our contemporary time, they exist outside of our known world creating a world in which issues of difference, race, education, class, gender, justice, foreign cultures, and socioeconomic class are readily examined and addressed. Everyone and everything in Harry’s new world is different than what he experienced living with his aunt and uncle in the muggle world.

Despite being portrayed in a positive light, Harry’s new life and school contain a variety of stereotypes and misconceptions about modern Witchcraft. None of the earth-centered religious aspects are in evidence although there is great respect and appreciation for diverse species and their care. Classes include examples such as Potions and Defense Against the Dark Arts, Ancient Runes, Care of Magical Creatures, Divination, and Charms, among others; carrying and using magic wands; flying on brooms; and living in a castle that is alive with ghosts, gnomes, elves, talking paintings, and staircases that move on their own are only some of the misconceptions about Witchcraft put forth by the Harry Potter books and films.

Author J.K. Rowling has achieved amazing commercial success with her Harry Potter series of novels and films. The incredible popularity of both the books and films,

as well as being considered by some to be “this generation’s most formative narratives,” makes it necessary for scholars to take seriously their impact not only on American and British culture, but world culture. The impact of Rowling’s books reaches not only children but adults as well as crossing class, race, and gender lines. Although sometimes the storylines are scary, Harry is always fighting evil and working to be the best person, friend, and Wizard he can be.

Critics of Rowling’s works state that the books and films promote devil worship, and encourage the use of magic and belief in the supernatural. In May 2007 the Associated Press reported that a Georgia Superior Court judge upheld a decision by the Georgia Board of Education in support of Gwinnett County school officials to keep Harry Potter books on the shelves in the county’s school libraries. Local parent Laura Mallory had brought the suit stating the Harry Potter series attempts to “indoctrinate children in witchcraft.” School officials stated that the books “are good tools to encourage children to read and to spark creativity and imagination.” The parent who brought the suit argued that Witchcraft is a religion, and the books should be banned because reading them in schools is a violation of the separation of church and state. Ironically, Ms. Mallory also stated, “I have a dream that God will be welcomed back in our schools again, I think we need him.” (Associated Press on yahoo.com)

A necessary first step in constructing beliefs and images, externalizing or grouping specific ideas together directs societal thought and lays the foundation for a stereotype. This is often done consciously, as when rival political groups each seek to discredit the other’s candidate in a political debate during an election. These foundations,

however, are often shaky; they are quickly erected and their flaws are usually easy to identify.

At other times foundations are laid which produce long lasting and widely held beliefs. These are built more slowly and often from seemingly disparate events. These foundations are often laid unconsciously; the connections between these events may only be apparent in retrospect, after a stereotype has been fully constructed. These foundations have created popular identities for various American groups, from the religious right, to left-wing environmentalists and feminists, to Pagans and Wiccans.

The American public has been exposed to a great variety of images and ideas about this particular group of people in the last forty years or so, especially since the creation of *Bewitched* in 1964. While these representations do not, together on their own, construct an identifiable image of this particular group of people, they have helped to build the stereotypical profile of contemporary Pagans and Wiccans in American society.

I get a kick out of Hollywood. I always wish that I could twitch my nose like Samantha (Bewitched) and I do have to say I pretty much enjoyed the Hollywood movies...I would love to be able to float across the room and drag my pointed green toes on the ground. I think that...Hollywood's concepts on Wicca and Witchcraft is probably just about as close as Disney is how a mouse truly thinks, you know, I mean they personalized Mickey and they personalized Witches. (Interview from Tosh, 114)

Because religion provides us with a grand narrative, with explanations for the ordering of all life, the images we see of Witches and Pagans in the media have a profound effect on our beliefs about this group of people and what they believe and do. Media images also have an important impact on the Wiccan community itself because a successful worldview provides order and narrative that shape an individual's reality. Theorist Clifford Geertz states that,

Religion is 1) as system of symbols which acts to 2) establish

powerful, pervasive, and long lasting moods and motivations in men by 3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and 4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that 5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic (90).

For Geertz, the importance of religion equals the source of general, yet distinctive conceptions of the world, the self and the relations between them.

Pagan scholar Loretta Orion, author of Never Again the Burning Times: Paganism Revived, discusses various sociological definitions of religion in her work on Pagans and Paganism and has defined religion,

...as a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things (Durkheim 1915) that are powerful and persuasive and that motivate (Geertz 1973) actions, both worshipful and magical, and provide for all those who adhere to them the foundation for a sense of unity based on their sharing of these common beliefs. Revived Paganism/Wicca is, according to this definition, a religion, albeit a radical religion (5).

It is my belief that although Paganism is a relatively modern socially constructed religion it has had and can have further important impact on our culture. Examples of this can be seen in the environmental/animal rights movement(s), and the women's/feminist movement(s). Paganism serves as only one provider of narrative on what it means to call oneself a Witch. Indeed, the vast majority of individuals encounter story lines popularized by Hollywood years before they encounter practicing Witches and Pagans. Just as with other nontraditional groups, often the very first encounter a person has have with Wiccans, Witches, and Pagans is filtered and served to them through various media. Many Americans remember the many Witches from various Disney movies, the Witches in the film *The Wizard of Oz*, printed and televised cartoons, Halloween costumes and decorations, and more children's books than we can count, among many others.

Part of the surge in popularity of television shows and films about Witches can be explained in part by Kellner's idea that "difference sells" (40). By offering viewers a limited, oftentimes fantastical, view of what it means to be a modern Witch, media corporations are able to sell merchandise, and commercial time. However, focusing on differences promotes a very limited identity for those being portrayed.

A cynical observer might note that the role of the Other often appears to lie in being misunderstood by the majority. While Pagans and Witches certainly qualify as "the Other" in Western society, accuracy often suffers for the sake of entertainment and accurate portrayals of religions seldom appear in popular media. (Tosh, 120)

Over time people become desensitized to the inaccuracies, violence, and stereotypes depicted in media images. If they are entertained what does it matter? Desensitization remains a common social occurrence, and the process begins when they are young. The "wicked Witch" first appears in children's stories and holiday celebrations and remains pervasive throughout our culture. The stories and holiday celebrations can depict fun and appealing images or violent and destructive ones. People often fail to see the affects of such desensitization in our culture until they step outside their society and gain a new perspective.

Bewitched (ABC, 1964-1972) is the television show many Americans would identify as one of the first and most well known portrayals of what it means to be a Witch. Samantha Stephens, played by actress Elizabeth Montgomery, is a "beautiful, good hearted witch" (tv.com) who disregards her family and the Witches Councils wishes and marries a mortal. Although Samantha is seemingly proud of her heritage, she must hide who she is in order to fit into her new husband's world. Her attempts to "fit in" are what drive the show. No one can know she is a Witch, so Samantha must do things like "mortals" such as vacuum the house herself instead of using magic as her family would. Her family is, of course, dismayed that she has married a

“mere mortal” and has chosen to live in their world where she is “the Other.” Samantha has, in essence, given up her power for love very much like Kim Novak’s character Gillian in the film *Bell, Book, and Candle* (1958). Throughout various episodes Samantha’s love for her husband is tested by the meddlesome antics of her family, especially her mother Endora.

In June 2005 the TV Land television corporation installed a statue of Elizabeth Montgomery as her character Samantha Stephens in Salem, Massachusetts (<http://www.bewitched.net/>). Salem is famous for its 17th Century Witch Trials in which twenty people were put to death after being found guilty of Witchcraft. Dozens of other people who had been accused sat in jail for months without trials until the hysteria abated (<http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/salem/salem.htm>). The statue was placed in a city park and depicts Stephens, as Samantha, riding a broom over a crescent moon. Some town officials and residents welcomed the new statue as a bit of fun, but others were offended and believed it to be in bad taste; trivializing and co-opting a horrible time in American history (<http://www.bewitched.net/>).

Other Salem residents believed the new statue was a convenient advertisement for the film version of *Bewitched* that was released by Sony Pictures in June 2005. The film features well-known actors Nicole Kidman and Will Ferrell. Kidman plays “Isabel,” a “naive, good-natured witch determined to reinvent herself and lead a normal life.” Ferrell’s character, “Jack Wyatt,” is an actor hoping to get his career going with an updated version of the classic *Bewitched* television series. Jack Wyatt meets Isabel and he believes she would be perfect as Samantha, not knowing she is a real Witch. Despite the media attention created by the controversy over the statue, and the ongoing popularity of the television series, the film version of *Bewitched* was not as popular.

More contemporary television shows such as *Sabrina, the Teenaged Witch* have shown a new generation of television viewers what it means to be a Witch. Debuting in 1996 and ending in 2003, *Sabrina, the Teenaged Witch* is the story of Sabrina Spellman who finds out she is a Witch on her sixteenth birthday. As she struggles to come to terms with her newfound identity and learn the “tricks of magic” in order to earn her Witch’s License, she struggles with the daily problems of being a teenager. Sabrina is like Samantha of *Bewitched* in that they are both working to hide their identities from non-Witches while at the same time living in their world. The same can be said of other television shows and films featuring Witches such as *Charmed*. Both *Bewitched* and *Sabrina the Teenaged Witch* are comedies and have storylines that explore Witchcraft in humorous ways. For example, in Episode 13 one of Sabrina’s friends mistakenly wanders into the “other realm” through the linen closet. Due to a rule forbidding mortals to enter the “other realm,” she is turned into a grasshopper by the Witches Council as punishment. Sabrina rescues her friend, turns her back into her human form, and convinces her it was all a dream.

On the darker side of contemporary television shows depicting modern day Witches are *Charmed* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Based on the popular 1992 film, the television version of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* debuted in 1997 and ran through 2003. The show follows the life of Buffy Summers. Buffy is the typical all American teenaged girl except that she kills vampires, demons, and fights against the forces of darkness. She is the “Chosen One” and has the help of her friends Willow and Xander as well as her “Watcher” Giles. Willow is her best friend and over the course of the show, Willow learns about Wicca and becomes Wiccan. In Season Two, Willow begins studying magic and spells, and meeting other Witches who are all the focus of a Witchhunt led by the parents in their hometown of Sunnydale. She meets and becomes

intimately involved with “serious Witch” Tara Maclay. Throughout Seasons Three, Four, and Five Willow becomes more and more powerful, using her powers to help Buffy and her friends. However, in Season Five Willow uses “dark magic” for the first time in order to take on the powerful “hell-goddess” Glory. Willow uses dark magic to help Buffy defeat Glory and rescue her girlfriend Tara. In the same episode, Buffy decides to sacrifice herself in order to save her sister, Dawn.

In the Season Six premiere episode, “Bargaining,” Willow gathers her friends and unleashes her powers in order to resurrect Buffy from the dead. In the process she becomes addicted to using magic, causing her to lose Tara and eventually realize she has to stop using magic in negative ways. It is also in Season Six that we meet “Dark Willow.” In the episode entitled “Villains,” Willow absorbs all of the words from “black arts” books kept at Sunnydale’s magic shop to help her seek revenge on the man, Warren Mears, who killed her girlfriend Tara and injured Buffy earlier in the episode. Insane with grief, seeking vengeance, and full of dark magic, Willow tracks Warren through the woods where she tortures and eventually kills him by conjuring a spell and flaying him alive from the waist up. She then goes on to hunt down the two men who were working with Warren in his plot to kill Buffy.

Throughout the series Willow uses magic, good and not so good, to help Buffy and her friends. It is not until late in the series, after the Season Six finale, that she goes to England to study with a Coven in order to develop a better understanding of magic, her powers and how to use them, and the balance needed to accomplish all this. By the end of the series in 2003, Willow’s powers have greatly increased and expanded as has her control over them. She is able to fly by force of will, deflect spells directed at her, and project huge amounts of energy from her

fingertips. Another character on the show dubs her the "big all-powerful earth-mother witch goddess."

Listed on the website "Dark Side of the Net" (<http://www.darklinks.com/index.html>) that hosts links for websites featuring "dark" art, music, literature, etc, are links for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* along with *Charmed*. *Charmed* debuted in October 1998 and ended on May 21, 2006. *Charmed* is the story of the three Halliwell sisters Prue (Prudence), Piper, and Phoebe. In the first episode, "Something Wicca This Way Comes," the sisters are reunited after the death of their grandmother. After finding the family "Book of Shadows" in the attic, the youngest sister, Phoebe, activates their powers by reciting an incantation. She also learns they are "The Chosen Ones" who are to use their magic to protect "innocents" from the forces of evil. Throughout the first episode and season, the sisters discover their particular powers and begin to learn about their family history, Witchcraft, their individual and combined powers, and magic. The forces of evil in this series include demons, vampires, sirens, and the ultimate evil labeled "The Source." As the sisters struggle to maintain their daily lives, working, going to school, having relationships, they find themselves drawn more and more to the work they have been told is their destiny. Although each of them has a special power, they quickly learn they are more powerful together, which is what they call "The Power of three."

In Episode # 48 which aired October 26, 2000 (wikipedia.com), the sisters are called back in time on All Hallows Eve. Entitled "All Halliwell's Eve" and set in Colonial Virginia during the 1600's, the episode shows the sisters learning some of the basics of Witchcraft and magic from a group of Witches who called them back to help stop evil forces from taking a newborn baby. In this episode, we see some of the aspects of Wicca or Witchcraft as a religion, such as learning what the five-pointed star means, and forming a circle of power to keep danger

away. At the end of the episode the sisters learn they have saved baby Melinda Warren, their ancestor and founder of their family line in the United States. She is also the progenitor of their family's vast magical powers that have been handed down through every generation.

In Season 4 Episode 1, a new sister is introduced because Shannon Doherty, who played oldest sister Prue, wished to leave the series. The newest Halliwell sister, Paige, has the same mother as the older sisters but her father is a Whitelighter (protector of Witches). She had been adopted by a non-magical family to keep "The Elders" from finding out about her and to keep her safe. Being one-half Witch and one-half Whitelighter, Paige has the powers of both. She can "orb," or move from one place to another, move objects, and heal injuries as Whitelighters can, and has the magical power of her sisters. Again, the "Power of three."

Just as in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and other shows featuring Witches, throughout the *Charmed* series the sisters discuss how to best use their powers and knowledge; how to do the best they can to protect mainstream society from evil, and how to have "normal" lives. Just as Buffy sacrifices herself in order to save her sister, oldest sister Prue from *Charmed* sacrifices herself in order to save her sisters. In the episode entitled "All Hell Breaks Loose," the sisters are outed as Witches when they are caught vanquishing a demon assassin by a television crew. Caught using their powers on live television, a mob gathers outside their house along with several television crews. After a misunderstanding with a woman from the crowd, they are deemed to be "bad witches," and the woman eventually shoots middle sister Piper. After making a deal with "The Source," the ultimate evil on the show, to reverse time in order to save their sister, the

demon assassin is back and, at the end of the episode, kills Prue instead of being killed itself.

Also released during the same time frame as *Charmed*, *Buffy*, and *Sabrina*, *Halloweentown* is the first in a series of four films created by the Disney Channel about Witches. Released in 1998, *Halloweentown* introduces us to the Piper family; Gwen (mother), Marnie (oldest child), Dylan (middle child), and Sophie (youngest child). Gwen's mother, Aggie Cromwell played by Debbie Reynolds, is a Witch who lives in Halloweentown. It is during this first film we learn that Gwen and her children come from a family of Witches and are Witches themselves. However, even though Gwen was born a Witch, she chose to leave Halloweentown in order to marry a human and live in the mortal world. She wants to raise her children as "normal" kids in the human world, but they are quickly finding out about their Witch heritage with the help of their grandmother. The first and subsequent three films all center around the holiday and theme of Halloween. Released in 2001, 2004 and 2006, the films were released to coincide with the holiday.

In the third film, entitled *Halloweentown High* (2004), Marnie attempts to breach the divide between the mortal world and the alternate world of Halloweentown. She asks the Halloweentown Witches Council to allow a group of Halloweentown High's students to attend high school with her in the mortal world. The council agrees to allow the switch, but only after Marnie accidentally bets "all the Cromwell family magic," which is considerable, that her idea will work. She has to prove the two worlds can intermingle by midnight on Halloween or her entire family will lose their magical powers. The students from Halloweentown come to the mortal world to attend high school disguised as humans

in order to disguise their non-human natures. These include an ogre, a troll, a wood nymph, a werewolf, a gremlin, and a zombie, among others. Of course, chaos ensues when the Halloweentown students use the school's Halloween carnival to "improve mortal attitudes toward magical folk."

Their haunted house depicts the ordinary lives of creatures that have typically been used as monstrous images in the mortal world. Ironically, this is in the form of displays like the "Monster Tea Party" and ogres "picnicking in their natural setting," which winds up boring the carnival goers. In the meantime, Marnie's mother Gwen uses a "Witch's glass" to hunt down a missing student who has been imprisoned by Edgar Dalloway, head of the Witches Council. It seems he wants to keep Halloweentown separated from the mortal world, and hopes Marnie's friends don't do well in the mortal high school or its Halloween Carnival, so the portal between the mortal world and Halloweentown remains closed.

During the Halloween Carnival, Dalloway brings to life inanimate monsters from the haunted house to attack the mortal students. Marnie and her grandmother are unable to control the monsters and a mob corners the Halloweentown students, forcing them to reveal their true selves. Marnie's friend Cody shames the mortal students into accepting the Halloweentown students as they truly are with a speech about being accepting of difference(s). At this point the portal between Halloweentown and the mortal world opens and mortal kids cross over to enjoy the carnival going on in Halloweentown.

The fourth film in the *Halloweentown* series aired in October 2006 on the Disney Channel. Entitled "Return to Halloweentown," the film featured young Witch Marnie Piper and her friends as they go off to college. Marnie decides to go to Witch University,

located in the alternate reality of Halloweentown, despite her mother's wish that she go to a local college in the "human world."

Marnie Piper has been given a full scholarship to Halloweentown's "Witch University," a prestigious school built out of an old Cromwell family castle. Her mother, Gwen, agrees that Marnie can go if her brother, Dylan, goes to school there as well. Marnie is soon disappointed to learn that the new school rule is "no magic," which she says is the whole reason why she wanted to attend Witch University. In this film, Marnie travels back in time to learn about her family's "gift" in order to thwart the "Dominion's" plan to use her family's gift to control all Witches and magical creatures. Because "the Dominion" has been caught using their magic in an attempt to harm and control others, they are stripped of their powers and imprisoned in the "Witches glass."

A number of films featuring Witchcraft as its main theme illustrate magic gone wrong or abused in some fashion. As discussed in Chapter One, the 1996 film *The Craft* is one example. The title of the film, *The Craft*, is a reference to alternate names for Witchcraft or Wicca. With the tag line "Welcome to the Witching Hour," by the end of the film the character Nancy Downs has been driven insane by her misuse of magic and is shown strapped to a bed in the psychiatric ward hysterically laughing and screaming. The review of the film on the website Wikipedia states the film's impact on popular culture is that

The film employed state-of-the-art special effects, presenting "gothic fashion" and pagan behavior to the MTV Generation in an attractive package. Through this exposure, many teenage viewers gained an interest in witchcraft/paganism, and especially Wicca. Though some of the interest waned, the movie helped lesser known religions come into the spotlight for a time. Although *The Craft* is fictional, some of its background details are based on actual neo-pagan beliefs and practices (wikipedia.com).

The interesting comment here is that the film presented Pagan and Wiccan “behavior” to the “MTV Generation in an attractive package.” In 1998 well known Pagan author and teacher Silver Ravenwolf published *Teen Witch: Wicca for a New Generation* that was met with some suspicion and criticism (<http://www.spiralnature.com/reviews/book/ravenwolfs.html> and <http://www.ecauldron.com/opedtarnishedsilver.php>). Some bookstores refused to carry it just as some bookstores sometimes refuse to carry books about Paganism or Witchcraft in general. Some members of the Pagan community criticized her for writing a book geared for young people when many are very careful about discussing or exposing the Pagan worldview to people under the age of 18 unless they were raised in that world. Others criticized her for attempting to “cash in” on the growing interest in Paganism and Witchcraft by young people involved in the “goth” world as well as not providing enough information about Wicca as a religion.

Based on the book by Alice Hoffman, the 1998 film *Practical Magic* is another example of how magic can go horribly wrong. Sisters Sally and Gillian Owens, played by Sandra Bullock and Nicole Kidman, are descended from a long line of Witches who, along with their aunts, are viewed with distrust by residents in their small town. However, despite believing Sally, Gillian, and their aunts Frances and Jet, played by Stockard Channing and Dianne Wiest, are evil and associated with the devil, various townspeople, especially women, call on them for help in finding love and money, among other things. With the tag line, “There’s a little Witch in every woman,” the film shows Sally Owens (Bullock) being hesitant to use her powers after trying to thwart the family curse stating that any man in love with an Owens woman will die horribly. When her

husband is killed despite her best efforts, she moves back to her aunt's home with her two young daughters.

In the meantime, sister Gillian (Kidman) has gotten involved with a man named Jimmy who turns out to be nasty and abusive. When Gillian asks Sally for help he attempts to kidnap them both. In order to get away from him, Sally puts the poison belladonna in his drink to render him unconscious so they can escape. She uses too much of the poison, killing him. Afraid they will be sent to prison for his death, they attempt to resurrect him using a forbidden spell in their aunt's "book of magic." The same spell their aunts would not even use to resurrect Sally's husband in fear he would come back as something "perverse and unnatural." Bringing Jimmy back from the dead turns out to be just as their aunts feared. He is as nasty and evil as ever, making it necessary for them to kill him again. However, his angry spirit will not leave the house and eventually possesses Gillian, prompting the aunts to take action, enlisting the help of women from town to exorcise him from Gillian and their house. The end of the film shows all the Owens women standing on the roof of their home on Halloween dressed in black hats and robes with striped stockings similar to the Wicked Witch from *The Wizard of Oz* as townspeople walk by.

A new series featuring Wizard Harry Blackstone Copperfield Dresden on the Science Fiction Channel is based on a series of books by Jim Butcher (wikipedia.com). Harry is the only "professional Wizard in modern-day Chicago," and works to protect regular people from a variety of dark forces which most of them do not believe in. In this world magic as well as vampires, demons, werewolves, fairies, and spirits are real. Along with helping clients who come to him on their own, Harry works with the Chicago

Police Department's Special Investigation Unit to help solve cases having a supernatural flavor. Just as in other television shows and films featuring Witchcraft, there are rules that must be followed, what Butcher calls the "Seven Laws of Magic," as well as something called "The White Council," which is much like The Witches Council in *Sabrina, the Teenaged Witch* and *Halloweentown*. The White Council is the governing body for wizards and the wizard community. The council works to protect humans from wizards who abuse their power and from other magical (nonhuman) creatures. The council also operates as a political organization working to "unite Wizards throughout the world."

As we can see from these contemporary media images, there are numerous differences between how Pagan and Wiccan groups and individuals are portrayed and how they actually live in the world. Film and television characters obtain and possess magical and supernatural powers without any religious overtones. "Neither years of learning, in depth philosophical musings, or communing with deities contribute to the abilities exercised by the casts of *Charmed* or *Bewitched*" (Keenan quoted in Tosh, 115). Other characters can be included in Keenan's list. Television and film images present both positive images as well as negative ones. Keenan points out, however, that even an inaccurate image, no matter how positive, can create misunderstandings and misinformation, leading to the continued marginalization of Pagan religions. "In addition to the older B-rated horror movies, kinder images such as *Practical Magic* present their own problems..." (Keenan quoted in Tosh, 115).

Although I do not think *Practical Magic* is necessarily a "kinder image," people interested in the religion or spirituality behind the magical practice in *Charmed*, *Sabrina*,

or *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* or any films featuring Witches are many times led to create unrealistic and sometimes dangerous views of what Witchcraft is about. This is especially true of teenagers and young adults.

It does irritate me when I see the movies and everything that exaggerate and use evil stereotypes, or exaggerate the power that witches really have. They go for the pyrotechnics and things they can do with special effects in a big way and, frankly, if I waved my wand and I saw a rainbow appear in front of me it'd scare the shit out of me" (Interview in Tosh, 115).

In *The Craft* the young women perform spells cursing other students and in one spell Nancy asks "for all the power of Manon." The old adage "Be careful what you wish for" comes to mind here, because while Nancy becomes powerful she is the one who ultimately ends up going insane and being locked away. Many contemporary Witches would say this is the power of the "Three-fold Law" that states what we put out, positive or negative, comes back to us three times over. The young women's behavior also violates the most basic and foremost Wiccan tenet, The Wiccan Rede, which states, "An it harm none, do as ye will." This may lead some to believe that Wiccans have license to do what they want, but this is not the case at all.

As I mentioned earlier, it is often difficult for minors to have access to accurate information about Paganism and Witchcraft. Although the ability to get accurate information is improving, there are still bookstores that refuse to sell books on Paganism to minors without parental permission, as well as libraries that are hesitant to loan books to minors without parental notification. Parents and other adults block internet access for minors as well, so many teens and young adults, among others, utilize Hollywood images hoping to learn what they can and possibly obtain the same abilities. One interviewee in Tosh's work commented that if he could actually control people, and do what movies and

television shows said he could, he did not think Paganism would be such a minority religion (Tosh, 116).

As we have seen from the examples I have discussed here, many contemporary media images of Pagans, most especially Witches and Witchcraft, are portrayed in more positive ways. Media images of Witches as a group have transitioned and expanded from green-skinned hags who fly around on their brooms to include new more contemporary images of attractive people living in a modern world. For example, many of the characters discussed are working to fight evil in various forms in order to protect “innocents,” “muggles,” or other nonhuman beings. A number of them also provide strong feminist icons for young women to emulate, such as Buffy and Willow from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and the Halliwell sisters from *Charmed*. Also, many of these characters live in an alternate reality in which difference is not only respected but appreciated and celebrated. However, in these examples, some of the older stereotypes are still apparent. Magic can and has been used in negative and destructive ways, and there are more fantastical elements such as time travel, demons, vampires, werewolves, unicorns, fairies, elves, ogres, giants, griffins, gnomes, and giant spiders, among many others. Whether or not one believes in the existence of these and other nonhuman beings, they are not part of the religious and/or spiritual aspects of Paganism or Wicca in its various forms.

Magic and the paranormal also serve as exciting entertainment and no fictitious piece on Witchcraft or Paganism could succeed without a strong emphasis on the fantastic. The magickal, or fantastic, nature of the Pagan worldview confuses many outsiders and questions about love spells abound for out of the broom closet Witches. Witches and Pagans look on the current fascination with the occult as both an opportunity and a problem (Tosh, 119).

Pagan authors such as Margot Adler ([Drawing Down the Moon](#)) have for many years pointed out that the “obscuring of real images by the stronger and more prevalent cultural issues” impacts not only how society views Witches and Pagans, but also how Witches and Pagans view themselves and how they choose to interact with society.

Knowing and comprehending that now several generations of people have grown up with (cable) television, movies, and reading fiction such as the Harry Potter series requires acknowledgement of the profound role media images play in social consciousness and overall culture. The profound impact of media culture not only affects how Witches and Pagans are viewed by society but how they view themselves--through the lens of society at large, which may or may not be accepting of difference.

The complex interplay between contemporary Pagans and Witches, mythology, literature, folklore, and today’s media influences identity construction in ways unique to this religion and requires a certain amount of unfolding. Strong archetypes provoke powerful emotions and the prevalence of centuries of culture over the social constructions of small religions means that these images often play the first and sometimes the most important role in building Pagan identity (Tosh, 115).

Pagans and Witches do not possess the power (or access) to create truth about themselves on the same scale as the media and popular culture. The creators of the contemporary films and television shows we are familiar with use ideas about Witches from the past to help create powerful new images which impact non-Pagans and Pagans alike. The images discussed here have served as potential descriptors of Witches and Pagans. Each has contributed a specific idea or character trait to an overall image, and each has helped to establish a context for the stereotype to come. A stereotype is defined as a “widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person....” ([Webster’s Dictionary](#)). Although a stereotype of fixed ideas contains a

kernel of perceived truth within its falsehoods and exaggerations, these characterizations must be contextualized, viewed in relation to other trends, events, images, and ideas of their time in order to be understood. Just as the evolution of stereotypes about Witches and Pagans can be seen through the historical process of social construction, the same process is at work with other groups such as feminists, right-wing fundamentalists, African Americans, and conservatives. These groups have also been contextualized and viewed in relation to other events, images, and ideas in a given time frame to help create mainstream ideas about who they are and what they do.

In order for Pagans and Witches to add their voices to the creation of cultural understanding of their world, they must understand the influence contemporary literary and media images continue to have on modern perceptions of their religion. Many Pagan individuals and groups have already added their voices to this cultural exchange by utilizing computer technology and the internet to create web sites, blogs, chatrooms, and email lists, among other things, in order to provide information to Pagans and non-Pagans as well as providing places for community building among themselves and coalition building between and among Pagans and non-Pagans. Chapter Three will examine several groups and individuals who have been utilizing the world of the internet to connect with other Pagans and Wiccans as well as working to provide more accurate information about their beliefs and traditions to non-Pagans.

CHAPTER III

WITCHES IN THE MAINSTREAM

The Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution states:

"No state shall...deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."

The Fourteenth Amendment protects against discrimination by state and local governments on the basis of religious beliefs, as well as gender or ethnicity.

(<http://www.religioustolerance.org/>)

Peter Berger, in his work entitled *The Sacred Canopy* (1967), says we “construct” our world/society/culture following his and Thomas Luckmann’s ideas in their book *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966). However, he goes further to suggest we include our religions and spiritual beliefs as part of this social construction. He would argue that Paganism is just as socially constructed as other more mainstream or traditional religions. This chapter will provide examples of the media Witches and Pagans have created themselves using computer technology in order to combat and resist mainstream notions of who they are. This chapter will examine several websites created by Wiccan and Pagan groups and individuals in order to provide more positive images and information about them, as well as creating opportunities for community building both inside and outside the Wiccan community.

As with other religions, Paganism teaches its adherents about the world around them, what it means to be a good person, and what it means to be a part of a greater whole and/or community, etc. We have learned about what it means to be a Christian, Muslim, Jew, or Pagan not only from our families and local communities; but from the wide variety of media we are exposed to on a daily basis. As we change, and our ideas about the world change, our religious beliefs, political views, how we interact with

others, and how we view our experiences in the world, among other things, change and evolve as well in a continuous cycle of socialization and re-socialization.

Like other forms of popular media we learn about ourselves, each other, and the world around us via the internet and its communities because the internet is, at least at this time, a much more democratic forum. Non-mainstream individuals and groups can still control what information goes onto their web sites or gets posted on their email lists. Not only are our computers and the internet tools to help us do research, write, keep track of our personal business, etc.; utilizing the internet also allows for a counter balance to mainstream notions of alternate groups and individuals as well as allowing opposing viewpoints and other “truths” to be discussed. Many Pagan groups and individuals have created web sites in which they relay more truthful information to the general public on Pagan beliefs, traditions, holidays, etc. as well as their own personal observances. They also work to dispel misconceptions about the Pagan community. They network with each other, creating online communities that sponsor discussion groups, review books, do research and write papers for conferences, give and receive feedback on their work, organize festivals, and even hold rituals. Many Pagan organizations such as the Witches League for Public Awareness (WLPA) utilize their web sites to publish articles on various aspects of Paganism, review new books, and interview well known Pagan community members, among others. Loretta Orion’s statement about Pagan organizing rings true for internet communities as well. She states, “The desire to share information and socialize with others like themselves induced collaboration on projects like publishing newsletters or organizing festivals that unwittingly resulted in a reluctant and amorphous social cohesion” (Orion, 236). Computers do not simply do things for us,

they do things to us. Just as Douglas Kellner argues that media culture--films, television, and radio--are the dominant form through which we are socialized and which shapes our political views, social behavior, and identities (Kellner, 1), so, too, does computer technology. Although, some would argue, in a much more interactive form than television, radio, and film.

Pagan operated web sites contain information about beliefs and traditions as well as links to other sites that present both personal and academic information. For example, author Silver Ravenwolf's "Official web site"

(<http://www.silverravenwolf.com/ocean/host.php?page=0>), provides information about her personally and her blog as well as information about classes, a newsletter, and a resources link. In her research, Nancy Tosh found that both books (primary and secondary sources) and the internet play an important role in the Pagan community. She states, "In both resources, the melding of academic and spiritual sources appears as a major component of the Pagan identity" (15).

Well-known technology scholar Douglas Rushkoff calls the "boundless" space we know as the world wide web "Cyberia," with the ideas, words, and images which have emerged out of this space called the "cyberian paradigm." In his 1994 (reprint 2002) book Cyberia: Life in the Trenches of Hyperspace he wrote,

Cyberia is the place alluded to by the mystical teaching of every religion, the theoretical tangents of every science, and the wildest speculations of every imagination.... The technological strides of our postmodern culture, coupled with the rebirth of ancient spiritual ideas, have convinced a growing number of people that Cyberia is the dimensional plane in which humanity will soon find itself (Rushkoff, 5).

It is the boundlessness of the internet or world wide web which I believe attracts those on the “outside” of conventional society. Within the world of the internet, these people are free to express themselves in ways which, in their everyday mainstream existence, may only serve to ostracize them. Those who may have had no community before find community and acceptance among others on the internet who may have also suffered from being on the fringe of traditional American culture. Thus, while Pagan activities, customs, etiquette and viewpoints may not be acceptable to mainstream society, those who find their views and culture more accepting, interesting, enlightening, or simply better than the mainstream are able to find a forum on the world wide web.

As a cultural studies scholar, I recognize, as do many of my colleagues, that, as Rushkoff says, these new kinds of expression and ways of thinking upset the foundations of some of our most widely held beliefs, and the reactions of some more traditional scholars as well as the general population has been suspicion and fear that our “old” ways are disappearing (6). Rushkoff believes that as more and more people question the reality on which societal control and manipulation are based, and become more and more technologically savvy, that this will challenge “historical power centers.” He states,

A bright young hacker with enough time on his or her hands can break into almost any computer system in the world. Meanwhile, do-it-yourself technology and a huge, hungry media empire sow the seeds of their own destruction by inviting private citizens to participate through “zines,” cable shows, and interactive television. The hypnotic spell of years of television and its intense public relations is broken as people learn to deconstruct and recombine the images intended to persuade them. The result is that the population at large gains the freedom to reexamine previously accepted policies and prejudices. Using media “viruses” politically inclined cyberians launch into the datasphere, at lightning speed, potent ideas that openly challenge hypocritical and illogical social structures, thus rendering them powerless (Rushkoff, 6).

Putting the power of such an awesome cultural product into the hands of ordinary people has quite possibly done more to challenge and dismantle the status quo than any other technological innovation to date. Rushkoff also points out that many people who believe in the power of the internet as critical space are often considered by others to be on the fringe of mass culture. However, this notion has been changing, and Rushkoff himself uses the example of 1960's counterculture to illustrate how the beliefs of so-called "fringe cultures" can "trickle up" from the fringe into the mainstream (6).

In the time since Rushkoff wrote Cyberia: Life in the Trenches of Hyperspace, more people all over the world, from all walks of life, now have access to computer technology on a daily basis. Whether it be at home, through school or work, or by visiting their local coffee shop, many people use a computer in some form or fashion every day to help them complete tasks, communicate with friends and family, order goods or services, read the latest novel or hear the latest song, among many other things. Although equal access does not exist and not everyone in the world has a computer, it would seem that interest in computers and computer technology encompasses a large, diverse group of people possibly more than any form of media technology, e.g., television, radio, etc., prior to it.

Rushkoff and other scholars such as Erik Davis discuss the connection between computer technology and Paganism. Rushkoff believes there is a growing "spiritual subculture" on the internet of Pagans characterized by "pagan ethics, reliance on technology, and interconnectivity through vast networks. The neopagan revival incorporates ancient and modern skills in a free-for-all sampling of whatever works, making no distinction between occult magic and high technology" (143).

In several articles, as well as his book entitled Techgnosis: Myth, Magic, and Mysticism in the Age of Information (1998, 2004), scholar Erik Davis supports work done by Rushkoff and discusses his views of the technopagan subculture. In a *Wired Magazine* article published in 1995, Davis described technopagan culture this way:

Besides whatever technical inspiration they can draw from magical lore, technopagans are driven by an even more basic desire: to honor technology as part of the circle of human life, a life that for Pagans is already divine. Pagans refuse to draw sharp boundaries between the sacred and the profane, and their religion is a frank celebration of the total flux of experience... Even the goofier rites of technopaganism (and there are plenty) represent a passionate attempt to influence the course of our digital future and human evolution (Davis, 128).

While Davis obviously believes Pagans and technopagans connect technology to their lives and how that helps them connect to the world as a whole, he also understands the less religious or spiritual uses of the internet. Pagans, like any other group or individual, do use the internet for a variety of strange and sometimes silly things.

Associate Scholar at the Center for Millennial Studies at Boston University, John Reilly, writes that early in Davis' book he states, "The spiritual imagination seizes information technology for its own purposes" (1), and notes that many scholars have found that a large number of members of "occult" religions work in computer-related fields. Reilly states, "It seems that these ancient ways of thinking work better in cyberspace, where consensual realities can be easily constructed" (1). He goes on to point out that while media like the internet may be constructed, it does not mean it is or can be controlled. As Davis says, "The god of communication is known to be a trickster." Reilly also notes that Davis and other internet scholars understand that "...our new wired world is really part of a larger episode in intellectual history" (1). The impact computer technology has had on cultures world wide is that they allow us to "externalize

and share subjective states” in ways we had not been able to before; creating “public spaces” in which rituals have an impact on the “real world” and magic(k) works.

This cultivation of the imagination with the hope of affecting an intersubjective reality is exactly what ritual magicians do, and a surprising number of them choose to do it online. Technopaganism is, probably, a minor factor in the religious life of "meat space" (cyber-speak for the real world), but it is a characteristic feature of spiritual life online. Just as you can play games with other players online, so you can hold rituals in private chat rooms where you attempt to influence real pagan gods (Reilly, 1).

As Rushkoff, Davis, and other scholars understand, for many Pagans and Wiccans there is sometimes no division between their spiritual beliefs and their interests in computer technology. In fact, they are complimentary. The world wide web is viewed as a complex, powerful and unseen “web” connecting people around the world from various cultures, races, and classes. Technology has made accessing other people and vast amounts of information almost cost free, thus giving people of like mind and interests- who would have never known each other beforehand--the ability to expand pre-existing communities as well as create new ones.

Technopagans actually rank among the conservatives of cyber religion. "Chaos wizards," by contrast, are as skeptical about traditional magic as they are about the physical sciences. Such persons do not strongly distinguish ceremonies conducted online from their private psychological exercises, making cyberspace and the imagination seamless. What makes all this of more than folkloric interest is that cyberspace seems to have much the same effect on any human activity conducted online, whether magic, economics, or politics (Reilly, 1).

Computer technology also gives voice to many people in the Pagan community who may be silenced in other arenas, and allows them access to others who share their beliefs. This also allows people who are outside the Pagan community to learn more

about a group or individual should they choose to do so. Thus, in many ways, Pagan and Wiccans are restructuring and/or reconstructing reality, much like creators and producers of the television shows and films that portray them inaccurately. They are simply using the technology available to them.

The websites that will be discussed in this chapter connect thousands of people to thousands of websites allowing them to gain access to each other, information, chat rooms, blogs, and the support many find they need living in communities which are not accepting of those on the “fringe” of mainstream society. In her work on Pagan identity Nancy Tosh states:

Internet research fits in well with an introverted and solitary lifestyle. The world wide web provides more immediate interaction with others yet still allows an individual to maintain anonymity and a sense of privacy. In my research I noticed that books, both primary and secondary sources, weighed heavily in importance with older Pagans and the internet played a greater role with younger Pagans, more important than actually knowing other Pagans. Many websites designed by younger individuals list the likes, dislikes, and other personal information as a means of presenting oneself to the cyber community in a relatively safe fashion. Even the most personal of these websites usually contain links to other sites that specialize in teaching or presenting information in a quasi-academic fashion. In both resources, the melding of academic and spiritual sources appears as a major component of the Pagan identity (15).

We, as “social actors” (Jones, 12), create worlds, domains, place(s), or communities on the web, and proceed to incorporate these worlds into our lives as a whole. The communities we participate in on the web become another place, just as important and valid, in which we interact with others much like the workplace, gym, classroom, nightclub, etc. This reality is not created *by* the technology but *within* it. The only difference is that we may never physically meet the people we contact online. Does this difference invalidate the connections we make online? I do not believe so.

It may be that much of the problem some scholars have with considering web interaction “building” community stems from differing ideas about what constitutes or defines “community,” “interaction,” “place,” etc. Groups formed via internet contact are called “virtual communities,” and while indisputably social spaces in which people still meet and interact face to face, they have different definitions of both “meet” and “face.”

Virtual communities are passage points for collections of common beliefs and practices that united people who were physically separated. In that sense, cyberspace hasn’t a “where” (although there are “sites” or “nodes” at which users gather). Rather, the space of cyberspace is predicated on knowledge and information, on the common beliefs and practices of a society abstracted from physical space (Jones, 19).

The important aspect of web interaction is the sharing of information not necessarily how that information is transmitted. Therefore, it is not that Pagans and Wiccans gather together physically, which they do, but that they exchange information that enables their ideals and practices to remain active within American and European society that is most important. Just as early Pagans are said to have handed down their knowledge via word of mouth from one generation to the next, so, too, are “techno” or “cyber” Pagans continuing this tradition, only on a much grander scale.

WEAVING THE WEB

Like many other groups and individuals who share common interests, Pagans have created websites which link together hundreds, and even thousands, of websites called “webrings” dedicated to Pagan and Wiccan interests. Webrings are typically described as collections of websites found on the internet which are linked together to help improve searches in those categories (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Webring>). A Fall 2007 Google.com search for websites containing the word “Pagan” found over 22 million

listings and searches for sites featuring “Wicca,” “Wiccan,” and “Witchcraft” all found several million listings each. Along with basic information about Paganism and Wicca, websites feature everything from online stores carrying specialty items such as handcrafted incense to Pagan personal ads to correspondence courses taught by well-known Pagan and Wiccan scholars about the various aspects of Wicca. For example, Wiccaweb.com is a website devoted to “providing discussion forums, a resource database, interesting readings, and chat.”

Several large and well-known national and international Pagan and Wiccan groups utilize their websites to reach the larger Pagan community and work on their behalf for a variety of causes. These groups work on various legal issues concerning Pagans; local, state, and world politics; and provide space for large gatherings for members of the community from all over the world.

A large international group working for not only the Pagan community but global issues at large is the Reclaiming Collective (<http://www.reclaiming.org/about/index.html>). Reclaiming was founded in San Francisco, California in the late 1970’s by well-known Wiccan author, writer, and activist Starhawk and a small group of people taking classes in magic and Wicca taught by Starhawk and Diane Baker. Many of the early members were active in the anti-nuclear movement. Some members of Reclaiming had also worked in the Civil Rights movement in the 1960’s, some in the Anarchist movement of the 1970’s and 1980’s, and all believed in feminist values and promoted non-violence. Their mission is to “combine Earth-based spirituality with political, social, and ecological action” (<http://www.reclaiming.org/>).

By the mid-1990's, the San Francisco group had become very large and their work as a whole had expanded into other countries, leading founders of Reclaiming to attempt a restructuring. Input was sought from members around the world in November 1997, at which time their Principles of Unity were written. The Principles state that “fundamental value is placed on reverence for the Earth, the natural cycles of life and death, individual autonomy, non-violence, feminism, and responsible activism” (<http://www.reclaiming.org/>). Many Reclaiming members around the world actively participate in anti-nuclear protests, various types of environmental protection work, feminist activism, and other political and social organizations. Members of the Reclaiming Collective have participated in protests against the World Trade Organization because of its environmental and human rights policies. They have also participated in protests at nuclear power plants around the world as well as at the School of the Americas currently located at Fort Benning, Georgia. In 2001 the school was renamed the “Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation” and since 1946 has provided training for Latin American military personnel in sniper training, military intelligence, interrogation tactics, commando and psychological warfare, and counterinsurgency techniques (<http://www.ciponline.org/facts/soa.htm>). It is believed that this training has then been used to target union organizers, religious leaders and workers, educators, student leaders and others who conduct work on behalf of that country's poorest citizens (<http://www.reclaiming.org/>).

Members of the Reclaiming Collective can be found in communities across the United States as well as in various Western European countries including France,

Germany, the Netherlands, and Canada. The Reclaiming Collective's website lists contact information for these groups at: <http://www.reclaiming.org/worldwide/index.html>

Another large group working on behalf of Wiccan and Pagan concerns as well as the larger community is Circle Sanctuary. Circle Sanctuary was founded in 1974 by Selena Fox on 200 acres near Mount Horeb, Wisconsin (<http://www.circlesanctuary.org/index.html>). Circle Sanctuary is a non-profit organization created to sponsor community gatherings, research and education, and networking for members of Pagan and Wiccan communities. In 1980, Circle Sanctuary was recognized by the United States Federal Government as a church, and in 1984 members of Circle Sanctuary helped to update the United States Army Chaplains Handbook. Also, during the mid-to late 1980's, Circle Sanctuary was involved in several legal battles with local governments attempting to utilize local zoning laws to prevent Circle Sanctuary from establishing their 200-acre property as church property. Local governments failed to keep Circle Sanctuary's property from being used as church property, and in 1988 Circle Sanctuary was the first church of Witchcraft to receive official United States recognition.

In 1985 Selena Fox and Circle Sanctuary founded the Lady Liberty League (<http://www.circlesanctuary.org/liberty/>). The Lady Liberty League provides "information and networking assistance to individuals and organizations concerned with religious freedom issues pertaining to Wiccan ways, Paganism, and other forms of Nature religions" (Circle Sanctuary Web site). The Lady Liberty League is also proactive in helping to counter negative stereotypes of Pagans, Wiccans, and members of other Nature religions. Recently, Circle Sanctuary and Selena Fox have been working with the

American Civil Liberties Union and families of soldiers killed in the line of duty to gain approval from the United States Veteran's Administration to allow Pagan and Wiccan symbols to be used on grave markers. They have been successful in several cases thus far (<http://www.aclu.org/>).

Circle Sanctuary also publishes *Circle Magazine*, an international quarterly journal with articles, news, and contact information for various Pagan scholars and academic conferences. *Circle Magazine* was first published in 1978 in a newspaper format, but was changed to a magazine format with the Fall 1999 issue (<http://www.circlesanctuary.org/index.html>). It is believed to have a readership of over 10,000 people per month (<http://www.circlesanctuary.org/index.html>).

The Witches League for Public Awareness (WLPA) (<http://www.celticcrow.com/>) works to “dispel the misconceptions surrounding Witchcraft and Wicca.” The group was founded in 1986 by Laurie Cabot, also known as “The Official Witch of Salem, Massachusetts.” The WLPA works with schools, various media agencies, government agencies, and the private sector, promoting educational programs about Wicca and religious freedom and tolerance. Their Mission Statement reads:

The Witches League for Public Awareness is a proactive educational network dedicated to correcting misinformation about Witches and Witchcraft. The work of the League springs from a shared vision of a world free from all religious persecution (WLPA web site).

The WLPA also works on behalf of environmental issues such as global warming and established the “Bless The Vote” project. Bless the Vote was created as a response to the growing number of right wing groups working to establish their own religious beliefs

while restricting the religious beliefs of others. Bless the Vote works to encourage citizens to register to vote and become aware of matters related to religious freedom that have become of more interest and reason for debate in recent elections. In 2007 Laurie Cabot formed a new group called “Project, Witches Protection” described on her website (<http://www.cabotwitchcraft.com/default.asp>) as a “proactive, educational network dedicated to correcting mis-information about Witches and Witchcraft.”

The Military Pagan Network (<http://www.milpagan.org/>) was formed in 1992 to serve members of our armed forces who often find themselves unable to speak openly about their religious and spiritual beliefs. Based in Columbia, Maryland, the Military Pagan Network was created to address several key issues. The first is to be an advocate for military personnel who have suffered harassment or discrimination because of their beliefs. Second, to create networking opportunities for the Pagan military community. Third, to work with various governmental and military agencies to provide information about various Pagan practices, as well as suggesting possible modifications or changes for military regulations and policies (Military Pagan Network website).

Other organizations serve as “spiritual networking organizations” that provide space for gatherings of Pagans, Wiccans, and others in order to network, share ideas, and learn about projects of specific interest to Pagans, Wiccans, and other Pantheistic groups and individuals around the country. One such group is the Free Spirit Alliance (<http://www.free-spirit.org/>). Founded in 1985, their focus is to make available “national, regional, and local events where people from all backgrounds can learn and share ideas” (Free Spirit website). Possibly their best known and largest event is the Free Spirit Gathering held every summer in northern Maryland

(<http://www.freespiritgathering.org/main.html>). People from all over the United States gather for several days of workshops, discussion groups, children's activities, drumming circles, and communing with nature in what is deemed a "spiritual community."

Another well-known event is Circle Sanctuary's Pagan Spirit Gathering or PSG (<http://www.circlesanctuary.org/psg/>). Begun in 1980, PSG is one of the oldest festivals held in the United States, bringing together people from all over the world to celebrate the Summer Solstice in a "sacred environment." Participants in the Pagan Spirit Gathering, like other festivals and gatherings, create a "Pagan Town" in which people can participate in educational workshops, hear and play music, and network with others in the Pagan community, among other things.

Many Wiccans and Pagans with advanced college educations also gather for academic conferences and join Pagan academic groups such as the Pagan Academic Network (<http://www.circlesanctuary.org/studies/academicnetwork.htm>). Also created by Circle Sanctuary is The Pagan Academic Network. Formed in 1992 by Dr. Dennis Carpenter of Circle Sanctuary, The Pagan Academic Network "facilitates communication and information sharing among those with an academic interest in contemporary Paganism and related subjects" (Circle Sanctuary website). Members from across the United States, Canada, and a number of other countries hold conferences, conduct research, print journals, and publish articles about Paganism and related topics. Also, many colleges and universities have Pagan student groups such as the ones at Purdue University, The Ohio State University, Texas A & M University, and Rutgers University, among many others (<http://www.apocalypse.org/~hilda/collpgn.html>).

A well-known gathering place for followers of Earth based religions is Four

Quarters Farm, an “InterFaith Sanctuary of Earth Religion” located in Pennsylvania (<http://www.4qf.org/index.htm>). With over 500 members and growing, Four Quarters is incorporated as an “InterFaith Non-Denominational Church, Monastery, and Spiritual Retreat Center” (Four Quarters Farm website). Their mission statement is broad based and states that they are an association of people who are drawn to Earth religions who support people on “allied paths,” who are concerned about honoring the land, who work to foster “communication and cooperation” among people, and who recognize, honor, and preserve the many different cultures and religious traditions that have developed within the Pagan community. As with other gatherings, people who visit Four Quarters Farm participate in rituals, network with others of similar beliefs, and learn about Earth-based religions.

Two annual global events have inspired people of many differing faiths to come together and Pagan groups and individuals have joined in their efforts. The Culture of Peace Initiative’s “30 Days of Peace” was held from September 11, 2007 to October 10, 2007. The Culture of Peace Initiative is a United Nations designated Peace Messenger Initiative bringing together many of the world’s leading Peace organizations, such as the United Nations, in an “effort to motivate people everywhere, particularly youth, to take positive action for Peace in our personal lives, communities and nations” (<http://www.cultureofpeace.org/30days.cfm>). Working together and utilizing various media outlets, the 30 Days of Peace call to action campaign will hopefully create awareness and inspire participation in “year-round Peacebuilding efforts, in furtherance of the Culture of Peace Initiative.” A major part of the program will include an online community “commons” and “educational peace portal.”

The website will serve as an outreach and enrollment channel for the 30 Days of Peace partner organizations, and highlight their ongoing activities. Further, the site will provide context for the international peace movement, and convey the global scope and impact of current peace efforts. The goal of the site is to inspire and empower individuals to engage in peacebuilding, locally and globally (Culture of Peace Initiative web site).

According to the group's website, their online community will include web pages, a global events calendar, networking tools for site members, audio-video chat, photo and media file sharing, online interviews, educational materials, a children's area, and web journals, among other things. The month long event was scheduled to coincide with the anniversary of the September 11th terrorist attacks in the United States and the birthday of musician and international journalist Daniel Pearl. An International Day of Peace was also scheduled for September 21, 2007.

The 11th Annual EarthDance: The Global Festival for Peace is held in over 50 countries and 300 locations worldwide (www.earthdance.org). Working alongside groups such as the Culture of Peace Initiative discussed above, the EarthDance Festival is a one day event created to "promote peace by joining participants worldwide in a synchronized Prayer for Peace and to support humanitarian causes through the global language of music and dance" (Earth Dance Festival web site). In 1996 Earthdance founder Chris Deckker organized the first event from his home in London with 18 cities participating. In 1999, after moving to California, he formed Earthdance as a nonprofit organization. The event has grown from 18 cities in 1996 to 340 locations around the world in 2006.

These are only a few of the many groups working on behalf of the Pagan community. Many include well-known scholars and activists who work together to bring about change worldwide, as well as helping make life better for members of their local

communities. Many have joined forces with other national and international organizations working on behalf of environmental issues, anti-nuclear causes, civil and human rights issues as well as other social and political concerns. It is evident from examining these and other websites that these groups and individuals take their faith seriously, and, based on their faith, are committed to using their talents to create a better world for everyone, just as many members of other beliefs and churches do.

Examples of Witches from mainstream media do not often show Wiccans and Pagans working on behalf of environmental causes or protesting at nuclear power plants. If we were to see members of the Reclaiming Collective on television protesting, we would most likely never know they were Witches. However, some protesters do hold signs proclaiming they are “Witches for Peace” or “Witches Opposing War.” It’s not sexy. Nor is it an image that makes money. Three sisters running around in revealing outfits using their powers to vanquish demons and making poor relationship choices is sexy. It also plays on any number of stereotypes about Witchcraft as a religion, and women as a group.

Groups such as those discussed here and the Pagan Civil Rights Coalition take on “educational, informational, and advocacy projects directed at mainstream media, government, and cultural institutions...” (<http://www.ourfreedomcoalition.org/>). They all work to help remake or reconstruct Pagan and Wiccan images in American society by working on projects focused on mainstream media and cultural institutions. Thousands of individuals in the Pagan community also use their computers to create websites, blogs, and email lists to help combat mainstream ideas and images of what their community is and does. For example, web sites like the Reclaiming Collective’s site and Starhawk’s

site have links to pages that provide information on what Paganism and Wicca are and are not as well as information about what holidays Pagans celebrate, among other things. Whereas many people have their religious identities formed (constructed) by the face to face social interactions of their church community, Pagans are more often influenced through the written word, whether it be an academic text or fiction novel or the website of a well-known figure in the Pagan or Wiccan community (Tosh, 20). As technology has developed, and its use has grown, many Pagans interact and create community online, attend rituals, buy and sell goods, find friends and mates, and take classes, among many other activities. Nancy Ramsey Tosh states, “Part of the importance of books and the internet lies in the lack of acceptance given Paganism by the Christian majority. For adherents who live in conservative areas of the country, contact with Pagan ideas from the safety of the ‘broom closet’ provides the main building blocks of religious identity.” The internet is an educational and networking tool for those interested in and practitioners of Pagan and Wiccan traditions. Websites such as The Witches Voice (<http://www.witchvox.com/>) help connect Wiccans and Pagans and provides an internet community as well as a powerful tool for those who work on anti-defamation issues. For many in the Pagan community, “identity development and expression exists primarily in virtual space” (Tosh, 20).

The internet is used for self-promotion as well. Websites provide information about an organization, its activities and location as well as discussion groups, schedules for upcoming events, membership information, fundraising, and ongoing projects. This information is provided to everyone who visits the website, not only those in the Pagan community. Even those in the Pagan community who will never have the opportunity to

travel to the physical space of Circle Sanctuary or Four Quarters Farm are able to interact with other Pagans and form community online. Websites such as Wiccan Way (<http://www.wiccanway.com/>) provide not only educational resources but any and all supplies a Witch may need, such as ritual supplies, herbs, incense, books, jewelry, and home items. Just as with any good free market, there is competition and many sellers of items of interest to those in the Pagan community use the internet to sell their products. Pagan musicians sell their music, artisans showcase their crafts and art works, teachers and organizations advertise their classes and workshops, and Ebay has listings for Pagan and Witchcraft items.

Self-promotion of an organization's activities are also included on their websites. The internet is a wonderful marketing tool, enabling groups to showcase all of the "good works" they are involved in which counteract many traditional notions of Pagans and Witches as a group. Many more formal organizations such as Circle Sanctuary and The Witches League for Public Awareness have Mission Statements and/or Constitutions, Boards of Directors, Executive Directors, and internship opportunities. They are engaged in serious scholarly research about Paganism in its many forms, hold conferences, publish journals, magazines, and newsletters on various topics of interest to the Pagan and Wiccan community, and promote their involvement in the various political and social causes important to them. Connecting their websites to those of the more easily recognizable and more mainstream groups they are working with enables Wiccan and Pagan groups to be viewed less suspiciously and with less consternation by the mainstream. For example, on the Reclaiming Collective's web site, not only are there links to other Reclaiming groups all over the world and their activities, but to other

organizations they work with as well as photos of their participation in the March 2007 March for Peace in San Francisco, California (<http://www.reclaimingquarterly.org/web/peace/07/>). Groups involved with Reclaiming in this “direct action” included many other faith-based groups in the San Francisco area as well as The Brass Liberation Orchestra. During the G8 meetings in Scotland in 2005, members of the Reclaiming Collective (<http://www.reclaimingquarterly.org/web/g8/>) traveled overseas for the “Make Poverty History” rally held on the day before the summit began, and to work with other protesters such as members of Campaign and Policy at War on Want (www.corporateG8.org). Members of Reclaiming also participate in protests and marches organized by various women’s organizations and pro-choice groups such as NARAL and Planned Parenthood (<http://www.reclaimingquarterly.org/web/choice05/>).

CONCLUSION: WHAT IS BEING DONE?

Douglas Kellner defines a “media culture” as a phenomenon made of “images, sound, and spectacles” (1). This concept serves many functions: it shapes political views and social behavior(s), provides models to the public, constitutes a common culture for the world and, significantly, “provides the materials whereby individuals insert themselves into techno-capitalist societies” (1). Certainly the popular mainstream (socially) constructed images we have of Wiccans and Pagans fit into the “spectacle” portion of Kellner’s definition. These constructed images work well with that of a media culture; “Witches” is a category that has been created and is maintained through cultural representation and culturally-based identity. Examples of images that are used to

perpetuate cultural notions of “Witches” come from many sources, including print and visual media: these provide the public with clear and explicit visions of how “Witches” look and act, and what they believe. However, Kellner cautions, this tendency has dangerous effects, because we, the public, the consumers of media culture, do not often completely enough question what we see.

In Berger and Luckmann’s “convergence phase,” externalized patterns of images and ideas form directed thought structures (60). When viewed as a cohesive group, thought structures move beyond the sum of their parts and become a cultural institution with the “explicit intention to serve as an index of subjective meanings” (35). In other words, patterns of meaning converge into a directed thought structure to form the constructed definition of a stereotypical image. The formulations of character found within these events are not new, however; all are built upon the foundational images of the previous images and can be seen as continuations of those original ideas. Some can be linked directly to an event or events of the foundation phase; others may bear only a vague resemblance to earlier images.

What kinds of information are these “Witch” oriented films and television shows drawing from this group of Americans? What ideas and images do these shows and films reformulate about the Pagan community? Do they successfully serve the media culture’s interest, covertly manipulating us by telling us what we want to hear about these groups, thus maintaining the status quo?

In the convergence phase of stereotype construction, foundational ideas are recycled into cohesive and definitive structures. The most highly visible and widely accessible representations of Witches and Pagans are television programs and films such

as those discussed in Chapter Two. These ideas are continuously cycled and recycled allowing mainstream society to continue to believe that Wiccans, Pagans, Heathens, and other Earth based religious groups and individuals are devil worshippers who sacrifice babies and ride on brooms. Contemporary stereotypes have added notions about Witches that include demon and vampire “vanquishing,” other or alternate “realms” of existence, the meanings behind ritual and magic, and the existence of fantastical creatures, among other things. However, the films and programs featuring Witches do reflect many of our daily (mainstream) lives because underlying many of these images are real problems. Harry Potter must face life without his parents and feeling like a misunderstood outsider. The sisters of *Charmed* and *Practical Magic* must live in communities where they are misunderstood and outcast. Buffy and Willow in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* face personal loss, and have to learn how to make difficult choices in using their power(s). All of these are topics that speak to contemporary audiences, and are some of what makes these television shows and films so successful. We, as a society, are not challenged or asked to reexamine our values. We are reassured and told that everything is ok; everything works out, for the most part, in the end.

An exchange between the media and its audience exists in these films and television shows, an exchange through which a culture, our socially constructed culture, speaks to itself, and acts as an “instrument of control” that serves to “reproduce the dominant ideology of the capitalist system” (Feuer, 119). A successful show or film is one that is able to “fit” these approaches together, speaking to/with and controlling culture without our realizing that it does so, “because the public doesn’t want to know that it’s being manipulated” (Feuer, 120). In other words, we are speaking to ourselves,

but only in words we want to hear. Thus, the television shows and films featuring Witches that are most successful are those that do not overtly challenge the status quo. They do not force us to question our mainstream values or our societal structures rather, they leave us feeling satisfied with what we have.

However, members of the Pagan and Wiccan community have utilized the media tools available to them, primarily the internet, to add additional foundational ideas to the cycle of stereotype construction. This gives mainstream society as well as members of their own communities the information they need to question cultural stereotypes surrounding Witches and Pagans. As these new and re-structured/constructed ideas become part of the mainstream notions of what Witches and Pagans of all types are, and are included in mainstream media products, so, too, will ideas about this group change and evolve.

How do we begin a new dialogue, learn new words, to discuss Paganism and Witchcraft? One way to accomplish this is for the Pagan community to join forces with more mainstream groups and organizations, as many in the Pagan community have already been doing. Over the last few years, they have been much more public about themselves, what they are, what they believe, their traditions, and ritual practices.

Once a stereotype becomes known to a society, it can be challenged through the presentation of oppositional information. In this chapter, many of the examples that resist the Wiccan, Witch, or Pagan stereotype as evil devil worshippers did so by presenting material and information that contradicted those qualities, showing the public that Pagan individuals and groups are already active participants in the social, political, and economic order.

The resistant ideas of this chapter represent a direct challenge to the status quo, as members of the Pagan and Wiccan community let us know who and what they really are. Resistant ideas, events, and images, either on their own or (most often) in combination with reinforcing information, lay foundations for new stereotypes. These new stereotypes may resemble the ones that came previously, presenting a reorganized continuation of old ideas and images, or they may seem quite unlike their predecessors, having been organized and grown from a foundation of resistance to the old stereotypes. In either case, it is the introduction of resistant material that allows the historical process of stereotype construction to continue its evolution. The introduction of the idea that members of the Wiccan and Pagan community are productive and active members of society will allow that stereotype to evolve into new foundations and ultimately construct a new image of the group. This will allow them to continue to combat misinformation about them as well as enable them to work with others on a variety of social, political, environmental, cultural, and ethical issues.

CHAPTER IV

WORKING TOGETHER: “WALKING THE TALK”

**Wiccan Rede
(wise teaching)****published in Green Egg, 1975
Gwen Thompson**

Bide ye the Wiccan laws ye must, in perfect love and perfect trust
 Ye must live and let live, fairly take and fairly give.
 Cast the Circle thrice about, to keep unwelcome spirits out.
 To bind the spell well every time, let the spell be spoken in rhyme.
 Soft of eye and light of touch, speak ye little and listen much.
 Deosil go by waxing moon, chanting out the Wiccan runes.
 Widdershins go by waning moon, chanting out ye baneful tune.
 When the lady's moon is new, kiss the band in Her times two.
 When the moon rides at her peak, then the hearts desire seek.
 Heed the North winds mighty gale, lock the door and trim the sail.
 When the wind comes from the South, love will kiss thee on the mouth.
 When the moor wind blows from the West, departed spirits have no rest.
 When the wind blows from the East, expect the new and set the feast.
 Nine woods in the cauldron go, burn them quick and burn them slow.
 Elder be the Lady's tree, burn it not or cursed ye'll be.
 When the wheel begins to turn, let the Beltane fires burn.
 When the wheel has turned to Yule, light the log and the horned one rules.
 Heed ye flower, bush and tree, by the Lady, Blessed Be.
 Where the Rippling waters go, cast a stone, the truth to know.
 When ye have and hold a need, hearken not to others greed.
 With a fool no seasons spend, or be counted as his friend.
 Merry meet and merry part, bright the cheeks and warm the heart.
 Mind the threefold law ye should, three times bad and three times good.
 When misfortune is enow, wear the blue star on thy brow.
 True in love ye must ever be, lest they love be false to thee.
 These words the Wiccan Rede fulfill: an ye harm none, do what ye will.

Thompson quoted Doreen Valiente from October 3, 1964 when she said, “Eight words the Wiccan Rede fulfill, An' it harm none, do what ye will.”

In the approximately four hundred years since Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth*, ideas about Witches in American popular culture have changed very little. Macbeth referred to the Witches he consults as "...secret, black, and midnight hags" (Act 4, Scene 1), and stirring their cauldron the three Witches call up ghosts who warn Macbeth of troubles ahead. Many of our contemporary images of Witches include these and other stereotypical ideas about what Witches are and what they do. Many people unfamiliar with Wicca or Wiccan beliefs still say that Witches are evil and worship the devil, despite there being more and more information available about this group of people.

The preceding chapters have presented only a few examples of films, television shows, novels, and websites that have both reinforced and resisted the established stereotypes of Wiccans, Witches, and Pagans being evil, devil worshippers who perform bizarre frightening rituals in which they dance naked around a large fire; and sacrifice animals, virgins, and small children. In the reinforcement and resistance phase of the historical process of stereotype construction, the ideas and images that were used to build a stereotype in the foundation and convergence phases are both reiterated and refuted. This chapter will discuss contemporary Wiccans and Pagans and the positive images of themselves they have created by examining their ongoing involvement in current political and social justice work. It will be shown that stereotypes of Wiccans and Pagans, as a group, have been morphing and evolving because they have been creating their own images which have created, and continue to create, new representations and new definitions of them as a group in mainstream American media and culture.

Once a stereotype has been constructed, it can be exploited through repetitive use. Media artifacts, such as the books, films, television shows, and websites described in this study can “reproduce the dominant ideology” of a cultural system (Feuer, 119), as they draw upon and reformulate social meaning and values through their construction. Casting Pagans, Wiccans, Witches, and other Earth based religions in a negative light constructed the group as evil and not to be trusted, therefore making them unable to be considered fully functioning members of contemporary social and economic order(s).

The reinforcement and resistance phase can be seen as a sub-process of Berger and Luckmann’s “secondary socialization” in which “new sectors of the objective world” are made familiar to individuals within an established society (130). A recently constructed stereotype is familiarized through reinforcement, which combines Berger and Luckmann’s processes of “internalization,” the application of personal subjective meaning to objectivated ideas and events (129-130), and “reification,” the apprehension of constructed “human phenomena as facts of nature,” (89), to further underscore a stereotype’s legitimacy.

The constructed image(s) of Pagans and Wiccans were established through the repeated publicized appearance of a specific set of character traits. This helped create the stereotype of Witches as devil worshippers among other stereotypes. Once certain constructions of societal groups become the legitimated image of those groups, they can be formed into patterns of representation in which the same characterizations are repeatedly displayed and against which alternate images of the groups can be contrasted. This is the reinforcement and resistance phase of stereotype construction in which the

information used to create a group's image is simultaneously affirmed and challenged through public representations.

However, contemporary Pagan and Wiccan identity in mainstream culture is continually evolving. By continuing to utilize the technology available to them, Pagans have been (re)creating their images and identities in increasingly more positive and more accurate ways. As computer technology develops, so will Pagan's use of technology expand and grow. They have created online movies, bigger and more interactive websites, email discussion lists, and blogs. Along with utilizing computer technology, Pagans have been (re)creating their image(s) by being involved in a variety of political, social, and cultural groups and movements over the last forty years. Prior to using the internet, Pagans and Wiccans were recreating and re-imaging themselves by joining forces with feminist, environmental, and anti-war groups to name a few. They must continue to use technology and continue the coalition building that has already been established with more mainstream groups in order to continue to create and recreate their image(s) and de-construct mainstream culture's negative beliefs about them.

A constructed stereotype can be challenged using Fiske's idea of "excorporation," a borrowing of information from the constructed body of knowledge that produces a resistant reinterpretation of the ideas and events that would otherwise reinforce stereotypes (15). For example, in *The Simpsons: Treehouse of Horror* Halloween special (October 29, 1997) entitled "Easybake Coven" (*The Simpsons*, Episode 182) stereotypes from mainstream culture such as Witches flying on brooms, turning people into animals, and wanting to eat children are used to poke fun at the citizens of Colonial Springfield for their beliefs about what Witches are and what they do, enabling viewers of the program

to begin thinking about their views of Witches in a nonthreatening way through the use of humor. However, neither reinforcement nor resistance can be seen as absolute; because all interpretations of stereotype information circulate freely in a society, materials can be excorporated and incorporated (a further reinterpretation which bolsters reinforcement) indefinitely, altering meanings with each new interpretation (18). Thus, some of the examples in this discussion of Pagans and Wiccans have combined reinforcing and resistant information to create images and ideas that simultaneously affirm and challenge the stereotypes about this group. The television show *Charmed* does this throughout the series. Some elements of “real” or “true” Witchcraft are in evidence alongside things that are completely outside the realm of what contemporary Witches do.

The resistant images discussed in Chapter Three represent a direct challenge to the status quo. Resistant ideas, events, and images, either on their own or in combination with reinforcing information, lay foundations for new stereotypes. These new stereotypes may resemble the ones that came before them, presenting a reorganized continuation of old ideas and images, or they may seem quite unlike their predecessors, having been organized and grown from a foundation of resistance to the old stereotypes. In either case, it is the introduction of resistant material that allows the historical process of stereotype construction to continue its evolution.

JOINING FORCES

As discussed throughout this study, the process of stereotype construction concerning individuals and groups known as Witches or Wiccans, part of a larger group called Pagans, can be traced through the three stages of foundation, convergence, and

reinforcement and resistance. Douglas Kellner believes that one of the things Cultural Studies as a discipline should do is discuss how media and media technology can be restructured and transformed into instruments of social change and then used to empower individuals in a given society. One of the ways members of the larger group known as Pagans have combated stereotypical images found in television shows and films has been to use computer technology. Another is to join forces with more mainstream groups that are working on behalf of social and political causes Pagans also wish to address. Combining forces with other groups began long before computer technology became available to the average consumer. Thus, the image(s) of Wiccans and Pagans has been evolving for some time. However, it is more recently that scholars, and society members in general, have been more vocal and public about their challenges to the characterizations of this group, declaring them to be inaccurate images constructed from stereotypes. Stepping out of the relative anonymity of working in larger groups to use computer technology to create new representations of this group which directly counter the negative perceptions of Wiccans, Witches, and Pagans is a new endeavor. The last ten to fifteen years have shown more and more members of the Pagan community “coming out” and creating online discussion groups, websites, blogs, and films. In response to the rise in counter images, mainstream media has created more stereotypical images showing their resistance to evolving stereotypes. At this point, it is helpful to have an understanding of the connections between and among various social and political groups and the people who call themselves Pagans and Wiccans.

WORKING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Over the last forty years various groups have inspired political, social, and cultural movements, and have long shaped and changed the things we believe in and how we act. Our beliefs impact our actions and the ways we live, work, think, raise our children, vote, and socialize, among other things. Often these groups and movements are inspired by changes in the legal or political system, unequal treatment of one group or individual by another, or disagreement over actions taken by the government such as the current War on Terror. Such a variety of groups and movements serve to create and maintain ways in which we can affect social/political/cultural change and insure that government policies are representative of the majority of people and not simply a select group. The Civil Rights, Women's Rights, Farm Workers, Human Rights, Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgendered Rights, and Environmental movements have affected large scale legal, political, and social/cultural changes in our society. One reason they may be so effective is that, in many cases, these movements blend with each other because of similar ideologies, strategies, and goals. By having similar goals and ideas, the people involved in these groups and movements are able to support each other and work together to achieve their goals.

One of the basic tenets of feminism coming out of the women's movement in the 1960's is the idea that "the personal is political" (Carol Hanisch, 1969), and for many people involved in the political movements mentioned previously this holds true. Because what is personal to us, what we believe to be right or wrong, are very often the things that provoke us to become involved with causes that we believe to be good or are ripe for change. Therefore, it is difficult to separate the idea of political movements from

social/cultural movements, because what changes occur in one effects/affects the other(s). The things that influence our beliefs, and hence, our activities, are varied and include our family influences, life experiences, class status, education level, race, gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity, physical ability, and religion. Many people act on behalf of their religious beliefs, and Pagans are no different than Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, and Taoists, among others, in this respect.

WESTERN THOUGHT AND DUALISTIC THINKING

For philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, and St. Thomas Aquinas, a woman was simply a “misbegotten male” (Aquinas, The Summa Theologica) and women had no place in the public world of men. They believed in a split between our minds and our bodies with men being the only ones who had the ability to “transcend” their bodies and achieve spiritual and intellectual enlightenment.

This split, or dualism, for them, naturally divided men and women from each other into their own “natural” tendencies, with each gender identified with a prescribed set of traits and behaviors. Men, who can transcend their bodies and achieve the desired moral enlightenment and ultimate ability to reason, are considered superior both intellectually and spiritually and, thus, are natural leaders. On the other hand, women are tied to their bodies by menstruation and childbirth and these biological traits were believed to be connected to the cycles of the planets and the seasons. Thus, they are unable to transcend into the desired state of being. Today, we still connect women with nature and examples of this can be found throughout our culture and various forms of media. Because women are so tied to their bodily activities, they cannot be counted on for rational and reasonable thinking and behavior. They are “natural” followers and

dependents. Such assumptions led these foundational western scholars to conclude that women are “lacking” and/or are “less than” men in most, if not all, ways. Such are some of the foundations of Western patriarchal cultures.

Our “cultural inheritance” from these early scholars predisposes many modern scholars to devalue non-duality and any ideas which endeavor to reconnect us to the natural world; what Karen Warren in her work on ecofeminism calls “organicism” (Warren, 426). Many Americans continue to view culture through a dualistic framework and not as one part of a whole world of cultures.

These cultural foundations help Westerners establish our identities. Our search for identity involves us in a classification process that defines whether or not we are the same as or different from what surrounds us. The same thinking applies not only to us as human individuals but to other creatures in our world and to the world itself. Carol Adams, in her discussion of ecofeminism suggests that,

The logic of domination is often expressed in dualisms. Dualisms reduce diversity to two categories: A or Not A. They convey the impression that everything can then be appropriately categorized: *either* it is A *or* Not A. These dualisms represent dichotomy rather than continuity, enacting exclusion rather than inclusion. Ecofeminists analyze many restrictive dualisms that uphold a logic of domination: independence/interdependence; heaven/earth; male/female; culture/nature; mind/body; white/’non-white’; humans/animals; humans/nature (Adams, 2).

These dualisms also include such things as order/disorder, good/evil and right/wrong, and some suggest that this “difference” classification assumes significance because it implies the possibility of opposition and disorder.

In such a “hierarchy of value,” we value one thing more value than the other. We then view the thing or person having more value and being more desirable on an arbitrary

list and apply such concepts as good and evil to a thing or person based on what value they or it has. For example, in Western thought, humans have more value than animals, men have more value than women, and certain races are superior to others. Contained within various religious perspectives is the belief that humans must rule a natural world which is chaotic and unruly, as well as believing women are weak and lead men to temptation as Eve did Adam. Such thinking is then applied to other categories within our society. However, Pagans and Wiccans as a group tend to believe that women and men are equal, no one race is better than another, nature is sacred, and it is our duty to care for animals and the earth. Everything is part of a holistic being, meaning we are connected to each other, and everything we see around us. Each part of the whole impacts the other parts. Damage to the earth in turn causes damage to us and the animals and vice versa.

Scholars in a variety of disciplines such as Gerda Lerner, Mary Daly, Carol Christ, and others have examined the history of Eurocentric patriarchal cultures and have found these dualisms not only in classical Western thought, but in Judeo-Christian religious traditions, “modern” science and Enlightenment philosophy. These dualisms have had several results: the idea that the natural world must be transcended and dominated by humans (men) with and through science and technology, a fear of our bodies and our sexuality, the projection of evil on women, which can be found in various religious teachings, and what Carol Adams calls “world-destroying spiritual views” (Adams, 2). What is created from this subordination is an enslavement or service to the dominant or desired aspect of the dualism. This has led to the lenience in pollution laws

and regulations, disregard for animals and their well-being, and the subordination of women to name only a few things.

Our current cultural paradigm also stems from moral laws written in such holy texts as the Bible, among others. These texts urge us to accept and believe in a

...single omniscient, omnipotent and relatively benevolent male deity (Jahweh, Jehovah, God or Lord, or Allah), who created and populated the world but is essentially transcendent with respect to it. This deity is opposed by another somewhat less knowing and powerful, relatively malevolent male deity (Lucifer, the Devil) who is also essentially supernatural. These two opposed forces of good and evil, light and darkness, contend with each other by intervening in our affairs. Each of us shall spend eternity with whichever one he or she allies with; in any case this earth is a temporary inconvenience, unimportant in the greater order of things. It is in our interest to ally ourselves with the 'good guy', and we know how to do this because He's thoughtfully sent us a male savior or prophet to so inform us (Dees, 2).

In traditional Western religious teachings and beliefs almost all deities are male, the very first human is male and the female was made from him, any important prophets are male, and in today's churches there still exists the struggle for women to become Ministers, Priests, Bishops, Rabbis or any other type of church leader. Leaving women and the feminine out of religious beliefs and teachings has lead many women to feel alienated from not only their religious traditions but from society as a whole. The foundational teachings of Paganism, in which women and men are equals and in which women in many cases are venerated, have enabled and empowered women to take their place in a society that has oftentimes discounted and ignored the importance of their influence.

The social and political movements of the last forty years have had profound impacts on our Western patriarchal culture. Collectively, they pose a powerful challenge to religiously grounded relational paradigms which until recently have been accepted

almost without question. These movements include what Dees calls the “human rights trio” (3): ethnic/racial civil rights, lesbian/gay rights, and feminism. Included with these human rights movements is environmentalism, with its recognition that we are part of the world around us (instead of having dominion over it) and should take care not to destroy our resources any further. These movements blend together based on similar ideologies, strategies and goals. By having similar goals and ideals, the people involved in these groups and movements are able to support each other and work together to achieve their goals. Thus, new laws are enacted, old laws are rewritten, social and cultural attitudes and behaviors evolve and change, and our society as a whole changes. The ideals put forth by such groups as feminists, environmentalists, and Pagans, among others, very much strike at the heart of traditional Christian religious beliefs and practices, which do not speak for everyone. They also challenge our social and political structure(s) and can therefore offer us alternatives and resolutions to the issues central to our current way of life.

PAGANISM AND THE WOMEN’S MOVEMENT

By the late 1960’s and 1970’s, many women involved in the feminist and women’s movements also had become involved in “women’s spirituality” groups. These groups were endeavoring to reconnect with their spiritual selves in ways that would support and enhance their newfound sense of independence and empowerment. Many of these women were searching for a religious base that would enable them to reconnect with their inner strengths as well as beliefs that would allow for the female or the feminine to be a central focus, or, at the very least, would view women and men as equals. Meeting and working with women who already considered themselves Pagan or

Wiccan and who were also involved in the women's movement, women who were new to both groups found what they had been seeking. It was during this time and into the 1980's that well-known Pagan and Wiccan authors and scholars such as Starhawk (<http://www.starhawk.org/index.html>), Margot Adler, Dr. Carol Christ, and others began their influential works, writings and projects.

At the same time there was a small group of women theologians who were already challenging the notions of traditional religious beliefs about women and their status within American society. They were working on "feminizing" traditionally androcentric and patriarchal belief systems and called for "women's ordination, new language about God, i.e., non-sexist, and greater ecclesiastical recognition of women's needs and contributions" (Ludeke, 31). Described as "reformists," feminist scholars such as Mary Daly and Rosemary Radford Ruether represented different sides of this "women's spirituality" debate.

Mary Daly called attention to the Catholic Church's "arrogant and degrading treatment of women," and by the time she had published her third book, in 1973, she had become a leader in the Goddess religion movement. On the other hand, Rosemary Radford Ruether worked within the Christian tradition to re-interpret texts and emphasize female religious imagery and to reject the dominating male authority image.

By 1979, the feminist search for religious alternatives was not news. Discouraged by a textual tradition that appeared to deny women's experience, some scholars attempted to discover and integrate "the feminine dimension of the divine" into the main streams of the tradition while others saw "the Goddess" as a guide to a new religious world. With the publication of *Gyn/Ecology*, Mary Daly one of the most original thinkers among former Catholic feminist theologians, moved away from patriarchal religion entirely by repudiating her first book, eclipsing her second, and using this latest book to argue that men were naturally necrophilic, their religions inexorably patriarchal, and their world on the

verge of collapse. In the process, she made a case for Goddess religion as a separatist search for creative transcendence and urged women to reclaim their creative, biophilic natures. Rosemary Ruether, a prolific, but more moderate critic of conventional Christianity, was, in 1979, still involved in the bracing project of recovery, finding “Women of Spirit” within the tradition, she had also published a set of radical essays that set the stage for her continued attempts to link theological revolution with ecology and with “a spiritual quest” within nonbiblical religion that focuses on the Goddess (Weaver, 51).

For many women researchers and writers on religious matters, whether they wanted to reform Christian beliefs or leave them behind entirely, equality and change were the goals. They wanted to challenge and change, not only themselves, but laws, behaviors, values, and institutions as well as how society thinks about personal relationships. The personal was and still is political, and Feminist Paganism or Wicca “grew out of the political, social, and religious consciousness-raising meetings held by activists bent on changing those spheres of societal control from a patriarchal orientation to one that was matriarchal in substance” (Ludeke, 18). The connection had been made between spiritual oppression and political and social oppression.

Participating in Pagan and other Earth-centered rituals and other activities with a variety of people became a source of power and solidarity for these women. Rituals enabled women to gain personal and spiritual power for themselves, as well as gaining the strength to challenge the status quo. As these women understood it, spiritual and personal growth for the individual translates into positive changes for society as a whole. Joan Ludeke found this to be true in her study of 1989 study of “post-industrial urban American women” who adopted Wiccan beliefs and practices, and found themselves better able to address social and cultural problems in their local communities.

As Feminist Wiccans conceptualize it, enduring change in the status of American women will come only through the parallel transformation of

symbols and realities. Feminist ritual practice is currently regarded by Wiccans as the most important paradigm for symbolic, therefore psychic and spiritual change in women and eventually, society and culture (Ludeke, 18).

In the 1980's renewed interest in and the (re)discovery of Paganism and Wicca was evident to anyone involved in the women's and/or feminist movements. University classes, conferences of various kinds, and women's group meetings all showed evidence of the growth and acceptance of Pagan, Wiccan, and other alternate beliefs and practices.

As we moved into the 1980s, excitement about "the Goddess" and expansion of "the Craft" seemed to reach everywhere. Since one of the tenets of the women's movement demands as full a representation of women's ideas and practices as possible, meetings related to what many began to call "womanspirit" were enormously varied. Conferences attracted scholars, practicing witches, pantheists, healers, tarot readers, repertory groups devoted to staging Goddess events, and a host of other women's groups that were drawn to what Charlene Spretnak called "the rise of spiritual power within the women's movement." By the mid-1980s, "feminist spirituality" had come to mean that set of religious experiences clustered around Goddess religion and witchcraft. Stories about housewives in Ohio offering fruits of the harvest to Isis in a civic festival were as much a part of this new movement as bibliographies on Goddess religion published by women's studies programs and seminary consortiums (Weaver, 54).

The interest in and study of Paganism, Wicca, and other Earth-based religions continues today. Classes are offered in a variety of places including colleges and universities. In 2000 I taught a class entitled "Women and Paganism" at Bowling Green State University in Ohio. It was the first time such a class was offered at that campus and an article about the class made the front page of the local paper. Many of the questions I was asked by the newspaper addressed the beliefs, customs, and traditions of the Wiccan and Pagan community as it is understood by mainstream society. It was clear that the woman conducting the interview based her questions on the stereotypical ideas she had

been exposed to in popular media but that she was doing her best not to let her views bias the interview (Bowling Green Sentinel Tribune <http://www.sentinel-tribune.com/>).

Whether they are positive or negative, the thousands of websites, blogs, and other internet activities as well as the large volume of academic studies and writings over the last ten to fifteen years attest to the interest in Paganism as a cultural and social phenomena. Studying Paganism and being Pagan is just as much a lifestyle and personal choice as is being a Christian, Jew or Muslim. It is just as intimately personal and important to those who consider themselves Wiccan, and not something most have chosen lightly or without great thought and study.

Those who have moved towards Paganism, environmentalism, and feminism are concerned about the ways in which women and other minorities are traditionally treated in dominant religions as well as within our society, how governmental policies allow for abuses of the Earth and its natural resources, and how we can best work to rectify these and other issues. They also recognize the connections between the ways the Earth is viewed and the ways we view minorities and women, and, much like Paganism, being concerned about the environment is also a lifestyle in which certain choices are made concerning such things as what products will be bought and how household waste will be disposed of.

On Starhawk's website (<http://www.starhawk.org/>) she defines herself as a "peace, environmental, and global justice activist and trainer, a permaculture designer and teacher, a Pagan and Witch." Included on her website are links to activism resources, permaculture and nature resources, and Pagan resources. Also included on her site is a link to a blog hosted by the *Washington Post* and *Newsweek* magazine called "On Faith."

Starhawk is participating online with others in an “interfaith dialogue,” as well as answering questions about faith and spirituality. Listed on the “On Faith” site is not only an archive of Starhawk’s writings for them but also her writings on a variety of other topics such as global warming, political campaigns, gay and lesbian issues, and war.

While Starhawk obviously considers herself to be an environmentalist, activist, and Pagan, not all people involved in these movements do so. Even though Paganism, feminism, and environmentalism are intricately linked and overlap, not every person considers himself or herself to be dedicated to all three. There is a continuum of activity within each which extends, for example, from simply recycling trash to chaining themselves to the gates of a nuclear power plant or protesting the current War on Terror. On the activism writings sections of Starhawk’s website are essays on a variety of topics in which she connects her spirituality with her environmental, political, and social justice work(s). Also included on this section of her website are the writings she has done on Palestine and Israel and her travels in those nations.

Although Starhawk is highly influential in certain circles around the world, many people have never heard of her. However, they have heard of Al Gore. Al Gore was a Member of the United States House of Representatives from 1977 until 1985, a United States Senator from 1985 until 1993, and the 45th Vice President of the United States from 1993 until 2001. He was the Democratic nominee for President in 2000. During his time in Congress, Mr. Gore co-sponsored hearings on a variety of environmental issues, such as toxic waste and global warming, and as Vice President worked on a number of resolutions as well as the Kyoto Treaty, which called for the reduction of greenhouse gasses worldwide (wikipedia.com).

In 1992, just prior to becoming Vice President Mr. Gore released a book entitled Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit (Houghton Mifflin). In this book Mr. Gore explains the “world’s ecological predicament” and goes on to offer solutions to these issues. He also suggests ideas about how to avoid future environmental crises. Throughout his time in the White House, Mr. Gore continued to raise awareness about global warming and other environmental issues by using his political and governmental contacts (wikipedia.com). His work has had a tremendous impact in the United States and around the world. Part of the reason for this is his media presence. Not only has he given public lectures and television interviews around the world about environmental issues, in 2006, Mr. Gore helped create and starred in the award winning film *An Inconvenient Truth*, which discusses global warming and its effects on the environment and us (<http://www.climatecrisis.net/>). Mr. Gore’s organization, Save Our Selves, held a benefit concert in July 2007, called Live Earth. The concert was held in various locations around the world in an effort to raise awareness about climate change.

Mr. Gore’s activist work and written works would be considered by many people to be much more mainstream than someone like Starhawk’s writings and work, despite both being outspoken critics of our current administration’s environmental policies, and the ongoing war, among other issues. Certainly not as many people have heard of her book, Webs of Power: Notes from the Global Uprising (2002), which is a collection of articles about her work and nonviolent activism around the world; including the World Trade Organization protests in 1999. Because of Mr. Gore’s status, both formerly as a Senator and Vice President and currently, Mr. Gore gets much more “face time” on mainstream television and has access to the right people to have a film made about global

warming which highlighted many of the concerns people like Starhawk and others also work to address. Winning the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize for his work will only increase his visibility. By aligning themselves with people and organizations like Mr. Gore's, Wiccan individuals and groups are able to combine their energies and work together to bring to light many of the issues facing everyone, not simply Pagans and Wiccans as a small group. By working together these groups are helping mainstream culture to examine their beliefs and actions and encouraging them to change unhealthy behaviors and assumptions/attitudes, not only concerning environmental issues but also their beliefs about other people and cultures as well.

Although Mr. Gore is a Christian (Baptist), he has been criticized by many Christians for connecting his views on environmental issues to those of Pagan and other earth-centered religious beliefs. On the Watchman Fellowship, Inc. website (<http://www.watchman.org/re/top.gore.htm>), Berit Kjos's article on Mr. Gore's book Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit criticizes Gore's use of earth-based religious beliefs to discuss how humans are connected to the earth, and our responsibilities for the earth as a result. Kjos questions Gore's Baptist beliefs and asks if Gore will "dilute the truth with pagan persuasions?" Commenting on Al Gore's statement, "My own faith is rooted in the unshakable belief in God as creator and sustainer, a deeply personal interpretation of and relationship with Christ, and an awareness of a constant and holy spiritual presence in all people, all life and all things" (368), Kjos concludes his thoughts on Gore's work by saying,

Earth-centered spirituality and pantheistic gods sounds good to people who don't know Scripture - but they can never heal the earth. The true God is separate from His creation, not in or part of it. Al Gore's well-meant manual for global salvation will only deepen our problems. Feminine or

earth-centered spirituality may be "politically correct" today, but it mocks biblical Christianity. Like Israel who witnessed God's miracles and settled in the promised land, America is turning from God's Word to the beliefs of pagan neighbors within one generation (<http://www.watchman.org/rektop.gore.htm>).

If it is true that “pagan neighbors” are taking over within one generation, as Kjos suggests, there would probably be many more happy Pagans in the world and we would not see the types of stereotypical media images that continue to be shown in films and television shows.

PAGANISM AND ECOFEMINISM WORKING TOGETHER

Ecological feminism is the “position that there are important connections between how one treats women, people of color, and the underclass on one hand, and how one treats the nonhuman natural environment on the other” (Warren, xi). Something is a feminist issue if an understanding of it is framed in terms of the oppression or subordination of women. Such issues as equal rights, comparable pay for comparable work, and child-care centers are feminist issues because they are clearly related to the larger issue of the subordination of women. “Racism, classism, ableism, anti-Semitism raise feminist issues because understanding them helps one understand the subordination of women. According to ecofeminists, trees, water, animals, toxics, and nature language are feminist issues because understanding them helps one understand the status and plight of women cross-culturally” (Warren, 3-4). By examining and critiquing social, cultural, and political movements, ecofeminism critiques patriarchal culture in general, and offers a different or alternate view of our society as well as new ways to address current problems.

Environmental feminist scholars such as Karen Warren and others argue that historical and causal links between the domination of nature and of women are located in the *conceptual* structures of domination and the ways in which women and nature have been conceptualized in Western intellectual tradition that encourages dualistic and binary thinking. For example, they cite current ideas concerning sex-gender differences, difference as opposition, that which is different from us must be in opposition to us, hierarchal value-those who are perceived as being “higher” on the food chain or intellectual scale are given more status or prestige and superiority, therefore, justifying subordination.

Scholars who study ecology and the environment also cite experiential connections honoring and celebrating the cultural and spiritual connections of women and indigenous peoples to the earth in conjunction with the empirical data linking various pollutants to health related problems we suffer from. Dr. Carol Christ, founder of the Ariadne Institute located in Oregon (<http://www.goddessariadne.org/index1.htm>), states that “indeed, documenting such connections and making them integral to the project of ‘feminism and the environment’ is often heralded as one of the most important contributions to the creation of liberating, life-affirming, and post-patriarchal worldviews and earth-based spirituality or theology” (quoted in Warren, xiv). Warren and others believe one of the most powerful forces behind the environmental and other social movements is the connection that has been made between scientific research and personal experiences. For example, the dumping of toxic wastes near or on Native American lands or in poor urban neighborhoods makes the impact of such unrestricted exploitation much more personal, and is more likely to create individual and community activism.

Near where I am from, a large industrial plant has been in operation since the 1939 (http://heritage.dupont.com/floater/fl_seaford/floater.shtml). Located on a beautiful river that runs through downtown, it is widely believed that the company has allowed the dumping of a variety of chemicals and waste materials into the river as well as the burial of barrels of waste in various places on its vast property along the river. Being one of the largest employers in the county, I, too, worked at the factory for several months while in college. During that time I spoke to a number of my fellow employees who had worked for the company for twenty or more years and they told me about their knowledge concerning the company's dumping violations.

A large piece of the property has recently been turned into a golf course and although the factory has been sold, the property itself still belongs to the original company. Many locals believe that if the company was to sell the land, the Environmental Protection Agency and other environmental organizations would require massive clean-ups meaning millions of dollars in costs to the company, which is why the company will not sell the land the factory stands on. Many former employees know of any number of environmentally hazardous spills, dumping, and burials on the property but are not able to discuss the issue. With more and more development in the area and one of the highest cancer rates in the country for both people and animals (<http://www.delawareonline.com/newsjournal/local/specials/cancer/>), concern has been growing about the damage this and other industry in the area has caused over the years. Connecting social and political issues such as pollution to a community's lived experience is one way to encourage residents to become involved in local and state government, clean up groups, and protest organizations. We no longer see ourselves as

separate from the world around us. The adage “think globally, act locally” has been adopted by local residents, which is a new idea in this area.

Using many techniques and strategies, (eco)feminists, environmentalists, peace activists, anti-nuclear activists, Pagans, Wiccans, and others work to expose and dismantle our dualistic way(s) of thinking; reexamine and re-conceive traditional philosophical notions concerning reason and rationality; expose and overcome the theories and practices that oppress women, nature, people of color, etc. and uphold patriarchy. They work together to develop new ways to use language in discussions concerning these issues as well as theories and practices that are gender, race, sexuality as well as nature sensitive and do not continue androcentric ideologies and cultures. Their work allows individuals and groups to gather together to combat anti-environment, anti-non-Christian, anti-people of color, and anti-gay exclusionary thinking as well as the oftentimes conservative viewpoints which have shown themselves to be harmful and nonproductive in addressing the social, political, and cultural issues we are facing today.

“THE SPIRITUAL IS PERSONAL AND POLITICAL”

Many people are deeply unhappy and dissatisfied with our world as it exists today and believe their dissatisfaction to be directly related to contemporary political views, and/or actions, or what they view as a failure to act on important issues. In a personal email conversation with friends about these issues one friend stated,

...a government that does not, or no longer listens to anything except money was called by Socrates a Plutocratic Oligarchy, and he termed this the worst form of governance. Plato later noted that in such a system the people have no part or share of anything. Of course today we can say he is referring to the process of disenfranchisement and alienation that are ever present in our social system. Couple that with a

violent and brutal mythology of might makes right and it spells the end of the America that I know I was fighting for. I just hope that even if we are alone among all the states, Delaware stays true to the humanistic principles of its people and the enlightenment, to our constitution and to its heritage (personal email September 2007).

As mentioned earlier, early feminists coined the phrase “the personal is political,” and many people, like my friend quoted above, very much believe this to be true for themselves. Adding to this, Religious Studies scholar Ursula King has expanded this phrase to say: “the spiritual is personal and political.” She states:

...spiritual concerns, orientations and choices do not only affect a person’s own inner life, but have social and community dimensions: they shape social structures, political behaviour and public ethos. (King, 198)

We can see the combination of these seemingly disconnected personal beliefs working together in the work of Starhawk, Al Gore and others, and how their religious beliefs inform their work, as well as how their political work impacts their religious beliefs.

One of the most common criticisms made against Pagans, Wiccans and other nature based belief systems-- other than the stereotypical comments about devil worship-- is that they are “romantic, solipsistic, and politically lethargic” (Weaver, 62) or “escapist, anti-political and dangerous” (King, 199). However, Weaver points out, “Goddess feminists repeatedly extol the value of political action and are involved in a variety of grass roots movements” (Weaver, 62). Paganism, ecofeminism, and environmentalism among other social and political groups are based on not only attitudes towards life but ways of living and being in the world. More importantly, Paganism, feminism, and environmentalism give everyone more tools with which to challenge the status quo. One of the ongoing ways to challenge androcentrism and patriarchy and create an alternate future has been protest and political activism on behalf of the peace and environmental

movements. The current War on Terror as well as the environmental and economic policies of the current President has caused a great many people to become more politically active. Parents of soldiers who have been killed in service to our country during our most recent conflict have organized protests, formed support groups, and raised money for veteran's injuries, among many other activities. Cindy Sheehan, mother of US Army Specialist Casey Sheehan, began protesting the war after her son was killed in Iraq. Joined by others, Ms. Sheehan set up "Camp Casey" on land near President Bush's vacation home in Crawford, Texas in order to protest the war in Iraq and draw the President's attention to their concerns about the United States' continued presence there. Other "peace camps" were set up across the country in support of Camp Casey and Ms. Sheehan, as well as to memorialize other soldiers killed in the war. Personal experiences, such as those of the families of soldiers killed or injured in the current war, have prompted many people like Ms. Sheehan to get involved in political or social causes, sometimes for the first time in their lives, and their faith is an important aspect of their political action.

Ursula King believes the changes individuals and women, in particular, experience also can and do affect society and politics. She says that spirituality can become a "political force" (200) by enabling us to direct the energy and power we gain as individuals (within ourselves) to "power without" (200). The power we gain from becoming involved in religious communities that venerate and empower women and understand our connection to each other and the earth, such as Paganism, can be and have been turned outwards to change social and political injustices, both locally and globally, as is evidenced by the works of Starhawk, Carol Christ and others.

As King and others point out, the majority of the world's governments give "lip service" to the ideas of peace while at the same time gathering more weapons and spending billions of dollars on the military, civil defense, and war. The ongoing War on Terror President George Bush initiated has cost billions, of dollars as well as the lives of many men, women and children. Concerns about North Korea and Iran's, among others, use of nuclear weapons demonstrates the focus on the proliferation of weapons despite the belief and understanding that they should not be used.

King, Starhawk, and others believes we are currently at a crucial turning point in our history, given the advances in and continuing work on nuclear technology and that in order for not only individuals but the species to survive, many people have had to come together and take up the cause of peace. Not only have people working for peace been concerned with abolishing nuclear weapons themselves, they have worked to get rid of the very structures that created and continue to support the creation of such technology. While not opposed to the use of technology in and of itself, all of these activists protest the use of technology to create these weapons and the policies that support such use. Thus, for many people, a connection is made between their social and cultural activities, spiritual beliefs, and political activism. They believe there is a "spiritual imperative" which calls for (nonviolent) political action in a world that uses violence to dominate others and solve problems. Pagans, environmentalists, feminists, eco-feminists and others work to dismantle the teachings that claim the "superiority of man" and to restore the balance between humans and nature that is disrupted in such a hierarchical patriarchal worldview. King and others believe that to achieve this goal our attitude should be one of "biocentric rather than anthropocentric, life--rather than human--centered" (King,

210). In saying this King ties her work, knowingly or not, into ideals and beliefs held by Wiccans and Pagans who believe we are all part of an interdependent system not a hierarchal system with humans at the top and in control.

In 2006 Al Gore and director Davis Guggenheim released the documentary film *An Inconvenient Truth*, which documents much of the evidence for global warming and warns us of the consequences if we do not make immediate changes in our behavior. Standing on stage with Mr. Guggenheim at the 2007 Academy Awards accepting the award for Documentary Feature, Mr. Gore took the opportunity to tell the audience,

My fellow Americans, people all over the world, we need to solve the climate crisis. It's not a political issue; it's a moral issue. We have everything we need to get started, with the possible exception of the will to act. That's a renewable resource. Let's renew it (wikipedia.com).

In July 2006, *An Inconvenient Truth* became the “third highest grossing documentary in U.S. history” surpassing Michael Moore’s *Bowling for Columbine* (wikipedia.com).

Scientific research supports the ideals that Pagans, ecofeminists, environmentalists and others believe, and which they have been using to effect political and social change. Such scientific support has resulted in a variety of laws regarding environmental issues such as pesticides and farm pollution, pollution from factories, water pollution, hunting and fishing regulations, vehicle emissions, waste disposal, and the disposal of toxic chemicals, among others. Starhawk, King, and others believe that by working together these various, seemingly different groups, are working together to inspire a “new paradigm for our culture, a radical alternative based on strength of insight, experience and feeling, a sense of kinship and bonding, a mode of thinking and acting which makes more use of integrative than analytical skills by stressing the interplay and

connectedness of all polarities rather than their separation, opposition and conflict”

(King, 211). Work being done currently by former President Mr. Bill Clinton is one example of the “new paradigm for our culture” that King discusses. Mr. Clinton, along with Heads of State, CEO’s, well-known celebrities, and activists met in September 2007 for the “Clinton Global Initiative” in New York City. These individuals and groups are working together to address and solve problems world wide including poverty, health, education, and climate change (Los Angeles Times newspaper, September 28, 2007).

The Clinton Global Initiative’s Mission describes their work as a “non-partisan catalyst for action, bringing together a community of global leaders to devise and implement innovative solutions to some of the world’s most pressing challenges”

(<http://www.clintonglobalinitiative.org/>).

CONCLUSION

A RADICAL NEW CULTURAL PARADIGM

Those who are practitioners of earth-based religions, as well as ecofeminists, environmentalists and others, envision a future that has little to do with our earth-destroying, patriarchal, heterosexist, racist, classist present. A majority of them are concerned with bringing about what is considered by some to be a radical new social paradigm that has political, social, spiritual and environmental implications for all peoples, and many believe we are currently at an appropriately liminal stage in our cultural development. Groups such as Reclaiming and Circle Sanctuary and individuals such as Starhawk, Al Gore, and Bill Clinton are all working to achieve a new social, cultural, and political paradigm. They are working to (re)create a social structure and way of life that is much different from what many of us have grown used to because they believe what we are used to simply does not work any longer for the majority of people.

In this study I applied the historical process of stereotype construction to American Pagans, Witches and Wiccans in particular, who have had a great deal of media visibility in the last decade. Although most Pagans and Wiccans do not have access to film and television production they do have access to computer technology and have used this technology to actively fight against the images that have been created by others in order to combat and resist the socially created stereotypes that often misrepresent who they are and what they do. By creating representations and images of themselves, many Pagan individuals and groups have used the internet to create more accurate portrayals of their culture. Since the early to mid-1990's when internet use became widespread, Pagans, and other nontraditional groups, have created websites, blogs, online journals,

email lists, and web based videos as alternatives to the popular mass media images many of us are familiar with.

Chapter One outlined social construction theory and its use in examining and understanding stereotype construction specifically as it pertains to the construction of these media images. Chapter One also provided a brief history of Paganism in the United States, and discussed some important scholarly works, primary and secondary, on Pagans and Wiccans in order to provide a brief historical overview and social context for Witches in American society to illustrate the foundation upon which the media images and stereotypes were built. Chapter Two applied existing social construction theory to the group known as Pagans, Wiccans, and Witches, as well as examined the ideas and images that have constructed an identifying stereotype for this group. Chapter Two also provided examples of media images of Witches and Pagans in contemporary American media in order to contrast them with the images created by Witches and Pagans that are discussed in Chapter Three. Examples of Witches and Pagans they have created themselves using computer technology were provided in Chapter Three. Chapter Three also examined the ways in which Pagans have utilized the internet to counteract mainstream notions and stereotypes about them. Chapter Four discussed and gave examples of resistant images of Pagans and Wiccans in the ongoing political and social justice work being conducted by people who call themselves Pagan and/or Wiccan. It was shown that stereotypes are changing and evolving as Wiccans and Pagans have been creating their own images, and that these new representations are constructing new definitions of these people in mainstream American media and culture.

A number of scholars connect the work currently being done by Pagans, feminists, environmentalists, and other activists to ideas and actions of 1960s counterculture. Citing Laurence Veysey's work as a historian of 1960s counterculture, Wiccan scholar Loretta Orion points to several themes in earth-centered spiritual thinking that also appear in cultural radicalism within the United States:

...opposition to established agencies of social authority such as governments and churches; the ideal of uncompromising social brotherhood; economic decentralization and self-sufficiency; inner self-development and the search for mental clarity; free thought in religion; the quest for individual or collective states of ecstasy; pacifism; racial and sexual equality; abolition or modification of the nuclear family; belief in a simpler, more natural way of life, for instance in matters of clothing or diet; extreme progressivism in education; and the pursuit of a guru or other enlightened leader (Orion, 233).

For historians of counterculture, the 1960s was a liminal period between the rejection of old societal structures and the formation of new ones. What feminists, Pagans, environmentalists, ecofeminists and others now are endeavoring to do is encourage mainstream culture to re-think the things we believe to be "fact" or "truth," to question how we come to "know" things, to approach the learning process in a different way by being more inclusive and understanding of differences, as well as to believe in our connection to the world and people around us. In other words, they are challenging our concept of reality.

[T]he cultural radicalism of the 1960s resembled other historical periods of cultural transition when there was a prevalent disenchantment with fundamental assumptions about the nature of knowledge and experience, such as the early centuries of this era that we have already discussed, when the Gnostics devised the Hermetic texts; transition from the Roman Empire into Christian culture; and the Renaissance and Reformation people. In each case, radical thinkers paved the way back to an experiential approach to knowledge (Orion, 234).

While this process has happened throughout human history, Orion feels this “experiential approach” began again in the 1960s and is still developing and evolving in American society today. “The 1970s marked the tentative re-entry into a new structure that is still in the process of becoming. Many of the inspirations that occurred to the hippies during that liminal period of *communitas* can be seen as the “hypotheses” that inspire the “experiments” in which the Neopagans are presently engaged. (Orion, 235) The experiments all of these groups and individuals have been involved in have led to increased interactions and collaborations between various Pagan individuals and groups and various feminist, environmental, and political groups and individuals. The “experiments” that these groups are involved in include political and social activities, communal living, communal decision making, academic research and publishing, organic gardening and recycling, redesigning landfill usage, cleaning up waterways, beaches, and public parks, various legislative reform, among many others.

Technological developments over the last twenty years have greatly impacted the interactions among and between these groups, and represent another facet of the “experiments” which have been occurring since the 1970s. “The desire to share information and socialize with others like themselves induced collaboration on projects like publishing newsletters or organizing festivals that unwittingly resulted in a reluctant and amorphous social cohesion” (Orion, 236). Computer advancements such as the World Wide Web, electronic mail (email), blogs, personal websites, online films and documentaries have contributed to the social cohesion begun in the 1960s and 1970s. Not only are groups and individuals exchanging information, they are forming new communities, participating in discussion groups, organizing protests, fund raising,

holding specialized classes, challenging and changing outdated laws, and worshipping, all online. The very nature of computer technology allows them to form connections and support each other without having to be in the same geographical area. Online communities can bring people together from a wide variety of groups and interests who may never have been able to converse before and facilitate their working together for a common cause. Web pages, besides offering basic information, help combat mainstream stereotypes and misconceptions by allowing the creator of the website to include any and all information deemed necessary and reaching a much larger number of people. Reaching people nationally as well as from all over the world can be done online. Using technology in this way is another avenue by which we can challenge dominant paradigms and create change. Taking advantage of the “liberatory potential” (Dr. Donald McQuarie) of the internet and the alternate views offered by non-mainstream political and spiritual beliefs, these activist groups and their supporters offer other ways to address the cultural, political, social, environmental, racial, sexual, and spiritual issues they feel are inhibiting us and keeping us from being involved more fully in the world as a partner with other nations. Instead, we are continuing to act as the world’s police. Some people do believe the revolution, when it comes and as it develops, will be a virtual one.

THE FUTURE OF THE WITCH/WICCAN STEREOTYPE

As discussed in Chapter Two, in the foundational stage of the creation of the Witch stereotype (begun many, many years ago), the image of the Witch as an unattractive hag who flies through the air on her broom, performing strange rituals, and making contracts with the devil was used to scare small children into better behavior and

women into knowing their place in society, among other things. These stereotypes persisted through the centuries and while much is still misunderstood about the group of people who call themselves Pagan or Wiccan, some of the age-old stereotypes are changing. As mass media and technology improved over the years, new technologies helped solidify the existing stereotypes as well as creating additional ones.

Once the stereotypes of Wiccans and Witches were established, they were publicly confirmed and challenged in the reinforcement and resistance phase of their social construction. The reiteration and challenging of these stereotypes is ongoing. In the last ten years since the films *The Craft*, *Practical Magic*, *The Wicker Man*, and the Harry Potter series, among others debuted, media images both supporting mainstream stereotypes and images challenging them have emerged.

One recent example of an image that supports older mainstream stereotypes is the film *Stardust*. Based on the book by Neil Gaiman and released in August 2007, the film stars such well-known and popular actors as Michelle Pfeiffer, Claire Danes, and Robert DeNiro. Pfeiffer plays a “chillingly powerful Witch” intent upon finding a fallen evening star named Yvaine, played by Claire Danes, in order to use the star’s powers to insure “eternal youth and beauty” for her and her Witch sisters (<http://www.stardustmovie.com/>). Although time has not diminished their powers, the sisters are frail and no longer beautiful. Like many fairy tales, these Witches are not nice. In fact they are plain evil. In order to restore their beauty and ensure eternal life, they must devour the star’s heart that must be cut from her chest while she is still alive in order for its restorative powers to work.

This film is set in an English town called “Wall” and its neighbor, the “Kingdom of Stormhold.” “Wall” is called “Wall” because of the ancient stone-wall that divides the two. We learn that “Wall” is in the “human realm” and the “Kingdom of Stormhold” is in a magical realm, and the stone-wall separating them keeps magic from spilling over into the rest of England.

Throughout the film, Pfeiffer’s character, Lamia, and her sisters, Mormo and Empusa, use their magical powers to track the star as she and her rescuer, Tristan, travel through the kingdom trying to get back to Wall. In order to divine the star’s path to Wall, the Witch sisters kill a variety of small and large animals in order to read their entrails. The bigger the animal the greater or more powerful the magic is conjured. With the opportunity to acquire another star’s heart so close at hand, Lamia eats the last of the star’s heart the Witch sisters captured four hundred years earlier in order to make Lamia able to track the star, capture her, and bring her back to her sisters so all three can once again be young and beautiful. It becomes clear very quickly, and dramatically, that using her magic diminishes Lamia’s beauty and youth and her sisters urge her to hurry before she turns back into an ugly hag.

Another Witch in the Kingdom of Stormhold is Ditchwater Sal. Although Sal is a less powerful Witch than Lamia and her sisters, she is still quite powerful and owns a slave who turns out to be Tristan’s long lost mother, Una. Sal travels the magical world of Stormhold buying and selling magical items such as “Babylon Candles” that enable the user to travel from place to place in the blink of an eye. Sal uses her magic to enslave Una by keeping her in the form of a bird until she is needed in human form, as well as keeping her tethered to Sal’s wagon by an enchanted silver chain. Unfortunately for Sal

she crosses Lamia one time too many, and they engage in a short-lived magical battle that Sal loses.

During the course of the film, Lamia also uses her powers to change people into animals and at one point in the film, changes a man into a woman. Every time she uses her power, she loses more of her youth and beauty until, by the end of the film, she is more hideous than at the beginning. Like so many other fairy tales, *Stardust* ends with the wicked Witches being killed by the hero Tristan. He rescues his true love Yvaine and they live happily ever after, ruling the Kingdom of Stormhold.

Despite the actions of the Witches in this film following the stereotypical pattern, the proliferation of media images about Witches and Pagans over the last ten years has begun to evolve and expand as more information about Witches has become more public. Their emphasis has begun to shift away from Witches being evil hags who ride brooms to images of seemingly ordinary people fighting against evil, albeit using magical powers, such as in the television shows *Charmed* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, or in the Harry Potter films. It would seem that these more positive images are becoming more popular with mainstream audiences and that they see these images more often because media products such as television shows debut a new episode every week. The Harry Potter series has five very popular and successful films with two more to go and all seven books have been completed and published. Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, the last book in the series, sold over 11 million copies during the book's first 10 days of sales (6.9 million in the first twenty four hours) and over 350 million copies of all seven books have been sold worldwide to date (<http://www.msnbc.com/>).

Do the characters in these television shows and films make mistakes? Yes. Do they sometimes do bad things? Yes. However, they are human and ultimately return to the business of living their lives. Media images that continue to reinforce earlier socially constructed stereotype(s) have shifted their focus to what contemporary Witches are doing or could potentially do, quite possibly due to the influence of more and more Witches and other Pagans being open publicly about their beliefs and traditions.

The paradigm of the Witch, Wiccan, and Pagan stereotype has shifted as the American public's perception of them has evolved through the historical process of stereotype construction. In his highly influential work, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (1962), Dr. Thomas Kuhn argues that a paradigm shifts or changes when conceptions of the familiar are altered and ways of dealing with the world must be updated. An established paradigm creates preconceived rules about the world. However, paradigms are not perfect or absolute and anomalies or problems can arise in any paradigm and lead to changes or reversals. This is applicable to stereotypes about Witches because preconceptions about the group have been altered due to new images and information and a new vision of the group is currently emerging.

Over the last several years, televised images of Wiccans and Pagans have begun to represent them as regular people who happen to be Pagan and not Christian, as many characters are or are assumed to be. For example, on the television show *Dharma and Greg*, that ran on ABC from 1997 to 2002 (<http://www.tv.com/>), Dharma and her "hippie" parents Larry and Abby oftentimes make references to ideas and images that could be considered Pagan or "neo-Pagan." Larry and Abby were activists in the 1960's and 1970's, and Dharma inherited their love of animals, non-violence, dancing naked in

the moonlight, and environmental consciousness. Being Pagan or neo-Pagan was simply part of Dharma's character, and not something that involved vanquishing demons or vampires.

More recently, "Wiccan Teacher" Elwood Bartlett from Nottingham, Maryland was one of the four winning Mega Millions jackpot winners with his share being worth over forty million dollars. The headline on Yahoo.com exclaimed "Wicca Teacher Claims 1 Mega Ticket" (Sunday, September 2, 2007). The article discussed where Mr. Bartlett purchased the ticket, as well as his occupation as an accountant. Of course, being Wiccan and, therefore, newsworthy, Mr. Bartlett was quoted as saying he had "made a bargain with the multiple gods associated with his Wiccan beliefs" in order to win the lottery, although this is no different than anyone else saying a prayer for luck. It would seem that all of the media images and websites showcasing Wiccans over the last few years has made it possible for him to be open about his beliefs.

As Wiccans and Pagans as a group have gone through these changes and constructed new images for themselves, ideas and stereotypes of what Pagans are and do have changed, and these stereotypical ideas and images have been left a bit empty of the negative connotations previously associated with the labels.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study has created a better understanding of both the stereotypes surrounding Wiccans, Witches, and Pagans and of the multi-stepped historical process by which these stereotypes were constructed. The historical process of stereotype construction will continue, through time, to create new images of and beliefs about various groups of people in our society. As the stereotypes about Witches near the end of their usefulness,

they are already being revised to reflect more accurate ideas about this heretofore little known group of people.

The ongoing demise of these socially constructed images clears the way for updated (constructed) images of what Wiccans and Pagans are and can be, creating possible subjects for further research. Though contemporary constructions of Wiccans or Witches may apply to a new group of younger Americans, they rely on some old familiar characteristics to create their stereotypical images. Potential avenues of research arise from these new foundations which include: (1) the continued and growing use of the internet in the (re)construction of identity and stereotype(s) of Wiccans, Witches, and Pagans, (2) the growing popularity of Pagan beliefs among more and younger people and its impact on youth culture, and (3) the continued impact of socially constructed mainstream media images of Wiccans and Pagans on the Pagan community itself.

The explosion in internet site construction and usage has the potential to seriously affect the future construction of group identity and stereotypes as this new medium is introduced into the historical process of stereotype construction. Evidence has already shown that the internet is assisting in the construction of group identity, especially among young people who prefer reading information on the internet to reading about Wiccan beliefs in books, as Nancy Tosh found in her work quoted previously. Websites, blogs, email information, and discussion lists about Wiccan beliefs and practices number in the thousands and this number is growing.

Witches and other non-Christians have been characterized as evil in many popular representations of them. While negative traits may seem unique to a particular group of people, and, therefore, static, negative beliefs about a group, and the subsequent creation

of negative stereotypes, is fluid and mobile with traits being transferred from one group to another. This occurs as the need to construct new images arises. New and more frightening images of evil have emerged in the last few years and these images are used, among other things, to propel a war many people around the world now believe to be wrong and short sighted.

The public's perception of a group of people is largely determined through the historical process of stereotype construction. Using the media, images and definitions of different kinds of people are constructed so that they might be understood in both positive and negative ways. Sometimes, as in the case of modern day Witches, it is not until these public definitions are challenged that a fuller image of a group of people emerges. As I conclude this project in the early fall of 2007, popular American mainstream images of Witches are very much in evidence in stores around the country in preparation for upcoming Halloween festivities. Costumes, candles, tablecloths, lights, and many different kinds of decorations are for sale to help people celebrate one of the largest holidays in the United States. Television shows and films with Halloween themes--horror and comedy--are being advertised, including a show on the Disney Channel called *Twitches Two* featuring twin sisters Tia and Tamera Mowry from the popular television show *Sister, Sister* (1993-1999). The film will debut in October 2007 during the Disney Channel's month long "Hauntober Fest."

Many television networks take advantage of the popularity of Halloween by featuring month long series of television shows and films both reinforcing and challenging popular mainstream notions of Witches. For example, The Learning Channel and the History Channel will feature specials on the "history" of Halloween and

Witchcraft, one of which includes interviews with Bowling Green State University folklore scholar Dr. Jack Santino. The Sci Fi and Travel Channels will have shows featuring “paranormal” investigations or ghost hunters and Witch hunters, and film channels will feature reruns of popular horror films, from early black and white films to contemporary horror films. Are images of Witches in contemporary media changing? Yes and no. The commercial interests in Witches and who they are and what they do has become combined with the activities and activism of “real” Witches and Pagans to create new ideas and stereotypes about them as a group. The process of stereotype construction will continue to create images and beliefs about this group of people, whether they call themselves Witches, Wiccans, Pagans or Heathens. As noted above, all indications are that the foundations for new stereotypes are already being laid. Though their appearance may as yet be unknown, the arrivals of newly constructed stereotypes are only a matter of time.

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