

WHICH WITCH IS WITCH: THE APPROPRIATION OF WOMEN'S PAIN IN THE USE OF
THE WITCH HUNT METAPHOR IN MODERN POLITICAL RHETORIC

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ABSTRACT

The evolution of the term “witch hunt” from a physical act to a political metaphor is largely overlooked by modern audiences. As the hysteria of the witch trials =fades into popular memory, certain associations live on. In the case of the witch hunt, the association of the term ‘witch hunt’ is women’s innocence. Thousands of innocent women were killed in the original witch trials. The metaphor calls back to this collective memory of innocence. In politics, the witch hunt metaphor is used as a rallying cry against an accuser. White male politicians use this metaphor as a claim of innocence against accusations of wrongdoing. Women, who experienced these instances of gendered history differently, do not use the witch hunt defense. Through careful analysis of social media rhetoric, I argue that powerful male politicians such as President Donald Trump appropriate specific historical instances of women’s pain for their own gain.

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CHAPTER ONE: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The 2016 presidential elections brought the term ‘witch hunt’ into popular political rhetoric. President Donald Trump called reports of Russian involvement in the outcomes of the election “[t]he greatest Witch Hunt in American History” and continues to use the term in reference to accusations of collusion, the Mueller Report, and the presidential impeachment trials (@realDonaldTrump 5 June 2018, 8:33:37 PM). The president’s use of the term on the popular social media website Twitter sparked a rash of the term ‘witch hunt’ being used in political rhetoric.¹ To understand the evolution of the term from a physical² and social act to a political metaphor necessitates an in-depth understanding of the historical significance of this term and how it is being presented by politicians today.

The modern political meaning of the term ‘witch hunt’ evolved from the early European and American witch trials. The use of the term calls back to a complex historical moment. The European witch trials spanned from “roughly 1450 to 1750” and “thousands of persons, most of them women, were tried for the crime of witchcraft. About half of these individuals were executed, usually by burning” (Levack 1). The European and American witch trials garnered impressive amounts of scholarship throughout the last century. Scholars have considered the possible causes of the trials, the sociopolitical atmosphere leading up to the trials, and the gendered implications of the victims of the original witch trials. This is, by no means, an

¹ Political rhetoric here is defined as the style and content of language being used to discuss modern politics in a public space. In this case, political rhetoric is specific to political discussions involving United States politics.

² The term ‘physical’ when applied to the witch trials focuses on how the witch trials were a physical ‘hunt’ for wrongdoers. This is also a social and political act, however, the term is used in social and political rhetoric still today, so the term ‘physical’ is used to discuss the negative impact of the witch trials on physical bodies such as torture and death.

exhaustive history of the European and American witch trials. Instead, this section is meant as an overview of the original witch trials in an attempt to explain the significance of this event to modern women and how the terms ‘witch’ and ‘witch hunt’ have been used throughout history.

There is no one specific cause that can be attributed to the witch trials. Robin Briggs, an English historian, cautions that “serious interpretations of European witchcraft must be multifactorial, relating it to a number of discrete, or at least separable, causes” (Briggs 51). As such, scholars have considered many different, often overlapping causes to help explain how the witch trials came into existence.

One of the many cited contributions to the European witch trials is the challenge of the political power of the Catholic Church during the Reformation in the 16th century. In trying to reaffirm their political power, the Church turned popular tide against people who did not subscribe to the dominant religious belief system. The belief in witches stemmed from the idea that “large numbers of [w]itches were completely rejecting their Christian faith and undermining Christian civilization” (Levack 31-32). Steven T. Katz connects Christian ideals with the misogynistic views of “Christian society” to create a fear of women’s power and the rise in the fear of witchcraft (Katz 403). The witch trials became “a way for Catholic and Protestant churches to compete with each other for followers” (Little). The witch trials were a battleground where the Catholic and Protestant churches tried to prove how they could protect their members from Satanic influences (Little). The new balance of power in Europe that came after the 1648 treaty of the Peace of Westphalia brought about a decline in witch hunts in the 17th century (Little). Scholars believe that Catholicism interacted with “the process of state-forming or nation-building” which allowed “for a tighter grip on the religious or superstitious beliefs of the subjects” (Behringer 84). The need to control the social and religious beliefs of constituents led

to an outbreak of witchcraft accusations. When the balance of power was redistributed, the witch hunts died down. As Briggs suggests, this process is complex and any possible causes of the witch trials will remain inevitably intertwined no matter the context.

The persecution of witches does not always adhere to the previously mentioned religious model of social change. According to Thomas J. Schoeneman, a professor of Psychology at Lewis and Clark College, non-Western witch trials tend to be private accusations while the Western witch trials tend to be social conflict accusations and resulted from a more generalized social discord (530). Much of the Western witch trials, specifically those in Europe and the United States, arose from “the political and social anxieties rampant in the early republic” and were “derived from both the rise of modern political parties and the gradual democratization of politics” (Gould 59). Part of the political evolution in this time period involved an implementation of belief systems into political rhetoric. The belief of the church is one example as the Catholic Church struggled to maintain political power in Europe while the rise of political parties in the United States is another example. The reaffirmation of the nation is carried out when “society creates its own internal enemies” (Bergeson 221). This reaffirmation focused on the “creation of enemies, as a means of renewing the presence of these sacred forces, centered on discovering ‘enemies of the people,’ the nation, and even enemies of Nature and History itself” (Bergeson 222). The sacred forces that need to be renewed through this process are individual to each nation.

A spike in witchcraft accusations in the 1640s resulted from widespread civil unrest. Marianne Hester found that “[t]he onset of civil war and the widespread political and religious disorder in the 1640s ushered in a new phase in the history of English witchcraft” (108). This renewed interest proposed “it was far better to prosecute those real enemies of God, the

witches... than to punish men whose only crime was to differ on the non-essentials of religious faith and opinion” (Hester 114). Those with differing political and religious opinions in government banded together to persecute witches instead of opposing against one another. In many ways, the witch trials, especially the trials in Salem, became “decidedly political event[s]” (Gould 64). These political events worked to help reinstate the “dominant political values of the ruling group” by making the witch trials the main topic of political discussion (Elmer 104). Together, these factors resulted in the persecution of thousands of individuals for the crimes of witchcraft in early modern Europe.

The true number of those accused and persecuted throughout the European witch trials is debated between scholars. Part of this debate comes from the fact that “witch hunting varied dramatically throughout Europe, ranging from a high of 26,000 deaths in Germany to a low of 4 in Ireland” (Jacobs). One of the most recent estimations is “100,000 trials between 1450 and 1750, with something between 40,000-50,000 executions” (Jacobs). However, other scholars disagree with this number. Nachman Ben-Yehuda estimates between 200,000-500,000 people were executed in this timeframe (1). Interestingly, the resulting estimate of the percentage of women who were executed (whatever the full number of deaths is estimated to be) rests between 75-85% (Apps and Gow 25). The consistent estimation of women who died within the European and American witch trials indicates a gendered historical moment where women were the majority of victims in a sociopolitical purge. Hester argues that “the imposition of a Christian political ideology” centered around gender relations helped to ignite the original witch trials (292). Katz agrees with this assessment, suggesting that the witch trials stemmed from the fear of “the allegedly inherent, destabilizing, even dangerous (sexual and other) power of women” (Katz 403). The term ‘witch’ carried, and continues to carry, an explicit connotation of womanhood.

The explicit connotation of womanhood that comes with the term ‘witch’ is specified in various treaties written throughout the original witch trials. The treaties written during the original witch trials were meant as a guide on how to identify and ultimately convict witches. While the shifting political and social atmosphere during the European and American witch trials didn’t allow for just one concrete definition of what a witch was or how a witch could be identified, various treaties attempted to rectify this oversight. One of the most significant treaties was *The Malleus Maleficarum*.

The Malleus Maleficarum (hereby referred to as *The Malleus*) was published by Heinrich Institoris³ in 1486. Hans Peter Broedel, the Department Chair in History at University of North Dakota, wrote *The Malleus Maleficarum and the Construction of Witchcraft: Theology and Popular Belief* which was published in 2003 discussing the theological discussion of *The Malleus*. “By 1500, eight editions of the *Malleus* had been published, and there were five more by 1520. By the time of Institoris’ death around 1505, his work could be found in many libraries and the judicial reference collections throughout Europe” (Broedel 7). During this period of time, George Mora estimates that “between thirty and fifty thousand copies were distributed” (Broedel 8). Throughout this entire time period, *The Malleus* remained the authoritative work on witchcraft.

The *Malleus* itself did “not directly inspir[e] a frenzy of witchcraft prosecutions, nevertheless [it] did make an important contribution to the development of the entire European

³ Some sources claim that Institoris (whose original name was Heinrich Kramer) wrote *The Malleus* with Jacob Sprenger. Many historians and scholars have disputed this claim. The translator of this version of *The Malleus* suggests that Sprenger himself took offense to Institoris adding his name to the treaties (27). As such, Sprenger’s name is not indicated here as a coauthor.

witch-hunt” (Levack 56). Institoris states that “in the old days, such people [witches] were punished by means of a twofold penalty—by death and by [animals’] claws. Their body was torn to pieces or they were thrown to wild animals to be eaten. Nowadays, however, they were burned, perhaps because of the female sex” (46). The translator of *The Malleus*, P.G. Maxwell-Stuart, indicates that the particular wording “*propter foemineum sexum* . . . implies that not all those who were burned were necessarily female, and that the female sex as a whole bore the responsibility for the executions of both male and female practitioners of harmful magic” (Institoris 46). These statements, both the one made by Institoris and the one translated by Maxwell-Stuart, specifically code witches as women, suggesting the majority of witches were women and all women were responsible for the death of those who were accused of witchcraft in any form.

Institoris continues to indicate witches were primarily women as he critiques the *Canon Episcopi* (hereby referred to as the *Canon*), the medieval canon law, in his explanation of what witches are. The *Canon* never specifically mentions “workers of harmful magic,” though it does mention “silly women [who think they ride with Diana]” which seem to have the powers of witches (Institoris 48). Institoris believes that this passage is referencing witches, which indicates a gendered aspect to the term. The *Canon* specifically refers to “silly women,” not silly people or silly men. Throughout Institoris’s critique of the *Canon*, he insinuates that women are not only weaker in faith than men, but that they are also physically unable to resist the lure of witchcraft. The most notable moment in which Institoris makes this claim is when he is discussing the punishment of witches. Institoris writes, “if an evil spirit acts through a witch, he is using her as his instrument” (52-53). Here, Institoris specifically implies that the witch will always be a woman who is under the direct control of a man, a male-coded spirit in this case. But Institoris

doesn't stop there. He goes on to explain that "women can use certain things to make changes to the bodies of other people without the aid of evil spirits, changes which go beyond our understanding" (Institoris 52-53). This likely refers to women who functioned within the roles of healer and mystic. Women, "[d]enied the ancient role of clergy or the newly emerging one of doctor... drew on their own networks of information and skill" (Barstow 109). The power that women possessed in these positions placed them between the role of the priest or doctor, a position entirely its own.

As the witch trials continued to develop, a direct relation between the role of mystic and healer and accusations of witchcraft emerged. Anne Llewellyn Barstow wrote that the "records speak eloquently of the fear of the wise woman that developed, especially in men. The role of healer, long respected and even seen as essential, became suspect" (109). With the rise of the priesthood and the position of physician, the roles traditionally inhabited by women became unsafe. One of the results of the witch trials was the purging of women who existed within these spaces. Elspeth Whitney discusses this as a "fear of economically and psychologically independent women who threatened in various ways to upset male control of property and the social order, in particular women who stood to inherit property because they had no brothers or sons" (85). The women in these positions "were perceived by the community to be 'discontent,' that is, as refusing to accept their 'place' in the social hierarchy" (Whitney 85). The continued persecution of women who fell outside the ideal social roles went largely unacknowledged in historical scholarship focused around the witch trials until the 1970s.

Many scholars who study the witch trials, like Keith Thomas, "shie[d] away from seeing this outcome for women as in any way related to the male-female conflicts" (Hester 290). Christina Lerner argues that the European witch trials were sex-related, not sex-specific, because

the “two principal characteristics of the witch, that is malice and alleged supernatural power, are human rather than female characteristics” (Hester 291). Hester explains this further by suggesting that Lerner’s definition of sex-related acts of violence are “one degree removed from an attack on women as such” (Hester 291). The assumption of sex-relation simply rests in the technical aspects of witch trial documentation, specifically witch trial treaties, in which the definition of the witch as a being did not specify womanhood and instead simply assumed it.

In 1972, E. William Monter acknowledged that “witchcraft accusations could best be understood as projections of patriarchal social fears onto atypical women, that is, those who lived apart from male controls of husbands or fathers and were therefore defenseless, isolated, and unable to revenge themselves by the more normal means of physical violence or recourse to law courts” (Whitney 80). The discussion of atypical women does not commonly mention a discussion of race and race relations. Matthew Dennis and Elizabeth Reis suggest in their article “Women as Witches, Witches as Women: Witchcraft and Patriarchy in Colonial North America” that “[w]itches could appear at any moment in colonial America. Or at least so believed virtually all of the inhabitants of North America, Native and newcomer, throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, across geographical regions and various colonial regimes, across class, race, gender, and religion, and regardless of free or unfree status” (66). Scholars including Dennis and Reis, Veta Smith Tucker, and Timothy J. McMillan all acknowledge race in the American witch trials, but acknowledgement of race in the European witch trials is lacking. This lack indicates that the women being persecuted during the witch hunt may have been from any descent. This also suggests that the term ‘women’ used in scholarship surrounding the witch trials in Europe and the United States is a general term for all women where the assumption may be that the women being accused were all white women. This is not true, as we see in the case of

Tituba Indian, an African women accused of witchcraft in the Salem witch trials. When we're discussing women who do not fit the social norms of the time, it is highly likely that some of these women are women of color who did not fit the social roles subscribed to them.

The acknowledgement of the targeting of women who do not fit into the perceived social norms of the time periods surrounding the witch trials came into scholarship in the 1970s, however, it wasn't until the mid-1990s that there was a full acknowledgement of the gendered language used in witch trial scholarship. Whitney points out that, even in modern scholarship, "there is a tendency... to use the generic male pronoun for everyone...except in the case of the witches themselves for whom the generic female pronoun is used" (82). This assumption of womanhood falls back to the original witch trials and treatises like *The Malleus*.

Some scholars argue that misogyny cannot be blamed for the witch trials. One of the main arguments against this assertion is explicated by Stuart Clarke, whose argument was summarized by Whitney as:

Contemporary demonologists... were not concerned with the question of why witches were women, largely because they operated within the binary system of thought which celebrated polarity as part of the natural order of things. This dependence on polarity necessarily but inadvertently defined women as the polar opposite of good—we must blame the equation of women with witches, therefore, not on misogyny but on the habit of seeing gender in terms of polarity, which Clarke points out was shared by women's defenders as well as their detractors, and therefore was in itself gender neutral. (84).

However, this argument proposes that the misogyny of the time period is to blame for women being witches, while simultaneously arguing that the demonologists of this time period only looked for witches, not women. And yet, the assumption of womanhood still permeated the hunt

for witches because women were equated with evil due to the overreliance of demonologists on binary systems of understanding that coded men as good and women as evil. This is an assumption that is rooted in misogyny. Katz explains this best when he says, “the persecution of witches means primarily, essentially, the persecution of women” (435). If we look back on the discussion by Whitney and the language used in *The Malleus*, we can see that the language of the treaties addressing the witch trials is sex-specific, which also means that this language was not, as Clarke argues, gender neutral. As such, a witch trial or a witch hunt cannot be gender neutral either.

The use of the term ‘witch hunt’ isn’t an instance that is specific to the witch trials. As time goes on, the term ‘witch hunt’ in print spikes and dies regularly according to print culture during the original witch trials. The Google NGRAM algorithm presented in Figure 1 found that instances of the phrase ‘witch hunt’ spiked in the early 1600s with the rise of the original witch trials in Europe. The phrase spiked again from 1685 to 1692. In the early 1700s, the term is once again brought into popular print culture. The Google NGRAM system only presented information through 2000 when the study took place, however, projected data based on current usage of the term in modern political rhetoric predicts that the usage of the term would continue to rise throughout the 2000s to spike again closer to 2020. The term ‘witch hunt’ came back into popular print rhetoric in 1897 and continued to be used thereafter. If we look at the current uses of the term ‘witch,’ we see that the same assumptions of womanhood are applied to the term in the original witch trials. In modern rhetoric, the term ‘witch’ is associated with womanhood⁴ just as it was in the original witch trials. Even if, “[b]y twentieth-century standards, of course, the

⁴ There are modern terms for male practitioners of magic including wizard, sorcerer, mage, etc. These terms are often used in the place of the term ‘witch’ in modern media representations of men with supernatural powers.

entire episode [the witch trials] was simply a matter of ‘superstition,’” the lasting impression of the witch trials still pervades modern rhetoric (Boyer and Nissenbaum 19).



Fig. 1. Google NGRAM Viewer for the term ‘witch hunt’.

The term is still being used, though the usage has changed rapidly over time. From a term used to describe the original witch trials as a physical and social hunt, the witch hunt has evolved into a metaphor used in political rhetoric. However, the political usage of the term ‘witch hunt’ still falls back on the assumptions common in the original witch trials.

The use of the term ‘witch hunt’ as a political metaphor became popular with George Orwell’s 1938 publication of *Homage to Catalonia* when he wrote, “No doubt the leaders had always realized that the party was likely to be suppressed, but they had never expected a wholesale witch-hunt of this description” (166). Previous to Orwell’s usage, the term ‘witch hunt’ was instead used in reference to the witch trials. However, Orwell’s use of the term launched it into the political realm, where the term slowly evolved into a political metaphor.

The evolution of the term ‘witch hunt’ from a physical act to a political metaphor started between the 1940s and 1950s when McCarthyism was at its peak. An exhibit created for the

Cold War Museum by Joyce Oh and Amanda Latham states that Senator Joseph McCarthy “accused several innocent citizens... of being associated with communism” (Oh and Latham). McCarthy made accusations against political enemies without the proper evidence to back those claims. These people weren’t just people accused of communism, but also alcoholics or sexual deviants (Oh and Latham). Oftentimes, these political enemies were quite literally hunted by governmental agencies. The use of the term ‘witch hunt’ when referencing McCarthyism combines the physical aspect of the original witch trials with the metaphorical allusion to innocence and victimhood that continues to pervade political uses of the metaphor today.

The metaphor of the witch hunt continued its popularity from the 1950s into the 1980s. Ross E. Cheit dedicated 15 years to studying the child sexual abuse scandals of the 1980s and published his findings in his book *The Witch-Hunt Narrative: Politics, Psychology, and the Sexual Abuse of Children*. The use of the witch hunt metaphor in reference to these cases started the mistaken belief that “there were hundreds or thousands of injustices during this time that were akin to the Salem witch trials... But to claim that those cases define a whole period is to adopt a view not borne out by evidence” (Cheit xi). This claim is disputed by the fact that, in many cases, the people who were accused of sexual assault were also considered Satanists. The ‘Satanic Panic,’ as Sarah Pruitt labels this time period in her article “Babysitters Accused of Satanic Crimes Exonerated After 25 Years,” lasted throughout the 1970s and 80s when daycares were demonized as women entered the workforce and more children were being left in daycares. In 2011, three Arkansas men were exonerated from a conviction of the sexual assault and murder of three young boys during the Satanic Panic when DNA evidence showed they weren’t connected to the crime (Pruitt). In 2013, Fran and Dan Keller were exonerated after 25 years in prison when the District Attorney in Travis County, Margaret Moore, when the doctor who

provided the only physical evidence of the alleged assault of a three-year-old girl recanted his statement (Pruitt). As Maura Casey states in her article for the Washington Post “How the Daycare Child Abuse Hysteria of the 1980s Became a Witch Hunt,” “fewer than 1 percent of [sexual assault] cases take place in day-care centers.” Richard Beck, in his book *We Believe the Children: A Moral Panic in the 1980s*, suggests that:

the sexual abuse trials of the 1980s yoked numerous undercurrents in American society: fear of crime; the decline of respect for traditional authority; homophobia (being gay helped send some day-care workers to prison); the conservative backlash against feminism, which encouraged women to work outside the home (with its resultant need for day care); and the reality that the patriarchal nuclear family had not just changed, it had become ‘incoherent.’ (Casey)

The suggestion that social change influenced a hunt for Satanists falls in line with the original purposes of the witch trials in Europe and the United States as innocent people in the 1970s and 80s were being accused of what amounts to witchcraft.

The witch hunt in these cases became a metaphor for victimhood and innocence as the accused started to be proven innocent. It is important to recognize that not all of the people tried and convicted during this period were innocent of the charges levelled against them. While some cases lacked solid evidence from which to draw a criminal conviction, there were also many legitimate cases where criminal convictions were drawn. Cheit specifically states that “[l]abeling cases with words such as *hoax* and *witch-hunt* conveys the impression that all of these cases were entirely without factual basis. But there were real cases involving sexual abuse in day-care centers” (Cheit 152). These instances stemmed from the instances of communist sympathizers being hunted by the government. Instead of using the witch hunt metaphor as a descriptor of

what was happening, the witch hunt metaphor was used as a public claim of victimhood by those being accused. This complex historical moment is when the term 'witch hunt' transitions from a descriptor of events to a political metaphor for victimhood as it is being used in today's political rhetoric.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As the use of the witch hunt metaphor transitions into political rhetoric, it's important to understand just how the term 'witch hunt' is being used in modern politics and what the significance of this usage is. The overall analysis of the use of the witch hunt metaphor in President Donald Trump's tweets will be guided by a combination of the theory of civil religion, feminist theory, the theory of metaphor usage in politics, and the appropriation of women's pain through victimhood narratives.

The European and American witch trials focused specifically on the weakest members of society, those who could not protect themselves against accusations of witchcraft. The people who were persecuted fell outside the 'normal' social roles prescribed to them, oftentimes women who fell outside the overarching patriarchal ideals of the time period they lived within. During times of political and social upheaval, finding a common enemy becomes important to reaffirm "the dominant political values of the ruling group" (Elmer 104). In the case of the original witch trials, the common enemy becomes women who fall outside the political, religious, and social norms prescribed on them. Instead, these women somehow exist outside these spaces and become the enemy of the state. However, to enact such a system, there has to be an overarching belief system already in place to promote the dichotomy of good and evil.

In the case of nations, politicians institute social symbols as a way for the country and the people to represent themselves (Bergeson 221). As Robert E. Goodin states in reference to the witch trials, "[w]here politics gets infused with religious fervor, brutal consequences inevitably follow" (1). In the case of the witch trials, the Church positioned itself opposite the witches,

ensuring the enemy of the state became those who engaged in harmful acts of magic.⁵ However, as acknowledged by Boyer and Nissenbaum, the witch trials specifically focused on superstitious reasoning without the possibility of concrete evidence (19). To fully understand how the political system negotiates this space in a more modern sense, Albert James Bergeson studied sacred symbolism in politics and how those symbols influence public opinion. The concept of sacred symbolism in politics combines with the witch hunt narrative in President Trump's tweets as he calls back to a time of patriarchal power in the United States. The narrative being used calls upon traditional beliefs in the symbolism of the president's office as an office of power to situate opposing political figures as enemies of the state.

The concept of civil religion in politics requires constituents to believe in an overarching ideology, such as the ideology that the president is the symbolic head of the nation. Throughout this process, "ordinary reality loses its usual meanings and human beings mingle with mythical beings, playing roles in a cosmic drama" (Bergeson 223). In the case of the original witch trials, the witch became a mythical creature out to create havoc while the inquisitor held the position of the mythical hero. The inquisitor held a powerful position on the side of what was 'good' while the witch held a position on the side of 'evil'. This connects to the positioning of men as 'good' and women as 'evil' as discussed by Stuart Clarke, Emeritus Professor of History at Swansea University that studies witchcraft in the early modern period, and Elspeth Whitney, Professor of History at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas who specializes in medieval European history, the Reformation, and European Women's History. Even in the positioning of the witch and the inquisitor, the dichotomy of good and evil presents itself.

⁵ Or, as previously discussed, those who fell outside the dominant religious ideals.

The good and evil dichotomy is layered into everyday life through the use of sacred symbolism in political rhetorics. Political parties present society “through a variety of symbolizations or collective representations ranging from material objects to systems of ideas... society mobilizes itself through rites performed to these symbolizations as a means of periodically renewing their presence and simultaneously renewing the larger social order they symbolically represent” (Bergesen 221). As Bergesen states, the witch trials “are truly unreal and irrational, for their logic derives from the symbolic significance of the ritual encounters between mythical beings and not from the actualities of human conduct” (223). This is especially evident in the way women were persecuted throughout the original witch trials. Like sacred symbols used in politics, social ideals were in place for how women should act. The ideas propagated through the original witch trials originated in the Victorian period.

The “angel in the house” motif represents the ideal Victorian woman and came into being after the publication of Coventry Patmore’s 1854 poem, “The Angel in the House.” The poem was “inspired by Patmore’s love for his wife Emily and tells the tale of how the narrator met, courted and married the love of his life... the poem does very successfully describe in great detail the many wonderful qualities that make Honoria, the female protagonist, a perfect bride and wife” (Kühl 172-73). The poem “seems to fetishize a type of woman that could not possibly exist in the real world. And yet... the poem did eventually strike a chord in the British public, it gained great popularity and its title became synonymous with the ideal Victorian housewife” (Kühl 173). As time went on, the ideal Victorian housewife became the measure with which women were considered against. As such, this position became intertwined with the witch trials in Europe and the United States.

The angel in the house held the position opposite the witch on the scale of ideal womanhood wherein the angel in the house was coded as ‘good’ and the witch as ‘evil’. The angel in the house “represents the perfect housewife, the domestic goddess of the middle class” (Kühl 171). The performativity of womanhood necessitates the assumption of certain roles in society. Just as the term ‘girl’ “initiates the process by which certain ‘girling’ is compelled,” the term ‘witch’ brings to mind a certain performance of witching (*Bodies That Matter* 232). Sarah Kühl argues that “creating categories and propagating certain stereotypes was... a way for men to try and regain control over women” (172). Just as womanhood propagated the “perfect housewife” stereotype, witchcraft represented the opposite (Kühl 171). The women who were described as witches often fell outside the ideal of womanhood whether that be through economic and psychological independence, ownership of property, or non-adherence to beauty norms (Whitney 85). Women who chose to present themselves in any way but “modest, chaste and innocent” or refused to submit to a man’s control (often a husband or father) risked being accused of witchcraft and ultimately killed for their performativity of womanhood (Kühl 173). The social order of the time glorified women who conceded their identity to the social role of the angel in the house and vilified those who did not adhere to this narrative by punishing women who fell out of the socially prescribed role of angel in the house through the witch trials, ignoring the fact that not all women perform womanhood in the same ways. Falling in line with Bergesen’s analysis of the witch trials, women who opposed this representation were victims of a social purge to reify the social order imposed upon constituents by ruling political parties.

The women who died during the witch trials are now acknowledged as victims of a social and political wrong. Historically, scholars acknowledge the victim status of those who were

killed during the witch trials⁶. In the case of the European and American witch trials, the victims being targeted were women whose positionality placed them outside the social norm. However, the claim of victimhood we see through the use of the witch hunt metaphor in modern political rhetoric is much more complex than simply understanding and acknowledging the wrongdoings of the past. An understanding of the associations of victimhood in modern political rhetoric is necessary to truly understand how this metaphor is being used.

To be a victim, one needs to have experienced some sort of injustice, usually a social or political injustice. According to Robert B. Horowitz, the victim is identified as a person who experienced “some broad social evil, some malevolent elite, some institutional authority that unfairly shapes or negatively influences [their] life-chances” (554). When a large group of victims is established, such as the women accused during the witch trials, a trauma carrier group⁷ is created. These groups of victims “cooperated to define particular experiences as psychologically harmful and morally atrocious” (Degloma 106). I suggest that modern women in Europe and the United States make up a trauma carrier group, specifically a group of individuals who lives in the aftermath of the trauma of the original witch trials. The trauma carrier group I propose is a group that identifies with Thomas Degloma’s specific definition of a trauma carrier group though they are not the original victims of the witch trials in Europe and the United States. Instead, modern women in Europe and the United States comprise a unique trauma carrier group

⁶ Contemporary scholars, whether they agree with the assertion that women were the primary victims of the witch trials, agree that those who died as a result of the witch trials were victims and unfairly tried.

⁷ Oftentimes, trauma carrier groups are associated with post-traumatic stress disorder. However, as we are discussing the historical witch trials in relation to the current political climate, trauma carrier groups as discussed do not fit the clinical definition of post-traumatic stress disorder as defined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. This does not mean that the trauma carrier group does not exist, it simply means that post-traumatic stress disorder is not being experienced by this group.

from the historical trauma of the witch trial. As such, the current use of the term ‘witch hunt’ in popular political rhetoric appropriates the trauma of women who live in the aftermath of this historical moment in an attempt to claim the victimhood of the women who died during this time period.

In the original witch trials, and in the later use of the term ‘witch hunt’ as a political metaphor, the loss of women’s lives is often erased. As Joan W. Scott explains:

By subsuming women into the general ‘human’ identity, we lose the specificity of female diversity and women’s experiences; we are back, in other words, to the days when ‘man’s’ story was supposed to be everyone’s story, when women were ‘hidden from history,’ when the feminine served as the negative counterpoint, the ‘Other’, for the construction of positive masculine identity. (45)

While it is true that men also died in the witch trials throughout Europe and the United States, evidence proves that women were disproportionately killed during this time. The discussion of men who died in the witch trials has surged in recent years. However, even scholarship = discussing men who were accused of witchcraft acknowledges the gendered assumptions of witchcraft and the original witch trials. Lara Apps, a professor at Athabasca University who specializes in witchcraft and atheism in early modern Europe and Britain, and Andrew Gow, an Emeritus professor of History at the University of the University of Alberta who studied witchcraft in early modern Europe, co-wrote the book *Male Witches in Early Modern Europe* considering the role of male witches in the witch trials. Apps and Gow⁸ specifically quote Eva

⁸ Apps and Gow specifically try to position the male victims of the witch trials as a viable mode of study in the scholarship of this period. I do not argue with this positionality. I am simply suggesting that the assumption of equal losses is harmful to the overall understanding of women who live in the aftermath of these events and, while acknowledging the loss of men’s lives, we need to be sure not to erase the overwhelming loss of women’s lives.

Labouvie who states that “men were accused of certain kinds of witchcraft, mainly rooted in ‘agricultural everyday reality’ and male areas of responsibility” (34). While there is definitely a gap in scholarship where male witches are concerned, the overall reality is that women were the prime victims of the witch trials. To say that men were equally affected or equally accused is inaccurate. This assertion also means that the trauma experienced by those accused of witchcraft cannot affect men in the same way that it affects women.

The trauma carrier group I have identified focuses specifically on women’s experiences in the aftermath of the witch trials, an aftermath women still live in today. Historical trauma affects all manners of people and can be traced “horizontally to communities and vertically across generations” (Rinker and Lawler 151). Women experience historical trauma throughout their lives in the aftermath of misogyny and gendered violence. Instances of gender violence women live through and live in the aftermath of are domestic violence, sexual violence, and overall misogyny. The National Organization for Women (NOW) “have worked for over three decades to halt the epidemic of gender-based violence and sexual assault” (“Violence Against Women in the United States”). The NOW website quotes the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control in stating that “women experience about 4.8 million intimate partner-related physical assaults and rapes every year,” while more than 300 women a day are raped or sexually assaulted (“Violence Against Women in the United States”). In the United States, about one-third of women murdered were killed by an intimate partner (“Violence Against Women in the United States”). These instances of gendered violence are all ongoing struggles women are still living with and are in line with historical instances of gendered violence such as the witch trials. While all women live in the aftermath of gendered violence, especially domestic and

sexual violence, women who did not fit into socially prescribed roles were disproportionately affected by the witch trials.

The witch trials affected women and those women who lived outside the social norm. Women's "[c]ollective memory of past experiences clearly has social psychological impacts in the present" (Rinker and Lawler 151). The memory of the witch trials in Europe and the United States lives on not only in the trauma carrier groups that are affected by this history, but also in the use of the witch hunt metaphor in modern politics.

Metaphors in political arenas often call back to the symbolism established through civil religion. Jonathan Charteris-Black, a professor of Linguistics at the University of the West of England-Bristol who developed the rhetorically based approach to metaphor analysis known as Critical Metaphor Analysis, states that "ideology, myth, and metaphor are similar in that they share a common discourse function of persuasion and the expressive potential for cognitive and emotional engagement. They differ in the extent to which appeal is made to conscious cognition or unconscious association" (13). Politicians use metaphors to call back to conscious or unconscious associations in constituents to persuade these constituents to believe in a certain narrative. The narrative can then trigger "unconscious emotional associations" which "influence the value we place on ideas and beliefs on a scale of goodness and badness" (Charteris-Black 13). The conscious or unconscious associations these metaphors call upon influence the thought processes of constituents no matter the context. They are "effective because of their ability to resonate with latent symbolic representations residing at the unconscious level" (Mio 130). When combined with the sacred symbols instituted by civil religion, the invocation of a metaphor can and does influence the overall view of social movements and political candidates. The use of metaphors in popular political rhetoric can help simplify complex issues and make

them more understandable to the general public (Mio 118). The witch hunt metaphor simplifies accusations of wrongdoing into a victimhood claim, assuming that the accusations are not built upon credible evidence and instead are the result of persecution.

The current use of the term ‘witch hunt’ as a metaphor of innocence calls upon the conscious and unconscious associations constituents have of the original witch trials. Oftentimes, these associations are related with innocence and victimhood. When a political figure uses the witch hunt metaphor, they are positioning themselves as the victim of a social or political wrong. Oftentimes, like in the case of President Donald Trump, this narrative is invoked when the politician is being accused of some sort of wrongdoing. The invocation of this metaphor uses the “underlying notions of goodness and evil [to] provide a very clear scale for the evaluation of political parties and their ideologies” (Charteris-Black 103). When a politician labels something a witch hunt metaphorically, they are positioning themselves as the victim and the other party who is accusing them as an evildoer in line with the perpetrators of the original witch trials. The positionality of the accused as a metaphorical ‘witch’ also contains a heavily gendered connotation.

As discussed in Chapter One, the witch is coded feminine in the discourse surrounding the original witch trials. To use the witch hunt metaphor in modern politics calls back to the gendered massacre of thousands of women and calls upon the conscious and unconscious associations of victimhood and innocence that surround the modern thought processes involving the witch trials. The repeated use of this term by male politicians not only references a very specific historical moment of women’s oppression, but also enforces the gender dynamics that equate ideal womanhood with innocence.

While invoking this ideology, male politicians seem to perform a certain aspect of ideal womanhood in an attempt to present themselves as victims. The questions posed in this study seek to answer the following questions: How is the victimhood narrative being used by President Trump on Twitter? In what way does the witch hunt metaphor draw on these victimhood narratives? And how does the use of the witch hunt metaphor appropriate women's pain? As the witch hunt metaphor starts to become a commonly heard term, it is important for rhetoricians to consider how this term is being used, in what ways it is being used, and how this usage interacts with large social or political narratives. To truly understand how the witch hunt metaphor is used in politics, the discussion into what the metaphor is trying to achieve must be considered, especially in a time of political and social upheaval.

The use of the narrative of victimhood in political rhetoric is not new. Robert B. Horowitz, a professor of Sociology at the University of California- San Diego, has studied political rhetoric since the late 1970s. His work deals with democracy, communication, and political reform. His most recent article, "Politics as Victimhood; Victimhood as Politics," focuses on how "victimhood seems to have become a status that must be established before political claims can be advanced" (Horowitz 553). Horowitz argues that, to become a successful political candidate, a politician must first prove their own societal victimhood. Claims of victimhood are seen throughout United States politics. Some examples Horowitz puts forward are "Wall Street bankers see themselves as misjudged victims of fatuous, irresponsible anticapitalist reformers; evangelical Christians understand themselves as victims of an insolent, triumphant secular humanism... Tea Party adherents and Trump supporters view themselves as victims of big government and smug self-serving elites" (554). These positionalities allow politicians the option of adhering to a social narrative, whether this narrative is accurate or self-

prescribed. Horowitz himself states that “[m]emories, fictionalized or real, of shared victimhood or trauma formed the basis of much nineteenth-century nationalism” (554). To successfully campaign for office, a political candidate must adhere, in some way, to a victimhood narrative.

President Donald Trump is not exempt from this political move. The victimhood narrative is not universally accepted. Horowitz states that “[t]he irony is that even as conservative critics deplore the politics of victimhood, and reproach those whom they believe play the “victim card,” they too engage in the exercise and claim the status of victim even as they disavow doing so--which only underscores how powerful and defining the dynamic of victimhood politics really is” (560). The victimhood narrative allows politicians the opportunity of connecting with constituents through forms of victimization.

The platform President Donald Trump ran on necessitated a unique performance of victimhood. President Trump’s campaign focused on his performance of peak masculinity where he adhered strictly to the narrative of a successful white man. To relate to his constituents, President Trump paradoxically positions himself as the victim of an unfair political witch hunt through his social media rhetoric, specifically the published tweets on his Twitter page.

The idealization of gender performativity assumes that the gendered body is “compelled to ‘cite’ the norm in order to qualify and remain a viable subject” (*Bodies that Matter* 232). This idealized form of gender and the performativity of that idealized form is not specific to women and femininity. Men and masculinity also cite an idealized form. According to Shawn M. Burns, a professor of Psychology at California Polytechnic State University, and A. Zachary Ward, a professor at Texas Tech University, the idealized form cited by men who want to perform peak masculinity focuses on toughness, success-status, and anti femininity (256). Each of these traits is considered individually. Toughness is meant to portray physical toughness, mental toughness,

and emotional toughness just as the “success-status norm is described as the expectation that men succeed in their professional careers, which is often measured by income” (Burns and Ward 257). Finally, the anti femininity norm is represented as “the belief that men should avoid stereotypically female activities, behaviors, or occupations” (Burns and Ward 257). Idealized masculinity, when considered as a political notion, must be performed in its whole to engage with constituents who may have more traditional values.

President Trump specifically focused on the concept of ideal masculinity throughout his campaign, running his campaign and presidency on the idea that “[o]nly a sexually powerful man can make a politically powerful nation” (Friedland). His hypermasculinity is based on the idea that other men are “unable to practice [masculinity] in its idealized form” and that people will respond well to a prototypical alpha male (Swain 169). Instead of moving toward a nuanced version of masculinity, President Trump reverts back to the traditional view of masculinity, just as the original witch trials attempted to call women back to ideal womanhood.

In attempting to achieve ideal masculinity, President Trump made it known that he previously “owned the Miss Universe Organization, which also runs Miss USA, from 1996 to 2015” (Friedland). Owning a beauty pageant gave President Trump unlimited access to beautiful women in which he was allegedly able to walk into the dressing rooms of the pageants while the women were getting dressed because of his ownership of the pageant⁹ (Merica). While Burns and Ward do not mention access to beautiful women in their understanding of traditional masculinity, this concept connects well with the success-status point in their research. President

⁹ President Trump alleged that he was allowed to walk into the dressing rooms of the beauty pageants while the girls were getting dressed because he was the owner. Later testimony from various contestants revealed that some of the girls President Trump may have witnessed changing clothing were underage and were competing for the Miss Teen USA title. These allegations are in the process of being investigated. (Merica)

Trump's status as an owner of the Miss Universe pageant puts him in a position of traditionally masculinized power. His masculinity is affirmed through three marriages and four children. President Trump's current wife, Melania Trump, is "over 23 years his junior" and together the couple has one son ("Donald Trump Biography"). The continued, unfettered access to beautiful young women becomes a status symbol in this case, especially when the man has married multiple times to women significantly younger than him. Tied to this is the ability to provide financially for a large family.

President Donald Trump continues to show himself capable of providing for his family through financial means, which is a traditionally masculine role that once again adheres to the success-status mold. President Trump's position in society "is determined by an array of social, cultural, physical, intellectual, and economic resources" (Swain 171). As of 2017, Trump's net worth was "\$3.1 billion. Of that, \$1.6 billion is in New York real estate; \$570 million is in gold clubs and resorts; \$500 million is in non-New York real estate; \$290 million is in cash and personal assets; and \$200 million is in brand businesses" ("Donald Trump Biography"). While there is some investigation into how much the Trump Organization is actually worth monetarily, the fact remains that President Trump has managed to achieve a level of financial stability many people can't even begin to imagine.

Financial success, beautiful women, and power are just some of the ways President Trump attempts to engender peak masculinity. These expressions of masculine power appeal to a nation that wants to reaffirm itself as a political patriarchy. President Trump positioned himself as hypermasculinized because the overall political atmosphere has been attempting to move

away from this narrative in recent years. The election of President Barack Obama¹⁰ was met with outcry by many who believed that the election of a man of color was an attack on the majority of white male politicians. Darrel Enck-Wanzer, an associate professor at Indiana University, discusses the overall response to President Obama's election. Enck-Wanzer quotes an online news magazine, AlterNet, as summarizing the overall ideal of this time period as the "basic idea: Obama is not really one of 'us.' He, because of his race, his personhood, and his color can never be a 'real American.' For the Tea Party and right-wing populists, Obama is not fit to rule because as a person of color he is a perpetual outsider and racial Other" (23-24). The Tea Party became a vocal supporter of smaller government and lowered taxes, a platform President Trump then ran on (Enck-Wanzer 24). The election of Donald Trump as president "was considered a resounding rejection of establishment politics by blue-collar and working-class Americans" ("Donald Trump Biography"). Specifically, President Trump's election interacted with President Obama's time in office, rejecting the bipartisan policies President Obama pushed toward. To do so, President Trump not only turned to policy differences, but also to traditional roles of masculinity to stand out from previous candidates.

The gender norms President Trump subscribes to play into the "social fictions" of gender identity (*Gender Trouble* 191). His presidency is "a return to the masculine principle as the ground of the order of creation," wherein the specific masculine grounds being reaffirmed are those of white men (Friedland). President Trump's presidency is built on the assumption of peak

¹⁰ A full discussion of the implications of critical race theory and its interactions with the witch hunt metaphor is outside the scope of this paper, but certainly important to the overall discussion of victimhood narratives in modern politics.

masculinity. The performance of peak masculinity becomes intersected with the victimhood narrative throughout President Trump's campaign and his subsequent election.

To adhere to social expectations, President Trump both attempts to present himself as hypermasculinized, but also as a victim of social and political wrongs. The victimhood narrative has become one of the most important identities in American politics (Horowitz 553). The identity of hypermasculinity and the identity of victim are at odds with one another as they play themselves out on a public platform. These identities remain contradictory, especially as the victimhood narrative being used is the witch hunt metaphor. President Trump positions himself as a victimized white male who is being attacked because of his race and traditional values. This is a narrative that resonates with President Trump's constituents, who feel victimized based on their adherence to traditional, white narratives of gender and identity. As stated earlier, this narrative does not need to be accurate or real, it can simply be a perceived social or political slight so long as other constituents feel a connection to the narrative itself (Horowitz 554). To prove himself innocent of alleged wrongdoings, President Trump begins to reference his perceived victimization through the metaphor of the witch hunt. In doing so, he calls back to a specific historical moment of oppression that women are still living in the aftermath of.

The dichotomy of the victimhood narrative being used by men in positions of power comes through the traditionalized performance of masculinity and the adherence to strict gender norms. To call upon the witch hunt metaphor, the person using the narrative should not only be classified as a victim, but also as feminine. As the term 'witch' is synonymous with woman, the user of the term 'witch hunt' should be seen as a woman. Yet, President Trump uses the witch hunt metaphor in his political rhetoric while still constantly positioning himself as hypermasculine.

The use of the term ‘witch hunt’ in political rhetoric calls upon, perhaps unconsciously, the collective memory of oppression, violence, and death that affected a large population of women. Whether he intends to make this comparison or not, President Trump commodifies and appropriates women’s pain in an attempt to make himself look like a victim. In his use of the term ‘witch hunt,’ President Trump negotiates his “relationship with larger social constructs” (Mendoza-Denton 475). As he continues to articulate an identity through language, President Trump’s performance is meant as a “process of signification” and “[t]he rejection of textual sovereignty, of authorial or directorial authority” (Reinelt 202). Instead of living in the aftermath of the witch trials like women must, male politicians use this instance of gendered pain as a metaphor for innocence and victimhood.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research study was chosen to analyze President Donald Trump's use of the term 'witch hunt' in popular social media rhetoric. The qualitative data was then transcribed quantitatively for the purposes of data representation. This mixed methods approach was used to analyze President Donald Trump's use of the witch hunt metaphor on the popular social media website Twitter. Using a mixed methods approach allows for a deeper understanding of how and when this term is being used while also providing a deeper understanding of the performative nature of the metaphorical use of the term 'witch hunt.' The qualitative coding methods used in this research focused on three three-month periods in President Trump's *Twitter* feed surrounding three separate events in the last two years: the accusations of Russian collusion, the release of the Mueller Report, and the impeachment trials.

A qualitative study is appropriate to the goals of this research in explaining the use of the witch hunt metaphor in President Donald Trump's tweets on the social media website Twitter. The use of qualitative coding methods through the textual analysis of President Trump's tweets provided an opportunity to examine the topic the chosen tweets were referencing and to what goals the tweets were written. The tweets were chosen throughout three three-month time periods. The time periods being analyzed were 1 May 2018- 31 July 2018, 29 1 March 2019- 31 May 2019, and 1 November 2019- 31. These time periods were chosen because of their association with three major points of controversy in President Trump's presidency: accusations of Russian collusion, the Mueller Report, and the impeachment trials. The tweets being analyzed all used the term 'witch hunt' in their text. Out of the total of 5,401 tweets President Trump posted throughout the three time periods that were analyzed, there were 125 tweets using the term 'witch hunt' as a metaphor.

The first coding method used was the initial coding method, which allowed for a basic coding of the data gathered. This basic coding method allowed me to organize the data based on the time period when the tweet was posted. During this phase of analysis, the chosen tweets were sorted by date of publication, split into the three distinct time periods.

After the initial coding period, descriptive coding was used as an analysis of the subject being discussed. The three descriptive codes chosen reference a point of contest in President Trump's presidency: accusations of Russian collusion, the Mueller Report, and the impeachment trial. The tweets using the witch hunt metaphor were found through the use of the website *Trump Twitter Archive*, where President Trump's tweets have been archived by Brendan Brown. *The Trump Twitter Archive* boasts a search function where terms are searchable. There is also a function on the website where the date of the tweets being presented can be restricted. The content analyzed in this study came from a search of the term 'witch hunt' in tweets composed during the active time periods of the accusations of collusion, the release of The Mueller Report, and the impeachment trials. Of the 125 tweets, there were 63 tweets using the term 'witch hunt' analyzed from between 1 May 2018- 31 July 2018 when reports of collusion peaked, 29 tweets using the term 'witch hunt' analyzed from between 1 March 2019- 31 May 2019 when the Mueller Report was published, and 33 tweets using the term 'witch hunt' analyzed from between 1 November 2019- 31 January 2020 during the impeachment trial. It is important to note that the time period being represented did not always adhere to the subject being discussed. Therefore, a tweet posted during the impeachment trials did not always discuss the impeachment but sometimes focused on the Mueller Report or Russian collusion, which resulted in some overlap in the quantitative data.

The descriptive coding used for this analysis focused on the event the tweets referenced. The descriptive codes help to “interpret the symbolic meanings of artifacts and physical environments of our social worlds” (Saldaña 104). This method “categorizes data at a basic level to provide...an organizational grasp of the study” (Saldaña 105). Using the descriptive coding method through the analysis of tweets allows for the study to consider the subject of the tweet as well as an analysis of how often the subject is being addressed through the metaphorical use of the term ‘witch hunt.’ In some cases throughout the analysis, President Trump referenced multiple events in one tweet, which combined the impeachment with the Mueller Report or accusation of collusion.

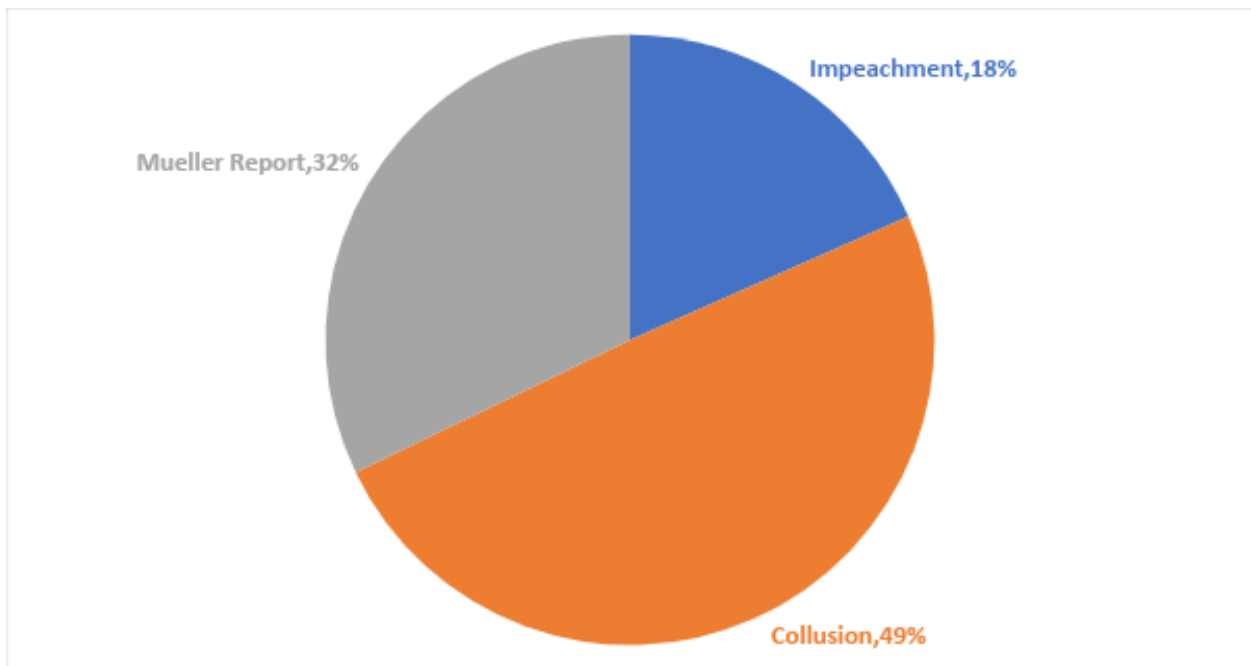


Fig. 2. Circular graph of the percentage of time President Trump refers to each individual incident as a witch hunt: The Mueller Report, The Impeachment, and Accusations of Russian Collusion.

In total, there were 36 instances of President Trump referencing the impeachment trial, 97 references to reports of Russian collusion, and 63 references to the Mueller Report. As shown

in Figure 2, references to Russian collusion make up just under 50% of the tweets being analyzed.

The overall use of the witch hunt metaphor seems to correlate with the evidence being presented for each case. In early 2016, the Federal Bureau of Investigation determined that a “Russian troll farm... known as the Internet Research Agency” interfered in the 2016 presidential election” (Levine). From this moment on, the FBI started to gather information on how deeply the Russian government has been involved in the campaigns and election outcomes. In May 2016, the Democratic National Convention found out that they were hacked and hired a security company to investigate the hack (Levine). The investigations into Russian involvement into the 2016 presidential elections continued on until the release of the Mueller Report in 2018. In the case of Russian collusion, 34 people and 3 companies were indicted or pled guilty to charges of collusion (Prokop). According to Andrew Prokop with *Vox*, the group consisted of “six former Trump advisers, 26 Russian nationals, three Russian companies, one California man, and one London-based lawyer. Seven of these people (including five of the six former Trump advisers) have pleaded guilty” (Prokop). To show his own innocence, President Trump started to refer to the investigations into collusion as a witch hunt, using the witch hunt metaphor as a metaphor for his victimhood. As the trials were ongoing¹¹ President Trump used the witch hunt narrative more often than any other instance being analyzed.

The Mueller Report is another instance that is being analyzed through this study. The Mueller Report is the reported culmination of the Russian collusion investigation and is a term

¹¹ The time periods being analyzed took place before the end of the impeachment trials. As such, the data collected may change based on the conclusion of the trials.

used to reference the *Report on the Investigation into Russian Interference in the 2016 Presidential Election*, the report of information found in the Special Counsel’s investigation into Russian interference during the 2016 presidential elections.

← **Tweet**



Donald J. Trump ✓
@realDonaldTrump



The Russia Witch Hunt is rapidly losing credibility. House Intelligence Committee found No Collusion, Coordination or anything else with Russia. So now the Probe says OK, what else is there? How about Obstruction for a made up, phony crime. There is no O, it’s called Fighting Back

6:27 AM · May 7, 2018 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

18K Retweets **80.3K** Likes

Fig. 3. This is a tweet posted 7 May 2018 that was given the code Accusation of Russian Collusion. This tweet specifically references Russia and Collusion in its text.

The report found that “[t]he Russian government interfered in the 2016 presidential election in sweeping and systematic fashion” although “the investigation did not establish that the Trump Campaign coordinated with the Russian government in its election interference activities” wherein coordination is defined as “an agreement—tacit or express—between the Trump Campaign and the Russian government” (Mueller 1-2). President Trump’s reaction to The Mueller Report findings showing there wasn’t sufficient evidence to show involvement by his campaign in the Russian interference involved several celebratory tweets which included a tweet saying that “The end result of the greatest Witch Hunt in U.S. political history is No

Collusion with Russia (and No Obstruction). Pretty Amazing!” (@realDonaldTrump 20 April 2019, 7:15:41 AM). Sixteen days before this, President Trump tweeted “few people seem to care about the Russian Collusion Hoax, but some Democrats are fighting hard to keep the Witch Hunt alive. They should focus on legislation or, even better, an investigation of how the ridiculous Collusion Delusion got start—so illegal!” (@realDonaldTrump, 4 April 2019, 7:22:54 AM).



Donald J. Trump 
@realDonaldTrump



Now that the long awaited Mueller Report conclusions have been released, most Democrats and others have gone back to the pre-Witch Hunt phase of their lives before Collusion Delusion took over. Others are pretending that their former hero, Bob Mueller, no longer exists!

7:07 AM · Apr 1, 2019 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

15.9K Retweets **73.6K** Likes

Fig. 4. This is a tweet posted 1 April 2019 that was given the code of Mueller Report. The tweet specifically cites the Mueller Report and the primary investigator, Robert Mueller.

The last time period being analyzed is focused on the impeachment trials. The impeachment focused on two articles of impeachment, or two separate charges. The first is that President Trump is “accused of seeking help from Ukraine’s government to help himself get re-elected this November. He’s alleged to have held back millions of dollars of military aid to Ukraine and dangled a proposed White House meeting with Ukraine’s president, both as bargaining chips” (“Trump Impeachment”). The second charge is that President Trump obstructed Congress by refusing to allow staff to testify in the first impeachment trials in 2019

(“Trump Impeachment”). President Trump claimed on 12 January 2020 that the impeachment trial “gives the partisan Democrat Witch Hunt credibility that it otherwise does not have” (@realDonaldTrump, 12 January 2020, 2:55:08 AM). Descriptive coding put both of these tweets into the category of ‘Impeachment,’ however, another code was assigned to these two data sets in a second coding method.

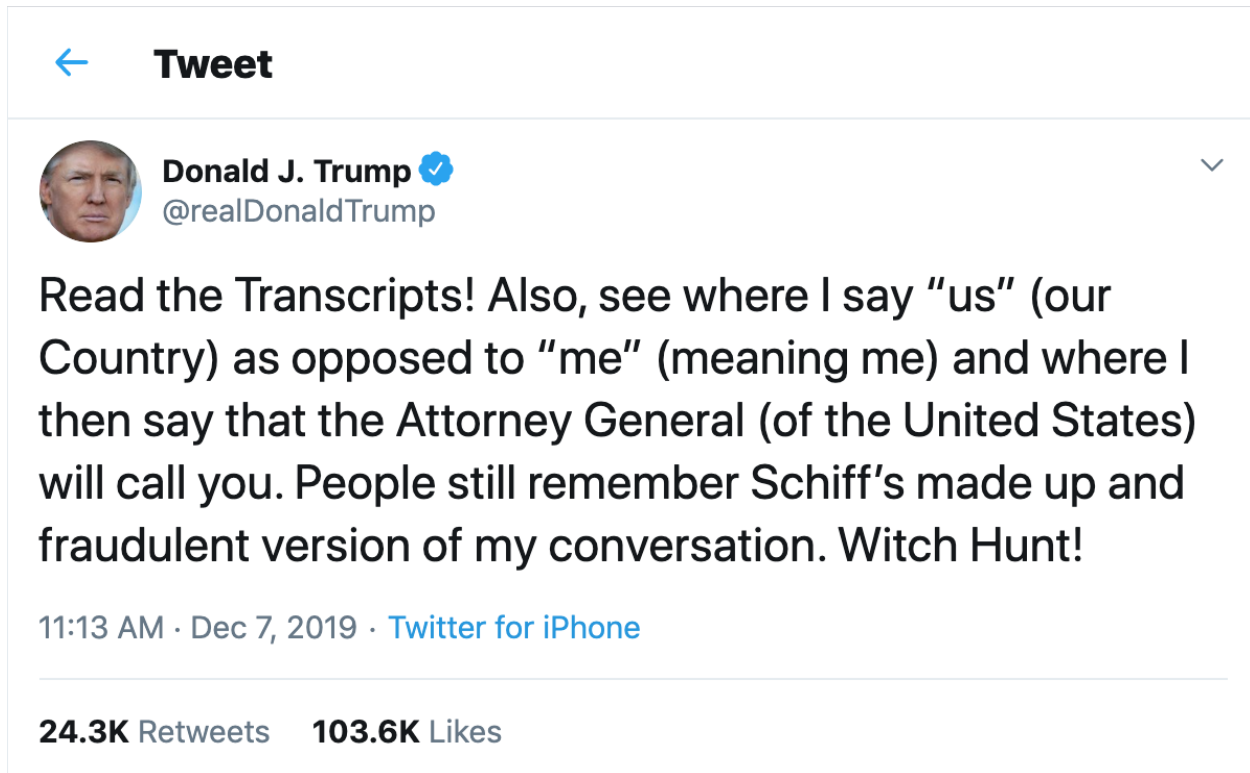


Fig. 5. This is a tweet posted 7 December 2019 that was given the code of Impeachment. The tweet specifically addresses the Attorney General of the United States and Robert Schiff.

In the second round of coding, in vivo coding was attempted first. In vivo coding did not allow for the type of analysis I was attempting, because in vivo coding focuses too firmly on the actual language being used in the tweet (Saldaña 105). For this round of coding, I wanted to look specifically at what the tweets were meant to do, not how language was being used. I moved to process coding when I realized that in vivo coding would not be productive to the overall project I was attempting.

Process coding “uses gerunds (‘ing’ words) exclusively to connote action in the data” (Saldaña 111). The process codes used throughout this analysis were: accusing, amplifying, demanding, false historicizing/misinforming, and celebrating. These codes were chosen through the second round of coding where several codes were combined to create larger, more inclusive codes. The term ‘amplifying’ is a good example of a code that needed to be made as it became clear that President Trump’s use of the term ‘witch hunt’ often coincided with his choice to retweet someone else’s tweet about his presidency or the events in question. Figuring out how these retweet moments coincided with the larger project of the witch hunt metaphor became a complicated maneuver to figure out what, exactly, the president was hoping to accomplish through these retweets. The answer came that President Trump was amplifying the voices of constituents who either supported him or agreed with his understanding of events. These retweets were relabeled from the previous codes of ‘agreeing,’ ‘promoting,’ and ‘supporting.’ The overall use of the term ‘amplifying’ better fit the use of the term ‘witch hunt’ in these instances, allowing for a better understanding of the overall purpose of the tweets. The purpose of this coding method is to “search for the routines and rituals” of how the witch hunt metaphor is being used in President Trump’s tweets (Saldaña 111). As such, the other coding terms were simplified into larger codes in line with the process that produced the code ‘amplifying’. Figure 3 shows the distribution of process codes through the lens of the descriptive codes used earlier. As shown, President Trump disproportionately uses the term ‘witch hunt’ in reference to the reports of Russian involvement in the 2016 elections, shown in Figure 3 as ‘Collusion.’ His use of the term ‘witch hunt’ is often used in conjunction with the process of false historicization/misinformation. This seems to coincide with the amount of evidence being presented against President Trump.

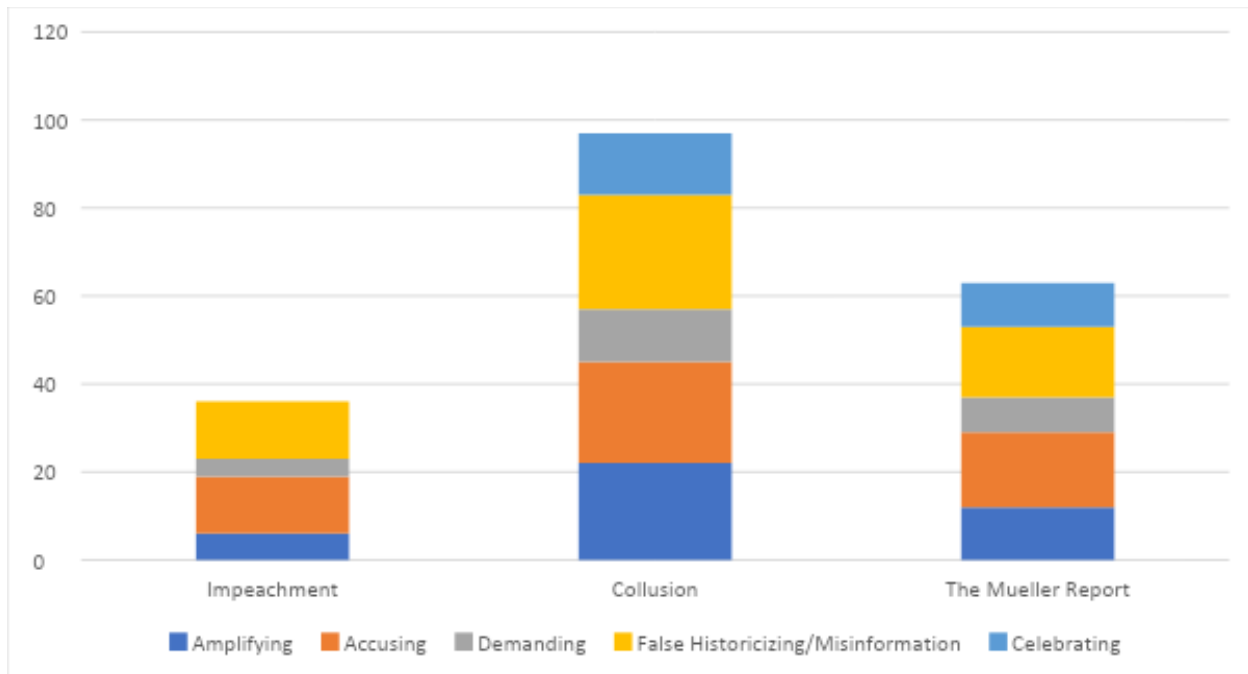


Fig. 6. Bar graph visualizing how often each descriptive code is used with each process code throughout the tweets being analyzed.

President Trump used the witch hunt metaphor in reference to the accusations of Russian collusion, the publication of the Mueller Report, and the Impeachment trials. The overall use of the term seems to fall in line with the process code ‘False Historicizing/Misinforming.’ One instance where President Trump presents misinformation to his constituents is when he wrote on 22 May 2019, “Without the ILLEGAL Witch Hunt, my poll numbers, especially because of our historically “great” economy, would be at 65%. Too bad! The greatest Hoax in American History” (@realDonaldTrump 22 May 2019, 6:00:15 AM). This tweet was coded as False Historicizing/Misinforming because, first, the investigations into Russian collusion in the 2016 elections was completely legal and went through the legal governmental processes that it must, and second, there is no way to say what the poll numbers would be without the investigations into Russian collusion. This is a way of misinforming the public about the current state of American politics, but also a way to pull attention away from the evidence being presented in the

investigations. As stated previously, the Mueller Report did not find *sufficient* evidence to bring charges against the Trump Administration. However, that isn't to say there wasn't *any* evidence. Manipulating the narrative with the use of the witch hunt metaphor falls under the process code of False Historicizing/Misinforming. The qualitative data was then transferred into quantitative data for data representation, resulting in Figure 2 and Figure 6.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the study conducted was to analyze how the witch hunt metaphor is being used in modern political rhetoric. Specifically, the study analyzed how President Donald Trump uses the witch hunt metaphor on the popular social media website Twitter. The presented data show that the witch hunt metaphor is being used in conjunction with the discussion of accusations of Russian collusion, the publication of the Mueller Report, and the impeachment trials. Observable data results show a significant correlation between the use of the witch hunt metaphor and instances of false historicizing/misinforming. The witch hunt metaphor is used in conjunction with false historicizing/misinforming in 55 of the 125 tweets analyzed, making these instances 44% of the collected data, as seen in Figure 7. The next most significant data set is the use of the witch hunt metaphor for purposes of accusing which was used in 53 of the 125 tweets analyzed and came out to 42.4% of the tweets analyzed.

Table 1

How often each of the descriptive codes were used in the tweets being analyzed.

Process Code ¹²	How Many Times Used	Percentage of Total Tweets Analyzed
Amplifying	40	32%
Accusing	53	42.5%
Demanding	24	19.2%
False Historicizing/Misinforming	55	44%
Celebrating	24	19.2%

¹² Some tweets coded for multiple process codes.

President Trump’s use of the witch hunt metaphor tends to coincide with the code ‘false historicizing/misinforming.’ By using the witch hunt metaphor to present information in the case of accusations of Russian collusion, the release of the Mueller Report, and the impeachment trials, President Trump represents these instances as an attack against American ideals. We see this when President Trump accuses the leaders of the impeachment trial of being “corrupt, compromised, coward & congenital liar” as well as that “[e]verything you’re going to see in the next two weeks is rigged... This is a phony showtrial. There is zero due process, none. It is yet another fraudulent hoax conspiracy theory. It is another Witch Hunt” (@realDonaldTrump 12 November 2019, 10:33:45 PM). Here, President Trump is positioning the opposing forces behind the impeachment trials as the antithesis to hypermasculinity. The man he is discussing, Adam Schiff, is described as the evil-doer, continuing to push the hypermasculine trope President Trump presents himself through. To be seen as masculine, a man needs to be tough, strong in his ideals, successful, powerful, and able to stand up for himself and his family (Burns and Ward 256). In calling Schiff a coward and compromised, President Trump positions him as unmasculine because he is not strong enough or successful enough to stand for his beliefs.¹³ In doing this, President Trump also positions Adam Schiff against the United States and United States political ideologies in that Schiff isn’t just a coward, but corrupt and compromised. These two terms cannot exist within the binary of good and evil that are apparent in United States politics. To be compromised is to be unable to complete the terms of employment through the U.S. government. This is not the only way that President Trump represents these cases as an

¹³ This is stated as an interpretation of President Donald Trump’s tweets, not as any commentary on Adam Schiff’s own belief system/process.

attack against American ideals. This is continued when President Trump calls the impeachment trial a “phony showtrial” with “zero due process” (@realDonaldTrump 12 November 2019, 10:33:45 PM). Due process is a right given to all Americans when they are taken to court. To say there is no due process is to assume that American rights are being violated by the impeachment trial specifically, but by attacks on President Trump more broadly.

As someone who aligns himself with blue collar workers, President Trump ensures that his constituents see these attacks against him as attacks against themselves and their ideal of an overall nation. This also ensures that constituents position the accusers as against themselves on a more personalized level. This positionality and the use of the witch hunt metaphor creates an understanding of current investigations into President Trump as an attack on the working class and ultimately unites constituents against what President Trump calls “The Fake News Media” and the “13 Angry Democrats” (@realDonaldTrump 18 November 2019, 8:52:24 AM)(@realDonaldTrump 21 July 2018, 5:50:38 PM). By considering journalists and news media as ‘fake,’ President Trump represents himself as a truth-speaker. To maintain authority in these situations, President Trump must represent himself as the one who speaks the truth, no matter what other professionals or specialists say. Maintaining this status helps to maintain authority, especially as accusations of wrongdoing are at the forefront of President Trump’s presidency. The monikers he makes up take away from the seriousness of accusations and present President Trump as the victim and those accusing him as the aggressors.

The use of the witch hunt metaphor appeals to the dichotomy of good and evil present throughout the witch trials and current associations of civil religion, as discussed previously. President Trump presents himself as the ‘good’ while those who are against him are the ‘evil.’ The civil religion that is being attacked in this scenario is the idea of a political patriarchy in

which President Trump represents himself as the hypermasculinized figurehead of this ideal. By using the witch hunt metaphor to represent an attack against this ideology, President Trump places himself in the position of the victim who is being hunted by a “broad social evil, some malevolent elite, some institutional authority that unfairly shapes or negatively influences [his] life-chances” (Horowitz 554). By positioning himself against the 13 angry Democrats and the fake news media, President Trump engages in what Albert James Bergesen, Professor with the school of Psychology at the University of Arizona, explains as “[t]he ritualistic creation of enemies, as a means of renewing the presence of these sacred forces, centers on discovering ‘enemies of the people,’ the nation, and even enemies of Nature and History itself” (222). Bergesen discusses how political witch hunts attempt to reinstate collective forces within political systems. President Trump engages in this act while he attempts to renegotiate the political patriarchy, both by presenting himself as a prototypical hypermasculine figure, but also through his positioning of those against his belief systems as the enemies or the ‘bad guys’. By positioning himself against the people he believes are the ‘bad guys’, President Trump continues to perpetuate the dichotomous ideals of good and evil without considering complexities and circumstances that might influence such instances.

We see this when President Trump states that “[t]he Rigged Witch Hunt, originally headed by FBI lover boy Peter S (for one year) & now, 13 Angry Democrats, should look into the missing DNC Server, Crooked Hillary’s illegally deleted Emails, the Pakistani Fraudster, Uranium one, Podesta & so much more. It’s a Democrat Con Job!” (@realDonaldTrump 7 July 2018, 3:42:48 PM). In this tweet alone, President Trump positions the Democrat party as opposite United States’ constituents ideals by not only suggesting that the investigation into accusations of wrongdoing is being headed by someone who is inherently bias, but also by

suggesting that the Democratic party has not done their due diligence in half a dozen other cases. In this case, the social evil or malevolent elite attacking President Trump are those who are investigating accusations of wrongdoing and are positioned against the nation itself. This attempt at a victim narrative does not need to be true, it only needs to be believed.

President Trump is a monetarily and politically powerful man. He is in a position of power that the women who were accused of witchcraft during the original witch trials would not have been in. This position of power allows President Trump the opportunity to defend himself in a way women during the witch trials could not. This is especially important to remember when combined with renowned social historian William Monter's point that the women who were targeted were specifically targeted because they were "unable to revenge themselves by the more normal means of physical violence or recourse to law courts" (Whitney 80). In a total of 100,000 witch trials, it is suggested that anywhere from 40,000-50,000 people were executed (Jacobs). Somewhere between 75-85% of these deaths were women (Apps and Gow 25). These were women who positioned themselves outside the dominant patriarchal society and were unable to defend themselves against legal action. The women in these positions "were perceived by the community to be 'discontent,' that is, as refusing to accept their 'place' in the social hierarchy" (Whitney 85). The position President Trump is in is entirely different than the position the women who died in the witch trials would have found themselves.

President Trump has the appropriate financial resources to go to court to prove his innocence, as discussed earlier. This is also important to remember when we consider the outcomes of the witch trials as opposed to current investigations into corruption. Those accused of witchcraft, whether that be the outcome of a court trial or a result of mistreatment leading up to the trial, died in almost half of all cases (Jacobs). Accusations against President Trump are

required to go through full investigations in multiple courts of law before the President himself would need to even consider going to court. If the outcome were to be an impeachment, the President would be removed from office and possibly be disbarred from holding federal office in the future. This does not protect the person being impeached from further legal action; however, the ultimate goal is only to remove the person from political office. Either way, the ultimate outcome for President Trump would not as severe as the outcome women accused of witchcraft faced during the witch trials, who would likely face death. The ultimate paradox to the witch hunt metaphor is that the women who were killed during the witch trials operated outside the social norm. President Trump, through his performance of masculinity, is the ultimate insider, the man who adheres to expected gender roles and has the social and political power to protect himself.

To bridge the paradoxical gap, President Trump is attempting to reaffirm the nation through a political patriarchy by positioning the powerful white, male politician as a victim of social ill in line with the women who died during the witch trials. He ran on the platform ‘Make America Great Again,’ a callback to the “rise of the North American suburban middle class—the world of the single-income nuclear family with the father himself playing the role of the ‘nucleus’” (Flisfeder 648). The loss of this social structure created a victim narrative surrounding the white male figure in a position of social and political power. The witch hunt metaphor is used to reinstate the “dominant political values of the ruling group,” which, in this case, is based around the North American suburban middle-class family ideal (Elmer 104). By invoking the witch hunt metaphor, President Trump calls upon his constituents by positioning these accusations as a personal attack against their belief systems.

By suggesting that the accusations of Russian collusion, the publication of the Mueller Report, and the impeachment trials are an attack against middle class America, President Trump draws attention away from the evidence being presented in these cases. The use of the witch hunt metaphor is a tactic meant to redirect attention to the metaphorical witch hunt. Albert James Bergesen says it best when he says, “guilt and innocence have never mattered during political witch hunts” (223). Even where evidence is found, like the evidence presented in the Mueller Report, this evidence is called into question because it was found by the accusing party, those labelled as social ‘evil.’ By viewing these investigations through the witch hunt metaphor, innocence is implied for those on the side who proved their victimhood. President Trump, through the use of the witch hunt metaphor, has positioned himself as the victim in these cases.

The implied innocence that comes with the position of the victim calls back to the innocence of the victims, specifically the women, accused of witchcraft during the original witch trials. Using the witch hunt metaphor as a defense against accusations of wrongdoing should immediately negate the reaffirmation of patriarchal ideologies as the witch is coded feminine. By using a term that largely refers to women, the performativity of masculinity inherent in President Trump’s campaign should be negated. In the original witch trials, the performativity of ‘witch’ included a rejection of feminine social norms. The changing social structure of Europe and, later, the United States, gave rise to a society that punished women who existed outside patriarchal social norms. And yet, even as President Trump performs a victimhood narrative unlike the hypermasculine image he has crafted for himself, he is not questioned. The gender binary President Trump enforces necessitates the performativity of masculinity and, yet, when performing innocence and victimhood, he relies upon a feminine coded metaphor such as the witch hunt.

The use of a feminine coded metaphor like the witch hunt metaphor calls back to an instance of gendered historical violence to appropriate and commodify women's pain. The reason the metaphor of the witch hunt works well in today's society is that the term calls back to a specific, remembered moment. In this case, that moment is the witch trials, an instance of gendered violence against women. Women's "[c]ollective memory of past experiences," specifically the witch trials, "has social psychological impacts in the present" (Rinker and Lawler 151). Without the trauma carrier group of women who live in the aftermath of these trials, the attempt to call upon this historical moment as a symbol and a metaphor would be impossible. The memory of the witch trials in Europe and the United States lives on in the trauma carrier groups that are affected by this history. Considering the gendered violence inherent in the witch trials, these trauma carrier groups are primarily composed of women. Using the witch hunt narrative in political rhetoric as President Trump does calls upon this remembered trauma, whether the remembered trauma is an accurate representation of events or not. Instead of provoking a discussion of inequalities between gender identities or discussing how the witch trials came to be, this metaphor focuses on the dichotomy of good and evil in society and politics.

Instead of living in the aftermath of the witch trials as women must, President Trump is able to manipulate the victimhood associated with the historical moment of the witch trials. Whether or not this narrative produces the effects President Trump hopes to achieve remains to be seen. The performativity of innocence President Trump has chosen to enact is a largely empty gesture not meant to raise awareness to the circumstances of the original witch trials, but instead meant to detract from honest accusations of wrongdoing (Reinalt 201). Instead of acknowledging

the very real horror of the original witch trials, President Trump uses this historical moment as a tool in his performance of victimhood.

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