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Tentative Title of Dissertation:

Deviance and Social Control in a Gendered Subculture: Appropriation of the 'Witch' Stigma as Women's Self-Empowerment

Abstract:

A sociological study on deviance and social control, this dissertation research will examine the manner and process in which women chose to adopt the stigma of 'witch' in contemporary popular culture as a means of self-empowerment. Deviance and social control are long-standing topics of reflection in sociology and other social sciences, but they have not sufficiently been connected with questions of gender and popular culture. These connections are important to consider because women have historically been subjected to specific means of social control, defined as the definition of and response to crime and/or deviance, that have targeted their voices, bodies, and behaviors in peculiar ways. Since the days of the Salem Witch Trials, however, much has changed. Most remarkably, recent times have seen women appropriate the identity of 'witch' and thus bring about a de-stigmatization. Relying on a symbolic-interactionist framework, this study will involve in-depth interviews with self-identified 'witches' to address the following four research questions: 1) what sociological factors lead women choosing to self-identify as a witch; 2) what components does the process of choosing to identify as a witch entail; 3) what meanings do self-identified witches attach to their and others' depictions of witches in popular culture; and 4) what are the experiences that self-identified witches have with social control. The findings of this study should contribute to our understanding of the interplay between deviance and social control and, additionally, help to develop insight on how women in contemporary culture can find their own unique places of empowerment.