

A Cabal of Outsiders:
Negotiating the (Virtual) Boundaries of the Church of Satan

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ABSTRACT

A Cabal of Outsiders: Negotiating the (Virtual) Boundaries of the Church of Satan

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This dissertation is a qualitative digital ethnography about members of the Church of Satan (CoS) and how they negotiate the boundaries of modern religious Satanism in public virtual landscapes. The Church of Satan emerges from 1960s American countercultural movements within the social and political turbulence of second-wave feminism and the sexual revolution, the civil rights movement, anti-war protests, hippies, and the so-called witch revival. The founder of the Church of Satan, Anton Szandor LaVey (née Howard Stanton Levy 1928-1997), developed a codified religion best understood as emerging from and responding to the popular discourses of his time, embracing the infamous symbol of rebellion—Satan—and positioning his new religion of Satanism in calculated tension with both the ubiquitous Protestant ethos of American society and its radical counterculture.

Throughout this thesis, highlighted claims from LaVey, the Church of Satan, and its members are presented in terms of their respective social and historical contexts to demonstrate that, despite the CoS Administration's claim to being apolitical and somewhat indifferent to modern concerns, the body of the Church of Satan viewed via the lens of its members' lives online is deeply political, heavily invested in social discourses, with CoS members re/negotiating a Satanic identity via the demands of the modern world. The tripartite model is organized by delineating between: LaVey's authored texts and interviews; the Church of Satan Administration's official statements and policies; and the body of the membership in their own

words expressed via their published works, public online content, and supplemented with data from a circulated questionnaire. This thesis examines modern religious Satanism as a highly individualistic religion that exalts the notion of a “true self” to reveal that each member of the Church of Satan absorbs Satanic literature and official policies and doctrines, and interprets them according to their own idiosyncratic experience, extending their identities as Satanists outward into their respective virtual spaces. The variety of Satanic interpretations can and often do conflict with one another, which this thesis argues is a deliberately constructed tension to avoid homogeneity within internal CoS culture.

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Preface: An Orientation for Readers

This thesis certainly developed in unanticipated ways. In order to position my study in both its social and academic context, this preface is written as an orientation for the reader. It also functions as a discussion to my peers on the issues faced doing auto-ethnography.

Initially, under the guidance of my now-deceased supervisor, Dr. Donald L. Boisvert, I had planned a deeply reflexive thesis as an auto-ethnographer studying her own group, offered for my sub-discipline as but one example on how to conduct fieldwork in virtual spaces for digital anthropology. My research question began with the observation that most scholarship centralized the founder, Anton Szander LaVey, and canon texts, with little or outdated ethnographic data on modern Satanism as a lived religion, which prompted me to ask, “How do Satanists *live*?” I developed a methodology and questionnaire to examine how members of the Church of Satan: choose their profession, raise their children, ritualize, engage in a multitude of hobbies, socialize, celebrate, rest, mourn, and develop a concept of self in relationship to an identity as “Satanist.” I had a romanticized idea of investigating the multitude of unusual personalities whose lifestyles were on the margins of social behaviour. Eccentrics, iconoclasts, magicians, all adopting their chosen metaphor of radical resistance in various ways. They share a conceptual alienation and sensitivity to the human experience, expressed via their shared metaphor of Satan, the “opposer.” I wanted to highlight the idiosyncrasies of such a disparate group as a study in material culture and lived religion.

That was in 2012 at the beginning of my doctoral degree. Since then, the world has changed, and as my digital field site shifted with it, so too did the direction my research. The changes prompted new methodological and ethical concerns that require careful parsing.

Educational anthropologist Heewon Chang discusses auto-ethnography in a handbook of methodologies for the social sciences, outlining three main characteristics:

- Autoethnography uses the researcher’s personal experiences as primary data.
- Autoethnography intends to expand the understanding of social phenomena.
- Autoethnographic processes can vary and result in different writing products. (Chang 2013, 108)

Chang states that the primary data for auto-ethnographies is personal experience, described in material terms: “memories, memorabilia, documents about themselves, official records, photos, interviews with others, and on-going self-reflective and self-observational memos” (108). While this approach is useful, it would expose the vulnerabilities of my research group, and thus requires adjusting for digital ethnographies in the modern age. First, confidentiality must be strictly enforced, as being outed as a Satanist could have negative, even disastrous consequences. Any name I use in this thesis is from unambiguously public content or anonymous. Second, in-person activities with co-religionists are deliberately excluded from my data. This was done for two reasons: in-person meetings are extremely rare (in fifteen years, I have met up with other CoS Satanists no more than half a dozen times); it permits other CoS members not to feel unduly examined during exceptional celebratory interactions. As my participation with Church of Satan members is over 99% online, that is the focus of this digital ethnography. Third, despite weaving in and out of Satanic virtual spaces for many years, I cannot directly quote that content. Even vague references to patterns in the confidential data have to be considered and circumspect. This is my responsibility to both my ethics in research protocols *and* to the Church of Satan.

During the years I investigated the CoS, the internet—the medium by which I access and analyze my data—underwent a shift, from Web 1 to Web 2. Web 1 is characterized by people

logging on and navigating to specific websites to read or participate in forums delineated by various interests. Web 2 is social media and user-generated content. As I understand it, we are now on the cusp of Web 3. Web 3 is dubbed “meta,” which includes virtual reality and crypto currencies, though this shift is in its initial stages.

What’s of relevance to this thesis is that I witnessed the shift between Web 1 and Web 2 in my digital “field site” without realising it at first, nor recognizing that the change in the medium itself meant that there were new, unaccounted for conditions. The cultural artifact in which I isolate my data (the internet itself) underwent a drastic change. The CoS reflected and adjusted to these changes.

My exposure to the Church of Satan began in 2006 on Bulletin Board Systems (BBS) dedicated to Satanism. Most of the forums I frequented were run and moderated by members of the CoS, though officially they are not operated by CoS administration. In those virtual spaces, disagreements adhered to strict protocols. The rules of engagement mandated respectful discourse, no personal attacks, with violators facing temporary or permanent bans. Political discussions were barred in the public areas. When political discussions happened in the members-only forums, they could get heated. Despite the impassioned responses, participants obeyed the rules of conduct or faced temporary or permanent sanctions. As social media platforms became more popular, BBSs slowly became defunct. CoS members migrated to personal social media accounts, and linked to each other across webs of mutual interest, sometimes creating private groups. Around the same time, I began my doctoral degree with this digital ethnography as my research project. I also drifted away from dedicated online Satanic forums to my personal social media profiles, permitting other CoS members to connect with me

on those platforms as an exercise in mutual trust and transparency. Initially, the contact with CoS members was primarily on Facebook.¹

This shift caused changes to my approach and challenged my ethical responsibilities as an ethnographer. First, it meant that my field site was no longer contained to moderated virtual spaces frequented solely by registered CoS members, but instead an expanded digital landscape, diffused across the internet. CoS members increasingly created accessible online content in the form of YouTube channels, e-zines, podcasts, seminars, internet radio, blogs, newsletters, as well as music, art, films, books, and accounts selling various goods and services. The publicly available Satanic content grew my data pool. As Chang notes, auto-ethnographers have the unique opportunity to “locate relevant data” (Chang 2013, 108). My affiliation allowed easier access on *where* to look for CoS members’ online content. This data is available to anyone that seeks it, but I had privileged admittance to virtual hubs where CoS members regularly advertise their various public projects. My approach thus had to reconfigure how to extend an analysis of data beyond the controlled virtual spaces and adjust for a web of (Satanic) connections across the internet.

The second change was far more challenging. Chang emphasizes that the auto-ethnographer is “uniquely qualified” to make distinctive contributions to humans’ lived experiences precisely because of the tension embedded in an auto-ethnographic work (108). Allowing CoS members virtually unfettered access to my life via social media created one such (unexpected) tension: beginning slowly but with increasing frequency I was subject to aggressive trolling posts by a handful of CoS Satanists. I cannot provide concrete examples or direct quotes as it would violate both the ethical protocols of ethnographic research as well as internal CoS

¹ I deleted my Facebook profile as I was preparing for my thesis defence to protect the identities of CoS members that I was connected to on that platform.

rules of confidentiality. The behaviour, however, followed a consistent and recognizable pattern: when I posted my opinions on topical events, which tend to fall under feminist, leftist, and anti-racist rhetoric as informed by my progressive personal politics, I was subject to antagonistic derailing tactics on these issues. The trolling involved commonly used methods via deliberately provocative logical fallacies such as: sealioning², whataboutism³; straw man fallacies⁴; poisoning the well⁵; tribalism⁶; hatemongering⁷; debate obsessiveness⁸; tone trolling⁹; appeals to nature¹⁰; and sockpuppetry.¹¹ I experienced all of the above (and more) multiple times from a small subset of CoS members. It is important to note that this trolling did not include illegal acts such as doxing, death threats, or other threats of violence. Had that been the case, I would have reported the behaviour to both my department and law enforcement, as well as to CoS authorities. This likely would have resulted in their expulsion from the Church; the CoS has a zero-tolerance policy for illegal activity. Though the overwhelming majority of my interactions with other CoS members ranges from benign disinterest to long-standing friendships, the hostile minority was loud, intrusive, and combative. They disrupted my innocuous connections to other members by interfering in my virtual activity. Nearly overnight, my field site became contentious. I now had to consider how to navigate my digital experience with Church of Satan membership in

² Asking relentless questions about the topic of discussion and demanding more and more explanations even after sufficient answers have been provided.

³ Responding with a topic unrelated to the original point in order to reorient the discussion towards a different topic.

⁴ Presenting something in a deliberately distorted way to force someone to respond to the knowingly false claim. One example is “Feminism is cancer!” which is a phrase coined by notorious alt-right troll Milos Yiannopolous.

⁵ Deliberately associating negative emotions with the argument to distract from evaluating the evidence.

⁶ Making derogatory remarks about targeted groups.

⁷ Racist and misogynist remarks.

⁸ Relentlessly attempting to drag someone into debates under the guise of “free speech” or “thought experiments.”

⁹ Disingenuously feigning offense and demanding an apology after being critiqued for racist dog whistles.

¹⁰ Using “natural” as a signifier for something “good” or incontrovertible. Appeals to “natural law” as a rationalization for racism and sexism, for example.

¹¹ Creating multiple accounts to troll a person via more than one avenue.

unmoderated online spaces that both extended externally across the web and internally into my personal virtual spheres of interest.

In one of the few meetings that I had with Dr. Boisvert before his passing, I expressed misgivings on how to analyze my data when a handful of CoS Satanists actively made my online experience intentionally hostile. I had to consider the underlying motivation of such antagonizing rhetoric on my personal pages. What purpose did it serve? How did it function? The patterns of trolling behaviour I was subject to followed play-play patterns of behaviour that were increasingly common across all social media and emerging from alt-right/far-right/white-nationalist/fascist/incel/manosphere corners of the internet. It took the form of what I belatedly recognized as “metapolitical warfare,” which is an aggressive mobilization of online activity with the intent to drag discourse towards the right in what’s called an “ideological drift” (Balkin 1993, 873). The nature and pattern of this online activity is not unique to the CoS. A recent study on trolling looked at Russian trolls exacerbating racial tensions around #BlackLivesMatter, academics being harassed by right-wing trolls on social media, and white supremacist organizers of Charlottesville linked to virtual trolling communities (Ortiz 2020) and concluded that trolling is a collective form of harassment that “despite being undertaken by individuals, the strategies used by trolls are shared beyond that individual person or one interaction” (4). Individual trolls mobilize as a hive of harassment targeting “women, feminists, people of color, and disabled persons” with malicious intent (4). Though trolling behaviour was present since the early days of the internet, that it “made a shift from the margins of the web to the forefront of academic and media discourses about free speech, harassment, racism, and politics” (1). It is important to emphasize that this behaviour represents only a small percentage of CoS members’ content, and because of these reasons I considered omitting all references to it. My concern was that any

mention of conflicts that directly involved me would generate undue attention and be disproportionately amplified as representative of the CoS as a whole.

Dr. Boisvert's advice differed. He, first, insisted that I block, mute, unfollow, and otherwise virtually silence members who behaved aggressively. He argued that my field site still required boundaries around my personal life. My social media profiles were connected to webs of my life entirely divorced from Satanism: family, my personal friends, academic colleagues, co-workers, various artistic collaborators, and even children I babysat decades ago (who are now well into adulthood). None are associated with Satanism (except the scholars who publish in my field), yet some expressed offense and shock at comments and challenges they witnessed on my personal accounts, especially on Facebook. The separate spheres of my life were no longer contained to their respective virtual corners of the internet. As someone who has been online since the mid-1990s and is extremely comfortable navigating virtual spaces—especially ones focused on marginal identities¹²—I did not account for the shift in new communication platforms that compel users into merging previously disconnected social or professional circles. Nor did I account for the global wave of trolling partly responsible for the rise of populist politics. Considering that I never faced such behaviour in the moderated message boards, I was unprepared. The older BBS format explicitly forbade “shit disturbers,” and this was strictly enforced. In an anecdotal comparison of my experiences engaging in other BBS' in the mid-2000s, CoS-focused forums were far above the standard in mitigating trolling behaviour as moderators were active in preventing abuses of the platform. As an individualistic religion, when many CoS members migrated to social media, the protocols for engagement did not automatically transfer with it; our personal profiles are not under the purview of the CoS. As I

¹² In the late 1990s and early 2000s, it was fun finding BBS forums dedicated to a multitude of quirky interests, hobbies, and games. In the early days, introverts flourished in niche corners of the internet.

wrote this dissertation, considerations regarding personal conflicts in unmoderated virtual spaces developed in CoS rhetoric partly as a response to harassing and trolling rhetoric. Public evidence of this discourse is included in this thesis.

I did eventually exchange emails about the behaviour with CoS authorities and expressed my concern. In retrospect, I should have done this far earlier. I was hesitant to involve CoS authorities unless there was a direct or explicit threat. Behind-the-scenes discussions are entirely outside of my access as I have no authority or input on internal church proceedings. Soon after these correspondences, however, the contentious behaviours lessened, then (mostly) ceased.¹³ If I can offer any methodological advice to other digital ethnographers, it is to protect your virtual boundaries. When the metapolitical trolling and derailing tactics first appeared and then quickly amplified in my online spaces, I permitted it as I considered the interactions as informing this thesis: all fieldwork is rife with issues that require addressing, and this was no different. It was a misguided attempt to remain neutral. If this tension-filled space was my field site, then I had to allow it to unfold without too much intervention. The sudden consistent bombardment by co-religionist trolls took me by surprise; I considered resigning because of it. Despite years in moderated CoS virtual spaces where I navigated without issues, I was suddenly made to feel distinctly unwelcome. This coincided with my increasing focus on academic inquiries in the intersections of gender and race in my scholarship, including my scholarship on modern religious Satanism. As I had already collected all my data and had more than enough public content to write an ethnography, drawing lines around my virtual spaces did not impede my research. Following Dr. Boisvert's advice and the CoS authorities' intervention permitted the virtual peace and conceptual space to proceed with this dissertation.

¹³ The odd outlier still permeates my virtual boundaries, though I have confidence in CoS authorities to stem this behaviour when I report it.

Dr. Boisvert's second suggestion was to prompt me to consider shifting focus onto the tension itself: a methodology of discomfort. Far from sidestepping or downplaying this hostile behaviour, allow it to inform pressing questions that are immediately relevant to the Church of Satan and Satanism as a lived religion. Clearly, my presence represented a threat of some sort to a small number of Satanists. Similar rhetoric was not isolated to my personal pages; it existed across public virtual Satanic content as well. Satanism is a religion based on deliberately provoking the status quo with its antinomian symbol, but it also has its own internal tensions. My job as a scholar is to examine these tensions. I could not in good conscience bypass primary concerns and issues within the Church of Satan today as it plays out in public virtual spaces. I instead decided to ask questions of my data informed by conversations with Dr. Boisvert: What is the tension doing? What is it challenging? Why it is philosophically dangerous? And it is with these in mind that I began to put together the thesis before you.

Part of that process involved viewing the harassment I experienced as successful in its goal; that of dominating digital Satanic discourse and shifting this dissertation's focus to specifically include how those talking points inform the perceived boundaries of Satanism and its individualized varieties. I realized that the dissertation I had originally planned did not account for one thing: my primary data pool is digital and therefore deeply immersed in the effects of internet rhetoric on the global cultural shifts of our current era. In literal terms, most of my interaction with co-religionists is online. That data exists as Bulletin Board Systems' typed scripts, handles, and avatars that over the years migrated to Facebook comments, Twitter tweets, YouTube channels, podcast episodes, and Instagram posts. I have absorbed much of it. My direct experience in the Church of Satan, then, begins with reading digital textual exchanges between members, now enhanced by viewing images and video and listening to audio online. I have

rarely experienced my “religion” IRL (In Real Life). If we consider the internet as a cultural artifact, then as CoS members engage online, they are living contributors to Satanic virtual rhetoric via digital interactions with their co-religionists. The digital discourses from CoS members gleaned from the articles they post, the memes they circulate, the jokes they make, the stories they celebrate and the stories that produce outrage, offer a variety of political opinions emerging across multiple platforms (the far right, centrists, the far left, the politically apathetic, the impassioned activists, and the silent). In that vast sea of (unofficial) digital data, the evidence suggests that my leftist/progressive politics are a non-issue. The individuality of CoS members’ personal politics reflects the official positions of the CoS administration.

As of October 2021, a whistleblower former employee of Facebook leaked documents to confirm what has long-since been suspected: the company’s algorithms encouraged hateful radicalization as it increases profits (CBC News 2021, “Whistleblower Testifies”). Over the past decade, I watched in real time as my connections to CoS members polarized; they slowly began to mutually block and unfriend each other, usually over another’s political opinions, drawing lines around what they each deemed unacceptable in their virtual spaces. This type of cleavage is common in the current culture wars: it happens in families, institutions, workplaces, and friend groups. The CoS mirrored this social tension in its internal virtual dynamics. The important point for this dissertation, is that no CoS member directly links their personal politics to Satanism proper as the singular orthodox interpretation without backlash, even if they individually incorporate their concept of the “Satanic” to either polarized position. Within the public Satanic discourse, it is not uncommon for any given CoS member to claim that police brutality is a prejudiced application of law and order and seek solutions from reform to abolition, just as much as another to insist that current policing policies are righteous acts stemming criminal activity.

They exist in a fraught tension.

Another issue for auto-ethnographers is how to balance our contribution to knowledge in academia with its effect *on the religion itself*. As recently as June 2021, as I am finishing the final edits of this thesis, I received a newly published canon text: *We Are Satanists: The History and Future of the Church of Satan*, written by Blanche Barton. An old blog post of mine is quoted where I discuss studying Satanism in academia. That section also includes several quotes from other scholars in my field, solicited via an emailed questionnaire by Barton herself (a member of my thesis committee, Dr. Jesper Petersen, is among them). Though I stand by what I wrote for the most part, it highlights that those of us working on marginal modern groups and religions negotiate unique tensions; our scholarship can and does have an impact on practitioners' lives. They are invested in the claims that we scholars make, even as they (unsurprisingly) deride them as well. Given this consideration, I chose to mention the co-religionist trolling to, first, position myself in this research as accurately and truthfully as possible, and second, to highlight that my objections contributed to shifts in internal CoS policies. Though my contribution to these shifts is minor, I am not without influence. Within academia, writing and publishing about the Church of Satan has benefitted me personally: my career as a scholar is built upon my publications, conference presentations, and unique contributions to my sub-field, on top of winning multiple prestigious research grants and funding awards available to me as a doctoral researcher. Auto-ethnographers operate in creative, delicate, and frustrating inherent tensions. It is fitting, then, that for a religion based on deliberate provocations, that the thesis you are about to read centralizes those provocations.

CoS members' primary concerns on my research surround whether I would posit an interpretation of Satanism that skewed as either politically left or politically right. I do neither,

deliberately. Methodologically speaking in this study, every CoS member's expression of Satanism is, by default, "Satanic." In keeping with academic approaches in religious studies, this thesis makes no claim to any "true" version CoS Satanism. If participants of any particular group are doing it, then that falls under our purview, whether it corresponds with "official" doctrines or not.

Given the above, in this dissertation, I *intentionally* take no position on Satanism proper. I am not invested in advancing a particular interpretation of Satanism. My goal is now and has always been critical scholarship. I instead apply an analytical lens to the broader social and political context of Satanism's ideas and concepts as understood and enacted by its members.

In this thesis, I highlight the filtering process of the negotiated boundaries of Satanism itself. Within the data, I ask: what ideas are canon, and what ideas are contested? What ideas are neutral, and what ideas are open to disruption? CoS members producing content are (whether purposefully or not) absorbed in a continual procedure of demarcation of the borders of Satanism. When Satanists construct a concept of the individualized self within their various projects and discourses, they are by implication extending *a* version of Satanism out into virtual space.

The data that I consumed as very much an "online person" even from the early days of the internet is a textual digital archive that I have witnessed and experienced. This dissertation is written as a narrative that synthesizes the absorption of a specific subset of that data as a digitally lived experience into broader social, religious, and political discourses. I have analyzed these discourses according to the theoretical and methodological tools accessible to me as an academic and by the exacting standards of my training. I stress that there are CoS members that do not interact much online, and entire areas of unexamined Satanic content offline. That content is

beyond the scope of this thesis. The narrative in the dissertation you are about to read is curated from unambiguously public content produced by CoS members and the results of my anonymous questionnaire, but it is informed by patterns mirrored in casual online Satanic rhetoric.

Political issues among CoS members have wildly divergent accord with canonical ideas. Gun rights, abortion, voting rights, policing, protesting, and multiple other political issues relevant to the modern world have drastically different interpretations. The escalating incidents of the American social and political landscape in the past several years permit a unique opportunity to highlight CoS members' responses to topical events in the news surrounding these issues. Presenting the range of these responses with equal weight was a calculated choice on my part. Barring a large study where verified members self-identified their political inclinations, including whether or not they voted, organized, protested, ran for office, or engaged in metapolitical trolling, I do not have quantifiable data on political leanings. Neither do I attempt to calculate the distribution of left-leaning or right-leaning Satanists. I instead chose to demonstrate that political polarities sit in tension with one another. This tension appears to be foundational from the beginning. Much of it is understood as inherent to the concept of oppositional antinomianism, however perceived.

By the time I submitted this thesis, I decided to resign from the Church of Satan. This allows the CoS to react to this dissertation on their own platforms without concern for my membership; I stress that their responses should be respected. The pattern for my past scholarship has been mixed, and I anticipate similar varied reactions. Resigning also permits me the freedom to pursue other intellectual interests and professional goals without impediments.

Throughout I have tried to remain cognizant that as an ethnographer I am responsible for a portrayal of real people, with real lives. I take this responsibility seriously. They are negotiating

the world as individuals connected via a loose concept: Satan the opposer, the challenger of the status quo, the rebel hero. This concept is surrounded by clusters of constantly shifting ideas informed by the historical and popular narratives around Satan. “Satanist” is an ephemeral identity. By that I do not mean that CoS members take it lightly—few things are more important than the high stakes game of constructions of the self—but deferment to authorities (even LaVey’s or CoS authorities) is tempered with confidence in their own distinct experience and judgment. As such, readers of this dissertation should remain aware that imposing a single uniform definition to Satanists does not do justice to the persons engaging with this identity; they are not now, nor have they ever been a monolith.

Chapter One: Introduction

Modern Religious Satanism and the Culture Wars

1.1. Purpose/Subject of Thesis

Sociologist, professor, cultural critic, and public scholar, Dr. Tressie McMillan Cottom writes:

The “culture wars” is a decades-long fight for control of The Discourse. It traffics in discursive violence—words and ideas are the weapons. The stakes are never explicit but that does not mean they are not high. The war for controlling The Discourse is a war over controlling which ideas attract money and social capital. (March 25, 2021)

Cottom expresses the broader social context within which this dissertation emerges and responds. This dissertation is, ultimately, about the culture wars. It is more specifically about how the competing interests of various factions of the culture wars manifest within the membership of a marginal American new religious movement, the Church of Satan. The Church of Satan’s administrative body claims that it is apolitical—that is, as Satanism is a highly individualistic self-religion, the governing agents remain neutral on current positions in social and political discourse, allowing its members to engage however the individual sees fit. This study, however, argues that the popular rhetoric present in public content produced by members of the Church of Satan reflect an ongoing tension to control *Satanic* discourse, and that this tension is a deliberately embedded foundational aspect of the internal structure of the Church of Satan. The tension is present from the beginning, but drastic recent political events caused its amplification, as CoS members mutually draw boundaries around each other in their respective online spaces. It is a tension that is now ubiquitous, as CoS members move in polarized directions in various social, personal, and professional circles. The culture wars invades all.

This dissertation is a qualitative digital ethnography about members of the Church of Satan and how they negotiate the boundaries of a modern religious Satanism via popular discourse in public virtual landscapes combined with the responses to an anonymous questionnaire that I circulated solely to CoS members. This thesis tracks a conversation happening across multiple platforms. Topics such as politics, race and racism, gun rights, police brutality, white supremacy, gender-based violence, free speech, abortion and reproductive justice, and LGBTQ issues that are ever-present across social media and online public discourse are discussed among Satanists in the Church of Satan, as they react to topical issues. CoS Satanists, perhaps un/surprisingly, rarely engage in direct analyses of Satanic ideas and texts. There are no *The Satanic Bible* study groups or deep exegeses of texts that argue beyond a superficial restatement of LaVey's ideas. Much of the hardcopy publications orbit around already established canon, and rarely attempt to extend, interpret, or weave them into other philosophical areas. Embedded in the seemingly disparate topics of conversation that exist across multiple digital platforms, however, is a subtext about what is or is not "Satanic." Interpretations of the social and political discourses in online forums are expressed via idiosyncratic Satanic identities, and often contrast with one another. This dissertation emphasizes that, while much of the examined data is viewable to a public audience, the rhetorical tension reflects an *internal discourse*. Satanists extend their individualized understanding of topical events outwards, directly or indirectly countering each other, in a slow, ongoing filtration process of what it means to live Satanically in the world. They are not debating Satanism *per se* in open forums. They are, however, presenting their opinions as Satanists, with the implication that it is Satanic. This implication that one's personal politics is *more* Satanic than another's is a consistent tension, though it is against informal CoS codes of contact to outright name someone else *un-Satanic* as

the concept of individual interpretation overrides someone else’s judgement. Satanic public discourse openly names other external Satanic groups and religions as pseudo-Satanist. Internally the tension revolves *around* those implications by challenging the politics of others in various public ways. This dissertation does not resolve this tension. It instead positions it as an intentional keystone that permits dissenting opinions across a wide variety of social and political perspectives.

The Church of Satan emerges from 1960s American countercultural movements within the social and political turbulence of second-wave feminism and the sexual revolution, the civil rights movement, anti-war protests, hippies, and the so-called witch revival. The founder of the Church of Satan, Anton Szandor LaVey (born Howard Stanton Levy 1928-1997), developed a codified religion embracing the infamous symbol of rebellion—Satan—and positioning his new religion of Satanism in calculated tension with both the broad Protestant ethos of American society and its radical counterculture.

Canon literature¹⁴ from the Church of Satan claims that there is little difference between theory and practice; that is, that Satanists “naturally” identify with the ideas in its prime text, *The Satanic Bible* (LaVey 2005; original printing in 1969) and are predisposed to respond positively to LaVey’s Satanism as a distinct religion. The often-repeated phrase, “Satanists are born, not made,” references the internally understood idea of an immediate resonance with the Satanic worldview upon first exposure to Satanism, usually via *The Satanic Bible*. This dissertation determines that, as an atheistic self-religion that centralizes the individual, religious Satanism

¹⁴ “Canonical” works and their original printing dates are: *The Satanic Bible* (1969); *The Satanic Witch* (originally *The Compleat Witch*; 1970); *The Satanic Rituals* (1972); *The Devil’s Notebook* (1992); and *Satan Speaks!* (1998) by Anton Szandor LaVey; *The Secret Life of a Satanist* (1990) and *The Church of Satan* (1990) by Blanche Barton; *The Satanic Scriptures* (2007) by Peter H. Gilmore; and recently *The Satanic Warlock* (2016) by Robert Johnson was advertised as canon in its promotional materials.

within the Church of Satan has wildly varied interpretations by its members and that there is no single, coherent application of how Satanists in the CoS translate their chosen religion in their daily lives. The differences in interpretation of Satanism create an internal tension that functions as a deliberate underpinning within the Church of Satan's social structure and a process of filtration. On the one hand, interpretative variance allows for creativity and individuality to express a Satanic concept of self and extend it outward into virtual spaces. On the other, the conflicts that this variance generates between Satanists continually hone the very definition of Satanism by tracking the micro-shifts in policy, structure, and inter-relational dynamics in reaction to tensions expressed with topical issues. Superficially, the Church of Satan has remained relatively unchanged in the fifty-plus years of its existence, compared to other alternative and emergent religions, which tend to have more drastic shifts as they adjust to new conditions. Upon closer inspection, however, Satanism as defined by LaVey and maintained by the Church of Satan administration is engaged in a slow, ongoing, and ever-shifting process of filtration on ideas considered "Satanic." This dissertation highlights those micro-shifts by investigating the internet rhetoric of Church of Satan members.

1.2. Theory

This section summarizes the theories and approaches used in this dissertation, divided into loose overlapping categories. This section ends with a discussion on my particular theoretical approach and how it informs not only my investigation into the membership of the Church of Satan but also the ways in which the boundaries of Satanism are negotiated online via discourses in popular culture.

1.2.1. Religions of the Self, the New Age, and the Cultic Milieu

Sociologist and anthropologist Paul Heelas posits that one of the features of post-modernity is religions of the self or self-religions or self-spirituality. Heelas states that self-spirituality has three main components: it begins with the premise that human life is not fulfilling; it envisions what satisfaction would look like; and it suggests the means to achieve it (1996, 18). Homogenous society, he argues, has conditioned us to strive for material goods and maintain the status-quo, but that pursuit leaves us anxiety-ridden and conflicted (18-19). Breaking free from this social conditioning is offered via various participations in activities such as “workshops, retreats, seminars, lectures, rituals, or healing sessions,” along with techniques known as processes, psychotechnology, magic, or meditation, which have the noble goals of shedding one’s socially enforced concept of self in order to rebuild anew with agency as your own authority (18-21). Self-religions claim that there is, within each of us, a higher self, divine in nature, and that it is our individual responsibility to search within (with the guide of specialists conveying theory and method) to reach our full potential. Heelas notes that the New Age is a “highly optimistic, celebratory, utopian and spiritual form of humanism,” with significant variations (31-32).

One of those variations is the counterculture. British sociologist Colin Campbell writes about the “cultic milieu” in his prototypical study on new religious movements that developed in 1960s America (and the “Western” world) in his 1972 work, “The Cult, The Cultic Milieu, and Secularization.” Campbell does not mention religious Satanism, but his insights are foundational for studies on new, alternative, and emergent religions. Campbell coins the phrase, “cultic milieu,” to describe the cultural environment that produces fringe groups (2002, 53). The social context of 1960s counterculture movements include all unorthodox ideas, including ufology

(alien) religions, eccentric sciences, holistic medicine, magical practices, mysticism and spiritualism, and popular interests such as tarot and psychic phenomena (53-54). These groups and individuals, he observes, are tolerant of each other, especially in the practice of “seekership,” and so moving from one group or interest to another is common. The collective goal is gaining knowledge in the search of ultimate truth, through varied fragmentary paths, considering themselves as deviations from dominant and normative culture (57). Cultic movements are heavily reliant on circulating materials, such as “magazines, periodicals, books, pamphlets, lectures, demonstrations, and informal meetings through which its beliefs and practices are discussed and disseminated” (55), which is a feature of New Age movements and new religions more generally. Such movements are characterized by a high turnover, instability of structure, and fluidity of ideas. Despite this, the broad cultic environment itself remains relatively stable, and in constant tension with orthodox culture (49). Campbell argues that longstanding conventional religions are fading as scientific institutions grow, which leaves a void among the non-scientific and the newly non-religious. This void is filled with quasi-scientific beliefs, as fusions of new age spirituality and science (83). The cultic milieu, then, is a deliberately deviant response to a dominant mainstream ideology, reflecting ever-shifting social norms. Modern religious Satanism reflects these underlying traits of self-religion in post-modernity.

1.2.2. Popular Culture and/as Religion

The historian of American religion Catherine Albanese claims that popular culture is characterized by product consumed by mass culture (1996). She notes that it is mainly mediated “by, in, and through” print and electronic sources. Due to this highly flexible and individualized consumption of pop culture, the very concept of religion itself has shifted from universalized to

examining religions in their culturally situated locations (Hoover 2006, 71). While in 1996 the use of “electronic sources” did not include new media—that is, social media, networking sites, blogs, and user-generated content sites—the overarching point is that religion is no longer “received, formal, or inductive” (149).

Almost three decades later, scholarship is still grappling with the effects of new media on religion. New media is characterized by efficiency, instantaneous communication, networked interactivity, and mobility (Campbell and Teusner 2015, 154). The general populace *create* the popular with new media, not merely consume it. This user-generated content creation is complicated by the manipulation of algorithms written by coders invested in corporate financial profit, propaganda produced by various social and political parties, and laws that ostensibly designed to protect the consumers/users of new media from online abuse/harassment and nefarious business practices. Pop culture certainly predates the modern era, but the new communication technologies amplify trends. If one of pop culture’s main features is mass-produced content (media, in either print or electronic form), then, as John C. Lyden claims, pop culture is a “circuit of culture,” a process of production. That is, it involves three interrelated questions: What is produced? How is it distributed and marketed? How is it received by a population? (Lyden 2015, 2). Lyden does not offer firm definitions of “religion” or “pop culture” more than any other text, but instead claims that “popular conversation” and “academic discourse” are subject to a continuous (re)negotiation based on new information and deliberation. The process of “continuous (re)negotiation)” of the encounter between religion and pop culture is informed by “traditional” religious tropes, performances, nomenclature, symbols, and expectations. Scholarship is thus interrogating these ever-shifting negotiations.

Generally speaking, scholars who investigate popular culture and/as religion in postmodernity frame it in terms of neoliberalist characteristics. Sociologist Adam Possamai emphasizes that a feature of postmodernism is that there is no longer a distinction between high (civilized) and low (popular) culture and the “boundary between art and everyday life” no longer exists (2005, 18). Do-it-yourself religions characterize postmodern religiosity as being constructed from a bricolage of ideas that are principally informed by pop culture and disseminated primarily via new media. Possamai calls these “hyper-real” religions. Hyper-real religions deliberately mimic religion and overtly claim virtual space as enchanted space. They are part fandom, part religion, using social media sites and other virtual forums and engaging in activities that provide metaphysical meaning in a “simulacrum” of religion (Possamai 2005, 24).

Divisions between “high” and “low” culture are not fixed. The categories are deeply rooted in the power dynamics of social, historical, and religious structures. The binary categories shift over time, are challenged on multiple fronts, and reflect the interests and concerns of the population that produces and consumes popular culture (Bickerdike 2016; Clark and Clanton 2012; Kirby 2013; Klassen 2014; Munford and Waters 2014; Possamai 2005). Pop culture may be a “subculture for the masses,” evasion for anxieties, retreat from real world socio-political problems, or a form of social control, and a tool of global capitalism serving the interests of corporations, but it is also a “medium for the autodetermination of social actors” (Possamai 2007, 20). It is a biography that we live through and with, as “we create our lives and views ourselves through popular culture” (20).

Carol Cusack claims that secularism, individualism, and consumer culture in modern and post-modern Western society affect the shifting varieties of religions today (2010, 1). In the contemporary West, “invented religions” develop via direct inspiration of film and science

fiction. Cusack dispenses with the concept that “true” intent is required to join a deliberately constructed religion inspired by popular culture. “Religion is, to a large extent, about narrative and the success of the story” (2010, 4). Since the 1950s, pop culture influences the “spiritual marketplace” from which people create modern religiosity.

Jeffrey Kripal adds to Possamai in his analysis of science fiction and the paranormal (2011). He claims that pop culture investigates the “hidden connection” between the divine and humans—however conceived—to explore mysticism in a theological sense. He interprets science fiction and superhero comics within a lineage of gnostic and esoteric ideas (emerging from Rosicrucians and Theosophists) as literature that conceals a “deep experiential truth” (2011, 48). Paranormal realities are ultimately “authored” by oneself (that is, any mystical experience is interpreted via oneself and culture) thus so are concepts such as “society,” “religion,” and “self” likewise authored. “In short,” he writes, “the fantastic, handled properly, might help us to realize the true nature of the real, which is fantastic” (2011, 38). Kripal’s arguments reflect scholarly studies in other forms of pop culture, which make similar claims about postmodern consumerist culture’s direct relationship to contemporary religiosity, such as in video games (Wagner 2011, 2015), comics (Camus 2011; Clemens 2017; Clanton Jr. 2017; Kramer and Lewis 2015; Imray 2017), television (Kipp 2015; O’Reilly 2019; Siegler 2015, 2017), fashion (Dutton 2015), food (Zeller 2015), and music (Klassen 2014; Hulsether 2015; Pinn 2017; St John 2015).

Chris Klassen adds that virtual access collapses the divides between ancient, traditional, fictional, and new religions as the combination of fantasy and virtual world creation develops unique post-modern religions (2014). People creating religious fantasy/play in forums online, via chat forums, web sites, and Facebook groups are highly influenced by pop culture. Kirby claims that it represents a “re-enchantment of technology,” except they are not waiting for science to

explain—and thus de-enchant—the science (99). People engaging in these activities are openly embracing technologies as “authentic” spirituality. That is, science, technology, and industry—the media in and of themselves—are becoming enchanted.¹⁵

In this vein, Christopher Partridge notes how the internet has become a place for “occult” groups to meet online in light of the increased alienation from “traditional religion” and the refocus on self-religions (2013, 115). This important shift is enmeshed with a “culture of consumption” that commodifies self-improvement; “well-being” is marketed, branded, and has economic value (114). Postmodern self-religion is a “purchasable good” (114). On this subject, Possamai argues that this religious marketplace is driven by the neoliberal trend of society’s increasing withdrawal of social infrastructures to place the welfare of its citizens under the responsibility of the individual. He writes: “New forms of regulation and governmentality have been created to regulate this individual self: people are expected to resolve, themselves, their possible unhappiness and their sense of alienation and disenchantment” (2018, 28). Hence, religious entrepreneurs create content valued for their ability to sell self-improvement techniques.

Partridge agrees, stating that pop culture is both expressive and formative. He offers the term “popular occulture” (coined by artist, musician, and author Genesis P-Orridge),¹⁶ which expands the sub-categories of Eastern esotericism, paganism, spiritualism, theosophy, and alternative science, the so-called new age, and pop psychology to a broad religious resource reflecting the significance of the self and higher self. “Popular occulture” is a reservoir of ideas, practices, symbols, and beliefs (2004, 5). Its presence contrasts with the failed sociological

¹⁵ The use of terms such as “spirituality” and “enchanted” convey a concept of religion reliant on versions of a mundane/sacred divide, which this thesis does not apply. I am summarizing other scholarship, however, and using the terms of their theory.

¹⁶ LaVey and P-Orridge knew each other in overlapping counterculture circles.

prediction that the modern scientific, rationalist, and industrial culture would fully secularize culture. In discussing popular culture as religious text, Partridge writes:

[W]hatever meanings are intended by the producers of popular culture, there is little doubt that people are, from their own particular perspectives, developing religious and metaphysical ideas by reflecting on themes explored in literature, film, and music. However, I will also argue that we need to take account of more than this, for, at a basic level, popular culture both reflects and informs ideas, values and meanings within society as well as providing a site for the exploration of ideas, values and meanings. Hence, the relationship is a rather complex one, and, moreover, one that is implicated in the occultural milieu. (2004, 121)

Pop culture is thus a reservoir of concepts and cosmologies. Ideas found in music, film, video games, and literature lead to familiarization and then spiritualization (Partridge 2004, 141). In response, a popular rhetoric of “cool” occulture develops around clusters of ideas that are considered outside the mainstream, exploring deviant, taboo, and occult themes (132). Partridge writes: “Cool people immediately identify and feel a sense of belonging with like-minded cool people. And...within these communities of coolness informal hierarchies of coolness form, based on the amount of ‘sub-occultural’ capital individuals accrue” (132).

Many of the scholars above mention LaVey and the Church of Satan as prime examples of their models of a relationship between pop culture and religion. Possamai’s *Handbook of Hyper-Real Religions* lists LaVey’s use of Lovecraftian themes and ideas in ritual scripts, noting LaVey’s emphasis on fantasy as a necessary part of religion (2012, 4). Danielle Kirby mentions Satanism as “ideologically continuous” with Sithism, a notion that is inspired by the Star Wars films to the Sith as the “dark” counterparts to Jedi. They write, “Sithism appears to invert Christian notions of good and relies more on a brutalist reading of social Darwinism for its ethical structures. It is also comfortably occultural and typically eclectic in the array of practices and techniques utilised” (2013, 5-6).

Partridge calls a subgenre of the pop occulture “dark occulture,” and places the Church of Satan into the increasing tendency to align with “the other” via western demonic icons (2005, 208). Citing Michel Foucault, Partridge notes the reliance on the monstrous, or a “Satanic other,” as the marker of *alterity* in religious discourse (208). They self-understand as part of a religious fringe that is, “flourishing beyond the boundaries of institutional religion and respectable culture,” holding a titillating appeal in the western popular imagination (208). LaVey’s capitalization on the adversarial characteristics of a symbolic Satan functions as both a magnet and a filter (Holt and Petersen 2016, 450). “The sensational aspect of Satanism draws the curious and deters the fearful or apathetic,” and is a tension that is carefully negotiated, for as they promote rebellion and an oppositional stance, they categorically denounce criminal activity in Satan’s name (450). Hence LaVey’s Satanism is tendered as an alternative to a culture that demands conformity (Partridge 2005, 208).

Partridge introduces the “dilution thesis” that was formulated by sociologist Marcello Truzzi in the 1970s, which noted the occult revival’s reliance on popular culture to “indicate its superficial faddishness” (Partridge 2004, 122). Truzzi’s example that the playfulness of *masse* engagement with the premodern notion of demons demonstrates a (regretful) trivialization of occultism is countered by Partridge emphasizing that “superficial spirituality” becomes serious religion over time. Sincerity and commitment are present regardless of how concepts have shifted: “Just because their demons are less malevolent, does not mean they are less real. That the occult is being resurrected and re-packaged in the West is not in doubt” (123). Partridge therefore rejects the dilution thesis, offering instead that reimagining “traditional” occultism is a process of identity construction.

Today, popular culture is being interpreted and communicated in alternative and emergent religions (124). Partridge emphasizes that LaVey is a prime example of this (new?) tendency, writing:

The more we eliminate these old fears and myths, the more we develop a naturalistic rationalism, a scientific view of the universe. And certainly we will see that, in some cases, this is true—not least in the case of the founder of modern Satanism, the late Anton LaVey, a skilled manipulator of the media. He explicitly denied the existence of Satan, referring to his belief system as “fun,” and thus, arguably, diluted the old fears and myths about Satanism. (Partridge 2004, 122)

What Partridge and Truzzi both note is that medieval to early modern concepts of Satan and demons are no longer considered as a cosmic threat (broadly speaking), but instead, titillating entertainment and, in the case of Satanism, a (fun) central symbol for the exaltation of the self. But where Truzzi calls this shift a dilution of tradition, Partridge frames the reimagining as a feature of postmodern religion.

Wouter Hanegraaff, an expert on western esotericism, coins the term “rejected knowledge” to encompass a broad spectrum of ideas and concepts that incorporate astrology, Hermeticism, demonology, necromancy, magic, Kabbalah, Gnosticism, spiritualism, tarot, and other currents of discarded philosophy and science (2012, 152). For him, the borders of this reservoir of knowledge are delineated via an ongoing process of filtering out unorthodox ideas to establish an authoritative Christianity. Hanegraaff argues that this process of categorization then transfers to academia’s sanctioned areas of study along similar legitimizing lines (221):

...If the early Church had once needed a concept of “heresy” (gnostic or otherwise) to define its own “orthodox” identity, and Protestantism had needed the concept of a “pagan” opponent (Roman Catholic or otherwise) to define its own identity as true Christianity, the newly developing academic orthodoxies created reified “Others” more suitable to their own needs of self definition: irrational “superstition” based on human ignorance, credulity, prejudice, and sheer stupidity in the case of Enlightenment philosophers, “alchemy” in the case of modern chemists, “astrology” in the case of modern astronomers, “magic” and “occult philosophy” in the case of scientists in general. In this manner the category of “the occult” emerged during this period as a

conceptual waste-basket for “rejected knowledge,” and it has kept functioning as the academy’s radical “Other” to the present day. (2012, 221)

Within modern academic pursuits of this “occult” knowledge, scholars assert that it is an “artificial category applied retrospectively to a range of currents and ideas that were known by other names at least prior to the end of the eighteenth century” (Hanegraaff 2013, 3).

In a similar vein, the academic study of “magic” has longstanding and continued presence in academia, though it also reflects a particular bias, as it is often relegated to an ostensible separation between “elite” and “vernacular” traditions (2013, 5). Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm state that scholarly treatises on magic often ignore contemporary magical religions, reinforcing the idea that magic has an “elite” history: “the elite bias becomes particularly problematic when recognizing that contemporary esotericism is intimately, and increasingly, connected with popular culture and new media” (2013, 5). Although in this dissertation I focus on internet rhetoric and not magic, Asprem and Granholm’s comment is relevant as it indicates a framing of the Church of Satan (and other similar groups) as not esoteric *enough* for certain audiences. The academic study of religion has an embedded divide between concepts of elite and popular, which this thesis intentionally collapses. The following section outlines this approach.

1.2.3. Satanism as Total Environment: A Working Theory

In order to outline the theoretical approach in this dissertation, consider the aforementioned perspectives on religion and/as pop culture, and allow me to offer insights from my peer-reviewed published research, which was written with this dissertation in mind.¹⁷ In

¹⁷ Holt, Cimminnee. 2017. “Playing with Art and Artifice: Religious Satanism as Total Environment.” *La Rosa di Paracelso. Special issue: Diabolus in singulis est: The Devil, Satan and Lucifer*, 2: 95-114.

order to outline this framing, we must first discuss LaVey's concept of ritual magic (i.e. Greater Magic), and then, by extension, his concept of Satanic "Total Environments."

The Church of Satan directly mirrors a connection between pop culture, new media, and an ostensible esoteric tradition, as the previous sections illustrates. LaVey promotes Satan as a timeless, transcultural symbol for the "adversary" (Faxneld 2013, 85). According to LaVey, "expressions of the accuser" predate Christianity but are absorbed, reinterpreted, and disseminated via a Christian lens, coming to form its particular iteration in American popular culture where Satan is simultaneously appreciated as heinous evil, theatrical amusement, and self-empowerment. Adopting a narrative of symbolic oppositional antinomianism among Satanists facilitates their living a (perceived) critical and engaged life. In LaVey's worldview, Satanists are simply choosing their preferred fiction as a reflection of their notion of self. Within LaVey's Satanism, then, notions of authenticity to a supposed "occult" tradition are recognized as artificial, but instrumental.

In the early years of the Church of Satan, LaVey enacted public rituals for promotional display. A journalist at the time writes that LaVey "staged embarrassingly naïve nightclub rituals involving topless witches and a bikini-clad 'inquisitor'" (Godwin 1972, 88). Far from shying away from this framing, LaVey embraced them with an air of seediness in order to defy an elitist, ostentatious idea of magic reserved solely for ostensible aristocrats. The "camp" is deliberate. As LaVey seeks to disrupt binary categories of "good" and "bad" morality, sexuality, and other forms of socially enforced propriety, he also seeks to strip away pretentiousness from magical discourse by embracing its performative artificiality. For LaVey, maintaining any notion of purity in magic or occultism detracts from its potency; pretense renders it ineffective. Satanic

magical performance is considered *more* powerful as it requires the celebrant to be self-aware of the tension between art and artifice, the real and hyper-real.

As my earlier work outlines, recent academic approaches in the study of religion challenge the ostensible separation between “elite” and “popular” as it pertains to its cousins:

...the dubious distinctions between spiritual/material; mind/body; male/female gender; high and low culture; theology/magic; philosophy/ritual; theory/praxis; and any system that reinforces a binary schema. Gender studies, queer theory, feminism, and post-colonial critiques are all academic disciplines that have disputed constructed dichotomies in an attempt to review and re-examine the underlying assumptions of the academy. (Holt 2017, 97)

The notion of “magic” as construed by LaVey, promoted by the Church of Satan, and enacted by its members centralizes this disruption between established categories. Greater Magic scripts contained in *The Satanic Bible* are suggestive, not prescriptive. The ultimate goal of ritual is to have a cathartic experience, wherein one freely expels anxieties in a controlled space, prompted by material objects that have been deliberately chosen to stimulate the sensorial experience in order to heighten the emotions within the individual practitioner. Magic, as it is understood in the Satanic imagination, however, is far beyond a scripted rite. It is an idealized concept underlying the entire worldview, that of extending one’s will outwards to achieve a life reflecting one’s personal goals and desires.

Media and occultists, then and now, often frame LaVey and the CoS as entertainment. LaVey has been called a huckster (Lewis 2001, xiv); performing “crude” sex magic (King 1971, 149); esoterically void (Lewis 2001, 256); with “feeble pretensions of wickedness,” while his church is a “poor terminus” for the esoteric and philosophical history of Satanic discourse (Mathews 2009, 59).

Dismissing the theatricality of LaVey and the CoS as carnivalesque or a promotional display is a delegitimizing tactic, as described by CoS Magister Carl Abrahamsson (2014, 200). Abrahamsson claims that this very theatricality and deliberate engagement with artificiality is a novel contribution to *magical* discourse (9). One of LaVey's innovations with magic is the deliberate emotional manipulation as the primary factor for ritual effectiveness, using "occult" objects as stimuli (Holt 2017, 96). He shifts the focus from outward forces of "darkness" to the actions of one's own body, and the emotionally transformative effect of one's idiosyncratically designed material surroundings.

The current High Priestess of the Church of Satan, Magistra Peggy Nadramia, addresses concerns regarding magic and the tension between perceived "high" and "low" magical practice. On a podcast in 2013, she was asked about whether the Church of Satan's notion of magic was "just going through the motions." Her response was to contest the word "just." Pushing the full intent of your will during ritual to compel a desired result is never "just" by rote. "By doing, you are, in fact, creating" (Campbell 2013; Holt 2016, 104). The "contrived ignorance" of ritual magic and strategic occult framing is thus a highly effective and "excellent prop" (Faxneld 2013, 87; Holt 2017, 99).

As Satanists adapt ritual practices, they are informed by esoteric discourses and pop culture alike. It is not uncommon to include fictional languages such as Klingon (from the *Star Trek* universe) or Lovecraftian-informed proclamations of the Auld Ones in one's rites. CoS Magistra Kim Rice translated *The Satanic Bible* into Latin, and self-published the volumes with glossy hardcovers and gold fonts (Rice 2017). While Latin is not understood as a particularly "occult" language, it has certainly been presented that way in much of popular culture (and has a continued dramatic film presence in exorcism scenes conducted by Catholic priests). Other ritual

adaptations borrow from various cultures, including a Tibetan kapala (a human skull cap); prancing nymphs to stir Pan's lust; First Nations mask dances; and the Goddess Ishtar's vengeance (Holt 2017, 102-103). CoS Magister Nemo outlines a ritual script based on 1920's American gangster era. Instead of using Satan as the primary figure, he substitutes it by invoking, "John Dillinger! Bugsy Moran! Frank Nitti! Bonnie & Clyde! Ma Barker! Babyface Nelson!" and finally, "Al Capone!" (Nemo 2007, 20). Much of the adaptations centralize ever-present themes in pop culture. Authenticity is irrelevant.

Keeping this concept of LaVey's Greater Magic in mind, Abrahamsson notes another of LaVey's contribution to magical discourse, that of Total Environments (TEs). In a 1988 document¹⁸ outlining five points that Satanists can strive for, the one I highlight here is Total Environments, defined as:

The opportunity for anyone to live within a total environment of his or her choice, with a mandatory adherence to the aesthetic and behavioral standards of the same privately owned, operated and controlled environments as an alternative to homogenized and polyglot ones. The freedom to insularize oneself within a social milieu of personal well-being, an opportunity to feel, see, and hear that which is most aesthetically pleasing, without interference from those who would pollute or detract from that option. (LaVey 1988)

TEs are immersive physical spaces, idiosyncratically designed to produce a particular *experience* by stimulating sensorial pleasure. Similar to theme parks, restaurants, and haunted houses, LaVey's examples include: a Wild West frontier town; medieval Castle; LGBTQ communities, such as Boy's Town and a Girl's Town devoted to aesthetics and interests catered to those groups; and a Satan City with grotesque architecture designed to stimulate the uncanny (LaVey 1998, 152-154). "These idealized, constructed places are devised for complete immersion. They

¹⁸ The document's title is "Pentagonal Revisionism," and is discussed further in chapter three of this dissertation.

transport the individual to different eras and parallel spaces—the experiences are wholly separate from everyday life, much like ritual space” (Holt 2017, 105).

LaVey’s concept of TEs emerges from his well-documented misanthropy, especially in the later years when he became disillusioned with the unwanted attention from “Hell’s Angels, Nazis and sex-starved men” who were drawn to the Church of Satan (Harrington 1986). In the basement of his San Francisco Victorian home, infamously painted all black, he built a Den of Inequity, which was a seedy bar equipped with mannequins. One mannequin was dressed as an inebriated woman with her garters exposed. Others were a leering sailor, a prim woman neatly dressed, and a cabbie (Holt 2017, 107).

A journalist interviewing LaVey remarks that the Den of Inequity is a “magical time warp, circa 1944. His basement tavern...is more Satanic than a black mass” (Harrington 1986). For LaVey, being surrounded by inanimate objects is not isolating, but rejuvenating. His cellar saloon freezes time, and immediately transports the patron (Holt 2017, 108). It thus functions as a hub of immortality. LaVey claims that one can inject their ego into blank slates to create highly personalized spaces as a refuge from the world. Notoriously selective in who was granted an audience, his later texts depict a clear disdain for most human companionship, and preferred Total Environments as both immersive extensions of self-indulgent aesthetic preferences and an escape from a corruptive, mundane world. Total Environments are thresholds of protection to the sensitive Satanist. As I summarize in my previous work:

For LaVey, then, a Total Environment straddles the line between reality and hyper reality because of its transformative qualities: it rejuvenates, arouses, and entertains, as it warps cognition, displaces space, and collapses time itself. It should not, however, be dismissed as “artificial.” For LaVey, artificiality itself is a magical tool. A TE is not merely a reproduction, it is a vehicle in which to manifest and expand one’s true desires. They are bastions of inspiration, wherein one can access and revel in magical experiences. LaVey writes: “Only when one can fully accept artificiality as a natural and often superior development of intelligent life can one have and hold a powerful

magical ability” (LaVey 1998, 130). Emotional satisfaction is a creative process in which you “infuse the unreal” with the real. (Holt 2017, 108)

Not all Church of Satan members have the space or resources to create such a fixed or elaborate TE in their own homes. Of those that do, however, a range of aesthetic preferences emerges. CoS Priestess Marilyn Mansfield collects dolls and has over five hundred in her home. These are not simply on display, as she enjoys bathing and dressing them. Some are seated in family areas, as ever-present members of the household (Holt 2017, 110-11). Mansfield notes that holding the dolls reminds her of when her children were young, and the special feeling of bonding with a newborn. Taking care of her dolls thus has therapeutic properties. Reverend Shannon Gausten discusses her artistic pursuits and doing murals. She created a Boba Fett mural in her own bathroom as part of creating a home that reflects her and the other occupants’ interests (Campbell 2017c, Mar. 24). CoS High Priestess Peggy Nadramia has a fully functioning Tiki bar in her old Victorian house, outfitted with kitsch and tchotchkes, evoking nostalgia for a distinctly American interpretation of Indonesian aesthetic in the popular imagination (Holt 2017, 111). She writes about her Tiki interest from childhood on in a recent publication:

...[A]s I passed into adulthood, the siren song of the cocktail lounge returned. In true Satanic fashion, I realized that our enjoyment of something must always be strictly on our own terms and should become whatever we made it. So I rooted around for vintage bartending manuals and found my Grandma’s antique cocktail glasses. (Barton 2021, 523)

She notes that her carefully curated Tiki Lounge is hidden behind a door visitors assume is a closet, and that her Total Environment is her own “Den of Inequity, and I think it’s pretty Satanic” (Barton 2021, 524).

Other aesthetics of popular culture also feature in CoS members preferred aesthetics; when asked about their ideal TE in my questionnaire, CoS members responded with a range of

themes such as “techno/retro-futurism, 70s psychedelic music, cozy libraries, seedy bars, the Addams Family, Art Deco, Viking village, and television shows Star Trek and Mad Men” (111). Others emphasize the transformative qualities of physical activity, noting that they consider “martial arts, hiking, camping, and experiencing the splendour of nature” as immersive TEs as that heighten emotion and push the body to its limits. These function as cathartic magical workings (111).

As ritual activity within the CoS is suggested, but not mandated, the discourse on magic itself extends beyond physical spaces. LaVey defines magic as an “extension of the will,” and within this framing, CoS members consider their entire lives “magical” when pursuing their personal and professional goals. Thus, when “Satanists gather for barbecues more than rituals, and official events are rife with booze, burlesque, food, and music” they are considered living “religiously” Satanic. “Satanists consider sex, ambition, success, vengeance, and revelry as equally ‘Satanic’” (109).

I contend that Total Environments provide a useful aid (among many) to understanding the Satanic worldview. The concept is not a strict theoretical approach, but a loose internal guideline informing how Satanists construct a Satanic identity. If, as the scholars above contend, contemporary religiosity is a bricolage of ideas idiosyncratically constructed from materials available in popular culture, then “religion” itself as a “traditional” category is challenged. This challenge is not new, but it does reflect innovations in the study of religion as the academy itself engages in critical reflexive work on the implications of excluding/including people and communities from the category of “religion” in outmoded ways.

David Chidester discusses how academia has produced a definition of religion that protects imperial interests (2014). As early European anthropologists traveled across the globe

via colonial, mercantile routes, the theory of religion they produced assumed a European superiority as it served the economic interests of trading with Indigenous peoples (41). Chidester notes that this assumption is still embedded in theoretical approaches to the study of religion via its new axis of power in America (288). Though the United States is not an empire, it displays the hallmarks of European imperial controls: it has the “same imperial engines—competition with rival European powers over trading and financial interests, dominion over foreign territories, and a civilizing mission that justified proclaiming liberty while practicing coercion” (288). Britain justified studying world religions as useful for trade and economic benefit. When the United States assumed this academic trajectory, it was with the specific goal to inform the American armed forces of its findings, assuming that the persons being studied could potentially be allies, antagonists, or even under occupation (288). The discipline of the academic study of religion thus developed with an assumption of Christian superiority, with its accompanying biases on race, gender, class, and unsurprisingly positioning white Protestant Christian males as the pinnacle of advanced civilisation (290). The racialized divisions in anthropology and sociology viewed Native Americans and African Americans as primitive against the persistence of “civilized” religion (291). Chidester writes, “For the study of religion in the United States, this division of labor in dealing with internally colonized people was crucial to the birth of an academic field of inquiry that was distinct from but located within the European empire of religion” (290). The legacy of unequal divisions between “high” and “low” culture, “elite” and “popular,” and “primitive” and “civilized” ripples throughout the academic study of religion today. The tendency to frame religious experience as separate from everyday life, as if the “sacred” was located in specific, sanctioned places, with all else being mundane, persists, even if it is continuously challenged in contemporary approaches to the study of religion.

Such a paradigm would not serve well for a study of new religions in general and the Church of Satan in particular:

The satanic worldview is holistic: members of the Church of Satan are expected to accept Satanism (as defined by LaVey) completely or not at all. Picking and choosing which elements to adopt or reject, or altering components to fit an alternative view, is strongly discouraged, and may result in expulsion. This is complicated by equivocal elements of LaVey's texts, as members easily interpret ambiguities according to their own interests, resulting in drastically different applications of Satanism. Even behaviours considered mistakes (the so-called "Satanic Sins"), are viewed as learning opportunities, points to recognize one's own weaknesses and adjust accordingly. The important factor is that, not only is there no cosmic retribution for these "sins," but the Church of Satan itself remains neutral about the individual choices of their members. Satanism provides dogma, but it is up to members to apply it, or not. (Holt 2017, 109-110)

This dissertation focuses precisely on those ambiguities of interpretation in Satanic dogma among members of the Church of Satan. Jesper Aagaard Petersen notes that LaVey's brand of Satanism has "diffuse and fluent borders" within the Satanic milieu (2010, 68). He characterizes LaVey's appeal to science as a legitimizing tactic, wrapped in esoteric language to enhance theatricality, emphasizing that LaVey's "undefiled wisdom" and CoS High Priest Peter H. Gilmore's demand for "bedrock knowledge" are positions "between positivist scientism and outright esotericism" that distinguishes the Church of Satan from its more esoterically inclined Satanic contemporaries (68). My focus is on those "diffuse and fluent borders" as they complicate internally understood "bedrock knowledge." Which ideas are foundational, and which are open to challenge? Applied Satanism can be understood as each individual Satanist's extending their will outwards to create an idiosyncratic Total Environment, including their virtual content and presence on social media. My interest in this dissertation is investigating the fuzzy boundaries of these individualized applications of Satanism in relationship to LaVey and administrative authorities via the popular rhetoric of the culture wars ever-present in new media.

1.3. Methodology

The cardinal question of my investigation is this: What are the virtual boundaries of modern religious Satanism as they are understood and applied by members of the Church of Satan? The Church of Satan as viewed via its membership and their online activity fits within the framework of religion and/as pop culture. Satanists are extending the concept of self into virtual spaces, encountering those of like-mind, and testing a comfort with marginal identities within relatively low-risk virtual boundaries. This dissertation is thus part of the newer trend in the humanities that incorporates digital discourses as primary sources in postmodern religiosity.

Much of my methodology is indebted to the work of Christine Hine, who in several studies outlines methods for digital research in the social sciences (2019, 2015a, 2015b, 2013, 2012, 2000, and in Snee et al. 2016). Hine's work in virtual ethnographies began in the early days of the internet, and as such, demonstrates the shift in ethical and methodological concerns as human activity in virtual space adapts to new technologies and conditions. How this dissertation protects confidentiality, respects the internal dynamics of my virtual subject group, and analyzes the data is informed by Hine's internet research protocols. Details of Hine's work and others are outlined in the section below.

1.3.1. Digital Ethnography or "Netnography"

An anthropologist by training, Robert Kozinets coined the word "netnography." That is: (Inter)Net (Eth)nography as an extension of anthropological research adapted and applied to marketing and commerce. User-generated sites allow consumers to spontaneously join

discussion groups to rate and advise on merchandise, from sneakers to hair products.

Netnographers then monitor this activity without the impact of targeted questionnaires or corporate influence. The data is used by corporations to adjust their products and marketing.

Kozinets emphasizes the ethics involved with such research. His initial work in this area began in the early 2000s. “Netnography: Redefined” updates his methodology, published in 2015.

Kozinets’s methodology is relevant to my dissertation in pivotal ways. He specifically names the internet as a cultural artifact. By this he means that online activity is geared towards specific topics and groups develop their own cultural fluency, and that users communicate with abbreviations, acronyms, and memes that are virtually incomprehensible to outsiders. The netnographer, according to Kozinets, must immerse themselves in these areas so as to be culturally fluent and interpret the qualitative data. This cannot be done with large data collected via algorithms, which would require programming to search for terms that are in a constant state of flux and evolution. By the time algorithms could be programmed, the key words and phrases would change. Internet nomenclature has an exceptionally high rate of turnover. This is why he argues for cultural fluency in virtual spaces. Internet language is unconstrained by regular grammar rules and evolving with niche pop culture narratives, and thus user-generated content is a prime site for netnographers seeking qualitative data.

Christine Hine’s work on digital ethnographies differs from netnography. Hine’s focus is geared towards anthropological academic research, as opposed to data produced for commercial interests. In a 2000 study, Hine argues that researchers embrace the internet as a product of culture and as a cultural artefact. That is, the internet is “a technology that was produced by particular people with contextually situated goals and priorities” (9). These contexts have “interpretive flexibility,” which lends itself to ethnographic inquiry (9). Anthropological research

typically focuses on visiting field sites, immersion in social activities, and a “thick” description (so Clifford Geertz). Hine notes that this embedded standard practice poses particular problems for ethnographers collecting data by “experience and interaction” through a “limited medium like CMC [Computer-Mediated Communication]” (10). To challenge the hesitation with digital research, she emphasizes that:

[W]e recognize that the ethnographer could instead be construed as needing to have similar experiences to those of informants, however those experiences are mediated. Conducting an ethnographic enquiry through the use of CMC opens up the possibility of gaining a reflexive understanding of what it is to be a part of the internet. This provides a symmetry to the ethnography, as the ethnographer learns through using the same media as informants. (2001, 10)

That is, by conducting research mediated via technologies that access the internet, the ethnographer parallels the experience and interaction of their informants. Both tap in and out of virtual field sites with relatively equal ease of access, rendering the ethnographer’s experience not drastically different than those of informants.

In a later work, Hine reflects on her own early experience researching online and offers methodologies for navigating “ethnographic immersion in a space of interaction that did not have a physical grounding” (2017, 21). She dispenses with the idea that an ethnographer needs to judge *a priori* whether or not her virtual field site is “sufficiently rich or meaningful,” and instead notes that immersion, observation, and interaction with any given conditions are the basis of standard ethnographic methods. She states: “If people do it, then that is enough to make it a legitimate focus for ethnography” (22).

This dissertation relies on Hine’s 2015 book, *Ethnography for the internet: Embedded, Embodied and Everyday*, as its primary methodological approach, with contributions from other digital humanities theories and methods where appropriate. Hines notes several key

considerations for ethnographers. An ethnographer embedded in her research engages in subjective analysis. Qualitative studies (such as this dissertation) are unique interpretations, derived from direct, intensive, and challenging experiences. She states: “Ethnography does not make a claim to developing an objective account independent of the specificities of a particular ethnographer’s engagement with the setting” (Hine 2015, 20). Hine emphasizes that a distinction between real world and virtual world ignores how the internet is now deeply embedded in our daily lives, requiring sensitive approaches to unstable virtual conditions. A digital ethnographer is no less a methodological pragmatist than a field researcher adapting to shifting situations on the ground. New technologies, applications, and social media mean that our media-infused lives are now a rich source of ever-shifting ethnographic interest. Hine claims: “An ethnographer, even in the internet age, continues to develop a distinctive form of knowledge by being, doing, learning, and practicing, and by a close association with those who do so in the course of their everyday lives” (Hine 2015, 21). High visible engagement, where ethnographers declare their presence online versus lurking anonymously, is therefore a significant strategy. “Ethnographers need to be active participants in order to build up a robust, well-rounded account, and this will probably involve being visible in some form to participants but not necessarily all the time, in every medium that participants use” (Hine 2015, 59). In order to address potential issues with virtual ethnography, Hine emphasizes that virtual field sites are just as rife with unpredictable challenges as physical ones, and the ethnographer must use a combination of adaptable strategies in order to position herself for critical insight.

As a result, the special considerations for digital research methods in this thesis are multifaceted and require parsing. First, as I have been a registered member of the Church of Satan since 2007, and interacted online since 2006, CoS members and administration are aware

of my doctoral research. I have never hidden my intention to pursue an ethnographic study. I possess cultural fluency in virtual Satanic spaces. This dissertation translates that internal fluency to an academic audience.

I have been especially careful about the confidentiality of CoS members and internal content that is explicitly private (such as discussion forums open solely to CoS members). I characterize my relationship with the High Priest and Priestess as friendly, yet not close. I have met them thrice in the past fifteen years. Their sole stipulation for my research is that I make it clear that it is done outside the auspices of the Church of Satan. I have adhered to this as strictly as possible. Physical meetings with other CoS members are extremely rare. My interaction with other CoS members is overwhelmingly online. I have gone years without (knowingly) seeing other Church of Satan members in person. Once I entered the doctoral program, I had little time for socialization of any kind.

In the beginning, I interacted online using a “handle,” though I did not hide my real name in private messages. CoS authorities were aware of my identity and interest in possible future graduate research. I have operated with a policy of transparency with both the CoS and my department and supervisors. Over several years, I observed the personal social media accounts of other members, but I stress that this data is not used in my dissertation except in abstract terms and patterns. It does, however, provide a broader context from which to analyze the publicly accessible online data. Nearing the writing phase of this dissertation, I deleted my research profiles. This was done to provide the conceptual space to view my data and thesis in objective, abstract terms, without the immediate, daily interactions of CoS members’ social media accounts. I have an open policy to address questions and apprehensions from CoS members and the administration. Few of its members ever approached me regarding the academic work itself,

and those that did expressed more curiosity than concern. I was occasionally asked for clarification on academic jargon in some of my peer-reviewed articles. No CoS member has ever had access to my work prior to publication. Apart from the ethical protocols and permissions necessary to obtain ethics approval from my university, I have operated entirely without input from the Church of Satan. Though a small handful of CoS members have voiced objections (the CoS is notoriously reluctant to participate in academic studies), no person has openly impeded my research or discouraged other CoS members from participating. If there are serious concerns over my study and presence from administrative authorities, I remain unaware.

1.3.2. Intersectionality of Race and Gender in Qualitative Research

A recent edited anthology, *Seeing Race Again: Countering Colorblindness Across the Disciplines* (Crenshaw et al 2019) argues that the pervasive absence of critical race inquiries in academia reinforces white supremacy. Kimberlé Crenshaw frames Obama as a “symbol of hyperracial visibility” that functions to disavow systemic racism (22) and is part of a “long-standing conservative project of associating colorblindness with racial enlightenment and racial justice advocacy with grievance politics” (128). Postracialism, despite its ostensible claim to objectivity, facilitates racist structures to go unchallenged under the guise of racial transcendence. In the same volume, George Lipsitz notes that “colorblindness” thus “survives and thrives not because of what it produces, but because of what it prevents: that is, exposure, analysis, and remediation of the skewing of social opportunities and life chances by race” (Crenshaw et al 2019, 24). In order to address this gap, this dissertation endeavours to introduce an initiatory critical approach to race in my subfield. My method is to analyze my data with the

intersections of race and gender developed in non-traditional ways. Allow me to elaborate in the interest of furthering the discourse with my peers.

Analyzing gender and sexuality in the Church of Satan was a goal from the initial inception of this dissertation. As I was drafting a focused chapter on gender and sexuality, the rise of racial rhetoric online prompted to me to consider that I had not included analyses of race in my thesis. This was a glaring oversight. My immediate sub-fields have small but increasing productions of studies on gender, while race is barely mentioned, and never centralized. Given that the intersection of race and religion is peripheral in my sub-field, I looked to scholars that examine race in American society—the society from which the Church of Satan emerges and to which it responds. Locating appropriate scholarship that is the most helpful was both unexpected and serendipitous; it was in my interactions online with other academics on Twitter that exposed me to scholars on race and gender and class that inform this thesis.

One such connection is Jonita Davis—academic, journalist, and pop culture critic.¹⁹ She writes that Black women’s contributions to culture are overlooked. She emphasizes that, as the world witnessed Minneapolis police officers murder George Floyd, and the “murders of Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery sparked a year of education on race, color, social justice”²⁰ that “the world needs to start hearing and seeing Black people” (2021). This is especially true of Black women, given their role in starting the Black Lives Matter movement, mobilizing Black communities to vote, and consistently standing against the rising tide of fascist political

¹⁹ We initially connected on Twitter via nerdy fangirling over the television show *American Gods* (2017), based on the novel of the same name by Neil Gaiman (2001).

²⁰ Ahmaud Arbery was jogging, and then chased and murdered by three white men; Breonna Taylor was murdered in her home by police in a botched arrest warrant intended for a different address.

ideologies (Davis 2021).²¹ It was Davis' tweets and articles that led me to other scholars interrogating the intersections of culture, gender, and race. I cluster followed the Twitter accounts of several academics linked to her account (and those she amplified by retweeting), whose work is featured in this thesis precisely because they offered expert commentary on the events of 2020 in their tweets. This led me to their peer-reviewed work and its related scholarship, following trails of footnotes and citations to reach the most appropriate and critical expertise. Witnessing casual scholarly peer-conversations on social media provided a previously obfuscated framework on race and society. I mention this trail of connection to highlight two things. First, that as this dissertation is embedded in virtual methodologies and the rhetoric of the internet, that finding relevant scholarship via hashtags such as #academictwitter, #citeblackwomen, and #blackintheivory²² functions in much the same way as professional conferences; we get the synthesized version of expert opinion, which then leads us to targeted deep research on relevant academic sources.²³ Second, that as scholarship on race is relatively absent in my field, I began to address this void with an abstract approach by asking: if members of the Church of Satan are (mostly) white and (mostly) male, and this directly mirrors the demographics of scholars on modern religious Satanism as well as the focus of scholarship itself, how do I inject race into my analysis? Academic twitter provides an answer: Black feminist

²¹ On the lack of Black women representation in Hollywood, Davis writes: "In the same year [as Floyd], there were several government offices filled by Black women seeking to affect change in the local and national levels of government. Remember how a Black woman named Stacy Abrams registered nearly an entire state to vote? Remember that organization founded by Black women, Black Lives Matter, which took the lead in educating and activating the world in the quest to value and protect Black lives? Black women saved the country from four more years of death and nonsense. How do you miss us when it's time to snatch some zombies in a sci-fi flick?" (2021)

²² A small sampling of related hashtags relevant to this thesis are: #ThisIsWhatAProfessorLooksLike, #blackacademic, #AcademicTwitter, #AcademicChatter, #BlackFemSoc, #phdchat, #phdlife, #phdadvice, #WorkingClassAcademic, #firstgen, #firstgenPhD, #BlackAcademicsMatter, #intersectionalSTEM, #blackandstem #wocinstem, #chicanascholar, #representationmatters, #IndigenousAcademia, #indigenoustorytelling, #oralhistory, #indigenousresearch, #WomenInScience, #IndigenousSTEM, and #AcademiaSoWhite.

²³ A select list of social media accounts of influence on this thesis is listed in the bibliography.

academics have produced significant and foundational studies that address the social and political implications of (mostly) white and (mostly) male conceptual spaces, which, in a patriarchal white supremacist society, is *all* public space, including the internet.

The works of Black feminist academics are many. The foundational work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, a critical race legal scholar, developed an underlying theoretical approach I apply in this thesis, intersectionality. Intersectionality is a Black feminist method of inquiry developed in 1989 born to address the failings of “white feminism” which focuses on the issues of educated upper class white women and ignores the multitude of women’s experiences outside this narrow window (Crenshaw 1991, 2015). Another is Assistant Professor at Syracuse University in the Department of Political Science, Jenn M. Jackson, who writes that academia functions as gatekeeper, writing:

As the university grows increasingly neoliberal, orienting itself toward quotas, commodification of “diversity and inclusion,” and mimicking market-driven processes of supply and demand, underserved and minority populations remain vulnerable to institutional agenda setting and policies that rarely serve their gravest interests (Slaughter and Rhoades 2000). Thus, it is the responsibility of those of us within the Academy, with greater privilege and proximity to power, to leverage our positions toward the liberation of all people. (Jackson 2019)

A similar campaign is founded by Christen A. Smith, Associate Professor of Anthropology and African and African Diaspora Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, who promotes the hashtag #citeblackwomen, which is a “campaign to push people to engage in a radical praxis of citation that acknowledges and honors Black women's transnational intellectual production” (Smith n.d.). This collective intellectual production directly informs modern American society as it is embedded with a racial history. This racial history is on full display in current social and political issues discussed in this thesis.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the work of Tressie McMillan Cottom, whose quote opens my introduction. Her twitter feed led me to her extensive work on race, gender, and class. It is a running (expert) commentary on the modern world. I have included her scholarship when relevant to my analysis, but I wish to highlight that her casual social media and public presence prompted multiple critical questions—not only of my data itself but also of my complicity in upholding white supremacist structures via an *absence* of analyses on race in my scholarship. This dissertation is thus one small attempt at applying an intersectional method of critical race and gender theory in my sub-field of modern religious Satanism.

1.3.3. Virtual Landscape of the Satanic Milieu

In his article, “From Book to Bit: Enacting Satanism Online,” Petersen observes that new religious movements use the computer mediated communication (CMC) technologies for two main purposes: as a communication tool and as a “virtual social space” (Markham in Petersen 2011b, 267). The ongoing prevalence of varied self-identified Satanists contributing virtual content and participating in “meaning-making” in online spaces echoes Campbell’s concept of the “cultic milieu,” where alternative and emergent religions from 1960’s American counterculture movements used media such as magazines, periodicals, pamphlets, books, and lectures to disseminate and discuss ideas and practices (Campbell 2002, 123; Petersen 2011, 267). Petersen shifts the focus of this investigation from the decentralized media of the cultic milieu to modern virtual spaces in what he calls “hybrid texts.” These include, “located between text and speech, displaying interpretive practices which on one hand construct a meaningful social order and on the other hand are conditioned by the same order—ideally in the form of a ‘virtual community’” (2011, 269). Here, Petersen is emphasizing that conducting research in

online spaces requires a bridge between traditional methodologies (focusing on texts, etc.) and the emerging methods of “cyber-Anthropology” (269).

Online human activity has become a rich source of data for anthropologists and various social scientists. Hine reports that in the early days of the internet a stigmatization of virtual intimacy permeated social life. Divulging that one had befriended or dated someone they met online was met with concern (Hine 2015, 8-9). Nowadays, with smart phones, internet commerce, and social media, one is rarely *without* virtual action. We pay bills, download songs, buy books, put up profiles on dating apps, book and confirm flights, and stream movies and television (ibid). Claiming that such human activities are somehow less authentic would be considered preposterous. Yet scholars of new religious movements followed a similar arc in their approach to studying religion. Initial observations of virtual religious activity were mixed. As scholars observed the drastic shift the internet had on society in late 1990s and early 2000s, Christopher Helland designated two categories to examine religion and the internet: religion online versus online religion (Petersen 2011b, 268). Petersen notes that Helland’s distinction between “online religion” (religionists interacting online) and “religion online” (authoritative top-down communication) contributes to the pre-existing and ongoing rhetorical discourses of legitimacy and “real or imagine fears of pollution and dilution” (268). What Petersen emphasizes more significantly is the hybridity of online content in virtual Satanic activity, positioned between speech and text (269). Satanists of all sorts generate content and community online across chat forums, message boards, websites, and social media. As contentious as much of the online content can be—with groups and persons regularly discounting each other, engaging in heated disputes, and forming (and reforming) new groups—exceptional debaters and writers participating in interpretative discourses can be tracked for their “different articulations and

degrees of engagement, status, and activity” (294). Petersen claims these discourses are a new genre; they are “hybrid-texts” that provide a “direct access to plays of power and discourse” (295). The online activity of Satanic content continually adopts strategies of “in-group cleansing and out-group marginalization” (294). The cacophony of Satanic internet rhetoric functions as a filtering process.

In this dissertation, I highlight this filtering process itself. CoS members producing content in the virtual spaces they occupy are engaged in an internal, virtual, and ongoing procedure of demarcation of the borders of Satanism. As members adapt their online activity with new media and technological communications (podcasts, internet radio, discussion forums, social media, etc.), they develop a discourse on individual understandings and applications of Satanism, which expand and conflict with one another. This thesis aims to highlight these areas of friction to demonstrate that they are a deliberate internal mechanism which functions to filter out undesirables and allow for micro-shifts in internal policy.

In a study of the digital subculture of Otherkin (people who socially and spiritually identify as not entirely human), Danielle Kirby claims that online engagement is not only a communication forum, but participatory “textually and graphically rich extensions of the self” (2014, 103). Otherkin are an admittedly idiosyncratic subculture, yet they reflect broad cultural shifts in postmodern virtual engagement, elaborating: “The ‘othering’ of individuals who holding to unusual beliefs or practices is slowly giving way to the development of outsider cultures as online communications puts people in contact with other likeminded individuals previously distanced, no matter how obscure their shared beliefs or interests may be” (103-104). This contact with others who share interests and hobbies deemed countercultural, marginal, or occult in nature is exponentially easier with virtual connections. Participants do not make clear

distinctions between online and offline experiences (109). The distinction itself for digital natives is obsolete,²⁴ and in this dissertation I dismiss the notion that virtual connections are any less “authentic” than other forms of communication. The CoS as viewed via its membership and their online activity fits within this framework of extending the concept of self into virtual spaces, encountering those of like-mind, and testing a comfort with marginal identities within relatively low-risk virtual boundaries. This dissertation is thus part of the newer trend in the humanities that incorporates digital discourses as primary sources in postmodern religiosity.

In the late 1990s and into the 2000s, the CoS itself reacted to an implied lesser value of online activity by insisting that its members have “real world accomplishments” and denouncing virtual communication as a distraction from an “authentic” Satanism (Gilmore 2011). This is despite the multiple members who frequented early internet sites such as alt.satanism.net, Usenet forums, and Bulletin Board Systems (Petersen 2011b, 270). In those initial days, multiple parties argued over the definition of Satanism, with a variety of people reflecting occult, magical, Pagan, and Satanic interests on various CMC forums (267). One of the early online studies of Satanists conducted by sociologist James R. Lewis in 2001,²⁵ claimed that Satanists were mostly white middle-class males with some college education, and that their religious activity consisted mostly of virtual connections (2001b, 12).

The internet serves an interesting purpose for new religious movements such as the CoS. First, it became a way for interested parties to access information and virtually interact with other CoS members under low commitment. In the 1960s, the Church had localized grotto systems for members to meet, ritualize, and engage in activities of general interest. They were disbanded in the mid-1970s (partly as a response to the problem of schisms), and LaVey then reorganized the

²⁴ People born from the mid-1990s on that have never lived without the internet and its pervasive influence.

²⁵ A full outline of Lewis’ data is in the Demographic section in chapter two of this thesis.

CoS as a “fellowship of individuals” (Lewis 2001a, 256). This “cabbalistic underground” no longer required local grottos, and the lineage of authority shifted from LaVey-to-group-leader-to-individual members to a central authority disseminating authoritative information (Petersen 2011b, 133). As independent practitioners, CoS members are not required to befriend or interact with other Satanists. Emphasis is placed on achievements in the “real” world, without a community requirement. The CoS was then dubbed a cabal of the “alien elite” (133).

The anti-community stance is reflected in the modern structure of the CoS. The Central Office is a singular P.O. Box in Poughkeepsie, NY. The Church rarely holds official events, with a few notable exceptions such as a ritual performance on June 6, 2006 in Los Angeles (the “6-6-06” event was covered by the media but accessible only to registered members), and private festivities in 2015-2016 to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the CoS (select details of which were released only after the event). I attended most of these anniversary celebrations, details of which I am prohibited from revealing for reasons of confidentiality except to confirm that it was organized by the Church of Satan, attended by hundreds, with tickets available solely to CoS members and their vetted guests.

Much of the observable voluntary interaction between CoS members is now via virtual forums. When the internet first became common in the 1990s, Satanism’s presence online flourished (Petersen 2011b, 270). Petersen notes that multiple individuals and groups of Satanists have always challenged the authority of the Church of Satan and the definition of Satanism, but the internet promulgated a “drastic surge” of alternatives, “transforming the Satanic milieu itself into a more polyvocal entity feedback loop” (270). Email discussion groups on Usenet produced numerous Satanic virtual communities and websites with varied Satanic content weaving in Neo-Paganism, new age, occult, and other esoteric thought (271). Contentious interactions between

Satanists morphed from chat groups to Bulletin Board Systems (BBS), then later migrated to Myspace and Facebook (270). Petersen's article was published in 2011, but a decade later, the virtual landscape remains contentious, now fully prevalent on Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and other social media platforms. The proliferation of online activity has transformed the Satanic milieu and will likely continue to shift as it further adapts to virtual developments and new technologies of communication. The Church's reaction to early online activity follows the same pattern as its pre-internet position: categorically denouncing other Satanists in the "ghetto of online Satanism" (Petersen 2011b, 274-5) and repeating its stance that a Satanic community is a "myth," virtual or otherwise (Gilmore 2011).

The current CoS administration maintains this position, but their online presence develops in tandem with social media innovations; they maintain an official website, Twitter account and Tumblr news feed, while an unofficial Church of Satan Facebook group is moderated by CoS hierarchy, and a private CoS Facebook group is accessible via invitation solely after approval by High Priestess Peggy Nadramia once membership has been verified. Official online public activity is thus highly moderated and controlled content. This does not include, however, CoS members who maintain personal virtual accounts on social media, which may or may not address Satanism. Individual social media accounts of CoS members remain entirely unregulated, as interference on private accounts would go against CoS administrative policy.

How this plays out in the online Satanic milieu is that the Church enacts strong-arm tactics to claim sole authority to defining Satanism/Satanist as the "true" form to outsiders deemed heretical. Much of its social media is devoted to maintaining this line. Its Twitter feed, for example, continually asserts that other usages of "Satanic," "Satanist," and "Satanism" are

incorrect, false, illegitimate, or, as is the case with theistic/esoteric Satanism, devil worshippers. The Church has multiple targets: other religious Satanic groups (example: CoS members regularly engage with The Satanic Temple²⁶ in “flame wars” or “Twitter feuds” over terminology and the definition of Satanism); Twitter users that employ the word “Satanic” as an adjective for things they deem objectionable (naming a person or idea “Satanic”); and political conspiracy theories (addressing politicians as “Satanic” regardless of party affiliation;²⁷ responding to accusations of “pizzagate”²⁸ involvement, etc.). The Church of Satan’s Twitter feed is sometimes tagged²⁹ by other users to which they selectively engage.³⁰ The Church’s social media presence is part of its campaign to combat conspiracy theorists, accusations of criminal activity, and as an effort to prevent violence against its members. The irony, though, is that by scapegoating other self-identified Satanic groups or individuals as “devil worshippers” they contribute to the inflammatory rhetoric surrounding religious Satanism. What the Twitter activity reveals³¹ is that the Church’s continued effort to establish a single authoritative definition of “Satanism” is of paramount importance in the online public arena. Scholars and

²⁶ The Satanic Temple is a separate modern religious Satanism group. It is discussed briefly in chapter three.

²⁷ Hillary Clinton is regularly referenced as “Satanic” in on social media by right-wing propaganda accounts. Her daughter Chelsea Clinton, amusingly, has interacted with the Church of Satan’s Twitter account because of the consistent overlap in being the targets of conspiracy theorists online (see Polus 2018).

²⁸ Pizzagate refers to an instance where a man so convinced by far-right propaganda that Hillary Clinton lead an international Satanic pedophile ring from the (non-existent) basement of a pizza parlour in Washington, D.C., that he crashed the storefront brandishing a firearm, demanding to free children held captive for purposes of heinous acts of Satanic ritual abuse (Zadrozny 2019, *NBC News*).

²⁹ “Tagging” indicates that a second party will receive a notification if directly linking their Twitter (or other social media) account. A related phrase “blowing up” their “mentions” refers to a higher than usual amount of Twitter users directly citing/tagging a Twitter handle in their commentary.

³⁰ A subset of maintaining an ideological line in digital space is to combat fraud accounts claiming to be the CoS and requesting money or engage in other forms of exploitation. The CoS encourages its members to report these accounts via the appropriate channels on the respective digital platforms, which is usually successful in getting the fraudulent accounts deleted.

³¹ Versions of this exist on other social media as well, but the immediacy and brevity of the Twitter platform is the best immediate example, subject to change with the fast-evolving nature of virtual developments.

journalists correctly reject the CoS hegemonic position and frame these efforts as motivated by a desire to be the solitary recognized Satanic religion.

Scholarship on modern religious Satanism has rarely been well received by the CoS. In a recent 2021 canon text, *We Are Satanists: The History and Future of the Church of Satan*, written by Blanche Barton, Peter Gilmore criticizes scholarship examining historical narratives that inform modern religious Satanism without giving proper credit to LaVey as the progenitor. He writes: “They dilute Satanism by including any historical mention of Satan, even though the group they’re studying didn’t affect more than six people” (Barton 2021, 331). Barton includes a discussion on the specific subfield of modern religious Satanism as a growing area of study onto its own. She emailed several academics actively publishing in this area (whose work is contained throughout this thesis) asking questions about the reception of Satanism within academia. Barton repeats the consistent CoS criticism of academics examining the variety of the Satanic milieu on equal terms: “To dignify those who became disenchanted with the Church of Satan (who may have attempted to redefine Satanism to suit their needs) by treating them as equal authorities is irresponsible” (2021, 340).

Despite the (expected) position above, it is interesting to observe the CoS recognizing the work of scholars “who have distinguished themselves by writing fairly about LaVey over the years” (341). Barton sent a questionnaire to these academics inquiring about the reception of their work in academia, many whose studies contribute to this thesis. Jesper Petersen states:

It seems to me I have to cover the same basic ground every time, as the topic of Satan and Satanists, not to mention satanic culture and communities, is entangled in stereotypes and judgements. Specialists in other religions are not immune to this. The many manifestations of what I call the Satan code, from culture to religious communities, works like a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it keeps the subject fresh and interesting; on the other, it conflates black, satanic occulture and committed Satanists to the detriment of the latter as a serious religious expression. Most

academics cannot distinguish discourse on the satanic from authentic satanic discourse. (Barton 2021, 344)

The conflation with Satanism in popular narratives as demonology or criminal activity is mentioned by other scholars quoted in Barton's text. The frustration of describing Satanism 101 in scholarship is also a sentiment I share. In order to bypass this, this thesis is written with my immediate peers in Satanism studies as my primary imagined audience.

In this dissertation, referencing the CoS administration as a whole or an administrator in particular can be understood as official statements from sanctioned representatives. I do not affirm the Church's claim as the sole legitimate form of Satanism. The commonly-used term "LaVeyan Satanism" conveys Church of Satan Satanism or Satanists philosophically aligned with LaVey's codification in *The Satanic Bible* yet reject the structure and trappings of the Church as a religious institution. As it is an externally applied moniker imposed on the CoS that they find redundant and offending, I have chosen not to apply it within this thesis. Readers should note that this small detail does not shift the wider acceptance of "LaVeyan Satanism" as equivalent to CoS Satanism/Satanists within scholarship. I use the terms "CoS Satanist" or "CoS member" to indicate a registered member of the Church of Satan, and "LaVey's Satanism" or "CoS Satanism" for the organizational framing of its religion. These minor adjustments in nomenclature are meant to clearly delineate between the internal Satanism of the Church of Satan and the broader, varied Satanic milieu. Readers should remain cognizant that there are multiple points of contact between internal CoS Satanism and Satanism in the Satanic milieu, despite all parties proclaiming their unique properties.

As I argued in 2011 and maintain in this thesis, the adjectival form of the noun Satan is typically written in the lowercase ("satanic"), while adjectives within other traditions, such as

Buddhism and Christianity, are written in the uppercase (“Buddhist,” “Christian”). Within modern religious Satanism, its internal discourse, and primary source literature, it is standard to capitalize the adjective form “Satanic.” For these reasons, the uppercase Satanic is used in this thesis to respect the tradition itself, and to render the capitalized adjective form equal with other traditions; a Satanic altar is then presented as equivalent to a Christian shrine or Buddhist stupa (Holt 2011, 34).

1.3.4. Defining the Parameters of the Primary Sources

The primary sources for this dissertation are multiple, and defining their delimitations are important for both the study and protecting the identities of informants. The lines between official Satanic doctrine and the personal opinions of LaVey or Gilmore are at times ambiguous. So, too, are the lines between the official statements from the Church administration and an individual member’s interpretation of any particular issue when that member also holds a title in the Priesthood, as they act as spokespersons for the CoS. There are six levels of membership in the Church of Satan:

- registered member (no degree);
- first degree Satanist is an Active Member;
- second degree, Witch or Warlock;
- third degree, Reverend, Priest, or Priestess;
- fourth degree, Magister or Magistra;
- fifth degree, Magus and Maga.³²

Titles are awarded to members demonstrating Satanic principles outside of the Church of Satan’s

³² The High Priest and High Priestess are the official titles of Peter H. Gilmore and Peggy Nadramia. Blanche Barton, the long-time companion of LaVey at the time of his death in 1997 and mother to LaVey’s son, Satan Xerxes LaVey, holds the title of Magistra Templi Rex. She leads mostly a private life.

interests (i.e. “real world accomplishments”). The CoS administration emphasizes that degrees are “bestowed as tokens of appreciation for accomplishments, not a means for the establishment of rank and authority that commands submission” (Church of Satan n.d., “Hierarchy”). Levels three to five are part of the Priesthood of Mendes, which are legally defined positions in the Church and mandated to represent CoS Satanism (Church of Satan n.d., “Hierarchy”). Yet, CoS hierarchy engage in a variety of public projects—just as do non-titled members—expressing a range of opinions on popular social and political issues as they understand them in their application of Satanism.

This thesis does not aim to delineate a *clear* separation between a CoS member and an official spokesperson when expressing opinions online. This uncertain area is perhaps one of the more pressing questions of internal Church debate in terms of its membership. That is, as CoS members are increasingly active online expressing opinions, and Satanism (as they define it) is expressed via the lived experiences of its members, which opinions are truly sanctioned as “Satanism” when those opinions conflict? This dissertation is written with this underlying query in mind, not to answer it definitively, but to demonstrate that the Church of Satan deliberately positions itself in a tension between social acceptance and provocation. I emphasize that whatever line exists between an authoritative source and the average CoS member is an ambiguous, ever-shifting, and deeply contested one.

Two significant factors should be noted. First, while opinions from hierarchy hold more weight to the general public as well as to members of the CoS themselves, the Church mandates that explicit disclaimers be visible on public content clarifying that a member (titled or not) does not represent the CoS in their private projects—their opinions are considered that of an individual *outside* the auspices of the Church of Satan. In keeping with LaVey’s re-organization

of the CoS into a “loose cabal,” the High Priest Gilmore dismisses the idea of collectivity. “There is no ‘Satanic Community,’” he writes in an essay admonishing internet cliques under the banner of Satanism, “nor should one ever exist” (2011). Second, there is no requirement within the CoS to agree with one another, regardless of title. Being CoS hierarchy does not translate to authority *over* another CoS member (Church of Satan n.d. “Hierarchy”). One’s individual opinion is considered sovereign, since autonomy is a primary Satanic ideal (Holt 2011, 45). Internal CoS culture dictates that both jockeying for titles and interacting with (perceived) annoying members are considered foolish (un-Satanic) acts.

High Priestess Nadramia notes that she works mostly behind the scenes, interacting with and observing CoS members. She comments: “My favorite part of being the High Priestess of Satan is watching the development of other Satanists, being on the cutting edge of the new things they produce and discover, of being able to recognize and reward their accomplishments,” teasingly adding, “and of course, the state dinners and fancy cocktails” (Williams 2016). Her role is to administer to the “nuts and bolts of the operation,” compared to Gilmore, whose primary function is to represent Satanism publicly (ibid). Within this thesis, Nadramia’s position is not viewed as lesser to Gilmore’s. Nadramia is the main point of contact for CoS members online. She releases public content, circulates new official policy via various social media, and moderates disagreements at her discretion, should the need arise. Hence she sets the tone for members’ virtual interaction with each other. Many of Nadramia’s communications to CoS members are also circulated via private internet forums, and cannot be quoted here, but her authority and influence is significant. She commands “the inner workings of the Church” (Williams 2016). Affectionately dubbed “Mama Satan,” her impact on CoS members’ virtual experience with each other is internally critical, despite receiving relatively little academic

attention.³³

Nadramia reflects her role as early contributor to Satanism’s virtual discourses as the CoS’ first official Online Representative (Barton 2021, 230). She went online in 1993 and found a four-line call-in system called “Satan’s Playground” owned and operated by a “brainy teenager named ‘Master Baalack’” (231). Baalack is now a long-time member of the CoS known as Magister Frost. Nadramia notes that the twice-disbanded Grotto system could not function well under the parameters set by the CoS administration due to infighting, Grotto leaders becoming “petty tyrants,” or claiming authority in unauthorized ways (529-530). She claims that many members collaborate on multiple projects because of the effectiveness of catering one’s virtual interactions according to mutual interests. The internet and social media minimize the “forced camaraderie” of physical proximity in Grottos (531). “In a way, [these technologies] give us a grotto for every member, which they can tailor to their own needs and whims, with no need to conform to the wishes or preferences of a local leader” (Barton 2021, 531). Recall the section above regarding extending the concept of Total Environments to a Satanist’s entire life, as carefully crafted aesthetics and ideas to reflect the individual. Nadramia easily identifies the virtual application of TEs for Satanists wishing to curate their online experience to a bespoke standard.

In their work on religion and new media, Heidi A. Campbell and Paul Emerson Teusner examine how the “intersection and interaction between religion and new media technologies” is characterized by the themes of identity, community, and authority in religion and social networking (2015, 154-55). They note that in the early days on the internet in the 1990s, traditional and non-traditional religions alike experimented with methods to provide online

³³ Nadramia declined to be interviewed for this thesis.

sources for practitioners. By the early 2000s, individualized platforms and hosting forums shifted the landscape, providing new venues such as blogs, chat forums, visual broadcasting, and adapted gaming technology such as Second-Life interactive simulations, which permits users to “import their religious practice into digital space” (156). Campbell and Teusner describe the discussions surrounding the social and religious impact of new media as “Rhetorics of the Internet,” which are, “situated around the perceived impact technologies have (or technology has) on our perception of identity, community, new understandings of the social world in terms of networks, authority, and the blurring of offline and online worlds” (159). This “internet rhetoric” is integral to this dissertation. I aim to track how CoS members respond to popular social and political events in terms of their identity as Satanists. I focus on how these responses create a tension with (so-called) Satanic communities (both internal and external), how a Satanic network expands beyond the bounds of physical space, how Satanists negotiate Satanic authorities (prominent Satanists and the CoS administration) online; and how the boundaries of Satanism are created and defended as an observable, shifting, filtration process that migrates between offline and online worlds.

CoS members are active with exegeses, expansions, clarifications, and applications of Satanism in social and political issues in the forms of essays, art, music, books, podcasts, videoblogs, and other forms of media in the modern age.³⁴ Although these treatises align with the official Church of Satan statements that its body is politically diverse, this multiplicity is rarely discussed in detail or analyzed in scholarship. CoS members are also engaged in multiple professional or personal projects that are not included in this case study for reasons of confidentiality, except if one divulges the nature of their work publicly online or anonymously in

³⁴ See bibliography for a select compilation of CoS members’ public projects.

my circulated questionnaire. The respondents to the CoS Survey³⁵ are both titled and non-titled. Given this, when data is included from my survey it is presented with equal status to that of CoS hierarchy *when expressed on their own private platforms*. When a CoS member or a spokesperson gives an interview publicly representing Satanism the medium itself indicates sanction by CoS authorities. When CoS members use their legal names on social media, even with public accounts, I have not directly quoted or paraphrased them without explicit permissions.³⁶

I do not quote the individual personal social media accounts of church members, but I do quote their podcasts, blogs, or otherwise unambiguously public content. The exceptions to this are when a CoS member is a known spokesperson, has a highly visible account in which their affiliation is openly known, and I have permission to quote their Facebook post, Twitter tweet, YouTube channel, or Instagram story. The social media accounts of members of lower profile are never quoted—even if their affiliation is widely known—so as not to draw undue attention to their private lives. Supplementing this public data, are the answers to my anonymous questionnaire, circulated to CoS members in 2016/2017. I track popular online discourse in current events, and CoS Satanic rhetoric comments alongside and responds to this cacophony of online content.

Three important points should be underscored regarding the content in the projects of CoS members. First, the list of those that are listed in the bibliography or mentioned in this dissertation is far from comprehensive. It is limited to public projects that involve persons who

³⁵ Details of the survey are examined in chapter two of this thesis, as well as peppered throughout all chapters.

³⁶ In 2015, fewer Church of Satan members use handles on social media like Facebook, as the platform forced users to register with their real names or face suspension of their account (CBC News, Sept. 8, 2018). The Facebook policy has been criticized for putting marginal communities at risk, which could potentially include Satanists. Because of this, I consider a CoS members' personal social media accounts (regardless of platform) as private, even if their content is publicly accessible and/or they name themselves as CoS members in a byline.

were members of the Church of Satan at the time they were produced,³⁷ and are open about their affiliation. Second, co-collaborators on various music, writing, film, or art projects are not Satanists by association. Members have artistic and professional acquaintances entirely divorced from the CoS. Finally, these public projects may or may not directly reference Satanism per se, but they are included because all creative works produced by CoS Satanists are considered applied Satanism.

In the early days of the CoS, as it emerged within American counterculture, it circulated promotional material. In this it mirrored other groups in the cultic milieu that were reliant on, “magazines, periodicals, books, pamphlets, lectures, demonstrations, and informal meetings through which its beliefs and practices are discussed and disseminated” (Campbell 2002, 15). *The Black Flame* (1989-2005) was a hardcopy magazine published by the Church of Satan, with essays published on the CoS website, while *The Cloven Hoof* was a bulletin issued on and off in its formative years until 2013. Other periodicals and newsletters were produced by CoS members, such as *The Raven*, an official internal newsletter for the Grotto ODM.³⁸ Reverend Andre Peter Schlesinger hosted a Manhattan Cable Public Access show titled *Satanic Mass* (Church of Satan n.d., “In Memoriam”), as did High Priestess Peggy Nadramia, *Class of '66*, which consisted of her favourite Scopitones (pers. Comm. April 1, 2020). In the modern digital age of user-generated content, several online talk shows are produced by CoS members. *Satanism Today* on Free Thought Radio was likely the first internet radio show about modern religious Satanism run by now-Magister David M. Harris (2008-2009), while the current Radio Free Satan hosts a variety of audio on music (rockabilly, punk, new wave, metal, opera,

³⁷ Some members have since resigned their membership. This is discussed when their resignation is relevant.

³⁸ From the Latin *Oderint Dum Metuant*: “Let them hate, so long as they fear,” described as “The Satanic Journal of Humor & Good Living” (Smith 1993, 1).

classical), comedy, storytelling, and talk shows of general interest (Gene 2000-2020).

The increase in popularity of podcasting over the past decade has led to CoS members creating Satanic themed internet content.³⁹ Within these expressions of Satanism, current political and social issues are debated and referenced, often in the format of responding to popular news stories. Recurring topics are: the separation of church and state, magic, aesthetics, social justice, marriage, family, comedy, death, gun rights, professionalism, the alt-right/far-right, cannabis legalization, feminism, gender, sexuality, liberalism, food and drink, parenting, music, art, film, fitness, hobbies, home beer brewing, gardening, pet ownership, doll collecting, sewing and knitting, and martial arts, alongside returning guests and interviews with various CoS members and hierarchy.

The public endeavors of CoS members are varied and many. They create music or have their own labels (Bitter Candy, Blood Axis, Highbrow Lowlife, Invisible War, Man In Black, The Quintessentials, The Wedding Funeral, The Electric Hellfire Club, The Jimmy Psycho Experiment, Transyuggoth, Vokillz For Hire, Reptilian Records). They make and sell clothing, films, knitted figures, reborn dolls, jewelry, ritual paraphernalia, pornography, and beheaded historical figures (Abrahamson 2019; Anderson and Anderson 2010-2020; Harris and Nytes 2017-2020; Mansfield 2019; Rabid Crow 2020; Rodriguez n.d.; Satanknits n.d.; Third Side Threads n.d.). Most importantly, members publish and write books, periodicals, and magazines on horror and erotic fiction (Star 2012-2019, 2014; Star and Lipscomb 2010-2013; Star and Straus 2017), occultism (Abrahamson 2009-2017, 2018; Howl 2016), histories of demons

³⁹ A sampling of which are: audio lectures from Magister Nemo (1989-2015); *Raising Hell: The Satanic Perspective on Parenting* (Cruver 2015-2018); *9sense Podcast: A Satanic Perspective on our Modern World* (Campbell 2011-2020) [Note: as of January 22, 2022, all of Campbell's websites are deleted and his YouTube Channel is now private. An archived list of older episodes can still be found on Podchaser: <https://www.podchaser.com/podcasts/9sense-podcast-archive-25856>]; *The Demented I* (Texxx 2015-2018); *The Accusation Party* and *The Vinyl Reacquisition Project* (Paradise 2015-2019; 2019-2020); and *Third Side Network* (Shaw et al. 2016-2019).

(Vernor 2015), gaining wealth (2017), and haunted prisons and asylums (2014, 2017), poetry (Geary III 2020; Jerry 2019a,b); gender and sexuality (Arden 2016-2017, 2015; Johnson 2016; Malabranche 2007a, b; Oxyer et al 2011), in addition to works directly related to Satanism (Black 2019; Hernandez 2017; Nemo 2007; Nocturnum 2016; Paradise 2007; Rice 2017; Rose 2015; Sass 2007). As recently as 2021, Reverend William J. Butler digitized his personal archive of (mostly pulp) magazines covering LaVey and the Church of Satan ranging the span five decades. It is now a publicly available internet archive, at just under a thousand pages. Butler is among a handful of CoS members with an interest in Satanic memorabilia, compiling personal collections over decades. This dissertation cannot possibly examine all this content. For this reason, I have chosen to highlight certain works as they are exemplars of broader patterns that I have gleaned from years researching the CoS.

1.4. Outline of Chapters

1.4.1. Chapter Two

Chapter two contains a literature review on scholarship and sources that inform this thesis. It also includes an expanded demographics section, incorporating new data from my qualitative questionnaire in 2016/2017. Among other demographical data across studies on Satanism, James R. Lewis's three sociological quantitative surveys on Satanists and Satanism are outlined (2001, 2009, 2011). A comparison to these studies demonstrates that the isolated data from my questionnaire on the CoS differs only slightly in terms of the previous statistical data on pan Satanic religions. Despite the continual demarcations and counteraccusations among self-identified Satanists, Satanic religions have far more points of contact than differences.

1.4.2. Chapter Three

In chapter three, I discuss popular discourse on social and political topics as expressed in the Church of Satan. LaVey claims to be apolitical in terms of active involvement, but Satanism as defined by his Church is deeply rooted in ideas of American exceptionalism, which develops from Protestant Calvinism and is currently embedded in American political culture. This chapter frames my study into a broader discourse on how marginal new religions, by their very nature, inevitably make political claims as they emerge in response to their social contexts. The CoS is briefly compared to another Satanic religion, the Satanic Temple (2013), or TST, in terms of their respective political activity. As TST centers solely leftist politics and protest activism, it stands in direct contrast to the CoS, which firmly distances itself from most political positions. This apolitical stance is a feature solely of the CoS' ruling administrative board and its official public statements, allowing individual members to interpret politics as they fit, according to their own interests. CoS members have multiple and varied political opinions and actions, and interpret Satanic doctrine in wildly divergent and conflicting ways on issues such as abortion, civil rights, racial discrimination, gun rights, and feminism. This chapter also delves into LaVey's personal politics and where they either inform official Church tenets or are considered separate private opinions to demonstrate that political views are highly idiosyncratic, shifting with each new era, and subject to wildly distinctive interpretations as "Satanic."

1.4.3. Chapter Four

Chapter four focuses on gender and sexuality in the Church of Satan. LaVey's writings reflect responses to second-wave feminism, the sexual revolution, and the hippie movement's

notion of “free love.” CoS members respond to popular notions on gender and sexuality in an assortment of ways, sometimes directly mirroring official positions that are firmly pro-LGBTQ, and sometimes interpreting notions of gender and sexuality via modern political far-right discourses. This chapter highlights these tensions, as they mirror the current social, political, and cultural landscape. The conflicts underline that the Church of Satan’s official stance as well as LaVey’s personal opinions—while proven to be pro-LGBTQ and at least nominally against sexism—are not the sole factors that influence a CoS member’s position on gender and sexuality. They incorporate shifting ideas on gender and sexuality as they adjust to contemporary popular discourse.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature, Demographics, and Results of the Questionnaire

2.1. Review of Literature

2.1.1. Overview

An examination of the sources for modern religious Satanism reveals the varied history of discourse on concepts of the Satanic itself. These sources include theological treatises on Satanism as diabolical threat or heresy, popular depictions of Satan as a fool or clever manipulator for titillating entertainment, esoteric framings for magical purposes, political rhetoric to both demonize opponents and adopt as a language of resistance, an imposed label for social outcasts, and multiple other discourses that contribute to the grand, multi-faceted narrative surrounding the figure of Satan. Viewing Satan's many manifestations runs the spectrum from its roots in ancient Iranian Zoroastrianism's radical dualism that features a cosmic battle between good and evil to contemporary American hip hop artist's Lil Nas X's recent song, "Call me by your name (Montero)," whose video depicts a young queer Black man being seduced by a snake in the garden of Eden, put on trial, and cast down to hell (sliding on a stripper pole no less) to happily give an erotic lap dance to Satan (2021). Given such a range, there is no shortage of content from which groups and individuals may draw – and have drawn.

The literature discussed below represents a selection of subcategories that feed into this dissertation, directly or indirectly, and is divided into loose categories. As Satanism is a popular American religion founded during the social turbulence of the 1960s counterculture, these categories have overlapping interests and are organized by how I engage with them in this

dissertation. This chapter includes studies and literature that orbit around or focus on modern religious Satanism. It ends with a detailed and extensive summary of demographical data, compared to the data from my own circulated questionnaire of 97 respondents from verified members of the Church of Satan.

2.1.2. Biographies of Satan

Scholarly examinations of the concept and imagery of the Devil are useful for background historical narratives, since they inform modern interpretations. The figure of Satan has been depicted as personified evil, a fool, a sensitive anti-hero, a shrewd manipulator, a depraved deviant, and generally, a corruptive influence on established orders. Select examples of broad studies include historian Jeffrey Burton Russell's four books (1977, 1981, 1984, 1986) which trace early perceptions of personified evil to the depictions of the Devil in the modern world. Elaine Pagels' *The Origin of Satan* examines the scriptural roots of Christian demonization of heretics, Jews, and pagans (1996). W. Scott Pool examines Satan's role in American culture (2010), while Philip C. Almond (2014) adds yet another secular history of the idea of the Devil, yet with distinct sensitivity to Christians today. Bill Ellis' *Raising the Devil* examines the Christian Pentecostal movements and right-wing conspiracy theories of Satanic cults emerges from 1970s social anxieties (2000). These types of texts contribute indirectly to this thesis as part of the broader scholarly investigation of the pivotal role narratives about the figure of Satan play in Western history and the popular imagination.

2.1.3. Satan in the European Imagination: From Witch Trials to Proto-Satanism

The early modern European witchcraft trials inform contemporary narratives about the devil through a series of interlocking discourses. Accusations of heresy or expression of theological dissent amplified accusations of being in league with Satan. This functions as a *rhetorical* tool to devalue one's political rivals (Cohn 1993; Frassetto 2008; Roach 2005). A related discourse on medieval magic depicts Satan or demons as powerful beings intent on corrupting pure souls and testing one's steadfastness in the face of temptation, either as dim-witted lesser demons that are easily outwitted by clever humans or as demonic entities that could be summoned to do one's bidding by the especially skilled magician or necromancer (Kieckheffer 2000).

I have selected a few texts to demonstrate an overarching narrative in which the Devil is imagined to be seducing witches on the Sabbath and making a pact to worship Satan. Margaret Murray's thesis – that the confessions (under duress) by those accused as witches indicate evidence of a pre-Christian “old religion” which was actively suppressed by Christian inquisitors – is now mostly rejected by scholars (Introvigne 2016, 23).⁴⁰ That being said, Carlo Ginzburg offers that, despite Murray's debunked claims, a European “folkloric culture” exists in the popular imagination and is therefore central to understanding the appreciation of witchcraft (Ginzburg 2013; Introvigne 2013, 23).

Walter Stephens argues that the witch trials are the result of theologians' addressing theodicy as exposure to Greek philosophy and the empirical method created existential doubt. In an instance of circular logic, as the trials amplified the heinous threat of Satan they concurrently

⁴⁰ Within the occult milieu, Murray's thesis has been widely adopted in Pagan (and some Satanic) circles, even as scholars reject its claims.

proved that God not only exists but is necessary to address the ongoing threat (2001). For Stephens, misogyny was a convenient tool to achieve this goal, and the *malleus maleficarum* a series of protocols to exploit gendered inequalities. Allison Coudert counters Stephens' superficial dismissal of misogyny for the witchcraft trials and instead centralizes misogyny as a primary and all-pervasive social reality (2008). Concerns over an emerging definition of a bad woman (as curious, usurping social order, and with agency)⁴¹ grow just as the image of the witch becomes amplified as a cautionary tale. Coudert demonstrates that the easily accessible misogynistic underpinnings of society are woven into existential threats about theodicy. Uncertainty over God's existence is enmeshed in anxiety in uncertainty over gender roles: destabilizing one threatens the other, and by this logic the witch trials function as a solution to both theodicy and women who transgress their gendered roles. Satan's role as a corruptive agent to the established order neatly obscures human bias; as women were seen as more prone to temptation by their feminine nature, Satan's successful seduction of women proved both the inferiority of women (and therefore deserving of control and persecution) and the existence of God. Despite the fact that data in witchcraft trial studies emphasize that men were just as susceptible to being accused of witchcraft as women, and in some areas, more likely to be tried, the overarching popular narratives centralize the witch and her deviant feminine nature by virtue of Satanic manipulation and seduction.

A body of literature that is important to highlight here are the scholarly treatises on historical Satanism, that is, retroactive discourses on the Satanic that then inform contemporary religious Satanism. Three lengthy volumes are most useful and used throughout this thesis: Per

⁴¹ Owen Davies notes in his book, *Grimoires: A History of Magic Books*, that as women increasingly had access to knowledge there were counter efforts to restrict reading materials: "In certain circumstances women and books were seen as a toxic mix" (66, 2009).

Faxneld's *Satanic Feminism: Lucifer as Liberator of Woman in Nineteenth-Century Culture* (2014), Massimo Introvigne's *Satanism: A Social History* (2016), and Reuben van Luijk's *Children of Lucifer: The Origins of Modern Religious Satanism* (2016). Faxneld introduces Satanism as a "language of resistance to patriarchy and heterosexuality" (2014, 661). He traces the political leanings of usurping a "Satanic" label as a "subversive feminist strategy" (439) by European, educated, upper-class lesbian poets, scholars, occultists, and philosophers (667). Van Luijk examines the roots of "Romantic Satanism" as an esoteric discourse emerging from European artistic, philosophical, and politically radical circles that reframe the figure of Satan into sympathetic terms and re-invent him into a rebel-hero, symbol of liberty and sexual freedom, and challenger of the status quo. Introvigne traces multiple incidences of mentions of (alleged) Satanism, from what he calls "proto-Satanism" across early modern Europe, Satan as liberator into the Renaissance, and then modern religious Satanism in the contemporary era. He notes that the first emergence of the expression "Black Mass" is in the grand court of French King Louis XIV (2016, 35). It designates an inverted Catholic mass, complete with Satanic liturgies, to achieve material goods. In Sweden, court cases from the seventeenth century identify blasphemers who worship Satan (44), while in Italy in the eighteenth century, ecclesiastical authorities accused clerics and nuns of illicit transactions with the devil (48). John Wilkes, a political agitator and member of Parliament in England in 1762, used his position as a journalist to hint that opponents gathered as a group of Satanists (54). These select examples "underline the connection between Satanism, or at least suspicion of Satanism, and radical politics" (67). Satanic rhetoric as a political tool for demonizing enemies is consistent throughout history, and a concept that modern religious Satanists incorporate to varying to degrees.

Introvigne distinguishes between Satanic “possession” (worship of the figure of Satan or Lucifer by organized groups), “Romantic Satanism” (symbol of Satan or Lucifer for political, artistic, or literary purposes), and “Folk Satanism” (adolescent or criminal groups appropriating rituals from Satanism). He introduces a compelling argument for a broad trend of “Satanism” in the popular imagination in what he calls a three-stage pendulum model. That is, first, Satanic movements emerge from various subcultures and gain wider notoriety. Second, dominant culture responds with an over-reaction (witch trials, moral panics, etc.) that, finally, results in debunked conspiracy theories and widespread diffusion of tension. We can perhaps understand our current climate as somewhere in the second phase of this cyclical discourse, with increased social, religious, and political tensions worldwide, mirrored by efforts from various modern religious Satanic groups to clarify their positions and distance themselves from ever-exaggerated anti-Satanic rhetoric and conspiracy theories. This dissertation is written in that culturally situated tension. The scholars and discourses above are used extensively throughout this dissertation to demonstrate a link between modern religious Satanism as a distinct new religious movement and its philosophical precedents.

2.1.4. Journalistic and Popular Sources on Modern Religious Satanism

Tabloids, lifestyle magazines, and local newspapers were some of the first publications to cover religious Satanism. Several published photo-essays of LaVey’s nude female altars or centralized the titillating aspect of the Church of Satan (*Hustler*, 6.6. Dec. 1979; *Jaybird Journal*, 1967; *Argosy*, June 1975; *The Exploiter*, 4.4, Jan. 24, 1975). LaVey made the cover of general interest quarterly *Look Magazine* (Aug. 24, 1971), while mainstream newspapers published stories on various Church of Satan’s subjects or events: Navy funeral of mate third class and

Church of Satan member Edward D. Olsen (*The Miami News*, Dec. 12, 1967); a story LaVey's pet lion Togare (*Waterton Daily Times*, Mar. 4, 1967); a Satanic wedding (*Times Herald*, Feb. 2, 1967); and articles focusing on the growth of Satanism within the counterculture (*The Deseret News*, Oct. 16, 1971). In 1972, *Time Magazine's* cover was a graphic black pentagram with red eyes on a red background, titled "The Occult Revival: A Substitute Faith," which discusses occultism in America and references the Church of Satan (June 19). LaVey made the cover of *The Washington Post* in 1986 (Feb. 23). These tidbits of coverage demonstrate that topics related to Satanism, Witchcraft and occultism were clearly within popular interest to general readers, often presented as curious entertainment in the context of alternative movements in the cultic milieu (Campbell 1972).

Several in-depth journalistic and popular-writer investigative profiles from the late sixties and early seventies present often sensational portrayals of LaVey and the CoS (Cabot 1969/70, 207-25; Dwyer 1979, 167-171; Freedland 1972, 48-54; Fritscher 2004 [1969], 3-28; Godwin 1972, 241-251; Holzer 1972; Lyons 1970; Roberts 1971, ch. 13-15; Russell 1975). Much of the coverage centers around the countercultural environment, and the Church of Satan as but one of many unconventional groups or movements challenging American norms, alongside witchcraft and paganism (usually contrasting the two). These texts are regularly referenced for their primary source data in much of early scholarship on modern religious Satanism. Jack Fritscher's 1969 book, *Popular Witchcraft*, examines the oc/cultic milieus via its connection to queer, BDSM, and witchcraft subcultures and the relationship to American gender politics (Petersen 2011b, 24). It contains an interview⁴² with LaVey, which describes him appearing from behind a hidden door

⁴² Heavily edited and unauthorized versions of Fritscher's interview with LaVey circulate the internet (including one posted on the Church of Satan website). These versions omit all reference to Fritscher's book or his questions, and instead publish LaVey's responses as if they were a solo authored essay. This thesis uses the original text in its full

just after midnight, wearing a red lined cape and priest's collar: "He was absolutely everything he was supposed to be" (Fritscher 2004, 4). The conversation provides a reflexive account between peers in and of the counterculture of the time.

Arthur Lyons, a mystery writer, wrote two books, *The Second Coming: Satanism in America* (1970) and its rewrite, *Satan Wants You* (1988), both an examination of why Satan is on the forefront of popular obsessions. Lyons notes that movements deemed radical "fringe" are no longer clearly demarcated from the so-called normal, as people seek "stability" (9). Lyons' untrained quasi-scientific psychologizing and over-generalizations are overlooked as the books contain rare ethnographic data on Witchcraft, Satanism, LaVey, and the Church. It continues to be heavily referenced in scholarship for this reason. CoS Reverend Gavin Baddeley's *Lucifer Rising* frames modern Satanism as a distinctly popular religion (2015 [1999]). The book is a detailed representation of historical Satanism, LaVey and the Church of Satan, and other Satanic esoteric groups and individuals, but its sections focusing on the symbiosis between Satanic aesthetics and ideas in film and music are especially poignant.

Petersen notes that a subcategory of the empirical source material is the LaVey-biographies (2011b, 29). Burton H. Wolfe's *The Devil's Avenger* (1974) along with Blanche Barton's (LaVey's long-time companion at the time of this death) two books, *The Church of Satan* (1990) and *The Secret Life of a Satanist* (1992) present a cohesive "LaVey myth" (Petersen 2011b, 29). In this thesis they are understood as functional rather than factual as "the (likely deliberate) weaving of fact and fantasy" operates to maintain a strategic antagonistic tension (Holt and Petersen 2016, 443-444).

version, published in Fritscher's book, *Popular Witchcraft* (2004). (See also Holt [forthcoming] in *Satanism: A Reader*, ed. by Per Faxneld and Johann Nilsson).

These many examples, combined with interviews from occultists and artists alike, outline a clear mutual influence of modern religious Satanism emerging from pop culture just as much as pop culture is influenced by Satanism. Petersen claims that, because many are members of the Church or are friendly with LaVey, portraits by Lyons, Fritscher, Baddeley, Wolfe, and Barton “straddle the divide between research and source material,” providing journalistic analysis, ethnographic content from practitioners, and popular entertainment material for research (Petersen 2011b, 23 fn4). Viewing these portraits as a comprehensive whole, they demonstrate that LaVey and his Church of Satan were depicted as a curious theatrical new religion with persuasive statements on America’s ever-shifting critical assessment of the status quo via the theatre and pageantry of Satanic aesthetic.

Sean Macloud’s *The Making of American Religious Fringe: Exotics, Subversives, and Journalists, 1955-1993*, discusses how mainstream journalists generated suspicions of fringe religious movements as it functioned to confirm and exacerbate the fears of their primary audience: a white middle class that self-understood as moderate and rational (2004, 7). Macloud notes the bias is unconscious, but evident in the presuppositions of editors and writers in similar social locations, reflecting common interests and concerns (8). The in-depth portrayals above are reasonable, but the overarching coverage of fringe new religious movements in American news media depicts them as a threat to the social order. “Strikingly, occult depictions in the largest news and general-interest magazines simultaneously evoked exotic curiosity and dangerous deviancy” (2004, 111). Satanism is thus but one of these titillating threats.

2.1.5. Early Academic Sources on Modern Religious Satanism

The academic studies on modern religious Satanism begin with sociologists in the early 1970s (Truzzi 1972, 1974; Moody 1974; Alfred 1976). Their reports frame the CoS as part of the emerging counterculture in the social unrest of 1960s America. It is positioned as a somewhat distinct religious fringe group within the so-called occult revival, alongside other esoteric practices and religions becoming re-popularized at the time: Witchcraft/Wicca, tarot, astrology, and spiritualism. The authors provide a generally harmonious picture of LaVey and the Church of Satan yet highlight that it stands slightly apart in significant ways; it is certainly iconoclastic, but its subversive critique extends to its counterculture contemporaries.

Marcello Truzzi's two articles are on the sociology of the occult (1972) and the Satanism as a pop culture fringe group in the New Age (1974). He notes that the rising interest in astrology, spiritualism, Ouija, witchcraft, and magic denotes a particular fascination of esoteric ideas within the American popular imagination (1972, 17). He calls these interests a "vast reservoir of magical and superstitious thoughts" (17), divided into four dominant categories: astrology, witchcraft-satanism, parapsychology and extra-sensory perception, and Eastern religious thought, with a fifth "waste-basket" of occult interests of minor influence (18). Truzzi concludes that the cultic milieu's interest in occultism is *pop religion* [italics in original] (29), and that the occult revival within the 1960's counterculture movements is playful in its demystification of the supernatural. He writes: "What were once fearful and awe-inspiring dark secrets known only through initiation into arcane orders are now fully exposed to the eyes of Everyman" (1972, 29). He notes that his interests lie with occultism as a "*mass phenomena*" that aligns with an increasing scientific perspective of secular societies (30).

Witchcraft and Satanism, while both understood as esoteric new religious movements, are separate (and sometimes contentious), differing primarily in their concept of magic itself: Witchcraft/Wicca names their magic as white (for ostensible benevolent purposes); Satanism calls magic black (for ostensible malevolent purposes). Truzzi comments that this distinction has political implications as Wiccans/Witches submit their notion of magic as a protective measure against being perceived as a threat (1972, 23). Black magicians, despite the perceived emphasis on malevolence, tend to view all magic as a neutral tool, subject only to the interpretation of the practitioner (23). While noting that many Satanists are atheists, Truzzi lists four categories of various overlap: Gnostic interpretations of Christianity wherein Satan's status as angel positions him as worthy of veneration (26); clubs focused on pornography, sex, and sadomasochistic interests with Satanic imagery (26); Satanists that are associated with narcotic use and Charles Manson (largely a sensationalized media-fueled fixation) (26); and finally, the dominant group, the Church of Satan (27). Truzzi's portrayal of the CoS and LaVey presents Satanists as personable, educated, pragmatic, rational, and atheistic (28). This variety of Satanism positions itself opposed to the hippie counterculture, its use of recreational drugs and ideal of altruism, instead focusing on positions of "extreme Machiavellianism," "cynical-realism," and the philosophical ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche and Ayn Rand (28). Truzzi concludes that most Satanists are not spiritual seekers commonly found in the counterculture—in fact, they openly deride it—but instead position themselves around a "disenchantment with religious orthodoxy" (28). Truzzi adds a relevant endnote:

As a result, many conservative, anti-hippie persons have been strongly attracted to Satanism. The Church of Satan is elitist, but it has no political ideology or preference for the particular economic system. Some authoritarian personalities are especially attracted to the Church of Satan; in some of the recent church literature, a rising note of appeals to patriotism has occurred. (Truzzi 1972, 28)

Truzzi's touches upon one of the main themes of this thesis: that is, while the CoS claims an apolitical stance [which remains today], its members reflect a tension with its surrounding counterculture. The nature of its core philosophy draws conservative leaning members just as much as its rebellious antinomian stance draws leftist, liberal leaning, and anarchist members, with no political consensus apart from the anti-theistic/pro-secular stance.⁴³

In his 1974 article, "Magical Therapy: An Anthropological Investigation of Contemporary Satanism" Edward J. Moody presents an ethnographic article of sorts, though it assumes that Satanists are inherently abnormal. Moody then retroactively psychoanalyzes their (presumed) backgrounds as "pre-Satanists," tautologically concluding that Satanists are predisposed to deviant behaviour. Moody does not list a methodology. His type case admittedly, "does not provide a list of characteristics that would allow one to predict just who becomes a satanist and who does not" (Moody 1974, 448-9). The last source in these early sociological studies of Satanism is from Randall H. Alfred, "The Church of Satan," from an edited volume of new religious movements (1976). Unlike Moody, Alfred details an extensive methodology of participant observation: classes, group rituals, seminars, and social events, while taking extensive notes on his interactions (1976, 481-483). This data is useful for details about the early church (frequency of meetings, composition of attendees, demographics, topics of conversation, etc.) and its points of contact with the surrounding counterculture of the occult milieu.

Much like the journalistic portraits of LaVey and the Church of Satan in the first decade, the sociological academic portrayals are favourable. Petersen, for example, notes that Alfred and Moody were "high-ranking and enthusiastic members of the Church of Satan, allegedly for ethnographic reasons," while Truzzi was friendly with LaVey (Petersen 2011b, 25: fn7).

⁴³ Politics in the Church of Satan is discussed in chapter three of this thesis.

These studies position the emergence of the Church of Satan within its own culturally situated context—that is, informed by social movements; reflecting its atheistic version of self-religiosity in post-modernity; as part of the counterculture but in tension with it; co-opting the aesthetics of the occult revival; and critical of overly mystical views on magic and witchcraft. When LaVey founded the Church of Satan in 1966 in San Francisco, he was certainly part of the broader radical shifts in American society, yet he did not consider himself or his church as directly aligned with the counterculture. Even so, scholars discussing self-religiosity, the cultic milieu, and the occult revival accurately frame LaVey within the counterculture’s challenge to institutional religion, heavily informed by *popular* ideas on witchcraft and magic, and their provocation of the dominant public and ubiquitous Protestantism that underlays American society.

2.1.6. Satanism in the Modern Popular Imagination

Several studies weave intersecting discourses on Satanism as/and pop culture. For example, texts on Satanism and metal music are common (Bivens 2017; Dyrendal 2009, 2008; Introvigne 2016, ch.12; Granholm 2013b, 2012b, 2012c, 2011; Moberg 2012; Mork 2009; Moynihan and Söderling 2003). These studies examine black/heavy metal music as related to social issues and how loosely related subgenres build friendship, community, belonging, and the construction of identities. The music subculture is a means by which to confront established norms and engage in subversive Christian narratives, as lyrically and aesthetically, metal is highly influenced by biblical apocalypticism, modern occultism, Satanism, and Paganism. Introvigne writes that, despite the significant draw to Satanism via metal music, few actually join churches or become self-identified Satanists (2016, 505).

Other forms of pop culture are studied along similar lines, such as Satanism in film. Christopher Partridge's *Re-Enchantment of West* (volumes 1 & 2), centralizes the occult in pop culture, and in the section examining Satanism in film of the 1960s and 1970s⁴⁴ he notes, "supernaturalism of popular culture, particularly screen demonologies and the satanic chic of the contemporary heavy metal subculture...are drawing from a common pool of myths and ideas that can be traced back through the period of the witch-craze and the Middle Ages to early Christian thought and ultimately to Jewish apocalypticism" (2006, 239). Carrol L. Fry in the book, *Cinema of the Occult: New Age, Satanism, Wicca, and Spiritualism in Film*, claims that film depictions are highly influential for perceptions of Satanists in the popular imagination (2008), which [much like metal music subcultures] do not reflect the numbers or reality of practicing Satanists.

A collection of sources that focus on Satanism as demonology are useful for academics mainly to demonstrate that the external perception of Satanism continues to be informed by theological interests. For example, Dominican theologian Richard Woods is concerned with the rising threat of Satanism, claiming that the theatrical blasphemy of "Victorian diabolism" (1972, 97) began as Christian parody but evolved into an actual practice and therefore a threat (95). His text reads as academic (he has a PhD in Religion from Loyola Chicago), but frames Satanism as a collection of devil-worshipping cults intent on committing atrocious crimes, with increasing appeal to atheists and psychiatrists (93). A second type of literature that is cautiously useful is occult authors that deride LaVey's Satanism for not being esoteric *enough*. One example is Arthur King's *Sexuality, Magic, and Perversion*, which frames LaVey's ritual script as "crude,"

⁴⁴ Examples: *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), *The Devil Rides Out* (1968), *The Brotherhood of Satan* (1971), *The Exorcist* (1973), *The Satanic Rites of Dracula* (1974), *To the Devil a Daughter* (1976), and *The Omen* (1976), just to name a few.

Satanic ideas as “pale” imitations of Aleister Crowley’s (1971, 151), and Satanic sex magic as vulgar, devoid of the mystical properties of orgasm (152). Critiques from the esoteric milieu towards LaVey’s (atheistic) Satanism echo such sentiments, even today.

A third body of literature that is used sparingly but remains integral to understanding Satanists’ suspicion of outsiders and reluctance to be openly affiliated concerns the widespread Satanic Ritual Abuse scare, dubbed the “Satanic Panic” (Bromley et al 1991; Frankfurter 2003; Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994; Hicks 1991; Lanning 1992; Medway 2001; Nathan and Sedecker 1995; Victor 1993; Wright 1994). Satanic Ritual Abuse (SRA) was a phrase coined during the 1980s to depict a group of nefarious criminal Satanists regularly abusing children in secret rituals, a seemingly widespread and organized activity (Lewis 2001a, 240-4). This fear resulted in several people being charged with child abuse, based on the coerced testimonies of children by law enforcement using interrogative tactics that were later banned. Eventually the Federal Bureau of Investigation funded an inquiry into the widespread allegations and found no evidence of systematic abuse of children (Lanning 1992). The report concludes by asking why mental health professionals, teachers, parents, and law enforcement were so quick to act on flimsy evidence, allowing rumours to destroy lives and cause social panic, and suggests further study. Media coverage at the time first generated and then exacerbated the public alarm, profiting from public anxieties. Scholars and most law enforcement agencies now recognize that fears of a global Satanic conspiracy were the result of mutual influences: evangelical exorcisms, sensationalized news coverage, far-right conspiracy theories, social anxieties over alleged deviance, and dubious “experts” capitalizing on public panic, all informed by surrounding negative discourse on cults and brainwashing. This literature is useful when considering Church of Satan members that experienced the public outcry and moral panic during the late 1980s and

early 1990s. Scholarship on the Satanic Panic—despite being less immediately relevant to this particular study—is important to highlight that the outward popular perception of anything connected to Satan and Satanism is heavily skewed by diabolical narratives in the popular imagination.

2.1.7. Scholarly Studies on the Satanic Milieu

The “Satanic milieu” is a term coined by Petersen to denote the subcategory of the occult milieu, as a subfield of its own. He writes:

The satanic milieu is in itself a polythetic category with fuzzy borders, and could be conceived of as a cult-producing substance of key terms and practices as well as the reservoir of ideas uniting the broad movement of modern Satanism, mirroring the larger cultic milieu in a fractal sense. Thus the satanic milieu is a trend in popular culture...a collective style and identity within satanic neotribes... and the reference points of the satanic subcultures that crystallize around distinct interpretations or manifestations of Satanism today. (Petersen 2009a, 5)

Since the occult revival of the 1960s, coined by Colin Campbell as the “occult milieu” (1972),⁴⁵ Satanic discourse evolved into the Satanic milieu—a loose collection of individuals and groups centralizing the figure of Satan (symbolically or literally). Most are influenced by LaVey’s *The Satanic Bible* but also incorporate ideas from pagan, esoteric, and overlapping new age ideas. Self-identified Satanists often mutually exclude each other, with groups and individuals engaged in a “process of othering” (Petersen 2009a, 6). Most Satanists do not identify as a cohesive group but act as a “diffuse ‘occultural’ movement” (Petersen 2009a, 5; see also Lewis 2010, 2011).

Petersen discusses the Satanic milieu based on two interrelated concepts that define modern religious Satanism: Satanism remains in tension between “ongoing *negotiations of*

⁴⁵ Elaboration on Campbell’s occult milieu in the theory section in chapter one of this dissertation.

individuality” (italics original) that is considered both a positive proclamation of self-empowerment and a negative absence of conformist behaviour or “herd mentality” (Petersen 2009b, 219). Individual self-identifying Satanists and groups that form, fracture, and reform are all part of the high turnover within the Satanic milieu, though Petersen emphasizes the milieu itself is stable (and still growing). Thus, the macro-view of the Satanic milieu is marked by groups and individuals each claiming authority over particular expressions of Satanism. These expressions are subject to change and adaption.

There are three scholarly categories of modern religious Satanism that require discussion with the caveat that the borders between them are “fuzzy”: Rationalistic Satanism, Esoteric Satanism, and Reactive Satanism (Petersen 2009a, 6). Rationalistic Satanism is atheistic in nature, viewing Satan solely as a symbol or metaphor for the self and its potential. Esoteric Satanism is a religion of self-actualization, a theistic tradition incorporating paganism, Western esotericism, Buddhism, and Hinduism (7). Reactive Satanism is unorganized youth rebellion engaged in various defiant or criminal actions (such as church burnings), though the overwhelming majority of Satanic groups strongly condemn criminal activity.

Much of tension in the Satanic milieu is in relation to the categories themselves: rationalist/atheistic versus esoteric/theistic, though the lines between the rationalistic and esoteric are intertwined. As I have argued earlier (Holt 2017, 95-96), members of the “rationalistic” Church of Satan are mostly staunch atheists that view magic as encouraged but optional, others are firmly secular in their worldview with little interest in occult writings or rituals, while yet still other members are widely knowledgeable about esoteric texts and ideas and consider magic an essential Satanic practice. With the esoteric/theistic Satanic circles that includes magical and occult practices, there are varying degrees of secular worldviews, some of which practically

mirror atheistic/rationalistic Satanism. The division between an atheistic/rational and theistic/esoteric Satanism is necessary for academics in order to quantify their areas of research and identify the larger themes within the movement. These distinctions, despite being useful, are not firm separations within religious Satanism itself, even within a fairly cohesive group like the Church of Satan. The mutual opposition these loose distinctions have to each other is flamed by popular (mis)understandings of Satanism as reactive adolescent criminal activity and the desire to promote particular definitions of Satanism. Journalists and scholars, in tension with popular portrayals, then dissect these definitions. Satanists of all sorts are constantly negotiating a generalized suspicion of malevolence from the population at large, and the specific mudslinging from within the Satanic milieu. Often, aggressive encounters between various Satanists are displayed over social media, internet blogs and videos, and published literature, then reflected in media portrayals and scholarly studies. The social setting, even for participants ostensibly unconcerned with popular acceptance, is important, as each person or group vies for primary recognition of its particular brand of Satanism.

The first major schism in the Church of Satan occurred in the mid-1970s, though other smaller resignations and reformations did take place prior. Then-CoS Magister Michael Aquino had been a member of the CoS since 1968 (Lyons 1988, 125). He wrote correspondence and responded to the high demand of inquiries, eventually becoming editor of *The Cloven Hoof*, the CoS' newsletter (Lyons 1988: 124-4; Lewis 2001a: 256). In 1975, he left to establish his own esoteric religion, the Temple of Set (ToS), along with Lilith Sinclair, a former CoS grotto master in New Jersey. Aquino claimed that LaVey was overly focused on material success, selling titles to members, or bestowing them to persons deemed unworthy (like LaVey's chauffeur) (Petersen 2009b, 235). When Aquino left, he establishes the distinctly esoteric religion of Setianism, which

views the Egyptian god Set as an ancient deity pre-dating Satan. Aquino reoriented Setianism as older—and thus more legitimate—while positioning LaVey as a necessary first (if now outdated) step prior to Aquino’s new “Infernal Mandate” (236). The ToS is framed under the rubric of religious Satanism and studied as a schismatic group. Although LaVey’s influence is unambiguous, Aquino is informed by other esoteric discourses and does not use the Satanic label. The academic classification of Setianism as a “Satanic” religion is thus both apt and inaccurate: lived religions exist in tension with academic taxonomies. As with many groups in the occult milieu, Set, Satan, Lucifer, or the Red Dragon represent similar Enlightenment ideals as the chosen symbolic figure epitomizes antinomianism, individualism, self-awareness, and challenges to hegemony (van Luijk 2016: 328-9, 356).

Several studies on the ToS examine it beyond its relationship to the CoS. In 1983, Gini Graham Scott wrote *The Magicians: A Study of the Use of Power in a Black Magic Group* as an ethnographic study. It pathologizes esotericism by centering a religious choice as obvious psychological deviancy. Petersen notes that Scott’s research was covert, and when it was discovered, Scott was ejected, perhaps influencing the negative portrayal (2011b, fn 19). Lloyd Keane examines the ancient Egyptian concept *xeper* used by Setians, translated as “coming into being” (Keane 2009, 7). Others define it as “self-improvement” or “self-creation” (Lewis 2001a, 257) or “becoming” (Lyons 1988, 128). Keane highlights that this Setian principle is a process of exploration of one’s internal light and dark natures (2009, 7). As the primary schismatic group from the Church of Satan, the ToS is included in multiple encyclopedic entries, anthologies, and studies on Satanism or occultism (Ainsley and Bromley 1995; Flowers 2012; Gardell 2003; Graham 1995; La Fontaine 1999; Lewis 2002, 2001a; Lyons 1988). Its esoteric nature (as opposed to the CoS’ atheistic stance) is the subject of scholarship on western esotericism:

Petersen discusses the ToS as an initiatory organization practicing magic (2012b, 99). He calls Aquino's position on magic a "countermove," as it both adopts some of LaVey's distinctions between White and Black magic (100) but also shifts to a highly subjective inner process "in accordance with the principle of *Xeper*" (101). Petersen's distinction that LaVey's Satanism is "esotericized secularism" is in contrast to Aquino's "secularized esotericism" (101). Aquino himself has penned histories of the ToS, but his multiple editions of CoS histories, complete with correspondences and appendixes, inform much of the scholarship of modern religious Satanism, especially in terms of early CoS history (Aquino 1985, 2002, 2013, 2016).

Granholm argues that the application of the term "Satanism" varies relative to the popular, familiar or academic approach (2009, 1). Non-scholarly reactions to the word "Satan" are particularly negative, for two reasons: modern religious Satanism is rarely understood beyond ideas of devil worship in the popular imagination, therefore the term itself is inseparable from its stereotypical connotations (2). He offers a breakdown of how academics categorize groups, noting its arbitrary application. For example, the *Encyclopedia of Esoterism in Scandinavia* lists the schismatic (from the Church of Satan) Temple of Set (1975) under the "Satanism" heading, but places others—such as the Rune-Guild and Dragon Rouge—under Occultist Groups in the same ostensibly "Satanic milieu" (Granholm 2009, 3). The issue with this categorization is that the Temple of Set is similar to the Rune-Guild, and that even though the ToS is an offshoot of the CoS, their prime "Satanic" figure is Set, referring to themselves as Setians.

Granholm challenges a claim by Petersen that multiple representations of Satan in terms of their cultural counterparts (Ahriman, Odin, Set, Shiva, etc.) are viewed as the same type of symbol for antinomian self-religion (Petersen 2009a, 8). Granholm instead posits that deities not

historically associated with Christianity (like the term Satan) are “post-Satanism,” requiring new terms for accurate categorization (2009, 85). Post-Satanism, according to Granholm, is a term more accurately applied to groups relinquishing the symbol of Satan. Where the ToS views Set as teacher and guide, the “Ageless Intelligence of this Universe,” the Rune-Guild focuses on the runes of the Germanic tradition, incorporating meditation, divination, and self-transformational rune-work (Granholm 2009, 94). Various Rune-Guild authors consider gods/god in different forms: as “magical archetypes” that can have a “subjective existence” for individuals but also a “tripartite objective existence,” or as Odin as a god-model for self-deification (94). The Dragon Rouge has an even broader incorporation of demonic deities. They include Apep, Anubis, Leviathan, Loki, Lucifer, Melek Taos, Odin, Pan, Quetzalcoatl, Samael, Set, Typhon and others (95). The Dragon Rouge also has an emphasis on Princesses of Darkness, and incorporates feminine deities such as Hecate, Hel, Kali, Kebechet, Lilith, Morana, Naamah, Ragana, Sekhmet, Skuld, Tiamat, Urd, and Verdandi. Despite the eclectic pantheon of gods/goddesses, the Dragon is the prime symbol of the rhythm of nature, the ultimate source of power, and is manifested through individual magicians (95). Granholm observes that these groups are engaged in a process of transformation in which they reach beyond the Satanic for symbols of their antinomian self-deification (in Petersen 2009, 89). Apart from the sectarian nature of the ToS with regard to the CoS, any reference to Satanism with the Rune-Guild or Dragon Rouge is an externally applied term (97). Granholm argues, “Satanism should be avoided whenever possible, due to the vague definition of the term and the overly pejorative connotations it arouses” (97). Granholm suggests instead the term Left Hand Path (LHP) as a broader, more appropriate term to describe groups beyond Satanism that share certain characteristics. LHP has five characteristics: i) the ideology of individualism; ii) the view of man as a psycho-physical totality; iii) a focus on life in the here-

and-now; iv) the goal of self-deification; v) an antinomian stance (Granholm 2009, 88-89). In essence, Left Hand Path religion is a category that includes both self-identified Satanists as well as those who follow the above criteria but have evolved beyond Satanic symbols (97). Introvigne makes the distinction that, while Satanists can be viewed under the term of LHP religions, that not all LHP religions are Satanists (2016, 5).

Several studies focus on regional Satanism, often using samplings in their geographical and social context: Canada (Lippert 2008); Denmark (Petersen 2016) Estonia (Ringvee 2009); Finland (Hermonen 2008; Hjelm 2016); Italy (Introvigne 2009; Menegotto 2009); Lithuania (Alisauskiene 2009); Norway (Dyrendal 2016); Poland (Smoczynky 2013); South Georgia (Lowney 2008 [1995]); Sweden (Bogdan 2016; Granholm 2016); the United Kingdom (Evans 2009; Harvey 1995); and Scandinavia (Hjelm, Bogdan, Dyrendal, and Petersen 2009; Soderling and Dyrendal 2009). In several of these studies, hyperbolic rumour, journalistic portrayals, and practicing Satanists examine the social issues reflected in the Satanic rhetoric. In others, the distinct interpretation of socialist Satanism contrasts with its American counterparts.

Other studies focus on particular groups. The Order of the Nine Angels has esoteric and Nationalist Socialist political leanings (Goodrick-Clarke 2003; Monette 2013; Senholt 2013a, 2013b; Sieg 2013). It was started by Anton Long (a synonym) or British Neo-Nazi David William Myatt, originally as a pagan group (Introvigne 2016, 357). It develops what Senholt calls “sinister” overtones in its political far-right counterculture. They view modern society’s concepts of egalitarianism, capitalism, and liberalism as destructive principles, with roots in Christianity. They adopt a pagan notion of a “neo-tribal society based on uniformity in culture, tradition and identity,” and align with an esoteric far-right rhetoric (Senholt 2013a, 263). Several semi-official factions emerged, such as the Temple of Blood in the USA, and the Temple of

THEM in Australia which both have similar “predatory” dialectics (Introvigne 2016, 358). Another neo-Nazi Satanic group, the Joy of Satan, incorporates an alien origin story (371). Enlightened aliens, led by Enki (a.k.a. Satan) battled monstrous extra-terrestrials, the Reptilians. Satan and his cohorts created a “Nordic-Aryan” race via technology, and the Reptilians created Jews by combining their DNA with “semi-animal humanoids.” Jews created false religions and maligned Satan, with whom members of the Joy of Satan commune via ritual and sex magic (371).

In 2013 a new atheist Satanic group emerged, The Satanic Temple (TST), led by Doug Mesner (a.k.a. Lucien Greaves). It is a group focused on leftist activism, using the symbol of Satan to challenge Christian privilege in American institutions. They organize protests, file lawsuits, and generally develop as a response to the “US political landscape since the 1960s and 1970s that have coincided with a backlash against the civil rights movement, the LGBTQ movement, and the second-wave women’s movement” (Hedenborg White and Gregorios 2020, 95). News media coverage on TST is extensive, and scholarship has increased mentions of TST. Joseph Laycock’s book, *Speak of the Devil: How The Satanic Temple is Changing the Way We Talk about Religion* is a study on how the group challenges the concepts and definitions of religion, activism, trolling, and Satanism itself (2020). TST is mentioned in most academic overviews of modern religious Satanism due to their widespread coverage in news media and novel approach to activism, though historical Satanic political rhetoric itself has a distinct influence (Dyrendal, Lewis, and Petersen 2016; Hedenborg White and Gregorios 2020; Hjelm 2016; Holt and Petersen 2016; Introvigne 2016). Graduate students are increasingly focused on The Satanic Temple as well, as evidence by Zikva Koleva’s master’s thesis from Uppsala University in Sweden (2020), and Mathieu Colin master’s thesis (2018) from École Pratique des

Hautes Études in France with Colin's recent peer-reviewed article, "Satan-Prométhée: Une lecture alternative du mal dans le satanisme contemporain" (2021). In field beyond religious studies, Eric Sprinkle et al published a study on Satanism as a diversity issue for sex and relationship therapists (2021).

2.2. Demographics and Summaries of Questionnaire Data

This section summarizes previous demographical research and compares the data to the results of my own questionnaire. I circulated a questionnaire accessible solely to verified members of the Church of Satan in late 2016, early 2017. I received 97 respondents. For comparative data, I primarily use James R. Lewis' three *Satan Surveys* (2001, 2009, 2011) as they are extensive sources for demographics.

The first of Lewis' internet survey of self-identifying Satanists (2001) suggests this ideological profile:

[A]n unmarried, white male in his mid-twenties with a few years of college. He became involved in Satanism through something he read in high school, and has been a self-identified Satanist for seven years. Raised Christian, he explored one non-Satanist religious group beyond the one in which he was raised before settling into Satanism. His view of Satan is some variety of non-theistic humanism and he practices magic. His primary interaction with his co-religionists is via e-mail and internet chat rooms. (Lewis 2001b, 12)

In the two follow-up surveys (*Satan Survey 2* in 2009 and *Satan Survey 3* in 2011), the profile remains "predominantly white males raised in Christian households," with the average respondent thirty-years old (Dyrendal, Lewis, and Petersen 2016, 137). Respondents self-identify as religiously pan-Satanic, so the studies provide a broad window into the Satanic milieu. I focus on Lewis's most recent studies (2009 and 2011) as they are closest to my CoS Survey. I

emphasize that Lewis's studies are sociological in approach and method (as oppose to religious studies, which has no fixed methodology given its interdisciplinary nature), and thus a neat and direct comparison is not possible. His surveys are far more comprehensive than this dissertation's questionnaire, involving inquiries absent from my survey (for example, ethnic background, political tendencies, civic issues, and social engagement). These topics are instead addressed in this dissertation based on information gleaned from the public content produced by CoS members. I highlight Lewis's statistical demographics relative to this study in the summary below.

Numbers of self-identifying Satanists are difficult to measure, especially as the Satanic milieu is diffused, existing in ephemeral individual identities and loosely formed groups on top of official groups that may or may not keep reliable records that they release publicly. Granholm suggests that Satanists "regularly generate a level of mass media and public interest not implied by [the] relatively low membership numbers" (2009, 93). In the 1970s, quoted numbers for Satanists range from seven thousand to one hundred thousand (Alfred 1974; Lyons 1970; Truzzi 1972; Woods 1971), and in the 1980s numbers for the Church of Satan ranged from two thousand to five thousand (Melton 1986, 77; Lyons 1988, 115). In the 1980s and 1990s, Setians numbered forty to fifty (Harvey 1995; Scott 2007), and Satanists listed as between three hundred and an improbable one million (Lyons 1988; Taub and Nelson 1993). In the past two decades, quoted numbers range from: a few hundred (Granholm 2009; Hjelm et al. 2009; Introvigne 2009; Lewis and Petersen 2005); one to four thousand (Bromley 2005; Evans 2009; Hanegraaff 2006; Lewis 2011; Mombelet 2009); an estimated range of thirty thousand to one hundred thousand worldwide (Matthews 2009, 160, supported by Faxneld and Petersen 2013); to the more recently updated study by Lewis which had four hundred respondents to his *Satan Survey 3* (Dyrendal,

Lewis, and Petersen 2016, 137). The same survey includes purchased census data from select countries which numbers of self-identifying Satanists as follows: 1167 for New Zealand in 2006 (2016, 139); 2453 in Australia in 2011 (159); and 1893 in the UK also in 2011 (160). The Order of the Nine Angels is estimated at two thousand (Monette 2013, 89). The differences in quoted numbers reflect that scholars do not possess enough data to make realistic appraisals of self-identified Satanists, yet Lewis' most recent *Satan Survey 3* indicates that Satanism tends to remain a relatively small yet expanding new religion (160). Making inroads into Satanic demographics is challenging due to their tendency to be secretive: few Satanists openly identify their religious inclination, and quantifying observable internet activity is but one small source of data. Complicating this data is the self-reported numbers from the recently founded The Satanic Temple (2013) in Boston, which claims fifty thousand members worldwide (Lane 2019). Laycock notes that TST's membership is ethnically diverse, estimated at 75% LGBTQ, with equal gender representation in leadership (2020, 97).

The gender ratio remains relatively constant for all three of Lewis's surveys, with an average of 72.9% male to 27.1% female (Dyrendal, Lewis, and Petersen 2016, 158). Lewis claims that this is in direct contrast to most religions and "particularly new religions" which principally attract females (158). The CoS discouraged, but did not forbid, members from participating in Lewis' studies (9), yet *Satan Survey 3* (2011) reveals that most respondents still identify generally in the "LaVeyan tradition" with varieties of theistic/esoteric Satanism (137). He notes that the census data from New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and United Kingdom accentuates that "core Satanists" are between fifteen and twenty-five years old, with a steady increase in older Satanists across all four censuses (139). He summarizes that the surveys and census data indicate "involvement in Satanism tends to peak in one's early twenties and then to

drop off sharply in one's thirties—which supports the position that Satanism is a youth religion for rebellious adolescents,” but emphasizes that there is also steady, slow increase of people that retain Satanism as a “mature life philosophy” (159-160). The two most recent studies (2009 and 2011) showed 70 and 66% heterosexual, and 17 and 20% bisexual. Lewis notes that, though this is higher than the assumed (admittedly problematic) average, it is also likely Satanists are far more honest about non-heteronormative sexual orientation (161). Single Satanists numbered just over half, with others in variations of committed partnerships (162). Partners of Satanists range from unknowing (7.8%), indifferent (14.4%), sympathetic (11.9%), to partly (11.9%) or completely (10.6%) sharing an interest in Satanism—with relative equal distribution—though there is a drop with antagonistic partners (2.3%). The declining birthrates in many nations post-2008 recession is likely partly responsible for the drop of Satanists with children in the two recent surveys, from 25% in 2009 to 11% in 2011 (164).

American respondents dominate with 55% in 2011, trailed by Denmark (6%), Canada (4%), Finland (3%), and Australia (3%), followed by a scattering of other countries (165). Just under half were students in 2011 (45.6%), and of those the most popular major was psychology, which Lewis notes is “probably an obvious choice for seekers trying to understand themselves (166-167). The remaining distribution of occupations is self-employed/business owner (7.3%), artist (5.5%), technician (4.3%), editor/writer (4.0%), then teacher/professor, sales personnel, administrator manager, homemaker, and cook/chef within the 3-4% range, with a scattering of other professions. Lewis notes that almost 35% of respondents to the questionnaire in 2011 either skipped or checked “other” on the grid of occupation options, which leaves significant gaps in terms of conclusions. He cites Danish Satanist Amina Lap’s opinion that many Satanic artists do not earn money off of their art, yet being an artist is a Satanic ideal. In the second (2009) and

third (2011) surveys, 15-10% have military service, which, omitting the large number of young respondents ineligible for military service, indicates “that Satanists are disproportionately inclined to serve in the armed forces” (177).

An expected 93% come from a Christian religious background (171). Politically, 49% did not vote in their most recent local or national election (173). Only a small number identify as conservative: 5% Right-Conservative and 4% Far Right, with the largest group being non-political at 34%, followed by Independent (16%) and Libertarian (16%), Anarchist (12%), Left-Liberal (10%), Socialist (9%), Green (6%), and other (12%) (172). Lewis notes LaVey’s well-known politically conservative outlook, but emphasizes that his views are not indicative of Satanism as a whole (171). Lewis mentions a book of dubious journalism by Chris Mathews (2009) which devotes a significant section to linking Satanism with Nazism (172), but dismisses the study as a “non-academic attack on contemporary Satanists” (171), highlighting the book’s multiple histrionic claims, and citing *Satan Survey 2*’s explicit question about Nazism and neo-Nazis:

Two hundred and ninety-five out of 300 respondents answered this item—143 (or 49.5%) were extremely negative, 55 (or 19.0%) were negative, 60 (or 20.8%) were neutral, 16 (or 5.5%) were positive, and 15 (or 5.2%) were extremely positive. In other words, well over two-thirds of respondents expressed either a negative or an extremely negative evaluation of Nazism. These statistics speak for themselves. (Dyrendal, Lewis, and Petersen 2016, 173).

Interestingly, when the survey breaks down into questions on specific social issues (voting, abortion, women’s right, LGBTQ rights, healthcare, recreational drug use, etc.) most respondents would fall into a politically “Socialist” category, despite the low number of self-identifying Socialist Satanists (176).

When compared to other studies in the cultic milieu, most respondents echoed the common theme of exposure to Satanism being a “fit” (144) similar to Pagans describing a sense

of “coming home” (145). “Conversion” is understood as adopting a label for “what one already is,” a common idea across New Age spirituality and self-religions (144). Satanism is a decentralized movement, not reliant on pre-existing networks for outreach and recruitment (146). Lewis notes that the model of conversion put forward by Lofland-Stark (1965) based on a study of the Unification Church demonstrated that people became involved through personal relationships (146) does not apply to Satanists as they overwhelmingly come across or seek out Satanism via an article, book, or website (148). Younger Satanists (unsurprisingly) first encounter Satanism online, suggesting the declining influence of books (148). Lewis’ study claims that Satanism is predominantly an internet religion based on their lack of ritual activity and the large percentages of respondents that listed either public (message boards, blogs) or private (email, private messages) as their primary means of communication with other Satanists (150-151). Lewis concludes:

What we end up with for Satanism, then, is a movement whose members rarely if ever meet face to face, and who almost never engage in group religious activities. The primary activity of contemporary Satanists appears to be emailing or otherwise engaging in online discussions with other Satanists. (Dyrendal, Lewis, and Petersen 2016, 153).

Lewis’ surveys correlate to similar statistics of my smaller survey on the CoS, with a few variations, which are noted in the following section. Lewis’ conclusion introduces a criticism by asking, “if adopting...a Satanic self-identity involves neither ritual practices nor non-internet communities of co-religionists, is it really valid to say that one has become a member of a particular religion?” (153), adding, “this line of questioning arises from...how fundamentally the virtual environment has problematized what we traditionally regard as religious communities and religious conversion” (155). Lewis prompts scholars to consider “conversion” as identity construction, for traditional and non-traditional religions alike.

2.2.1. Church of Satan Questionnaire

My questionnaire's data was collected over a period of twelve months in 2016-2017, with a total of 97 respondents, exclusively members of the Church Satan. All ethical protocols mandated by my university have been met to conduct this research. Participants had to attest to being adult members of the CoS and provide an email. Otherwise, all answers were optional and rendered anonymous.

Q6. What is your age?		
Answered	97	
Skipped	0	
Answer Choices	Responses	
18 to 24	2.06%	2
25 to 34	32.99%	32
35 to 44	37.11%	36
45 to 54	20.62%	20
55 to 64	6.19%	6
65 to 74	1.03%	1
75 or older	0.00%	0
Total	100.00%	97

Figure 1. Question 6. What is your age?

Q7. What is your gender?		
Answered	97.00	
Skipped	0.00	
Answers	Responses	
Female	21.65%	21
Female/gender queer	1.03%	1
Male	74.23%	72
Male/cis	1.03%	1
Transgender female	1.03%	1
Transgender male	1.03%	1
Total	100.00%	97

Figure 2. Question 7: What is your gender?

Q8. What is your sexual orientation?		
Answered	97	
Skipped	0	
Answers	Responses	
Asexual	1.03%	1
Bisexual	12.37%	12
Bi-sexual (leaning towards hetero)	1.03%	1
Bisexual/Homoflexible	1.03%	1
Heteroflexible	1.03%	1
Homosexual (unqualified)	3.09%	3
Lesbian	1.03%	1
Gay	2.06%	2
Mostly heterosexual.	1.03%	1
Heterosexual/straight	71.13%	69
Heterosexual, but has had sex with a woman.	1.03%	1
If we are going off a binary system, straight. Two on the Kinsey scale.	1.03%	1
Pansexual	3.09%	3
Total	100.00%	97

Figure 3. Question 8: What is your sexual orientation?

The demographic data in the tables above are summarized as follows: the largest grouping of respondents (37.11%) is between the ages of 35-44, the second (32.99%) between the ages of 25-34, followed (20.62%) by the 45-54 age-group. Only 2.06% of respondents are between the ages of 18-24. Gender identification reveals that only 3.06% self-identified as transgender or gender queer, with 95.88% identifying as (an assumed) cisgender. Sexual orientation demonstrates more variety, with 28.87% self-identifying as something other than heterosexual. Respondents are predominantly American residents (85.57%). An omission in my questionnaire is that it did not ask about race or ethnicity. My (unscientific) anecdotal observations are that, while the CoS certainly contains people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, they are mostly white.

Compared to Lewis' quantitative studies, the gender ratio is relatively comparable across collected data, while my qualitative CoS study reports slightly more diversity in sexual orientation. This is likely due, however, to the open-ended nature of my questionnaire, whereas Lewis' survey provided solely four options (heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, and other). Respondents in my survey are concentrated in higher age groups. Lewis surmises that Satanism attracts a stable and growing number of mature adherents, which is reflected in the Church of Satan as a stable and older group. As seen in question nine below, Americans also dominate the Church of Satan within my study, followed by other Anglo-speaking countries.

Q9. What is your country of residence?		
Answered	97	
Skipped	0	
Answers	Responses	
Australia	2.06%	2
Austria	1.03%	1
Canada	4.12%	4
England	1.03%	1
Germany	1.03%	1
Northern Ireland	1.03%	1
Norway	1.03%	1
Sweden	1.03%	1
Switzerland	1.03%	1
United States	85.57%	83
United Kingdom	1.03%	1
Total	100.00%	97

Figure 4. Question 9: What is your country of residence?

Question ten asks, “What is your profession and why did you choose it?” As I did not provide pre-set options, it allows respondents to name and elaborate on their choice of profession. The replies vary from one word to long paragraphs. The nuances of their choices within these responses are included within the dissertation when relevant. Aggregating the information, however, presents a series of issues. For example, applying the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08) used by the United Nations Statistic Division, translates to this distribution:

Q10. What is your profession and why did you choose it?		
Answered	94	
Skipped	3	
Answers	Responses	
Group 1. Managers	9.28%	9
Group 2. Professional	52.58%	51
Group. 3. Technicians and associate professionals	5.15%	5
Group. 4. Clerical support workers	6.19%	6
Group 5. Service and sales workers	7.22%	7
Group 6. Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers	0.00%	0
Group 7. Craft and related trades workers	3.09%	3
Group 8. Plant and machine operators, and assemblers	0.00%	0
Group 9. Elementary occupations	2.06%	2
Group 10. Armed forces occupations	10.31%	10
Retired (non-specified)	1.03%	1
N/A	3.09%	3
Total	100.00%	97

Figure 5. Question 10: What is your profession and why did you choose it?

According to the ISCO rubric, the professional class (Group 2) in the Church of Satan makes up just over half (52.58%). This includes occupations in the areas of law, nursing, university teaching, information technology, and performance art. The Group 2 category is perhaps artificially inflated as certain respondents simply named a field (marketing, finance industry, law, healthcare, academia, etc.) without listing their specific job title. The concentration of respondents in their thirties and forties correlates to more stable careers.

The second issue with the ISCO-08 (or other categorization) is that no rubric allows for the increasing prevalence of multiple jobs in the current gig economy. Some respondents list a primary occupation, a side-hustle, and/or interests and hobbies that generate supplementary income. A prime example of this is found in one telling answer: “I have 2: 1. Network Security Technician—I've always had a knack for IT work, and the security side of that is something I

find fascinating. 2. Fetish Film Producer—It was something I've always wanted to do, and one day, my wife asked me ‘why aren't you doing this,’ and I didn't have a good answer.” Barring the confusion of cross listing occupations, I opt instead to emphasize that of the 94 respondents to this question, 19 (20%) list more than one source of income; 3 (3.15%) are students who are also working; and 2 (2.10%) are retired (one in a non-specified field).

In summary, the significant differences with Lewis’ findings and mine are: the non-prevalence of students in the CoS; the large number of older working professionals; and the near-equal number of Satanists in the armed forces or law enforcement (10.31%) though that is equal to the percentage of veterans nationwide (Dyrendal, Lewis, and Petersen 2016, 177).

Responses to *why* CoS members chose their profession reveal some interesting insights into self-religions such as Satanism. Many respondents include an elaboration of a particular enjoyable aspect of their job related to a variety of concepts within Satanic literature. As examples: one highlights a preference for solitary work and an annoyance at other people (a misanthropic thread runs throughout Satanic worldview); an owner of a tattoo parlour enjoys the independence and artistic expression (creativity is considered a prime Satanic ideal); the nurse likes the intellectual challenge of quick-decision making (the ideal Satanist uses one’s skills and intellect to demonstrate Satanism in professional settings); and finally this revealing response, “I am a free lance journalist, stand up comedian, fetish model and Pro Domme. I don’t feel so much like I ‘choose’ professions as take opportunities to master, or at least become passably good at new things.”

All of the highlighted interests in such professions are directly linked to ideas within Church of Satan doctrine: misanthropy, creativity, curiosity, and self-improvement. Many of the answers to this question indicate identical correlations of their chosen profession to well-

established Satanic ideas. This is not terribly surprising, considering they are answering a questionnaire based on religious affiliation. Perhaps what is more revealing is that CoS members are also picking-and-choosing *how* to relate their concept of self and religion *to* their occupation. Post-modern religions in neoliberal capitalist societies commodify improvement of the self; how we make money is just as integral to our identity as our religious affiliations as it permits us to purchase that commodity (Possamai 2018, 28). In post-modern religiosity, consumerism is embedded in our identities. It is not surprising, then, that CoS members understand their occupation in terms of selectively applying ideas contained within Satanic texts and the general ethos of the Church of Satan; they are markers of “success.” If identities are a bricolage (Partridge 2004), then framing occupations in terms of Satanic ideals is part of how CoS members construct theirs.

Q11. Were you raised in any particular religion?		
Answered	97	
Skipped	0	
Answers	Responses	
Atheist	1.03%	1
Non-religious/secular/agnostic	19.59%	19
Catholic	28.87%	28
Non-denominational Christian	10.31%	10
Hybrid Christianity	9.28%	9
Baptist	5.15%	5
Church of God	3.09%	3
Episcopalian	3.09%	3
LDS	3.09%	3
Methodist	3.09%	3
Church of Christ	2.06%	2
Presbyterian	2.06%	2
Protestant (unqualified)	2.06%	2
Magic	1.03%	1
Menonite	1.03%	1
United Church of Canada	1.03%	1
Hindu	1.03%	1
Jewish	1.03%	1
N/A	2.06%	2
Total	100.00%	97

Figure 6. Question 11: Were you raised in any particular religion?

When asked if they were raised in any particular religion, my survey reveals that 74.23% of CoS members are from Christian households, with a 28.87% Catholic and 45.36% Protestant (all denominations) divide. Responses naming more than one Christian denomination are listed under “Hybrid Christianity,” while unqualified Christianity is listed under “non-denominational.”

Reading through the open-ended answers one thing stands out: the amount of respondents that claim they were raised in a strict religious household is negligible at just over 2.02%, though

only half qualified their experience at all. For the rest that did, few wrote negatively about their childhood experience. The pattern is instead that most respondents were raised in households that were casually religious, or even indifferently atheist/secular, using the descriptive words “loosely” and “nominally,” or referencing a ubiquitous community religion, such as, “generalized Christianity” or “ambiently Reform Protestant.” Respondents sometimes name Christmas and Easter holidays as the only times they actively participated in religious ceremonies. Hybrid-Christianities are present in 9.28% of respondents, as per this example:

My birth mother was a Christian Scientist, my step-mother is a ‘recovering Methodist,’ and my father is a self-professed Agnostic.

The prevalence of a family’s cavalier attitude towards religion and a declining relevance over time is also present in a handful of CoS members that describe their own resistance to religion during pre-teen years and into adolescence:

My mother took me very infrequently to church until I was maybe 6-7. Then stopped. I had no desire to go on my own.

My Italian parents tried to raise me Catholic, but I asked too many questions from a young age and was dissatisfied with the answers.

Taking into account only those that defined their childhood experience with religious heritage, the responses to my questionnaire reflect that they were raised within a culturally Christian social environment without strong enforcement in the family dynamic. The specifically atheist or indifferently secular/agnostic households also reflect broader trends, at a combined 20.62%. In 2019, Pew Research Center noted this category at 26%, up from 17% in 2009 in the United States.

As for religious heritages other than Christianity or secular households, a few choice respondents to the survey describe a complicated context for how they interpret the question:

Christian and Nationalism. Christianity on my mother's side, and patriotic nationalism from my father's side. My mother grew up in an incredibly religious Christian household, and my father was a Captain in the United States Marine Corps, serving 20 years to Country, Corps and God.

No. My parents were not religious and we never spoke of religion in any way. But I knew from my grandmother, that she and my mother were practitioners and/or believers in magic. The subject was never discussed in any detail other than to say that some people had skills/powers to make things happen.

My mother and her family were members of the Pentecostal Holiness Church (Church of God, ironically enough). My father and his family were mostly atheist. So, my upbringing was a mixed bag of non-belief and literal interpretation of the Bible. One of my grandmother's (my father's mother) was heavily into the paranormal and ufology. Think Ancient Aliens before that was a thing and you just about have her self-styled belief system.

Though they are a minority, such responses reveal shifting notions of what we consider "religion." In these cases, magic, paranormal interests, and nationalism are listed as religious, which are difficult to isolate in surveys as they intersect with other experiences and ideas.

Q12. Describe your first contact with Satanism? (When, by what means, and how long until you decided to become a registered member of the Church of Satan?)		
Answered	97	
Skipped	0	
Years between first contact and official membership.	Responses	
1-5	32.99%	32
6-10	17.53%	17
11-15	7.22%	7
16-20	10.31%	10
21-30	7.22%	7
31-40	4.12%	4
Unspecified	20.62%	20
Total	100.00%	97

Figure 6. Question 12: Describe your first contact with Satanism?

My survey indicates that the time between first exposure to Satanism and sending in an application to become a registered member ranges from a few months to a staggering forty years. CoS policy stresses that, “Affiliation must primarily be a result of philosophical agreement, not the desire for socializing” (Church of Satan n.d. “Registered”), emphasizing their non-proselytizing stance. Given this, it is not surprising that only a small fraction (6.19%) of respondents listed another person (friend or acquaintance) as their first exposure to Satanism. The primary means of first contact is reading *The Satanic Bible* (LaVey 2005), with two people listing *The Satanic Witch* (LaVey 2003) and one naming *The Devil’s Notebook* (LaVey 1992), for a combined 49.48%. Of those 48 people, 22 mention picking it up in a bookstore out of curiosity (there is currently no legal e-book version, though bootleg and counterfeit⁴⁶ copies

⁴⁶ I have come across ebooks titled *The Satanic Bible* which were not authored by LaVey and often directly undermine LaVey’s primary interpretation of Satan. They usually present a theistic Satanist worldview.

circulate the internet). The “Satanic Panic” category is distinct from others as respondents specifically used the phrase or mention television talk-shows notorious for capitalizing on the moral panic for ratings boons, whereas general interest in occultism, witchcraft, or esotericism is separate. Responses to the “pop culture” category directly mention horror films that then piqued an interest for further study. For a religion such as Satanism, though, its sensationalist reputation is ubiquitous in Western popular culture. Several respondents mention that they had always been “vaguely aware” of it, especially those that were alive during the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Given my respondent pool is older in age than Lewis’, it is perhaps expected that the combined categories of first exposure via chat forums/website/online content is only 12.37%, though this result is unanticipated. The diversity of lapsed time between exposure and membership reveals a few interesting trends. A small selection of respondents consists of teenagers who became members as soon as they were of legal age (8 out of 97 respondents), while others expressed a longer route to membership:

I first read about the Church of Satan in the 1960s. Due to being a devout Christian I wanted nothing to do with it. By 2010 I had become an Atheist and was no longer afraid of a non-existent Devil. I was reading a collection of H.P. Lovecraft’s work I had bought on my Kindle and Amazon thought I might like to buy the Satanic Bible. I ordered the book to amuse myself with what I thought would be devil worshipping nonsense. However to my happy surprise I discovered a rational egoist philosophy presented with dramatic flair. Anton LaVey described in the Satanic Bible the type of life I had been trying to live since I abandoned Christianity 20 years before. After reading the rest of Anton LaVeys’ books plus the Satanic Scriptures by Peter Gilmore and essays at the Church of Satan website I decided I was indeed a Satanist. That took one year of reading and thinking. In 2013 I became a registered member of the Church of Satan and in 2014 was accepted as an active member.

A few respondents assumed their experience is the most common, such as with music (specifically metal, goth, industrial, and punk), which is only at 7.22% in my survey:

My first contact with Satanism was like many people, through music, then through people who considered themselves Satanists (and really weren't). In high school it

became an attractive philosophy, and I began reading more into it. This was the late 90's, early 2000's so there was a lot of terrible content on Satanism on the internet at the time, but I was more drawn towards the Church of Satan material. It took me until 2007 to formally join, and then took until 2012 to become an active member.

Q13. How open are you about your affiliation?		
Answered	97	
Skipped	0	
Answers	Responses	
Very private	12.37%	12
Only open with spouse, one or two friends	20.62%	20
Selectively share affiliation, with great discretion	35.05%	34
Open but not professionally	8.25%	8
Open	19.59%	19
Open as CoS spokesperson	4.12%	4
Total	100.00%	97

Figure 7. Question 13: How open are you about your affiliation?

The majority of CoS members from my survey do not publicly identify as Satanists. The overwhelming commentary on this question is that respondents divulge their affiliation with great discretion, carefully choosing the conditions by which they decide to openly discuss Satanism:

Only to a select few. Most think I'm just an ordinary atheist.

I am open about my affiliation with the Church of Satan both personally and professionally. Even before coming out as a homosexual in the 1990s, I realized that that society will always find something to hate or stigmatize an individual so there is no need to create a false narrative. It has been my experience that on a professional level, a boss does not care if one is a queer or a Satanist if you make them lots of money.

Open with friends. Strictly hidden professionally.

Several CoS members emphasized that keeping their religious affiliation separate from their work environment was extremely important, even if they were selectively open about it within

social circles. Within the 12.37% that are private, half stressed the fear of professional repercussions.

I asked CoS members: “If you are a parent, are your children raised in the religion?” Of the 91 respondents, 45 are parents, and *none* claimed to raise their children as religiously Satanic. The official Twitter account, run by anonymous but verified spokespersons, recently answered a similar question: “We do not proselytize nor do we support the indoctrination of children into any religion. It’s not very Satanic to ‘raise someone to be a Satanist’ - much better to raise children to be inquisitive and able to make their own educated decisions based on logic and reason” (Twitter @ChurchofSatan Oct. 24, 2020).

Just under half (49.45%) of respondents have children. This is higher than in Lewis’ studies: 11% in 2011, but still higher than the 22% in 2001, and 25% in 2009. Most list atheist/agnostic/secular/non-religious households, yet some elaborate on their parenting approach and its relationship to Satanism. I have singled out the most eloquent answer, but it should be noted that this sentiment was similarly expressed throughout all answers to this query:

I am a parent of two young children, my daughter is four years old and my son is two. This is both a complicated question and simple, all at once. From an outsider’s perspective and to those who ask this question, it is a resounding no. Satanism does not proselytize or indoctrinate, and as Satanists are born so to speak not made, it is pointless to attempt to raise children “as” Satanists. That said, the main difference for me between Satanism and other religions besides the obvious, is that while others practice their religion, we live it. We ARE Satanism. And it is through this living, what we know and recognize as vital existence, that we teach our children the ways of the world and how to navigate it. We are those who move among them, but are not them. We embolden our children to find what works best for them, whatever that may mean, and to excel in it as best they are able. So in a sense, yes, Satanic parents raise their children within the religion...but not in the hopes to make them Satanists. That’s not what Satanism does. Satanism doesn’t make Satanists. But it can allow one to see a better way of living, whether Satanist or not, and through the lens of the Satanic live a life of freedom, responsibility and happiness.

A half a dozen respondents voiced objections that spouses, ex-spouses, and co-parents were

raising their shared children or step-children in Christian households. They negotiate this tension with sensitivity to the children's welfare. One parent expressed the difficulties in negotiating parenthood with their former spouse who identifies as Christian, continuing:

My youngest daughter is 5 years old, but is special-needs and is so far speech delayed that at this point I'm more concerned with getting her to speak above a level of a two-year old than I am with teaching her religion. At any rate, it's my hope that both of my daughters will choose their preference for religion (or lack thereof) on their own. I think Anton LaVey's family is proof enough of what happens when you try to raise children in Satanism.

The above highlights CoS approaches to childrearing reflected within the answers. First, that religion should be chosen as an adult, not enforced by parents or the state. Second, that encouraging creativity, free-thought, and self-awareness are prime Satanic ideals present in good parenting. Finally, within internal CoS culture, LaVey's family strife is considered his personal business, yet the well-documented conflict with his daughters is presented as evidence that Satanism is ideally never an inherited religion. Amusingly, three respondents without children answered this question about their pets: "I consider myself a parent to my cat and she believes she's a god, but I definitely didn't teach her that."

Q16. Do you ritualize? If so, please provide details as to the frequency and motivation for ritualization. If not, why not?		
Answered	96	
Skipped	1	
Do you ritualize?		Responses
Yes	89.69%	87
No	9.28%	9
N/A	1.03%	1
Total		100.00% 97
Frequency of the 87		Responses
Rarely	45.98%	40
As needed	32.18%	28
Holidays, Equinoxes, Solstices	8.05%	7
Frequently	5.75%	5
Near daily	2.30%	2
Unspecified	5.75%	5
Total		100.00% 87

Figure 8. Question 16: Do you ritualize?

Many questions in my survey cannot easily be translated to statistical data (i.e. do they object to any part of Satanism; how does their life reflect being a Satanist; and what do they do for fun, etc.). The answers to those questions are scattered throughout this dissertation and used to enhance a portrait of CoS membership and Satanism as a lived religion. I did, however, ask several questions about magic and ritual, which are aggregated to this graph above for comparison.

Only 9.28% claimed not to ritualize, but among those that do (89.69%), their frequency varies according to need. Most respondents discussed a waxing and waning of ritual frequency (mostly a solitary rite) according to life events demanding extra attention, such as in this example:

I ritualize, time and place permitting. As I have grown in my art and through practice, I rarely partake in physical ritual. Also, as a family man and father in an upscale urban neighborhood, I have my family and neighbors to think of. Instead, I often desire to fall within myself and meditate, picturing in my mind the ritual chamber of my choice within a series of imaginative creations I have constructed for such purposes. My motivation can come from many places, but quite often it is to overcome a feeling or block which is holding me back or down.

One of the more interesting patterns is that 8 people mention meditation, while others frequently list engaging in art and music as ritual practice:

I am myself a musician and ritualize if I write songs.

Within the Church of Satan, “magic” is somewhat of an ephemeral concept. Formal, structured ritual is suggested, but not prescribed. Internal discussions on how to live a “magical” life range according to personal preferences: physical fitness, sexual satisfaction, and achieving professional goals are considered “magical” Satanic acts, purgative, or celebratory rites. They have no clear distinctions between magic in a defined space and time and how they live their everyday lives. Compared to Lewis’s survey, CoS members are more likely to ritualize but not as often, taking into account that respondents to my questionnaire were not choosing from pre-set options.

Chapter Three: Politics and Race in the Church of Satan

“Satanism IS Americanism.”

—Anton Szandor LaVey, founder and High Priest of the Church of Satan (1971).

“The Church of Satan itself is not a political organization and doesn’t operate as such. There is no requirement that members must involve themselves in any form of political activity whatsoever.”

—Peter H. Gilmore, High Priest of the Church of Satan (Policy on politics, n.d.).

“I don't object to any of the doctrinal content or practice of Satanism as I understand it. Anton LaVey had some opinions and some attitudes I don't agree with, and sometimes expressed himself in a way I would not endorse, but these usually have to do with matters not implicating Satanism per se, such as politics.”

—Anonymous Member of the Church of Satan (2017).

3.1. Introducing the Chapter

Occultism has a distinct history of political involvement. Sabrina Magliocco states that the intersection of contemporary magic and American politics is unique in that “communities practicing political magic today have a robust internet presence, and some exist exclusively online” (2020, 9). Virtual communications are not causative of political magic, but they do accelerate reach to other communities, which threatens boundaries and in turn leads to “boundary-keeping reactions” (9). Magliocco highlights the filtering process of “exclusion and inclusion” among modern magical practitioners and their political tensions, as fragmented echo-chambers polarize communities within virtual spaces, promulgated by social media (10).

Occultism and politics are not unique to one particular party or ideology. On the left, poets co-opting Satanic rhetoric to declare themselves “of the Devil’s party” in the late eighteenth-century Europe flourished into socialist narratives in literature, poetry, and prose (Faxneld 2016, 113). In America, magical practitioners formed a “hex party” against Hitler in 1941. In 1967, thirty-five thousand people formed a ring around the Pentagon to “exorcise all evil from the seat of United States military power.” In 1968, radical feminists marched on Wall Street cursing the New York Stock Exchange (Magliocco 2020, 8); while after the 2016 American presidential election, occultist Michael M. Hughes published a spell to “Bind Donald Trump and All Those Who Abet Him,” published on Medium (Asprem 2020, 19). Magliocco states:

The magical resistance arising from the political left must be understood in the context of the much larger liberal resistance movement, of which it is just a small slice. The resistance is not a single, united movement, but a network of groups linked through social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter that sometimes coordinate efforts, and at other times operate separately or even in conflict with one another. (2020, 44)

Magliocco also emphasizes that the broad range of interests among leftist magical circles includes direct action in political processes (such as urging flips from Republican to Democrat congressional seats), to community-based organizing and involvement with Black Lives Matters, the #MeToo movement, LGBTQ+ equality, reproductive justice, immigration reforms, science education, and other liberal issues (2020, 45).

Egil Asprem outlines that leftist magical actions prompted a right-wing magical reaction within counter-movements on the right, such as one of the American leaders of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, David Giffin, going pro-Trump (2020, 20). Giffin’s online assault grew with increasing inflammatory language, attacking anti-Trump magicians by forming a

coalition of occultists to combat the: [G]ang of “black magicians,” “traitors,” “Satanist terrorists,” and “crypto-Fascist witches—whose REAL objective is to establish a globalist world Empire!” (Asprem 2020, 21). Asprem notes that, while it is difficult to gage how many people performed magical actions based on Giffin’s claims, this rhetoric has a particular thread in ring-wing extremism, which directly informs where occultism intersects with “online image board culture and the alt-right” (22). The strategy is “metapolitics,” which is weaponizing online memes and flame wars by “targeting general culture,” not getting directly involved in politics, and rebranding right-wing extremism via “traditionalist spirituality” (inspired by esoteric writers such as René Guénon and Julius Evola) (22). “Right-wing idealogues reach a new audience interested in ‘esotericism’ and ‘spiritual traditions’” (22). Asprem writes:

Through a string of coincidences and contingencies that could probably only have taken place on an imageboard, where hundreds of thousands of messages are posted anonymously at high pace every day, elements of modern occultism were woven into the emerging alt-right’s blend of tactics, ideology, and interpretations of unfolding events. The result was the birth of an online religion, situated somewhere between parody, make-believe, metapolitical strategy, genuine messianic expectations, and magic. (2020, 23)

For white nationalists, anti-Semites, and the alt-right, online rhetoric and “metapolitical warfare” is a battle that extends “beyond fighting for the meanings of a given meme or mainstreaming specific antisemitic symbols: to win the narrative, it was also necessary to co-opt the language, myths, and symbolisms of religion” (Asprem 2020, 28).

Among the modern magical practitioners in the United States, Magliocco references author Gary Lachman’s argument that political occultist groups, both left and right, share a common underlying element of “Ur-Fascism,” a concept named by Umberto Eco, wherein they adopt a narrative that the recovery of a lost body knowledge “will bring about a better world” (2020, 45). Magliocco summarizes the divergence of interpretations of this narrative as follows:

“right-leaning occultists tend to conflate this narrative with ethnic identity and purity, those on the left adopt a more universalist view” (45).

Neither Asprey, Jones, or Magliocco directly address self-identified Satanists and their particular political leanings, but I highlight their respective articles here to demonstrate that the broader occult milieu online is directly involved in political actions and reactions. Both left- and right-leaning CoS members inherit and reflect these responses to social and political issues. All members engaged in political rhetoric generate their own echo-chambers, and this chapter presents a range of opinions contained in the content produced by members.

This chapter is, accidentally, about race. It was not originally planned to be a discussion on how the CoS frames race or racism. I did not initially consider integrating queries on race or racism at all in my questionnaire or theoretical approach. As a religion comprised of mostly white people, topics such as racial dynamics and systemic racism are not centered in Church of Satan discourse. LaVey rarely tackles it directly, and when he does mention race or racism, it is a dismissive commentary about its collectivist delusional qualities. The CoS administration likewise mirrors LaVey’s perspective, as Gilmore denounces inherent racial superiority as ludicrous. CoS members, mostly white, rarely *directly* engage with race or racism as topics in their public discourse, with a few exceptions. They do, however, discuss American political issues, which are increasingly framed as systemically racist in popular discourse, to varying levels of resistance from both the right and left.

Leading up to and after the 2016 American presidential election there was an upsurge in CoS members’ responses to events in the news, especially as President Trump’s (2016-2020) political rhetoric amplified discourses on race and racism in the public sphere. Activist movements such as Black Lives Matter are increasingly topics of informal discussion, especially as

social media and cell phone camera footage document excessive violence on Black people at the hands of police (Stern 2020). During the summer of 2020, protests against police brutality erupted internationally, with ensuing mass media coverage. This news then informs CoS members' internal (yet public) discourse, as modern religious Satanism broadly is positioned as a "self-religion," that is, a religion that is focused on the improvement of the self, that centers one's own potential, and one's natural predispositions (Heelas 2002, 362). Post-modern religiosity in Western capitalist societies is characterized by "a spiritual supermarket where religious consumers pick and choose the spiritual commodities they fancy, and use them to create their own spiritual syntheses fine-tuned to their strictly personal needs" (Hanegraaff 2002, 299). Though LaVey's Satanism as a self-religion is not unique in contemporary popular occulture, the question examined here is how individual Church of Satan members *interpret* Satanic ideas between LaVey's thoughts on social and political issues and their own predispositions. That is, while members of the Church of Satan are certainly directly informed by LaVey's *The Satanic Bible*, they also view some of his later writings with greater or lesser authority in their own lives (if they even read them at all). Because LaVey deliberately positioned his brand of Satanism as a "loose cabal" of individuals, the understanding was and continues to be that CoS Satanists have wildly divergent applications of LaVey's Satanism. The distinctions between what is and is not "official" Satanic doctrine (versus LaVey's personal opinions) is an ongoing, internal deliberation—at times considered and thoughtful, at times heated and contentious.

3.2. LaVey

In Anton Szandor LaVey's (1930-1997) authorized biography, Blanche Barton (1961—), his long-time companion at the time of his death, writes: "As for the political machinery in America, LaVey has little positive to say, believing it's nothing more than a spectator sport presented to keep people occupied while the real moving and shaking goes on elsewhere" (1992, 180). LaVey's documented disdain for the public theater of American politics gleaned from his authored texts, authorized biography, and interviews, demonstrates a mix of conservative and liberal opinions on popular social and political issues.

What, then, to make of LaVey's personal opinions on social and political topics? Though LaVey rejects the public drama of political theatre, his primary source materials are commentaries on popular concerns of his time that fit into broader historical threads of social discourse. That is, while LaVey is not *engaged* in social or political issues via civic activism, lobbying, or legal challenges, he is *responding* to the topical issues of his time (at least superficially) within his interviews, personal essays, columns, and books. In *The Satanic Bible*, LaVey viewed his newly codified religion as heralding a new age. He writes:

The twilight is done. A glow of new light is borne out of the night and Lucifer is risen, once more to proclaim: "This is the age of Satan! Satan Rules the Earth!" The gods of the unjust are dead. This is the morning of magic, and undefiled wisdom. (LaVey 2005, 23)

These few lines, written as a rhythmical proclamation and read in the broader context of LaVey's works, reference his vision for a future society in which a new era of philosophical inquiry is unencumbered by the ostensible stifling of Christian morality (van Luijk 2016, 357). Satan—or Lucifer in this passage—is LaVey's metaphor signalling a worldview in which the natural, carnal self is centered as one's subjective universe (LaVey 2005, 44). LaVey sought to fill his church

with the “alien elite” as a “dark cabal” of iconoclasts and radicals that resonate with their chosen symbol, Satan.

This affinity with core Satanic dogma, though, is considered timeless. Petersen writes: “LaVey’s claim that ‘the basics of Satanism have always existed’ rests not on the veracity of an inverted Christian tradition or the worship of pre-Christian deities, but on the claim that man and nature are the essential constituents of reality, and that any religion should build on these fundamental principles” (2012, 174). Partridge argues that “dark spirituality” is a significant and growing aspect of post-modern religiosity. He notes that while church attendance and formal, institutional Christianity are on the decline, that iconic rebels and monsters, our phobias of the “other,” the paranormal, the alien, and our obsession with “the dark side,” are “shaped principally by Christian demonology” (2005, 208). Hence, LaVey views “core” Satanism as timeless as human existence itself because he frames it as a “carnal” religion based on fundamental human needs and desires, but its narratives and metaphors are informed by inherited histories of Christian theology and its muddled intermingling with folklore and popular culture. Far from being timeless, LaVey’s essentialist “carnality” has direct roots in post-modern “New Age” discourses of the True Self, which posit that one’s core concept of selfhood is part of a holistic or non-dualistic concept of spirituality. These New Age discourses deliberately reject the strong anti-material and oppositional dualistic position of Christian theology; the body—and its needs and desires—as an unfortunate hurdle to overcome for (Christian) salvation. LaVey, reflecting the circulating New Age concepts of his time, discards the conflict of a mind/body divide, and views the self as a totality. True to (rebellious) form, LaVey also opposes the New Age idea of spirituality itself.

LaVey's primary political message, repeated throughout his texts and interviews, is one of anti-Christian/theistic sentiment; he openly derides Christianity's influence in society. He considers theism generally and Christianity especially as oppressive, limiting, and against human nature. He writes:

All religions of a spiritual nature are inventions of man. He has created an entire system of gods with nothing more than his carnal brain. Just because he has an ego and cannot accept it, he has to externalize it into some great spiritual device which he calls "God."
(LaVey 2005, 44)

Christianity and its influence in American society are a consistent target of LaVey's ire, and he advocated a truly secular society. But what of his vision for society beyond a demand for separation of church and state? *The Satanic Bible* (TSB) expresses fairly liberal views, especially in terms of personal freedoms. Chapter two, the "Book of Lucifer" (LaVey 2005, 37-105), is a series of twelve essays originally written in the format of 1960's "rainbow sheets" and circulated in LaVey's Friday night "Magic Circle" gatherings before TSB's publication in 1969 (Petersen 2010, 78). They contain "popular culture criticism, discussing various aspects of being a Satanist and the ailments of modern Christian culture in secular terms" (78). The chapter condones all sexual activity between consenting adults, including asexuality (LaVey 2005, 66-67), and advocates personal freedoms (except recreational drug use) as long as indulgence is done responsibly and legally (81). In chapter one, the "Book of Satan," large sections are taken from the 1896 political diatribe, *Might is Right*, written under the pseudonym Ragnar Redbeard (Gallagher 2012, 108). Redbeard's book contains explicitly anti-Semitic and racist claims, yet these were omitted from LaVey's work. Petersen notes that LaVey had a "right-wing libertarian political view indebted to Ayn Rand and Herbert Spencer"⁴⁷ (2012, 178) and social Darwinist

⁴⁷ Ayn Rand developed objectivist philosophy, which influences Libertarianism; Herbert Spencer was a social Darwinist that emphasized individual freedoms and limited state interference.

opinions, but emphasizes that scholars “have to exercise caution; what one leaves in might be as telling as what is included” (177). As LaVey was an outspoken misanthropist, his early writings display an underlying disregard for humanity, but with a libertine slant. In an interview from 1971, LaVey states, “I was very liberal in my younger years... I was always for civil rights. I had Negro friends when Negro friends weren’t fashionable” (Fritscher 2004, 14). He claims that he would have been imprisoned during American Senator Joseph McCarthy’s purge on social undesirables during the 1950s, stating that Martin Luther King Jr. was “killed because he was an articulate gentleman, concerned about his wife and family” (14).

During these initial years of the Church of Satan, LaVey was an active public figure, promoting his newly founded religion. He hosted public performances, wrote columns and newsletters, gave interviews, and kept busy as the primary spokesperson. *The Satanic Bible* is the most authoritative text within the Church of Satan, and its influence extends into the broader Satanic milieu. Lewis notes:

However one might criticize and depreciate it, *The Satanic Bible* is still the single most influential document shaping the contemporary Satanist movement. Whether LaVey was a religious virtuoso or a misanthropic huckster, and whether *The Satanic Bible* was an inspired document or a poorly edited plagiarism, their influence was and is pervasive. (2001a, xiv)

In a 1986 interview, a journalist addresses LaVey’s increasing seclusion, presented as a process of disillusionment (Harrington 1986). As my earlier work claims: “At the height of his popular arc, LaVey cavorted with movie stars, consulted on films, appeared in hundreds of television, radio, and print media, and generally capitalized on his status as an infamous black magician. The success brought unwanted fringe attention” (Holt 2017, 105). LaVey states that he grew wary of the church’s popularity with Hell’s Angels, Nazis, and men seeking sexual encounters with Satanic women (Harrington 1986). He also had to contend with death threats

and harassment against him and his family. The “Satanic circus” that generated buzz in the early years was now an impediment to his increasingly acute misanthropic views. Barton writes about the consequences of early church promotional materials, stating that LaVey printed his address and phone number on posters and fake money (which was folded and left on the street) (2021, 111). He states: “I don’t like to think that I was naïve during that period of my life. I just wanted the Church of Satan to be honest, open, and above board” (111). His response was to retreat to a private life of “madness and mystery” (Harrington 1986).

By the mid-eighties until the advent of the internet in the mid-nineties, access to LaVey remained for trusted members and vetted inquirers (Barton 2021, 113). His subsequent writings favour total sequestration from the public and immersion in insular environments of his own creation (Holt 2017, 105). The transmission of authority in the Church of Satan during this period was disseminated by official statements via the Church of Satan’s administrative board, the anonymous Council of Nine, which eased LaVey’s transition from public life, resulting in less upheaval upon his death in 1997⁴⁸ (Davies 2009, 77). A marked cynicism permeates LaVey’s output in the later period, informing his views of society. Petersen notes, “there is definitely a moral and political biologism present from the start, which seems to grow stronger in the late 1970s and 1980s” (2010, 81).

In 1988, LaVey wrote a document titled “Pentagonal Revisionism: A Five-Point Plan,” originally printed in the Church of Satan newsletter, *The Black Flame*. The directives are:

- 1) “Stratification,” in which LaVey derides the notion of equality and claims that it has allowed the “mediocre” to thrive at the expense of the exceptional.

⁴⁸ Post-humous conflicts between LaVey’s children and Blanche Barton (his companion at the time of his death) over ownership of his works and organization were settled in court. The final ruling of those legal proceedings resulted in LaVey’s children possessing the rights to his copyrighted texts, while Blanche Barton remained High Priestess (and owner) of the Church of Satan for a year, with Peter H. Gilmore as High Priest, until Barton switched titles with Peggy Nadramia, Gilmore’s spouse, in 2001. Barton’s title is now Magistra Templi Rex (van Luijk 2016, 380). Barton maintains mostly a private life. Gilmore and Nadramia remain the High Priest and High Priestess of the Church of Satan.

- 2) “Strict taxation of all churches,” reflecting his mandate that religions should be able to survive without tax exempt status.
- 3) “Lex Talionis,” an instruction that punishments should reflect the crimes committed. This is a critique of a religious notion of leniency incorporated into what LaVey perceives as lax criminal justice.
- 4) “Development and production of artificial human companions,” which both reflects LaVey’s disdain for humanity, and alleviates the lack of suitable companionship.
- 5) The creation of insular spaces called “Total Environments,” which are highly idiosyncratic immersive places as hubs of immortality. (Holt 2017, 107)

“Pentagonal Revisionism” re-emphasizes LaVey’s pre-existing contempt for humanity, especially as his church was subject to unstable or undesirable persons, and he became even more of a recluse. Points one to three reflect his social Darwinist and libertarian views, while points four and five demonstrate his desire for spaces of his own design. To LaVey, collectivism in any form is considered corruptive, as it caters to the “lowest common denominator” (Holt 2017, 106), and represents one of LaVey’s Satanic sins, “herd conformity” (LaVey 1987).

But what of LaVey’s vision for society outside of his insular space? In a 1989 interview with *Modern Primitive Magazine*, he states:

My most elitist, Satanic society dream is of something that’s not based on racism, but based on *intelligence vs. stupidity*—THAT’S IT! *There are the stupid and there are the intelligent.* There are the people who are alive and vital and sensitive and thinking, and there are the people who are dead, the cloned, the pods that are just *things*. They’re the ones that I feel should be put to the flamethrower, regardless of race. (Vale 1989, 95)

LaVey’s strong misanthropic views are reiterated in multiple interviews. In 1992, *ANSWER Me!*—an alternative magazine edited by Jim and Debbie Goad notorious for its racism and misogyny (Smith 1999, 101)—Goad and LaVey commiserate to their shared “boundless contempt for Homo sapiens” (Goad and Goad 1992, 6). Throughout the interview, LaVey: derides the notion of equality; heralds the “stimulators” or “performers” of society, framing the

“audience” as nearly identical mass-produced human beings (9); ponders whether Jesus had masochistic sexual satisfaction from his torture and humiliation (10); condemns blaming leaders such as Stalin, Hitler, Manson (or himself) for individuals “overextending” their original claims; and dismisses anarchists as being in “aimless disarray” (15). Anti-egalitarian sentiment is repeated again in a 1994 interview: “There is no way Satanism can be egalitarian” (Blush and Petros 2005, 178).

On racism LaVey elaborates: “What the racists don’t want to hear is that we’re against stupidity, and that’s the bottom line. If there are more stupid Black people, then we’re against those Blacks. But the same goes for the Whites—no one gets a free ride” (183). Eugenics is discussed in *Satan Speaks* (1998), detailing his concept of “Third Side Perspectives”—that is, when any particular social or political issue is polarized in the popular imagination and the media, that a nuanced, alternative view is a “Satanic Third Side.” He writes: “It is invariably a third side that is overlooked in every issue and endeavor, from abortion to gun control. The third side can be the crackpot stuff of conspiracy theories, or it can be the most logical and simple, yet deliberately neglected conclusion” (LaVey 1998, 11). He notes that eugenics is a solution to the much-contested abortion issue, “Satanically speaking, I am against abortion,” he explains, continuing, “Yet I do consider a problem of overpopulation. Therefore, I advocate compulsory birth control” (11). He then encourages sterilization for “irresponsible parents, male or female” to prevent having unwanted children (11). LaVey does not qualify “irresponsible” in terms of social status or race, noting that the white upper-class engage in a ridiculous theatre of courting rituals because of prurient attitudes around sex; “Most marriages served a single purpose — to fuck and get fucked... Even more depressing to contemplate are the eugenic effects of entire societies born to such unions” (LaVey 1998, 13). In another essay, he claims that because

excessive hygiene erases one's sweat it distances humans from their animal olfactory senses and mating instincts; "Bathing is genetically disastrous and eugenically unsound" (135).

LaVey's views on social or political concerns were perceived via the centrality of his contempt for humanity as a whole. He writes in his final book, "One of the reasons I hate people so much is because they are basically an insecure, treacherous, dishonest lot... Whether on a grubby little get-something-for-nothing, win-the-lottery level, or on a corporate and political level, there is complete disregard for the lives of the most valuable fellow humans" (LaVey 1998, 172). As I have argued elsewhere: LaVey's premise for human existence appears to be that we are quickly-multiplying parasites, whose lives have no special inherent meaning (Holt 2017, 106). He even suggests that space exploration will have an added benefit of creating habitable locations to send the dismal, herd-like "locusts" of humanity into "space ghettos," and thus freeing up earth for creative individualism to thrive (LaVey 1992, 95-96). To enter a LaVeyan Satanic society is both a withdrawal from a wearisome, corruptive world (of boring and tedious people), and immersion in a measured construction of an energizing, creative world (Holt 2017, 106). For LaVey, grandiose political ideas for improving society are a theatrical farce, only ostensibly concerned with the good of humanity, in which the powerful sit "in closed rooms" privately mocking—while publicly campaigning—equality (Goad and Goad 1992, 11).

Many of LaVey's political statements are viewed via his acquaintance with far-right neo-Nazi groups operating in the United States (Petersen 2012, 177-178; van Luijk 2016, 368), which position LaVey in proximity to white supremacist principles, if not directly aligned. Even so, scholars suggest that LaVey's courting of fascists has a transgressive function. Petersen writes: "Apart from cultural critique and shock effect, they seemed most valuable as foils for the church" (2012, 178; supported by Aquino 2009, 374-386; Lyons 1988, 117-119).

Van Luijk positions LaVey's thought within three overlapping traditions. The first is the Western Revolution. He writes, "LaVey's plans look like a crude but not necessarily incorrect implication of Nietzsche's plea for creative elite that would reshape Western values" without Christian impediment (2016, 376). The second tradition is the backlash against the Western Revolution's cores of liberty, equality, and brotherhood, which heavily criticized equality. The third tradition is contained in doctrines of Western occultism, which frame specialized, esoteric knowledge as for the few, "spiritual" elite that can "dispose of old prejudices and embrace a new, radical, nontranscendent, and this-worldly life-view" (368). LaVey, then, coopts these traditions in a uniquely American way, but not without confusion as to whether he uses the symbol of Satan within the framework of its long history as radical leftist-oriented political defiance—in keeping with the counterculture movements of the 1960s—or as common ground with fascist ideology (369).

Whether LaVey was politically "left" or "right" is one of the primary tensions surrounding the Church of Satan, both internally (LaVey's politics are casually to heatedly debated among its members) and externally (the CoS continues to face accusations that it is a fascist organization, textually supported in LaVey's writings). In order to discuss this question, I examine LaVey's own words within its *American* social and political context of the 1980s and 1990s (when LaVey wrote his later texts): a foundational neoliberalism, an ambient public Protestantism, Reagan era neoconservatism, and a strong notion of American Exceptionalism.

Regardless of LaVey's rejection of political activism and involvement, his statements on criminal justice, eugenics, sterilization, abortion, and intelligence are echoes of the racially coded appeals for explicit strategic racism within American neoconservative politics. Within the broader American political discourse of the 1980s, they are "purposeful efforts to use racial

animus as leverage to gain material wealth, political power, or heightened social standing” (López 2014, 46). President Ronald Reagan’s (1981-1989) courted the evangelical vote by framing the Republican party as for Christian American “family values” (Butler 2021, 72). An important movement coined the Moral Majority developed in the late 1970s from evangelical circles to promote issues such as denouncing homosexuality and communism; the “moral had become political” (71). In a 1980 speech to an evangelical audience, Reagan rapturously mobilized the crowd by vowing to protect America and its special interests (72). Anthea Butler notes: “Evangelicals were well politicized by this point, and almost all of the ones in Reagan’s camp were white” (72). Reagan’s subsequent rhetoric against welfare programs was a deliberate effort to suppress racial equality under the guise of American Exceptionalism.

Beyond propagating the stereotypical image of a lazy, larcenous black woman ripping off society’s generosity without remorse, Reagan also implied another stereotype, this one about whites: they were the workers, the taxpayers, the persons playing by the rules and struggling to make ends meet while brazen minorities partied with their hard-earned tax dollars. (López 2014, 58-59)

Reagan’s rhetoric positions the righteous Christian citizen holding up America and her conservative ideals by “provoking a sense of white victimization” (López 2014, 59). LaVey’s coinciding rhetoric is *nearly* identical. He notes: “White kids grow up feeling angry and resentful that there doesn’t seem to be an identity of power for them anymore” (van Luijk 2016, 370). While LaVey omits race in his criticism of abortion, contraception, and sterilization, neo/conservative talking points on Black welfare recipients in the Reagan era directly align with LaVey’s statements on responsibility. Van Luijk posits that LaVey’s racially coded language is tactical, since he considered far-right circles fertile recruiting ground. LaVey dismisses the neo-Nazi movement comprised of “acned and bucolic types” (371) with unstable principles yet ripe to be easily propagandized into Satanism: “Their racist ideals...are as removable as their

armbands” (370). It is important to note that within popular American political rhetoric, racially coded language is not unique to the far-right. White liberals (such as Hillary Clinton) used similar language in order to appeal to southern Democratic voters, and politically strategic racism embeds much of America’s social welfare and incarceration policies (López 2014, 111). Racism is endemic empirical political structures.

Van Luijk further notes that internal letters and correspondence between members of the CoS and LaVey indicate that he and then-CoS Magister Michael Aquino⁴⁹ endorsed the idea of a quasi-authoritarian Americanism, welcomed the neoconservative backlash of the 1980s, and anticipated an “imminent Right-wing regime” that would be responsive to Satanism (370). LaVey’s vision of America mirrors right-wing political rhetoric—especially of the Reagan era (and its continued resonance with the alt-right today)—yet without Christian evangelical underpinnings. He writes:

To sum up our political doctrine: Satanism IS Americanism in its purest form, with only the outdated moral codes altered to fit the times, and with recognition of the fact that only if man’s most basic instincts are satisfied can a nation receive his best. When it becomes common knowledge that we do not advocate or even approve of denial or desecration of such sacred American traditions as home, family, patriotism, personal pride, etc., but instead champion these things, our one-time opponents in “The Establishment” will not have a leg to stand on. (LaVey 2017 [1971])

LaVey equates Satanism with American Exceptionalism itself. In this view, LaVey imagines “traditional” values stripped of their theistic (specifically Christian) and racist properties. This thesis emphasizes, however, that despite LaVey’s personal rejection of theism and racism, the political views he espouses are embedded with systemic racial oppression and

⁴⁹ Aquino later left the Church of Satan to found the Temple of Set in 1975. He published multiple editions of his own lengthy history of the CoS with accompanying documents, including letters from LaVey.

justified by theological concepts. Put another way, LaVey does not reject the racially coded language or rhetoric, even as he rejects the racism itself.

Van Luijk argues that LaVey used racism in similar ways to Reagan: as a calculated appeal, but to fringe neo-Nazis, not evangelicals. Van Luijk notes that LaVey had contempt for Nazism (van Luijk 2016, 370-371; Williams 2016). LaVey deliberately positions himself in proximity to authoritarian ideology as it appeals to his pro-establishment patriotic sense of Satanic Americanism, yet dismisses racist and Christian theological ideals enmeshed within American far-right and conservative political rhetoric. LaVey viewed Satanism itself as timeless, as a truly “carnal” religion, and therefore beyond concepts of theism and racism themselves, as he claims, “true Satanism ‘transcends ethnic, racial and economic differences,’” a position he maintained until his death in 1997 (van Luijk 2016, 369).

Sociologist Adam Possamai argues that the neoliberalist trend of societies withdrawing social infrastructures places the welfare of its citizens under the responsibility of the individual, and that the “ultimate goal of neoliberalism is to extend existing markets and create new ones” (2018, 4). Ronald Reagan in the US, Margaret Thatcher in the UK, “economic rationalism” in Australia, and “economic fundamentalism” in New Zealand were part of a broader wave of capitalist political movements to force public institutions to function like for-profit markets in the private sector (4). Possamai writes: “New forms of regulation and governmentality have been created to regulate this individual self: people are expected to resolve, themselves, their possible unhappiness and their sense of alienation and disenchantment” (2018, 28). The absence of social welfare programs is particularly germane to America and its current political issues and social unrest. LaVey, then, mirrors the demands of a society focused on the individual as a consumer, as solely responsible for the direction of one’s own life. In the cultic milieu, this includes the

hallmarks of new age spirituality focused on individualism (73). I suggest that, as LaVey aligns with libertarian policies, he also fits within Possamai's categorization of new age religion functioning as a tool of neoliberalism: commodifying the improvement of the self (76).

LaVey's personal social and political opinions as expressed in his writings and interviews link directly to a Reagan era neoconservatism stripped of theism and racism, though that view is not explicit in the fairly liberal ideas contained in his earlier work, *The Satanic Bible*, which has far more influence. TSB has such loosely defined liberal claims which can easily be interpreted across a wide spectrum of political opinions and social concerns. I position LaVey, who would have been in his 80s today, as radically liberal in some ways, conservative in others, and certainly with an affinity for totalitarianism. Regardless, LaVey alienated everyone, deliberately. In ex-CoS Magister Boyd Rice's recent book, *The Last Testament of Anton LaVey*, he writes:

To the religious Right, LaVey is a very dangerous figure—a libertine Antichrist whose philosophy of sex, violence and power will surely usher in The End of The World. To the liberal Left, LaVey represents an equal but opposite threat: for them he's the modern face of Fascism, a man whose anti-democratic principles will set the stage for the reemergence of totalitarianism and erase the triumphs of egalitarianism...LaVey is both tyrant and libertarian and one and the same time. (Rice 2019, 11)

LaVey is in constant tension with established social circles: emerging from the counterculture yet holding it contempt (Dyrendal, Lewis, and Petersen 2016, 67); capitalizing on occult aesthetics yet deriding esotericism (Petersen 2011b, 130); designing his Church with inherent political tensions between members; and creating a persona that is contested by "scholars, journalists, detractors, and Satanists" that have "exalted, belittled, discounted, corroborated, and debunked claims made by LaVey and the Church of Satan" (Holt and Petersen 2016, 443). As Petersen and myself claim: "LaVey's adoption of the oppositional figure of Satan is reflected in this use of biographical storytelling: His (likely deliberate) weaving of fact and fantasy re-

establishes the tension through an air of mystique, as does the disputed mythic status resulting from antagonistic reinterpretation” (443-444). That is, LaVey’s contentious political opinions position him within his lifelong intentional antagonism for fixed categorization.

3.3. The Administration of the Church of Satan

The Church of Satan claims that its organization is apolitical. The current High Priest, Peter H. Gilmore, maintains the official stance that politics are under the purvey solely of each individual member. He writes:

As has been said many times before, one’s politics are up to each individual member, and most of our members are political pragmatists. They support political candidates and movements whose goals reflect their own practical needs and desires. Our members span an amazing political spectrum, which includes but is not limited to: Libertarians, Liberals, Conservatives, Republicans, Democrats, Reform Party members, Independents, Capitalists, Socialists, Communists, Stalinists, Leninists, Trotskyites, Maoists, Zionists, Monarchists, Fascists, Anarchists, and just about anything else you could possibly imagine. It is up to each member to apply Satanism and determine what political means will reach his/her ends, and they are each solely responsible for this decision. Freedom and responsibility—must be a novel concept for those who aren’t Satanists. We take it in stride. Members who demand conformity from other members to their particular political fetish are welcomed to depart. (Church of Satan n.d., “Policy”)

Gilmore’s writings echo those of LaVey on certain comparable popular issues. In Gilmore’s book, *The Satanic Scriptures* (2007), he dismisses accusations that the Church of Satan is an organization encouraging Nazi eugenics, writing, “While there are provable biological differences between the races and statistically demonstrable performance levels in various activities, it is quite irrational to think that someone can be elite or not simply because of the color of their skin” (33). Gilmore defines eugenics as, “The practice of encouraging people of talent and ability to reproduce, to enrich the gene pool from which our species can grow” (35).

Gilmore and LaVey reframe eugenics similarly: they superficially dismiss racial discrimination and herald stratification via personalized selective procreation based on the (Satanic) concepts of intelligence and creativity.

It is important to note, however, that both Gilmore and LaVey ignore that so-called “quantifiable” differences between races—especially in terms of cognitive abilities—are based on deeply systemic racial discriminatory practices and policies embedded in institutional structures (see Benjamin 2019; Gillborn 2016; Jackson and Weidman 2004; Rutherford 2020; Sloan and Krimsky 2011). In a 2016 interview, Gilmore states that LaVey, “never advocated eugenics as a governmentally mandated program, which ironically was something that some Christian sects did prior to the Nazi regime when this idea was pushed to horrifying conclusions” (Williams 2016). LaVey and Gilmore’s Satanic tendentious interpretation of eugenics reflect the Satanism-inherent misanthropic derision for rash impulses of humanity, mob mentality, and broad collectivist thinking.

Gilmore’s political opinions are rarely presented with the same weight as LaVey’s, though his position as High Priest does convey authority. A summary of his personal opinions found in interviews and essays is as follows. Gilmore claims that: abortion is acceptable but emphasizes contraception as a preferable preventative; the Iraq war, like all wars, are operated by politicians with their own agendas that result in the death of civilians and innocents; he would choose Hillary Clinton over Rudolph Giuliani for president (Shankbone 2007); champions progress of LGBTQ rights and same-sex marriage (Church of Satan 2004); notes that the Church of Satan was fully accepting of transgender persons from the beginning (Church of Satan n.d., “Self-Realization”); and that there is no apocalyptic thought in Satanism nor desire for mass conversion (Holt and Petersen 2016, 450). Gilmore’s opinions as expressed in interviews, much

like LaVey's, hold an esteemed status that allows for ambiguous personal views unless explicitly referencing canonical ideas. Hence, Gilmore's comments on reproductive rights, military action in other countries, or politics in general are considered private opinions (though certainly with a Satanic slant, and not without influence on CoS members), while the positions against an afterlife or evangelicalism stand firmly within the Church of Satan's official atheistic and anti-spiritual doctrine.

Gilmore and the Church of Satan are perhaps pressured to discuss political issues more since another atheistic Satanic religion emerged in 2013, the Boston-based The Satanic Temple (TST). TST, led by Lucien Greaves (a.k.a. Doug Mesner), organized several provocative events designed for maximum public outrage: in response to public schools providing copies of the Christian Bible to children in Florida, TST distributed *The Satanic Children's Big Book of Activities* (2014); they staged a same-sex kiss-in over the grave of the grandmother of Fred Phelps (the notorious anti-LGBTQ crusader and founder of the Westboro Baptist Church); campaigned to adopt-a-highway to promote civic responsibility; and perhaps its most infamous feat, proposed erecting a Satanic statue on the grounds of an Oklahoma capitol building (Banner 2014; Holt and Petersen 2016, 449). The statue is a direct response to an erected monument of the Ten Commandments on state grounds. TST's proposal highlights two related legal issues: the ostensible separation between church and state and the privileged status of Christianity in American institutions. Greaves explains: "The idea was that Satanists, asserting their rights and privileges where religious agendas have been successful in imposing themselves upon public affairs, could serve as a poignant reminder that such privileges are for everybody" (Banner 2014).

TST is decidedly a politically motivated religion. It centers leftist political activism as its primary religious action, focusing on issues of secularism and social justice with the goal of encouraging “benevolence and empathy in all people” (The Satanic Temple n.d., “Our Mission”). TST encourages public protests and provocative political art, yet also emphasizes that legal issues are best challenged by external organizations such as the Freedom From Religion Foundation and Americans United for Separation of Church and State (The Satanic Temple n.d., “FAQ”). Like the Church of Satan, The Satanic Temple centres the inflammatory symbol of Satan in one of its original permutations: that of the Hebraic *ha-satan* which translates to “adversary” or “opposer” in the Book of Job (Job 1:6 NRSV; Pagels 1995, 39).⁵⁰ The Satanic Temple’s role as Devil’s Advocate and leftist radical politics is enacted by public protests and staged events. Their group is not satire or pranks; they emphasize that challenging Christian privilege via spectacle is a “noble pursuit” to improve society: “The broader implication is that Christian privilege is being contested by forcing officials to recognize the diversity of American society. These types of events highlight that in order to allow a mainstream religion (Christianity) license to have prominence in state institutions, it (legally) opens the door to fringe and marginal religions” (Holt and Petersen 2016, 449).

When the Church of Satan responds to popular political issues on their news feed post-2013 (when The Satanic Temple first makes headlines), they often indirectly reference TST’s activism, and explicitly voice disapproval. Gilmore writes:

A self-proclaimed Satanist group has recently gotten media attention, though one may wonder if it is a political activist prank rather than a legitimate philosophical organization. Mounting public stunts geared to be as obnoxious as those perpetrated by certain Christian activist groups suggests that they are looking to leverage

⁵⁰ Both the Church of Satan and The Satanic Temple point to this “original” interpretation as an appeal to authority to bypass Christian theological framings of Satan. This modern understanding of Satan’s origins conveniently omits that it was developed by ancient Jews who were firmly theistic and did not view *ha-satan* in those terms. The CoS and TST far more aptly inherit the Romantic Satanists historical rehabilitation.

contemporary social media and blog culture so as to grab people's attention. It's working. But is it provoking thought or simply making Satanism look as ridiculous as the theist belief systems that are being mocked? (2013)

That was written in 2013, when TST first began its widely publicized campaigns. In 2020, the CoS continues to indirectly disparage TST, this time by accusing it of cultural appropriation. The High Priestess writes:

[R]ecently political activist groups have started using the symbols, phrases and structure of the Church of Satan to further a particular social agenda; by attempting to compel their followers to take specific action, they're completely misrepresenting the Satanic principle we hold dearest: individual expression, independence from herd mentality. We would never require our members to agitate, vote, protest, strike—our only “requirement” is that they think for themselves! (Nadramia 2020b)

The CoS and TST certainly have differences. They regularly engage in publicly denouncing each other via various official social media accounts, in their respective drives to dominate Satanic discourse. The CoS alleges that TST was conceived as a satirical hoax and is thus an “illegitimate” religion, much less Satanism (Ethan 2017). TST, in response, lists its activism, physical headquarters, regular meetings, tax-exempt status, and mandate for social responsibility as legitimizing characteristics of their religion, while denouncing the CoS as “inactive” and illegitimate precisely because it *lacks* these traits (The Satanic Temple n.d.). It is significant that the *absence* of collectivist political activities encouraged by the CoS is by design; this allows CoS members to participate in activism of their choosing, or not, as individual choice is the repeated mandate from official CoS channels.

Yet the CoS and TST also have points of political contact. Apart from their chosen metaphorical figure, Satan, they are both regularly outspoken about issues affecting a secular state. The official CoS news feed releases several statements a year responding to topical events. When the Alabama Senate voted to allow Christian churches to form their own militias, the

Church’s news feed comments (opportunistically taking a small swipe at TST): “While the Church of Satan supports clear separation of church and state, we are not an activist group and do not partake in protests or lobbying. We trust that sensible residents of Alabama share our desire for respectful, equitable, secular law and order and will move to defeat this blatant theistic overstep” (2017, “Official Statement”). In 2014, when a Mississippi group attempted to declare Christianity a state religion, Priestess Rice responds that the Founding Fathers were likely “turning in their graves” (2014b, “One State”). Reverend Deicide champions the US Air Force dropping “so help me God” in their oath requirements (2014a, “US Air”). The CoS admonishes a Florida court for banning an atheist invocation (2014c, “Brevard”). And every year they celebrate Religious Freedom Day on January 16 with statements from various ordained representatives (2016-2020, “Religious Freedom”).

The CoS website contains multiple examples along similar lines, but solely as it pertains to *uncontested* issues within the CoS, such as the mandate of separation of church and state, secularism, atheism, and anti-theism. The pattern for public political statements from the Church of Satan’s Administration or its high-ranking members *when speaking as official representatives* is delimited to issues directly related to unchallenged Church of Satan doctrine. The CoS’s official stance on popular political and social issues (in accordance with Gilmore and LaVey) emphasizes that its version of Satanism is highly individualistic and “not for the masses; it is deliberately dancing the fine line of marginality in order to maintain its critical position. It is neither rejecting society nor embracing it but posits any engagement with social issues as outside Satanism per se—that is, outside organizational interests” (Holt and Petersen 2016, 450).

The CoS accuses TST of being mere pranksterism; TST claims the CoS is illegitimate because it does not mandate activities (political or not). The counteraccusations are common in

the Satanic milieu, yet they both face similar denouncements from outside for their atheistic stance, i.e. they are not “real” religions. They are new religions that have absorbed historical ideas about Satan in the popular imagination, repackaged this concept omitting its theological origins yet maintaining its oppositional antinomian stance, adjusted to social and political issues in their respective interpretations of post-modern radical individualism. A Satanic identity, in these two examples, is one of carefully navigating social acceptance of marginal religions in terms of secular ideals yet via two different approaches to social and political issues: TST centralizes liberal politics and theatrical activism as their primary example of radical individualism challenging the status quo; the CoS administration *de*-centralizes social and political issues as an optional, personal choice for its members except for advocating the secular ideal of separation of church and state. When the CoS consistently distances itself from TST its concerns are in controlling discourse on the Satanic. Gilmore emphasizes that CoS doctrine has no apocalyptic vision or objective for mass conversion (Thomas 2014). The exclusivity of the CoS is precisely how Gilmore targets “deliberately dancing the fine line of marginality in order to maintain its critical position. It is neither rejecting society nor embracing it but posits any engagement with social issues as outside Satanism per se—that is, outside organizational interests” (Holt and Petersen 2016, 450).

Apart from the liberal positions on personal freedoms expressed in *The Satanic Bible* (especially in the “Book of Lucifer”), Pentagonal Revisionism is perhaps the closest outline of a Satanic society promoted by the CoS. Magistra Templi Rex Blanche Barton cautions, though, that this document is still subject to personal application, or not. She writes: “What is different from a political party's platform is that every Satanist is free to support through action any or none of the points of Pentagonal Revisionism. We do not collectively lobby for our ideals, we

work in the background, effecting change when and where we can, and we have been pretty successful” (Church of Satan n.d., “Politics,” rt. widget).

In 2014, journalist Greg Stevens questioned Gilmore about the CoS policy on politics. Gilmore responds, “Political issues are...the province of each member and we’ve noticed that choices beyond embracing the fundamental tenets of Satanism can be widely divergent amongst them” (Stevens 2014). In the same interview Gilmore notes that during the Satanic Panic in the 1980s, legislation was proposed to make Satanism illegal. CoS spokespersons were actively engaged in combatting falsehoods about Satanism to the news media in order to educate the public. When asked by Stevens if he would ever take firm political positions as official church policy, Gilmore responds, “If a law, politician, or movement arose that was directly and specifically hostile to the members of the Church of Satan, I would determine, considering the factors involved, what might be the most advantageous course of action towards resisting such efforts” (ibid). In this statement Gilmore is then demonstrating a cautious adaptability to official church policy, based on pragmatic circumstances and potential danger posed to members.

On June 4, 2020, the CoS website published an article written by one of its hierarchy admonishing police brutality and racial prejudice as a response to the death of George Floyd—a Black resident of Minneapolis, MN—after policeman Derek Chauvin knelt on Floyd’s neck until he suffocated,⁵¹ sparking anti-police brutality protests across America and the world. The international human rights group, Black Lives Matter (BLM) featured in much of the news media coverage, though thousands of unaffiliated activists were also responsible for organizing.

The Reverend writes:

Those familiar with Satanism, clearly articulated in decades of our literature, should understand our philosophy’s stance regarding the murder of an innocent man and the

⁵¹ After much public uproar, Chauvin was tried and convicted on three counts—second-degree unintentional murder, third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter—in April 2021. He is sentenced to 25 years in prison.

abuse of power currently being protested across the country—we find it appalling. We recognize the historical importance of recent events and, in the same way the Stonewall Uprising ignited societal change, we consider these actions will possibly lead to a more accountable system of justice. (Ethan, June 4, 2020)

This declaration of support is a somewhat rare phenomenon, as the CoS administration sidesteps issues on racial prejudice; it falls outside of their primary political stance of separation of church of state. As Ethan’s article is published on the CoS website—but not as an official statement or policy—it thus it falls into an ambiguous category of authoritative text. Not all members agree that protesting police brutality is a valid Satanic interpretation of Satanic literature, especially considering LaVey’s pro-establishment and pro law enforcement positions. The Church’s official Twitter account (likely run and monitored by more than one anonymous person) comments a day after the article was posted a somewhat contradictory testimony:

We stand opposed to looting, vandalism & rioting, which includes the counter-productive burning of churches. Equitable law & order is our guiding principle, Lex Talionis (law of the claw) applies to those who would harm others or their property. (Twitter @churchofsatan June 5, 2020)

This statement can be interpreted as a mid-way point between Ethan’s clear admonishment of police brutality and the CoS administration’s drawing a line at condoning illegal activities. Petersen equates the emphasis on legality as a safety measure, especially considering the injustices of the Satanic Panic and morality mobs. He writes: “LaVey and by extension the Church of Satan is rather famous for the ‘law-and-order’ position, combining an adversarial stance of antinomianism, elitism and social Darwinism with a distinctly conservative respect for the body politic. This is of course a matter of self-preservation, in itself cited as a satanic virtue across the satanic milieu” (2011b, 83). That is, that proximity to illegal activity, real or perceived, is potentially dangerous for Satanists given the overzealousness of both law

enforcement and conspiracy theorists. The BLM protests, however, reflect a shift in social acceptance.

On June nineteenth, 2020, the Church of Satan website issues a brief statement on Juneteenth—an unofficial⁵² Texan holiday marking the liberation of enslaved persons two years after abolition, as enslaved persons were not informed until then—with a flag designed for that specific purpose:

The Church of Satan celebrates independence, sovereignty, and emancipation from imposed servitude on this Juneteenth, 2020. Our unique banner design for this holiday includes 19 vertices between the two stars, to mark the date, while the central star is inverted to symbolize our carnal philosophy, which has always championed liberty and individualism. To Self-Determination—Hail Freedom! (Gilmore 2020)

While the statement does not mention BLM, police brutality, or the international protests, within the immediate context of summer 2020 in the United States, the reference to recent events is obvious. It centralizes the Satanic concept of individualism and freedom, though does not explicitly mention race.

As a response to both recent events and Ethan’s article, an administrator in the Unofficial Church of Satan Facebook group (run and moderated by approved CoS hierarchy, but accessible to non-members by request) pens an essay emphasizing the CoS’ official policy on politics and controversial issues. Moderator Reverend Byrd is adamant that Satanists are free to support whichever cause they choose, but do so without the official sanction of the CoS. He writes:

If the Church of Satan was adamantly and vocally pro-X this would suggest that pro-Y or anti-X Satanists have opinions that are flawed or contrary to Satanism in some way; insinuating they aren’t “real” Satanists at all. Assuming the issues at hand are within the “tent” of Satanism, this assertion wouldn’t be true and certainly wouldn’t be fair to those Satanists. And what of Satanists who are indifferent to the topic altogether? They’re free to have apathy without compromising Satanic ideals. Abortion, eugenics, the spectrum of human rights, guns, sexual identities and similarly polarizing issues are personal issues that require the individual to determine their own

⁵² A year later in 2021, the government made Juneteenth a federal holiday.

stance—if any at all—for themselves that coincide with their personal experiences, research, and interest—if any at all. The same is true of any topic, political or otherwise. Vegan Satanists have every right to feel passionately about their ethical eating habits. Carnivorous Satanists have every right to enjoy their steaks. How could the Church of Satan step in and declare one diet more “Satanic” than the other? They couldn’t. Neither “side” conflicts with core Satanic principles so it’s up to the individual Satanist to find what suits their needs and wants. (Byrd June 4, 2020)

Byrd’s essay, like Ethan’s, falls under a category of equivocal authoritative texts, where the authors’ titles and publishing platforms reflect the centralized power of the CoS administration, yet allows space for dissent, apathy, and opposition by and between CoS members.

Another document I wish to examine here is the Grotto Master’s Handbook, an unpublished internally circulated text for leaders of official Church of Satan Grottos, between their brief revival and subsequent re-disbandment as the internet became a far more favourable alternative to keep contact with Central administration. It was originally composed after decentralization in the mid-1970s by Michael Aquino (Aquino 2002, 160), though it is important to note that the version I am referencing is unauthenticated. Although it is no longer applicable to the immediate church, I wish to highlight certain mandates within as it as protocols reflecting administrative interests. It contains relevant information emphasizing the issues discussed in this chapter. For example, it warns about the CoS drawing various known undesirables into their ranks:

There will be those that want to use Satanism as a cheap identity. You may run across kids who just want sex, drugs and rock and roll; some may want to sacrifice cats and babies; others may want orgies or to see red-headed nude altars; some “sincere inquirers” may want to attend a Satanic ritual “just to see what it’s like”;...they may be Christian or misguided law enforcement associates who want to “infiltrate” to expose our evil network once and for all. You can deal with of these types confidently with the instructions in this book. (Grotto Master’s Handbook, n.d., 3)

The above demonstrates that little has changed in terms of categories of persons that the CoS expects to draw and subsequently filter out, since the initial days of the CoS Grottos. The current CoS website contains similar warnings in their Frequently Asked Questions section regarding the press, men seeking sexual encounters, evangelical Christians, conspiracists, and devil worshippers (Church of Satan n.d., “FAQ”). Official protocols to filter out obvious detractors and/or misguided persons maintain an ideological line. An interesting note in the handbook is that this ideological line pertains only to the Master and their regulation of *internal* membership and activities, not external personal relationships:

We wouldn't presume to dictate who your friends are. ...[C]ertain relationships [may be] not only tolerable but useful. There may be certain political groups, social advocacy groups, or animal activist groups you want to lend your support to that may also have affiliations with members of other religions. We would only ask that you not blur the line between personal friendships and organizational endorsements. (n.d., 14).

The emphasis on separating a CoS member's private interests from organizational ones serves the same function as the filtering processes; it maintains the focus on Satanism proper, however conceived. As for racism—an inadvertent theme in this chapter—little is written in the handbook except to restate the official CoS stance:

In case you you've gotten this far in your Satanic development and haven't figured this out yet: Satanists are not racist, apart from a distinctive favoritism toward our own unidentified race: “Satanist.” That delineation crosses racial boundaries as they are presently defined. A Satanist is ecumenical in his disdain for humanity. *We hate everybody equally* [my emphasis]. (n.d., 14)

The Grotto Master's Handbook also advises on how to manage “shit disturbers” (41); petty disagreements (30); group activities (46); security (53); and confidentiality (55). These concerns are still reflected in CoS policies today.

Considering that much of recent events centering the rise of right-wing populism in the United States and globally, the CoS is not immune to the political turbulence; in-house discussions and conflicts directly mirror it. As already stated, much of those dialogues cannot be included here, but those tensions, diffused across social media platforms, are present enough between CoS members that the CoS administration issued a new policy change when addressing conflicts in public forums. Nadramia wrote in the private Facebook Church of Satan group accessible solely to its confirmed members, “For the foreseeable future, the Church of Satan will not be promoting any talk-based podcasts” (December 17, 2018, reprinted with permission). On March 8, 2019,⁵³ Gilmore wrote:

If any member attempts to use a title they were given by the Church of Satan to validate their position, you should insist the titled member support their point of view with evidence and reason. Arguments from authority don’t hold water, here.

If and when hostility arises on personal platforms, it is not our duty to police and punish. Remember: You are not required to bow to other members; You need not interact with them in any way. And, as stated in the 8th Satanic Rule of the Earth: Do not complain about anything to which you need not subject yourself. (n.d. “When Words”)

Gilmore restates a mandate from LaVey encouraging diverse opinions. Both statements refer to tensions between CoS members’ political opinions, and the disagreements they can and do spark. Gilmore and Nadramia are reinforcing the CoS administrative position of mutual avoidance between opposing parties. Nadramia addresses the internal directive that they will no longer promote CoS members’ podcasts so that outsiders do not misconstrue opinions on a podcast with official CoS positions.

⁵³ The posted essay on the Church of Satan website is undated, however, March 8, 2019 is the date it was first widely circulated on social media.

On Feb. 25, 2020, Nadramia posted an essay to the CoS website addressing conflicts between CoS members, restating the first Satanic Rule of Earth, “Do not give opinions or advice unless you are asked” (LaVey 1967). She writes: “Social media comments that are actually negative fall directly under Rule Number One and it’s simple to avoid them. Don’t insult people on their own pages, unless you WANT to start a fight, and then there’s probably no better way to do it.” She restates the mandate to not interfere with the opinions of others unless you are deliberately seeking conflict, in which case, the consequences of those actions are entirely predictable. Nadramia’s essay considers, however, the “Satanic” approach to sharing undesired views with close friends and loved ones, and where the line of unsolicited opinion might be negotiated. Allow Nadramia to elaborate:

Here’s the thing: if you feel strongly about a friend or loved one taking your advice, you should bring something to the table. Nobody asked you what you thought, but your Satanic permission slip is the offer of help. If you’re tired of seeing an older relative pushing a pair of taped-together spectacles up his nose, offer to drive him to the optometrist and help pay for his new glasses. Sometimes people don’t know how to recognize their problems, let alone search for solutions. If you genuinely want to help, then help with research, time, services, or funding and put that right up front. Otherwise, it’s just words, perhaps hurtful ones. Bossing someone around with your “advice” may just make them feel worse about their situation, and about YOU. (Nadramia 2019b)

Here, Nadramia engages in a Satanic exegesis of the Satanic principle to “mind your business,” a sentiment expressed in various texts and ideas throughout all of Satanism, and a strong thread in most of LaVey’s Eleven Rules of Earth.⁵⁴ Nadramia and Gilmore are mitigating internal tensions by emphasizing self-reflection, self-monitoring, and self-discipline.

⁵⁴ The eleven rules are: 1) Do not give opinions or advice unless you are asked; 2) Do not tell your troubles to others unless you are sure they want to hear them; 3) When in another’s lair, show him respect or else do not go there; 4) If a guest in your lair annoys you, treat him cruelly and without mercy; 5) Do not make sexual advances unless you are given the mating signal; 6) Do not take that which does not belong to you unless it is a burden to the other person and he cries out to be relieved; 7) Acknowledge the power of magic if you have employed it successfully to obtain

The disembodied nature of virtual activity does not immediately translate to non-hierarchical authority within the CoS—as Campbell and Teusner suggest in a previous chapter—but it does shift the landscape from centralized virtual forum directly under administrative purview to diffused, individualized venues in which the administration remains equivocal (2015). That is, a virtual forum moderated by CoS hierarchy under specific set guidelines for communications is different than the individual social media pages of CoS members, who are free to express themselves as they wish. The CoS administration does not provide guidelines for CoS members' expressing themselves on their own pages on topics outside of Satanism proper—private opinions expressed on individual platforms are *deliberately* unregulated; non-interference respects the Satanic ideal of individualism. The CoS administration does, however, mandate that if a CoS member discusses Satanism, they provide disclaimers that they do not represent the Church of Satan. This distancing provides autonomy to members as well as protection for the church. Gilmore writes:

I value the diversity of the intelligent discussions on the podcasts that our creative members continue to create, but in this age of social media herd-think, there is a vocal part of the listening audience that refuses to grasp that differences of opinion are encouraged by our philosophy, whether one shares those perspectives or not. People then ascribe what they feel is contrary to their beliefs as being officially the Church of Satan position, and ignore other discussed concepts that they might embrace. Thus, our organization is a scapegoat for what they find offensive, regardless of their position on the spectrum from left to right. They refuse to grasp that there can be a broad means for the application of Satanic principles in the lives of our thousands of members which suit their unique values and pursuits. May that change in the near future so that we may restore these intelligent discussions to our news feeds. (Campbell 2018)

your desires. If you deny the power of magic after having called upon it with success, you will lose all you have obtained; 8) Do not complain about anything to which you need not subject yourself; 9) Do not harm little children; 10) Do not kill non-human animals unless you are attacked or for your food; 11) When walking in open territory, bother no one. If someone bothers you, ask him to stop. If he does not stop, destroy him (LaVey 1967).

Gilmore references a consistent tension within CoS circles; that personal opinions—especially on politics—have and continue to be areas rife with tension between members. Eliminating the promotion of talk-based podcasts solves two related problems: internal tension between members as others promote ideas they find reprehensible; and distances the administration from CoS members' content online. The tensions—while always present within the CoS—became more of an issue within the last decade, as CoS members increasingly produce content on their own unmoderated digital platforms.

The final text to discuss here is authored by Magistra Templi Rex Blanche Barton, from a speech she gave at the fiftieth anniversary of the Church of Satan in Washington in 2015, reprinted in an anthology edited by Reverend Eric Vernor (2016). In her essay, she encourages what she calls “Sustainable Satanism,” examining ideas so that Satanists may “continue to refine and exemplify this philosophy in the future” (Barton 2016, 245). She separates Satanists into two categories: “one type of person is running away from something, the other is running toward something” (244). The first is a reactive person, likely raised in a stifling Christian household, motivated by a juvenile impulse to outrage and rebel against “Big Daddy in the Sky” (244). The second are proactive persons who reflect and examine Satanism, applying it in ways that it benefits them best. She states that when Satanists exhibit exemplary behaviour others will be nurtured by a Satanist’s “playfulness and patience” (244). She provides seven points of action to further Satanism’s sustainability, of which I highlight items of importance to this thesis. A broad theme within these suggestive actions is the concept of direct, proactive involvement in interconnected things, with a strong environmentalist perspective. She suggests that one’s physical, mental, and financial health is connected to one’s consumer habits, long-term thinking, and respect for the earth, emphasizing that animal welfare is a distinct Satanic concern: “I won’t

even ask for a show of hands from the many people in this room who have rescued animals, worked with animal rights groups or given money to support animal conservation causes” (252).

Of particular interest here is her statement on politics:

If there are any political issues that excite you, get involved. Dr. LaVey, while he admired many of the founders of our country as Satanic revolutionaries, believed politics to be yet another entertainment for the masses. But I think if you vote the issue or the candidate, not the party, involvement and advocacy can be vital. It doesn't take many people to change things—just the right people, in the right positions, at the right time. That's how revolutions happen. ...Our adversaries have different trappings but are still big, consuming, oppressive, powerful entities, often called corporations and medical associations. Again, it doesn't take much of a shift. Naomi Klein, in her latest book on the economics of climate change, states that it only takes 3.5% of a given population to substantially shift policies. Go home and find out what the population of your city or town is, crunch the numbers and start changing some minds. I think that activism is native to Satanism, part of our hard wiring. Why are you a Satanist instead of an atheist? Because you want to take a more active stand against oppression and hypocrisy. Satanism is revolutionary by definition. It would have been different had it developed in another country. But our U.S. troops are buried deep in the soil of rebelliousness and Enlightenment, as well as mystical metaphors and allusions. (Barton 2016, 250)

Barton is perhaps one of the few members of hierarchy to directly link political activism as *inherent* to Satanism itself, not simply a side-effect of individually motivated political action.

Note, though, how careful her language is regarding remaining neutral in terms of specific party affiliations (despite climate justice now being an issue on the left). Barton also links America itself to Satanism; as integral to an ethos of rebellion and “Enlightenment.”

LaVey and the CoS have been considered “left”—it was labelled a communist threat by conservative watchdogs influenced by Senator Joseph McCartney crusade (van Luijk 2016, 368), and accused of being in league with Chelsea Clinton as part of a Satanic pedophile ring (Samuels 2018)—as well as being decidedly fascist. Mathews argues that, “Satanists’ denials of Nazi or fascist sympathies generally follow two lines: that Satanism is politically nonprescriptive and that the similarities are merely a matter of aesthetics” (145).

Rather than judging whether or not the CoS is politically left or right, I instead suggest that the CoS administration is engaged in a slow, ongoing, and silent filtration process: it repeatedly (re)draws the boundaries of Satanism, careful to release statements deemed uncontested. The bedrock knowledge is in tandem with guarding their concept of an apolitical organization, except for the separation of church and state and LGBTQ issues (discussed in the next chapter). Issues of racism are now present in public Satanic virtual rhetoric due to recent political and social events, and the CoS administration is responding in real time to the rapid shifts in popular discourse. When Gilmore celebrates Juneteenth and does not mention race, he, like LaVey, emphasizes the strong Satanic ideals of freedom and liberty. The pro-law enforcement position of the CoS is maintained yet allows for critique of police brutality under the concept of Satanic justice. While the shifts in Satanic interpretation are not loud or direct in terms of confronting systemic racism (the same way they consistently confront violations of separation of church and state in the public sphere), there is the beginning of a conversation in official texts and Satanic internet rhetoric. Whether or not this conversation would turn to an inward critique of its own foundational ideas and the racist roots of some of LaVey's political opinions, is a measure of conjecture. All statements thus far have remained consistently dismissive of racism as a collectivist delusion.

3.4. Members of the Church of Satan and Popular Social and Political Issues

A handful of books written by CoS hierarchy echo similar disdain for the political system and egalitarianism as LaVey. Magister Rose writes in *Infernal* (a reprinted collection of older essays) that he rejects democracy's cornerstone of "all men are created equal" (2015 [2009], 36), and instead proposes a redefined version of the aristocracy (136-145). In this system, any notion

of inherent or hereditary benefits based on wealth or class is eschewed for earned access to personal freedoms and responsibility (137). Rose describes openly deriding the welfare system at a public talk and subsequently being approached by a Ku Klux Klan member who assumed their sensibilities were aligned (28). Rose responds, “I told this moron that I was not what he thought I was, and that he had obviously misunderstood my position” (28). Rose’s ideal vision of society appears to be a strictly regulated meritocracy where solely creativity and intelligence are rewarded with social mobility and access to resources. There is no mention on how or by whom this idealized system would be regulated.

In his 2007 book, *Essays in Satanism*, Magister James D. Sass discusses the points of contact between Satanism and Nazism, declaring that he despises all ideologies equally but will deride overly eager “white supremacists” using racial or ethnic slurs “like obnoxious eight year old children who just learned how to say ‘naughty’ words like ‘piss’ and ‘fuck’” (222). He notes that the Church of Satan’s history is enmeshed with Nazi imagery and connotations, writing, “All this has been well documented and explicitly discussed by Dr. LaVey, not downplayed or swept under the rug for the sake of political correctness” (224). On “The Jewish Question” (i.e., Is there are an international cabal of Jews secretly controlling economic and political decisions?”), Sass names conspiracy theorists as having “sorry” lives, whose tendency to avoid responsibility is to blame a shadowy “parasitic overclass” (225). He writes:

If your only claim to fame is that other white people, more or less responsible or productive than you managed to reproduce, you should try harder to make your own mark on the world around you. Yes, people of European origin have created and maintained a culture that can be called “superior” in the sense that tools are superior to sticks and stones – but chances are that your ass that *nothing* to do with it.... If you want to establish and survive in a *meritocracy*, don’t expect to pass off the achievements of your dead ancestors as currency when you have none of your own. (Sass 2007, 225)

He contends that there is a correlation between socio-economic status and low-IQ scores among “Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans” but emphasizes that this does not mean it is causative (222). Like LaVey, Gilmore, and Rose, Sass concentrates on individual responsibility, disregards systemic issues, and maintains that Satanism is unconcerned with personal plights.⁵⁵

In Magister Matt G. Paradise’s book, *Bearing the Devil’s Mark*, the author compares “racialism” and “Satanism” (2007, 91-96). In this essay, he notes that Satanists and racialists have similar discriminatory principles, and while he derides the Ku Klux Klan for being a Christian group that “believes that the White Race is the chosen people of their god, and that the Jews are descended from ‘Satan’” (93), he objects to their theism, not their racism. Paradise laments politically correct tendencies to condemn racialists and their ideas while allowing “affirmative action” to remain uncritiqued (2007, 95). Paradise’s essay is mostly a lamentation of false equivalencies, as he claims that discussions of racial superiority are suppressed under the censorship of a politically correct society. The author does not engage with a single credible source on race or racism, and instead submits quotations from known white supremacists to build his argument. In another essay from Paradise’s *Not Like Most* magazine, he argues for Artificial Human Companions (androids) as a useful replacement for enslaved people.

These are not the only commentaries Paradise has on social or political issues. In his (now deleted) *The Accusation Party* podcast episodes (2015-2019), he ridicules feminism (2016. Ep. 7, Aug. 6), derides Antifa (2017. Ep. 11, Sept. 18), dismisses issues of “political correctness” (2017. Ep. 10, Jan. 8.), while in another he labels transgenderism as child abuse and a social cancer (2018. Ep. 12, Sept. 3). On eugenics, Paradise discusses its past abuses and how it could be adapted for the modern world (2016. Ep. 5, June 9). In the episode “expos[ing] the media

⁵⁵ It is worth noting that Sass, in recent years, is no longer publicly addressing Satanism or responding to queries about it. He is still a Magister.

manipulation of race-oriented events and the defense of minority crime,” Paradise examines the Black Lives Matter movement and its, “criminal inspirations, silencing techniques and, lastly, the question of BLM as a terrorist group” (2016. Ep. 4, May 1). Under the banner of *The Accusation Network*, Paradise’s description of his various podcasts and online content reads as decidedly anti-leftist, anti-feminist, and anti-egalitarian: “The Accusation Network is your guide to the third side, representing total free speech—no trigger warnings, no political correctness, no privilege checking, no cultural inclusiveness. Nothing is sacred. None will be spared” (iHeartRadio Jan. 25, 2021). As of the writing of this thesis, Paradise’s *The Accusation Party* podcast episodes have been removed without explanation [though descriptions of each episode remain online].⁵⁶ Paradise has since revamped his virtual content as a vintage vinyl review podcast for rock and metal music enthusiasts. In similar vein of critique of political correctness, Reverend Raul Antony claims that the far-left “hate the Enlightenment” and its ideals of individualism and private property (Campbell 2017b, Sep. 2). He states that the tendency to link all ideas right of left as violent is a product of academia (ibid).

In his 2006 book, *Androphilia: A Manifesto*, then-Reverend Jack Malabranche writes that liberal and progressive political movements run counter to his concept of strength, honour, and masculinity (92-95). In the third edition of his book, he describes an article that he wrote for *Alternative Right*, which is “an online journal for radical traditionalists and various far-right dissidents,” arguing for the end of the US Military’s “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy based on a “masculinist, right-wing perspective” (2012, 6). Malabranche, now writing under the name Jack Donovan, resigned from the CoS in 2009. In his open letter he states: “There is certainly a great deal of overlap and shared understanding when it comes to my own evolving philosophy and the

⁵⁶ Descriptions of Paradise’s *The Accusation Network*’s various online content can still be found at iHeartRadio. Accessed Jan. 25, 2021. <https://www.iheart.com/podcast/256-the-accusation-network-30946715/>

religio-philosophy of Satanism. But for a while now, there's been a growing chasm of disagreement between the two. It is small, but significant—especially in certain areas that have become very important to me personally” (Donovan 2009, “Rev. Jack”). Donovan does not list specifics. According to his website, he denies accusations of being a white nationalist, listing ever-evolving interests on masculinity,⁵⁷ self-defence, and pagan ritual (Donovan n.d., “Positions & FAQ”).⁵⁸ *Third Side Network*, owned by ex-CoS member, John H. Shaw, produces podcasts, films, and other Satanic content. Shaw was demoted from his Reverend title in 2019 without public explanation from CoS authorities; he resigned soon after. On *The Devil You Know* Podcast (recorded while Shaw was still a member), he calls political correctness “horseshit” and that the “greater percentage of people” decrying racism or sexism are just “very weak minded” that use it as a “crutch” (Ep. 21, Mar. 10, 2016).

These are not the only resignations. The CoS has a stream of abdications/expulsions resulting from extremist views since its inception. In 1973, dissatisfied Church of Satan members Michael Grumbowski and John Amend left the CoS to found The Order of the Black Ram and the Shrine of the Little Mother fusing Satanism, neo-Nazism, and paganism (Mathews 2009, 82). In the 1980s, accusations of fascist and pro-Nazi sentiments within the CoS “became stronger as a new generation of Satanists with links to the extremist fringe rose to prominence” (142). Journalist Chris Mathews names Adam Parfrey, Nikolas Schreck, Michael Moynihan, Boyd Rice, and LaVey's daughter, Zeena Schreck, as playing significant roles in asserting a radicalized version of Satanism as public proponents of the Church of Satan (142). In 1990, as a

⁵⁷ Donovan/Malabranche's book on masculinity—written while he was still a CoS member—is discussed in chapter four of this dissertation.

⁵⁸ Donovan is the focus of a chapter by Mathew N. Lyons in a recent edited volume on radical far-right thinkers, “Jack Donovan and Male Tribalism,” in *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right: Behind the New Threat to Liberal Democracy*, edited by Mark Sedgwick (2019).

response to leading members vying for dominance, LaVey expelled his daughter Zeena and her Nazi-sympathizer husband Nicholas Schreck for their extremist leanings (van Luijk 2016, 378). In 2011, Magister Diabolus Rex left the CoS convinced that demons were real by the success of his Greater Magic rituals; he was no longer comfortable promoting the atheistic position of the Church of Satan. He now heads Black Sun Occult Engineering and Design, a company in the process of building a Ragnarok Engine, whose purpose is a black magic portal for “quantum tunneling beyond the fabric of reality” (2020).

Another high-profile CoS departure relevant here is that of Magister Boyd Rice in 2010. Artist, musician, writer, and known provocateur, Rice has been accused of being a racist, fascist, misogynist, and Nazi since at least the late 1980s (Small 2018). He claimed on his website that LaVey had offered him the leadership of the Church of Satan—which he initially declined—and then, over a decade after LaVey’s death, retroactively accepts the offer and subsequently declares the Church of Satan defunct⁵⁹ (Colin 2018, 42; Crystal Carver 2010). The Church’s response to Boyd’s announcement was (perplexed) silence. Boyd produced no legal document to substantiate his claim—then or now—hence cannot disband an organization he does not legally own. Boyd’s actions, however, fit into his known history of provocative artistic pranks, which function much like LaVey’s titillating rituals to promote the early days of the Church of Satan.⁶⁰

The select texts, quotes, art, and podcasts discussed above by Gilmore, Rose, Sass, Paradise, Malabranche/Donovan, and Rice echo versions of LaVey’s political rhetoric. As a whole, they reflect a vision of society informed by a romanticized western culture viewed as an advanced, and thus greater, civilization. That this perception is the result of whitewashed popular narratives, political discourse, and educational curriculums directly invested in

⁵⁹ Boyd’s essay “Church of Satan is Dead” and the website that hosted it are no longer online.

⁶⁰ As does recent public events performed by The Satanic Temple. It is a feature of the Satanic milieu.

empirical/colonial interests is not discussed in any of the above-mentioned texts or podcasts.⁶¹

The information contained within these books and podcasts reflects if not quite a unanimous political perspective, they are largely derisive of ideas considered leftist and progressive.

But what of other political opinions or social concerns among CoS members that diverge from this proximity to Republican, conservative, fascist, alt-right, or white supremacist ideologies? Magister Carl Abrahamsson chastises academia for skewing the perception of the Church of Satan as right-leaning, observing:

The consensus view seems to be that LaVey's Satanism is a precursor to or bedfellow with fascism. It's an easy way out in an environment permeated by buzzwords rather than facts, and by trigger warnings rather than critical thinking. I don't think there's a genuine desire to understand the wealth of LaVey's pragmatism; instead a super trouper is gladly shown on some stern attitudes and sources of inspiration while the whoopee cushions and musical ad-libbing are discarded as irrelevant. (Barton 2021, 349).

Indeed, this dissertation falls directly into this category of scholarship, though disrupting it also part of my goal. Abrahamsson notes that LaVey's humour and creativity are rarely examined, and that his magical innovations often dismissed within esoteric circles. The focus on LaVey's political opinions authored later in life distorts perceptions of the CoS as a whole.

During the last decade, but especially around the time leading up to the 2016 American presidential election, tensions between popularly perceived "left" and "right" politics within the Church of Satan have consistently mirrored popular tensions in society. This is not new, as from its inception up to and including the modern-day church, this tension is partially deliberate; LaVey's mandate was to actively encourage dissenting opinions. As members rarely interact in

⁶¹ This is a feature of academia as well, where a Eurocentric bias is increasingly challenged in the social sciences, contributing to the critiques of colonial discourse advanced by Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). Syed Farid Alatas writes: "Anthropologists, sociologists, historians and others, it is argued, have become more aware of the need to avoid reading European meanings into non-European data and meticulously guard against homogenizing societies and communities in their teaching and research" (15, 2006). See also David Chidester, *Empire of Religion* (2014).

physical spaces with each other, often going for years (even decades) without meeting another CoS member in person, they live diverse lives outside virtual interactions. Portrayals of CoS membership and its diversity of political opinion are obfuscated by sensational headlines and provocative public content. Dramatic public broadcasting of fascist aesthetic or alt-right ideology from CoS members (Paradise, Rice, Shaw) receive far more attention in the popular imagination than a Satanist whose podcast or book is about gardening (Campbell 2017a), parenting (Cruver 2015-2018), classical music (Gene 2020), or sexuality (Arden 2015).

Other CoS members express polarized opinions on popular social and political issues, and this is a consistent trait. Reverend Peter Andre Schlesinger (1962-2016) was perhaps one of the more controversial figures, described as a brutish, punk skinhead who was also a “proud member of S.H.A.R.P.”⁶² (Gilmore in Church of Satan n.d., “In Memorium”). Reverend Raul Antony comments on the 2016 American Presidential election: “I could definitely understand why a [S]atanist would vote for Trump,” emphasizing the mandate for law and order (Capps 2016). In 2017, CoS member Lorcan Black, as a guest on *The Demented1* podcast, wonders, “I still to this day don’t understand why people would want to vote for Hillary Clinton and I’m not saying that Trump was like the savior of the world...just everything about her...is so shady and so untrustworthy” (Texx 2017, May 12. Min. 41:56). Within more neutral stances, one CoS member in my questionnaire writes that their primary enjoyment in life is carnal pleasures—sex, food, fun—adding, “I’m not overly loyal to any one political (or otherwise) party.”

Contrast the above to Magistra Ygraine Mitchell’s open contempt for Trump voters, “The stupid are utterly unaware how their actions will hurt them,” she writes on her blog, continuing with a colourful claim that, “the bulk of these red state fuckers wouldn’t know a Monet from a

⁶² Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice

monologue, I will take the elitist liberal stance that they are, in fact, deplorable, along with [the] conservative view that they are not even people, and my own conviction that in a perfect world they should be Soylent Green candidates” (Confessions 2017, “Support”). On political tensions within the CoS, Witch Josie Gallows opines:

Right wingers are frequently encountered in Satanism, but even those right wingers among us reject obnoxious behavioral disorders such as racism, homophobia, transphobia, and sexism, for being the popular delusions they are. We value merit. We value self-determination...In the past, I've advised White Supremacist queer-phobic pseudo-Satanists to join a White Supremacist organization instead of hanging around Satanism. It wasn't just a pot shot. I meant it. I knew they'd be happier. (Gallows 2020)

A few respondents to my survey answered the question, “What do you do for fun?” by emphasizing an enjoyment of philosophical and sociopolitical discussions in the spirit of robust, civil debate. When asked if they object to any part of Satanism, of the ninety-four CoS members that answered this question, fifty-four provided firm “no/none” or “Satanism is as it is, if you object to its tenets then you're not a Satanist” delineations. A sampling of other three separate responses range as follows:

As an extension of myself, the words which resonate with who I am and how I feel, no. Do I like everything that LaVey liked, or enjoy every particular peculiarity that he did? Of course not. But this isn't a pick or choose religion. You either are, or you aren't. I do not object to anything in particular which might be described as LaVey's end game, though it is the Satanic prerogative to find our own way in which to bring them to fruition.

No. I like that it is understood that Satanists can have widely varying points of view and will not always agree. Despite this, in my experience, Satanists are civil and accepting of others' points of view. For example, there are white nationalist elements of our body. There are also Jewish elements. Among ourselves as nowhere else, these poles are not at war.⁶³

I don't object to any of the doctrinal content or practice of Satanism as I understand it. Anton LaVey had some opinions and some attitudes I don't agree with, and sometimes expressed himself in a way I would not endorse, but these usually have to do with matters not implicating Satanism per se, such as politics. I worry that Satanists today

⁶³ With all due respect to this informant, they are indeed at odds.

have lost something of the sympathy the Doktor⁶⁴ displayed in the Satanic Bible for everyday people caught up in a guilt industry not of their own making. I think some Satanists come off as high handed and intolerant, and I worry that it reflects poorly on the Church and its message.

The answers above demonstrate that what CoS members perceive as “Satanism proper” has somewhat porous borders with what they distinguish as LaVey’s private opinions or ultimate direction for the Church of Satan. Some CoS members shift their objections to relatively immaterial details:

I certainly disagree with how some Satanists have chosen to interpret some aspects of Satanism, but I believe these elements are largely up to interpretation, so the “problem” is not with Satanism itself. I believe that it is actually in my own best self-interest to care about other people and to be concerned with the larger fate of the world, and I don’t believe that acting in my own rational self-interest or understanding that “Might Makes Right” entitles me to act like a dick.

Although more espoused by members in somewhat canonical literature, I am firmly against the death penalty as a form of punishment.

The only aspect I take a step further than what LaVey has codified is that I do not harm animals,⁶⁵ even for food. I have many reasons for being a vegan, which is backed by my own personal research, and I feel like the step should be taken further to not harm animals including using them for human consumption and bi-products.

No. The outline is pretty solid. I’ve taken issue with what some people have tried to make fit within Satanism (racism, sexism, drug use, etc.), but that’s a completely different question.

The only thing I might find objectionable *now* is the drug stance, as I think laws on marijuana should be relaxed, even though I’m not a user. And even then, it’s not a hard objection, just a softening of my thinking on it based upon seeing evidence of the possible benefits of it.

LaVey’s personal tastes sometimes get wrongly conflated with the practice of Satanism. One need not like 50’s aesthetics and music, urine or Rubenesque blondes

⁶⁴ LaVey was often referred to as Doktor as a sign of respect, referencing his lifetime as an autodidact. Since 2016, Gilmore is known as Maestro for similar reasons, reflecting his compositional skills and graduate degrees in classical music.

⁶⁵ LaVey’s *The Eleven Satanic Rules of Earth* lists number ten as, “Do not kill non-human animals unless you are attacked or for your food” (1967).

to be a Satanist.⁶⁶ The anti-drug stance of the CoS and some of its members is a bit of a practical defensive affectation that I do not personally fully share. There surely are people I consider to be admirably successful and functional human beings who indulge casually in drugs. These are fairly minor differences, I think.

These responses demonstrate both agreement and discord with LaVey's unwavering anti-drug stance, which was rooted in overt disdain for the hippie counterculture combined with his firm "law and order" reputation. The Church of Satan administration maintains the position of denouncing illegal activity of any kind—including recreational drug use—though Gilmore comments, "If a substance is legal, a Satanist may or may not choose to indulge in it" (Church of Satan n.d., "Drug Use"). With the increased loosening of laws regarding the recreational use of cannabis in the United States and worldwide, it is a topical subject on Satanic podcasts. In a discussion with Campbell, Reverend Darren Deicide notes the racist agenda behind anti-cannabis laws as part of President Richard Nixon's "war on drugs," elaborating:

[Nixon's] entire intent was to criminalize certain elements of society and they knew that they could do it by rescheduling certain things [such as cannabis and psychedelics]. ...so it had this twofold purpose of criminalizing the radical left at the time, which was the anti-war left, as well as an entire demographic of African-Americans who wound up being de-politicized as a result. Because he instituted along with that mandatory minimum sentencing, and if you look at the statistics the amount of arrests that happened which were overwhelmingly young Black men the amount of arrests right after that rescheduling is just...it's just unbelievable. That's the beginning of the prison industry in this country in some ways. (2018, Dec. 29)

A handful of CoS members state strong objections to the interpretations of Satanism by other members, a view that is best expressed in this lengthy answer:

I don't object to anything Anton LaVey defined as Satanism. He had a lot of opinions and many of them weren't dogma. I disagree with some of his opinions. Though I do end up debating what Anton LaVey outlined. More than anything I disagree with extremely limited misinterpretations of what qualifies as "Satanic." Those are often touted as being part and parcel with Anton LaVey's definition of Satanism. For

⁶⁶ LaVey elaborated on his urolagnia, aesthetics, and musical preferences in their application to Satanism in his later books (1992, 1998, 2003).

instance there's the understanding that Satanism is highly Darwinian, which is true. Naturally, Satanism is touched all over by Social Darwinism where people should either rise to the occasion or fail, unprotected from their own stupidity. And that's great. That's an exceptional challenge to spiritual religions. Though where it gets mixed up is when people think capitalism, just for one example, is the only system where these kinds of "rise to the occasion" attitudes or "standard of the strong" values can occur. Ultimately, Anton LaVey wanted people to stratify themselves and find their most appropriate niche in the human pecking order. That will happen within any type of social order, what type is neither here nor there. Anton LaVey seems to have wanted an accelerated stratification or a more pronounced divide between weak and strong. I say maybe it would be more pronounced in a social order where people weren't vying for basic necessities like food, medicine, shelter, and utilities, where otherwise exceptional people waste precious years and even decades on meaningless drudgery. So I personally have rectified a robust welfare state with Satanic ideals. Other Satanists have disagreed with me, quite vocally at that. I get into protracted debates with other Satanists Church of Satan members—about this internal controversy in Satanism, which is of course a very healthy thing to happen.

Another CoS member, Warlock Robert J. Leuthold, writes an essay about his disability in terms of Satanism and Social Darwinism. Posted from the Church of Satan website:

The statement has been made over the years—usually by detractors or former members or never-weres—that, because of our founder's interest in eugenics, somehow the disabled are unfit to be Satanists. Well, I won't presume to speak for the dead, but did these people read the same book I did? As is well-known by now, Magus Anton Szandor LaVey's *The Satanic Bible* takes some influence from Ragnar Redbeard's *Might Is Right*, which champions the subjugation of the weak by the strong. There is, of course, a caveat: the clever rule the strong. ...Furthermore, who is "strong" and who is "weak" is open to interpretation. (Leuthold 2020)

The interpretative quality of CoS members' individual understanding of core Satanic ideas is the primary tension among them. Leuthold directs his essay at detractors, ex-members, and "never-weres," but indirectly addresses internal conflicts regarding LaVey's statements on eugenics and Social Darwinism.

A similar sentiment is expressed in an unpublished essay, *Satanic Witch in a Wheelchair*, written by Priestess Magda Graham. She outlines that a talented disabled witch, who *requires* help to maintain a high quality of life, will enchant people with her charm using Lesser Magic,

which is defined as everyday manipulation.⁶⁷ If someone begrudges providing services, then the witch has failed to adequately apply the principles. A successful manipulation leaves the service provider happy to have helped someone in need. In her essay, Graham also notes that her disability renders her sexuality somewhat inert in the eyes of others, and that disabled persons may have to remind potential partners of their sexual desires. She adds a cautionary note: persons attracted to the disabled to exploit them are dangerous, and a disabled witch must remain acutely aware of this threat to protect herself. Both Leuthold and Graham reflect concepts in Satanic ideas on how marginalized identities live in a constant alienation that they can use to their own advantage. LaVey once remarked on this type of reversal portrayed in the cult film

Freaks:

[The film] had to go underground for many years, even though it was produced at MGM as a sort of competitive film for Universal's *Frankenstein*. [Tod] Browning used real freaks and malformed people, which disgusted not only much of MGM but audiences as well. It's purely Satanic in that audience sympathies lie with the freaks themselves, and the villains are the straight people, who are the cruel exploiters of human misery. You cheer at the end when the freaks rise up and turn their [tormentor] into one of them. (Barton 1990, 140)

In his authorized biography and other interviews, LaVey often expressed fondness for people living on the margins on society. His mention of eugenics in these passages is non-existent.

A few CoS members are directly involved in politics, non-profits, law, and influencing public policy. CoS member Brandon Phinney ran for office (and won) as a Republican and open atheist in New Hampshire in 2016, then switched to the Libertarian party a year later as it was more receptive to secular statehood (Mehta 2017). As a guest on Shaw's podcast in 2019, he states, "I created the party's first ever secular caucus as its founder and chairman and so I thought that was a really big achievement... We're trying to promote the ideas of the separation

⁶⁷ Elaboration on Lesser Magic is the subject of chapter four of this thesis.

of church and state and trying to keep those institutions as separate as possible in America,” lamenting that “theocracy is so entrenched in our politics” (Ep. 128. Aug. 16). When asked if he faced obstacles as a Satanist or a public atheist, Phinney affirms that individuals are free to choose any religion—such as the “Christian fundamentalists” he encounters—but that he objects to religion’s influence in party platforms, asking, “How much of it are you willing to allow the state to enforce on others?” Though he does not hide his membership in the Cos, Phinney does not broadcast it either, preferring that one’s personal religion remain a private affair. Phinney’s other concerns are high property taxes, the state controlling public education, and how to manage the “drug problem” (Ep. 128. Aug. 16). Priestess Renee Anderson sat on the Magna town Council, and served as President, which discussed local government issues and worked with Salt Lake City officials for local events, zoning, and businesses (Barton 2021, 369). One member expresses that they run a non-profit because “I like enacting large scale change and fucking with existing governmental and institutional power structures” (CoS Survey 2017). Environmentalist and CoS Reverend, Sean Bonner, assembled a team for radiation monitoring after the Fukushima earthquake and nuclear meltdown (Barton 2021, 371). After making the results available, it “forced the hands of governments and industry to reconsider how radiation data should be collected and published” (371). Reverend Dr. Robert Ing has worked as a forensic investigator, instructor, and science professor (376). In 2005 he “lobbied international governments to use intelligence resources to apprehend human traffickers and child pornographers” (376). Warlock Jeff Bowling established a non-profit veteran’s service, The Infernal Legion in 2017, providing services and assistance to CoS military members (417).

Within my survey, one CoS member reveals that they work as an environmental attorney with concerns regarding corporate ecological malfeasance. Others work in diverse fields, such as

retail, government, law enforcement, finance, academia, trade, service, journalism, communications, and information technology. I mention these occupations to emphasize two points. First, the tendency to openly divulge membership in the Church of Satan disproportionately favours those in the artistic field—its sensational factor can work *for* them, and they may face fewer professional repercussions. Second, that unless a private CoS member creates a pseudonym to release public content as an open Satanist, their opinions and interpretations of Satanism are absent, thus uninvestigated. The focus on LaVey’s Social Darwinism as a deeply misanthropic worldview that is unconcerned for the welfare of others obfuscates that some CoS members—regardless of their political affiliation or indifference towards politics in general—are concerned about social welfare as the term loosely applies. Reverend Joel Ethan writes, “We reject the idea that humans are selfish to the point of self-destruction unless forced to be otherwise...I think the push for a progressive, individualism supportive society is a clear and common theme in all of the canon works” (Ethan n.d., “Full Disclosure”).

Summer 2020 offered a unique opportunity to witness the responses of CoS members to current events in real time. During the Black Lives Matter protests, online content demonstrates a variety of reactions. The promotional Facebook page for the book and website of *The Satanic Warlock*, written by CoS Magister Robert Johnson, comments:

DON’T BE FOOLED! Coward anarchist outside agitators are destroying our beloved cities in a false claim of seeking justice for the murder of George Floyd. Limp, impotent local governments are handcuffing authorities from doing what needs to be done to stop this madness and looting. Sweep the streets of these radical assholes who have and earn nothing, and simply want to ruin the hard-earned livelihoods of decent people out of jealousy and their frustrating incompetence. Support local law enforcement and If you must, defend what’s yours and your family by all means because if this vermin continue to wreak havoc your safety and well-being could be next! (The Satanic Warlock Facebook Page, May 31, 2020)

Multiple commenters under this post either supported or mocked the statement. The same Facebook page clarifies its position a day later:

It appears as though reading comprehension is not the forte' of a number of the respondents of the past post despite the fact that its "likes and loves" from Satanists handily outnumber the critics. AGAIN, the piece calls out the anarchists and agitators who are exploiting the memory of George Floyd and offer nothing but chaos and destruction—NOT the peaceful protestors calling for reform (Floyd's family is now asking for non-violence and unity). Satanists always encourage intelligent discourse and/or disagreement. Personal insults, obscenities and scant knowledge of Anton LaVey's stance (read "Might Is Right," and note his penchant for "sweeping the streets of criminals") from those who never met him hurled for the sake of shock or to appear "in the know" or "cool badass rebel Satanists" are nothing but poor excuses for lack of debate acumen. (The Satanic Warlock Facebook Page June 1, 2020)

The tension between the Satanic ideal of "law and order" and the Satanic ideals of freedom and justice are again at play in this response to the BLM protests. It derides "agitators" for the destruction of private property yet emphasizes reform for prejudice.

In the history of the United States, police defense of private property functions to reinforce systemic racism. Leigh Brownhill states that looting is a response to the systemic effort to undermine "Black and Indigenous generational wealth through dispossession" (2020, 5). On the BLM protest events of 2020, they write:

Systemic or bureaucratic violence is delivered in public policy that supports voter suppression, redlining, mortgage and banking discrimination, underfunded public education, location of toxic industries in Black neighborhoods, and the militarization of police who have a foundational history of anti-Black and anti-Indigenous violence.

CoS members oscillate between scorn and support for challenges to systemic racism and disenfranchisement. CoS Magistra Ruth Waytz's⁶⁸ Twitter and Instagram feeds critique the Trump administration's policies on ICE detainment centres, white nationalism, and police

⁶⁸ Waytz has been a spokesperson for the CoS for decades. I have cited her social media here (with permission) as she is a high-profile member. Readers should remain cognizant that many CoS members' personal social media profiles mirror her commentaries.

brutality, regularly tagging her posts and tweets with hashtags indicating support for Black Lives Matter.⁶⁹ During the month of June 2020, Waytz posts a series of images demonstrating support for BLM protestors. To boost awareness, Waytz reposts a quote from American Black feminist scholar Brittney Cooper, who writes: “Rage is a reasonable response to the mistreatment that Black people endure, both at the hands of the state and to the daily indignities that attend to being a Black person,” in which Cooper calls for white women to use their considerable privilege to help end police brutality (Instagram @professor_crunk; @rwaytz, June 10, 2020;). One day after Trump supporters stormed the US Capitol building in a failed attempted coup Waytz posts an image of the insurrectionists, captioning it, “MAKE NO MISTAKE. If you ain’t #white, these people want you DEAD,” and calling for their arrest (Instagram @rwaytz, Jan. 7, 2021).

On Reverend Adam P. Campbell’s podcast, in a segment discussing topical events, he introduces the BLM protests by referencing a study that concluded, “nearly all Black Lives Matter protests are peaceful, despite Trump narrative. The report finds the vast majority of the thousands of Black Lives Matter protests this summer have been peaceful with more than 93% involving no serious harm to people or damage to property, according to a new report tracking political violence in the United States” (Campbell 2020a, Ep. 6. Sept. 6). He disparages the U.S. government’s violent response as well as armed agitators and cars ramming into protestors from individual actors believing the “irrational lies” of politicians and conservative news outlets deliberately stoking outrage, adding:

So when someone tells me that America is not inherently racist—after I’m finished laughing hysterically—I just point to history. We were founded under slavery, of subjecting other human beings to gruesome and inhuman treatment in order to prop up a young American economy. It’s just a fact. (Campbell 2020a, Ep. 6. Sept. 6)

⁶⁹ Examples: #BlackLivesMatter, #DefundThePolice, #SupportSocialPrograms, #BLM, #PoliceBrutality, #NoPardonForTrump, #NoPardon, #endracism, #whitesupremacy, #americaortrump.

In the YouTube comments under Campbell's various podcast episodes, his views are either commended or dismissed.

One final CoS member's online content to discuss here is the blog of Satanist D.A. In a post from November 21, 2019, titled, "Satanism, The White Man's Religion?" Satanist D.A. lists his ethnic background as "mixed," whose parents are a "Western European father" and an "African mother" (D.A. 2019). He describes a childhood where his nerd interests were designated as "white," and the teasing that ensued from seemingly existing between two cultures. He characterises his attraction to Satanism as a religion precisely because it makes no statement to race as a qualifier, focusing instead on meritocracy:

Satanism is terrific because it looks at the individual. Merit, not inherit, is our credo, and we only want people who can think. The Church of Satan will take a smart black (or brown, Asian, etc.) person who can reason and think for themselves over a white idiot conformist, any day of the week. With the church, you do not have a race-based passport to the Infernal Empire just because you have ancestors who did some cool things. Your achievements and character are what you will be judged upon, not your heritage. This is a terrifying thought to the pathetic doctrine of racism and its irresolute parishioners who have nothing but their ethnicity as their defining personality trait. Pathetic. (D.A. 2019)

Satanist D.A. remarks that Satanism is full of "melanin-challenged individuals" as part of its membership, and reasons that this is so simply because they are more white people in the U.S.A.

Allow me to engage in conjecture by suggesting an alternative explanation; given the racist roots of eugenics and Social Darwinism, Black communities have been far more attuned to how these ideas have been deliberately constructed as discriminatory tools against Black people, Indigenous people, and people of colour far more than white communities. The discourse on systemic racism in American institutions is increasingly prevalent in the popular imagination since the advent of the internet, and especially as it is amplified in the so-called culture wars. The focus of this thesis is recent content produced by CoS members, and among that internet rhetoric,

it is not uncommon for the average white CoS member to acknowledge and engage with how systemic racism is imbedded and affects every aspect of society. It is just as likely for CoS members to reject systemic racism altogether. Popular digital Satanic discourse within the CoS has just begun to be reflective on racism; it is an implicit privilege of majority white organizations to ignore it, as they remain largely (superficially) unaffected. The rise of the alt-right/far-right, the 2016 American Presidential election, and BLM protests forced the topic into internal virtual discourse, to a variety of reactions and engagement.⁷⁰ The second reason I suggest that Satanism is a majority white religion is that white privilege itself allows for a particular freedom to engage in marginal identities, keeping their affiliation private or not. If one is already from a marginalized community—especially a visibly racialized community that regularly faces violence from state institutions and daily social interactions—joining a fringe religion that might further their ostracization does not have the same appeal as to the average white person who risks less and can opt in and out of being visibly identified as marginalized. When and where to “tuck the Baphomet”⁷¹ is a topic of discussion among CoS Satanists. One’s safety and security are measured against freedom of expression and aesthetic preferences, especially during times of increased moral panics regarding Satanism.⁷²

3.5. Conclusion

⁷⁰ Alexa G. McCalla-Johnson, in their thesis on performative activism, writes: “The resurgence of Black Lives Matter in May of 2020 marked a pivotal point in time for popular culture. In “Notes on Deconstructing the ‘Popular,’” Stuart Hall asserts that cultural change occurs when dominant cultural forms are actively marginalized (1981). As activists continue to push back on the status quo and bring awareness to the issues of marginalized communities, they force a cultural shift where critical conversations about systemic racism enter the forefront of our consciousness to finally be acknowledged and addressed” (2021; Hall 1981).

⁷¹ This phrase refers to CoS Baphomet pendants on a chain worn around the neck, which could be hidden underneath a garment.

⁷² Tragic events and violence towards Satanists are briefly discussed in chapter four.

Petersen claims that the CoS' turn towards "Nazi-chic" in the eighties was an effort to "replicate the conflict in Western society's norms and values," but this was discontinued as LaVey briefly returned to public life in the early nineties to combat the rising challenges of the Satanic Panic (2005, 429). After Nadramia and Gilmore (with Barton present behind the scenes) took over after LaVey's death, the CoS administration primarily protected the "authority of LaVey writings," rarely concerning itself with CoS members' individual opinions and practices unless they "run counter to the interests of the church" (430). What consists of opposition to church doctrine is the primary question in this chapter and an underlying theme throughout this thesis.

The CoS administration took steps to limit the direct association between the CoS as an organization and the increasingly voluminous virtual public content produced by its members by: 1) ceasing to promote CoS members' podcasts; 2) releasing statements in support of current political and social issues as they happen (Juneteenth, BLM); 3) declaring that CoS titles are not protection from internal critique among CoS members; and 4) emphasizing that CoS members can either choose to ignore others they disagree with, or confront under the rules of civility and robust debate. If the CoS, like other religions in the neoliberal society, begins to perceive its brand as tarnished by proximity to white nationalism/Nazism, it is in its interest to publicly distance itself from CoS members promoting such ideas. It is ideological pragmatism (not necessarily morally or ethically motivated), which is an endemic feature of modern religious Satanism as conceived by LaVey and furthered by his Church of Satan. Individual CoS members are, as always, free to express themselves as they fit on their own platforms.

Petersen also argues that LaVey's "tension-filled codification of Satanism" becomes a "cultural product" disputed by other players in the Satanic milieu (2010, 104). Reading literature

produced by CoS members and observing their virtual activity as they respond to topical issues demonstrates that they are filtering events of the world via CoS doctrines. Church of Satan members view *The Satanic Bible's* broad ideas as superficially uncontested. Closer scrutiny reveals that there is a loose division between *TSB* as bedrock knowledge and LaVey's later writings which reflect his stronger misanthropic and conservative political views.

When it comes to popular social and political topics, CoS members engage in a tension between, first, how the Church is perceived by outsiders as either right-wing (justified by LaVey's literature and select other texts) or left-wing (an accusation they face from ex-members), and second, that ideas such as Social Darwinism are complicated by internal disputes on the *interpretation* and *application* of it by its members (if they are considered at all). Those interpretations span the political spectrum, including apathy towards political considerations or rejection of those ideas entirely. These parallel discourses (external perception versus internal interpretation) are unevenly examined in favour of a fixation solely on LaVey's clear right-wing leaning opinions. The nuance and breadth of CoS members' political positions or political indifferences are rarely centralized in coverage of the CoS.

One primary example of the dichotomy of political opinions of CoS members can be examined via LaVey's essay, *The Goodguy Badge* (1992, 20-27). It is a statement on people displaying their charitable activism as posturing, invested in social acceptance more than the issue itself. This accusation is often lobbied at left-leaning Satanists from right-leaning Satanists as a desire to be perceived as a "good" person. The phrase "social justice warrior" is used derogatorily. The counteraccusation is that right-leaning Satanists are seeking a "Badguy

Badge.” The word “edgelord”⁷³ is often used. Examples of this are peppered throughout public content in indirect and direct ways.

What is interesting to note about this essay, is that it also contains a statement to speak out against injustice or “whatever violates one’s security. This is the first law, the law of self-preservation” (20). In this essay LaVey is noticing a behaviour and offering a critic with a caveat (the Goodguy Badge is pretentious; fighting against oppressive laws is Satanic justice). Satanists, true to form, can fall on either side (or remain ambivalent depending on the issue).

There is a broader context in which to view LaVey’s concept of the Goodguy Badge, outside of Satanic framings and beyond the micro tensions in CoS interactions. Among Black activists, there is a related concept dubbed the “performative ally,” defined as: “Performative activism is activism done to increase one's social capital rather than because of one's devotion to a cause.”⁷⁴ Support your claim with action or do not interfere is a common statement from Black activists to white “allies.” They often do more harm than good. There is a robust body of literature that confirms the destructive effects of white saviourism from liberal circles (see Pallister-Wilkins 2021). They function to alleviate white guilt by voicing support to gain social capital, only to then reenforce systemic oppression. It rarely benefits the communities they purport to want to help (McCella-Johnson 2021, 38-39). It is interesting, then, that Black communities have marked a similar concept to LaVey’s “Goodguy Badge.” Black communities’ responses to the performative ally are either calls to action or commands not to impede. White saviours are not needed or wanted.

⁷³ From Dictionary.com, “edgelord”: “An edgelord is someone on an internet forum who deliberately talks about controversial, offensive, taboo, or nihilistic subjects in order to shock other users in an effort to appear cool, or *edgy*.” Accessed Jan. 23, 2022. <https://www.dictionary.com/e/slang/edgelord/>

⁷⁴ From Wikipedia.com, “Performative Activism.” Accessed Jan. 23, 2022. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Performative_activism

How this relates to my thesis is that this is but one example of LaVey's pattern of observations on human behaviour: with a fair amount of (pessimistic) accuracy he is naming the motivation for a human social conceit. He then interprets it according to his own interests. The CoS administration usually adopts a neutral position, decentralizing political issues as under the purview of the individual member unless it is unambiguously canon. This is a consistent pattern.

The sequence in opinions and responses expressed by CoS members is that ideas pertaining to liberal/libertine positions on personal freedoms, sexuality, and secularism contained in *The Satanic Bible* are fairly unchallenged (i.e. bedrock knowledge), by both the CoS administration and individual members. These notions of Satanic thought link directly to the popular rehabilitation of Satan by Romantic Satanists, their critique of divinely ordained authority, and emphasis that a Satanic figure is “the manifestation of the human drive for knowledge” (van Luijk 2016, 112). This is the origin for subsequent reinterpretations of Satan as the rebel-hero. The milieu of modern religious Satanism pivots around this central idea of using Satan as a symbol to challenge the status quo, both within and without the CoS. CoS members object to institutional Christian advantages and its pervasive influence in society. As they stand outside that *religious* privilege, its stronghold becomes obvious. Other types of perceived privileges are not as central within CoS discourse; the current political, academic, and legal conversations on privileges as they manifest in popular social media are instead the primary sources of internal polemical disagreements.

CoS members are extending their notion of a Satanic self onto their material and virtual platforms in their idiosyncratic interpretation of Satanism. When they do, they encounter tension with co-religionists and differing opinions. The CoS administration ceased promoting podcasts, noting that outsiders rarely distinguish between the personal opinions of a member and those of

the official Church of Satan. The encounter of these CoS members with externally imposed framings of the Church of Satan as a political organization creates internal tension: the right-leaning members deride the implication that the Church is liberal or politically correct, the left-leaning members admonish accusations of being far-right, while the apathetic or uninterested ignore both.

CoS Satanists thus pivot on an axis that is uniformly directed at Christianity and its privileged status in institutional structure and policy, but inconsistently aimed at other privileges (race, gender, ableism, sexual orientation, etc.), which are deemed *individual* interpretations. That is, members may differ greatly on which direction to point their ire, but indignation is always filtered via the prism of their Satanic symbol. Thus, the boundaries of Satanism as understood within the Church are pliable to an extent; the slow and ongoing filtering process maintains a diversity of political opinions as long as individual members do not force their interpretation onto others.

Chapter Four: Gender and Sexuality in the Church of Satan⁷⁵

“Homosexuals have not been duped by the prudes, and are the beneficiaries of heterosexual stupidity and pliability. Homosexuals are the only people who have approached sexual freedom.”

—Anton LaVey (1992, 99).

“We don’t need ‘feminism’ on our sleeve as our primary identity. We have our identity as Satanists.”

—Magistra Blanche Barton on *Satanic Feminism* (1997).

“I don’t have many of the sexual hang ups a lot of non-Satanists seem to have.”

—Anonymous CoS Member (2017).

4.1. Introduction

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Anton LaVey wrote a syndicated advice column published in tabloids called, “Letters from the Devil.” One person queried whether the desire to have a sex change is “nuts” even though he considered himself “just as sane as the next person” (LaVey 2010, 40). LaVey responds, “I don’t think you’re ‘nuts’ because you are dissatisfied with having been born a female in a male’s body, and there are a number of psychiatrists who would agree” (40). He proceeds to recommend the names of two physicians⁷⁶ and encourages the

⁷⁵ This chapter incorporates research from the following published paper: Holt, Cimminnee, 2013. “Blood, Sweat, and Urine: The Scent of Feminine Fluids in Anton LaVey’s *The Satanic Witch*.” *International Journal for the Study of New Religions*, 4(2): 177-199.

⁷⁶ Harry Benjamin, M.D. and Leo Wollman, M.D. Benjamin and Wollman were part of the founding committee of the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association, Inc. The committee wrote the original draft of *The Harry Benjamin Standards of Care* for transgender treatment in 1979, with multiple updates over the following

person to seek medical advice on transitioning. In other texts, LaVey extolls the virtues of healthy transvestitism (2010, 1), claims homosexuals are the only truly sexually liberated group (1992, 99), advocates for masculine women who want sex changes as an act of self-fulfillment (2003, 38), and generally considers indulgence in sexual proclivities in its varied manifestations—masturbation, sadomasochism, asexuality, polyamory—to be beneficial, productive parts of living well, as long as they are done with full self-awareness of all parties involved (2005, 66–74). The exceptions to LaVey’s sexual permissiveness are sex with children, animals, and those incapable of providing consent, all of which he categorically condemns (70).

LaVey’s positions on gender and sexuality are informed by a combination of significant discourses, including a response to the free-love attitude of 1960’s counterculture and second wave feminism, and esoteric treatises on the magical properties of human sexuality, both of which are underpinned by scientific discourses from psychological, biological, and medical fields to lend legitimacy to his magical ideas. Petersen notes that LaVey sanitizes the “Satanic” through a process of secularization, as he also “satanizes” the secular (2013, 181). LaVey’s concept of “lesser magic” is directly tied to his views on gender and sexuality, filtered via both these sanitizing and satanizing processes.

This chapter focuses on gender and sexuality within the Satanic imagination. I first discuss LaVey’s views and the Church of Satan administration’s official policies alongside those of prominent members of hierarchy, and then examine how CoS members interpret and adapt to ever-shifting modern concepts of gender and sexuality via their Satanic identity.

decades. Its newest iteration, now called the *Standards of Care for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender Nonconforming People*, is considered a foundational protocol text for the medical and psychological treatment of gender dysphoria.

4.2. LaVey and Lesser Magic

LaVey's positions on sexuality in *The Satanic Bible* (2005 [1969]) outline legal, consensual sexual freedom in its many iterations. The section "Satanic Sex" (66-74) is a direct response to the sexual freedom counterculture narratives of the 1960s. LaVey was critical of the "free love" aspect in popular discourses of the time, despite championing a libertine sexuality. He writes: "These free-sex clubs miss the whole point of sexual freedom," and admonishes the mechanical aspect of orgies without indulgence in individual fetishes and their failure to incorporate the range of sexual proclivities (2005, 67). For LaVey, sexual freedom is contingent on the self-awareness of one's true desires, without holdover guilt from Christianity and its perceived repression of sexual desires. He is responding to an American sensibility informed by public Protestantism when he notes that sexually deviant or fetishistic behaviour is prevalent, yet denied and shamed (67). Suppression and denigration of sexuality causes mental anguish, anxiety, and neurosis, which LaVey, in typical fashion, uses as part of his anti-religious, anti-spiritual, anti-Christian campaign (Lap 2013, 91). LaVey rarely elaborates on sexual acts, instead focusing on sexuality and his pro-LGBTQ stance between consenting adults. All iterations of sexual expression that fit within these parameters are considered "Satanic" sexuality. LaVey emphasizes that it is *un-Satanic* to force oneself into sexual activities deemed popular or political for reasons beyond one's own "natural" tendencies and desires. This sentiment is directed at the hippie counterculture and its promotion of "free love" without considering individual fetishes.

The primary text that discusses gender is LaVey's book describing his concept of everyday manipulation, or Lesser Magic. *The Satanic Witch* (originally *The Compleat Witch: Or What to Do When Virtue Fails* 2003 [1970]), is a response to second-wave feminism, outlining

his version of female sexual empowerment. Its prologue reads, “many will feel it to be a treatise on mancatching” (LaVey 2003, ix). LaVey claims this is an inaccurate reading, clarifying:

Whether or not a witch needs any man other than the one she has currently chosen is relatively unimportant. What is important, however, lies in the fact that if a woman wants anything in life, she can obtain it easier through a man than another woman, despite woman liberationists’ bellows to the contrary. The truly “liberated” female is the complete witch, who knows both how to use and enjoy men. She will find the energies she expends in her quixotic cause would be put to more rewarding use, where she can profit by her womanliness by manipulating the men she holds in contempt, while enjoying the ones she finds stimulating. (LaVey 2003, ix)

LaVey’s argument is that, because women are the perceived object of men’s lust, this provides women with an advantage to exploit men to achieve their (personal and professional) goals. Chapter six, “Bitchcraft,” contains essays titled such as, “How and When to Lie,” “Learn to be Stupid,” and “Taking Advantage of Men Who Think They’re Taking Advantage of You” (2003, 185-221), which are essays on how to usurp misogynist assumptions by delicately overplaying gender roles to make them work to one’s benefit; that is, to use femininity as a tool of manipulation, or Lesser Magic. LaVey emphasizes the materiality of the human body and its properties. *The Satanic Witch* is, essentially, a treatise on how to activate certain emotions (empathy, lust, generosity, etc.). Once a target is primed, a successful witch sways without their target being aware of the manipulation via the sensorial—that is, stimulate your target’s senses via dress, speech, mannerisms, and scent with the goal of “seduction, influence, and control” (Holt 2013, 178). These methods are designated as “basic psychology, glamour, non-ritual manipulative magic” (Barton in LaVey 2003, 277).

The Satanic Witch is written in a heteronormative voice, directed at heterosexual women, though LaVey takes as a given that his audience can and should adapt its practical applications to one’s gender identity and sexual orientation, depending on one’s objective. Gaining a sexual

partner is but one goal, alongside professional and social advantages. A lesbian using Lesser Magic to manipulate heterosexual men is considered a Satanic trait as she uses the arts of enchantment at her disposal to achieve her individualized goals. LaVey asserts, “Lesbians often make very capable witches, for they can attract men, bewitch them and accomplish whatever their ends might be without allowing themselves to be drawn into emotional involvements with them” (2003, 213). In another text, LaVey reinforces the idea that Lesser Magic itself depends on gendered polarity, as the tension is used for magical efficacy (manipulation). For example, in *The Satanic Rituals* (written in 1976), LaVey claims that a group of homosexual men potentially has higher magical impact than a mixed-gender ceremony (as their sexual orientation is aligned), but that the role of the male “altar of flesh” nevertheless represents feminine receptive qualities (1976, 24–25). He writes:

Whenever reference in this book is made to a priest, the role may also be taken by a woman who can serve in the capacity of priestess. It must be clarified, however, that the essence of Satanism—its dualistic principle—necessarily imposes an active/passive dichotomy upon the respective roles of celebrant and altar. If a woman serves as a celebrant, then for all intents and purposes she represents the masculine principle in the rite. The pervasive theme of active/passive (Yin/Yang) in human relations cannot be stifled, despite attempts to create matriarchal, patriarchal, or unisexual societies. There will always be those who “might as well be men” or “might as well be women,” depending upon their endocrinological, emotional and/or behavioral predilections. It is far sounder, from a magical standpoint, for an ego-driven or forceful woman to conduct a ritual, rather than a shy, introspective man. It might prove awkward, however, to cast a passive man in the role of Earth-Mother—as the altar—unless his appearance conveyed the image of a woman... It must be stressed that both male and female principles must be present, even if the same sex portrays both. (1976, 24–25)

Gender roles for priests and celebrants in LaVey’s texts are suggestive, not prescriptive, and not rooted in (ever-shifting) concepts of biological categories. Differentiation is what most important.

In other sections, LaVey rejects fashion trends geared towards a particular popular body type, which rarely work in favour of a witchy aesthetic. He dismisses the fickle nature of shifting clothing fads and instead suggests that women seek to project an aesthetic enhancing one's natural body type and hinting at archetypes: if one is tall and slim with dark hair it lends itself to a "vamp" persona; a mature woman embraces a "crone" mystique; a plump lady espouses an endearing nurturing manner (2003, 63–65). LaVey's premise for this advice is that embracing one's body as it is (without forcing oneself into popular standards of beauty) attracts mates with particular tastes for that body type. If a witch is prone to being full-figured, LaVey insists drastic weight loss directs attention to men expecting thinness is a pursuit of wasted energies. He instead directs them to embrace their "bulges" so as to attract men that respond to voluptuousness, especially as it taps into a particular archetype of feminine nurturing and/or fertility. "You need starve yourself no longer," he proclaims (65). A text authored by LaVey's long-time companion, Blanche Barton, confirms the gender adaptability in LaVey's use of Lesser Magic when discussing archetypes. She writes: "The masculine or feminine pronouns are used here only as a convenience—males or females can participate to a lesser or greater degree in any of these basic types" (Barton 1992, 169).

As deliberate manipulation of the body's involuntary reaction to sensorial stimuli is the basis for LaVey's Lesser Magic, a relevant concept here is his treatise on the alluring properties of scent in feminine fluids (i.e., blood, urine, and sweat) as tools of enchantment in a witch's reserve of sorcery (Holt 2013, 185). LaVey frames the scent of bodily fluids as inherently animalistic, befitting a carnal religion. In the chapter, "On the Importance of Odors," he writes:

As a witch, you should learn some basic principles of enchantment through odors. First of all, **DON'T SCRUB AWAY YOUR NATURAL ODORS OF SEDUCTION.** It doesn't matter how much brainwashing has been done to make certain bodily odors

undesirable. Millions of years have seen to this that such scents will never be reacted to in a negative way. (2003, 95)

LaVey admonishes women's preoccupation with excessive bathing, perfumes, and soaps, insisting that women can use the natural scent of their bodily fluids to attract a mate, allowing for basic, necessary hygiene (1998, 146–148). His diatribe is a response to the popularity of so-called "feminine hygiene products" of the 1970s, which are chemical deodorants applied to the vulva or inserted into the vagina. They were sold as "reputed aids to sexual freedom, the avenue by which to liberate" in ostensible alignment with the feminism (Holt 2013, 188). Feminists, in accord with LaVey, protested these "hygiene" products as medically dangerous, producing infections and burning. In agreement with LaVey, feminist objections declared these products "unsafe and exploitative of women's anxiety over her natural vaginal secretions," portraying women as perpetually unclean yet obsessed with cleanliness (188).

Sexual secretions were not the only bodily fluids that LaVey suggests can be used for magical efficacy, as he notes that menses, sweat, and urine are also historically considered potent magical witchcraft. "Unless the human animal is to be considered the only exception in nature, you are theoretically appealing, rather than offending, during your period," he writes (2003, 100), continuing:

Some of you may have noticed that men seem to swarm around you most when you have your period. Undoubtedly, such a situation has proved disturbing to many of you, as you feel it an inopportune time to really get involved, especially where sex is concerned...the changes that take place in your system at this time are such that the normal sexual odor is highly intensified and, because of this, carries further. (2003, 98)

LaVey claims that the scent of menses unconsciously communicates fertility, and thus sexual desirability. He argues that perfumes and colognes are usually made from the "mating scents of

beavers (castoreum), cats (civit), whales (ambergris), muskrats (Musk Zibata), deers and goats (musk),” as well as odors derived from flora that are necessary for pollination and germination (LaVey 2003, 96). In keeping with theme of olfactory cues for sexual attraction, he notes that the common location of sweat, the armpit, has been considered an erogenous zone (135-136). The scent of urine is an aphrodisiac, and that there are more “men who are stimulated by the smell of urine than will ever admit” (102). The clearest evidence of this is the fetishistic fixation on undergarments, which absorbs sweat and urine from the folds of the skin, and the ritual of “sniffing of the crotch, performed in an epicurean fashion” (2003, 98).

True to LaVey’s anti-Christian stance, he links the devaluation of human scent as a particularly inconvenient form of purity culture (Valenti 2009), writing:

This obsession to scrub away dirt (and with it sin) is a by-product of the kind of puritanism and Calvinism that defies all the laws of nature. The Huguenotes even had a hymn equating bodily odors with sin, called: “Everybody Stinks but Jesus.” There is no doubt that to many women, a bar of soap has replaced the confessional. (LaVey 2003, 96)

LaVey’s continued emphasis on Satanists’ carnality is a response to exalted ideals of humanity’s ostensibly spiritual distinctions, which censure the body, its materiality, and its wants and desires. Excessive bathing is thus an unconscious denouncement of our inherent animal nature by “washing away its very odiferous essence” (Holt 2013, 185). To LaVey, if odors originating from sexual organs are considered anathema to humans it is a “morality-based artifice” (189) that goes against all other animal behaviour (96-97).

As LaVey promotes a biological justification for the basis of his Lesser Magic, he also emphasizes their esoteric source. “Love potions” comprised of bodily fluids are used in various cultures by “shamans, medicine men, and magicians” (LaVey 2010, 6). The bibliography for *The Satanic Witch* LaVey consists of psychological, biological, and sociological titles alongside

grimoires, magical, and occult texts (Holt 2013, 183). It is the weaving of these two discourses that is particular to LaVey: if humans are animals, then their behaviour is “quantifiable and predictable by the scientific method, and thus malleable to the educated and clever” (183). Petersen notes that these two discourses—scientific and esoteric—are how LaVey legitimizes Satanism. LaVey sanitizes the “Satanic” through a process of secularization, as he also “satanizes” the secular (Petersen 2013, 181). These two processes are obvious in his concept of Lesser Magic: the theatricality of occult nomenclature envelopes the “(at times basic) techniques of social interaction” (179).

Much of LaVey’s early writings on gender and sexuality are influenced by the ambient Protestant Christianity of a reserved American idealized (real or perceived) society of the 1950s. If Christianity derides sexual pleasure, labeling it deviant and Satanic, then LaVey subverts this accusation by claiming the Satanic label as a symbol of embracing one’s carnal nature. He writes: “In order to be a successful witch, one does have to make a pact with the devil, at least symbolically” (LaVey 2003, 5). Faxneld notes that in the nineteenth century, feminist polemics informed by the Romantics’ transformation of Satan perform “counter-readings of Christian misogynist traditions. Hereby, Lucifer became reconceptualized as a feminist liberator of womankind” (2014, 16). While LaVey co-opts this tradition of Satan as sexual liberator of women, it is primarily used as fuel for his anti-Christian stance, not to advocate for women’s political power. He ultimately prefers gender-affirmation via aesthetics, not biology (LaVey 1998, 36). Two decades after writing *The Satanic Witch*, he writes:

Hardware (automobiles, equipment, etc.) reclaims masculine form long rejected as “phallic.” “Muscle” equates to “male” in our world. Androgyny is recognized as per *The Satanic Witch*, not as a visual dilemma. If a female Satanist wishes to dress as a man, she should do it with conviction and completion, cropping her hair, lowering her voice, building up muscles, and pasting on beard or moustache. She should present herself as male in every way and by any means possible. Likewise, a male who wishes

to present a female aesthetic image should become a completely honest TV [transvestite] or transsexual. Difference and contrast are Satanic. Homogenization is not. There is no place for visually-mixed gender identification in our world, unless displayed by hermaphroditism in a side show. (LaVey 1998, 117)

LaVey does not devote as much energy to critiquing concepts of masculinity as he does the changing norms of femininity, but his commentary falls into similar derision. He mocks men exhibiting typically feminine roles, such as grocery shopping (Barton 1992, 174), and instead worships the masculine archetypes of the 30s and 40s (23). Despite his overt disdain for feminism, he does not disempower women. He recognizes their social status puts them at a disadvantage. He instead advocates for the individualized agency that threads through much of his Satanic worldview, “Advanced, Satanically-oriented women can choose their own lifestyle rather than having it thrust upon them” (LaVey in Barton 1992, 174). This positions him in line with the American individualist feminist tradition, though LaVey’s goal was power *via* femininity, not in spite of it (Faxneld 2013c, 204).

Hugh B. Urban claims that LaVey’s concept of female sexual empowerment merely reinforces the male gaze, and does not challenge or usurp it. He writes that it is “at once classic expression of the rhetoric of sexual liberation and also quite blatant statement of male chauvinism,” as LaVey’s throwaway references to gender adaptations merely reinforce polarities (2006, 210). LaVey does not root gendered aesthetics onto biological categories, but instead emphasizes that the masculine and feminine are flexible roles humans play. Gender display is role-playing theatre, a means to manipulation.

Judith Butler’s ground-breaking work on gender is relevant here. Butler theorizes gender as performative and relational. That is, the concept of gender itself exists solely as a performance (i.e. gender is something one *does*). This performative action requires constant resignification via

the social context in which it is defined (Stone 2007, 66-67). This social context limits gender to two rigid categories, male and female, which Butler names the “heterosexual matrix” (61).

Gender behaviour is thus ascribed and reinforced across a society’s institutions, wherein political and economic powers are organized around imposed and divergent gendered performances (64): males must act “masculine” (a particular set of ways that is separate from the feminine); females must act “feminine” (a particular set of ways that is separate from the masculine) (61). The binary genders of the heterosexual matrix are presented as opposing and necessary principles in relation to each other (61). Butler emphasizes that there is no concept of “self” that is unaffected by social gender norms (65). The imperative to conform to an unequal binary schema promotes exploitation and abuse, wherein the burden to navigate patriarchal violence is unduly placed on everyone deemed not-male, as performing outside the boundaries of gender norms is met with socially sanctioned aggression. Butler contends that gender norms are thus desirable to subvert, as subversion prompts reflexivity, and with the ultimate goal of abolishing gender itself (66-67). If all gender is a relational social performance, then challenging gender in performative ways changes the very fabric of society and the structure of power.

Faxneld remarks that LaVey’s concept of gender as performative as “almost anticipating Judith Butler” (2013, 205). Butler’s theories on gender both correspond and diverge from LaVey in pivotal ways. LaVey acknowledged that all gender is a performance. Butler and LaVey both point to drag as primary examples of gender’s very theatricality and malleability. They also both note that pressure to conform women’s bodies into popular feminine ideals is undesirable, though they each present separate reasons: Butler views the act of regulating one’s body weight as inherently oppressive; LaVey voiced his personal sexual preference for plump women as evidence that popular fads ignore the reality of diverse sexual attraction. Butler wishes to

dismantle the heterosexual matrix. LaVey diverges here: while he applauds the malleability of gender performativity he emphasizes the necessity of oppositional dualistic masculine and feminine principles for esoteric purposes. The tension between deliberate, performed gender binaries produces conditions ripe for manipulation/magic. Butler encourages subversion of all gender performativity to display gender in unexpected ways—not only beyond a binary but to eliminate gender itself. And while LaVey championed transgenderism as an ultimate form of self-realization of the true self (an essential Satanic principle) (Gilmore 2019), he viewed androgyny and gender homogeneity as stagnate, without the conditions of necessary gendered tension in which to exploit one's target. His position on gendered performance thus reinforces the gender binary and heterosexual matrix by upholding masculine and feminine ideals (the ways in which one is expected to display gender) even as he subverts biological framings of gender and is firmly pro-LGBTQ.

LaVey's tenuous points of contact with Butler's theories expand to tenuous points of contact with feminist observations on social issues affecting women. Feminist responses advocate for collective freedom while LaVey's response gears towards the individual witch's perceived benefit. For example, LaVey notes that the Satanic Witch is often a solitary figure, with more male friends than female, and that men are more interested in women who openly dislike other women. He writes: "Listening to a girl talk about other men might make the man angry, but hearing all about your sweet and harmonious friendships with other women will sicken and bore him. If you start to talk about your hostile feelings towards another woman, though, his ears will perk up" (LaVey 2003, 189). Here, LaVey is noting an issue recognized by feminists; in a patriarchy, women are rewarded for openly displaying (internalized) misogyny. There is a payoff for gendered norm enforcement when "women police other women" (Manne

2018, 256). It is a phenomenon recognized across disciplines. In politics, just over half of white women voted for Trump so as to continue to benefit from their proximity to white men in a white supremacist society (Manne 2018, 15). In corporate culture, women who ascend to high positions in male-dominated fields exhibit misogyny to disassociate from their gender and display “masculinities in order to survive and possibly thrive in masculine work contexts” (Mavin et al. 2014, 442). And in social relationships women are encouraged to compete in destructive ways, as they have “internalized the prevailing misogynist ideology which we uphold both in order to survive and in order to improve our own individual positions vis-a-vis all other women” (Chesler 2009, 2).

Again, we see that both feminists and LaVey pinpoint a gendered social behaviour, but with very different agendas: feminist discourse attempts to dismantle the power dynamic in order for women to have improved and protected agency as a group; LaVey emphasizes the means by which the individual woman can exploit the prevailing system to her immediate perceived benefit. This reflects the foundational premise of *The Satanic Witch* that women “are for better or for worse ninety-nine percent dependent upon the support of men” (LaVey 1989 [1971], 185; Faxneld 2013, 203). LaVey acknowledges a pervasive patriarchy and offers methods to outsmarting this “uncomfortable truth,” but “considers it uneconomical for the female Satanist to expend time on fighting against it in cooperation with other women” (203).

LaVey’s derision for feminism and gender based collective political activism is consistent throughout his texts and interviews. He writes that a “true misogynist” resents feminine power, secretly desires to capture and wield it, and resorts to aggression out of fear:

He really loves women but the poor things won’t let him effect an expansive and pleasing sexual delineation essential to his masculinity. He consequently hates them for it. By not displaying archetypical signals of femininity they rob him of the ultimate expression of his masculinity. (LaVey 1992, 91)

In this passage, LaVey impugns women for not catering to men's desire for masculine demarcation and flattery. He expresses compassion for men displaying misogynistic hostility. Philosopher Kate Manne coins the phrase "himpathy" for this phenomenon, which is described as "excessive sympathy sometimes shown toward male perpetrators of sexual violence" (Manne 2018, 197). The onus is placed on women and their failure to placate masculine pride: i.e. they "rob" him of masculinity. Any potential violence resulting from the failure to appease men's "expression of masculinity" is thus blamed on feminism as a social movement (even if not the individual victim). LaVey states:

Most men are so threatened and fed up with dealing with women with chips on their shoulders that they place greater demands upon women in an attempt to assert power. They're so used to women threatening their masculinity that they take every opportunity to throw their weight around, even with a naturally passive woman. That's what the real crime of feminism is. (Barton 1992, 173)

LaVey emphasizes that men's insecurity of their own masculinity is entirely dependent on a passive feminine, which he reinforces with anti-feminist rhetoric. The responsibility of maintaining masculinity is placed on women, to feminist objections.

Allow me to use one of Satanism's internal directives to analyze the function of LaVey's anti-feminist rhetoric: Satanic discourse mandates that Satanists seeking insight to any particular issue ask themselves: *cui bono?* Who benefits? Feminist discourse mirrors this method of inquiry by examining the underlying high stakes of any perceived threat. That is, when LaVey expresses explicit disdain for feminism and its collective mobilization to challenge patriarchal norms, why is it philosophically dangerous to him? LaVey provides the answer that, since women are living under patriarchal conditions, the clever Satanic Witch uses any means at her disposal to manipulate men to her favour. Feminist efforts to dismantle the systemic patriarchal conditions

that positions beauty as capital is consistently derided by LaVey throughout his texts. His premise to women is always: work within whatever system exists to capitalize without sanctimony or moral judgment.

Sociologist Tressie McMillan Cottom defines the social capitol of beauty as a “structural apparatus that controls access to resources and ad hoc designates those with capital as beauty’s gatekeepers” (2019, 41). Cottom emphasizes that such capital is assigned primarily to uphold the standards of whiteness. That is, our concept of “beauty” is one that rewards maintaining the existing social order (28). Within this social order, perceived differences in archetypes simply reinforce its homogeny, not variety. She writes:

When white feminists catalogue how beauty standards over time have changed, from the “curvier” Marilyn Monroe to the skeletal Twiggy to the synthetic-athletic Pamela Anderson, their archetypes belie beauty’s true function: whiteness. Whiteness exists as a response to blackness. Whiteness is a violent sociocultural regime legitimized by property to always make clear who is black by fastidiously delineating who is officially white. It would stand to reason that beauty’s ultimate function is to exclude blackness. That beauty also violently conditions white women and symbolically precludes the existence of gender nonconforming people is a bonus. (Cottom 2019, 28-29)

If we apply this critique to *The Satanic Witch*, we notice that engagement in Lesser Magic, by default, is a decree to exploit this social order. LaVey himself rarely mentions race in *TSW*. He instead takes as a given that different groups of ethnicities and races have their own concepts and archetypes to exploit for one’s benefit, noting:

Just as these flesh and complexion variants are observable in a white environment, so will they be readily discernible in an oriental culture or within the black community. All of the rules of personality analysis in this book apply to black people as well as white. The same subtle differences exist in all races. One only has to open his eyes to observe them. The old cliché that “all _____ (fill in the blank with whatever race or nationality will be appropriate to the conversation) look alike to me” can only be applied when one is prejudicial in the truest meaning of the word. Where one doesn’t *want* to see the difference in types within a given ethnic group, the people comprising that group would, indeed, “all look alike.” (2003, 117)

As LaVey's concept of gender polarities is untethered to biology, he assumes his readers will adapt his methods to whichever social, cultural, and racial context suits them best.

LaVey's daughter, Zeena Schreck, however, certainly viewed *The Satanic Witch* under a white supremacist gaze. In the 1989 edition's introduction she writes: "*The Satanic Witch*, among many other things, is a guide to selective breeding, a manual for eugenics—the lost science of preserving the able-bodied and able-minded while controlling the surplus population of the weak and incompetent" (Schreck 1989, n.p.). Schreck's Nazi predilections ultimately led to her excommunication from the CoS [see chapter three of this thesis] and her introduction to *TSW* was removed as of the 2003 reprinting—but I note her framing of *TSW* here to highlight how it is and has been interpreted because, deliberately or unintentionally, the current social order that rewards beauty as capital is, by default, a participation in upholding whiteness just as much as it is a participation in upholding patriarchy. The underlying system that dictates the terms of transactions with beauty capital (to continue the economic metaphor) is patriarchal white supremacy. LaVey's concept of Lesser Magic relies on understanding these systems and exploiting them. LaVey has no interest in dismantling patriarchy or white supremacy, and his methods of Lesser Magic, despite the plasticity on the concepts of gender and race, are meant to conform to the pre-existing social order so as to maximize one's individual benefit. LaVey's pragmatic view is almost always to work within whatever system exists. Learn to exploit or be exploited. Opting out of the patriarchal system that rewards proximity to white standards of beauty would then fall under individual choice. It is important to note here that the mandate to exploit—not challenge—the social order does *not* apply when it comes to Christian privilege, which he continuously aims to dismantle. Put another way, he names Christianity's influence in society as destructive, and worthy of steadfast pressure to eliminate its influence for the benefit

of those wishing to live without its social, political, and legal constraints. He recognizes that Christian institutional privilege limits Satanists' freedom in the world. He emphasizes that Satanism itself stands against the tyranny of theism. Per CoS administrative policy, individual Satanists are free to work to dismantle adjacent white supremacist patriarchal systems of oppression, or not, if they so choose. Beauty as social capital, however, is thus the primary avenue for Witches to achieve status and resources within LaVey's texts.

This still does not yet answer my question: why is feminism philosophically so dangerous to LaVey? I speculate that the answer is partly that feminists advocating for the freedom to live without catering to men's egos renders LaVey's notion of Lesser Magic if not inert, then certainly more complicated; it repositions social and political power as malleable and unstable as gender itself, and thus open for disruption. If the premise of Lesser Magic is manipulation to achieve one's personal and professional goals via gendered polarities (which are also, then, racialized), then LaVey's ire for feminism is because it challenges ideas on masculinity's social, political, and economic power, and thus would redefine Lesser Magic itself. His multiple instances of anti-feminist rhetoric thus protect his assessment of social dynamics and maintain men as the ultimate purveyors of access to resources, which they dole out to women as reward for upholding masculinity. Put another way, if Lesser Magic is based on manipulation of social power dynamics via the aesthetic senses, then a feminist push for equal status changes the stakes on which Lesser Magic is based. It shifts women's gendered aesthetics—that is, their investment in beauty capital—as untethered to their social, financial, and professional stability.

In this section I stress that LaVey's ideas on Lesser Magic are culturally situated as a response to 1970's second-wave feminism. Even as feminism shifts and changes, LaVey maintains his anti-feminist positions, and continues to reinforce a performative gender binary,

but one that is malleable and unfixed to biology. He consistently expresses praise for people deliberately usurping their assigned gender at birth as he considers transgender persons fully embracing a true Satanic self. The discourses on non-binary and gender non-confirming persons had not quite been in popular circulation at the time of LaVey's writing of *TSW* or his later texts. In the next two sections, I examine the responses of the CoS administration and members to evolving concepts of gender and sexuality in popular discourse.

4.3. Church of Satan Administration

The Church of Satan's official positions on gender and sexuality are addressed in their "Frequently Asked Questions" section on its website.

Magus Anton LaVey embraced people from the entire LGBTQ spectrum wholeheartedly—and well in advance of most other religious organizations—and Magus Gilmore proudly maintains that position. We consider it intrinsic to Satanism to support our fellows' search for fulfillment so long as it involves other consenting mature, self-aware adults, even when our own pursuits are different. (Church of Satan n.d., "F.A.Q.")

The unwavering pro-LGBTQ position of the CoS has had only minor adjustments. In 2004, the US Supreme Court made same-sex marriage legal, with Gilmore voicing explicit support for the ruling, noting that marriage as a legal institution was enacted to protect Christian interests (Gilmore 2004). As a promoter of secular ideals and sexual freedom, objections to LGBTQ equal rights fall under the CoS mandate of separation of church and state:

The Church of Satan is the first church to fully accept members regardless of sexual orientation and so we champion weddings/civil unions between adult partners whether they be of opposite or the same sex.⁷⁷ [...] If existing law maintains outmoded religious moral codes which infringe on equal treatment for people subject to these dictates, then

⁷⁷ Even in the 1960s counterculture, LGBTQ rights were slower to be adopted, though individuals within esoteric circles have a history of queer political activism (see Faxneld 2014, especially ch. 8).

the time has come for our legislators to purge these laws of religious dogma and bring them in line with the secular society which exists in the USA. (Gilmore 2004)

Pro-LGBTQ positions of the CoS directly align with the opinions of LaVey. Other political issues that fall into the domain of sexuality are slightly more ambiguous, such as abortion (though admittedly this is a health issue, it is popularly discussed under the frameworks of sexual morality). In 2019, the CoS website released a statement on abortion rights that shifts the focus away from the particular issue and instead centralizes secular ideals: “As a religious organization, it would be hypocritical for us to take a political position when we actively support the separation of church and state” (Church of Satan 2019). The clarification then asserts:

Do not mistake this statement to imply Satanists are sitting idly by while issues we care about are being debated on national and local legal forums. For those living in democracies, there is a responsibility to be involved, to direct issues towards ends you favor. Satanists do not expect others to do that for us, and neither should you. [...] As individualists, we encourage people to get involved in issues about which they are passionate. Vote, speak out, and make certain your own positions are strengthened, whatever they might be, based on your own self-interests and priorities. (ibid)

The careful language in this passage and throughout much of similar content on the CoS website repeats a pattern shown in chapter three; when secular ideals are overtly challenged on issues that fit squarely within uncontested Satanic doctrine, the CoS voices explicit condemnation; the statement openly denounces Christian influence in legal or medical institutions. The distinction is that the CoS does not take a stand on abortion directly. Its voiced objections are directed at the Christian privilege that contests it. The CoS’ method of objection is to redirect the issue to the individual choice of the CoS member. This allows members with anti-abortion positions the conceptual “Satanic space” to engage in their respective political opinions on their own platforms. Put another way, it is not considered *un*-Satanic for one CoS member to advocate for widespread abortion access and reproductive justice, while another could just as easily promote

anti-abortion and pro-life views if both are acting in their own self-interests. Those interests are (deliberately) not vetted by the CoS administration.

An important text to include in this section is *The Satanic Warlock*, written by Magister Dr. Robert Johnson (2016). It is promoted as official “canon” and therefore falls into a category of text with more implied authority than other books by CoS hierarchy. Its premise is that it is *The Satanic Witch* for men. Johnson emphasizes that *The Satanic Warlock* is a book for men to seduce women. He touts his credentials: consulting copywriter for Pick Up Artists (PUA) texts, honorary doctorate in Human Sexuality from the Institute of Advanced Study of Human Sexuality in San Francisco, author of various articles on sex and Satanism, and generally successful in matters of carnal hedonism (2016, xix). Like LaVey, he encourages Warlocks to develop an aesthetic based on archetypes, with sections devoted to each, providing either historical or fictional iconic examples: the Devilish Gentleman (James Bond, Idris Elba, Vincent Price (26)); the Romantic Rake (Johnny Depp, David Bowie, Prince (28)); the Black Magician (Rob Hatford, Peter Steele, Ozzy Osbourne (30)); the Occultist (Anton LaVey, Severus Snape, Svengali (32)); the Intellectual (Sherlock Holms, Joseph Campbell, Tony Stark (34)); the Creative (Bob Dylan, Dali, Willy Wonka (36)); and finally, the Everyman, whose examples are comprised mostly of comedians or comedic characters (Patton Oswalt, Ron Swanson, Seth Rogan (41)). Johnson claims that, far from being denounced as boring, the Everyman signals strength and dependability, appealing to a larger group of potential mates (38). Like LaVey, Johnson notes that choosing an archetype can be a composite designed to maximize on one’s pre-existing attributes. One’s persona is “not meant to create a false self, but rather enhance and distill an ideal Warlock Self” (45). Style, scent, and speech should enrich an air of charismatic mystery.

Much of the text emphasizes etiquette and modes of social behaviour. Be polite; never kiss and tell; do not gossip; never ghost⁷⁸; face issues head on; be clear in your intentions, especially if the relationship is solely for non-romantic sexual encounters; always send a text or note the day after an erotic evening; do not pursue a woman who has made her disinterest clear; do not dwell on hurt feelings too long (69-83). Once engaged in an affair, sexual competence is important. Johnson observes: “The under-reported truth: Many men are lousy in bed” (137). He then emphasizes foreplay, neuro linguistic programming techniques, and listening to aural responses when engaged in sexual activity (137-138).

Advice on mutually pleasurable coitus is one of the marked differences between *The Satanic Warlock* and *The Satanic Witch* (which has little mention of specific sexual acts). It is a difference Nadramia inadvertently remarks on in her interview with Johnson in the last chapter of his book:

Johnson: How can today’s Warlock improve himself?

Nadramia: From my observations, a Warlock who desires to engage in the chase can do better in several areas. He has to assess his strengths and weaknesses mercilessly, and he has to make improvements accordingly. He has to clear his vision of many pre-determined standards of beauty and sexual attraction and decide what kind of woman really interests him. He has to understand that while sexual conquests and a varied and robust career between the sheets may be his main focus, *he may also want to pursue women as friends, business partners, and clients*. [My emphasis.] He should know his talents can be employed there as well. And a true Satanic Warlock must remember that he doesn’t work in a vacuum: his success can sometimes be contingent on his relationships with other men (Satanic or otherwise), so he must be careful and considerate when working his magic around them. (Johnson 2016, 189)

Nadramia’s comment highlights a particular gendered issue: men negotiating women as friends, colleagues, and clients is optional for professional and social advancement (even if encouraged here), while women navigating those same relationships with men is not. That is, both *The*

⁷⁸ “Ghosting” refers to someone suddenly ceasing all contact without explanation.

Satanic Witch and *The Satanic Warlock* focus on aesthetics and individual interactions to achieve one's goals. Both are written in a cis-heteronormative voice, with provisos that protocols are adjustable to variations of orientation and gender.

Other differences are subtle. LaVey maintains that, as women are negotiating a patriarchal system, the desired ends are not always a romantic or sexual affair, but professional or social goals as well (beauty as capital, as Cottom discusses). Johnson, however, writes the book solely as a means to sexual encounters; discussion on navigating social or professional situations with women is entirely absent. “Learn the secrets of Satanic seduction,” commands the front sleeve blurb of the book (Johnson 2016). They (unwittingly) demonstrate precisely an issue that feminists highlight; women navigate a world hostile to their freedom, and continually must account for moral judgments on their sexuality, with professional and social implications for any perceived impropriety, while men are free to pursue professional and personal goals without gendered bias or cross-implications from one area to another. A man's personal sexual life rarely has consequences for his career. Women, however, must arbitrate gendered power structures that negatively impact their personal and professional goals. True gender equality—for the modern feminist—is the freedom to pursue both without one impacting the other, either personally or professionally. Interestingly, Magistra Blanche Barton explicitly states this issue in her essay “Satanic Feminism” (1997). She rejects feminism for amplifying helplessness, man-hating, and victimization, and presents Satanism as a “philosophy through which [a woman] could be a businesswoman, an intellectual, a mother and a sexpot all at once. She wouldn't be criticized for committing the ultimate sin of reconciling irreconcilables” (ibid). Barton's framing of feminism here is geared towards a particular facet of dominant second-wave feminism, which often reinforced heterosexual stereotypes and gender roles, seeking an equality limited to middle class

white women's social, political, and economic realities. It tended to be anti-porn, anti-sex work, and excluded the experiences of other classes, women of colour, queer women, transgender, and non-binary persons. Barton's critique (unknowingly) somewhat echoes certain Black feminist objections to second wave feminism:

From the failure of white, mainstream, second-wave feminism came contemporary feminism, which recognizes the plurality of women and their various social plights. It is concerned with differences; issues of race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, language, and disability make it impossible for there to be one 'woman experience,' but that there are multiple experiences of being a woman. Hence, Black feminism emerged and was among the first to voice this need of expanding feminism. (Robinson 2007, 22)

To be clear: I am not claiming that Satanism as it is understood within the CoS is aligned with Black feminist philosophy—it most certainly is not—but I am highlighting that the anti-feminist thread within the CoS *at times* corresponds to other feminist critiques of mainstream white feminism, of which Black feminism is one. They are both observing a dominant (white) society and critiquing its social conceits, albeit from vastly different perspectives.

Another is sex positive feminism of the third wave, which focuses on the diverse sexuality beyond rigid patriarchal and heteronormative constraints. This approach is a response to a sex negative society, which positions sex as dangerous and corruptive (underlying much of the debate around reproductive justice and birth control in the United States), while sex positivity promotes sexual pleasure and diversity (DiTecco 2020, 56-57). In an interview, Gilmore proclaims a negative view of patriarchy because of its distastes for masculine sensuality (Faxneld 2013c, 209): “The patriarchal religions are always trying to make out men as controlled, stoic. They demonize more sensual men as being effeminate. Any male who is decadent can't be all male, you have to be all four-square—not really enjoying things” (209). As Faxneld notes, Gilmore rejects feminism (along with LaVey, Barton, and Johnson), but still criticizes socially constructed and enforced

gender norms for their limited perspective on masculinity (209). These examples highlight that, despite rejecting feminism broadly, there are several points of contact between Satanic rhetoric and the current discourse on gender and sexuality within feminism. The anti-feminist rhetoric within the CoS flattens feminism itself to solely an anti-man victimhood distortion. They critique a version of feminism that they imagine it to be, as a perceived threat to the social order.

Johnson's *The Satanic Warlock* is part of a broader package of lifestyle advice and male-bonding inspiration. He offers seminars and coaching so that, "Warlocks can excel in their personal success, relationships, and business" (The Satanic Warlock 2020). These services are sold as "Satanic Wisdom" but for a consumer that extends beyond the Church of Satan. Johnson's product reflects the trend of postmodern self-religions in neoliberal capitalist societies commodifying the mix of self-improvement, lifestyle branding, and occult knowledge, all promoted via virtual mercantilism (social media, subscriptions, video blogs, dedicated forums, websites, etc.). It has several points of contact with other self-help goods and services directed specifically to men seeking aids to sex and dating, though Johnson is quick to distance his brand from similar merchandizing of religious entrepreneurs in the self-improvement economic arena. He writes: "Technology also brings us the 'manosphere'—a virtual boot camp catering to the masses of feminized men desperate for advice. ...[T]hese sites offer nothing new, the rubes buying into the PUA line are shelling out big money to get a lot of nothing" (Johnson 2018, 102). He is critical of "hawks" selling techniques of seduction by amplifying men's insecurities and frustrations (103). Johnson positions himself with more nuance, allowing for men's emotional lives and vulnerability (xxvi, xxviii) while continually reinforcing an idealized strength (5, 75), and positioning women as far shrewder in their emotional needs than men (105). He discourages a common PUA tactic called "negging"—which is to tell a prospective mate a negative comment

hoping her insecurities will force her to overcompensate—stating that while it may be effective on insecure younger women (134) it will likely instead provoke one’s dismissal (103).

“*Intimidation isn’t seduction,*” Johnson insists (103; italics original). Johnson, echoing LaVey, insists on a polarized gendered schema where weak, ineffectual men are feminized (102). The Satanic Warlock must instead exhibit masculine traits. Johnson provides a “Masculinity Meter” for his audience to self-assess (153), though he qualifies masculinity ambiguously, observing: “The very term ‘masculinity’ may describe someone who exhibits strength, confidence, bravery, general attractiveness, and sexual virility, but it is a broad term and makes no specification as to type” (152).

Despite Johnson’s distancing from PUA circles, there are similarities. Recall Possamai’s claim from chapter two; that postmodern capitalist neoliberalism shifts responsibility for success to the individual while simultaneously withdrawing state resources and equitable opportunities (Possamai 2018). One of the economic consequences of this shift is the outcrop of postmodern religiosity selling techniques as a means to self-improvement:

Religious entrepreneurs not only offer their products offline but have also designed podcasts, videos, and apps to aid and direct individuals to work on themselves, by themselves. The issue, here, is not necessarily whether the religion is true, but whether its teachings work. As one spiritual healer, quoted in the work of Gauthier, stated, “efficiency is the measure of truth.” (Possamai 2018, 22).

Jack Z. Bratich and Sarah Banet-Weiser argue that in the last dozen years, self-styled PUA gurus “teach online communities of heterosexual men to seduce women increasingly shared cultural space with a different online community, that of ‘incels’ [involuntary celibates] who create homosocial bonds over their inability to become a PUA” (2019, 5004). The overlapping heightened presence of extreme far-right rhetoric intersects with discourses of “loss, injury, and entitlement, primarily to and by white men, is a core logic to these movements” (5004). As

neoliberal monetized self-improvement techniques fail, the blame is then put squarely on the consumer and their ostensible ineptness. In the case of PUA, its Incel offshoot, and the interrelating white nationalist discourses, the frustration of non-success is then violently redirected to women and feminism. They note: “neoliberalism cannot take care of its failures—especially its promises of self-confidence, and especially when white men are seen to lose self-confidence, to have been denied something they feel the world, and especially women, owes them” (2019, 5006).

Johnson is adamant that women owe men nothing; the success of the Satanic Warlock relies on the ingenuity and skill of the particular man and his ability to be (Satanically) masculine. Satanism offers a “timely emancipation of male Devils” creating the “only lasting bulwark against the radical feminization of men that has unfortunately festered and shows little sign of slowing” (Johnson 2016, 1). What is noteworthy here is how gender interlocks with Johnson’s concept of “Satanic-ness.” A Warlock’s botched attempt at seduction renders him both un-Satanic and un-masculine. The failure of idealized masculinity and its guaranteed self-confidence is transferred to the (implied lesser) feminine on a gendered axis of deflecting accountability: when a man cannot secure sexual partners, he is feminized; feminism is the reason a man cannot secure sexual partners; the solution to all is upholding masculinity. In the case of LaVey and Johnson, a man’s failure at masculinity is directed at feminism’s influence on popular culture. In these texts, it is feminists that have corrupted the masculine *and* the feminine, therefore deserve scorn and ridicule. They, however, also understand Satanic masculinity as a responsibility to achieve active, enthusiastic consent for sexual encounters. A derision for feminism does not automatically translate to a justification for gender-based violence, which is in keeping with the fifth *Eleven Satanic Rules of Earth*: “Do not make sexual advances unless you

are given the mating signal” (LaVey 1967). In the case of PUA and Incels, however, the failure of masculinity to deliver its promised self-confidence (and ensuing multiple sexual partners), *is* directed at women, feminists, and (perceived) beta males via explicit threats and violence. Both Johnson and PUA/Incels monetize an idealized masculinity; they present masculinity as under attack, being diluted by feminists, and offering means to overcome this unfortunate feminization. “Popular misogyny...capitalizes on men’s apparent injuries, caused by women and feminism, and offers routes to recoup men’s ‘natural’ capacities” (Bratich and Banet-Weiser 2019, 5008).

Nadramia admonishes the gendered divide in the introduction to the 2003 printing of LaVey’s *The Satanic Witch*. She writes:

I’m often surprised by how many [male Satanists] let the wisdom of *The Satanic Witch* just slip through their fingers. There are men of the Satanic persuasion who peruse its pages and then shelve it, figuring they’ll wait for *The Satanic Warlock* to come along and until then, take their fashion cues from heavy metal videos and vampire comics. Tsk, tsk, gentlemen; the parade is passing you by. (LaVey 2003, i)

Nadramia insists that Lesser Magic is easily adapted to other genders and situations, applicable for a wide range of personal and professional goals (Holt 2013, 178). Gilmore repeats this in his introduction to *The Satanic Warlock*, affirming, “LaVey believed that Warlocks could use *The Satanic Witch*” (Johnson 2016, xiii). Johnson addresses the book to men, but, as Gilmore notes, a “panoply of gender identification is now emerging, allowing for individual tailoring” (Johnson 2016, xiii). Johnson states that in his research with Warlocks about their sexual proclivities and orientations, he was pleased to see, “Satanism create confidence and comfort with their true carnal selves” (2016, 177). He intended to write a full chapter for the *Gay Satanic Warlock*, but notes:

...In numerous discussions with accomplished Gay Warlocks both inside and outside of the Church, it became clear that some sexual identities were omitted (bisexual, transgender, queer), and that a discussion of the gay Warlock needed to include

numerous subtitles, sub-categories, fetishes, and sexual tastes, that only a Gay Warlock himself could properly address. Niche interests and fetishes continue to expand and evolve. More importantly, gay men take their sexual delights very seriously and are some of the most epicurean when it comes to selecting partners (and porn!). (Johnson 2016, 177-178)

These modern considerations reflect new discourses on gender and queer sexuality, even if pro-LGBTQ positions have always been present within Church of Satan doctrine. LaVey took gender-queer malleability as a given; Johnson highlights their importance; both texts present primarily in a heteronormative voice and audience. It is interesting to note that while Johnson acknowledges that a Gay Warlock would better reflect the context of queer discourses on Lesser Magic, this logic does not apply to straight heterosexual Satanic Witches. If a treatise on seducing men is authored by a cisgendered heterosexual male person (LaVey) to provide an ostensibly unbiased account of what truly works, then the equivalent would be a treatise on seducing women authored by a cisgendered heterosexual female person to provide an ostensibly unbiased account of what truly works. Put another way, if *The Satanic Witch* is written by a man for women, why is not *The Satanic Warlock* written by a woman for men?

The answer lies in the shared goals of both texts. Each seeks to uphold patriarchal ideals of masculinity, as subverting those also subverts Lesser Magic (which is philosophically dangerous). Both texts reflect a particular investment in reinforcing a concept of masculinity based on other men's approval. Both books are motivated by *homosocial* interests.

Homosociality is a sociological concept describing men's *non-sexual* relationships with each other. It differs from homosexual relationships in that the focus is "male bonding," and a desire for intimacy and encouragement from other men. It is also marked by a homosexual panic: "Homosocial desire refers to men turning their attention to other men, and homosexual panic refers to the fear of this attention gliding over into homosexual desire. In an attempt to

emphasize heterosexuality, fear or hatred of homosexuals and misogynist language are developed” (Hammarén and Johansson 2014, 2). Homosociality is not limited to heterosexual men, as homosexual men easily reflect the same social bonding, especially in a patriarchal society. A marked feature of homosociality is that it is an extension of hegemonic masculinity, and “thus serving to always reconstruct and safeguard male interests and power” (7). Michael Flood, from the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, argues that homosociality constructs the narrative around heterosexual men’s relationships to women (2008, 339). In his study of “heterosexually active men (aged 18-26) who do not identify as gay, homosexual, bisexual or queer,” he notes that in order to gain the approval and acceptance of other men, they engage in homophobia and misogyny (341). Flood concludes: “Homosocial bonds are policed against the feminizing and homosexualizing influences of excessive heterosociality, achieving sex with women is a means to status among men, sex with women is a direct medium of male bonding, and men’s narratives of their sexual and gender relations are offered to male audiences in storytelling cultures generated in part by homosociality” (355).

Johnson’s *The Satanic Warlock* reflects homosociality in similar terms. The author lists his sexual conquests as proof of concept, as an avenue by which to entreat and impress other men. The book emphasizes a patriarchal framing of male interests, while denigrating men as “feminized” for not upholding an idealized masculinity. *The Satanic Warlock* diverges slightly from the homosocial characteristics in that it is explicit *not* to engage in homophobia (Johnson applauds sexual exploration in all its iterations). The methods to achieve sexual conquests encouraged in Johnson’s book are designed to maintain a concept of Satanic masculinity that involves procuring female sexual partners in order to uphold the bonds of male-to-male social relationships; the primary goal is other (Satanic) men’s approval. The anti-feminist sentiment is

framed as disrupting this goal. LaVey and Johnson both promote feminism as antithetical to Satanic masculinity and Satanism itself.

Contrary to LaVey and Johnson's (mis)perceptions of feminism, the history of feminism itself is entangled with discourses on the Satanic. Faxneld's *Satanic Feminism: Lucifer as the Liberator of Women in the Nineteenth-Century* (2014) outlines this narrative. Exegeses of ancient biblical texts depicting the "fall of man" in Genesis 3 are defences of an unequal gendered social order (61). The story of Eve and the expulsion from the Garden of Eden has been used as theological confirmation that women are to blame for introducing evil into the world; it justifies their lesser status. LaVey and Johnson, despite open disdain for Christian positions on sexuality, align with theological framings on gender. That is, ever since Eve's transgression, Christian theology blames women for a perceived loss of the ideal Eden. Ever since the feminists' challenge to gendered dichotomies, LaVey and Johnson blame feminism for a perceived loss of an ideal masculinity. Both identify a conceptual perfect model (Garden of Eden/Satanic Masculinity) which is understood as being corrupted, under siege, and diluted by the actions of women transgressing gender norms. This transgression has historically, and ironically, been labelled as "Satanic."

Satanic masculinity, like Satanic femininity, is a theatrical, magical social performance. Skilled Satanists are expected to use the Lesser Magic tools at their disposal to achieve their goals, and extend their will into the world. The inherent tension of gendered polarity is a framework for Satanists to orchestrate individual dramas in their favour via various emotional and aesthetic means. Thus far, CoS Satanic literature has developed few queer-centered texts or ideas on gender and sexuality, with notable exceptions (see the following section below). Within historical discourses on the Satanic, queerness is inherent. Faxneld notes that Satanism (i.e.

Satanic rhetoric) has been used as a “language of resistance to patriarchy and heterosexuality” (2014, 661) for several lesbians, poets, scholars, occultists, and philosophers throughout much of European women’s educated middle and upper class literary history (667). It is the result of usurping the “Satanic” label as a subversive feminist strategy (439).

Contemporaneously with LaVey, changing cultural mores and human rights advances in American politics resulted in a far-right evangelical reaction in the form of active political lobbying to suppress those efforts:

The Christian Right functioned as a movement for social rejuvenation that drew on the themes of American innocence and a simplistic conception of evil. The leaders of the movement found in the notion of Satanic influence a ready image to explain what they perceived as America’s decline as a moral innocent and as a global power. The foot soldiers of the movement, many of them the aging “silent majority” of the Nixon era, found in the rhetoric of the movement an explanation for social and cultural changes that made them anxious. Most significantly, they deployed the imagery of spiritual warfare in an arguably even more effective way than had nineteenth-century Christian reformers. The new Christian Right believed that they fought a supernatural battle in heavenly realms even as they struck at the minions of Satan on Earth (feminists, abortionists, liberals, and progressives of all stripes). (Poole 2009, 169-170)

The confluence of LGBTQ and women’s rights are viewed as literal conduits for Satan to permeate American society in conservative political discourse (192), already aggravated from advancing civil rights by Black Americans. All three defied the carefully constructed notion that America is a divinely sanctioned patriarchal white Christian nation (104). They are understood as a diabolical threat and contagion to America’s supposed pureness. Satanic queerness, then, used here broadly, is both an externally applied category of threat to American imperialism and an internal symbol of resistance.

4.4. Members of the Church of Satan

In 2002, the Church of Satan announced plans for CoS-members-only Special Interest Groups (SIGs) to facilitate projects of shared similar enthusiasms and talents on a variety of “occult” topics, sexuality among them. *Lust Magazine* is one such project, compiled and edited by Reverends Malabranche (a.k.a. Jack Donovan, now resigned)⁷⁹ and Shiva (active). It discusses sexuality from a Satanic perspective, remarking, “Anton LaVey was pro-kink before pro-kink was cool” (Malabranche 2007b, 7). Select entries (2003-2006) from its website were reprinted as a book/ebook in 2007. The editors Malabranche and Shiva compile articles on fetishes, interviews with queer icons Bruce LaBruce and Patrick Califia, and respond to reader-queries in an advice column. Neither LaBruce or Califia is a Satanist, yet the interviews highlight particular Satanic ideas on sexuality. When LaBruce was asked about marriage equality, he lamented civil rights movements being derailed by corporate interests, stating: “Perhaps once gays gain social benefits and equal rights under the law they’ll get back to asserting their right to be sexual rebels and anti-capitalist warriors. But I doubt it” (61). Anti-capitalism is not an inherent CoS ideal; as it emphasizes “real world success” some CoS members embrace capitalism under that banner. But rebellion most certainly *is* a Church of Satan ideal. Interviewer and interviewee lament the desexualization of homosexuality in mainstream media. That is, if homosexuality is a radical act then pushing for acceptance in heteronormative institutions like marriage should be rejected. Malabranche writes, “Mr. LaBruce and I seem to share [a] marked disdain for the gay herd,” (55) and wonders if homosexuals will, “abandon their more mundane, bourgeois goals and focus less on being accepted by the heterosexual mainstream?” (61). The

⁷⁹ See chapter three for an explanation of Malabranche/Donovan’s resignation.

interview is from 2004 and this sentiment positions itself in the prime popular debate of the time, that of marriage equality in the United States.

Malabranche emphasizes the ostracization of queerness as it functions to absorb society's anxieties. He states: "Homosexuals have always been scapegoats: if a society is viewed by the majority as decadent or corrupt, we are among the first to be weeded out in an effort to 'purify' the population," noting, "Homosexuals are now and always will be outsiders...[it] is a deviation from the norm of behaviour," but chastises its widespread acceptance for its tedious social position under the guise of "diversity" (2006, 22). Malabranche's other claims follow along similar lines. He derides drag culture for its now institutionalized social status, dismissing it as "hardly transgressive, and it isn't all that courageous" (2007b, 51). His main gripe is that drag is considered "proof" that gender is a performance, while he maintains that, "Only a man who hates being a man would honestly concede that drag queens represent manhood in any legitimate way" (52). Again, we see a version of LaVey's ambiguous notions of gender: Malabranche disagrees that gender is a performance and instead emphasizes an essentialist masculinity. His book, *Androphilia: Rejecting the Gay Identity, Reclaiming Masculinity*, is a diatribe against queerness and instead positions homosexuality as the pinnacle of masculinity, asking what is more masculine than men being sexually attracted to men (2007a)? It draws links to ancient Rome and the warrior homosexual as a masculine ideal.

Malabranche's understanding of ancient Roman culture is motivated by modern concerns and insecurities regarding unstable concepts of masculinity. It does not accurately interpret ancient Roman understandings of gender and sexuality (Gleason 1997; Ingleheart 2015; Parker 1997; Walters 1997). The book is best understood as promoting a modern concept of rigid masculinity that is beyond a man's sexuality: men are men regardless (Donovan n.d.

“Positions”). Malabranche has since resigned from the Church of Satan and pulled his book from publication. His website now claims he has moved beyond that identity and sexuality. He writes: “I do not promote or discourage homosexuality. I do encourage stable, accomplished men who want children to find a woman and start families. I’m convinced at this point that it is probably the best life for most men” (ibid).

In the advice column of *Lust Magazine* maintained by Reverend Shiva, a reader asks: if the CoS website states that Satanists are “pro-life,” then would a female CoS member have an abortion? Shiva responds, “Yes, Satanists cherish life. Particularly their own” (Malabranche 2007a, 163). She then notes that if a poll were taken among CoS members on the issue of abortion that you see the same “two camps” as the general public, but adds, “One thing is for certain, a Satanic woman who knows in her heart that she is not able to emotionally, physically, and financially meet the obligations of motherhood will do whatever she feels is the most responsible action in regards to her pregnancy” (164). The passage reflects a particular tension between the Satanic concepts of responsibility and agency. Preventing unwanted pregnancy is a Satanic responsibility; making a decision on one’s own body is Satanic agency. The tension resides on which is more important to the individual Satanist.

Contrasting Malabranche, CoS Witch Josie Gallows sums up her concept of Satanic gender and sexuality thus:

Satan loves queers. There’s no preference for what type of queers. They are gay men, whether they be femme, butch, top or bottom, bear or twink. Some of them are sashaying their way to cocktail hour. Some of them are brooding over their ultra-masculinity like Spartans in mating season. There is no principle against dousing yourself in glitter and dancing to diva music at the gay bar, incessantly referring to oneself as A Massive Homo. It’s your own self-interest at play when finding your niche. It’s your job to find the mode of expression most befitting your personality. (Gallows 2019)

She positions queerness within the margins of social deviance and fully embraces the imposed-then-championed Satanic identity to that deviance. CoS Magister Joe Netherworld⁸⁰ comments on a similar idea, calling a potential *The Gay Satanic Warlock* text a “Book of Homosexual Shadows” (Johnson 2016, 178) because “gay Satanic men need a resource to bolster their outsider reality, not surrender it” (xxxii). Throughout all, it is the outsider status of LGBTQ persons which is celebrated, not only for its joyful celebration of carnal pleasure, but for its non-conformity in a society designed around heteronormativity (i.e. Butler’s heterosexual matrix).

CoS members have reacted to LaVey’s ideas on gender and sexuality in a variety of ways. When asked if she considers Satanism empowering for women, Magistra Ruth Waytz responds, “I consider Satanism empowering for human beings. I consider life in general empowering for women (although I loathe the word ‘empowering’),” adding that she has a “distaste” for feminism (in Faxneld 2013c, 207). In a later publication, Waytz elaborates:

Am I a “feminist”? I sure hope not. Am I pissed off that we’ve legalized gay marriage (hooray) but still can’t ratify the Equal Rights Amendment [ERA] that passed IN THE 1970’S??? Yeah. But do I hate men and see the war between the sexes as a battle to the death? Oh my, no. (Johnson 2016, xxxv)

Waytz’s statements are similar to those of other CoS members who reject a particular anti-male understanding of feminism yet still lament the impediment of legal protections against women, despite those challenges being spearheaded by feminists. Waytz underlines that her power as a Witch is based on a notion of non-gendered self-empowerment (Johnson 2016, xxxv). Reverend Shiva similarly views gender as largely irrelevant to her experience in the CoS: “I never thought of the CoS as a male-power organization, but rather as a self-power one regardless of gender” (Nocturnum 2008a, 13; in Faxneld 2013c, 210). One respondent to my questionnaire echoes the

⁸⁰ Netherworld passed away in 2019.

notion of success, writing that Satanism “has helped me to develop into a successful woman and the knowledge I have gained on working with and gaining what I want from people has served me well.”

An anti-feminist thread is common in the membership of the Church of Satan. Magister Matt G. Paradise claims to “debunk” the women’s movement by ridiculing intersectionality on his (now-deleted) podcast and proceeds to discuss feminism’s “infighting, contradictions, false conclusions, hysteria, fabrications, and the various thin-skinned reactions that come to loosely define this anything-goes collective” (2016, ep. 7). Recall my summary of intersectionality earlier in this thesis: intersectionality is a Black feminist method of inquiry developed by critical race legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, as a response to the failings of “white feminism” which ignored the multitude of women’s experiences outside the narrow margin of upper class white women (Crenshaw 1991; Crenshaw et al 2019). Paradise’s critique does not reflect an accurate understanding of Crenshaw’s work. CoS member Dixie Rose critiques modern feminism as she understands it for being focused on victimization as opposed to action (2007-2008, 40-41). Faxneld notes that another text, edited by CoS member Ann Oxyer, *Lilith Awakened*, is a collection of essays that frame Satanism as “a strategy for coping with the plights of womanhood, either through a typically Satanic refusal to identify as a victim, or through Satanic rules that, properly applied, would prevent a woman from for example entering into an abusive relationship” (2013c, 209). In these cases, feminism is (mis)understood as amplifying a victim status for social and political gains. They emphasize Satanism as rejecting the victim mentality and instead providing an avenue for individual agency. Discussions on patriarchal systems that prevent legal protections (like the failure to ratify the ERA) or encourage violence against women (such as domestic violence) are mostly absent.

Others have more nuanced reactions to feminism. Priestess Hydra M. Star surmises: “Feminism is just one of the natural by-products of rejecting the dogmas of the Abrahamic religions and taking full personal responsibility for one’s life” (in Faxneld 2013c, 209). She views patriarchal religions as deeply misogynistic and considers LaVey’s writings as pivotal in accepting one’s body as it is, rejecting the popular fads of slim models. Vexen Crabtree admits that LaVey had some “misogynistic” writings, but overall views Satanism as practicing gender equality (208).

Within my questionnaire, a small handful of respondents describe contention with LaVey’s opinions on gender or sexuality. One writes that her mild objections to Satanism relate to LaVey’s ideas to allow one’s natural scent to attract a mate, writing:

Most of it is the material he shares in *The Satanic Witch*. A great example being the “unwashed” body being something to attract men that men like. I give LaVey credit in that I do know some men that are into that kind of thing and good for them. However, I do NOT like to “be able to smell myself” and I prefer the company of a man who delights in showers and soap as much as I do. :) He also goes into some suggestions on how a woman should dress to attract a man and while I actually agree with him on pretty much all his material, I personally find that many misunderstand the spirit of the guidance and end up implementing his suggestions inappropriately then wonder when they don’t seem to work. However, this is not objectionable, it’s more just a point that if he were alive today and I had the opportunity to talk to him, I might suggest he clarify some of his spirit and intent for those who weren’t quite getting it.

Other CoS members directly root their self-acceptance within Satanic notions of gender and sexuality, and integral to a satisfying sexual life:

This is especially important for me as a queer woman, I don’t allow other people’s ideas of degeneracy or ‘sin’ to influence my decisions or hamper my enthusiasm for the honest-to-goodness and most essential version of my self.

I am a fetish performer and producer, and dancer. I have a psychological need for attention, and these are positive outlets where I can receive it. I am outspoken about sex in general, believing that it’s a wonderful thing that everyone should explore and enjoy!

Other publications mimic the same ideals, linking their embrace of self, Lesser Magic, gender performance, and identity. Reverend Graves writes:

By the time I reached young adulthood, my ability to utilize Lesser Magic became second nature. I was comfortable with my flexible sexuality, had developed a small core of friends and associates who shared a similar lifestyle, and had built a confidence in myself that would drive me to create the life I enjoy today. Now a successful businessman with a loving husband by my side, I attribute it all to my early acceptance of my sexuality and my Satanic core. (Ardennes 2016, 54)

Despite the culture of self-acceptance and embrace of orientation and gender spectrums, gender identity is discussed as a contentious issue by some CoS members. In Paradise's (now deleted) *The Accusation Party* podcast episodes (2015-2019), he ridicules issues of "political correctness" (2017. Ep. 10, Jan. 8.), and labels transgenderism as child abuse (2018. Ep. 12, Sept. 3). The description for that episode states that transgenderism is a social cancer, and one that, "has metastasized to infect even the very science behind human evolution" (ibid). *Third Side Network*, owned by (now ex-CoS member) John H. Shaw threatened violence against trans women in the hypothetical scenario that one would use the same bathroom as Shaw's wife on a (now-deleted) podcast episode. He proclaims in an episode of *Satan Speaks* (his own podcast), "anybody that supports drugging children with puberty blockers is abusing children and is violating the tenets of Satanism" (Ep. 1).⁸¹ During a three-part video Shaw, who was stripped of his Reverend title in 2019, publicly discusses his subsequent resignation from the Church. Other CoS members protested Shaw's rescinded title. Their primary accusation is that the Church of Satan "no longer represents what its founder Anton Szandor LaVey intended" (Shaw et al. 2019, Ep. 1, Oct. 16). Within the three episodes, they claim the Church overly caters to liberal sensibilities under Gilmore's direction, especially on LGBTQ issues, and that they have been

⁸¹ LaVey's *Satanic Rules of Earth* number nine: Do not harm little children.

“silenced” in their criticisms (Ep. 1). “LaVey was an outsider,” one guest states, “and a champion of fellow deviants. The LGBTQ community is not a community of outsiders, not anymore” (ibid). In a response to an essay by Nadramia regarding respecting the preferred pronouns of transgender persons (2019), Shaw and his guests equate this expected etiquette as “authoritarianism” (Shaw 2019, Ep. 1. Oct. 16). They label it “virtue signaling,” denounce it as “antithetical to Satanism,” reject the new “political agenda” of appeasement, and deride the “liberal ideology” that the Church of Satan has adopted (2020, Ep. 2. Jan. 15).

Nadramia’s essay emphasizes that Satanism’s embrace of the true self enthusiastically includes transgenderism. She critiques the nature of objections:

Anti-trans speakers and writers are putting a tremendous effort behind their work—before you shrug and excuse it by saying, “it’s just information,” I suggest you stop kidding yourself, or at least stop kidding the rest of us. This wouldn’t be going on if there wasn’t an emotional component, a genuine, gut-level resistance to the very concept of transgender. People may need to work out for themselves where they’re harboring the source of that resistance. (Nadramia 2019)

A few years prior to Nadramia’s letter in 2019, the Church of Satan released an F.A.Q. section on its website, and concerns regarding trans inclusive language and nomenclature was apparently brought up by a random Twitter user. The CoS official Twitter account responds: “Thank you. Several of our Transgender members are actively discussing revisions, we’re deferring to their judgement for now” (@churchofsatan, May 23, 2017), demonstrating the CoS administration’s willingness to consult on issues affecting its members, evolving in conversation with queer discourses in some respect.

Nadramia’s statement relates to a particular issue within transgender discourses: gender is constituted through aggressive and often violent forms of social regulation (Corbett 2009, 385). Scholar of feminist philosophy and queer and transgender theory, Gayle Salamon, notes: “in

many instances of violence against gender-nonconforming and trans people, is that violence justifies itself by characterizing non-normative gender as itself a violent act of aggression” (2018, 23-24). Much of the rhetoric surrounding transphobia is a politic of “passing.” If a trans person passes, they are viewed as deceitful and at risk when someone discovers this “trickery.” If they are ambiguously gendered (i.e., somewhere along the point of androgyny, such as masculine-bodied but feminine affection and vice versa) then the discomfort they provoke is also used as justification for violence against them. It is the violation of gender norms itself that is viewed as a direct act of aggression to society at large, so when they are murdered (or hurt, attacked, bullied, fired, and disenfranchised) it is viewed as a response to the transgender person’s initial, social-violating act of gender confusion (ibid).

This relates to LaVey and the Church of Satan in a delicate balance between LaVey’s idealized gender polarities and the freedom for CoS members to express personal opinions. When Paradise names transgender persons as a cancer pushing a “heist” on society, he is not only condemning them for transgressing social conventions, but also framing it as a duplicitous act from leftist circles intent on controlling society. So, too, is Shaw when he calls transitioning a form of abuse or mutilation. They are both, as Salamon opines, justifying hostility towards transgender persons by viewing transgenderism itself as malicious (social power via a grand deceit; child abuse via medical transition). They have breached the social script—an act of perceived aggression—which then is used to validate returning that aggression.

Nadramia does not name any particular person in her essay, but broadly asks, “I struggle to understand what’s behind the rationale of those who don’t wish to accept a person’s transgender status, who insist on not using their pronouns, who want to promote the idea that the drive to change one’s gender is dishonest, aberrant, or indicative of mental illness” (2019).

Within the same time frame as Shaw's stripped title and subsequent resignation, Gilmore released two essays. They focus on the tension between civil disagreements within the CoS (2019b) and self-realization as "The Essence of Satanism" (2019a). Gilmore writes that fully embracing one's "true" self is a prime Satanic ideal. He indirectly addresses dissenters:

If you can't share our *esprit de corps infernal* that advocates self-realization in myriad manners, then you are cordially invited to depart the Church of Satan. Any who might deem themselves 'crusaders' for some sort of bigoted, repressive, condescending, or limiting position are proceeding from a Christian perspective—and that has never been welcomed in this, The Devil's Fane. (Gilmore 2019a)

Transgender discourse is entangled in Christian theology. There are hagiographies of transgender saints (Talbot 2006, 1-5), theologies of a transgender god (Ladin 2018), and a trans/bisexual Jesus (Althaus-Reid 2000, 112-120). But these are certainly not mainstream theologies; they are challenges to the status quo, an attempt to wrestle Christianity from its binary, oppressive heteronormativity and reorient divine agency into a transgender flourishing (Hero 2012, 152). In contemporary America, deviations of the gender binary are positioned against the hyper-masculinized Jesus, an effort to portray Jesus as the pinnacle of manhood, strength, power, and virility:

To the Progressive-era Protestants known as muscular Christians, a physically fit body was a sign of self-discipline, self-control, self-respect—in short, of Christian virtue. Directed primarily at males, the movement was a response to a late-nineteenth-century "crisis of masculinity." In light of fears about the feminization of culture, churches gave their faith and the image of Christ a masculine makeover. (Greve 2014, 142)

Transphobic rhetoric as it plays out in modern times is precisely a crisis of disrupting gender polarities. If gender binaries are fixed it denotes that society is secure. One's concept of the social order remains uncorrupted. The transgender person, by their mere existence, is "proof that gender is dynamic, unstable, and culturally constructed... a testimony to the absurdity of a

natural and static gender. This threat to power’s foundation is precisely why the trans body is targeted for violence, and, as every trans person knows, that violence is often justified through selective interpretations of biblical texts” (Hornsby and Guest 2016, 15). The transgender person is then viewed as a direct affront to the unmistakably masculine Jesus, and this concept is played out in various evangelical political efforts to deny civil rights and medical care to transgender persons (Simmons-Duffin 2020). Viewed from this angle, the Church of Satan’s position on LGBTQ acceptance is directly in line with its anti-Christian positions and upholding the ideal of a free society in a secular state, despite some CoS members personal objections and rhetoric.

CoS members are acutely aware of the dangers of anti-LGBTQ rhetoric, especially as they overlap with anti-Satanic rhetoric. Dr. Charles Lee Scudder, an open CoS member, scientist, and university professor, was murdered along with his partner, Joe Odom, in their home in Georgia in 1982 (Nadramia 2018; Ellis 2016). The perpetrators were eventually tried and convicted, but the case remains significant for the posthumous campaign to depict Scudder and Odom as devious homosexual occultists, and therefore somehow deserving of their fate (ibid). More recently, the home of CoS Magister Joe Netherworld—who passed away in 2019—was burned to the ground by arson on January 15, 2021. The house was a colourfully painted old Victorian—colloquially known as the “Halloween House—in Poughkeepsie” (Lapin 2021, “Hell to Pay”).⁸² The current resident was Netherworld’s friend, adult entertainer and social media influencer, Mathew Camp, who bought the home in October of 2020 to maintain its esoteric aesthetic and gathering place for social misfits, in service to Netherworld’s wishes. The 120-year-old house was, “painted dark green with purple embellishments and copper ornamentation,”

⁸² Security footage captured the arsonist carrying two large gas cans as he approaches the house. Two people sleeping inside managed to escape. Gilmore responded to the events on the CoS website. Poughkeepsie is also where Gilmore and Nadramia reside

while the interior was described as “decrepit luxury” full of “red ballroom, candelabras, a rotating chandelier, an Elvira pinball machine and respectable tiki cup collection” (Kilganon 2021). As of the writing of this thesis, the arsonist remains unknown and the motives unclear, yet Satanists remain alarmed at the stark reminder that popular anti-LGBTQ and anti-Satanic rhetoric often coincide and cause harm. Camp relays Netherworld’s statement of existing between two marginal identities: “Joe used to say, ‘I’m too gay for the Satanists and too Satanist for the gays’” (Kilganon 2021). The cross-sections of queerness and outlier are a common theme among queer Satanists. Reverend Aden Ardennes writes in his book, *Militant Eroticism*, “Much like others of our ilk, I was an outcast, and I had to find out why” (2015, 1). In a podcast in 2020, Ardennes was asked about queer theory in *The Satanic Witch*, defining it loosely as, “traditionally I would say that when people think of queer theory it's challenging the established ideas that have been presented in a heteronormative culture...it's trying to find a queer identity within that heteronormative lexicon” (Campbell 2020b, July 4). The host asks if TSW spoke to queer individuals, to which Ardennes responds:

I’ll say this, you and I both have seen those comments...on social media of men who dismissed the Satanic Witch and were waiting for the Satanic Warlock...If you require a blatant text that identifies you in particular and you won't read anything else well...If you can't find anything in there then I mean, come on now, that's just ridiculous. You didn't do the reading. (Campbell 2020b)

CoS members in this chapter link queerness and its imposed label of social deviance as part of their marginalized Satanic identity. When Ardennes uses the word “outcast” he is reflecting both a queer and a Satanic sensibility of existing outside socially accepted labels and behaviours. These intersecting identities inform each other, both historically and symbolically. Witch Josie Gallows notes in her essay, “Satan Loves Queers,” that the well-known occult

symbol, Baphomet⁸³—which is the image of a seated cross-legged goat-headed muscular chested human with hooves, wings, breasts, and phallus—is “anatomically correct—tits, cock, and all” (2016). She is framing her own gender as a trans woman in terms of gleeful adoption of a Satanic identity as Satanism, as the ultimate form of (Satanic) self-realization. She writes:

In Satanism, the intersections of orientation and gender expression are not weaponized against the individual but rather weaponized for the individual. First you have to pinpoint your most honest and unfettered self. Second you have to put in the real work, which is studying and applying the carnal principles that give you—the honest-to-goodness you—mastery over this world. Satanic liberation means more than being oneself, it means making yourself useful—to you! (Gallows 2016)

This statement sums up how most CoS members view gender and sexuality within Satanism, despite objections by some members. If the goal of Satanism is to fully embrace one’s “true” self, combined with an emphasis on carnal pleasure for the enhancement of life experiences, then various (legal, consensual) expressions of gender and sexuality are viewed as prime Satanic acts.

4.5. Conclusion

Much of the popular discourse on gender and sexuality in the Church of Satan focuses on a heteronormative masculinity and its displays, powers, and anxieties. *The Satanic Witch* is a treatise for women to navigate a man’s world. *The Satanic Warlock* is a handbook of techniques of seduction for men to secure women sexual partners. The anti-feminist rhetoric laments a loss of a masculine ideal and the feminization of men. The anti-transgender rhetoric from focuses on transgender women, viewing them as a threat to masculinity and society at large. Satanic texts that centralize the lives of women, femininity, lesbianism, transgender men, or gender queers are

⁸³ Alphonse Lévi is the originator of this image. Though it was become a symbol associated with Satanism and anti-Christian sentiment, Julien Strube contextualizes the image as representing magical theory of Astral Light in a social context of radical socialist writings from the 1840s (2016).

largely absent.⁸⁴ This is not terribly surprising considering that, “Women constitute ‘less than half’ of the membership,” according to Gilmore, though he admits that he has not “bothered to check exactly” (Faxneld 2013c, 206, fn5).

It is important to note that throughout virtually all Satanic texts produced by LaVey, the Church of Satan, and its membership are explicit about the full acceptance of a broad panoply of sexuality and gender identities. Yet within these texts, masculinity is centralized, while femininity is positioned as enhancing masculinity. The CoS fits within patriarchal systems; it does not comment on idealized societies without gendered inequities. It reflects the social conditions from which it emerges and to which it responds. It remains deliberately pragmatic, allowing individuals to engage in activism on LGBTQ issues if they so choose. As discourses on gender and sexuality multiply in popular, academic, legal, and medical arenas, time will tell whether or not CoS membership will produce more texts that reflect the blossoming creativity with gender identities and how they may relate to Satanism.

LGBTQ acceptance in the CoS is a political issue as it relates to civil rights and popular discourse, one that is debated among CoS members as they are influenced by external polarization of topical social concerns. Given this, I suggest that Shaw’s stripped title, Paradise’s deleted episodes, and the change in CoS policy to cease promotion of talk-show podcasts, implies that they violated “bedrock knowledge.” The CoS administration reiterates that private politics are up to the individual, and this dissertation posits that LaVey’s later writings are loosely considered important but nonetheless private opinions. Yet, unlike some of LaVey’s later political views expressed in the previous chapter, *The Satanic Bible*’s definition of Satanic

⁸⁴ Witch Josie Gallows has a forthcoming work title *The Satanic Transexual*. In addition to this work, I’ve observed informal queer Satanic discourse across social media in personal profiles, which I cannot quote for reasons of confidentiality.

sexuality has full acceptance of all legal and consensual forms of gender representation and sexual orientations and is solid canon from its inception. Pro-LGBTQ is thus unambiguous Satanic canon. The evidence indicates that open derision of LGBTQ persons, their civil rights, and slanders of child abuse violate canonical ideas and are not protected under the Church of Satan policy on politics. The Church of Satan, then, responds with its form of internal filtering by processes evident solely after the fact. One can trace the arc of this filtering process: the offending anti-trans comments are expressed in Satanic podcasts; then ensuing essays from Gilmore and Nadramia indirectly address anti-trans rhetoric are released on official forums; and followed by Paradise' deleted episodes and Shaw's demotion-then-resignation (a small handful of other CoS members also resigned in protest).

Conclusion: Varieties of Conceptual Satans

“Those are the kind of members I want—people who can stand on their own without a bunch of slobbering idiots propping them up!”

—Anton Szandor LaVey (in Lyons 1988).

“Your job as a Satanist is to identify and pursue your own happiness.”

—Blanche Barton (2013).



—Meme created by CoS Priestess Hydra M. Star demonstrating that there is no single Satanic aesthetic (Facebook Nov. 29, 2020, reprinted with permission).

5.1. Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation, I deliberately sidestepped centralizing or explaining Satanism and Satanic ideas in great detail to redirect focus on the multiplicity of CoS members' responses to contemporary concerns. I posit that each individual Satanist in the Church of Satan is constructing their Satanic identity via a highly idiosyncratic interpretation between three prime factors: Anton LaVey's canon literature, interviews, and essays; official statements and considerations from the Church of Satan's administration; and, most importantly, the experience of their own life. The meme above by Priestess Hydra M. Star (used with permission) demonstrates both the primary idea on Satanic aesthetics and the use of memes across social media. Though I have not focused on memes or communication formats specific to internet culture in this dissertation, members of the CoS are creative on social media. Satanic internet rhetoric has developed its own internal cultural fluency, as it merges Satanic ideas with new forms of technology and evolves its linguistic adaptations.

As Christopher Partridge notes, self-religions are a bricolage of popular occulture, and this dissertation assembles data of this phenomenon in the Church of Satan to tell a particular narrative on how members collect, interpret, and then extend their carefully constructed concepts of self into public virtual spaces. These constructions of self conflict with one another, but are intentional. The Church deliberately sits in that tension, both internal and external, as it represents their primary anthropomorphized symbol of oppositional antinomianism, Satan.

The question of authoritative voice in the Church of Satan has multiple parallels with Christianity. First, internally, CoS members are engaged in an ambiguous tension with LaVey's canon texts, especially as it relates to his political opinions. CoS members that claim LaVey "would have been X" and point to (selective) texts to support claims of their political rhetoric are

promoting an appeal to authority. The implication is that his (assumed) opinions are models for how all CoS members must align themselves politically. It is interesting to note, that this pattern has played out with LaVey on other issues before: Aquino claimed that LaVey secretly believed in a real Satan invested in the lives of humans to justify theistic Satanism and his Temple of Set; conversely, a popular rumour circulates about LaVey's ostensible death-bed conversion to Christianity. The death-bed conversion narrative fits neatly into post-humous legends of other famous atheists: Charles Darwin, Albert Einstein, and Christopher Hitchens. How these stories fit into parallels of Jesus is that both LaVey and Jesus become vessels in which to inject an idealized version of a chosen figurehead. Michael Warner, queer literary scholar and social theorist, writes:

C.S. Lewis once complained that English pictures of Jesus always made him look like an adolescent girl; I think this was and is part of the appeal, for me, for my mother's friends, *and* for Lewis, whose desire for a butch deity said more about his own queeny tastes than about the Jesus we continue to reinvent. (Boisvert and Daniel-Hughes 2017, 133)

This depiction of Jesus exists in tandem with other images: the Black Jesus of liberation theology (Douglas 2019); the hyper-masculine Jesus of American evangelicalism (Greve 2014); the Aryan Jesus of Nazi Germany (Heschel 2008). LaVey, at this particular point of history in 2021, was known directly by some members of the Church of Satan who continue to uphold his legacy. LaVey's reinvention in the popular imagination, however, began long before his death with his own creative biographies and the theatrical image of himself as conman, entertainer, autodidact, musician, and Black Magician all at once. That members of the Church of Satan use his texts to justify political opinions is on par with other religions rationalizing modern issues via canon writings.

The underlying tension here is twofold: one, the focus on “official” statements centralizes a logocentric approach, which, methodologically speaking, reflects the Christo-centric concept of authoritative voice that positions written canon text above other forms of media; and two, contradicts the Satanic imperative of radical individualism. When factions of CoS members infer, imply, and suggest that their (usually right-wing) opinions are validated by textual support in LaVey's writings and therefor prescriptive, it clashes with other CoS members that fall outside of those political opinions. CoS virtual rhetoric is rife with this tension.

Satan represents an anthropomorphized version of the self to members of the Church of Satan. This is not unique to Satanism, but in fact, a feature of the modern (western) world. Allow feminist philosopher Grace Jantzen to elaborate:

Now in the west what has counted as normatively human has been constructed in relation to what has counted as normatively divine. The philosophy of religion in the west has largely assumed a male, ‘omni-everything’ God: as a bishop wrote in Church Times a few years ago, ‘God is a relatively genderless male deity:’ we need only add that he is also white. It is of course always immediately added that God does not have a body, and therefore has neither colour nor gender. But lurking behind the denial is the imaginary: the body that God does not have is male and white. (Jantzen 2009, 300)

Perceptions of Satan—even as a loose conceptual framework of identity in an atheistic religion—are fun house mirrors of the theistic concept of God. Right-wing Satanists in the Church of Satan may reject theism, but their chosen symbol functions to project and replicate the same patriarchal white heteronormative authority as so-called “western” theistic religions. In the Church of Satan, Satan may not have a body, but the body that Satan does not have is male and white (but probably heteroflexible).

In terms of the images in pop culture, the functional differences between Jesus, Satan, Superman, or the Ubermensch are negligible. They are archetypes reinforcing patriarchal white supremacist societies. In the history of Satanic discourse, however, the Satanic symbolism is also

a challenge to established norms in queer and feminist theory. In the same way that queer theologians attempt to destabilize the image of Jesus from hyper-masculine heteronormative portrayals, queering Satan is a deliberate disruption of authority.

CoS members that deviate from the political rhetoric in LaVey's texts do not engage much in exegeses to squeeze him into alignment with their politics. They instead separate their interpretation of the Satanic from LaVey the historical man and cultivate a concept of Satan as an anthropomorphic extension of the self. When Witch Josie Gallows states that Satan is "anatomically correct—tits, cock, and all" (2016), she is not relying on an interpretation of LaVey for her Satanic identity but choosing the image of self that best represents her self-realization.

When asked, "How does your life reflect being a Satanist?" in my questionnaire, CoS members responded with similar thematic statements:

It doesn't, really. It's just my life. But upon realizing my thoughts and actions are Satanic I've tried honing those by basically trying to be a better person (ie not so lazy and sensitive) and a more successful individual (according to what I consider success).

My goal is to lead by example. I try to keep a close eye on human nature, which of course includes my own. I'm not expecting to be anything but an animal, but I am pursuing total honesty and sincerity.

It has taught me that there is a strength that can be found in enjoying things. Too many people are wrapped up in this subtractive mode of thought where maturity is defined by what you are too old to enjoy or isn't appropriate for you to enjoy because of purely arbitrary reasons. At times it seems like a contest to prove who is the most miserable. I learned that life doesn't have to be that way and prefer to spend as little time being miserable as possible.

To me Satanism has helped me be a better father.

I do not fool myself into thinking others feel as I do. I know I am different. My will remains my own regardless of pressure or attempts to control. My tastes are definitely epicurean, though I am able to enjoy "roughing it" with other humans.

I see Satanism in just about everything I do, because just about everything I do is an application of my self-interest, whether short-term or long-term.

I am unflinchingly and unapologetically ME. I understand myself better than a lot of people understand themselves. Most of all, I take no shame in those interests I have that do not conform to any of the many herds that have sprouted like so many weeds. In my world, there are no “guilty pleasures,” for I feel no guilt for something I truly enjoy.

Satanists centre themselves, and extend that outward to loved ones, preferred aesthetics, philosophical interests, creative hobbies, and professional goals. The anthropomorphized “Satan” as a symbol for the self is thus virtually limitless.

5.2. Future Research: Three Prime Areas

5.2.1. Gendered Inquiry

In the introduction to this thesis, I emphasize that High Priestess Peggy Nadramia is the primary mediator for Church of Satan members’ interactions online: she circulates protocols, enforces infractions, moderates forums, and generally sets the tone and pace of virtual Church of Satan spaces. This particular authority is unique to her as High Priestess. It is worth noting that this area—that is, the internal influence of Nadramia for CoS members—is not data that exists in any traditional way that we expect to access. She is one of several high-profile women in the CoS that set a particular tone for the internal machinations of the Church as it exists online. Magistra Ygraine Mitchell and Magistra Ruth Waytz are similar high-profile official spokespersons of the CoS, though their individual social media reflect their personal political and social opinions.⁸⁵ It is remarkable that all of these women also knew LaVey, so when they

⁸⁵ To a lesser extent, so does Magistra Blanche Barton; though she leads mostly a private life, her presence is ubiquitous.

respond to casual conversations between CoS members in various online forums their commentary has added weight and authority, perhaps not unlike the way that the “apostolic authority” possessed by the disciples who knew Jesus personally.

It was in writing my third chapter on gender and sexuality in the Church of Satan that I realized more starkly that a query on their particular internal influence is an area worthy of further study in line with how feminist inquiries have (re)investigated women in Christianity, Islam, and Judaism by narrowing in on how women’s contributions are often overlooked, existing in non-traditional ways. Within the CoS, that is the internal care, the everyday interactions, and the moderation of disputes—from gentle reminders to exacting judgments. Decisions on church protocols are made behind closed doors with Gilmore as the definitive word but communicating changes in policy in online spaces generally falls under Nadramia’s purview. Much like other religions, if women’s voices do not exist in official texts, their contributions tend to be subsumed into an assumption of silence. It would be our failure as academics to conclude that this is the case for Satanic women. Looking beyond official content to the broad panoply of unofficial virtual rhetoric addresses this in part by examining Satanism beyond canon texts and into how it is enacted and displayed online by various parties.

For reasons of confidentiality, I cannot quote the thousands of interactions I have read online that inform my claims here, and it is a failure of my early thesis proposal not to have conceived of this question and tailored my data collection accordingly. Indeed, my questionnaire did not ask directly about how CoS members viewed the boundaries of Satanism online as moderated and influenced by Nadramia (and other women). Future research could target this rich area to which my thesis points.

5.2.2. The Dark Enlightenment

Allow me to broaden my discussion here to direct scholars to other conceptual rhetorical Satans floating around the internet. The rhetoric in Satanic virtual spaces that mirrors far-right/alt-right/conservative hyper-visible metapolitical online trolling and derailing tactics obfuscates a subset of far-right rhetoric emerging from a little known alternative political movement called the Dark Enlightenment. It was first introduced by Curtis Yarvin (pen name Mencius Moldbug) and expanded on by Nick Land. The Dark Enlightenment is a neoreactionary (NRx) group evolving in late 2000s internet subcultures, which is “anti-egalitarian and antidemocratic, with strong authoritarian instincts... It] is also noted for its misanthropy” (Dafaure 2020, 8). Andrew Jones, in a study of how this neoreactionary movement informs the alt-right, notes that the divide between them is understood in terms of race: white nationalists using eugenic racial arguments derived from 1800s and 1900s and the “more technophilic libertarian wing of the movement” who justify racial disparities using biological determinism (2019, 103). The technophilic branch developed out of the New Atheist movement and libertarianism, embracing “racial politics as the natural progression from hyper-rationalist scientific projects and their work on artificial intelligence and superintelligence” (Jones 2019, 103). The Dark Enlightenment rejects liberalism, claiming that its dominance within academic institutions “propagate liberal state policy” (108). It seeks to dismantle humanities and social science departments—dubbing it The Cathedral—objecting to their hegemony over socially accepted ideas (110).⁸⁶ Far from being active on social media the way the alt-right mobilized its

⁸⁶ Jones correctly observes that: “The influence of academics and media can be significant, but for Yarvin he only sees the academy pushing for left-wing policies. These claims are categorically untrue if we take Yarvin’s arguments at face value because for the past 40 years as right-wing or third-way economic and international relations policy has been the norm, only in cultural policies have we seen any substantial left-wing movement” (2019, 108).

trolling tactics, the movement seeks to isolate itself from contemporary populism (115). Though the Enlightenment was successful for the separation of church and state, no reactionaries view schools as fulfilling the same role of social indoctrination (112). The critique of structural institutions does not extend to the role of capitalism, racism, or sexism (112), instead calling for an *antiversity* that draws disenchanted students as politics move towards the right, functioning to document and subvert liberalism. “Every journalist or professor would have a dossier at the antiversity, and the result would be a systematic attack on free speech and liberal politics” (113). American politicians are already pushing for such draconian laws. Recently Florida “MAGA-friendly” Governor Ron Desantis signed a bill mandating students and faculty at public universities be surveyed on their ideologies and threatened to defund schools with “stale ideology” (Bort 2021). American right-wing groups are funding these efforts, such as Turning Point USA. It is responsible for an Orwellian “Professor Watchlist” that disproportionately targets academics of colour (Gabbatt 2021; Orr 2018). Young Americas Foundation coordinates efforts for students to antagonize classmates and professors with “aggressive tactics,” while Campus Reform recruits students to fight back “against the ‘evil empire’ of leftism in higher education” (Orr 2018).⁸⁷ And cyberharassment of academics is increasingly on the rise. Abby L. Ferber writes: “Targeted online harassment refers to cases where a faculty member is targeted politically and ideologically for statements attributed to them. The initial accusations appear in some form of social media, and then trigger a large-scale online harassment campaign, often in the form of large numbers of e-mails filled with hate, anger, venom, and threats” (2018, 302-03).

⁸⁷ From an article on civil liberties by Caroline Orr: “Under the guise of free speech, conservative donors are pumping millions into an orchestrated effort to force their political agenda onto college campuses. And when they run into pushback, they cynically accuse their critics of censorship and cite it as evidence of a free-speech ‘crisis.’ In fact, it exists only because they manufactured it. So yes, free speech on campus is facing a reckoning. But as with all things political, one need only follow the money to find the real threat” (2018).

Land, a former university professor, developed right-wing accelerationist philosophy and political theory in the late 1990s, co-founding the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU) (Jones 2019, 107). Jones posits that Land’s “venomous tirade against the academy” is possibly based on resentment for having institutional support withdrawn for the CCRU at the philosophy department at the University of Warwick for failing to meet the standards of academic rigour (54-55). One of the primary goals of neoreactionaries is thus to entice disillusioned ideologues and “lure students away from the university orthodoxy” (55).

I mention this particular neoreactionary movement for its echoes in Satanic virtual rhetoric. The points of contact are many. I highlight a small sampling. First, LaVey’s well documented anti-feminist stance (see chapter four) coupled with his derision for social charity in his essay, “The Goodguy Badge” (LaVey 1992, 20) mirrors NRx’s contempt for progressivism and social reform (Davies and Gane 2021). NRx posits that all liberals are jockeying for status as Social Justice Warriors, to demonstrate piousness to the “religion” of The Cathedral. Second, LaVey’s elitism, anti-egalitarianism, and eugenic rhetoric ties into the race science of NRx, which is “different from the older eugenics movements and the white nationalists because it does not place whites at the top of the genetic hierarchy; rather, it places northeast Asians and Ashkenazi Jews as the peak of human development” as a means to justify its white supremacy via widely debunked pseudoscience (Jones 2019, 105). LaVey’s focus on “real world accomplishments” and materiality could be related to a fixation on capitalist interests, with Moldbug envisioning tech-CEO dictatorships “with a grim view of contemporary society but supreme confidence in technology and the private sector to supersede traditional politics” (Tait 2019, 200).⁸⁸ Finally, as technocratic biological determinists, NRx promotes a conquering of

⁸⁸ Moldbug has a relationship with investor-entrepreneur Peter Thiel, who sat on the board at Facebook, and counseled Milo Yiannopoulos when he was a Breitbart reporter (Tait 2019, 199-200).

death through artificial intelligence (Riggio 2016, 36) which marries both LaVey's interest in Artificial Human Companions (1992, 133; Holt 2017) and his concept of the afterlife through "fulfillment of the ego" (2005, 91; Holt 2011). An in-depth analysis of Dark Enlightenment documents and its virtual forums⁸⁹ compared to Satanic rhetoric diffused across the internet might yield more similarities than mere superficial observation.

5.2.3. Pop Culture and Satanic Joy

A final potential area of research expands beyond CoS rhetoric, found in a contemporary music video briefly mentioned at the beginning of this thesis: Lil Nas X's, "Call me by your name (Montero)" (2021). The video has a hyperrealist visual aesthetic, portraying a queer Black man being seduced by a snake in the garden of Eden. The young man is put on trial, condemned, and then cast down to hell (sliding on a stripper pole). Strutting in thigh-high boots to Satan sitting on a throne, Lil Nas X proceeds to give Satan an erotic lap dance. Lil Nas X plays every role in the video.

Lil Nas X's song is engaged in a dialogue with homophobic rhetoric in the Black church and hip-hop culture. He states: "I spent my entire teenage years hating myself because of the (expletive) y'all preached would happen to me because I was gay" (Habersham 2021). Lil Nas X not only confronts the demonization of his sexual orientation, he subverts it and adopts it as a symbol of resistance. The critical aspect of this is that it is a *joyful* subversion, not an angry or reactionary one. During the lap dance with Satan, Lil Nas X smiles. His lyrics convey queer sex

⁸⁹ Reddit is a prime example. Interestingly, in 2017 when Reddit closed down three major alt-right forums due to harassment, the Dark Enlightenment reddit remained. (see Romano 2017; Reddit, "Dark Enlightenment." <https://www.reddit.com/r/DarkEnlightenment/>).

as jubilant. He is making a political claim to experience sexual desire without shame. The unreserved self-realization is what signals a particular discourse in the type of Satanic rhetoric found in the Church of Satan.

Rolling Stone Magazine contacted the CoS for their reaction. CoS Magister David M. Harris responds with enthusiastic support for Lil Nas X. “We view ourselves as the most powerful beings in the world,” noting that a popular Black gay artist standing up to bigotry is a strong statement of empowerment (Dickson 2021). At the end of the video, Lil Nas X seductively circles Satan, snapping Satan’s neck from behind. As Satan’s head falls forward, Lil Nas X grabs the horns off Satan’s head and crowns himself as his own god. Harris, emphasizing my sentiment that this is the direction of future research, proclaims this as, “the most Satanic part of the video.”

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6.3. Select Social Media Accounts of Influence on this Thesis

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Annatheaverage. TikTok @annatheaverage.

#ArchiveMisanthrope. Twitter @prisonculture.

Lizzo. Instagram. @lizzobeating.

Agent ndn. Twitter @TheAgentNDN.

Ahmed, Sarah N. Twitter @SaraNAhmed.

Anya, Uju. Twitter @UjuAny.

Axel Folio, PhD. Twitter @ISASaxonists.

Bakari, Jael R. aka Dotsama Mama. Twitter @jaelrbakari.

Baker, Kelly J. Dr. Twitter @kelly_j_baker.

Barbarin, Imani, MAGC. Crutches&Spice . TikTok @crutches_and_spice.

Benjamin, Ruha. Twitter @ruha9.

Berry. TikTok @berryandco.

Black, Ashley Nicole. Twitter @ashleyn1cole.

Black Feminist Sociology. Twitter @BlackFemSoc.

Blackstock, Oni MD MHS. Twitter @oni_blackstock.

Blackstock, Uché MD. Twitter @uche_blackstock.

Blain, Keisha N. Dr. Twitter @KeishaBlain.

Blount, Levert. TikTok @levertthebassman.

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Cottom, Tressie McMillan. Twitter @tressiemcphd.
Cox, Monica. Dr. Twitter @DrMonicaCox.
Crenshaw, Kimberlé. Twitter @sandylocks.
Da'Shaun | they/them. Twitter @DaShaunLH.
Davis, Jonita. Twitter @JonitaLDavis.
Dennis, Gabrielle. Twitter @GabrielleDennis.
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