ABRACADABRA AND PROCESS THOUGHT: REALIZING MAGICK IN FEMINIST WICCA

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Abstract:

Between 1960 to 1980, America’s mainstream society considered magic as a combination of supernatural nonsense, themes of entertainment, and an umbrella word to describe indescribable events. However, Wicca, the counter-cultural Pagan religion, adopted the word as a form of resistance against a predominantly male-driven culture. By transforming and inventing socially devalued words such as magic into magick, Wiccans attempted to salvage and validate their practices. This allowed Wiccans to create their culture within the society that rejected them, and provide new interpretations of magick to separate from mainstream definitions. For instance, the practice of spells such as abracadabra exemplified how new categorical inventions and interactive kinds could be used to reconstruct the idea of magic. Additionally, Constance Wise’s application of the metaphysical philosophy of process thought demonstrated the reconstruction and invention of magick into a paradoxically new concept founded on old traditions. Feminist Wiccan subgroups adopted these new values and established new symbols from pre-existing traditions in order to further sociopolitical goals, particularly in respect to gender equality. From these instances, magick served as a tool and mediator for Feminist Wiccans against their social environment.

Keywords: Wicca, magick, mainstream, spells, reconstruct, metaphysical philosophy, sociopolitical, gender, equality, feminist

1. Introduction

In the 1960s, the adoption of Pagan practices as a form of religion spread across America in a sweeping movement with a touch of feminism. Different Pagan terms such as Wicca, Witch, and the all-comprising label of Pagans came to be adopted by different groups of individuals, growing in popularity in the 1970s particularly with women. Despite their distinctive group names, they shared similar notions of religious practice, pulled from both widespread religions such as Christianity and obscure traditions from ancient Greek texts and Medieval European myths. With the increase of informational technology, internet forums and social groups allowed self identifying Pagans to access similar rituals and ideas for individual spiritual purposes. In the macrocosm of social religions, specifically in America, a discrepancy separated Pagans from more widely accepted and well-known religions. In particular, a mixture of Christian and secular belief defined the major social attitudes toward certain practices and ideas. The idea of magic practice, common among Wiccan groups and other Pagans, suffered from the majority’s automatic assumption of two extremes: that magic was not real or that it was real but harmful. While the former echoed Enlightenment reactions to superstition and myth, the latter generally represented the remnants of Medieval European fear of the Devil and Witchcraft. This fear contributed to the overall negative connotations of
magic, and by extension, Witchcraft. Regardless of popular attitudes toward magic and Witchcraft, Pagans who self-identified as Witches, Wiccans, or both, embraced their religions and practices with a subtle defiance against mainstream ideas. In the 1980s, Paganism fell under counter-cultural categories of religion and social groups. Conservative Christianity, which held a strong but slowly declining following in America during that time, viewed the spread of Pagan religions as dangerous on a theological sense, and nonsensical. The words “witch” and “magic” held different meanings in the eighties than they do now. The “witch,” in particular, drew unpleasant images of green skinned hags on broomsticks, as seen on Halloween episodes of the popular television cartoon, Tom & Jerry. The word “magic,” on the other hand, served primarily as an umbrella term used by two extremes: by entertainment venues as a fictional genre and by scholars in academia. Current mainstream notions differ from 1980s with the greater ease of accessing information via the Internet. In this essay, I address the reaction against the mainstream and constructions of certain definitions by Pagans, specifically Wiccans, in the period of the spread of Wicca in the early 1960s to the surge of feminist Wicca in the 1980s. Thus, mainstream culture and references to a social reaction by Wiccans to a social majority refers primarily to the aforementioned time period. During this period, Wiccan sociopolitical motives in gender equality rose and continue to persist in recent Wiccan groups.

In comparison to the exclusive religious practices in Christianity, Paganism specifically targeted and assimilated a wide range of rituals from different cultures. Other Pagan groups sought to create new rituals from older and obscure practices, finding inspiration in ancient Hebrew and Greek texts. One such example was the word and practice of abracadabra, a popular “magic” word in mainstream society. Other practices combined created and previously existing traditions with dead languages, such as Latin and Hebrew to form a working religious creation myth. For instance, Aleister Crowley provided a detailed myth using previous traditions for his religious cult, the cult of Thelema. Yet others attempted to define and legitimize their faiths by applying mathematical and metaphysical theory, such as the idea of process thought. These different ideas and creations not only demonstrated a salvaging and reclaiming of ancient practices into modern religious practices but also reflected a re-invention of old traditions into new ones. In this process, Pagans applied new values and constructions to their adopted terms.

However, for what purposes did these re-inventions and salvaging have in the larger scope of Paganism? What benefits could be derived from embracing a primarily counter-cultural tradition? On an individual level, personal satisfaction and spiritual attainment might seem to be a popular reason for the adoption of Pagan identities. Yet on a macrocosmic level, mainstream culture and beliefs in the 1960s to 1980s opposed majority of Pagan ideas. The use of the word magic, for instance, aptly illustrated the discrepancies between popular culture and the counter-culture. Additionally, different political and social movements also suggested a deeper motivation in Pagan identity.

In an attempt to identify these motivations, I seek to demonstrate that although Wicca and Paganism are inter-changeable words due to highly varied and nonspecific religious practices, distinctions between using one label over the other rests in the use of different categories of religion and social groups. As Jason Pitzi-Walters writes, “When I became a Pagan in 1990, we still operated largely as a counterculture. But in the last 20-plus years, I’ve heard the conversations, the debates, and the yearnings, and I know that many want the respect, and the power, that comes from being part of the institution.” The institution mentioned here refers to a theoretical vast social community – the mainstream. The mainstream refers to the specifically a period between 1960 and the late 1980s. Pitzi-Walters, as a Pagan, indicates that even by 1990s, Paganism was still counter-cultural to the social majority, which was less forgiving, as described in his article. This time is echoed in other published pagan works, particularly in that of Cynthia Eller, Constance Wise, and Kristy Coleman. Jason Pitzi-Walters. “Institutions vs. Counter Culture in Paganism.” The Wild Hunt. wildhunt.org, accessed 11 Jan. 2014.

2 As Jason Pitzi-Walters writes, “When I became a Pagan in 1990, we still operated largely as a counterculture. But in the last 20-plus years, I’ve heard the conversations, the debates, and the yearnings, and I know that many want the respect, and the power, that comes from being part of the institution.” The institution mentioned here refers to a theoretical vast social community – the mainstream. The mainstream refers to the specifically a period between 1960 and the late 1980s. Pitzi-Walters, as a Pagan, indicates that even by 1990s, Paganism was still counter-cultural to the social majority, which was less forgiving, as described in his article. This time is echoed in other published pagan works, particularly in that of Cynthia Eller, Constance Wise, and Kristy Coleman. Jason Pitzi-Walters. “Institutions vs. Counter Culture in Paganism.” The Wild Hunt. wildhunt.org, accessed 11 Jan. 2014.
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blend of salvation, re-invention, and social construction of magic, subsequently Wiccan practices, as an interactive kind. Through an evaluation of a Wiccan application of metaphysical theories, I highlight that the Wiccan approach to magic seeks to validate its practice in a functional scope. From these instances, magic practice mediate discrepancies in juxtaposing socially-related concepts between Wiccan groups with mainstream culture. Finally, in the larger function and legitimization of magic and Pagan practices, I connect these process and re-constructions to demonstrate one possible motivation in a sociopolitical context for Wiccan and Pagan practices.

2. Scholarship on Magic and the Wiccan Notion of Magick

Definitions of magic, religion, and science change over time. Historically, general society discards or assimilates old definitions with new concepts, often reworking the reconstructed definitions with old ideas from other sources. This process of reconstructing a single idea can be described by the phrase "interactive kind." An interactive kind is "one that is created or significantly modified once a concept of it has been formulated and acted upon in certain ways." Interactive kinds constantly associate with the social environment, resulting in dynamic re-classifications or definitions. Magic, religion, and science all appear to be categories functioning within the parameters of an interactive kind. Yet these parameters, or definitions, change throughout time. However, underlying historical attitudes and events cement religion and science as functional categories as opposed to magic. Sociological and academic trends places magic on a lower intellectual level as religion and science, since magic has close connections to the

Enlightenment notion of superstition. Like superstition, something founded on an irrational fear of the unknown, magic holds a similar meaning.

As an interactive kind, magic represented a different problem in academic scholarship than in society. While society viewed magic as baseless entertainment, academic scholarship struggled to define magic with the existence of historical magical practices. Scholars attempted to provide a symbolic background to explain magic efficacy in different cultures. For instance, Claude Levi-Strauss, an anthropologist and ethnologist, provided a psychological description for the belief in magic. Propagation in the belief of magic, Levi-Strauss maintained, parallels psychoanalysis techniques in patient treatment. He essentially equated the practice of magic to psychological neuroses, providing a practical scientific understanding to magic, the antithesis of science. Levi-Strauss also described that magic efficacy is related to the belief in magic, represented in three components: the sorcerer's belief in his effectiveness, the victim's belief in the sorcerer's power, and the expectations of the group driving and identifying the relationship.

While Levi-Strauss's argument highlighted one perspective of magic, other scholars proposed to abandon the term magic altogether. For instance, Jonathan Z. Smith proposed to abandon the term magic from a religious context based on its ineffectiveness in discourses on ritual. Magic, he described, is "essentially synonymous with...religion" and a "second-order term" in academic discourse. Kyle Fraser further developed Smith's idea by identifying the Christian influences in religious scholarship. Fraser argued for the erasure of the Christian-established boundaries between magic and religion as a "dichotomy...shaped within pagan discourse, and...adapted to Christian polemical purposes."

Levi-Strauss, Fraser, and Smith illustrated the

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problem of magic discourse in scholarship. Magic and religion were on the same scale: that the notion of magic bleeds into the category of religion, and that the two counteracted yet interacted with one another under different political and religious purposes. However, popular media trends followed by the social majority identified magic more with entertainment than an idea of practical value. Magic lacked the realness perceived in religion. Additionally, post-Enlightenment attitudes, coordinating with an emphasis on thought and reason, judged religion as superior to magic in both function and realness. This realness referred to the practical evaluation of a concept that yield seeable results. Since science has a clear function in the physical world, capable of producing evidence to support conjectures, religion appeared inferior in contrast. Nonetheless, religious traditions and beliefs still preceded scientific values and yielded different results to religious practitioners as opposed to science. In the case of magic, however, the word served as an umbrella term for subcategories that do not fit into religious and scientific scholarship. This use of the magic category limited the conceptual perspective between magic and religion. As exemplified in Fraser’s and Smith’s argument, recent scholarship attempted to erase the barrier between magic and religion. Proposals to substitute the term “magic” illustrated such attempts. Yet, avoidance of the word does not yield the analytic freedom for other religions, such as Paganism. With the development and spread of ancient sources” in Classical Studies. Furthermore, he postulates that the removal of the category of magic may even benefit the Religious Studies due to the extensive discourse on magic that has resulted in “the ‘collapse of the category.’” Most scholars, he stresses, assume that magic is defined loosely as a set of supernatural circumstances. Bernd-Christian Otto. “Towards Historicizing ‘Magic’ in Antiquity.” Brill 60 (2013): 308-347, accessed 19 Oct, 2014. doi: 10.1164/15685276-12341267: 308


13 In “Towards Historicizing ‘Magic’ in Antiquity,” Bernd-Christian Otto advocates the abandonment of the term "magic" due to its obscure and indefinite definitions. By doing so, he argues that this will lead to a "proper analysis
a revival and reinvention of old traditions; second, it distinguishes Pagan magick from the cultural mainstream view of magic; lastly, it integrates a new notion and value of magic into the local culture. Aside from the value of magick, the Pagan religion of Wicca also holds similar reconstructions and new social definitions. The word Wicca itself refers to an Old English word wicce, which means "practitioners of magic" or "witch." The purposeful adoption of Medieval terminology suggests an embrace of ancient traditions, a reinvention of ancient magically classified practices by academic literature, and a purposeful distinction from mainstream notions.

Distinctions in Wiccan terminology from mainstream definitions separated Wiccan ideals from dominant cultural perspectives of magic. However, redefining and reshaping of magical elements did not fully legitimize Wiccan practices. Liberal Protestantism categorized old religious rituals and traditions as magic while secular society dictates the supernatural quality of magic as superstition. For Wiccans, the popular notion of magic in the 1960s and 1980s threatened the core of Wiccan practices as fake. The Wiccan attempt to counter secular notions of magick revolved around the idea of universal energy and metaphysics. For instance, Constance Wise, a Wiccan and Theology Professor, applied philosophical and metaphysical theories to explain the function and reality of magick and Wiccan rituals.

In this reconstruction of magick, Wise and other Wiccans also seek to invent and apply a new meaning to their religious practices. I do not attempt to argue whether the practice of magick is valid or invalid; for a highly varied and mostly minor religious group, Wiccans and other Pagans often battle against the larger social norm on theological concepts that are otherwise given little importance. On this theological basis, Wiccans transformed and brought the word magick into a higher order, onto a practical and functional level. Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger provided a theoretical understanding of the value of inventing and re-inventing a tradition. In Invention of Tradition, Hobsbawm defined "invented tradition" as a "set of practices, normally governed by...rules and of a ritual...which seek to inculcate certain values...by repetition, which automatically implies continuity in the past." The phrase "invented tradition" suggested that a pre-existing tradition gained new meanings that integrates into a culture or society through repeated use throughout a period of time. In relation to this definition, Wiccans reconstructed magick with values separate from pre-existing ones. These pre-existing values of magick, as previously discussed, referred to the lack of functionality and validity of magic as a real practice. While the Wiccan invention of magick highlights a transformation from old values, it simultaneously illuminated a salvaging mentality toward ancient traditions. Particularly in more political motives, such as the Pagan feminist movement in the 1970s, the idea of salvaging and recovering old values became a social and political symbol and identity.

A clearer picture of the Wiccan re-invention and use of magick began from the single most important Wiccan rule, "An it harm none, do what ye will." The Wiccan Rede discourages ill-intentioned religious practices, incorporating the invented notion of nervous energies to associate the mental state of the mind with the body. Christopher G. White, Unsettled Minds: Psychology and the American Search for Spiritual Assurance, 1830-1940 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

that magick yields organic results. Based on these new traditions, Wiccan magick served as a tool and mediator between Wiccans and their social environment. Underlying the use of magick labels, feminism and an inherent, historically based desire for gender equality American female spirituality movements and feminist thought in the late 1900s began to propel the adoption and deliberate misconception of religious Christian taboos. In reaction to the long-standing patriarchy, perceived as the primary cause of female subordination, Wiccan feminism reacted against

Historical witch burnings in the Medieval period stemmed from a religious fanaticism and fears of demonic practices. Rumors of slaying infants and cannibalism instilled fear in many people throughout Western Europe. Most of the witch-trials prosecuted women, particularly practicing medical women or women who stood out in society (i.e. attractive women). An estimated ninety-percent of the executed were women; in other witchcraft trials, outlined in Narratives of Witchcraft Trials, mostly depict the executions of women in England. Majority of the accusations were founded on a fear propagated by the Reformation. Women were accused of consort with Satan, on the basis of seen supernatural occurrences. Witness accounts mostly exaggerate the degree of the supernatural occurrence, such as the random flight of chairs and burlap bags which had proceeded to beat the owner and his family. Other accounts, however, reveal personal vendettas against the accused Witch. Following the reformation in the early 1600s, Denmark’s Witch Trials increased. Two hundred years later, witchcraft emerged as a persisting trend despite the scientific attitudes propagating since the Enlightenment. Despite the secular and religious claims of superstition and falsehoods, witchcraft was still practiced. “Witch-belief” describes the seemingly psychological phenomenon for the flourishing of backwoods witchcraft in the secular era. Generally attributed as a method to deal with “common problems,” witch belief entails a metaphysical framework, similar to Wiccan discussions of magic. Connotation of witches in Denmark, however, is highly negative, often associating with terrifying green-faced hags and evil yet powerful women. In relation to Wiccan feminism, the same connotation is adopted to empower the Witch and to instill fear in certain cases (W.I.T.C.H. groups). ed. George Lincoln Burr, Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases 1648-1706 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914). Gustav Henningsen, “Witchcraft in Denmark,” Folklore 93. 2 (1992): 131-137. Eller, Living in the Lap of the Goddess, 55.

3. History of Definitions: Abracadabra

In popular culture, the most famous magic word abracadabra appears to only be a word spoken by stage illusionists as a verbal prop. While the word permeated the entertainment sphere as a seemingly nonsensical word, Pagan religions embraced the word from both a new and old ritualistic approach. By tracing the historical record of the word and its current uses, abracadabra exemplifies the idea of an interactive kind and a reconstructed tradition.

Firstly, the earliest appearance of abracadabra in history appeared in a second century Roman medical text, the Liber medicinalis. Written by Quintus

Eller, Living in the Lap of the Goddess, 90. That is to say, certain Wiccan groups interact with feminism against the tradition of patriarchal religions seen in the Abrahamic religions.

Self-primitivization, coined by Gananath Obeyesekere, refers to the self labeling of a social taboo, such as cannibalism. However, in Wicca, the social taboo is the figure of “witch.” While “witch” instills a social fear, the Wiccan application attempts to reform this social identity of the witch symbol into a more spiritual sense. Gananath Obeyesekere. Cannibal Talk: The Man-Eating Myth and Human Sacrifice in the South Seas (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

The use of abracadabra as a magical formula were found on abraxas stones, worn as amulets. The Gnostics were perceived to have used this formula, invoking “beneficent spirits against disease and misfortune.” The amulet spread from Gnostic use to eventual pagan practices, resulting in a change of amulet mediums. Rather than using stones, the word abracadabra was
Serenus (Sammonicus), a Roman physician and medical scholar, *abracadabra* was a cure for a malady called *hemitritaeos*. sammonicus’s prescription for *hemitritaeos* consisted of inscribing the word *abracadabra* on a triangular tablet. The word was repeated eleven times with each subsequent line missing a letter so that the word “disappears.”

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A B R A C A D A B R A
A B R A C A D A B R
A B R A C A D A B
A B R A C A D A
A B R A C A D
A B R A C A
A B R A
A B R
A B
A
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The decreasing format results in an inverted triangular form, worn around the neck as an amulet. The disease was thought to escape through the last letter “A,” disappearing as the word disappears. From its appearance in a medical text written as a guide for physicians, *abracadabra* may have been widely practiced by the Romans, from royalty to peasantry. The amulet was also thought to have great destructive qualities, capable of destroying disease and even demonic spirits. Thus, the amulet also served as a protection against undesirable ailments.

Early religious rituals hold similar practical uses. For instance, ancient Aramaic scorpion spells referred to a set of instructions and rituals invoking the protection of deities to heal the scorpion sting. The instructions involved a ritual chanting and cleaning out the wound with saliva. Later Aramaic incantations, however, exchanged the deities for one God, seen in the transformation of words. The deity Baal, for instance, is interchanged with "lord" and "master." The action of cleaning the wound, however, remains unchanged, suggesting the consistency of certain meanings. The word *abracadabra* similarly reflects a consistency in old traditions despite additions and reconstructions over the course of time.

Practice of the *abracadabra* amulet persisted even after the fall of the Roman Empire. Textual appearance of *abracadabra* in sixteenth century literature, such as the *Troublesome Voyage of Captain Edward Fenton*, indicates its continued practice among European peasantry and local traditions. However, with the advent of Enlightenment values, the local practice of *abracadabra* dropped due to a lack of clear physical results. For instance, Daniel Defoe, author of *Robinson Crusoe*, criticized the practice of *abracadabra* by the peasantry, shown in “how the poor People found the Insufficiency of those things, and how many of them were afterwards carried away in the Dead-Carts.” With the revelation that the *abracadabra* amulet provided little medical aid, the amulet fell into disuse and was discarded as superstition.

Despite being categorized as superstition, *abracadabra* grew popular as a stage illusion phrase in

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27 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
the 1800s, due to its catchy syllabic pronunciation. Increasingly secular attitudes firmly associated the word with stage illusionists. Furthermore, current media and entertainment use *abracadabra* primarily from its association with stage tricks. For instance, DC comic book villain, Abra Kadabra, was a “sorcerer” whose real identity is a time traveler from the future, using future technology to create “magical” effects. Additionally, the creator of the popular Harry Potter series, J. K. Rowling, transformed *abracadabra* into a Killing Curse, *Avada Kedavra*. These various current instances of the use of *abracadabra* demonstrated the transience of definitions and reconstructions that each institution—from stage tricks to time-traveling villains to international popular franchises—added to pre-existing traditions.

While current social attitudes used *abracadabra* as part of the entertainment field, contemporary Pagans adapted the phrase into religious meanings. For instance, Aleister Crowley restyled and added symbolism in the word *abracadabra*. Replacing the “c” in *abracadabra* with “h,” Crowley fashioned the new word *abrahadabra* as the ultimate invocation for rituals. The “h” served as a reference to Crowley’s cult, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, distinct from the 

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36 Israel Regardie, *The Golden Dawn* (St. Paul: Llewellyn Publications, 1982). Additionally, in revising the spell of *abracadabra*, Aleister Crowley also changed the spelling of magic to *magick*, due to the significance in the letter “k.” According to Crowley, the letter “k” has magical implications, corresponding to the Egyptian *khu*, or magical power. His emphasis on sex *magick* more specifically designates that “k” to stand for *kteis*, or vagina, which complements the wand, or phallus. Aleister Crowley, ed. John Symonds and Kenneth Grant, “Editors’ Introduction,” *Magick* (1973), xvi.
39 Ibid., 179. Incidentally, Crowley incorporates numerology with other magical formulas, generally derived from Hebrew spellings. The number 418 is produced via a Jewish-adopted numerology system, referred to as Gematria. Standard methods assign a numerical values to corresponding Hebrew letters. Generally, Kabbalistic practices use this system to calculate the value of individual words, phrases, and sentences. John J. Davis, *Biblical Numerology* (1968).
40 Ibid., 177. Crowley indicates that the key to unlocking the truths of the universe is through the number 418.
embracement of older meanings.

4. Wiccan Philosophy and Feminist Ideals

The problem of using spells and magick as religious ritual, however, stemmed from the permeating mainstream notions of magic. As demonstrated by the phrase abracadabra, magic, religion, and entertainment both blended and created new meanings and values in order to fulfill some kind of purpose. The same process occurred in Wiccan magick. According to Zsuzsanna Budapest, a famous Wiccan priestess and founder of a feminist subgroup of Wicca, magick was effective based on symbolic visualization of ritual. Regardless of belief, the action and intent behind magick practice determined the efficacy of magick ritual as valid. Success of the ritual depended on the strength of the visualization, or thought, the timing of the thought, and fulfillment of the ritual procedure.  

In an attempt to reconstruct and attach a function to magick, Wiccan Priestess and theologian Constance Wise integrated Arthur Whitehead’s mathematical theory of process thought into the practice and workings of magick. Process thought, Wise described, is a "philosophical description of the structure of reality," a combination of empiricism and metaphysics. Each empirical unit was described as "organic," referring to humans and their immediate surroundings. For humans, this immediate surrounding referred to society. Therefore, empirically measured events in time moved from place to place and created a recognizable pattern known as "society." In other words, process thought described a pattern of events that later create or cause social states. The thought stemmed from an individual, which moved through a higher and undefinable force that might ultimately influence a future event in the individual’s life or a situation in a larger social group. Processing the thought through a series of steps encouraged the temporal movement of an event. Magick fitted into the metaphysical pattern of events by establishing the basis for potentially setting off a chain of events, which might result in the desired purpose. By connecting the philosophy of process thought with Wiccan magick, Wise created a philosophical and theological basis for magick efficacy. Contrary to other scholarship on magic, Wise did not define magic explicitly nor historicized the development and practice of Wiccan magick. Instead, she established a theological explanation for magic efficacy, in order to provide a legitimacy in the practice of magick as a physical reality.

Much of the discourse on Wiccan religion and magick served to explain Wicca in relatively practical and functional terms as seen in Wise’s discourse. As a result, much of Wiccan literature focused on Wicca as a female social movement. Wiccan scholarship attempted to negate social images through sociological or theological fields. For instance, Cynthia Eller, an Associate Professor in Philosophy and Religion, approached Wicca from a cultural-political perspective. Eller appropriated and traced a feminist foundation of Wiccan religion. As Eller described, since Gerald Gardner’s publication of Witchcraft Today in 1954, feminist spirituality quickly spread across America in the late 1960s, establishing a firm stance against gender inequalities in society. The role of women in religion, prior to the late 1800s, was mostly limited to the household. While women may have held respective religious roles, Wiccan feminists focused on the male dominance in religious practices. Emphasis on the women’s role in religion aimed to equalize the uneven social positions between men and women. In Feminist Wicca, feminism is combined with non-Christian religious orientation. Spiritual movements, embracing the feminine divine, subsequently attached a recognition of power to female spiritualists. For instance, monthly rites celebrated the course of the female body and emphasize the sanctity of women, particularly the spirituality of the female body and mind. Feminist Wiccans may conducted

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42 Ibid., 38
44 Wise, Hidden Circles in the Web, 30
45 Ibid., 32
47 Pike, New Age and Neopagan Religions, 10.
magick rituals on the full moon in respect to the menstrual cycle. These celebrations of the female body counters dominating patriarchal views and religious condemnations of women. In the world of Feminist Wicca, women replace men in authority and attention.

Feminist Wicca embraced and propagated the notion of power through ritual. Reactions against the entirety of society also presented a multitude of problems because Wiccans still lived and interacted with their social surroundings. By providing the instructions and the idea of influencing higher powers to generate a physical event, social misgivings and stresses led to the practice of magick rituals and spells and vice versa. Internet sites and witchcraft books provided spells for the day to day fortunes of obtaining a parking spot on a busy street and extended to a simple contemporary hex of targeting the individual with an IRS form. Rites performed by large groups emphasized the protection of each individual, praying for fortune and good omens, or reinforcing and exerting their presences before a higher being as a way of spiritual connection with each other. These spiritual connections translated into an idea of energy that could be channeled through Earthly objects, such as gemstones, or visualized in local surroundings as an outcome of magick.

Through these actions, Wiccans had a tool to mediate themselves as both individuals and groups with the social stresses in their public lives. Additionally, magick served an outlet to deal with opposing social and individual obstacles. Magick, then, became a tool and mediator between Wiccans and their social environments.

Additionally, certain Feminist Wiccan groups, such as Dianic Wicca, limited their membership to only women. The history of female subjugation and victimization to male authority, such as historic witch-burnings, and traditional stereotypes of women as homemakers, subordinate to man generated a subconscious reminder for female Wiccans. Particularly with the adoption of the label "witch" and the term magick, certain Wiccan groups and individuals resisted against the societal and historical connotations created by the more powerful gender in society. Yet rather than outright resisting against societal powers, Wiccans sought a passive-aggressive form of resistance: they rebelled within their social surroundings by both embracing mainstream definitions and then reconstructing them to fulfill different purposes. For instance, Wiccan groups focus on redefining female archetypes to combat social issues in the patriarchal society, such as W.I.T.C.H (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell), in the late 1960s. W.I.T.C.H groups aimed to counteract the patriarchy through magick in public protests and guerrilla theater. Simultaneously, they asserted their power as female spiritualists in public demonstrations. Politically, W.I.T.C.H. groups established themselves as advocators of independence from male domination, labelled as the “Imperialist Phallic Society.” More importantly, W.I.T.C.H. groups chose the symbol of “witch” to represent their cause. By identifying as a witch, women voluntarily embraced counter notions of female gender stereotypes: aggression, independence, malice. Rather than propagating this image, however, feminists molded the image of the witch into a symbol of “female power, knowledge, independence, and martyrdom.” Associations with martyrdom create a culture of historical oppression and a justification of reacting against the oppressors, the patriarch.

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50 Eller, Living in the Lap of the Goddess, 53.
51 Ibid., 55.
5. Discussion

Between 1960 to 1980, *magick* and witchcraft served as tools for Feminist Wiccans for both individual satisfaction and a symbol against the social patriarchy. For Wiccans living in a society which clearly devalued *magick* and witchcraft as old superstition or Hollywood blockbusters, the willing adoption of "witch" and *magick* by educated women poses a strange discrepancy. Yet by transforming the common assumptions of witches and magic, Wiccans recreated their culture against the dominant culture. The significance in creating a culture against the patriarchal mainstream stems from the emphasis on gender dualism and the sexual dichotomy between men and women. Spiritual feminism became the central focus of most Pagan groups, particularly Wicca. Furthermore, Wise's integration of process thought philosophy legitimized *magick* as a series of metaphysical events rather than post-Enlightenment categorizations of superstition. In this continuous invention and reconstruction of *magick* as a practice, Wiccans applied these new values to back different social and political motives. In the example of the W.I.T.C.H group, both *magick* and the word *Witch* gained symbolic values that enhance their political and social image and stance on gender inequality.

Ultimately, the reconstructions of *abracadabra* illustrated a history of changing definitions and values specific to different institutions. The revival of *abracadabra* in Wicca, is an example of social construction in action. American Wiccan culture transformed and combined the categories of magic and religion. Therefore, the Pagan reconstruction of *magick* demonstrated that Smith’s and Fraser’s propositions to cut out the term “magic” entirely from religious discourse is not entirely viable. Use of magic created Wiccan religion and culture, and provided a tool and a power against political and societal problems, illustrated in W.I.T.C.H. groups. In current American society, Feminist Wicca and other Pagan groups have started to morph into the dominant culture as opposed to previous counter-cultural positions in the 1960s and may eventually garner more attention and practitioners. Although published Pagan literature have multiplied throughout the last fifty years, sociological and religious research in the field have yet to grow in response to the increase in Pagan practitioners. Future research regarding social surveys and demographic analyses may provide more solid insight regarding the popularity and trends in Paganism.
References


