

Season of the Witch: The Externalization of Feminine Powers

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In

Cinema Studies

by

Hector Manuel Franco

San Francisco, California

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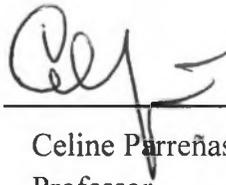
## CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read *Season of the Witch: The Externalization of Feminine Powers* by Hector Manuel Franco, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Arts: Cinema Studies at San Francisco State University.



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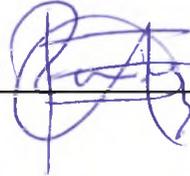
# SEASON OF THE WITCH: THE EXTERNALIZATION OF FEMININE POWERS

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San Francisco, California  
2019

Witches have always been portrayed as strong, powerful women who take control and are able to use their powers to receive what they want. Traditionally, scholarship dealing with the image of the witch have proposed this is possible due to the witch's claim to her femininity. This thesis argues that in mainstream representation the witch's power is also attached to her whiteness. This combination of whiteness and femininity allows the witch to continue perpetuating white supremacy and institutional power dynamics associated with oppressing People of Color, Women of Color, and other subjugated identities. Analyzing the Netflix series, *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, my thesis explores how the main character preserves the "white savior" trope, uses her whiteness to abuse her powers, and ignores the significance of other racial, ethnic and cultural communities.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.

ELIZABETH RAMIREZ-SOTO  
Chair, Thesis Committee



July 8, 2019  
Date

## PREFACE AND/OR ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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When I was a child, my cousin and I would frequently watch the same films over and over. One of our favorites was the 1993 children fantasy comedy, *Hocus Pocus*, directed by Kenny Ortega. We would shove the video into the VCR, watch the numerous Disney previews, and finally the movie would appear on-screen. I was instantly fascinated with Bette Midler's character, Winifred Sanderson, because of her sense of humor, drag queen aesthetics with big hair and loud make-up, and her consistent sassiness. However, the reason I was attracted to Winifred the most was the display of her witch powers. Bright lime green sparks would shoot out of her fingers or she would boil up a potion in her cauldron and suck the life out of children to sustain her youth and beauty or she would turn a man into a cat with the help of her spellbook. Winifred's magical abilities intrigued me to point where I wished I was a witch. From that time after, I have always been interested in films and TV series which feature narratives about witches, good or evil: from Willow Rosenberg (Alyson Hannigan) from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (WB 1997-2001, UPN 2001-2003) to Samantha Stephens (Elizabeth Montgomery) from *Bewitched* (ABC 1964-1972). Eventually as I grew older, I began to notice the witches had one thing in common: their whiteness.

Watching all this media, I found it troubling many of the witches I admired during my youth were mostly white women. Although I identified with their outsider status, I could not connect culturally and racially. My identity as a Queer, Chicano is an integral part of how I relate to the world and the community around me. Hollywood has a long history of ignoring, mischaracterizing, and/or excluding People of Color, Women of

Color, Queer people and other identities from their content. In recent years, the entertainment industry has attempted to remedy these discriminatory acts by including more representation of marginalized identities, yet the stories and characters continue to reflect the experience of white people. I am not asking to only see Queer People of Color on screen, although that is not a terrible thing to demand, but being aware of the lack of cultural, racially, ethnically queerness in certain media becomes quite apparent when everybody on television and film is white. Within the last few years, narratives surrounding the witch have become popular once again. Luca Guadagnino's remake of *Suspiria* was released last year in 2018 along with FX's *American Horror Story: Apocalypse*, which was a follow up to 2013's *AHS: Coven*. Yet once again, these witches are portrayed as/by mostly white women. Winifred Sanderson and her sisters, Mary (Kathy Najimy) and Sarah (Sarah Jessica Parker), are all white. Samantha Stephens is white. The witch in these dominant narratives seem to be unconcerned with the nuances race and ethnicity would add to the narrative, and since the witch is typically white, she cannot be racially coded, therefore her femininity is a substitute for her disenfranchisement. Netflix's *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018-Present) uses this concept to comment on the unfair treatment of women and the institutional misogyny ingrained in educational, social, and governmental establishments. While it may try to assert its subversiveness regarding female representation, *Sabrina* chooses to ignore dialogue around race and other forms of femininity by presenting the conventional narrative of a white feminine character who saves the world. It continues to disregard

race and other identities to focus on a narrative about a white savior figure. My essay will discuss how *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* continues to perpetuate the idea of how femininity and power is linked to whiteness through the depiction of its protagonist's characterization and the narrative content.

Simultaneously, this project will also be comparing and contrasting Sabrina against other characters, specifically Prudence Night and Ambrose Spellman, two out of the three characters who are People of Color. I use Prudence and Ambrose to reflect upon the distinction between their narrative arcs and representation compared to Sabrina's role in the series. *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* attempts to raise questions about misogyny and sexism and address the pressures young women suffer from social and political standards, but by doing so, the series never concerns itself with the consequences of racism, colorism, and whiteness that affect the People of Color.

Netflix's *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* is an adaption of the comic book of the same name and tells the story of Sabrina Spellman (Kiernan Shipka), a teenage half-witch who lives with her two Caucasian witch aunts, Hilda (Lucy Davis) and Zelda (Miranda Otto), as well as her Black cousin Ambrose (Chance Perdomo). In the first season, referred to as Part One, Sabrina is torn between her mortal friends and the prospect of furthering her education as a witch as her sixteenth birthday approaches. On this night she must sign the "Book of the Beast," a register full of witches who have signed their soul away to the Dark Lord. Along the way, Sabrina attends The Academy of Unseen Arts but opposes the misogynistic, sexist, "racist" (she uses that term in one episode) and

outdated traditions of the warlock and witch boarding school. Sabrina begins resisting her coven's, the Church of Night, desire to manipulate her and mold into a compliant witch because she wants to keep her humanity intact and every step of the way fends off Satan's influence. Toward the end of the season, Sabrina does submit to embracing her "witchiness" but establishes she will make changes to the coven and use her belief in equality to suspend the discrimination occurring in the witch world.

In season two, Sabrina has fully accepted all of her witch powers, donning new hair color, a new style, and more power. She is a full-time student at the Academy of Unseen Arts as she takes a leave absence from her mortal high school, Baxter High. As the season progresses, Sabrina's magic grows exponentially, including resurrecting a couple of dead students, restoring her best friend Roz's eyesight, and destroying a group of angels. Sabrina suggests these powers are meant for the sole purpose of uniting mortals and witches; an idea her late father had when trying to reform the Church of Night. Soon, Sabrina discovers her powers will bring about the "End Times" by fulfilling a number of prophecies, eventually becoming Satan's bride and Queen. Meanwhile, Father Blackwood has regressed the Church of Night to a militant, ultra-misogynistic state aiming to undermine Sabrina's rise as an opposing dissident. By the end, Lucifer returns to angelic appearance and urges Sabrina to join him, yet Sabrina and friends plot against him, sending him back to hell.

Before examining *Sabrina*, I want to lay out how dominant notions regarding femininity have influenced the portrayal of the witch. In Barbara Creed's seminal work, *The Monstrous- Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, she goes into length about how women are constantly represented as a witch in horror films and how her role is usually destructive and embodies a monstrous form. Creed claims "witches were feared because it was thought they could cast terrible spells and bring death to those they cursed" (74). Within cinematic representation, the witch is "an abject figure in that she is represented within patriarchal discourses as an implacable enemy of the symbolic order" (76). Creed continues by asserting their "powers are seen as part of her 'feminine' nature; she is closer to nature than man and can control forces in nature such as tempests, hurricanes and storms" (76). Creed interprets the witch as an abject figure man have made to vilify women's intuition and establishment of power within and outside the home. Creed does make a point to question this representation of women as grotesque monsters and how it is based on patriarchal ideas of femininity as a destructive force. I do believe the witch's power is an externalization and extension of femininity which cannot be contained, then is feared and opposed by institutions, such as educational and religious structures, marriage, and enables racism, misogyny and sexism that aim to suppress women; and ultimately fosters a hierarchy of patriarchal order. However, I think Creed neglects to mention she links this type of femininity with white characters in her piece. She mentions Regan MacNeil from William Friedkin's demonic possession film, *The Exorcist* (1973), Carrie White in Brian De Palma's supernatural horror classic, *Carrie*

(1976), and Ripley from Ridley Scott's sci-fi horror film, *Alien* (1979), among others, as prime examples for men's fear of women's reproductive system. While they may be women, these characters still maintain white privilege, an advantage bestowed upon those who have lighter skin compared to those with darker skin. For example, Regan is a white pre-teen living in a rented lavish home with her movie actress mother in Washington, D.C.; she is tutored privately by her nanny, has servants who care for her, and mentions to her mother about purchasing a horse when they get back home to Los Angeles. Although she is possessed by a demonic force, she faces no other hardships or prejudice. Regan leads a luxurious and pampered lifestyle only known by the wealthy and affluent who gets to walk away from a horrid possession while two priests die in the process of saving her. This privilege yields a significant amount of power and may be a threat to the patriarchal order. Before I begin my analysis, I would like to offer insight into how I define femininity. Historically, femininity is a socially constructed set of behaviors attributed to women and/or people who embody and perform bodily and personality characteristics which can be considered feminine. Femininity is a complex entity that cannot be defined by one aspect or boiled down to a clear-cut representation and characterization. Femininity is a concept beyond the binary of gender or physiological makeup, it is a perceived mode which can be created through one's own interpretation. While these characteristics are not universal, I perceive femininity as displaying visible features which can be inherently learned or promoted in society and these include: nurturing, protective, sensual, perceptive, compassionate, and kindness. In addition to

these shared traits, film scholar David Greven's *Representations of Femininity in American Genre Cinema*, asserts femininity is embodied when a woman "knows she wants power 'in a flash,' [she] resist[s] her gendered destiny as she defies logic of patriarchy... [femininity also includes] the lifelessness, or death-in-life-ness, of the woman's experience of patriarchy" (11). The witch embodies these tendencies by bestowing her own powers and challenging the notion of masculinity by fulfilling her own desire and through her own accord, without outside influences. Femininity and the witch become linked through their reluctance to patriarchy and defying expectations for women, such as marriage and domesticity, established by society. When it intersects with whiteness, it becomes an even greater destabilizing force.

In *Sabrina*, the titular character is prized among the others due to her commitment to embodying traits seemingly correlating with whiteness and femininity. These traits are usually linked with ethical values and heroic acts. These traits are present in well-known film heroines in an array of different genres including: Dorothy Gale (Judy Garland) in Victor Fleming's *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), Clarice Starling (Jodie Foster) in Jonathan Demme's psychological thriller, *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), and Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence) in Gary Ross' dystopian science fiction film, *The Hunger Games* (2012). These white women demonstrate moralistic efforts against those who are considered dangerous and oppose their virtuous crusade: Clarice is an FBI trainee recruited to stop a serial killer; Katniss volunteers as tribute in place of her sister; and Dorothy murders the Wicked Witch of the West to go back home. In "*The Hunger*

*Games: Performing Not-performing to Authenticate Femininity and Whiteness,*” co-authors Rachel E. Dubrofsky and Emily D. Ryalls state “authentic whiteness is, in contrast, unmarked on the body, not performative, and conveyed through honorable behavior. Those constructed as inauthentically white are caricatures of the privileges associated with whiteness, living a life of leisure and excess, out of touch with their humanity or utterly depraved and without appropriate moral values” (404). This “authentic whiteness” sets up white femininity to be an unattainable status and their morals can be weaponized as a means to continue the oppression of People of Color by empowering white femininity to be the ultimate authority figure. Dubrofsky and Ryalls also discuss the nature of how “white femininity” is not a performative act and does not need any physical alteration because “white femininity” is refined and instinctive. Similar to Dubrofsky’s and Ryalls’ analysis of Katniss Everdeen, Sabrina’s white femininity is also “the value of not-performing and behaving in a natural-seeming manner is transposed onto the body in the film: altered bodies—bodies marked as surgically transformed or adorned with makeup and ornate clothing—are constructed as deviant, in opposition to [Sabrina’s] natural, unaltered white femininity, dangerously entrenching notions of naturalized embodied feminine whiteness” (369). Film and media tend to favor this type of image of “feminine whiteness”: a chaste, modest, virtuous and white feminine character who can maintain these qualities throughout their narrative and use it to defeat their antagonist. Sabrina’s outer appearance, clothing, and style resembles other feminine heroines; she wears sensible shoes and blouses with dull and/or dark colors, a

short Bob-like hairstyle, and very little make-up. Sabrina is also revealed to be a virgin and is waiting for the moment with the “right” guy whom she loves. This “white femininity” paints Sabrina as untainted, pure and cannot be dissuaded from her morals. It also applies to her skin color, her whiteness is “natural” and “unaltered” unlike Prudence and Ambrose. When the witch converges with white femininity, it enforces the notion that this particular construction contains privileges People of Color are unable and never will be able to experience. With this idea of white femininity, *Sabrina* continues the tradition of white women solely practicing magic and having supremacy over it.

As I have mentioned above, most of the well-known cinematic witches have been white. From Glinda the Good Witch (Billie Burke) in *The Wizard of Oz* to the coven in Michael Cristofer’s *The Witches of Eastwick* (1987), each one is played by white actresses. In the United States, there are rare, if any, depictions of other forms of witchcraft in films and television. Brujería, Haitian Vodou, or Cuban Santería are not typically represented in U.S. series or practiced by characters of color, instead they root the witch’s powers in whiteness. Sociology scholar Steve Garner provides insight into “whiteness” and how it is determined in his book *Whiteness: An Introduction*. Garner explains whiteness does not only identify a person through their skin color, it also involves the “systemic practice” (13) that favors white people and impacts marginalized minorities, such as capitalism. Garner goes further into explaining authoritative influence whiteness has on society:

The power talked of here is of unchecked and untrammelled authority to exert its will; the power to invent and change the rules and transgress them with impunity; and the power to define the 'Other', and to kill him or her with impunity. The arbitrary imposition of life and death is one end of the spectrum of power relations that whiteness enacts, across the parts of the world where white people are preponderant in positions of power. (14)

Garner continues to discuss the ways the actual color white became a space to measure differences within painting and how this has given the color the power to determine what is normal, abnormal, ugly, and beautiful, civilized, and barbaric. According to Garner "whiteness has come to be *represented* as humanness, normality, and universality" (34). With the combination of femininity and whiteness, the character of Sabrina continues to preserve the standard of the non-racialized witch that wields power in and out of witchcraft.

Another element I want to explore regards the characterization of the witch. In cinema and other media, the witch is an abnormal figure who disrupts the average and ordinary. The witch usually takes on the appearance of a crone or an attractive woman and uses powerful magic to seduce the townspeople, alter a person's fate, and/or create chaos. According to author Ronald Hutton in *The Witch: A History of Fear, From Ancient Times to the Present*, he constructs a framework around the witch figure that contains five characteristics which can be significant across various cultures. These characteristics are created to link together how societies view the presence of the witch

and how their magical abilities can jeopardize the community. The aforementioned characteristics are as follows: 1) a witch causes harm by uncanny means, 2) a witch is an internal threat to a community, 3) the witch works within a tradition, 4) the witch is evil, and 5) the witch can be resisted (10-35). Although I do not believe Sabrina Spellman is evil or causes harm, I do think she is a threat to her witch and mortal community as well as involuntarily adheres to witch traditions. Furthermore, the witch represents the “Other” who lives on the outside of the conventions of society. In his book, *Monsters in the Closet: Homosexuality and the Horror Film*, film scholar Harry M. Benshoff gives a brief summation of how the “Other” is determined by those who have political and monetary influence. In the witch’s narrative there is a constant struggle between “normality (as defined chiefly by a heterosexual patriarchal capitalism), the Other (embodied in the figure of the monster), and the relationship between the two” (4). Even though Sabrina attempts to fully embrace her “Otherness,” the show fails at positioning her as a character who would face these injustices, that would indeed be experienced the other characters of color. Instead she is given an unlimited amount of power based on her femininity and whiteness, while the People of Color are ignored and continue to suffer by the establishment which claims to protect and care for them.

I think it is important to point out Sabrina’s connection to her power with her race as well as her femininity. Throughout the history of film, the “white savior” narrative device is prevalent and commonplace. In Matthew W. Hughey’s book, *The White Savior Film: Content, Critics, and Consumption*, he describes that the “white savior” exists in a

genre of film which features a “white messianic character [who] saves a lower or working class, usually urban or isolated, nonwhite character from a sad fate” (1). *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* follows this trope and continues to perpetuate whiteness as a powerful entity to the degree its titular character develops powers because of her familial heritage and her gender. Sabrina’s biological father turns out to be Lucifer, through him she is bestowed superior powers which will induce the “End Times.” She evolves into a messianic figure as the Apocalypse and Lucifer approaches. To mock the Holy Trinity, Lucifer uses Sabrina’s birth to emulate Jesus Christ’s. The show reiterates her upcoming saviorhood by having her easily and effortlessly resolve every obstacle she faces. Sabrina is equated to Christ, a religious figure who is defined by his sacrifice and is immortalized as a messiah for Judeo-Christian believers. Sabrina’s role as the “white savior” entails advantages that Prudence, her bi-racial counterpart, and her cousin, Ambrose do not receive. Once again, utilizing Hughey’s ideas of whiteness and the white savior, Sabrina is “akin to an invisible ‘knapsack’ of privileges, contemporary white dominance and privilege often go unquestioned (at least by most whites) or are justified in reference to whites’ supposed possession of ‘good values,’ such as a strong work ethic and commitment to sovereign individualism” (5). Sabrina’s narrative continues the long history of white characters who perform good deeds, “racial cooperation, nonwhite uplift, and white redemption” (Hughey 7), and campaigns for justice among subjugated groups who cannot do it without the help of the “white savior” figure. Sabrina’s crusade for gender and Queer equality can be seen in the first episode where she and her friends, Roz

(Jaz Sinclair), create a school club, meant to protect their friend, Susie (Lachlan Watson), from sexual harassment and transphobic attacks. Rosalind coins the club “WICCA,” also known as the “Woman’s Intersectional Cultural and Creative Association,” which is meant to foster the concept of comradeship and sisterhood among the young woman in the school who may be encountering similar instances of abuse. Yet, Sabrina takes things into her own hands by casting a spell on the ignorant, prudish school principal, George Hawthorne. This can be interpreted as Sabrina’s reluctance to trust the patriarchal institution established in her school to support her cause. Instead she uses her own magical powers to take the cause into her own hands. Without her supernatural interference, the club would have never been approved by Hawthorne. This scene sheds light on Sabrina’s status as the “white savior” and will continue this trend of Sabrina constantly “uplifting” communities who need a character of reputable and moralistic values:

White savior films share a perspective that associates that ideal white self with order, rationality, self-reliant individualism, courage, fortitude, and the ability to overcome personal deficiencies. This character is demarcated and constructed through two symbolic boundaries: inter- and intraracial distinctions. In the former, the ideal white is made in counterdistinction to nonwhite communities stereotyped by disorder, carnality, violence, unbridled emotion, and moral depravity. (Hughey 170)

Sabrina invokes this concept of “self-reliant individualism” and “fortitude” by surpassing the authority of her school and using her magical abilities to create change in her school in the name of self-satisfying social justice and secures her role as the “white savior.”

Along with her whiteness, Sabrina’s femininity heightens her powers. Sabrina’s on screen rise to power imitates the empowerment of the “final girl” in Carol Clover’s *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. In this case, Clover argues the “final girl” is not feminine. I disagree. From my viewpoint, the killer in slasher films wants to kill the “final girl’s” and/or possess some form of her femininity. The “final girl” is set apart from her other friends because she is a different form of femininity and is able to use these attributes to survive the killer’s attack. The “final girl” is “intelligent, watchful, level headed; the first character to sense something amiss and the only one to deduce from the accumulating evidence the pattern and extent of the threat; the only one, in other words, whose perspective approaches our own privileged understanding of the situation” (Clover 44), which are similar to characteristics relating to my understanding and definition of femininity. Sabrina’s femininity functions as a tool for survival, strength, and endurance against her enemies. Comparable to the “final girl’s” plight against the serial murderer, who “alone looks death in the face, but she alone also finds the strength either to stay the killer long enough to be rescued (ending A) or to kill him herself (ending B)” (Clover 35), Sabrina relies on her magical abilities to defy patriarchal and institutional oppressions. Instead of brandishing a phallic weapon,

Sabrina externalizes the qualities of her feminine powers enabled by her whiteness.

Even though Sabrina Spellman is the titular character of the show and significant events revolve around the main character, I think it is meaningful to consider how the show and its creators handle race and other identities related to the other characters in the series. This issue is significant because most television series revolve around white characters who do not experience discrimination, prejudice or other forms of bigotry. Or the opposite occurs and their whiteness is never mentioned. The privileges they receive are never a topic of discussion or a plot. "Race is configured as irrelevant, while at the same time whiteness is centered" (Dubrofsky and Ryalls 404) and is treated as society's problem. As long as they do not participate, the white character is free from sharing responsibility for the oppressions felt and experienced by marginalized people. In the series, Prudence Night is Sabrina's on and off again foe. She is an orphan alongside her foster sisters, Dorcas and Agatha, all together they make up the so-called Weird Sisters. She is also a Black bi-racial woman, her sisters are not. In the first season, Prudence has animosity towards Sabrina for being a half-witch. This narrative becomes a typical and reliable story device in media involving supernatural gifted beings, including the *Harry Potter* film series; it allows television writers and producers to delve into a discourse about discrimination in society, namely racism, homophobia, misogyny, and other forms of prejudice. It is a form of social justice disguised in a creative work, but it never amounts to anything except the half-witch being discriminated against thwarts the

genocidal, Hitler-esque plot of the villain. The film usually ends with the half-witch accepted by their coven, but we are never reassured if other witches of similar births will also be allowed to live or if humans and supernatural figures integrate. The audience is left with the impression the magical society does not evolve and allows the sole half-witch character to exist because of their messianic status. In the two seasons of *Sabrina*, these particular themes are re-explored, yet do not bring any original, contemporary arguments revolved around the bigotry or discrimination possibly faced by Prudence and Ambrose. In Ella Shohat's "Ethnicities-in-Relation: Toward a Multicultural Reading of American Cinema" in the book, *Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and the American Cinema*, she speaks about how the essence of ethnicity may be present but it is not always seen through the characters or story. Shohat describes this phenomenon as "inferential ethnic presences" and it involves "the various ways in which ethnic cultures penetrate the screen without always literally being represented by ethnic and racial themes or even characters" (Shohat 223). Although the audience is introduced to Prudence and Ambrose, we never really delve into their stories besides Prudence's hatred for Sabrina and Ambrose attempting to re-enter the coven and helping Sabrina navigate her way through the witch world. Shohat also claims "to ignore the issue of ethnicity in dominant films set in hegemonic and homogeneous environments would be as mistaken as to ignore issues of gender and sexuality in films privileging the male presence... in which women and sexuality per se tend to be absent from the narrative but issues of sexual politics and gender roles 'haunt' the film" (Shohat 219).

Prudence is the antagonist of the series, but her character simply exists to be the vessel for ignorance, hate, and bigotry against Sabrina's incorruptible, righteous characterization. Prudence has become a substitute for the white villain who spews hate for the "Other." Yet, in the series her race and bi-raciality is neither mentioned or investigated. In the second season, it is revealed Father Faustus Blackwood, a white man, is her biological father, but her mother is unknown. Prudence's bi-raciality mirrors Sabrina's half mortal and half magical existence. Both women exist in between two spaces, which in turn leads them to function and cope in different, separate capacities as Karin Beeler describes in her book, *Seers, Witches and Psychics on Screen: An Analysis of Women Visionary Characters in Recent Television and Film*. Prudence and Sabrina perform outside of "socially or institutionally acceptable" boundaries, within the context of their magical heritage and race, respectively. Also known as a "third space," this is "a space where mediation or subversive activities may take place for marginalized groups" (Beeler 15). The "third space" allows the witch to "negotiate between the worlds of the living and the dead, and who subvert the binary concepts of 'normal' vs. 'mad,' reason vs. intuition through their unusual powers" (Beeler 15). Prudence is accepted by her community because of her skills as a witch, yet she still lacks the amount of power Sabrina owns and her race/bi-raciality is disregarded and favored for Sabrina's whiteness. Prudence's race affects her chance at performing the same level of magic Sabrina is able to obtain. She has more experience casting spells and is regarded as a full-blooded witch, but the series still illustrates Prudence as incapable of performing powerful spells without

the assistance of her adoptive sisters. In the first episode, Prudence, Dorcas, and Agatha gather together to curse Sabrina. Sabrina washes away the curse when she gets to school in the gym shower, then later receives advice from her aunt Hilda to take a salt water bath with some candles and the curse will be lifted. Prudence is not seen again in the episode. Durbofsky and Ryalls claim that in some instances “bodies of color can never perform seamless whiteness, though they can sometimes have moments where they approximate the virtuous behavior associated with authentic whiteness” (404). Although Prudence is not depicted as a “virtuous” person, she still tries to emulate the magics Sabrina has but does not achieve it. Prudence’s bi-raciality does not allow her to enter the space of whiteness Sabrina has easy access to and Sabrina’s whiteness empowers her to obstruct Prudence by simply washing away her curse. Sabrina’s whiteness is what distinguishes her from the other witches, especially Prudence, because she is able to move from the mortal and witch space maintaining her moral values and encourages the use of her unlimited power.

One of the other characters of color is Sabrina’s cousin, Ambrose Spellman. Ambrose is a pansexual, Black man who lives with Sabrina and their two aunts. He has been under house arrest for the past several decades for attempting to blow up the Vatican. Similar to Prudence, it is unclear what side of the family he is from or how he is related to Sabrina, Zelda, and Hilda. I want to reiterate, I am not criticizing the dynamics of an interracial/mixed race family, I just do not understand why race is not discussed explicitly, considering witches are treated as a subjugated community in this world.

Especially as a Black Queer person, Ambrose may have dealt with discrimination outside of the witch world. Not only is race never mentioned, but his sexuality is not defined either. Perhaps, the show does not feel the need to engage with the rhetoric of designating the character to a certain identity, but I believe if the show is going to display “othered” and nonheteronormative identities, they should be able to define them. But how his race and sexuality is not considered, it is reinforced by the treatment he receives from the series’ writers. Besides Prudence, Ambrose suffers the most compared to his cousin, aunts, and other witches. In season two, Ambrose gets into a relationship with a man named, Luke Chalfant, another warlock. Luke is as misogynistic as the other heterosexual men in the coven since he opposes Sabrina’s acceptance into the Academy. By the end, their relationship ends as Luke is murdered. This narrative device falls into what has been called the “bury your gays” trope. Ambrose’s anguish, pain, and torment comes from the death of his same-sex partner. In “Bury Your Gays: History, Usage, and Context,” scholar, Haley Hulan, refers to the expression to describe “a narrative work (novels especially), which features a same-gender romantic couple, one of the lovers must die or otherwise be destroyed by the end of the story. Many instances of this trope draw a direct correlation between the couple confessing their feelings for one another, kissing, having sex for the first time and the character’s death” (17). This gimmick attempts to provide Ambrose with character development but just diminishes him to a systematized, generic, overused cliché against Sabrina’s heteronormativity and whiteness.

For this last section of my thesis, I will analyze two episodes from the first and second season which support my assertion Sabrina's power is linked to her femininity and whiteness. The first episode will be the pilot, otherwise known as "Chapter One: October Country," because it introduces the viewer to our main protagonist of the show. We also receive insight into Sabrina's life in the mortal world and how she copes with being a half-witch. As I mentioned earlier, it is a week before her sixteenth birthday and her Dark Baptism. At breakfast the next morning, Sabrina converses with her Aunts Hilda and Zelda about preparations for the Dark Baptism, with the topic focusing on Sabrina picking a "familiar"; a companion which serves their witch/warlock master. Sabrina goes into the forest to perform a spell to call upon her familiar but is interrupted by the Weird Sisters. Prudence antagonizes Sabrina about her spellcasting abilities and her possible transfer to the Academy. Sabrina confirms her attendance and Prudence replies "We don't want half-breeds at the academy." To which Sabrina retorts with "And who, exactly, are you calling a half-breed?" Prudence continues by saying "Isn't that what you are? Half-witch, half-mortal? Stay with your own kind." The scene ends with the Sisters placing a curse on Sabrina. What struck me in this particular scene is the moment Sabrina snaps back and directs the question toward Prudence. It may be a moment of Sabrina asking a rhetorical question. But I read the scene as Sabrina exposing the hypocrisy in Prudence's statement and pointing out her bi-raciality. This is an instance where race is inferred, as stated by Shohat, but never investigated further. Sabrina's ignorant comment exposes her own idea of her power as a white woman. She

uses race and the “half-breed” remark as a means of attack on Prudence’s racial background. Again, Prudence and Sabrina reflect one another through their occupation of different spaces and being divided by their lineage. Prudence parental hereditary is denied from her. Sabrina’s father, Edward (Georgie Daburas) was a “High Priest,” a position held in high esteem by fellow witches. It is an authoritative figure who has influence in witch law and has power deeply rooted in the academic and political institution system structured by the witches. Sabrina is able to lay claim to her father’s previous held position and constantly mentions her father’s legacy; she uses her father’s role as “High Priest” to empower her own agenda and weaponizes her surname to receive access into the Church of Night’s and manipulate the system to place new rules which she determines to not fit her own values. Also, Sabrina is granted more privileges by being fluid in the moral and witch world. Since her father was a warlock and her mother was a mortal, she is not restricted from staying in one space or the other. Prudence warns her not to come, but she does not physically, magically, or otherwise stop Sabrina from attending the Academy as we later see. She has the advantage of balancing the two spaces, she can weave in between worlds without any dire consequences. Sabrina is not confined to one space, she can easily slip into one or the other and is not reprimanded, instead she is encouraged by her friends, family, and peers to continue balancing the two. This allows Sabrina to explore her power and continue her path of “white saviorhood.”

In another episode titled, “Chapter Ten: The Witching Hour,” Madame Satan/Lilith/Mary Wardwell (Michelle Gomez) summons the “Greendale Thirteen,” a troupe of

witches who were betrayed by other witches and hung by mortals. The “Greendale Thirteen” conjure up the “Red Angel of Death” to bring about death to both witches and mortals. Sabrina does not want to abandon her friends and offers protection. A tornado conjured up by the Spellmans places all of the mortals in the Baxter High basement for shelter. Eventually, Madame Satan persuades Sabrina to finally sign the “Book of the Beast” to access all of her witch powers to defeat the “Greendale Witches.” Sabrina is still reluctant to sign until Madame Satan reassures her by proclaiming, “I know you’re scared, Sabrina. Because all women are taught to fear power. Own your power. Don’t accept it from the Dark Lord. Take it. Wield it.” She finally accepts her fate and signs her name. Sabrina invokes “hellfire” to burn the souls of the “Greendale Witches” and saves the town. By the end of the episode, Sabrina is seen walking with the Weird Sisters, with stark white hair and a blood red dress, distinguishable from the other girls’ black dresses, indicating Sabrina’s full transformation as a true witch. The last act of “Chapter Ten: The Witching Hour” focuses on Sabrina acquiring her witch powers from Satan. Although Madame Satan/Ms. Wardwell claims Sabrina should not “accept it from the Dark Lord” but to “take it,” a moment later Satan shows up behind Sabrina and guides her through the process of signing her name. He slices open her hand and wraps his hand/claw in hers and helps Sabrina to write in her own blood. Her power is not hers to “take,” contrary to Wardwell’s suggestion. Sabrina’s femininity enables this power to manifest, but Satan supplies her with it. Sabrina becomes protective of Harvey, Roz, Susie, and the Greendale residents that she will do anything to save them including sacrificing her

morals and values by participating in a ritual she has deemed “sexist.” Later, Wardwell says, “it’s your power.” This moment is significant because later on in the second season, it is revealed that Satan is Sabrina’s biological father. Witchcraft is never really owned by Sabrina. These advantages render Sabrina as a figure of emulating and mirroring the patriarchy structure she tries to fight against. Although Wardwell is depicted as a dominant, strong, man-eating she-demon, she is still subordinate to Satan as well. She is his lover and refers to herself as his “foot soldier.” Even her powers were endowed by Lucifer. Event though Wardwell tries to encourage Sabrina to “own your power,” secretly Wardwell wants Satan’s position and become Queen of Hell. Sabrina’s and Wardwell’s goals parallel one another as their quest to dismantle Satan’s unfair treatment of the coven, soon transforms into two white feminine figures who imitate the power structures which empower and seemingly subjugate them.

In season two’s “Chapter Seventeen: The Missionaries,” Ambrose has been falsely imprisoned after being framed by Father Blackwood for the murder of their Anti-Pope. Prudence and her sisters torture Ambrose and attempt to make him confess using a spell. Meanwhile, the coven comes under attack from two angel witch-hunters, Jerathmiel (Spencer Treat Clark) and Mehitabel (Bayley Corman). The witch-hunters penetrate the Academy, taking Ambrose, Prudence, and the other students as hostages. Soon, Jerathmiel and Mehitabel begin to execute the students one by one until Sabrina confronts them. The two angels kill Sabrina but she is resurrected by the Dark Lord, returns as a fiery beacon, and burns the angels alive. Later, she brings two students back

to life, leaving the coven and Harvey stunned and uneasy. In this episode we see Sabrina sacrifice herself “so the [witches] may have better lives” (42). This begins to culminate in her role as the white good doer who must display her values and showcase her messianic integrity. Picking up right after the previous episode, “Chapter Eighteen: The Miracles of Sabrina Spellman” shows Sabrina healing Ambrose from his fatal wounds. News spreads of Sabrina’s newly emerged powers within the coven, leaving some impressed while others not so much. Sabrina is convinced her new powers are meant to unite mortals and witches, similar to the sentiment her father, Edward, shared before he died. Before she can commit to uniting humankind and witchkind, she tries to prove Ambrose’s innocence of the murder of the Anti-Pope. Satan finds Ambrose innocent and demotes Blackwood, while Sabrina finally attempts to display her newly developed magical powers to a crowd of her witch and mortal friends, but is interrupted by the revelation she will bring about the apocalypse. During this episode, Sabrina has shown her ability to heal people and bring them back from the dead. At this time, her peers begin to follow her around and become her disciples. In this instance, “the non-whites must circumambulate...[and] go to great lengths to solidify just how wonderful contact with the white savior is” (Hughey 40). In place of the “non-whites” are the other witches who do not possess the same powers as Sabrina. Sabrina’s fellow students circle around because she has performed “violent, harsh, or destructive actions to achieve peace and order that [she think the witches] should experience” (Hughey 41). This episode affirms Sabrina’s fulfillment as the “white savior” because she has done what no other witch could achieve. She has

saved the coven from destruction, alone without the help of another witch. Although, Satan resurrected her and has given her power, this is meant to mimic the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the religious figure Sabrina has become closely linked to. The other witches gather around her because she has removed the harmful aspects of the angels from the coven and has shown them what true tranquility is and has persuaded the other witches to believe in her benevolence. Like the white heroes described by Hughey, she also “inspires them and teaches them how to be more like the savior” (Hughey 41) by telling them of her plans to unite the mortals and witches as well as trying to convince them mortals are not as different as the witches. Sabrina’s resurrection follows the structure of a “white savior” who must show how much better they are compared to everyone else. *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* uses Sabrina’s narrative to show the “white savior” trope continues to be told in current media and attempts to mask it in white feminism as an empowering message to young white girls to strive toward.

*Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* is an entertaining television show which does attempt to tackle issues of misogyny and sexism, while simultaneously dissecting themes of injustice present in certain communities. Yet, it does not excuse it from presenting narratives which are harmful and stem from stereotypes, racist tropes, and caricatures. *Sabrina* continues the legacy of demonstrating white supremacy and institutional power structures seen in past films, television series, and other media. However, from the episodes that were selected for this project, it is apparent certain images and tropes continue to exist. White and “color blind” people always refer to this imaginary “post-

racial” world, where racism, prejudice, and discrimination do not exist. The same can perhaps be attributed to misogyny, sexism, sexuality, and gender, in which these may not be issues to be concerned about anymore. Television shows and films are convinced by casting a Latina in a starring role or switching out a well-known canonical white character for an Asian person is the solution to resolving issues of representation on screen. It is not that simple. This applies to *Sabrina* as well; the optics of a series following a young white woman with supernatural abilities fighting against misogyny and becoming a social justice warrior for People of Color and other identities is quite alarming. The series still presents the idea that a white person can fix everything with or without magic and because she is a feminine figure, she is less of a threat than a white man would be. This perpetuates the idea that to become successful you must attain the status of a white man in power. White men in power usually involves the oppression of marginalized people. Sabrina’s powers derive from her father, Edward, and eventually as the audience finds out her biological father, Satan. These patriarchal figures push Sabrina’s to adopt the philosophy that she is destined for great things and she must continually push herself in seeking more power. Sabrina becomes another “white savior” and uses her white femininity as a disguise for the offenses and injustices that come with that role. Again, as a Gay, Chicano cis man, it is challenging to accept that a straight white person will save the day every day, especially when they hold legislative power in governmental institutions, like the current presidential administration, and use it to create laws which seek to harm Queer, Black, Latino, feminine, Transgender, and other

communities. This disconnect can cease if there could be an influx of content created by people who reflect my various identities. Television and film are barely figuring out that people do not always want to see white people on the screen saving the day, except in superhero movies; yet, even the superhero genre is expanding their pantheon of super-powered saviors to include women and Black men. The *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* has allowed Prudence, Ambrose, and Roz to become disposable and one-dimensional characters who wait for Sabrina to rescue them from disaster. As the main Black characters, their depiction is very disappointing and is veiled in racist stereotypes. Sabrina Spellman is not an evil, dubious character per se, but her actions and behaviors echo tropes which are meant to sustain the idea of white supremacy. Her white femininity drives the narrative throughout the entire series and presumably it will continue since she is the central character. The issues of sexism, racism, misogyny, colorism, whiteness, and other forms of discrimination may be difficult subject matters to represent but if *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* puts the effort to shed light on such topics, it can contribute to a dialogue missing in current media.

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