# The Suburban Witch: Power, Domesticity, and Whiteness in *Conjure Wife, The Witches of Eastwick*, and *The Love Witch*

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I would like to dedicate this work to all of my sisters—not merely my biological family, my cis-ters, or my white sisters, but all women, who are worthy of power, autonomy, and agency. We are the daughters of the witches they could not burn.

**Introduction**

*"The story of witchcraft is primarily the story of women, and I suspect this accounts for much of the fascination and elusiveness attending the subject. Especially in its Western incarnation, witchcraft confronts us with ideas about women, with fears about women, with the place of women in society, and with women themselves."* -- Carol Karlsen

The story of the witch begins with the story of women. In Jewish mythology, before Eve—who was created from Adam's rib—there was Lilith: a woman created from the same dirt as Adam (Genesis 1:27). As the story goes, while God created Adam, He said, "It is not good for man to be alone." Thus, like Adam, He created a woman from the earth and called her Lilith. Adam and Lilith immediately began to fight. She said, "I will not lie below." And he said, "I will not lie beneath you, but only on top. For you are fit only to be in the bottom position, while I am to be the superior one." Lilith responded, "We are equal to each other inasmuch as we were both created from the earth." But they would not listen to one another. When Lilith saw this, she pronounced the Ineffable Name and flew away into the air. In his book, *Eve's Herb: A History of Contraception and Abortion in the West*, John M. Riddle writes that Lilith was "a wife of Adam [who] was banished because she insisted on full equality with her husband." Not to be outdone by Adam, however, Lilith "takes her revenge by injuring babies" (113), becoming the first example of what is now known as the witch in American culture (Buckland, 57). Like her modern counterpart, Lilith was the original powerful and disobedient woman who preys on the innocent, casts demonic spells, communes with nature, and flies into the air (though she lacks her now-infamous broom).

Historically, the most scandalous witches in North America were found in New England, during the infamous Salem Witch Trials of 1692-1693. During the mass hysteria of the trials, more than 200 people—primarily white colonial women—were accused of witchcraft, and fourteen women and five men were put to death. Though the hysteria of the witch accusations peaked during the Salem trials, the

execution of women accused of witchcraft had been occurring within North America for nearly half a century, with the first recorded killing being Alse Young in Hartford, Connecticut in 1647 (Jewett, 133). While the trials are often considered a cautionary tale about the dangers of isolationism, religious extremism, false accusations, and lapses in due process (Adams, 2009), numerous feminist scholars, such as Silvia Federici and Carol Karlsen, view the North American witch trials as an act of misogyny and femicide meant to punish disobedient women, force women into subservience, and rob them of their autonomy—particularly their bodily autonomy. In their book, *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Women Healers*, Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English argue that many of the women accused of witchcraft were simply women who had the power to heal through their knowledge of herbs, folk remedies, and midwifery. Therefore, the fear of witches was considered to be "the fear of wise women who were experts in the use of herbs, able to control their own fertility, and unwilling to submit to a patriarchy" (19). Federici agrees with this notion, stating that the witch was the "embodiment of a world of female subjects that capitalism had to destroy: the heretic, the healer, the disobedient wife, the woman who dared to live alone" (11). The North American historical witch, much like her Biblical counterpart, suggests patriarchal anxiety regarding feminine equality, power, autonomy, and the fear of the disobedient white woman.

Some of the most famous witches in North America, however, were neither Biblical nor historical but appeared on the television screen. In the television classic, *Bewitched*, which premiered in 1964, a powerful witch named Samantha falls in love with and marries a human, Darrin, and moves to suburbia to build a family. Since one of the most pervasive fears taken up by the suburban gothic was the "post-war era insecure suburban male" (Murphy, 42), Darrin immediately becomes riddled with anxiety after discovering his wife's great magical power and forbids her from using magic as he views it as a threat to his patriarchal control within the home. This is a promise Samantha is never able to fulfill. This version of the witch was well-suited to the subgenre as suburbia was identified to be a largely white

feminine domain, inhabited by bored housewives. As the series regularly shows, Samantha is unable to keep her promise of forgoing witchcraft, and Darrin must come to terms with his wife's witchhood and powers—which often prove beneficial to him. Indeed in narratives such as *Bewitched* and *Conjure Wife*, we see that, more often than not, women's domestic "magic" is often beneficial to their husbands, as the women often use their powers to boost their husbands careers and maintain the home. For this reason, this representation of the suburban witch's power is a metaphor of actual lived power. Ideal white suburban women did maintain their homes and figures, shopped, cared for the kids, and cooked the roast. She poured her husband's drinks and hosted the work cocktail parties. She seemed to do it all, like magic. *Bewitched*, a suburban gothic classic, reimagines not only the figure of the witch, but also the figure of the white suburban wife and mother, by comedically approaching serious themes such as gender, familial roles, male anxiety regarding female power and knowledge, and the oppressive nature of a confined patriarchal society in white America.

If Lilith had Eden and the Salem witches had the New World, then the modern, twentieth-century witch had suburbia, an idealized, male-constructed, patriarchal setting where female subservience was the norm. During the rise of suburbanization in North America, it became commonplace for many writers and filmmakers to examine the anxieties associated with suburban life through the genre of the suburban gothic, a North American take on the classic gothic genre. That is, as soon as the plans for America's first suburb in Levittown were drawn up, the suburban gothic genre emerged as a response to America's ubiquitous process of suburbanization (*Conjure Wife* (1943), *I Am Legend* (1954), *Peyton Place* (1954), *Stir of Echoes* (1958) *Revolutionary Road* (1961), and the works of Shirley Jackson are just a few examples of this genre). In the suburban gothic, prevalent American anxieties associated with suburban life are recast through the genre's fixation on witchcraft, gothic unease, and uncanniness. Yet, when the witch is reborn in suburbia, she loses the menacing and villainous stereotypes once associated with witchcraft, becoming instead a duplicitous figure whose

magic is now tied to her image as the idealized suburban wife and mother. White, slim, blonde, pretty, and doting, the suburban witch emerged as a hybrid figure whose enchanted arts disrupted the façade of suburbia by evoking the darkness that lurks behind the white picket fence.

Unlike many of her male supernatural counterparts, the witch has been historically marked as a complex character grounded in a dark history of oppression and femicide. While the witch originally appeared in literature and film as a menacing and evil hag, out to destroy the pure and innocent—a trope that certainly has not been fully abandoned—her most prevalent representation in American pop culture since the 1940s has not been of a villainess but rather the middle-class white woman found on any street in American suburbia (Murphy, 39), suggesting that even the "ideal" American white woman has the potential to be an untrustworthy witch underneath. As previously mentioned, perhaps most famously, the suburban gothic planted Samantha Stevens, a powerful witch, in the role of doting suburban housewife and mother in the popular television show *Bewitched* (1964-1972). Thus, in her initial representation, the suburban witch was consistently presented as a wife and/or mother, representing the oppressed suburban woman as an enchanted figure in possession of magical powers. No longer was she merely responsible for dinner and housekeeping, she now also orchestrated her husband's successes with charms and spells, thus adding to the already bogged-down housewife's responsibilities. With novels like *Conjure Wife* and shows like *Bewitched*, the North American feminine ideal of the ultra-domesticated suburban wife and mother is suggestively combined with that of the rebellious, powerful witch. In doing so, the original suburban witch represents an empowered and sensationalized brand of often-overlooked suburban womanhood, as she is the woman who invisibly controls everything around her—even the weather—all while maintaining her clean house, slim figure, and motherly duties.

Thus, while the Biblical and Salem witches found themselves persecuted, banished, or killed, the suburban witch examines witches and white suburban womanhood from a new angle. For more than six

decades, there has been a longstanding belief that white, middle-class, North American suburban women were oppressed, depressed, anxious, and miserable. In her groundbreaking text, *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan (1962) argued that suburban wives suffered from "the problem that has no name," which suggested that many of these women longed for more than marriage, motherhood, and white picket fences. Friedan wrote of the "quiet concentration camp" of suburbia, where white women's hopes, dreams, and identities went to die. While this was certainly not the experience of all suburban women during suburbia's North American Golden Age (1945-1985) (Knapp, 22), a myriad of representations of suburbia has suggested that this is the prominent white feminine experience. The depressed and powerless housewife on the verge of breakdown has become a stock character in the dark narrative myth of suburbia, and no genre has reinforced this myth quite like the suburban gothic. In the sixty years since American suburbanization, the suburban gothic genre has depicted the suburban housewife as a depressed and restless figure, longing to escape her oppressive role as wife and mother. She often carries on sexual affairs, drinks heavily, abuses prescription medications, or suffers from some form of mental breakdown. However, the suburban gothic's representation of the suburban woman is not always so bleak.

In John Updike's final novel, *The Widows of Eastwick*, for example, his three female protagonists, witches Alexandra, Jane, and Sukie, return to the quiet suburban town of Eastwick, New England. Baffled that her daughter, Macy, is choosing to live a conventional and mundane life as a suburban housewife and mother, Alexandra becomes frustrated and tells Macy, "Girls your age just can't realize how few opportunities there were for women when I was young. Our job was to make babies and buy American consumer goods. If we fell off the marriage bandwagon, there was nothing much left for us but to ride a broomstick…it was power. Everybody needs power. Otherwise the world eats you up" (160). This connection between witchcraft as power and womanhood—specifically suburban white womanhood—is where the nuance of the suburban witch—as well as this research—

lies. The fictional character of the American suburban witch as wife/mother is a consistent site of power, control, and autonomy for white, heteronormative, suburban women. In these narratives, power not only implies magical ability, but also the ability to control one's own life—be entirely independent and autonomous of any men. The women gain this empowerment, control, and autonomy through their practice of witchcraft. In many cases, the suburban witch will use her power to benefit her husband, suggesting that the suburban male could not successfully exist without his wife working in the background—an allegory certainly not lost on many of the suburban women who read/watch these narratives. The figure of the white middle class witch is disciplined to a role of reproducing patriarchal heteronormative power structures, and also of hiding or ablating the actual powers of women into a mystical realm of "magic" that is impermeable to male understanding; a convenient way of not caring about how women get the job done, just so long as they do.

Given the suburban witch's depiction as both idealized suburban woman and menacing witch, she presents the reader and audience with a feminist take on Sigmund Freud's the uncanny. For Freud, the uncanny is that which is eerily familiar or the anxiety caused by the strangeness of the ordinary. It is that which is both familiar and comfortable, but also that which is foreign and unsettling. I will unpack Freud's theory of the uncanny within my theory chapter, but, ultimately, the suburban witch's dual role as beautiful wife and/or mother and macabre and often sinister witch renders her an unsettling and uncanny feminist figure. The suburban witch walks a fine line between cis-heternormative ideal woman and vilified woman, rendering her uncanny, but also raising questions about the duality of all white women. As Bernice Murphy argues: "[W]hen a feminine ideal of such ideological importance in post-war American society as that of the maternal, modern, ultra-domesticated housewife is suggestively combined with that of the disruptive, archaic and powerful witch, the resulting hybrid figure has the potential not only to tell us a great deal about the conflicted position in which American women often

found themselves during this time, but also further testifies to the manner in which gothic and horror inflected texts can illuminate barely concealed societal truths" (41).

While the character of the suburban witch not only allegorizes witchcraft as a tool of white female empowerment, she also alludes to the history of the witch in North America and why she was reviled in the first place: the patriarchal fear of women, women's knowledge, and female power. The suburban gothic witch acknowledges the figure's deeply disenfranchised North American roots based in patriarchal and capitalist control of the female body and identity by depicting her as the dangerous Other—a female not engaging in socially desired scripts—while also reclaiming the figure of the witch as a tool of female empowerment. In suburban gothic texts, the figure of the witch—traditionally presented as an undesirable and menacing female character in the gothic genre—is used as a way in which white women find empowerment and control. However, she also pays homage to the historical North American witch, and her representation as a Golden Age suburban white woman examines and reflects upon the fear of white feminine power, knowledge, and control in a North American patriarchal setting.

While the suburban witch offers a site of resistance within her patriarchal society, she is nonetheless a figure that is highly coded as a woman of privilege: white, middle-class, and heterosexual, the suburban witch hardly speaks for all forms of domestic femininity. By focusing exclusively on white middle-class life, the suburban gothic genre reflects the narrative myth that suburbia was an entirely white domain, with little attention given to other forms of domesticity. As Bernice Murphy notes of the genre, "[m]inorities tend not to feature much, save as exploited outsiders, bit players or dangerous interlopers" (2). I will engage more with the suburban gothic's obsession with the white myth of suburbia and discuss critical whiteness theory within my theory section. However, while the suburban gothic and the suburban witch may ignore various Othered narratives, I am hopeful that this examination of the suburban witch will open up new discussions about the representations of women as

witches and suburban womanhood, so that we may move past stereotypes and look to alternative narratives and representations. For, while the white suburban witch does not speak for all women, her female power, knowledge, and disobedience offers one model by which genuine damage may be inflicted against the patriarchal society.

In what follows, I examine the gender politics associated with the suburban witch's representational development into the white suburban wife and/or mother, thus offering alternative images of the witch and white suburban womanhood. To do this I will provide a feminist analysis of Fritz Leiber's novel *Conjure Wife* (1943), the film version of John Updike's *The Witches of Eastwick* (1987), and the recent film *The Love Witch* (2016). Each of these narratives explores preceding themes related to both the biblical and historical witch (the feminine connection to nature, female bodily autonomy, the disobedient woman, fear of female power and control), and applies them to womanhood in a Betty Friedan-inspired suburban atmosphere. One of the central questions I ask is: What kinds of powers does the suburban witch possess which helps her navigate the supposed "quiet concentration camp" of suburbia? Throughout my analysis, the suburban witch provides new light on stereotypes about both suburban womanhood and witchcraft, showing alternative images of home, gender dynamics, and motherhood while exploring the feminist nature of the uncanny.

*Conjure Wife* offers one of the first appearances of the character of the suburban witch and can be described as the dark and horrific predecessor of *Bewitched*. The novel's central female, Tansy Saylor, has a loving husband, Norman, and a wonderful life as a professor's wife in a New England suburb. Much like *Bewitched*, Norman requests that his wife stop practicing magic once he discovers her powers. While her husband loves her very much and eventually engages with magic to save her, he is incredibly unsettled and anxious about her powers. Tansy's power, agency, and knowledge ultimately save both their lives while returning her autonomy. This text employs both the traditional gothic witch as well as what will become the new suburban witch. The new suburban witch wins at the end of the novel, giving

rise to a powerful and positive female witch, who just so happens to be left with an uneasy and anxious husband. Tansy is represented as both educated and talented in the art of magic, which allows her a fulfilling and empowering life outside of her role as suburban housewife, though she remains a loyal housewife to Norman throughout the text. Tansy's representation of wife as witch, much like the character of Samantha Stevens, suggests that behind the suburban male is a wife who is secretly in control of their picturesque and successful life. While in other media depicting suburban life, media such as *Leave it to Beaver* or *Father Knows Best*, it is the husband/father figure who is in control of the household*, Conjure Wife* suggests that it is the wife who is truly in control, but merely allows her husband to believe he has some semblance of power within the home AND his life outside of the home. Tansy's powers prove subversive by suggesting that Norman would not have any of his academic successes without her power. Through Tansy's representation as suburban witch, we see the suburban woman gain power, control, and agency through her identity as a witch. This is an identity her husband must accept if he wishes for her to remain the woman he fell in love with, suggesting that the suburban woman requires power and control within her life to maintain her identity.

*The Witches of Eastwick* is perhaps the most famous of the three narratives I examine. The text and film both revolve around three women living in the 1960s, New England. Alexandra is a widowed mother of one, Sukie is an abandoned mother of five, and Jane is "barren," which leads to her divorce. The three women have a close bond and prove to be natural-born witches who only acquire their powers after the figurative and literal loss of their husbands. The women have already formed a sort of coven before Darryl Van Horne arrives in town and seduces all three. As best friends who are engaged in a sisterhood of witchcraft, an untraditional family relationship is formed, and all four live together, along with their children, in the landmark Eastwick mansion. Reminiscent of Puritan New England, the women become outcasts in society and scolded for their sexual debauchery. In the novel, Darryl leaves the women and marries their young, innocent friend, Jenny. In response, the women use magic to kill Jenny

and Darryl flees town, thus straining the women's friendship and self-worth. However, in the film version, the women decide to leave Darryl as he uses magic to kill the overtly-religious woman who has been accusing them of indecency to the other townspeople. The women begin to use witchcraft against Darryl, which leads to his misogynistic church hall rant about "God's mistake in creating women." The women can use magic to rid themselves of Darryl and eventually each give birth to a son and continue to raise their children together as a family in the Eastwick mansion. Though set in the 1960s, the film, as stated, was released in the 1980s, a crucial time for women to be positively depicted as single mothers, a topic I will elaborate on within my theory chapter. In John Updike's novel, the three women are initially represented as free-spirited, in-touch with nature, capable of manipulating nature, and deeply connected with one another. Their relationship with each other offers them great empowerment both from a standing of female camaraderie and their formation of a successful coven. However, their engagement in magic to exact revenge on other women ultimately destroy their bond and identities. Updike initially represents the women as empowered, but then suggests that women potentially go "too far" and become "catty" when empowered. The film version could be read as a more feminist rendition of the novel, given that the women end up eliminating Darryl himself and their coven remains intact with them all living happily together as a family. Alexandra, Jane, and Sukie are represented as failed wives and/or mothers who find empowerment together through witchcraft.

While set in the late-1960s or early-1970s, the 2016 film *The Love Witch*, tells a revisionist narrative of the now-classic character. Elaine, a beautiful young woman who is also a witch, moves to suburban California in hopes of finding a husband so that she can become domesticated. Her previous husband, Jerry, has died, and it is implied that Elaine murdered him because of his abusive treatment. Throughout the film, Elaine uses spells and magic to get men to fall in love with her, a feat that often leads to disastrous, even deadly results. Elaine's friend, Trish, accuses of Elaine of being "brainwashed by the patriarchy," as she yearns for a traditional domestic lifestyle where she is compliant to a

husband—because it seems the only way she can be accepted by this society. Yet Elaine is unable to contain her power, and the men in her life are made anxious by her agency, often turning cruel and misogynistic. For those who try to possess her fully, death is often their reward. Though the film is full of men who grow cruel or obsessive towards Elaine, it is never Elaine, the witch, who is at fault, but the men who react to her power, knowledge, and agency. In his review of the film, Scott Feinblatt notes that "*The Love Witch* uses the figure of the witch as a metaphor for women in general, as both an embodiment of men's fears of women, and of women's own innate powers of intuition and as mothers and sorceresses" (Feinblatt, 2016).

**Outline**

The first chapter of my thesis research will outline my methodology, focusing upon my examination of the suburban gothic genre and how it utilizes narrative myth to depict the suburban experience. I will also outline my use of literary and film analysis, gender studies, feminist historical studies, plus concepts relating to narrative and representation. The second chapter of my thesis research will outline my use of theory. For this, I will outline the thinkers and theories I use to unpack my corpus of narratives. In my theory section I outline my theoretical approaches to feminist theory, critical whiteness theory, representation, suburban domesticity, and the uncanny. Finally, in my third, and largest chapter, I will apply my methodologies and theoretical frameworks to the narratives I have outlined to dissect the following topics: (1) The pertinent features of the figure of the suburban witch; (2) what is her role as a figure of white feminine empowerment in popular culture?; (3) who she does and does not empower; (4) what is her historical purpose/relevance?; and (5) what does the character of the suburban witch reveal specifically about the patriarchal fear of white female "disobedience" and power? What I hope to achieve through this research is a well-rounded understanding of the fictional

character of the suburban witch, both as a white feminist figure who reflects a particular experience for white, middle-class women in suburbia, and as a figure who reflects a dark historical past of oppression for white women, inflicted upon them by a megalomaniac patriarchal, capitalist society.

**Methodology**

*"The Suburban Gothic is a sub-genre concerned, first and foremost, with playing upon the lingering suspicion that even the most ordinary-looking neighborhood, or house, or family, has something to hide, and that no matter how calm and settled a place looks, it is only ever a moment away from dramatic (and generally sinister) incident."* - Bernice Murphy

The Suburban Gothic & Genre

My analysis explores representations of the suburban witch throughout the mid-twentieth century. What I am calling "the suburban witch" is any female character who is depicted as a witch who inhabits, or wishes to inhabit, the suburbs during the Golden Age of American suburbanization. For specific reasons that I explore in my analysis chapter, this suburban witch is almost always a wife and/or mother, white, aged 25-35, slim, pretty, middle-class, and heteronormative. Further, this research considers the suburban witch in the context of narratives that fall within the genre of the suburban gothic, which treats the suburb not just as a setting, but rather as an active force that motivates the narrative: the suburban home/environment both hosts and motivates the action of the narrative because it entails certain sets of relationships, thematic elements, and dark and problematic ideologies of suburbanization. Therefore, when I speak about the American suburb, I am referring to the narrative mythology of the American suburb as it is depicted in the suburban gothic genre.

Most examples of the suburban gothic home are set in New England, and most revolve around white, middle-class, heteronormative characters. Moreover, the suburban gothic genre adheres to the idea that the American suburb is bleak and oppressive, full of unhappy inhabitants on the verge of breakdown. In her book *The Suburban Gothic in American Popular Culture*, Bernice M. Murphy writes: "Simply put, the Suburban Gothic is a sub-genre of the wider American gothic tradition that often dramatizes anxieties arising from the mass suburbanization of the United States and usually features suburban settings, preoccupations and protagonists. Minorities tend not to feature much, save as

exploited outsiders, bit players or dangerous interlopers" (2). The suburbs, this research argues, functions as a privileged site for not only representing important alternative discourses of and about white American gender roles and power relations in the mid-twentieth century but as a key signifier of an emerging anti-women, pro-domestic discourse that obscures its racialized others by problematizing its dominant white characters.

To properly understand the character of the suburban witch, we must first understand the genre of the suburban gothic and its adherence to the narrative myth of suburbia. As previously stated, the suburban gothic tackles the problematic ideologies of suburbia, and reveals a dark side to the idealized suburban community. The subgenre notably erases various Othered bodies, and rarely portrays single mothers. The suburban gothic attempts to present the most "idealized" version of suburbia (white, beautiful, nuclear families) only to unveil the suffering and alienation beneath the facade of perfection. The genre emerged almost immediately after the initial suburbanization of America in the 1940s and served as a negative response to the new suburban lifestyle. As Huq puts it in *Making Sense of Suburbia Through Popular Culture*, this genre focuses upon the bleak and dark side of suburban life and serves as a "rewriting of history to highlight the faults of suburban repression, [which] are then dramatized" (87). To which Bernice Murphy expands: "The Suburban Gothic has always had much more to do with how people chose to perceive suburbia than the reality of such neighbourhoods" (5). The suburban gothic highlights prominent Anglo-American anxieties associated with the creation of suburban communities. Since the suburbanization of America in the 1940s, writers and film-makers began to produce narratives in which suburbia's peaceful façade is disrupted by the dark menace that lurks beneath. America's social turmoil in the 1940s-1960s, along with the rise of suburbia and the nuclear family, influenced the reappearance of traditional gothic literary themes (darkness, isolation, madness, reality/illusion, horror and romance, dread, being "haunted," the repression of fears and desires, the eerie/uncanny, etc.) (Pepetone, 4). In the suburban gothic, horror, dread, and the

deterioration of the world do not stem from outside villains and ghouls, but rather from something that already exists within the home. These gothic literary traditions re-emerged, creating the suburban gothic genre due to major American events such as the Great Depression, World War II, The Cold War, and the Vietnam war. In his book *Gothic Perspectives on the American Experience*, Gregory G. Pepetone writes:

> The close historical connection between political strife and the emergence of the gothic is another unifying concept…American culture has been profoundly influenced by revolutionary upheavals and international conflicts: the Cold War, the two world wars, and Vietnam…[e]ach of these conflicts served as a catalyst for the gothic imagination because each provoked the kind of national identity crisis, pervasive social anxiety, and deep psychological denial for which gothic arts have always provided a cultural outlet. (1)

Many of the books, films, and television shows that arose during and after these "revolutionary upheavals" reveal skepticism toward the rapid expansion of post-war suburbs, and anxiety about the conformity, materialism, and psychological damage they bring.

There are two types of suburban gothic: one that focuses on negative aspects of suburban life through the presence of the supernatural and another that highlights the damaging aspects of suburban life through realism. Films such as *American Beauty*, *Little Children*, *Far From Heaven*, *Ordinary People*, and *The Virgin Suicides* fall into the latter category given that, while they view suburbia through a bleak and gothic lens, they do not incorporate any elements of the supernatural. On the other hand, films such as *Poltergeist*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, *The Stepford Wives*, and *Edward Scissorhands* focus on suburban anxieties by incorporating paranormal elements. Given that this research examines the fictional and magical character of the witch, I will focus on the supernatural suburban gothic.

Furthermore, while these diverse narratives spread over various genres, they are linked by their use of the suburban home as a sinister driving force of the plot. As Pamela Robertson Wojcik writes in

*The Apartment Plot: Urban Living in American Film and Popular Culture, 1945 to 1975*, "Like props, characters, and other semantic elements, space and place are more than just one lexical choice among many; they are imbricated in signifying structures that are historically determined and that carry tremendous connotative and ideological weight related to issues of sex, gender, class, race, the body, individuality, family, community, work, pleasure, and more" (8). In these films, the suburban home is not a simple setting but serves as a geo-social signifier of female oppression, isolation, anxiety, whiteness, strict heteronormative family values, and conformity. The suburb in the suburban gothic suggests a suffocating way of life that is disruptive to the mental well-being of its white inhabitants, especially women. From *The Virgin Suicides* to *The Stepford Wives,* what the suburban gothic attests to is the uncanny ways in which the lives of women are literally sacrificed to the domestic sphere.

As mentioned, many of the narratives I analyze do not fall within the same genre. In seeking to recognize the suburban witch as a pivotal feminist figure in the suburban gothic genre, I revalue and relocate some films, television programs, and novels, to highlight aspects of them that a traditional genre analysis might overlook. For example, a traditional genre analysis would put the novel and film *The Witches of Eastwick* in the fantasy genre, *The Love Witch* in the category of dark-comedy, *Conjure Wife* in the category of horror, and so on. While these films abide by different genre conventions, they also convergence around similar gothic themes and preoccupations, drawing attention to common experiences for suburban women that cross multiple genre codes. As Wojcik writes: "I'd like to suggest that genres be considered as sedimented cross-sections, as it were, or networks that touch upon or intersect with individual films but do not characterize them…[m]ultiple discourses and codes come together to produce genre, and the codes of one genre often intersect with the codes of another genre across a film or group of films" (10). In highlighting the suburban home in these films and novels, I argue that these narratives create an alternative discourse of suburban womanhood absent from both popular representations of the suburbs and early feminist writing.

Since my research attempts to unpack the significance of the mid-twentieth century (the 1940s-1970s) suburban witch through multiple genre conventions, my corpus of "texts" does not abide by a strict time-frame. While charting the suburban witches' various mutations and lines of continuity offers one way of exploring the suburban gothic, I rely on a series of paradigmatic "texts" that offer distinct perspectives on the meaning of the figure of the suburban witch and her ability to both reflect and counter the dominant myths and ideologies of the time. For example, I contend that the suburban witch disrupts popular culture's suburban narrative by merging two divergent modes of being a domestic woman. That is, the suburban witch uses the dark arts to reclaim her autonomy and disrupt the common narrative of the ideal, peaceful, suburban family home. As Wojcik argues, while much of popular culture "fed" the fifties ideal of the "white, heterosexual, middle class, rising marriage rates, the baby boom, and suburban living" (17), the suburban witch challenges this ideal by undoing it from within. By being both the idealized heterosexual, white, middle class, domestic woman, and a disobedient and powerful witch, the suburban witch can be seen as a satirical feminist attack on the suburban domestic ideology.

Engaging With the Material

To engage with the suburban witch within the suburban gothic genre, this research performs both literary and film analysis by utilizing a feminist, comparative/synergistic, and historical framework. My methods are gynocentric, as I am examining a female character and her cultural depiction of the white, middle class, feminine, American suburban experience. This research explores how the suburban witch is rendered an important feminist figure within the suburban gothic genre, as she appears at various points on the spectrum of the suburban gothic genre to create alternative discourses regarding popular culture depictions of the white suburban woman, while also altering feminist perspectives of the white suburban female experience. To do this, I begin with feminist theorists such as Betty Friedan

and Simone de Beauvoir, thinkers who provide extensive research in the oppressive nature of domestication for women. As mentioned, Friedan writes that suburbia is a quiet concentration camp for women, where their domesticity holds them hostage. This belief about the female suburban experience is prevalent within the suburban gothic genre, especially in regards to the suburban witch. Beauvoir expands on this point, stating: "In such circumstances the girl seems absolutely passive; she is married, given in marriage by her parents. Boys get married, they take a wife" (de Beauvoir, 479). Though the suburban experiences that Beauvoir and Friedan discuss do not pertain to only white, middle-class women, it is the prime experience depicted through the suburban gothic. Beauvoir and Friedan often ignore positive domestic experiences for white women, and because of this, black women have never been allowed to stay home and attend to their own domesticities; the suburban gothic genre does as well. While I use their writings to frame the suburban gothic, I move beyond this line of research by acknowledging what their research and the suburban gothic genre neglects: the positive and meaningful suburban domestic experience which surely many women had and the dream of staying home with their families that racialized and poor women had.

To draw out the historical points of comparison between the representation of the suburban witch and earlier cases of witchcraft, I also use a historical framework to account for the larger history of the witch in the American setting. As Griselda's Pollock writes "representation articulates—puts into words, visualizes, puts together—social practices and forces which are not, like trees, there to be seen but which we theoretically know condition our existence" (6). Using this notion of "representation," my goal is to read the suburban gothic in terms of the witches that came before, to use the witch as a figuration of the continued subjugation of women throughout diverse periods and settings. That is, while the suburban gothic engages with the narrative myth of suburbia, the suburban witch is deeply rooted in the real history of femicide within North America. The suburban witch, while a fictional character rooted in a fictionalized version of suburbia, borrows historical elements of the plight of the

historical witch to allegorically shed light upon gender roles and female oppression within a patriarchal setting.

For example, just as suburbanization forced the suburban witch into oppressive domestication, her historical New England sisters were punished by patriarchy's inability to deal with female power, agency, and knowledge, especially reproductive knowledge. In their book *Witches, Midwives and Nurses: A History of Women Healers*, Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English (1973) argue that many of the women accused of witchcraft during 17th-century New England were women who had the ability to heal through their knowledge of herbs, folk remedies, and midwifery. Similarly, in his text *Eve's Herbs*, John Riddle argues that the suppression of witchcraft involved three distinct things: witchcraft, midwifery, and birth control, which he claims were joined in an "unfortunate, unholy marriage" (110). The accusations against women accused of witchcraft were almost exclusively linked to sexuality and reproduction. Riddle lists what is called the "Sevenfold witchcraft," referring to the seven things that witches could do: practice fornication and adultery; obstruct procreation by rendering men impotent; perform castration or sterilization; engage in bestiality and homosexuality; destroy the generative force in women; procure abortion; and sacrifice children to the devils (Riddle, 111).

All these acts relate to sexuality, birth control, and a threat to born or unborn children. Though there has been no historical evidence of "witches" or midwives causing impotence or sterility in men, midwives were knowledgeable in ways to prevent and terminate a pregnancy, and thus formed a danger to the social orders that wished to prevent women from attaining autonomy. As Riddle notes: "Midwives were the victims of a vicious syllogism: to know the secrets was to be a witch; it was necessary to know the secrets to be a midwife; therefore, a midwife is a witch" (118). However, arguing that midwives were labeled witches due solely to their knowledge of the natural world concerning herbs and the female reproductive system would be incorrect and simplistic. Riddle notes of the European witch trials that midwives and witches were deemed a threat because "both the security of the state

and the prosperity of the community depended on the flourishing population" (113), therefore, to have women who could advise other women on ways to prevent or terminate pregnancy was deemed not only a threat to the population but a danger to the patriarchal family.

When accusations of witchcraft reached 17th-century New England, midwives and "witches" found themselves facing the same problems as that of the European witch, but with an additional twist. While the accused witches of New England were also condemned for engaging in the "Sevenfold witchcraft," there were slightly more economic reasons behind the colonizer's desire to terminate independent, knowledgeable, and powerful women during this time. The birth of colonial New England also brought forth the birth of capitalism within America, and it is here that the dark history between women and capitalism began. In "100 Notes – 100 Thoughts/ No96: Witch-Hunting, Past and Present, and the Fear of the Power of Women," Silvia Federici writes of the women accused of witchcraft in New England:

> As a system positing "industry" as the main source of accumulation, capitalism could not take hold without conducting a historic battle against anything that posed a limit to the full exploitation of the labourer, starting with the web of relations that tied the individuals to the natural world, other people, and their own bodies…It is in this context that the attack on women should be located. Because of their unique relationship to the process of reproduction, women in many pre-capitalist societies have been credited with a special understanding of the secrets of nature, presumably enabling them to procure life and death and discover the hidden property of things. Practicing magic (as healers, folk doctors, herbalists, midwives, makers of love potions) was also for many women a source of employment and undoubtedly a source of power… This is one reason why women became the primary targets in the capitalist attempt to create a more mechanized conception of the world (7-8).

In *Caliban and the Witch*, Federici elaborates on this argument by stating that the witch is the embodiment of a world of female subjects that capitalism had to destroy (11). While the New England witch-hunt was very much a war against women using their herbal and reproductive knowledge, it was

also a war against feminine power, agency, and autonomy. During this time, the medical profession was becoming a respected field for men, and population decline was dashing the capitalist dreams of the colonizers (Federici, 85); therefore the witch-hunt was used as a capitalistic tool in the New World to destroy any control that women had exercised over their reproductive functions—medicinal knowledge—as a way to secure and more oppressive "patriarchal regime" (14) while also turning the female body into an instrument for the "reproduction of labor and the expansion of the work-force" (91). Londa Schiebinger's *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* reinforces Federici's argument by suggesting that women's inclination towards nature, and our "defining characteristic" of lactation and motherhood ties us to brutes lacking in reason, which separates entirely from men, whose defining characteristic is reason (37). Therefore, women must be incapable of practical medical knowledge and engage solely with foolish herbal remedies which should not be taken seriously. I argue that just as the New England witch instilled anxiety through her control over her body and the home, within the Golden Age of suburbia, women caused great anxiety within suburban men, who wished to reinforce societally expected gender relations within the nuclear family.

While the suburban witch certainly acknowledges the witch's North American historical past, she also commits cultural appropriation. As has been established, the North American white witch was primarily a woman with knowledge and ability regarding herbs and midwifery. While the suburban witch acknowledges the persecution of powerful women in the patriarchal and capitalist setting, the magic she engages with does not coincide with her historical predecessor. As I will unpack within my theory chapter, the witches within the suburban gothic narrative almost exclusively engage in conjure magic, which is a form of hoodoo magic. Hoodoo magic (spells, voodoo dolls, potions, conjuration, rootwork, and witchcraft) (Hyatt, 27) is traditionally an African American folk spirituality stemming from West African spiritual traditions and beliefs. These practices, within North America, were religious and held in secret away from white slave owners (Zepke, 13). All the witches in the narratives I dissect

engage with traditional hoodoo magic. Yet, aside from a brief mention in *Conjure Wife*, neither "text" acknowledges the African American community and the women of colour who acted as the sources of such knowledge. While the suburban witch acknowledges her own white history, she conceals the roots of her power and its place in the history of women of colour.

This notion of whiteness alienating people of colour also links to how I approach the suburban landscape. As mentioned, the suburban gothic ignores stories of people of colour to focus solely upon the white suburban experience. As others have shown, within the Golden Age of American suburbanization, the suburbs were imagined as an exclusionary space designed to alienate people of colour. Instead of acting as an inclusive space, suburbia offered a "white utopia" meant for white, middle-class, and heteronormative families. Indeed, as it will become clear, in the suburban gothic, the practices of exclusion evidenced at the level of social geography are re-inscribed at the level of narrative, such that the suburban witch's experiments with magic fails to acknowledge the existence of Othered peoples.

**Theory**

The suburban witch finds empowerment and identity through her rejection of oppressive traditional domestic roles. I examine domesticity through an early feminist lens, where marriage and motherhood are depicted as oppressive and destructive to women. The suburban setting is viewed as a "quiet concentration camp" where women's identities go to die. I have chosen this theoretical framework because the suburban witch character is very much a product of the time she reflects. The character, when set during the Golden Age of the American suburbs, almost always reflects the Sylvia Plath or Betty Friedan-inspired woman. She is white, middle-class, heteronormative, and suffocating within the confines of suburbia. I argue that a fundamental experience of this approach to suburban domesticity is the liminality caused by abjection. In the narratives I explore, women's oppressive work (domestic roles, familial roles, emotional labor, reproductive labor) forms a liminal experience for the suburban witch who is incapable of settling into her new domestic setting, opening up feelings of the uncanny (comfort/discomfort) and abjection.

The theoretical framework for this research can be broken down into five distinct parts: feminist theory, theories of abjection, critical whiteness, representation, and anxiety as allegory. My use of feminist theory is perhaps the most influential and elaborate, as I explore the idea of motherhood, feminine domestication, and oppression via Betty Friedan, Simone de Beauvoir, Germaine Greer, and similar feminist thinkers. I also take a gynocentric historical approach to my research to explore the historical nature of white, middle-class domesticity during the Golden Age of Suburbia. For my critical whiteness theory, I focus upon the idea that the suburban witch acts as an insider-Other, as she exists both within the dominant white, patriarchal society, while never being full equals due to their womanhood. Under critical whiteness, I also examine the idea of haunting, the way in which the suburban witch is haunted by her historical predecessor. This then leads me to my work with representation and what this particular representation of white suburban woman as witch does. Finally,

I explore abjection—the idea that, as an ideal patriarchal female, the suburban witch transgresses these idyllic boundaries by being the feared menacing witch.

## Feminist Theory: Domestication, the Witch, and the Abject

A myriad of post-war feminist writers including Betty Friedan, Germaine Greer, Simone de Beauvoir viewed the domesticity of the suburbs as harmful and constricting to female identity. Within the suburban setting, femininity was defined by domesticity, but such a definition meant that at the same time women lacked power and autonomy, and when writing about white women during this time, the concept of the "problem with no name" consistently comes up. Friedan writes of the plight of the white suburban woman, writing, "It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone" (15). She elaborated that this emotional suffering potentially stemmed from the ways in which post-war American women were taught to strive for marriage and family and little else as the ultimate flourishing of their potential: "They learned that truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights—the independence and the opportunities that the old-fashioned feminists fought for…[a]ll they had to do was devote their lives from earliest girlhood to finding a husband and bearing children" (Friedan, 17). Friedan described this "problem with no name" as a deep sense of disempowerment and emptiness felt by white suburban women, writing, "Just what is this problem that has no name? What were the words women used when they tried to express it? Sometimes a woman would say 'I feel empty somehow…incomplete.' Or she would say 'I feel as if I don't exist.'" (Friedan, 20). Like Friedan, de Beauvoir argued that domesticity was crippling to the female psyche, and that it was something done to her, and not for her, and that women lack identity outside of domesticity once they are domesticated. She writes: "A man is socially an independent and complete

individual; he is regarded first of all as a producer whose existence is justified by the work he does for the group," (476).

The suburban gothic narrative clung to this post-war feminist concept that the white, suburban housewife was some great tortured soul. As Rupa Huq notes, "there is no single portrayal of women in the suburbs that can claim to be definitive or completely authoritative," (155); that being said, within the suburban gothic genre, there is adherence to the narrative myth that all white suburban women suffer from Friedan's quiet concentration camp. Within popular culture, "[a]s the war ended, the range of appropriate female behaviour portrayed narrowed" (Hartmann, 189). The appropriate female behaviour that was often depicted to white women was that of the idealized, submissive, suburban housewife. As Huq elaborates, "The stereotypical suburban daily routine established in 1950s-set suburban television shows sees besuited males kiss goodbye to their wives and kids *en route* to the daily commute to office leaving her to cheerfully perform household chores, for example baking sometimes with a housemaid/cook" (Huq, 133). The suburban gothic reflected the dark side of these suburban idealizations and the female oppression lurking beneath the peaceful façade. As Friedan writes:

> In a New York hospital, a woman had a nervous breakdown when she found she could not breastfeed her baby. In other hospitals, women dying of cancer refused a drug which research had proved might save their lives: its side effects were said to be unfeminine. 'If I have only one life, let me live it as a blonde,' a larger-than-life-sized picture of a pretty, vacuous woman proclaimed from newspaper, magazine, and drugstore ads. And across America, three out of every ten women dyed their hair blonde. They ate chalk called Metrecal, instead of food, to shrink to the size of the thin young models. Department-store buyers reported that American women, since 1939, had become three and four sizes smaller. (17)

According to Friedan's findings, there was a strong emphasis on white North American women to be the glorified pretty, thin, feminine blonde who controls her weight and manages to be successful at one of the most difficult aspects of new motherhood—breastfeeding. To see this dominant image of female

beauty, one can look to pop culture's consistent idolization of the beautiful, well-shaped blondes, such as Jean Harlow, Marilyn Monroe, Jayne Mansfield, and Twiggy. While I will unpack the significance of this representation shortly when I discuss my theoretical framework for examining representation, it is important to note that the suburban witch's physical representation is rooted in the "ideal" feminine body and identity fostered during the Golden Age of Suburbia. It should be noted that the first actress to portray the wife as witch character was blonde bombshell Veronica Lake in the 1942 film *I Married a Witch*. In all of the narratives I examine, the witch is presented through this lens of perfection: Tansy is the classic beautiful blonde, petit wife; Alexandra is a tall, slim, dark-haired beauty, Jane a buxom redhead, and Sukie the fertile, petit, angelic blonde; and, finally, Elaine is the voluptuous, fair-skinned, blue-eyed, raven-haired bombshell. Much of the suburban witch's power—in regards to the men within these narratives—is initially based upon her physical idealization as hyperfeminine, able-bodied, weak, and thin. Given not just their physical beauty, but also their desire to care for and nurture the men in their lives (along with Alexandra and Sukie's blatant fertility), they are presented as ideal suburban women that the men in the narratives long for and wish to obtain as wives. It is significant to note the nurturing nature of all of these women, as their maternal instincts—even those without children—towards the men is what renders them not merely objects of sexual desire, but objects of marital desire. Witchcraft aside, these women are given a certain amount of white female power within the suburban setting due to their ability to fit the ideal suburban woman mould. These women are not initially presented as menacing witches, but beautiful, caring wives, who wish to build a home and cook meals just as much as they wish to fulfil the males' sexual appetites.

Betty Friedan's feminist work focuses primarily upon white, educated suburban women, and paints a bleak picture of suburban womanhood. She argues that, within suburbia, women found themselves lost and depressed, feeling deeply anxious over things they could not explain. She writes: "For over fifteen years women in America found it harder to talk about this problem than about

sex…[s]uddenly they realized they all shared the same problem, the problem that has no name" (Friedan, 19-20). According to Friedan, there was a well-documented "problem" with white, suburban women rooted in their loss of identity. Or that their identity as a suburban wife and mother was deeply oppressive. She writes: "By 1962 the plight of the trapped American housewife had become a national parlor game. Whole issues of magazines, newspaper columns, books learned and frivolous, educational conferences and television panels were devoted to the problem" (25). In early suburbanization, the wife/mother played a quintessential role as she was considered a necessity to the suburban male's ideal lifestyle. To achieve the "American Dream," the man must move to suburbia to build a family, which required a subservient wife to maintain the household and raise the children, regardless of any oppression this might cause her. Huq writes, "in suburbanization, to have the dutiful wife and family at the side of the primeval, neo-colonial male was almost a requirement, and as we have seen critics saw that her fate was to become trapped in what Weber might have called an iron cage of rationalized suburban existence" (Huq, 139). Numerous feminist thinkers such a Friedan, Beauvoir, Greer, and Hartmann point out that during the early Golden Age of suburbia, there was an importance placed on wife and motherhood being central to women's happiness. Rarely did these two things lead to female fulfillment, and often, when mixed with the pressures of suburban domestication, left women feeling melancholy and void. Hartmann writes: "Even during the [second world] war, the new public images of women designed to evoke their contributions to the national effort did not subsume the ageless ideal of woman as wife and mother…[t]hroughout the 1940s the popular culture continued to 'propagandize for romance,' and to uphold marriage as the key to female happiness, while psychologists insisted that women could enjoy mental health only through dependence upon a man" (Hartmann, 163-4). Hartmann also notes that this idolization of marriage did indeed have an effect, as in the 1940s—when the suburban witch first appeared in literature and film—"marriage became the central feature of women's lives even more than it had in the past. The marriage rate in 1940 was 105 per 1000 women aged

seventeen to twenty-nine" (164). It is also worth nothing that simply because a woman decided to become a homemaker did not mean that she had a decreased workload. In fact, choosing to become a suburban wife/mother often meant that more physical and emotional labor was required than that of the working woman: "A study made in the 1940s conformed with other research in finding that wage-earning wives devoted thirty-four hours a week to housekeeping, while full-time homemakers spent fifty-six" (Hartmann, 168). This notion that the suburban homemaker essentially committed herself to more than full-time work hours to maintain her home while her husband worked is significant to my work on the suburban witch as it emphasizes the importance of the work that white, suburban women were doing within the home, but which was misrecognized as magic or unrecognized as a given.

The notion that marriage and domestication are often presented as crucial, yet oppressive, to the female identity is also a reoccurring theme within the works of Simone de Beauvoir. As she writes in *The Second Sex*, "Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society. It is still true that most women are married, or have been, or plan to be, or suffer from not being" (475). This suggests that within patriarchal society, women are taught that marriage is their sole purpose and to be without a husband is considered a failure at femininity. De Beauvoir also notes that, even when women obtain a husband and fulfil their "destiny", they are still not rewarded with equality, but instead confined to their domestic and reproductive roles within the home: "A man is socially an independent and complete individual; he is regarded first of all as a producer whose existence is justified by the work he does for the group; we have seen why it is that the reproductive and domestic role to which woman is confined has no guaranteed her an equal dignity" (de Beauvoir 476). Germaine Greer's writing adheres to both Friedan, Hartmann, and de Beauvoir's beliefs that domestication and marriage entrap women as workers of emotional and reproductive labor, stating that the "patrilineal family depends upon the free gift by women of the right of paternity to men" (217). While this oppression and entrapment may not be true for all white, suburban women within the North American patriarchal society, it does seem to be

the common belief amongst feminist writing during early suburbanization. In 1943, the same year *Conjure Wife* was originally published, Friedrich Engels wrote *The Origin of the Family*, in which he writes, "The modern individual family is founded on the open or concealed slavery of the wife" (79). It is this notion that, during early suburbanization, the role of wife and mother was a form of slavery and oppression, that we must keep in mind when examining the depiction of wife as witch within the suburban gothic.

In her essay, "Cult of Domesticity", Andrea N. Hunt writes:

> The new middle class in the 19th century was influenced by the "separate sphere" ideology. This is the idea that men are rightfully the primary breadwinners in a family, and women should be homemakers. The separate sphere ideology brought forth a new ideal of womanhood that focused on domesticity, that is, family and home life. The cult of domesticity, also known as the 'cult of true womanhood,' was reinforced in popular culture at the time, for example, in magazines such as *Godey's Lady Book*, and later in *Ladies Home Journal*…Proper wives and mothers should have certain virtues, such as piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. Men were considered superior, and women were supposed to be submissive or obedient to them" (1).

A large body of feminist writers (Greer, de Beauviour, Friedan, Hartmann) when discussing the role of the woman in the domestic sphere, present her as powerless. The husband is the one who holds all the power, while the wife is supposed to remain submissive, which leads to her internal breakdown of sorts. The domesticated woman is without power and identity, which ultimately destroys her personhood. This belief is critical to the figure of the suburban witch. As previously stated, the suburban witch is almost always depicted as an ideal white woman who either initially accepts her domestication, or longs for it because it is the primary means of assimilation and acceptance as a woman in society. While her power originally lies within her idealization (she embodies "true womanhood" within the patriarchal

setting), the suburban witch allegorically plays with the "cult of domesticity" by putting the power typically ascribed to the man into the hands of the nurturing, "perfect" woman. The suburban witch initially embraces her domestic role, but is incapable of rejecting her power and becoming submissive. This research looks to feminist writing on domesticity—which often highlights the powerlessness of women—and considers how the suburban witch reimagines the suburban role.

As previously stated, the suburban witch always fulfills her idealized physical requirements, and is always a caring and maternal woman—however, unlike the domesticated women that Friedan, Hartmann, de Beauvoir or Hunt write about, the suburban witch is incapable of becoming submissive; instead, the suburban witch offers a counter-narrative of suburban womanhood. The view of American women in the 1950s and their "dominant myth of victimization" (Kaledin, 1) is squashed by the powerful witch; the angel in the home, acting as cleaner and cook, is replaced by the witch in the home, casting spells, albeit spells that result in cleaning and cooking. The suburban witch takes these concepts of female oppression and quiet desperation due to her lack of power and control, and sheds new light on them. Can a woman be a nurturing, maternal figure, while still embracing her power and identity? The answer is complex. Regarding the suburban witch as mother, the answer appears to be yes, a woman can embrace motherhood and witchcraft at the same time. However, the line between wife and witch is far less clear. It is rare to find narratives where the suburban witch is able to exist comfortably with a husband who accepts her power. Even in the light-hearted series *Bewitched*, Darrin is consistently uncomfortable with Samantha's great powers and would prefer that she did not use them. While the suburban witch certainly reimagines a more feminist perspective on middle-class female domesticity, she also reinforces the cult of domesticity, and suggests that no woman can ever be truly powerful when she allows a man to domesticate her.

Although my research focuses on depictions of women in suburban America from the mid-1940s to late-1970s, one of my source texts and one of my source films were released in the 1980s and reflect,

not only early feminists such as Friedan, but also subsequent feminist issues of power from the 1980s. To situate these concerns, I look to Susan Faludi who writes about the war on women in her text *Backlash*. Faludi argues that after the women's rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s, there was a backlash against women in all forms of media, as well as real life. During this period, suburban ideals surrounding keeping the woman obedient and in the home were once again restored. She writes: "At home, a much increased proportion of women complained to pollsters of male mistreatment, unequal relationships, and male efforts to, in the words of the Virginia Slims poll, 'keep women down'…[t]he truth is that the last decade has seen a powerful counterassault on women's rights, a backlash, an attempt to retract the handful of small and hard-won victories that the feminist movement did manage to win for women" (xviii). This attack on women once again demanded women to remain in the home and refrain from exerting any control over their reproduction. As Faludi writes: "We have seen New Right politicians condemn women's independence, antiabortion protestors fire-bomb women's clinics, fundamentalist preachers damn feminists as 'whores' and 'witches'" (xxi). During the backlash, representations of women were also bleak and women who chose to live "alternative" lifestyles—lesbians, prostitutes, or even single mothers—were often vilified in the media. In fact, any woman who exerted any form of power was often represented as villainous: "Usually hidden fears about strong women's powers are on bold display. In both *The War of the Roses* and *She-Devil*, the wives are virtual witches, controlling and conquering their husbands with a supernatural and deadly precision" (Faludi 137). Once again, we see women being steered towards the home and marriage and motherhood, only to be "punished" (at the very least via media) if they refused. Faludi notes of this negative representation: "women on the '80s soaps who resisted wedding marches risked death. In the real world in 1988, 8 percent of AIDS victims were women. In daytime TV—100 percent" (158). When pop culture and society disempower women, the suburban witch offers them a representation of empowerment and control in an environment where they often feel submissive and insubordinate. It is

important to take this backlash and these representations into account when we examine films and novels abut women from this period, even if the depictions themselves are based in the 1960s.

Given the suburban witch's representation of the suburban wife/mother as witch, the character creates an ontological problem that links her domesticity to liminality, rendering the character uncanny and abject. The suburban witch stands on the threshold of ideal, submissive suburban womanhood and defiant, powerful witchhood. She represents both the comforts of the caring mother and the danger of the disobedient witch. This makes her a character hard to categorize. She inhabits a liminal space in which she is uncanny and abject. I believe the use of the uncanny and abjection, along with this liminality, is what makes the figure of the suburban witch particularly unsettling as she represents both the ideal suburban woman as well as the menacing witch. However, presenting her domesticity as uncanny also provides the suburban witch with her power.

While Sigmund Freud was perhaps the first to write of the concept of the uncanny, his analysis does not coincide with the liminal feelings I wish to evoke within this research. Instead, I look to Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection. Kristeva's abjection, much like Freud's uncanny, explores the idea of something existing within two oppositional roles at once. In *Powers of Horror*, she writes of the abject: "A massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A 'something' that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me" (2). The suburban witch represents two known figures: the witch, and the suburban woman, but she is also radically different from both. Her engagement with witchcraft separates her from the ideal suburban woman, and her domesticity conflicts with her role as witch. Her existence is confusing, and to acknowledge her ability to exist in both roles destroys what we previously had believed to be true of either. The suburban witch is the whore and the Madonna existing

as one, and to acknowledge that is to destroy those oppositional binaries, which creates a sense of unease and terror. Kristeva writes: “Essentially different from ‘uncanniness,’ more violent, too, abjection is elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin; nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a memory” (5). This research holds that the suburban witch’s abjection—her violent uncanniness within her liminal space—is what grants her power. She is a woman who exists within a space that is often depicted as destructive to women’s identity, autonomy, and mental health. However, within that space she has found a way to be both be nurturing and powerful. The suburban witch utilizes her power for self-fulfillment, and even to aid in the fulfillment of her loved ones. She does not sacrifice one role to embody the other, thus enforcing her power as a character. The suburban witch presents a powerful and nuanced image of domestic womanhood that does not fit cleanly into one role, but rather exists within opposing roles, much to the anxiety of the men within the narratives.

## Critical Whiteness: The Power (and Disempowerment) of the White Woman

In Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*, the young white women accused of witchcraft admittedly learn their practice from Tituba, the only black woman within the text. While Tituba is named, she is a one-dimensional character whose power is never examined and who’s identity lacks nuance. This same problematic representation also occurs within the suburban gothic. In *Conjure Wife*, the central female character of Tansy admittedly learns about magic during field work with women of colour, but those women are neither named nor examined. These representations of the suburban witch often allude to work by women of colour but fail to pay them proper acknowledgement. Much like the young white women in Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*, Tansy in *Conjure Wife* learns about nature-based magic from women of colour while she is serving as her husband’s research assistant in an unnamed third-world country. Like Tituba in *The Crucible*, these women are not given a voice, but rather serve as a base of

magical knowledge for white women, who then make it their own and create the narrative surrounding it.

Allegorically speaking, it could be argued that this appropriation of magic is akin to the failure to acknowledge the experiences and concepts espoused by black feminist thinkers. For example, the suburban witch begs the question of whether women can exist outside of the whore/Madonna binary. Can a woman be more nuanced, or must she exist in a neat little box so that she avoids creating ontological problems? This is a question black feminist thinkers have been discussing for decades. As Audre Lorde writes: "There's always someone asking you to underline one piece of yourself—whether it's Black, woman, mother, dyke, teacher, etc.—because that's the piece that they need to key in to. They want to dismiss everything else" (Audre Lorde, *Conversations with Audre Lorde*, p. 31). The suburban witch also examines feminine power, and the ways in which patriarchal society wishes to destroy women's power, a concept bell hooks has been discussing for decades: "Sometimes people try to destroy you, precisely because they recognize your power—not because they don't see it, but because they see it and they don't want it to exist" (bell hooks, *Redefining Realness*, p. 195). Within narratives surrounding the suburban witch, we often see groups of women coming together to form covens to find power within their community, which once again has been a longstanding concept of empowerment for women of colour: "One of the most vital ways we sustain ourselves is by building communities of resistance, places where we know we are not alone" (bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*, p. 227). Through their whiteness, white women are permitted a subjectivity and power within the witch narrative that women of colour are not allowed. White women are allowed to exist as individuals, and normalize their desires to have power in or out of the domestic sphere. So, one type of individualized subjectivity is set as a norm, against which the other is invisibilized. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the idea of shame has always played a crucial role in the story of the white woman as witch: shaming her for her power and knowledge so that she may

become subordinate to maintain her insider role. Using shame as a tool of control has long been used by women of colour when discussing their oppression within the capitalist patriarchy: “Shaming is one of the deepest tools of imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy because shame produces trauma and trauma often produces paralysis” (bell hooks, 231).

If white women are engaging with the magic, beliefs, and theories associated with black women, then why are the white women represented while the black women remain invisible? Indeed, it is not until the 1990s that black women begin to appear as suburban witches within popular culture (*The Craft*, 1996). I believe this is because white women are given subject positions within the suburban gothic whereas women of colour are often ignored and left invisible throughout the genre. Within the suburban gothic genre, white women are permitted to have subjectivity—they are given agency and identity concerning particular forms of knowledge and practice—even though much of that knowledge and practice stems from black women’s knowledge and practice and even though it is put in the service of a subjectivity that is constructed to be inferior to men. As white women are given subject position in the suburban gothic, they become the subject of a particular discourse, thus the bearers of its power/knowledge. Women of colour are robbed of this subject position within the suburban gothic—or the witch narrative, overall—so when their knowledge and practices are attributed to white women, it then becomes the white women’s knowledge and power. It is appropriated. Due to this issue of subject position, white women are able to locate themselves in the witch’s discourse, and thus become its “subjects” by subjecting ourselves to its meanings power; whereas women of colour do not see themselves in these discourses at all, as bell hooks argues in her essay “The Oppositional Gaze”.

While the suburban witch is consistently white, much of her knowledge and tools of empowerment stem from women of colour and black feminist thinkers; however, women of colour are never acknowledged in any of these texts. While the suburban witch suggests the ways in which white women are exploited, the way she appropriates women of colour’s knowledge and tools of

empowerment suggests she is exploitative herself even in going so far as to demand her particular liberation rather than the liberation of all women to choose. While this research focuses specifically on white women as witches in suburbia—because black women could never take up the subject position that would allow them to be witches with the particular needs and desires these witches centralize—I am hopeful that this information may lead to greater discussions on women's empowerment and the ways in which white women borrow from women of colour without acknowledging their knowledges and histories. Women of colour as witches are consistently under-represented in popular culture, and while this research does not address their few depictions, it acknowledges the ways in which the suburban witch exploits women of colour's knowledge and methods of empowerment.

It is important to note how the figure of the white suburban witch appropriates the knowledge of women of colour to centralize their own needs. As stated in the Introduction and Methodology chapters, historically speaking, white women in North America accused of witchcraft were often mid-wives, women with herbal knowledge, or women who existed outside the boundaries of normative society. However, in the literature and film I analyze, the white women who engage with witchcraft practice hoodoo magic and engage with witch stereotypes that are exclusive to women of colour. Hoodoo is a practice of conjuration, witchcraft, and rootwork that came to America as a result of the transatlantic slave trades. It is rooted in African spirituality and was originally found in places such as Louisiana. These hoodoo practices involved "seeking" processes, herbal magic, voodoo dolls, supernatural luck spells, and so on. When we see the women in *Conjure Wife*, *The Witches of Eastwick*, and *The Love Witch* engage with magic, it is not from the standpoint of white women's North American history with witchcraft, but rather that of the women of colour's engagement with witchcraft in North America—a fact that is barely addressed. In this sense, the white women within these narratives have thus taken on the demonized traits of racialized women; not only through magic, but also through their sexuality. All of the white women depicted are heavily sexualized which deems them impure—especially

in *The Witches of Eastwick.* Anne McClintock in *Imperial Leather* writes: "The idea of racial 'purity', for example, depends on the rigorous policing of women's sexuality; as an historical notion, then, racial 'purity' in inextricably implicated in the dynamics of gender and cannot be understood without a theory of gender power" (61). McClintock writes: "Under imperialism, I argue, certain groups are expelled and obliged to inhabit the impossible edges of modernity: the slum, the ghetto, the garret, the brothel, the convent, the colonial Bantustan and so on. Abject peoples are those whom industrial imperialism rejects but cannot do without: slaves, prostitutes, the colonized, domestic workers, the insane, the unemployed, and so on" (72). McClintock also speaks of the witch figure of Gagool, a black female witch figure whose description mirrors the white female witches I examine far more than that of the white female midwife history speaks of. As McClintock writes:

> "Gagool…Haggard's description of her, eloquent of a profound racial and sexual anxiety, is a thumbnail catalogue of the stigmata of debasement associated with African women…Gagool's preternatural knowledge places the men entirely in her power. Her merest touch during the 'witch-smelling' is equivalent to a ritual castration…Repeatedly and ritualistically invoked by her female isanusis as the 'mother, old mother' of the land, she holds all power of life and death. What appears to have appalled Haggard was the mortal consequences for men of the power of female generation. To compound matters, 'she and only she knows the secret of the Three Witches'" (246).

For these reasons, I believe that the suburban witch also proves to be a figure of appropriation.

The character of the suburban witch not only sheds light upon power dynamics between the sexes in the suburban sphere, but also notes the suburban woman's power via her whiteness. Within this research, I believe that the suburban witch's whiteness constructs both her power and the kind of disempowerment she experiences. That is, being white and middle-class allows her certain privileges to gain entry into the idealized suburban domain, for instance, she is not forced to work outside the home

without her family in order to survive. At the same time, her entry into the idealized suburban home then leads to the kind of submissive domesticity particular to white women, in that she does not have the choice to work outside the home. Hunt writes that this ideal nuclear family model that is often pushed within suburban narratives was not the reality of most North American families, and instead applies only to a privileged—and primarily white—few:

> "The standard North America family model has not been the reality for most families, and the economic conditions on which it is based are fading. For example, both parents in working-class and minority families have historically worked for pay. Working-class and minority women have had to construct unique notions of womanhood and motherhood, based on both their labor market and domestic obligations" (4).

Therefore, the notion of the ideal, suburban, domestic homemaker does not often apply to minority and working-class women, and is instead a role almost exclusively created for white, middle-class women to live up to, but is normalized as a model for all women nonetheless. This links back to the notion of care, as the domestic suburban woman is supposed to adhere to a certain, self-sacrificial role of "perfect" motherhood, much different than that of black women who must work outside the home to help care for white women's children, and cannot avail of this type of family care at all. The type of care that is expected of white suburban women does not necessarily exist outside of the middle-class, white, suburban setting, as Hunt writes: "These historical patterns of paid employment for mothers call into question the cult of domesticity and a unitary model of mothering. In *Black Feminist Thought*, sociologist Patricia Hill Collins argues that the labor market experiences of African-Americans have significantly diverged from the breadwinner-homemaker model, indicating that mothering takes place within specific historical contexts, framed by interlocking structure of race, class, and gender" (4). Given Hill Collins argument, this research argues that this idealized, Angel in the house, stay-at-home mother role is specifically white. This research also argues that the suburban witch offers a scathing commentary on

the role of mothering and womanhood within the white, middle-class, heteronormative suburban environment. All of the women depicted as suburban witches within my corpus are presented as caring, nurturing women who certainly fulfil many of the duties expected of the suburban wife/mother. However, their engagement with witchcraft as a form of self-empowerment and identification suggests that white women must engage in certain acts of domestic disobedience if they wish to maintain their autonomy and wield their own power.

Domestication aside, the suburban witch is also an insider-Other, which is one of the key concepts I will be using to address my research of her representation. In her book *Daughters of Suburbia: Growing Up White, Middle Class, and Female*, Lorraine Kenny argues that white, suburban women live lives that are intentionally taken for granted (2) given their status as insider-Others. She defines the insider-Other female in this specific context as "always already outsiders within the normative suburban world they inhabit. Girls and women occupy an ambivalent and at times contradictory position in relation to the norm. They are 'insider-Others.' Insider-Others are figures who are both insiders and outsiders. At times they can appear fully ensconced on the inside, but upon closer examination there is something not quite normative enough about their identity or how they carry themselves in the normative world," (3). I will be treating the women within the narratives I examine as insider-Others, as they meet the requirements Kenny speaks of: white, middle-class, and female. They are also all young, beautiful, slim, able-bodied, and heterosexual. However, they are also Others within the suburban domain both due to their womanhood and their witchhood, a form of disobedient self-empowerment. It is almost as if the suburban witch is a limit-situation of ideal femininity. She is everything hegemonic society demands of femininity, but it is not enough, thus revealing that there is no end or final goal of ideal womanhood: it is always already inadequate. Given this concept of the insider-Other and my examination, my research then becomes intersectional given that I am examining these women in regard to their gender, race, and class. I also believe this concept fits well within the

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suburban gothic as insider-Other characters have a tendency to call attention to the normal—which suburbia is supposed to epitomize—and to make the normal (their whiteness, middle-class status, womanhood) strange, which the women within these narratives do through their association with witchcraft. Within this research, there is an emphasis on the Other status of the insider-Other. While Kenny's Otherhood of the insider-Other simply refers to the suburban woman's womanhood, the Otherhood of the suburban witch also refers to her role as witch, thus amplifying her lack of belonging within the suburban domain. The women's role as witch adds an additional layer to their Otherness, which alienates them even more from the men within the narratives, and suggests that there is no room for powerful women within the patriarchal, suburban, domestic sphere.

During the Golden Age of suburbia, suburbia was almost an exclusively, middle-to upper-class, white domain. Early American suburbia was a planned community that alienated black, Latina, and Asian peoples by enforcing restrictive real-estate covenants and urban transport infrastructure, such as public buses. In her initial depiction from the 1940s-1980s, the suburban witch is almost strictly a white, heteronormative, middle-class woman. It is not until she is repurposed as an adolescent in the 1990s and onward that we begin to see witches in suburbia who represent different races, classes, and sexualities. I engage in a thorough examination of how the ideal, white, female is oppressed, maintained, and ultimately damned within the suburban context. All the suburban witches I study come very close to achieving the ideal suburban lifestyle given their physical appearance, caring nature, and desire to live the comfortable suburban life. However, her witchcraft—which gives her both power and a voice—alienates her from her male counterparts. In some cases, this merely results in male insecurity, in others it leads to banishment and murder, again suggesting there is no place for empowered white women within the traditional domestic sphere. I will also be looking to critical whiteness theorist Anne Louise Keating and her essay "Interrogating 'Whiteness', (De)Constructing 'Race'." Keating's essay calls for an examination of whiteness and questions how it functions in the construction of the "American"

identity. For my research, I will not be ignoring the whiteness of these women, but rather incorporating it into their identities as insider-Others. The whiteness is detrimental to their inclusion within white, patriarchal society, while also being significant to their representation as idealized women.

Representation: The Witch and the Suburban Woman

When Dutch and British settlers began to build lives in New England, witchcraft came with them, resulting in the infamous Salem trials which rocked Massachusetts from its foundation in 1692. The mania of the Salem witch trials are thought to have begun in January of 1692, when the daughter and niece of Reverend Samuel Parris of Salem Village became ill. When the two girls failed to improve, the village doctor made a diagnosis of bewitchment, which put into motion the forces that would ultimately result in the death by hanging of five men and fourteen women between June and September of that year (Flevotomos, 103). However, since the thirteenth century, accusations of witchcraft have potentially claimed millions of lives. In her *book Women, Men, and the Psychology of Power*, Hilary M. Lips writes: "Historians estimate that anywhere from one to nine million people, the vast majority (85 percent) of them female, were put to death for being judged guilty of witchcraft or died in the process of judicial proceedings. Feminist theorists compare it to the Nazi holocaust" (17). It is trite to point out the misogyny of the witch trials, as they are historically a gross abuse of patriarchal power to justify the killing of innocent women for the empowerment of patriarchal social authority. In her book *Witches: A Psychoanalytical Exploration of the Killing of Women*, Evelyn Heinemann writes: "While the victims of witchcraft trials were usually women, the accusers in court were mainly men…80 percent of the accusers in the witchcraft trials were men. The explanation of why women became the major victims of witch persecutions can be seen in the Church's misogynistic attitude" (19).

If the creation of the witch stems from a place of anxiety and fear in regards to feminine power, it is not surprising that the fictional depiction of the witch was originally evil and sinister. In the gothic

genre, which eventually inspired the creation of the horror genre, the witch is rarely portrayed with historical accuracy. Instead, she is a villainess, typically an old hag, out to hurt those who are young and pure; she is the dark Other. While European gothic fiction paid more attention to masculine monsters such as werewolves, vampires, and the undead, it is said that "the blood of witches has nurtured many an American tale of terror" (Gross, 31). Gothic fiction has always been reflective of societal fears and anxieties, and the depiction of the witch in its texts echoes that anxiety in regards to powerful women. A key example of this is the 1928 American gothic novel, *A Mirror for Witches*, which emphasises the "essentially alienated feelings of the early Americans towards their new home, a land full of unknown terror" (Gross, 31). In the novel, Doll Bilby is a woman perceived to be an evil witch and seductress. She is everything the Puritan man fears: "wild, natural, uninhibited, sexual, and powerful" (Gross, 33). Because of this, she is condemned as a witch and depicted as evil and highly sexualized, capable of making men engage in base sexual acts against their will. The gothic genre consistently portrayed women as either powerful, but an evil witch, or powerless, but innocent, making clear the goal towards which women should aspire if they want to live. It is not until the emergence of the gothic subgenre—the suburban gothic—that the figure of the witch is repurposed as a figure of positive, white female empowerment.

Another question that the suburban witch character begs is: why the witch? Why tackle the problematic gender-based power dynamics within post-war American suburbia through this particular figure? In *The Suburban Gothic in American Popular Culture*, Bernice Murphy writes that "one cannot embark upon a discussion of the twentieth-century witch in American popular culture without some mention of the infamous historical events which helped make witches and witchcraft one of colonial America's most contentious issues" (41). To understand why the representation of suburban woman as witch is important, we must once again look to the witch in the historical American setting, as the fictional representation of the suburban witch frequently alludes to the historical witch, both literally—

as the Salem Witch Trials are mentioned in all narratives—and metaphorically, as often the persecution of the suburban witch pays homage to the persecution of the historical witch. To examine the gender politics bound up with the persecution of the North American witch, I look to Silvia Federici, who argues that the witch trials were not a case of mass hysteria, but rather a specific attack on powerful women and women's bodies/sexuality. Federici writes:

> With respect to the Christian denial of female sexuality and the demonization of the female body, the sexual cultural norms instituted by the burgher/capitalist class have been deemed a turning point, being seemingly inspired by more utilitarian concerns. Thus the Protestant reintegration of sex into matrimonial life as a 'remedy to concupiscence,' and the legitimate role for women in the community as wives and mothers, have often been portrayed as a break with the past. But in reality, what capitalism reintegrated into the realm of acceptable female social behaviour was a tamed, domesticated form of sexuality…women would have to conform to be socially accepted in the developing capitalist society: sexless, obedient, submissive, resigned to subordination to the male world…Women were terrorized through fantastic accusations, horrendous torture, and public executions because their social power had to be destroyed. (11-13)

As I am engaging with misogynistic representations of witches within popular media, I explore how these acts of misogyny and femicide resonate with suburban women. Much like the witch of colonial times, the suburban witch is shamed by men for her power. During the Golden Age of the American suburb, the suburban woman was taught to conform—be sexless, obedient, submissive, resigned to subordination. And while within the suburban gothic, men do not kill witches, they do however pressure women to relinquish their power for societal and marital acceptance. Whether it be the historical New England witch or the suburban woman who longs for autonomy, control, and power, there is no place for either of these women within the patriarchal setting.

When looking to the Friedan-inspired woman, the role of mother was deemed a woman's sole purpose and goal. However, at the same time, there was still a desire for bodily autonomy amongst

white, suburban women. As Hartmann notes: “In all socioeconomic groups, except for the 6 percent with the least income and education, a majority of white women attempted to control their fertility” (171). Of course, in the early years of feminist theory and suburbanization, the birth control pill did not exist and abortion was not legal, meaning white, suburban women were often looking to herbal or illegal methods to control their bodily autonomy. Hartmann writes:

> No adequate statistics on abortion existed, but medical experts estimated the number of illegal abortions to be from 300,000 to 1 million per year…[t]he sample was highly skewed in favor of economically comfortable, highly educated and younger women; between 20 and 25 percent of these women who had ever married reported that they had had criminal abortions (172).

This suggests that, even in a time of glorified motherhood, white, married women were attempting to control their fertility, regardless of the legal consequences. If a woman wanted an abortion from her doctor “the remedies included ‘education’ of the woman and her husband, psychotherapy and shock treatment…according to a 1945 obstetrics text—by the late 1940s women found it even more difficult to obtain a hospital abortion” (Hartmann, 174). The notion that educated, married, white suburban women were still attempting to procure abortions suggests that the reality of wife and motherhood did not live up to its idolization. While these women were told they would find power within the home, their power was actually being taken in regard to their reproductive rights. If suburban women were being robbed of their bodily autonomy regarding equality and reproductive rights, that connects well to the historical and biblical depictions of the witch, which I will expand upon when I discuss representation.

When examining the patriarchal fear surrounding women’s knowledge of the natural world and women sharing their knowledge with one another, I look to Silvia Federici, a feminist scholar whose primary work is based around the figure of the witch and capitalism’s negative effect on women. When speaking about the persecution of women as witches Federici writes:

> It is in this context that the attack on women should be located. Because of their unique

> relationship to the process of reproduction, women in many pre-capitalist societies have been credited with a special understanding of the secrets of nature, presumably enabling them to procure life and death and discover the hidden property of things. Practicing magic (as healers, folk doctors, herbalists, midwives, makers of love potions) was also for many women a source of employment and undoubtedly a source of power (8).

When viewed through this lens, the witch-hunt's attack on women was based not on the evil-doing of women, but rather a fear of women's knowledge surrounding the natural world and their bodily knowledge about preventing or ending pregnancy. The persecution of witches was also rooted in a patriarchal fear of female financial independence and empowerment. Federici adds, "The witch hunt instituted a regime of terror on all women, from which emerged the new model of femininity to which women would have to conform to be socially accepted in the developing capitalist society: sexless, obedient, submissive, resigned to subordination to the male world, accepting as natural their confinement to a sphere of reproductive activities that in capitalism have been completely devalued" (13). When we look to Federici's examination of women as witches and the fear of female empowerment and knowledge, I believe there is an obvious overlap with early feminist writers such as Friedan and de Beauvoir. Federici suggests that women in early colonial America were persecuted as witches if they obtained certain knowledge/jobs, and that early North American capitalism pressured women to become obedient housewives and mothers, submissive to men and confined to the home. To step outside of this role was to risk being labeled a witch. The same could be said of North American suburban culture: women were taught to embrace the domestic sphere and find fulfillment as wives and mothers. To refuse this lifestyle was to be a social outcast, which is what typically occurred with the suburban witch. Federici also notes that during the North American witch-hunt there developed a patriarchal anxiety surrounding women sharing their knowledge with one another and working together. She notes that the word "gossip" had originally meant "female friend," but in colonial times the term began to take on a disparaging new meaning in an attempt to dissuade women from sharing

knowledge with one another (73). In the context of the suburban gothic and the suburban witch, women are presented as rejecting their submissive domestic roles, while still engaging with their roles as carers. They learn about and explore their witchcraft through their relationships with other women and become outcasts within the suburban setting once their role as witch is revealed, regardless of their desire to remain in the domestic sphere and continue their roles as caregivers. The women's representation as witch is significant because it offers them a form of disobedient power, as well as a linkage to other women and their knowledge, all of which prove to be unacceptable within the patriarchal society.

To examine the significance of representation within my corpus, I look to Griselda Pollock's work *Vision and Difference*. In it, Pollock writes, "Demanding that women be considered not only changes what is studied and what becomes relevant to investigate but it challenges the existing disciplines politically" (1). I examine the figure of the suburban witch by unpacking her representation as both suburban woman and witch so that I may uncover her historical and feminist implications regarding white women and knowledge/power. I believe the suburban gothic is an under-investigated topic and hope my research will open up new conversations not just about white women being represented as witches, but all women. Pollock notes that "representation stresses something refashioned, coded in rhetorical, textual or pictorial terms, quite distinct from its social existence" (6). The suburban witch offers an alternative depiction of both the witch and the white suburban woman that differs from traditional depictions, which I believe reveals underlying anxieties regarding the empowered insider-Other white woman. Pollock writes that "representation articulates—puts into words, visualizes, puts together—social practices and forces which are not, like trees, there to be seen but which we theoretically know condition our existence" (6). The figure of the suburban witch puts known gender and power dynamics at the forefront of the suburban narrative so that we may unpack and reconsider them. In my analysis, I explore how the suburban witch functions within each narrative and consider

how she both reinforces and destabilises dominate belief systems about the representation of suburban women. As Pollock writes:

> Understanding of what specific artistic practices are doing, their meanings and social effects, demands therefore a dual approach. First, the practice must be located as part of the social struggles between classes, races and genders, articulating with other sites of representation. But second we must analyze what any specific practice is doing, what meaning is being produced, and how and for whom (7).

When unpacking the figure of the suburban witch, I consider the significance of her representation as white suburban woman and as witch, and examining the importance of both of these individual representations, then discussing how they work together and what they do together. I take into consideration work on both representations of the witch and representations of the suburban woman. Robin Morgan, for instance, made a claim for "witches as the original resistance fighters against the oppression of women. This critical position understood the witch as a metaphor for female resistance…Mary Daly saw in witches a hidden history of powerful women, and reclaimed the figure of the Hag as a powerful, liberated woman" (Moseley, 410). Representations of the suburban woman tend to offer bleaker depictions, where "portrayals of the fairer sex in the suburbs in films in particular have increasingly shown female discontent at comfortable, even emotionally numbing, suburban surroundings resulting in mental breakdown, suicide, vengeance and 'playing away' in marital infidelity, the notion of women on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Yet the daily lived reality of most suburban women—juggling work with caring for children and ageing parents—is far from the representation. It is about 'getting on' with it. Once could argue from a Marxist perspective that the history of women's representations in popular culture is one of compromise and limitation imposed upon them by the logic of late capitalism" (Huq, 158).

As I am critically analysing the fictional character of the suburban witch within film and literature, representation plays a key role within my work. In the films and novels I will be examining, I

am not looking for an exact mirror to the world, but rather a fictional depiction of the plight of the suburban woman and how she comes to be oppressed and why being represented as a witch might prove to be empowering for her. Pollock writes that "representation articulates—puts into words, visualizes, puts together—social practices and forces which are not, like trees, there to be seen but which we theoretically know condition our existence" (6), and the suburban witch articulates the white suburban woman's desire for empowerment. This exploration of representation also renders this research feminist, as "feminist interventions demand recognition of gender power relations, making visible the mechanisms of male power, the social construction of sexual difference and the role of cultural representations in that construction" (Pollock 9).

The character of the suburban witch examines the plight of the white, middle-class, suburban woman during the Golden Age of the American suburb. More importantly, it examines the psychosocial anxiety surrounding powerful women and women who feel disempowered. In this sense, the figure of the suburban witch becomes an allegory of anxiety: both the anxiety patriarchal society feels regarding powerful women, and the anxiety middle-class white suburban women feel about their lives as disempowered housewives and mothers. The suburban woman's representation as witch is significant, as few other female figure has proven more anxiety inducing to the patriarchal norm than the grotesque and menacing witch. The suburban witch's duality of suburban housewife and witch allegorizes Betty Friedan's theory that women are split in two:

> In an earlier time, the image of woman was also split into two—the good, pure woman on the pedestal, and the whore of the desires of the flesh. The split in the new image opens a different fissure—the feminine woman, whose goodness includes the desires of the flesh, and the career woman, whose evil includes every desire of the separate self. The new feminine morality story is the exorcising of the forbidden career dream, the heroine's victory over Mephistopheles: the devil, first in the form of a career woman, who threatens to take away the heroine's husband or child, and finally, the devil inside the heroine herself, the dream of independence, the discontent of spirit, and even the feeling of a separate

identity that must be exorcised to win or keep the love of husband and child (46).

The suburban witch embodies the good pure woman on the pedestal, as well as a sexualized woman who fulfills her desires. However, in Friedan terms, the role of witch is more allegorical for a career. It is the career as witch that takes the woman out of the home and empowers her, putting the "devil inside" her. The way in which Friedan writes of anxiety surrounding career women is not unlike the way one writes about anxiety surrounding witches: "The myth that these women were 'unnatural monsters' was based on the belief that to destroy the God-given subservience of women would destroy the home and make slaves of men" (Friedan, 86). Within these narratives, the role of witch is significant as it alludes to anxieties surrounding women and power.

## Analysis

Representations of the suburban witch not only allegorize gender and power dynamics within the suburban setting, but also allude to the persecution of the historical witch, reframe the early feminist belief that middle-class domestication was highly oppressive to women, and examines how white women exploit the knowledge of women of colour. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* is woven throughout all of these narratives, even *Conjure Wife*, which was written almost twenty years prior. Friedan's discussion of the plight of the white suburban woman is central to all of these narratives. While Friedan speaks of the "problem with no name", the suburban witch exists as the woman with no name. Part suburban housewife, part powerful witch, she transgresses all of her boundaries and exists in an abject and liminal space between the idealized woman and the menacing hag. She embodies two opposing binaries which strikes terror into the patriarchal society. Her representation articulates barely concealed truths about patriarchal North American society: the fear of powerful women. The suburban witch's dual roles also present the character as a grotesque Other, rendering the suburban witch abject and uncanny. The character is also culturally situated in feminine anxiety, as the figure often appears during pivotal moments of psychosocial anxiety for white, middle-class women. The suburban witch reflects not only on psychosocial anxieties facing white, middle-class, heteronormative American women during the Golden Age of the American suburb, but also what problems were facing these women when these particular narratives were made. For example, *Conjure Wife* reflects not only traditional suburban anxieties, but also allegorizes feminine domestication anxieties, and the fear of being "sent back to the home" after being permitted to work during the war. *The Witches of Eastwick* continues the theme of anxiety surrounding suburbanization and female domestication during the Golden Age of suburbia—when the novel and film are set—but also acknowledges the psychosocial anxieties facing white, middle-class American women during the 1980s, when the novel and film were released. Susan Faludi's "backlash" is a clear influence on the film, and rebellious women, witches,

divorcees, and "bad" mothers, are depicted through a far more feminist and nuanced light. *The Love Witch,* much like all representations of the suburban witch in the Golden Age of the suburb, grapples with the oppressive nature of domestication, however, this film, while set in the late-1960s/early 1970s, was written and filmed in pre-Me Too, post-Steubenville America, when the spotlight on rape culture was growing. While the suburban witch is a fictional character who is depicted within a narrative myth of suburbia, this research will historically ground the societal relevance of these narratives by unpacking what feminine anxieties they allegorize and shed light on.

**Part One: The Post-War Witch**

Since her initial appearance in the 1940s, the Suburban Witch has tackled representations of power and gender dynamics within the domestic suburban setting. These representations shed a feminist light on the inequality of gender-based power within suburbia, revealing the difficulties of being a powerful woman within a male dominated society—even in the domestic, and supposedly feminine, sphere of the suburban home. As Griselda Pollock writes in *Vision and Difference*, "Feminist interventions demand recognition of gender power relations, making visible the mechanisms of male power, the social construction of sexual difference and the role of cultural representations in that construction" (9). Representing the white suburban woman as a witch demands an investigation of power within the suburban home, given the liminality held by the suburban witch character, as she exists as both idealized suburban woman and menacing witch—menacing in the sense that she poses a threat to heteronormative, middle-class, white, patriarchal structures. The suburban witch poses this threat simply through her use of her magic. By engaging with magic, the suburban witch exerts power over men, nature, and their own lives and bodies, deviating from the docile suburban housewife norm and revealing that the hegemonic system is neither absolute nor universal. The suburban witch is never merely the woman who vacuums, prepares the dinners, and drives the kids to school—though she often does do those things; she is also creative. She uses her magic to pull strings to aid her husband's career.

She uses her power to seduce and charm. She is able to covertly thrive within a suburban patriarchy during a time when the housewife was idealized as submissive (this is apart of her magic, to have the power to hide her power and make it look magical); yet she is also overtly powerful, even though her power is always viewed as a threat to men—even when her power benefits them.

Bernice Murphy writes that "when a feminine ideal of such ideological importance in post-war American society as that of the maternal, modern, ultra-domesticated housewife is suggestively combined with that of the disruptive, archaic and powerful witch, the resulting hybrid figure has the potential not only to tell us a great deal about the conflicted position in which American women often found themselves during this time, but also further testifies to the manner in which gothic and horror inflected texts can illuminate barely concealed truths" (41). The barely concealed truth the suburban witch illuminates is that within the suburban, white, patriarchal setting, there is no space for powerful women to exist. Sharon Russell persuasively attributes to the fact that, "as a horror figure, the witch 'embodies fears men would rather forget…[b]ecause witches are believed to have the power to cause impotence, they are the ultimate expression of male fears of castration, and as such they cannot be confronted too often on screen…horror is usually perpetrated on women, rather than by them" (Murphy 43). Though the suburban witch never physically castrates any men or causes them literal impotence, they do consistently take the power and control away from the men in their lives, which causes the men anxiety and anger. In *Conjure Wife*, Norman is devastated to find out that so many of his professional successes were aided by his witch wife, Tansy. In *The Witches of Eastwick*, Daryl, a powerful warlock himself, becomes unhinged and vengeful when he realizes his three witch lovers, Alexandra, Sukie, and Jane, are capable of performing magic on him, causing him to act against his will. In *The Love Witch*, Elaine believes she has found her perfect match, until she is rejected by her lover after he discovers her power. As Murphy continues, "ultimately the witch must choose between settling down with the mortal love of her life or continuing to live as a powerful, carefree, but lonely witch…it is a plot

device which reflects the powerful drive towards domesticity and marriage which existed during the first two decades of the post-war era" (43). In regards to depictions of gender and power relationships within the post-war American suburb, the suburban witch suggests that there is no place for powerful women, and that a woman may either be powerful and free (a witch), or domestic and contained (a wife); there is no true space for this dual woman.

During World War II, many women joined the workforce as thousands of men fought overseas. However, as the war ended, pressure was put on women to return to their rightful place: the home. While women had been encouraged to work while the men were away, the end of World War II saw a shift in the American mentality surrounding gender roles. As Eugenia Kaledin writes in *Mothers and More: American Women in the 1950s*, "The period after World War II was a time of value upheaval…[t]he family, women were told over and over, was the core of a free society. The ambivalence that most new mothers felt about going out to work was steadily reinforced by a society that did not want them competing with returning veterans for the best full-time jobs" (i). This push, Betty Friedan argued, to keep women in the home and focused solely on their husbands and children, caused a great identity crisis for white, middle-class women, and often left them feeling empty and powerless: "She has no identity except as a wife and mother. She does not know who she is herself. She waits all day for her husband to come home at night to make her feel alive" (Friedan, 29). This reinforced domestication during the end of the war left many white, middle-class suburban women feeling as if they lacked identity or control, and it was then that the powerful suburban housewife—the suburban witch—first arrived.

In the 2016 film *The Love Witch*, the central character, Elaine, is accused by a female friend of being "brainwashed by the patriarchy." Elaine is a beautiful white woman in her late-20s who longs to find a man to domesticate her so that she may sacrifice her own wants and desires in exchange for servitude to a husband. However, while Elaine proves capable of attracting the desire of multiple men,

one thing consistently stands in the way of her goal of becoming a submissive suburban housewife: Elaine is a powerful witch. Throughout the film, her nature-based spells often go awry, leading men to madness, rejection, and death. Elaine desires the traditional domestic life, but her power results in an inability to find a male partner. Throughout the suburban gothic genre, the suburban woman who plays dual roles as wife and witch is often faced with this problem: does she reject her power and fully domesticate herself, or does she maintain her power and find herself incapable of fulfilling the traditional domestic role? Within the suburban witch narrative, these always appear to be her only two choices. Even when the suburban witch is presented in a more comedic role, such as that of Samantha in *Bewitched*, the same central problem always arises: the suburban male's inability to accept his wife's power forces him to insist on her rejection of magic and to give herself up to a life of fulfilling domestic duties. As Samantha's husband, Darrin, says, upon discovering her witchhood: "You're going to have to learn to be a suburban housewife. You're going to have to learn to cook, keep house, and go round to my mother's every Friday night" ("I Darrin take this Witch," *Bewitched*, 1964). Throughout the history of the suburban witch I chart, she is never able to fully reject her power, nor is she ever able to find a male partner willing or able to accept her power. Only the film adaptation of *The Witches of Eastwick* finds the suburban witch in a happy ending; however, this comes about through the creation of a family unit comprised of other women. In texts such as *Conjure Wife*, the central character of Tansy keeps her husband, though he remains uneasy and insecure about her power. In the suburban gothic genre, white female power examined through a patriarchal lens, and displays the white male discomfort of powerful women.

Fritz Leiber's 1943 novel *Conjure Wife* was one of the very first suburban gothic novels, and one of the very first appearance of the suburban witch. Though written twenty years prior to Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, it appears to directly address Friedan's theory that post-War suburban women's "only dream was to be perfect wives and mothers; their highest ambition to have five children and a

beautiful house, their only fight to get and keep their husbands. They had no thought for the unfeminine problems of the world outside the home; they wanted the men to make the major decisions" (18). The novel tells the story of Norman, a New England college professor, who discovers that his wife Tansy has joined a coven with several other professor's wives. Norman and Tansy live in a small college suburb that "seemed to wear bravely its middle-class intellectual trappings of books and prints and record-albums" (6). The novel quickly establishes that Norman is fond of their restrictive suburban lifestyle, and relishes in its sexual suppression and societal taboos as a way of maintaining a "pure" suburban life: "Norman smiled. He was in a mood to cherish warmly the funny, cold little culture with its taboos against mentioned reality, its elaborate suppression of sex, its insistence on a stoical ability to withstand a monotonous routine of business or drudgery—and in the midst, performing the necessary rituals to keep dead ideas alive, like a college of witch-doctors in their stern stone tents, powerful, property-owning Hempnell" (6). However, Norman's world is quickly turned upside down when he invades his wife's personal space. On a random occurrence, Norman ventures into Tansy's dressing room, the one solely feminine space in the house, where he quickly discovers objects used for witchcraft, "Graveyard dirt from particular graves. A chief ingredient of Negro conjure magic…a box of old silver coins and silver fillings—strong protective magic; giving significance to the silver coins in front of his photograph" (12). Tansy's, and all suburban witches', engagement with conjure magic renders them deeply grotesque and abject due to their duality. In *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity*, Mary Russo writes: "Low, hidden, earthly, dark, material, immanent, visceral…These associations of the female with the earthly, material, and the archaic grotesque have suggested a positive and powerful figuration of culture and womanhood" (1). The witch's connection to nature and the body suggests that women who engage with witchcraft enter a feminine sphere that is far more grotesque, dark, and potentially powerful. Russo argues that the category of the female grotesque is crucial to identity-formation for women as a space of risk and abjection (12). The abject, in terms of this research, does not necessarily involve the

literal purging and expulsion of bodily fluids and excretions as Julia Kristeva describes it in her book *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Kristeva describes the process of abjection as a form of expulsion and rejection of the Other, which she ties to the historical exclusion of women. Neither subject nor object, the abject, or the state of abjection, is articulated in, and through, imagery. Kristeva also writes that the abject "break downs the borders separating the inside from the outside, the contained from the released. Abjection is a state of flux, where meaning collapses and the body is open and irregular, sprouting or protruding internal and external forms to link abjection to grotesquerie" (2). In *The Female Nude*, Lynda Nead notes that "for Kristeva the abject is on the side of the feminine; it stands in opposition to the patriarchal, rule-bound order of the symbolic…the body's margins are primary as the site for the subject's struggle for attainment of identity" and that the abject is "the site of both desire and danger" (32). The suburban witch exists outside of binaries and boundaries, as she embodies two opposite figures: the grotesque and menacing witch, and the idealized, domesticated white woman. She is, indeed, both the site of desire and danger. Through her spells she is connected to something more primal and natural, but given her insider-Other status within the suburban domain, she is also immersed in her own domestication within the patriarchal society. She is outside of the patriarchal, rule-bound order that Nead writes of, and the way in which she embraces the archaic connects her, according to Russo, to a powerful and positive form of womanhood identity. The suburban witch is not merely a fictional character, but the embodiment of powerful abject white womanhood.

Erasure of racialized peoples aside, Norman's discovery of Tansy's witchhood reveals multiple layers that are often found in depictions of the suburban witch. First, Norman only discovers Tansy's witchcraft items when he invades her feminine space—a space he has no right being, but takes it upon himself to enter anyway. Often within narratives of the suburban witch, the male counterparts only learn of the women's witchcraft when they invade feminine spaces in which they do not belong. Norman's entitlement to Tansy's private space reveals the perceived imbalance within the power

dynamics of their relationship. Secondly, we see that there is more to Tansy than that of suburban housewife; she has a rich and nuanced life practicing magic unbeknownst to her husband. Thirdly, Norman mentions that this is Negro conjure magic which Tansy must have learned when she assisted him doing a case study in Africa. This alludes back to the argument that, regarding the suburban witch, the knowledge of women of colour is used, but never properly acknowledged, and when it is acknowledged, it is identified as uncivilized, unregulated, or pure nature, rather than its own culture and understandings, so when their "magic" origins do come up it downgrades the identity of the white woman. Norman notes that this is indeed Negro magic, but that is the only mention of people of colour within the novel. Tansy admits to learning her magic while working as his assistant in an unnamed African country. However, while this conjure magic offers Tansy power and identity outside of merely being a professor's wife, the mention of her magic being learned from women of colour is only ever mentioned once, and the women she learned this magic from are never made characters. This is a key example of how, within the suburban gothic, the suburban witch engages with women of colour's ritualistic magic, but never truly gives her proper credit. As is customary with the suburban gothic, the people of colour are erased, even when their work and traditions are present. This research, while it focuses upon white women, acknowledges the ways in which white women exploit the knowledge of women of colour, who go uncredited for their practice of conjure magic within the suburban gothic genre.

As the novel continues, we begin to see the problematic gendered power dynamics within Norman and Tansy's relationship through Norman's discomfort with Tansy's power, even when it is beneficial to him. When Norman discovers Tansy's engagement with magic, he is baffled by her use of it given that she is such an educated, New England housewife: "But Tansy was so sane…a hard-headed New Englander. So well versed, from her work with him, in the psychological background of superstition and primitive magic. So well versed" (12). When Norman verbally attacks Tansy about her use of conjure

magic, she alludes to her historical predecessor, stating “Why don’t you strap me and stick pins in me? They used to do that” (14) before admitting that she engages with magic as a form of control, something “civilized” women should not do: “All right have it your own way then! I was seriously trying to use conjure magic. I was doing everything a civilized woman shouldn’t. I was trying to put spells on people and things. I was trying to change the future. I was…oh, the whole works!” (14). When Norman questions her motives, Tansy admits that she was engaging with magic “to protect you and your career” (14) and that she had only begun magic once they moved to their suburban Hempwell neighbourhood. Prior to Hempwell, she was out in the field with Norman as a research assistant, now she must conform to the role of a suburban professor’s wife. However, rather than become a docile suburban wife, Tansy begins to use the knowledge of conjure magic she acquired during field work to wield power both within and outside of the home. It is in this exchange that Norman discovers there is more to his beautiful wife than he had realized: “It was almost impossible to take at one gulp the realization that in the mind of this trim modern creature he had known in completest intimacy, there was a whole great area he had never dreamed of, an area that was part and parcel of the dead practices he analyzed in books, an area that belonged to the Stone Age and never to him, an area plunged in darkness, a crouch with fear, blown by giant winds” (15). Through her use of conjure magic, Norman comes to see Tansy as an abject and uncanny force, creating a sense of unease for him. Kristeva writes of abjection:

> A massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A ‘something’ that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge, annihilates me (2).

Perhaps the lesson here is to certainly use the magic, but certainly hide it, as well. Norman’s acknowledgement of Tansy as a witch annihilates his vision of his wife; she now exists in a liminal

space—not quite ideal suburban wife, not quite menacing witch. Tansy admits to Norman that she knew she would fail as a mere professor's wife once they moved to the suburbs, and that suburban life terrified her: "Hempwell terrified me. Everyone was so obviously antagonistic and so deadly respectable. I knew I'd be a flop as a professor's wife—I was practically told so to my face" (15). To maintain her identity and combat her suburban wife anxieties, Tansy begins to practice magic, so that she may influence the prosperity of their lives. Norman is quick to reject her power and informs her that she must stop immediately, which she agrees to do.

However, once Tansy's magic ceases to protect him, Norman's life begins crashing down. He loses a promotion he had all but secured, a female student accuses him of seduction, a male student threatens his life with a gun, and a colleague threatens to expose his thesis as plagiarism. Regardless of all this, Norman refuses to admit that Tansy's magic was either real or beneficial to their lives. Norman had believed that "Tansy had plunged into boring secretarial work right after their marriage" (16) and he preferred for her to stay that way, even if it meant his career being put on the line. A pivotal scene that reveals the imbalanced power dynamics within their relationship occurs when Tansy points out her influence to Norman and her disdain for her suburban womanhood, which crushes his illusion of neo-liberal individualists:

> "Why do I have to stop? What difference does it make? You said yourself it was just nonsense—a private ritual…Oh, so you think that everything you've won in life is just the result of your own unaided abilities? You don't recognize the luck in it?... And you think that everyone loves you and wish you well, don't you? You think all those beasts over at Hempwell are just a lot of pussies with their claws clipped?"
>
> "Tansy, when you talk that way, you actually sound like a witch"
>
> "Oh, do I? Well maybe I am. And maybe it's lucky for you I've been one…Oh, I see. It's been the velvet glove so far, but now it's going to be the iron hand. If I don't do just as you say, I

> get packed off to an asylum. Is that it? There've been enough times when I've wanted. Just like there've been times I've wanted to stop being a woman." (20)

From this point on, Norman somewhat turns on Tansy, rejecting her magic and the joy and empowerment she receives from it. He demands she stops, even though he does not believe it to be real, even though it brings her fulfillment. Tansy's power disrupts Norman's façade of their ideal suburban marriage, and his consistent refusal to accept her as a witch dramatizes the gendered power dynamics within the nuclear family setting. Norman refuses to accept Tansy's power, even if it is helpful to him, and prefers her as a docile, submissive housewife. Norman fears Tansy's knowledge, and is disturbed that she effectively engaged with the conjure magic she learned in the field and from the other suburban witches in Hempwell. Tansy, on the other hand, offers a solution of sorts to Friedan's concept of the "problem with no name." While Tansy is initially frightened and anxious about her role as suburban housewife, magic offers her a satisfying empowerment within her marriage—an empowerment that Norman does not allow her upon discovering it. Tansy is persecuted by Norman, and shamed for her use of magic, thus forcing her to cease engaging with her form of empowerment, agency, and knowledge so that she may conform to a proper role of suburban womanhood. The horrific elements of the novel escalate when Tansy's soul is removed from her body by rival witches—who are the wives of Norman's colleagues—and she becomes a zombie-like, submissive wife, suggesting that without some form of agency and empowerment, the suburban woman will become the "empty" vessel that Friedan and de Beauvoir speak of. Norman's rejection of Tansy's witchcraft therefore has dangerous consequences for her; as a witch without magical protection she becomes easy prey for her rivals. In order to defeat his wife's rivals, Norman must reluctantly acknowledge the presence of magic in the world. While Norman is eventually able to help Tansy regain her soul, he is still unable to accept her magic, and the novel concludes with an anxious Norman realizing that the so-called 'weaker' sex is much more powerful than men realize, and that a community of support is better than solely self-

reliance, a reality he admittedly does not know if he can accept, thus leaving the status of their marriage in limbo.

**Part Two: Motherhood, Sexuality, and the Backlash**

John Updike's novel *The Witches of Eastwick* takes place in a small town in Rhode Island, Eastwick, during the early years of the Vietnam War. It centers around three thirty-something divorced women – Alexandra, Sukie, and Jane, who have, in their post-husband lives, somehow developed witchly powers and formed a coven. The story's stirring incident involves the arrival of Darryl Van Horne, a mysterious rich man who moves into a mansion in town, and draws these women toward him. Tennis matches, bath-time orgies, obsessive gossip, pranks on unsuspecting locals, grim sorcery, and murder ensues. In the novel, all three women are divorced, and all three have been cheated on. They also have had several lovers, shared lovers, and have slept with each other's husbands. They show no guilt about cheating with the husbands of various women in town, because all the local ladies seem to be "just horrible" and "deserve it." They also neglect their numerous children, often saying very harsh things about them and having no interest in them at all. This representation feeds the stereotype that all witches are evil, jealous, sexually loose, and immoral, as these three women seem to have no respect for other women, or for themselves or their children for that matter. While *The Witches of Eastwick* falls within the suburban gothic, it provides a rare occurrence where the witches are not presented as traditional suburban witches, and deviates from the suburban witch narrative. Instead, the novel adheres to a more traditional take on representations of the witch, presenting the women as menacing, promiscuous, dangerous, neglectful mothers. The witches in the novel represent more traditional gothic anxieties surrounding witches: they are murderous and seductive, a danger to children, men, and themselves. The film adaptation, however, sides more with the suburban gothic representation of the suburban witch. Within the film, Alexandra, Sukie, and Jane are still somewhat sexualized, but the women are far more influenced by Betty Friedan than they are menacing, jealous harlotry. For this

reason, this research focuses primarily upon the representation of the witch in the film version of *The Witches of Eastwick* rather than the novel.

While the suburban witches within *The Witches of Eastwick* certainly reflect upon early suburban feminine anxieties, which I will soon discuss, the film itself—though set in the 1960s—was filmed in the mid-80s, and is one of the first occurrences of the suburban witch forming a nurturing coven with other women, embracing unconventional sexuality, and balancing her roles as mother and lover. One of the questions that this research asks is "Why did the suburban witch re-emerge in popular culture in this new form?" While adhering to many of the same themes as *Conjure Wife*, these new suburban witches tackle notions of the sexually liberated woman, female independence, and motherhood, as well. To answer the question fully, we must look to the period in time which feminist writer Susan Faludi calls "the Backlash," which was a powerful "counterassault on women's rights, and an attempt to retract the handful of small and hard-won victories that the feminist movement did manage to win for women" (xviii). The *Backlash* Faludi writes of occurred during the 1980s, when the troika of media, entertainment, and advertising industries collectively decided to undo the work of the women's liberation movement of the 1970s by putting women back "in their place." By this, I mean that depictions of independent womanhood were being tarnished and degraded, an emphasis was put on traditional, domesticated femininity, female voices were either derogatory or not present at all, and, in society, violence against women was on the rise (xvi). Politically, New Right politicians condemned women's independence, and "anti-abortion protestors fire-bombed women's clinics, [while] fundamentalist preachers damned feminists as 'whores' and 'witches'" (xxi). Women were losing the little power they had gained from the liberation movement of the 1970s and found themselves once again being silenced. Women needed a powerful figure to look up to, and what female character in history had proven more powerful than the witch?

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For that matter, the depictions of motherhood and independent female relationships and sexuality prove deeply meaningful within the film adaptation of *The Witches of Eastwick*. The film differs from the misogynistic novel in many significant ways. First, only Jane is a divorcee within the film—having been left due to her inability to have children. Alexandra's husband has died, leaving her with one teenage daughter, and Sukie—a devoted mother to six girls—has been abandoned by her husband. None of the women are known adulterers and none have any lovers. Instead, they get together once a week to drink wine and fantasize about lives outside of housework and motherhood. In this sense, these women adhere to a far more Friedan-esque lifestyle than the women in Updike's novel. As Friedan writes: "She has no identity except as wife and mother. She does not know who she is herself" (29). Early within the film, we watch as all three women struggle with the frustrations of keeping house, work, and motherhood. Alexandra is a struggling artist raising her daughter alone, Sukie attempts to raise six young girls on her own while working for the local paper, and Jane is a music teacher who must face a lecherous boss who sexually harasses her daily. However, when they come together and form a coven, they quickly cease to be downtrodden and victimized characters, and instead begin to embody representations of the New Woman. The New Woman was a popular female figure in stories and films in the mid-twentieth century, as Betty Friedan writes: "In 1939, the heroines of women's magazine stories were not always young, but in a certain sense they were younger than their fictional counterparts today. They were young in the same way the American hero has always been young: they were New Women, creating with a gay determined spirit a new identity for women—a life of their own" (38). She then adds: "The New Woman heroines were the ideal of yesterday's housewives; they reflected the dreams, mirrored the yearning for identity and the sense of possibility that existed for women then" (40). Historian Ruth Bordin writes of the New Woman: "The term New Woman always referred to women who exercised control over their own lives be it personal, social, or economic" (2). The suburban witch in *The Witches of Eastwick* is both a subtle nod to the New Woman, *AND* a housewife—to a certain extent.

**Commented [DCA3]:** I'm not sure I would agree here: the New Woman was a product of the new dynamics of modern urban life; she was mostly single, and carried out a life of promiscuity. She was in some ways the female equivalent of the modern flaneur.

While none of the women are wives at any point in the film, by the end they are all suburban, New England mothers, who are deeply devoted to the family they form together and their children. They are committed to their family and their role as mothers, however, they also embody New Women, as through witchcraft they have developed identity, sexuality, and empowerment. In the film adaptation of *The Witches of Eastwick*, the suburban witch becomes allegorical for the New Woman, with her witchcraft and coven allowing her empowerment and self-fulfilment, all while maintaining her status as devoted mother. However, as the film shows, this type of New Woman suburban witch who is able to successfully exist within the empowered woman and nurturing mother binary, cannot exist within a patriarchal setting, and can only find her balance, autonomy, and control when the man is removed.

At the beginning of the film, the three women attack a lecherous teacher who has been harassing Jane by using magic to cause a rain storm to overtake his pious outdoor sermon. The women learn they can control the weather and wish for a perfect man who could satisfy all of their needs. This marks the arrival of Darryl Von Thorne, a warlock, who seduces all three. Darryl is a stranger and joins the women to create an unconventional family unit in an old New England mansion where witches were allegedly burned at the stake—a reminder of the witch's historical past. Darryl initially proves to be a powerful ally to the women, understanding their desperation and suffocation as suburban mothers and housewives. Darryl's initial language evokes Friedan and de Beauvoir when he states "Marriage: good for the man, bad for the woman. She suffocates." Given their unconventional familial and sexual relationships, the town begins to look down upon Alexandra, Sukie, and Jane for engaging in such an open and free sexual lifestyle, given that none of them are married. As De Beauvoir writes: "The attainment of sexual freedom by the unmarried woman, further, is still made difficult by social customs…if she wishes to take a lover, she must first get married" (480). Alexandra, Jane, and Sukie's witchhood, sexual liberation, and independence render them grotesque and abject within their suburban society. Kristeva writes that "the abject is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a

prohibition, a rule, or a law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, take advantage of them, the better to deny them" (15). As witches and sexual beings, but also middle-class, white, suburban mothers, the three women deviate from the whore/Madonna binary and instead exist in an uncanny, in-between space that follows no rules and corrupts ideas about both witches and suburban mothers. Given that the women live in a mid-twentieth century American suburb, during the pinnacle of the importance of the nuclear family, their freedom with their sexuality becomes town gossip and the women are accused of being sluts. As Federici writes in *Caliban and the Witch*, "A sexually active woman, then, was a public danger, a threat to the social order as she subverted a man's sense of responsibility, and his capacity for work and self-control" (191). This new-found rejection from their suburban society stems from the women not only being sexually liberated, but also because none of them appears to be in a monogamous relationship, as none has any intention on marrying Darryl. De Beauvoir writes of this judgement against the unmarried woman in *The Second Sex*: "A single woman in America, still more than in France, is a socially incomplete being even if she makes her own living; if she is to attain the whole dignity of a person and gain her full rights, she must wear a wedding ring" (482). Alexandra, Sukie and, Jane engage with representations of the New Woman. They have a tight bond with one another, are sexually free, have obtained empowerment through magic, but still maintain devoted to their children. All four members of the unconventional family are seen playing with Sukie's children at the mansion, and Jane and Alex comfort and care for Sukie's daughters at the hospital as if they are their own. As the puritanical suburbanites continue to spread hateful gossip about the women, Darryl begins to use their power—unknowingly to the women—for evil; even killing the town's most pious suburban housewife. Alex, Sukie and Jane then reject him from the family, and he in turn uses their fears against them as a form of torture as payment for his rejection. When the women begin to use magic against him to protect themselves, Darryl is forced into a church where he rants about the evils of women, stating that woman was God's mistake. The women learn they are all impregnated by Darryl—

even the infertile Jane—and combine their powers to rid themselves of Darryl in hope of protecting their unborn babies from his corruption. With Darryl gone, the women continue to live in the mansion in Eastwick as a family unit with all children being raised happily together. Three mothers, ten children, no father, yet all three women appear much happier living as New Women and witches, all while maintaining their nurturing motherhood roles. *The Witches of Eastwick* is a rare glimpse of the suburban witch achieving happiness and fulfilment, yet she does this by ridding herself of any patriarchal influence and living just outside the bounds of suburbia.

**Part Three: The New (Old) Suburban Witch**

Over the next twenty years, the very real problem of rape culture—a term coined by feminist theorists in the 1970s—was brought to the forefront of the public eye. In feminist theory, rape culture is a setting in which rape is pervasive and normalized due to societal attitudes about gender and sexuality (Olfman, 9). Behaviours commonly associated with rape culture include victim blaming, sexual objectification, trivializing rape, denial of widespread rape, refusing to acknowledge the harm caused by some forms of sexual violence, or some combination of these (Attenborough, 184). By the end of 2012, the American media had seen nearly a dozen stories about young women in high school or college who had been raped at parties or in their home, and had received more shame than justice. Perhaps most famously, there was the Steubenville, Ohio rape case, where a high school girl, incapacitated by alcohol, was publicly and repeatedly assaulted by her peers, several of whom documented the acts on social media. The case garnered nationwide attention after it was prominently covered in the New York Times. The Steubenville case and many of its predecessors caused a rise in rape revenge horror films, and movies such as *I Spit on Your Grave* and *Last House on the Left*, which had originally been released during the women's liberation movement of the 1970s, were being remade. Once again, American

women felt that they were under attack and powerless; and, once again, the witch returned to seek her power, as the only strong female voice permitted is metaphorical, and speaking as a fictional character emphasizes the social power of art.

*The Love Witch* consistently plays with gender roles, fantasy, and contradiction. Released in 2016, but set in the 1960s, the film alludes to ideals of the past, offering a modern take on the problematic nature of mid-twentieth century suburban womanhood and domestication. The film's protagonist, Elaine, is a young, almost otherworldly beautiful woman who claims to believe woman's main purpose should be to cater to men and fulfil their utmost domestic and sexual fantasies. All Elaine wants is to find a husband for whom she can cook extravagant meals—without herself eating—care for unconditionally, and provide endless, passionate sex whenever he desires. Indeed, the character is heavily influenced by Friedan's suggestion that during this era, nothing meant more to middle-class suburban women than finding love: "If the answer is love, never have women searched for love with such determination" (Friedan, 29). However, while Elaine is desperate for love, she also happens to be a powerful witch who starves herself to achieve the ideal body, wears wigs, fake eyelashes, and layers upon layers of make-up to create her image as the conventionally ideal woman. This is part of Elaine's magic: the labor of transforming herself into a patriarchal fantasy while appearing natural to the men withing the narrative—highlighting the naturalization of the invisibility of women's work. While the men in the film see a stunning young woman who wants nothing more than to be domesticated and provide endless sex—a patriarchal fantasy—the audience sees the cracks in the fantasy, or the truth/reality poking through: Elaine's efforts and struggle to be physically perfect, her deranged obsession with finding love, and her homicidal tendencies. Elaine thinks of herself as "just a little girl dreaming of being carried off on a white horse," but instead has matured into a self-obsessed monster, emphasizing the problematic nature of the patriarchal fantasy and what it does to the female identity. As a woman, Elaine almost uncannily embodies Friedan's writing. Friedan writes: "It is my thesis that as Victorian

culture did not permit women to accept or gratify their basic sexual needs, our culture does not permit women to accept or gratify their basic need to grow and fulfill their potentialities as human beings, a need which is not solely defined by their sexual role" (77) and "[The white, suburban woman] was, at that time, so completely defined as object by man, never herself as subject, 'I,' that she was not even expected to enjoy or participate in sex" (81). Elaine is not only objectified by the men within the film, she also works hard to objectify herself, creating an ideal image to please the male gaze. When Elaine engages in sex, the men appear to experience intense pleasure, while a somber looking Elaine caters to their every fantasy. The men enjoy the meals she cooks, while Elaine eats nothing. Elaine offers a multitude of emotional labor, while the men make no attempts to get to know the person beneath her beauty. Elaine is a patriarchal fantasy object, aside from her identity as witch.

While the white, middle-class, Friedan-era woman may have been determined to find love, it is unlikely many turned to conjure magic to do so, and it is this element of Elaine's character—the love-obsessed witch—that proves her to be grotesque, abject, and unhinged. Russo writes of the female grotesque: "[T]he grotesque body. The Freudian canon, with its 'creature features' as case studies, is filled with horrific dismemberments, distortions, hybridities, apparitions, prostheses, and, of course, uncanny doubles. The figure of the female hysteric, ungrounded and out of bounds, enacting her pantomime of anguish and rebellion, is as foundational to psychoanalysis as the image of the 'senile, pregnant hags' is to the Bakhtinian model of grotesque realism" (9). Elaine alters her body and appearance to attract men, while embodying the Friedan-esque woman, she also, as a witch, embodies the abject female hysteric, enacting her anguish and rebellion through conjure magic made from urine, tampons covered in her menstrual blood, and earth objects such as dirt—again, a form of hoodoo or conjure magic where women of colour are not mentioned. This duality of beautiful suburban woman and primal witch adds to her abjection, as Kristeva writes: "Essentially different from 'uncanniness,' more violent, too, abjection is elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin; nothing is familiar, not

even the shadow of a memory" (5). Elaine's desire for love and domestication separates her from her coven, while her role as witch separates her from other suburban women. She has no kin; she is not familiar; she is ontologically problematic. Russo would argue that, given Elaine's intense magical powers, she embodies the female grotesque, of which Russo writes: "It concedes much to the misogyny which permeates the fear of 'losing one's femininity,' 'making a spectacle of oneself,' 'alienating men' (meaning powerful men) or otherwise making 'errors'" (12). Elaine's power could easily be seen as making a spectacle of herself, and throughout the film her use of magic alienates (or kills) all of the men who grow close to her.

From its very beginning, *The Love Witch* plays with contradiction, especially in its depiction of its protagonist. A serial killer and witch who thinks of herself as a hopeless romantic, Elaine is both empathetic and deeply disturbed. However, it does not take long for the viewer to understand the cause and complexity of her obsession. "Giving men sex is a way of unlocking their love potential," she flatly tells her friend Barbara, a scene that is made extra tongue-in-cheek as the conversation occurs over tea at the local females-only, pink Victorian tea house. "You sound as if you've been brainwashed by the patriarchy," Barbara replies. As the film progresses, Barbara proves to be correct. Elaine is stunningly beautiful, yet her obsession with finding a husband to settle down with and live a nice suburban life causes her to brew lethal love potions out of urine, nails, and period blood in order to make men fall in love with her. She is trapped between the glorified fantasy of dated suburban gender roles and the dehumanizing reality of actually living by them. "What do men want?" she asks herself rhetorically. "Just a pretty woman to take care of them." A product of patriarchal misogyny, suburban gender norms, and the male gaze, Elaine works tirelessly to become as aesthetically pleasing to men as possible, wearing wigs, fake eyelashes, an assortment of make-up, and rarely eating. She is a fully "constructed" female who is single-minded in her pursuit of suburban domestication and has become convinced that carving herself down to a doll of mindless devotion is the only way to gain the genuine love of a man.

Every man Elaine comes into contact with is overwhelmed by her perfection, often falling into shock and awe as she makes them steaks, strokes their ego, and dances seductively in lingerie before allowing them to take sexual control. She is a patriarchal fantasy come to life; however, her depiction in the film is dialectical to the audience. In *The Explicit Body in Performance*, Rebecca Schneider unpacks Walter Benjamin's phrase "dialectical image", which refers to "an object or constellation of objects which tell the secret—which reveal or expose the traces of their false promises, their secret(ed) service to the dreamscapes of capitalism" (52). She expands on this by arguing that "[d]ialectical images provoke a viewer/reader to think again—to take a second look. It is somehow in the flickering undecidability between the viewing subject's reading and the objects cracks (exposing masquerade) that dialectical images threaten to work" (52-3). To the men within the film, Elaine is the epitome of patriarchal desire, her sole purpose being to be domesticated and fulfil their masculine needs; however, this image is flawed to the viewer as Elaine's masquerade, and "falseness" is revealed. She has flashbacks of her ex-husband accusing her of gaining weight, then complimenting her body when she begins to starve herself; we watch as she applies make-up, false lashes, and wigs to enhance her beauty; we see when she becomes unhinged when she does not receive the love she so desperately wants. Elaine's suffering highlights the impossibility of becoming the "ideal woman", giving the viewer a "behind-the-scenes" look at all the excess and exhaustion that goes into creating the patriarchal fantasy. Near the end of the film, it seems as if Elaine has found her match with the local police chief, Griff, who is investigating her for murder. Like the other men within the film, Griff initially falls for her and Elaine begins to grow comfortable within their relationship, expressing her distastes, emotions, and even her witchhood, rather than presenting herself as solely a comforting, cooking sex slave. When a fellow police officer comments on Elaine's perfection to Griff, emphasizing his envy, Griff angrily states: "The feminine ideal only exists in a man's mind. Once you get to know her, you feel like you're suffocating. Women are less interesting once you get to know them." Elaine attempts to fulfil Griff's fantasies, but is

rejected once she reveals the humanity and power beneath the fantasy, which results in her stabbing him to death at the end of the film.

The problem for both Elaine and the men within the film is that they are attempting to access a fantasy which cannot exist within reality. The men who buy into the fantasy within reality pay for it with their lives. Elaine attempts to fulfil numerous roles in her pursuit of love, struggling to walk a fine line between sexual object and hopeful suburban wife. As a fellow witch tells her, "Display flesh artfully. Be a mother and a lover. Only then will he see you as a human being." Of course, fulfilling these two separate binary roles, the Madonna and the whore, proves to be impossible. Elaine attempts the role of comforting mother, pampering the men she seduces, frequently referring to them as "baby", but also puts in effort to be a muse, as she encourages their interests and desires. However, she is also overtly sexual and a legitimate witch. She cannot exist in both roles, which is evident to the viewer as she struggles with her dualism which results in the deaths of those who come closest to her. By the end of the film, Elaine is alone. The men who have been involved with her throughout the film are all dead: two intentionally murdered, one potentially poisoned by a love potion, and another via suicide. Elaine has spent her life attempting to make men love her, believing it to be her only purpose—an ideology pushed on young women during the mid-twentieth century—but never achieving her goal. At the end of the film, a group of men, including Griff, attempt to rape the powerful witch, Elaine—her potential gang rape symbolizing the patriarchal attempt to conquer the powerful, disobedient woman. However, Elaine is able to escape before an assault can occur. As the film closes, she stands, covered in blood, in front of her mirror—a bludgeoned Griff dead on her silk sheets. She stares at herself in the mirror, removes her wig, and begins to cry, thus emphasizing that in the pursuit of the white patriarchal suburban fantasy, there is no happy ending for a powerful woman.

*Conjure Wife, The Witches of Eastwick,* and *The Love Witch* all tell very different stories, but their over-arching theme remains the same. All women here adhere to the suburban witch narrative of

being suffocated within the suburban setting while trying to find balance in their role as wife and witch. All five women find control, agency, and empowerment through their engagement with witchcraft, but all five are rejected by the patriarchal society in which they inhabit for practicing witchcraft. More often than not, the women must decide whether or not they will remain powerful witches, or become submissive to men to achieve the mid-twentieth century ideological romantic goals for women. They must either chose to be a witch or a wife; there is no in-between. The suburban witch breaks away from the macabre traditional depiction of the witch, acknowledges the historical witch, and examines the fear of women's agency in a patriarchal context. Through this update of the figure of the witch, it is suggested that within the mid-twentieth century American suburb, there is no place for powerful women or women's knowledge, and for a woman to be truly domesticated, she must forfeit power and control—a sacrifice the suburban witch is never able to truly make.

**Conclusion**

The story of the witch has been etched in culture and popular culture for centuries. From the Biblical Lilith, to midwives in Salem, and the sinister old woman in films such as Rosemary's Baby, the witch has taken on numerous forms. Since the rise of suburbia in the 1940s, one of the witch's most popular incarnations has been that of the suburban housewife—a woman who attempts to balance suburban domesticity and powerful magic. This character, while prominent in popular culture depictions of the witch, has lacked a proper critical examination, which is what this research has done. The suburban witch explores feminine power, domesticity, and whiteness within the suburban gothic setting, and the purpose of this research has been to unpack those under-discussed topics in regards to the character. Where does her power lie? What does she say about domesticity? How does her whiteness play to her advantage, and how does it shed light on those who are disadvantaged? The suburban witch proves to be a complex character worthy of unpacking, and her mere existence raises a myriad of questions regarding gender roles, race, femininity, power, agency, and autonomy within the suburban setting.

The suburban gothic narratives *Conjure Wife, The Witches of Eastwick*, and *The Love Witch* all put the suburban witch on full display in her most stereotypical forms, and this research has examined the ways in which feminist theory, critical whiteness, abjection, the uncanny, and representation shape those characters. As this research has argued, representations of the suburban witch allegorize gender and power dynamics within the suburban setting, and also allude to the historical witch, while also reframing early feminist beliefs regarding white middle-class domestication. The suburban witch also examines how white women utilize the knowledge of women of colour without paying proper respect or dues to women of colour. Though written before *Conjure Wife*, the ideas presented in Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* are found throughout all of these narratives. Friedan's discussion of the plight of the white suburban woman is central to all of these narratives, which is why her work has been critical

to this research. The suburban witch proves to be part suburban housewife and part powerful witch, and because of this she transgresses all of her boundaries and exists in an abject and liminal space between the idealized woman and the menacing hag. She embodies two opposing binaries, striking terror into the white patriarchal society. As previously stated, her representation articulates barely concealed truths about patriarchal North American society: the fear of powerful women.

Although *Conjure Wife, The Witches of Eastwick*, and The *Love Witch* tell different stories, their over-arching theme remains the same. All women of the women represented adhere to the suburban witch narrative of being smothered within the suburban setting while trying to balance in their roles as wife and witch. All of the women find control, agency, and empowerment through witchcraft, but all five are rejected by the white patriarchal society for practicing witchcraft. The women must decide whether or not they will remain powerful witches, or become submissive to men to achieve the mid-twentieth century ideological romantic goals for women. They must choose one, there is no in-between. The suburban witch alters the macabre traditional depiction of the witch, acknowledges the historical witch, and examines the fear of women's agency in a patriarchal context. As this research argues, this update of the figure of the witch suggests that within the mid-twentieth century American suburb, there is no place for powerful women or women's knowledge, and for a woman to be truly domesticated, she must forfeit power and control—a sacrifice the suburban witch is never able to truly make.

This research believes that the lack of academic research on the suburban witch and the historical landmarks that cause her to arise in popular culture is harmful, dangerous, and even trivializes white women's/girl's experience, such that her empowerment in this representation as witch has been rebuffed and not taken seriously. My hope is that this research will raise more questions about women's depictions as witches, not just white women—where I have begun—but women in general. I believe that women being represented as witches is powerful, and deserves and in depth examination, which this research has done.

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