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Hail Satan's Phallus: A Critical Analysis of Gay Pornographic Satanism on Twitter

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Religious Studies

by

J Selke

September 2022

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Hail Satan's Phallus: A Critical Analysis of Gay Pornographic Satanism on Twitter

by

J Selke

Master of Arts, Graduate Program in Religious Studies
University of California, Riverside, September 2022
Dr. Melissa Wilcox, Chairperson

This paper employs netnography and critical discourse analysis to examine the ways gay men on Twitter foster Satanic communities and orient themselves to gay Satanic practice. How do these men centralize the language of pleasure, the erotic, and phallic objects as a linguistic ploy that both bathes in the pornographic and reifies their identities as Satanists? How does the use of taboos (incest, methamphetamine use, rape play, bondage, sexual demonology) within imagery shape the ways queer Satanists orient themselves within this social media context?

For this project, I examine common language, terminology, and themes surrounding queer pornographic discourses on self-identified Satanists twitter pages as touchstones that shape, twist, and deconstruct gay Satanic devotional practice, a practice that is fed predominantly by gay, cisgender, white men from Anglophone countries who consume pornography and enact sexual pleasure as an extension of their religiosity.

Each of these Satanists contribute to a synthesized look at the employment of gay pornographic imagery and language and its potential benefits and complications for practitioners who exist in this social media-driven contemporary moment, intent on drafting community and connectedness online. While these Satanists rely on oppositional rhetoric to construct their personhood as antithetical to Protestant Christianity, this paper explores certain remnants of a Protestant, neoliberal subject which still emerge within gay phallogentric Satanism. This phallogentrism, or connection to religious practice as deriving from the phallus (whether symbolically, iconographically, and/or physically), also is prevalent in larger social and religious communities that are separate from Satanisms, like symbolic use of the shiva lingam, the online reemergence of the Cult of Priapus, and specific Tantric practices that focus on semen retention.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2019, Reverend Harrison, an Australian retiree in his mid-seventies covered in white hair and a beard living in a small town in the countryside in Victoria, self-published a text entitled *For Gay Satanists*, in which he wrote:

“Now you might say is Satan real. I will say that I know he’s real from 2 points. 1. About 20 years ago I did meet Satan for real. I wasn’t high on drugs or sleep and no he didn’t have horns. I was a Christian working in my office looking at porn. 2. Ive tested Satan out and he’s answered my prayers many times over.”¹

While Reverend Harrison calls Victoria home, his ministry project does not exist in a physical entity like Anton LaVey’s Black Church; instead, Reverend Harrison and his followers communicate online, through email chains, Twitter communities, and the comment sections of his two websites. Although Reverend Harrison occasionally attends queer and kink festivals, speaking events, and other major commitments to spread his expertise in many parts of the globe, most of his community construction is online through his Twitter handle. This Twitter engagement enfolds Reverend Harrison into a larger community of gay Satanists online, practitioners who label themselves clearly as Satanists on their pages or through hashtags like #666 #s8n and others. This virtual Satanism contributes to a form unlike the Satanic Temple or the Church of Satan, which have public community gatherings to foster community in physical spaces; instead, these Satanic practitioners create virtual communities that are central to religious belonging and community.

¹ Reverend Harrison, *For Gay Satanists* (Self-published, 2019).

While desiring to be individual Satanic practitioners, each of the people behind Twitter handles within this community do not exist in a vacuum, enfolded into a larger gay Satanic community, with followings of roughly two to three thousand followers: twitter pseudonyms² like Lucifer's Legion, Maximus Vassago, Dimitris Satanás, James Erection, The Eater of Sperm, Satan's Favorite Demon, Hail Satanas 666, Santa's Blowjob Partner, Randolph Toomas, and Reverend Harrison. Each of these handles, and the men producing their content, identify themselves as Satanists, Devil Worshipers, Demon Worshipers, Theistic Satanists, or simply with the number *666*. 'Satan Is My God,' 'Hail Satan,' a gay pornographic version of the Last Supper, 'worshipper of our True God Satan/Phallus/Cock,' 'Sex Magic Practitioner,' 'Perv Pig,' and 'Live to Serve Satan' are some of the sayings these gay men utilize in their bios and cover photos, shaping their conceptualizations of a highly pornographic gay Satanism that centralizes sexual pleasure through the phallus and the experiences of orgasm. These men post sexually explicit videos and photos to their pages, using phrases that shift them from mainstream pornographic videos constructed by larger gay pornographic companies and reorients them to a Satanic image, through inclusion of phrases like 'Hail Satan, Hail the Beast'³ and 'Embrace the lust! It's Satan's gift.'⁴ These inclusions shape a larger

² For the purposes of this paper, the Twitter name or title of each Twitter is replaced by a pseudonym to protect confidentiality, a requirement of netnography. No inclusion of hyperlinks, handles, or other identifying information is given. Also, each quotation is slightly edited to prevent reverse searching and protect confidentiality; however, in the rewriting of these quotations, the aim of the researcher was to keep as close to the original meaning as possible. This is to moderately protect the Satanic users who practice forms of Satanisms that fetishize activities that are deemed illegal in some parts of the world. Thus, protecting the identities of queer people in marginalized religious communities is more important than retaining their names to respect the practice of Netnography (2020), as it is intended by Robert Kozinets.

³ Retrieved from Lucifer's Legion page on Twitter.

⁴ Retrieved from The Eater of Sperm page on Twitter.

community of gay Satanists who appeal to lust, sexuality, Baphomet, Satan, and the phallus as extensions of both their religiosity and sexuality, a blurring of the two, where neither can be separate from the other, a religio-sexual identification. This paper examines these themes as part of larger discourses that construct gay Satanic communities and individualized identities online.

These gay Satanists fit into three larger movements: Sex Magick,⁵ Phallic Worship,⁶ and Satanisms⁷ more generally. Similar to Crowleyan Sex Magick,⁸ practitioners of gay Satanism online utilize the socially-designated markers of the taboo, absurd, or perverted to make a statement about contemporary religiosity more broadly. For these contemporary Satanists, the use of Magick during sex is in opposition to Christian legal and social dominance⁹ in many Anglophone countries and the construction of a pure, virginal, and taboo-free whiteness.¹⁰ As the majority of gay Satanists are white, many push against racialized expectations of virginity and sexual purity through the embrace of queer forms of sexuality, including same-gender sexual activity, BDSM, fetish, kink, and the worship of sexual fluids, contrary to proper sexual

⁵ Hugh B. Urban, *Magia Sexualis: Sex, Magic, and Liberation in Modern Western Esotericism*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006)

⁶ George Ryley Scott, *Phallic Worship: A History of Sex And Sexual Rites*, (Senate, 1996)

⁷ These practitioners are self-identified Satanists, making their identification enfold them into a larger group of Satanist practitioners who may or may not align with larger organizational identifiers (i.e. the Temple of Set, the Church of Satan, the Satanic Temple, etc.)

⁸ Chapter Four: "The Beast with Two Backs: Aleister Crowley and Sex Magick in Late Victorian England" in Hugh B. Urban, *Magia Sexualis: Sex, Magic, and Liberation in Modern Western Esotericism*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006)

⁹ Samuel Perry and Andrew Whitehead, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States*, (London: Oxford University Press, 2020)

¹⁰ For more information on the concept of virginal identity within the United States particularly, see Sara Moslener, *Virgin Nation: Sexual Purity and American Adolescence* (London, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015).

forms dictated by cleanliness and compulsory heterosexuality, a term coined by Adrienne Rich¹¹ which expands cultural expectations for opposite-sex partnerships to a compulsion as opposed to same-sex partnerships. While discourses of virginity and sexual purity are often geared towards the maintenance of women and girls and their sexualities, gay men engage sexual purity and virginity through Evangelical demands of celibacy, or what Lynn Gerber describes as ‘queerish celibacy’¹² (an active renunciation of gay sexual activities while performing occasional heterosexual sexual activities). These gay men reject forms of celibacy and invert it to the utmost extent through intentional forms of religio-sexual ecstasy online.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

The relevant literature around Contemporary Satanism often falls into two major categories: a historical analysis of the Church of Satan¹³ or a political intervention into the Satanic Temple.¹⁴ Other research coming from Religious Studies scholarship about Satanism often centers the public opinions and responses to potentially satanic acts and practices, researching the Satanic Panic of the 1980s and 1990s.¹⁵ While all of these areas

¹¹ Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” 1980.

¹² Lynn Gerber, “‘Queerish’ Celibacy: Reorienting Marriage in the Ex-Gay Movement” in *Queer Christianities: Lived Religion in Transgressive Forms*, edited by Kathleen T. Talvacchia, Michael F. Pettinger, and Mark Larrimore (New York: New York University Press, 2015).

¹³ Hugh B. Urban, *Magia Sexualis: Sex, Magic, and Liberation in Modern Western Esotericism*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006); Massimo Introvigne, *Satanism: A Social History*, (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2016); Chris Mathews, *Modern Satanism: Anatomy of a Radical Subculture*, (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2009)

¹⁴ Joseph P. Laycock, *Speak of the Devil: How the Satanic Temple is Changing the Way We Talk about Religion*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

¹⁵ Joseph P. Laycock, *Dangerous Games: What the Moral Panic over Role-Playing Games Says about Play, Religion and Imagined Worlds*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2015); James T. Richardson, Joel Best, and David G. Bromley, *The Satanism Scare*, (London: Routledge, 1991); Gareth J.

are of interest within this literature review, these various studies of Satanism are vastly different from the hypersexualized nature of gay pornographic Satanism, which centralizes aspects of the Satanic presence that are avoided in other forms of organized Satanic practice.

The Definition(s) of Satanism(s)

While there are difficulties for fine-tuning a definition of Satanism, two groups of scholars specifically wrestle with this definition, providing a centrality of individuality and self-identification as central to being a Satanist. Granholm defines “Satanism as a countercultural form of spirituality where central premises are the focus on the self and the opposition to the experienced dualism of mainstream culture and religion [Granholm 2000]. I have also stressed the importance of focusing on the self-designation of individuals and groups as Satanic.”¹⁶ A method of self-identification allows for these practitioners to inhabit a Satanic religiosity, while still practicing religio-sexual rituals that are vastly different from the practices of other organized Satanic communities. In *The Invention of Satanism*, Asbjørn Dyrendal, James R. Lewis, and Jesper AA. Peterson, also wrestle with the definition of Satanism, stating that they:

“favor a polythetic, family resemblance-type approach to the definition of Satanism. ‘Self-religion’ constitutes for us one of the elements that ties the different kinds of Satanism together, albeit loosely. With self-religion we here stress a strong element of individualism. When the self is sacred, it is

Medway, *The Lure of the Sinister: The Unnatural History of Satanism*, (New York: NYU Press, 2001); Megan Goodwin, *Abusing Religion: Literary Persecution, Sex Scandals, and American Minority Religions*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2020).

¹⁶ Kennet Granholm, “Embracing Others than Satan: The Multiple Princes of Darkness in the Left-Hand Path Milieu,” in *Contemporary Religious Satanism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Jesper Aagaard Petersen (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 86.

also the individual self that is central. Satanism is, in the words of Stephen Flowers, ‘psyche-centric,’ meaning that ‘the individual is the epicenter of the path itself’ (1997: 3). Like other kinds of self-religion, Satanism is mainly this-worldly oriented. The human psyche and body are sacralized, and Satanists hold a critical attitude toward the socializing influence of ‘mass society.’”¹⁷

With this definitional construction in mind, the authors’ theorizations on self-religion are similar to Granholm’s definition of Satanism as a focus on the self. For the Satanic practitioners who may not practice in larger public and physical Satanic communities, this centralization of the individual and as world-oriented is replicated in their constructions and testimonials of their Satanic membership.

In the same text, the authors unpack three potential categories for Satanisms to fit into: Rational Satanisms, Esoteric Satanisms, and Reactive Satanisms. For rational Satanisms, the authors describe that “rationalist Satanism is atheistic, skeptical, materialistic, and epicurean.”¹⁸ The hedonistic nature of religious organizations like the Church of Satan connect their religious practice and ritual to their beliefs that a deity-based cosmology is not possible within their purview. Due to the rejection of mainstream U.S. conservative protestant forms of morality,¹⁹ practitioners of rationalist Satanism can embody hedonistic behaviors, as the religiously mandated taboos (often given from Conservative Protestant Evangelical moralities) are seen with utmost suspicion and

¹⁷ Asbjørn Dyrendal, James R. Lewis & Jesper AA. Petersen, *The Invention of Satanism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 7.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁹ Examples within these moral systems include the outright rejection of pornographic materials and their consumption, the exclusion of LGBTQIA+ people within conservative religious communities, and discourses that embrace abstinence until expected heterosexual marriage. These examples and the systems themselves are open to change, yet these discourses and mandates continue to persist, even as practitioners in these systems complicate them. Samuel L. Perry, *Addicted to Lust: Pornography in the Lives of Conservative Protestants* (London, UK: Oxford University Press, 2019).

eradication. For Esoteric Satanisms, the authors describe that “esoteric Satanism does not need to eschew science and rational thought, but it is more explicitly theistically oriented and uses the esoteric traditions of Paganism, Western Esotericism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, among others, to formulate a religion of self-actualization.”²⁰ Esoteric Satanisms often take processes of the mind from Buddhism, Left-Hand Tantric practices from Buddhism and Hinduism, and religious figures from the ancient Greeks, Romans, and Egyptians. Lastly, the authors describe Reactive Satanisms, stating that “reactive Satanism is reactive in the sense that it is in opposition to society, but it has been (and often still is) paradigmatically conform in that it tends to reiterate central cultural narratives of evil.”²¹ Thus, for reactive Satanisms, this practice is an embrace of what society thinks is evil, immoral, or wrong, which can shift and change based on what society or community the practitioner is in. For example, reactive Satanism could look like Goth or Heavy metal-style clothing and music, a person being sexually active in a community that shuns sexual activity, practicing magic in a highly rationalist community, and many more. While some of these aesthetics and practices shift and change between various Anglophone countries depending on social and communal context, many reactive forms of Satanism engage consistent concerns, including reacting to conservative Evangelical purity cultures and anti-occult discourses. As communities shift and change, Rational, Esoteric, and Reactive can be great spaces to divide the movements and understand them better, as many Satanic movements can be categorized by more than one

²⁰ Asbjørn Dyrendal, James R. Lewis & Jesper AA. Petersen, *The Invention of Satanism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 6.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

of these terms. Movements like gay Satanisms online can be both esoteric and reactive, while later forms of the Church of Satan and the Temple of Set can be described as both rational and esoteric. For the purposes of this current paper, gay pornographic Satanism needs to be seen as the combination of esoteric and reactive Satanisms.

The Rise of Cyber-Satanism

Despite the growth of research into online religion²² and the centrality of social media for Satanic communities, limited research has been done on social media and cyber-Satanism. While some work in the field has been done using online methods,²³ the specific rise of social media-based forms of Satanism and Satanist communication have been left outside of scholarship.

One of the only studies of social media and Satanic community is a text on Polish cyber-Satanism, which engaged with forum-based websites and promoted a cohesion and creation of community through these forums. The author, Rafal Smoczynski, argues that “Satanism reflects larger trends in secularization, specifically the decline in traditional patterns of belonging to formal institutions. One consequence of this trend is the rise of Satanic communities in a digital world.”²⁴ These traditional patterns can be attending a

²² Lorne L. Dawson and Douglas E. Cowan, eds., *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet* (New York: Routledge, 2004). Melinda Lundquist Denton and Richard Flory, *Back-Pocket God: Religion and Spirituality in the Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020). Gary Bunt, *Virtually Islamic: Computer-mediated Communication and Cyber Islamic Environments* (Cardiff, UK: University of Wales Press, 2002). Douglas E. Cowan, *Cyberhenge: Modern Pagans on the Internet* (New York: Routledge, 2005). Morten Hojsgaard and Margit Warburg, *Religion and Cyberspace* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

²³ James R. Lewis and Jesper Aagaard Petersen, editors, *The Encyclopedic Sourcebook of Satanism* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2008).

²⁴ Rafal Smoczynski, “Cyber-Satanism and Imagined Satanism: Dark Symptoms of Late Modernity,” in *Contemporary Religious Satanism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Jesper Aagaard Petersen (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 146.

religious service in a physical building or location or other forms of community cohesion through regimented physical presence. For Satanists, especially in places without larger communities (in the U.S., this space would most likely be the Midwest, the Bible Belt, and the Southeast), finding a group to identify with in a physical space can be incredibly difficult, if not impossible. This search can then lead to the creation of public-private social media accounts and forums. While these forums, and their discussions of Satanic spirituality, have consistently fizzled out, the encroachment of more modern social media platforms, especially Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr, into the contemporary mindset have allowed Satanists to form communities, enhance their understandings of their religious practice, practice healing from harmful experiences, and question the potential ‘rules’ of Satanism(s). This cyber-Satanic and social media driven religiosity must be researched more, as communities further shift their constructions from public, physical spaces to pseudo-private virtual spheres.

Leading scholars within new religious movement studies and its subfield of Satanism studies, including Massimo Introvigne, call for special attention to the role of social media and the internet when engaging with acts of religiosity, spirituality, and conversion.²⁵ In a discussion of the shift of the Church of Satan from a predominantly offline and physical entity in the 1960s to the contemporary iterations of the Church of Satan online, Introvigne argues that “the situation has been deeply changed by the Internet. If a few hundred people worldwide attend the meetings of the Satanist

²⁵Massimo Introvigne, *Satanism: A Social History*. (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2016). Asbjørn Dyrendal, James R. Lewis, and Jesper AA. Petersen, *The Invention of Satanism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016). Jesper Aagaard Petersen, editor, *Contemporary Religious Satanism: A Critical Anthology* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016).

movements, some thousands express their opinions regularly on forums, blogs and sites dedicated to Satanism... Most were glad to remain ‘cyber-Satanists,’ who did not participate to any organized Satanist activity outside of internet.”²⁶ As Introvigne points to, many cyber-Satanists do not see a need to find community offline, instead constructing a social movement exclusively in online spaces with their own social rules and regulations, enforced not only through communal discourses but also the digital service providers and social media creators.

In his Satanism Surveys, James R. Lewis found that “few Satanists were neo-Nazis: a significant number, on the contrary, manifested left-wing political ideas. This conclusion was strengthened by a second study Lewis carried out in 2009.”²⁷ While these surveys are incredibly useful to understanding demographics and political alignment, other scholarship is needed to investigate the particular nuances of social media and satanic community formation. This work answers that call, engaging critically with insider community discourses that possibly re-shape engagement with organized contemporary Satanist movements online, as they reach out to the larger social media followings, challenging larger Satanist groups’ formations of community and hierarchy.

METHODS

This project engages eight weeks of netnographic participant observation (October-December 2020) within the satanic milieu online on Twitter, a social media

²⁶ Massimo Introvigne, *Satanism: A Social History* (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2016), 521.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 522.

website that supports the posting and re-posting of images, text, videos, and hyperlinks to construct a specially tailored content area for users. Twitter is strictly managed by their character limits on posts, censorship rules of certain forms of sexually-explicit material and hate speech, and their lack of customization for the personal pages of people and organizations on Twitter.²⁸ Satanic practitioners predominantly are utilizing Twitter as their new home, sculpting self-religions into communities of connected practitioners, rituals, and beliefs within the Satanic milieu.

For the methodologies within this paper, I employ Kozinets' Netnography and Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), to analyze the social media-based archives constructed by these Satanists on Twitter, while also employing CDA to examine the ways that these same men manifest their (a)theologies and taboo practices, not just as an individual concern, but also a communal and universal one. Due to time constraints and a possibility of burning this data site,²⁹ I chose to conduct neither formal nor informal interviews of the practitioners. Kozinets describes Netnography as "not merely another name for online ethnography, but a set of general instructions relating to *a*

²⁸ Twitter's Terms of Service state that "accounts dedicated to posting sensitive media – your account may be permanently suspended if the majority of your activity on Twitter is sharing sensitive media" (<https://help.twitter.com/en/rules-and-policies/media-policy>). This 'sensitive media' includes the categories of graphic violence, adult content, and hateful imagery.

²⁹ This particular data site engages material that is sexual in nature. Most Satanists in these spaces rely on aliases and profile images that are not reflective of their offsite and legal identities. Other Satanists offline employ aliases when engaging the media and within religious communities as a way of protecting themselves and their family from possible abuse. These names also can hold religious significance. By requesting interviews from the online community, my requests may challenge the feelings of anonymity within the community. This community also is doubly marginalized as queer men online and as Satanists, which often leaves their community in a precarious position on Twitter, where censorship of certain explicit imagery pervades.

specific way to conduct qualitative social media research.”³⁰ As his work exclusively centered social media (including chat rooms, social media services like Facebook, and other virtual worlds), Netnography is a great use to qualitative sociological studies of gay pornographic Satanists on Twitter, and also Satanists’ engagements with social media more broadly.

Through Kozinets’ conceptualization of netnography, I chose to use both intellectual engagement and cultural engagement strategies to observe these participants. Kozinets describes intellectual engagement strategies as “a deliberate effort to gain a deeper conceptual understanding of relevant interests and information... questioning the meaning of particular ideas... or the seeking of a more holistic understanding of information that others take for granted.”³¹ Kozinets’ cultural engagement strategies allowed me to examine “the use of particular linguistic terms, symbols, rituals, and acronyms... [which] quest for deeper understanding of those terms and symbols.”³² This engagement strategy helped inform my work, as these forms of Satanisms were heavily aesthetic, relying on insider terms and symbols that I was initially unfamiliar with. Terms like ‘BBBH,’ an acronym for Bareback Brotherhood used commonly by men who have sex with other men without using forms of sexual protection (i.e. not using condoms, Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis, etc.), ‘s8n,’ referring to Satan with the 8 referencing the middle section of the term as a practice to avoid censorship and connect to other Satanists, and

³⁰ Robert V. Kozinets, *Netnography: The Essential Guide to Qualitative Social Media Research* (London, UK: Sage Publications Ltd, 2020), 7.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 250.

³² *Ibid.*

‘chemsex’ or ‘PnP,’ often acknowledging to others that the practitioner used certain drugs (often forms of methamphetamines) while engaging in sexual acts (PnP = Party and Play), were unknown to my lexicon prior to this research; however, after going through various search engines, these terms and their usage within the Satanic milieu started to form, becoming common place. These emic terms are important analytical anchors to ground the work inside the community. The community forms their own emic necessities through abbreviation, often navigating around social media surveillance or unwanted attention from individuals and organizations which may speak out against them.

Utilizing discourse analysis and netnography together is incredibly useful to this study, as these practitioners construct Satanic community almost entirely online, through forums, social media sites (i.e. Twitter & Tumblr), and through personal websites. As such, an analysis of their words and discourses is one of the profound ways that researchers can explore their community constructions in both liberating and constrictive ways, as they navigate parody, censorship, and their conceptions of what taboo and transgression look like.

Most of the theoretical model within this project consists of Grounded Theory,³³ a theoretical space that comes from ethnographic theoretical frameworks, where the words of the interlocutors expand, challenge, embody, distort, and shift the preexisting literature, instead of allowing the preexisting scholarly work to distort or shift the words of the interlocutors. This theory centers the narratives, terms, and phrases of those

³³ Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1999). Melanie Birks and Jane Mills, *Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide* (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications, 2011).

practitioners, as they post them online. Seeking latent themes relevant to the construction of Satanic community, I coded my netnographic field notes using Invivo and Versus Coding.³⁴

RESULTS

PORNOGRAPHIC GAY SATANISM AS CATEGORY/SYSTEM/RELIGION

From doing fieldwork on these virtual spaces and archives of personhood, I came across many similar themes across the pages. Within this paper, I choose to highlight two themes: gay Satanism as part of a larger collective of phallocentric worship as alternative religion online and the desecration of Protestant Christian values through the breaking of American taboos.

Cock is God: Gay Satanism within a Phallocentric Religious Milieu

For contemporary gay pornographic Satanism online, the real and idealized phallic symbol are core components to both ritual and magical practice. While this form of phallic worship is unique in its connection to a Satanic milieu, phallic worship is part of a larger phallocentric religious milieu that could include the post-Crowleyan Ordo Templi Orientis,³⁵ online phallic worshipers, phallic gay paganisms,³⁶ and the BDSM practice of cock worship.³⁷ Many within the gay Satanic milieu online either play with

³⁴ Johnny Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications, 2016).

³⁵ Hugh B. Urban, *Magia Sexualis: Sex, Magic, and Liberation in Modern Western Esotericism*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006).

³⁶ A prominent example of this practice is the Temple of Priapus, also called St. Priapus Church, founded in the 1980s and lives on mostly in digital spaces today.

³⁷ Phallic worship “can take the form of loving, sensual play, or be incorporated into different forms of BDSM, such as dominance and submission or even degradation. Because the penis is the center of attention

these other practices themselves or retweet from others who do these practices. For example, one of the satanic practitioners that I observed, Santa's Blowjob Partner,³⁸ had a bio that stated, "Rejoice Lord SATAN, Cock is God, Praise Sodomy #sex #nude #cock #gay #love #lust #masturbation." This combination connects Satan, phallogocentric religion, and sodomy to their religio-sexual practice. While sodomy is not a crime that was exclusively targeted to queer men, as many heterosexual partners could claim sodomy on their sexual partners, most of the sodomy language is geared at men who have anal sex with men, whether real or perceived sex acts.³⁹ By embracing the term sodomy, the phallus as god, and the Satanic figure, the practitioners themselves are constructing a gay, phallogocentric spirituality.

Within discourses surrounding sodomy particularly, Lucifer's Legion understands gay sexual penetration as a key to his phallic worship. The practitioner retweeted four images⁴⁰ from another practitioner, Plutarch, who argues that "SODOMY MAKES SATANISTS WHOLE AND REPLETE WITH TRUE SEXUAL SATISFACTION NOT

in a cock worship scene, acts that provide pleasure and empowerment to the person with the penis are essential. These can include touching, stroking, licking, fellatio, use of sex toys, and more. The worshipper is encouraged to embrace and admire all aspects of the penis, including its sight, smell, taste, and touch. Verbalization, including complimenting and romanticizing the penis, is encouraged. Some cock worship scenes involve spiritual elements and significant ceremony" (kinkly.com/definition/12486/cock-worship).

³⁸ Using Santa instead of Satan is a common occurrence among gay Satanists on social media sites who want to avoid detection and deletion of their social media handles. While Twitter does not directly delete Satanists for being Satanists, certain practices for gay Satanic practitioners, including simulated drug use and incest, can be cause for suspension or deletion of their accounts.

³⁹ William N. Eskridge, Jr., *Dishonorable Passions: Sodomy Laws in America 1861-2003* (New York: Viking, 2008).

⁴⁰ Image Descriptions: Photo 1 – Two white hairy men, in the midst of penetration, shot from under their bodies; Photo 2 – A professionally shot, while moving orgy image, all men are still wearing pants, but many are still groping each other; Photo 3 – Two white men mid-penetration. The top has a large back tattoo that fully covers his back and a mermaid as the centerpiece, the photo is shot from above; Photo 4 – a series of white men in masks stand behind a man who is bound in leather cuffs on his arms, stomach, thighs, and lower legs, 10 men are in the image, 9 covered with ski masks. One is penetrating the man who is strapped down with leather.

EVER BEFORE KNOWN TO MEN. WE CAN FEEL A FIRE COMPELLING US TO OFFER OUR FLESH TO MEN TO FEED ON SEMEN N ENJOY A LIFE FULL OF SEXUAL SODOMIC ECSTASY!!!” This post synthesizes the sexualized taboo of the term ‘sodomy’ within a context that allows gay phallogentric Satanists to reclaim a term weaponized against them to perform an ultimate form of sexualized religious worship. This sodomy is connected to the fleshiness of the body, seminal fluid as sacred seed, and forms of sexual penetration. Thus, while the phallus is not mentioned in this specific quote, the undercurrents of sexual penetration and the inclusion of a sacred seminal fluid would necessitate a phallus at the center of the religio-sexual ritual practice.

On notes of ritualized sacred seminal fluid, both Maximus Vassago and James Erektion see this byproduct of sexualized acts as a key component to phallogentric worship and ritual. Maximus Vassago, while retweeting a video⁴¹ from another gay Satanist named Virya, wrote “BLESSED BE THE SPIRIT FOREVER” over their post, which stated “My initial cumshot of the year! I submit it on the altar of the God Cock! ... #ritualex #magicksex #templeofpriapus #churchofphallus #cumrag #cumpowder #cumsaving #cumharvest.” Some of the people tagged into this post, which were removed from the tweet to protect anonymity, are prominent practitioners within a phallogentric religious milieu on Twitter, which many gay Satanists see themselves as a part of. Maximus Vassago plays into this space, by centering both the semen and phallus as part of this sexualized religious fetish, a ritualized practice that pushes cock worship

⁴¹ Video Description: 00:22 video, small yellow and white alter to a penis, man ejaculating onto the altar, only penis and alter shown

from a sexual kink to a genuine religious practice, performing worldmaking on Twitter through a religio-sexual advancement of the Satanic milieu. These ‘cumshots’ are seen as forms of ritualized magic, which align with temporal and seasonal metaphysical practices, including fall harvests, summer solstices, and the ushering of the new year. Similarly, Randolf Toomas, a South African gay Satanic practitioner, commented “Party! Party! Party!” on a post about the Winter Solstice. The image in question was a collection of nude white men running with lit Tiki torches. Under this image, centered in white, is the statement “WINTER SOLSTICE” under which is the sentence, “Get naked, drink mead and party like a Pagan because a Christmas spent queuing at Argos is just bollocks.” This retweet with his original caption centers the possibility of syncretism within the Satanic milieu, combining sexualized forms of Satanic practice with neopagan and Wiccan holidays, as a reaction and rejection of Christianity and its holy days, critiquing larger forms of commercialization of Christian holidays and Christian capitalism.⁴²

Unlike Maximus Vassago and Randolf Toomas, James Erection is more interested in retweeting images that hold more theological implications surrounding the importance of semen as *gnosis* and less interested in the magical performance of ritual during certain seasons. While retweeting an image⁴³ by Father Phallus, James Erection posts a caption that states, “Seed is Existence, the holy sanctified knowledge from our god.” This

⁴² Kevin Kruse, *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (New York: Basic Books, 2015); Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

⁴³ Image description: Gif shot from just the pelvic region, orgasming erect penis, from a white man, being held at the base with the right hand, while lying on his back.

construction of a religious practice through human seed, or seminal fluid, combines metaphysical theories of embodiment with gnostic understandings of knowledge, each which feed into the other. For phallic worshipers, seminal fluid itself holds a powerful and sacred energy. Catherine L. Albanese describes this concept of finding knowledge in the human body through metaphysical religious practices as a concept where “metaphysicians find a stream of energy flowing from above to below – so powerful and constitutive of their reality that they discover themselves to be, in some sense, made of the same ‘stuff.’”⁴⁴ While Albanese’s work on metaphysical traditions is helpful to orient a gay pornographic Satanism, much of metaphysical traditions’ connections to the mind⁴⁵ are absent here; instead, they are replaced with the phallus, feelings of pleasure, and seminal fluid as spaces of energy flow and god-like power.

While Satanism is a formulation of a religious practice, many gay Satanic practitioners still practice forms of reactive Satanisms,⁴⁶ practices that respond to communal or social notions of good and evil, producing discursive parodies of Christian terminology in this socially mediated context. Larger practices of reactive Satanism in the US often invert conservative Evangelical representations of Christianity while also engaging contemporary popular cultural representations of Satanic community. On Twitter, popular Satanic themes include the appropriation of Christian discourses onto the inverted religio-sexual ritual body of gay pornographic Satanism. One popular example

⁴⁴ Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind & Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 6.

⁴⁵ Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind & Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

⁴⁶ Asbjørn Dyrendal, James R. Lewis, and Jesper AA. Petersen, *The Invention of Satanism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

of this inversion is the utilization of Sunday as *sinday*, which was employed in original posts by both The Eater of Sperm and Satan’s Favorite Demon. In an original gif post,⁴⁷ The Eater of Sperm stated that, “Sinday is cumming so distribute the cummunion with pigbrothers #SinDay #gaypig #cumspit #snowball #gaysnowball #bbbh.” Within this quotation, The Eater of Sperm does not just employ the inversion of Sunday but also communion, used with the term ‘cum’ as a slang term for ejaculate. In an original image post,⁴⁸ Satan’s Favorite Demon also uses this concept of an inverted Sunday by stating, “SIN-day: Act upon your LUST and feel HIM inside you!!” This concept still utilizes *Sinday* as a special time to invert Christian concepts of purity, to promote sexual behavior. This post also includes an image which plays on the “Lord is my Shepherd” prayer from Psalm 23 in the Hebrew Bible, which the practitioner uses to highlight senses of individuality and a critique of *herd mentality*, through the embrace of taboo and rejection of shame.

A Gay(?) Satanist

The men who practice this branch of phallogentric gay Satanism online continue to contribute to larger discussions and questions surrounding the practices and studies of

⁴⁷ Image description: Gif taken from Men.com scene, a black man spits semen into a white man’s mouth. Gif shot from the neck up for both of them. Both are muscular and conventionally attractive

⁴⁸ Image Description: The first image has a black cloth background, man with arms outstretched, painted in black with horns, mouth agape, horns coming out in pairs on the sides of his head, the front of his head, and on his shoulders. He also has claws for fingernails. The bottom center has word art that states, in bright cherry red “SIN FOR ME!” The second image is a white man fully clothed, with his penis and testicles exposed, and wearing a backwards baseball cap, staring straight into the camera. On the white shirt is an edited word art that said “The Lord is not my Shepherd for I am not sheep”. The third image is a picture of a young white man (roughly 20) with an arm outreached and touching his lower cheek and lips. The image is shot from the young man’s chest to the top of his head, fully clothed. On the top left corner is the word art that states “BREED THEM ALL”. In the fourth image, a double exposure of one man, muscular and white, shirtless and looking down, while the other is of a man with pointy ears, yellow eyes, and sharp teeth, with a pointed tongue and a tongue piercing, staring directly into the camera.

Satanisms, while still reinforcing dominant views of Satanisms demographically. Most of the practitioners I observed were white, English-speaking, from Anglophone countries (predominantly from the United States) and identified as gay/queer/bisexual and as part of the larger Satanic milieu. Much of the discourse and imagery utilized by these men often echoed these identities as well. Images of nude men amid sexual interactions were often white, muscular, and hypermasculine. While this form of Satanism can support *some* queer men, the lack of Black, feminine, Jewish, and transgender practitioners within this milieu is not by accident. While I viewed practitioners' pages, symbols like the Nazi Swastika appeared occasionally, similar to the religious practice of Nazi Satanism,⁴⁹ which actively distances Black and Jewish practitioners from the Satanic movements. The appeals to a 'rugged individualism' that supports hypermasculinity and the usages of a phallus as central to Satanic practice distances both feminine and trans practitioners. Thus, practitioners may hold more accepting views personally, but a history of bias and a contemporary moment of discursive exclusion produces dominant and privileged identities within a cisgender, gay white American religious construction. Thus, practitioners in the US are locked into inversions within the boundaries of social and communal aesthetics, discourses, practices, and mythologies, while still perpetuating societal concepts of transphobia, white supremacy, antisemitism, and misogyny, reproducing certain biases of larger social groups while simultaneously rejecting anti-sex discourses.

⁴⁹ For more information on Nazi Satanism/Satanic Nazism, see Chapter 7, "Hail Loki! Hail Satan! Hail Hitler! Darkside Asatrú, Satanism, and Occult National Socialism," in Mattias Gardell, *Gods of the Blood: The Pagan Revival and White Separatism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

Down with the System: A Satanic (a)Theology of Alterity

Individualism, Willpower, and critiques of *Herd Mentality* are prime constructions of online Satanic religiosity. Many online practitioners articulate these terms in unique yet similar ways to each other and other larger, more organized Satanic movements. Similar to the Church of Satan, Dimitris Satanás argues that “as one who follows the basic laws of Anti-Cosmic Satanism,⁵⁰ I refute the pale dictates of God and His Churches, the Laws of Governmental oppression and the moral manacles of the pious and the hypocritical.” Here, morality, as constructed by a mainstream society, religious community, or government, is seen with huge suspicion and as something that should be destroyed. With a mind for morality, good/evil, and justice/injustice, this practitioner embraces the individual person to choose what is good and evil. This individualism is core to the practices of online Satanisms, where theodicies and the problem of evil within the movement are consistently individualized and relativized. Morality, good/evil, and other binaries that fit into theodicies often cannot have larger constructions than the individual; however, the rejection of mainstream morality and the desire for the abolition of Christian-based legal systems does create loose morals as *antithetical* to (often Evangelical and Conservative Protestant) Christianity, through a process of inversion, where the refutation of a theistic, moral and purely good God can also support the refutation of the morals aligned with these other religious movements.

⁵⁰ ‘anti-cosmic Satanism’ is an occasional term that came up during my work that often meant that they did not align with theistic Satanisms, yet many of them still believed in magic, phantom-like presences, or the presence of esoteric knowledge within their Satanic epistemological constructions.

Reverend Harrison pushes individualism even further to the point of understanding the presence or absence of demons and the Satanic figure. In *For Gay Satanists*, Reverend Harrison argues that as a first step into Satanism, a Satanist must “build the very foundation of [their] beliefs the very core that everything else revolves around. [They] need to sit down and study through books, websites, articles etc, (preferably multiple). And [they] need to decide for [themselves] what [they] believe. Such as what is ‘Satan’ to [them]? What are the ‘demons’ to [them]? What is ‘hell’ to [them]?”⁵¹ For Reverend Harrison, the presence of the Satanic figure and demonic activity is real and actualized within sexual intercourse, while he still leaves space for other Satanists who may reject the real presence of demonic figures and instead see these figures as allegories or metaphors.

Within many forms of online Satanisms, practitioners push for the eradication of shame and support of individual spiritual growth, while also challenging larger Satanic organizations and calling for their eradication. An American Satanist, Thrall, argues that “there can be no Church of Satan, no Temples or Orders – Satan’s Kindred are a Tribe, a Tribe of Libertines, Warlocks, Witches, Infernal Sorcerers, sexual activists, Occult anarchists and lone predators forged with their Kindred by the Unholy Blood of Satan!” These organizational structures can be interpreted as part of a larger control over an individual, not embracing the individualism in the Satanic, representing those ideals which Satanists are expected to resent. This anti-structural (a)theology is not derived from a god or deity but instead by the creation of organizations and structures for social

⁵¹ Reverend Harrison, *For Gay Satanists*, (Self-published, 2019).

control of individual people. Especially for gay Satanists online, these social systems are designed to produce the largest social evils: misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, ethnocentrism, racism, ableism, and Christian supremacy. This (a)theology also allows for a nonuniform, individual, and relativist construct of what Satanisms should look like to each practitioner, especially the ways Satanisms might be defined, which morality structures can be utilized and which can be avoided, and how personal ritual might be employed. While other terms may be useful to the construction of an ethical and religious system, I choose to employ (a)theology as an avenue to think through the ways particular gay Satanists identify themselves in relation to atheism, agnosticism, and theism (often a real presence of a devil figure who should be worshipped). As such, John Shook's term 'atheology,' as a systematic theology that understands the importance of atheism and the term theology themselves are not sufficient; instead, I place the 'a' in parentheses to work through the unique relationship devil figures are placed into by practitioners, whether as real presences in the world, as literary rebels to emulate one's life after, or simply as a figurehead of a movement.

Thrall's critique of larger social structures within the movement, pushes for the reconsideration of orthopraxy within the online Satanic movements, where figures must consistently fight physically, discursively, and virtually against forms of organization and structure that continuously infringe on the individual willpower and rights of the self-religious subject. Thrall also argues that Satanists must "rebuke those who think that our lives are to procreate, work for those who have no right to call themselves superiors and fit in to the labeled boxes of society - rise in decadence, beauty, power and primal

wrath!” This call is meant as a call to eradicate shame based in misogyny and homophobia, by supporting sexuality outside of procreative practices, embracing the full range of sexual experiences that human beings can have. In this case, morals imposed by larger societal structures are rejected due to the individual needs of the Satanic practitioner for both Thrall and Dimitris Satanás mentioned earlier. The self-religious component of these practitioners often pushes to embrace the individual but *still* has a collective impact.

While these critiques of larger social structures and supports of individualism can be seen at the larger social and legal scales, online gay Satanists like Satan’s Favorite Demon also take individual critiques for the betterment of the isolated practitioner, mostly through contemporary neoliberal notions of ‘self-care.’ On his Twitter page, Satan’s Favorite Demon created three original image collage posts with each image having a background in orange and red of the Baphomet statue constructed by the Satanic Temple. On the top of each image is “Satanic Self Care Tip”. These ten self-care tips for Satanic practitioners online go as follows:

“#1 SELF CARE IS NOT SELFISH. YOU CANNOT POUR FROM AN EMPTY VESSEL,” “#2 Live your life without regrets by learning from your mistakes and cherishing every short, finite moment,” “#3 When uninspired, find comfort in Science, Art, and the world progress of humankind,” “#4 Never feel guilt or shame for being who you are. Embrace and celebrate diversity,” “#5 Work hard daily to be your own voice of reason and morality. Take responsibility for your own actions and rely on nobody other than you to guide you,” “#6 You are your own savior. You have the strength inside of you to lift yourself up. Create your own purpose,” “#7 Don’t worry about pleasing the people who would judge you for being true to yourself. Let them go,” “#8 YOU ARE YOUR OWN MASTER. YOU ARE A SERVANT TO NO ONE. YOU HOLD THE POWER TO TRANSFORM YOUR LIFE,” “#9 Language is powerful and potent. Choose your words carefully and take time to be

conscious of your reaction to them. How does the word feel when you use it?” “#10 Trust your instincts and your body. Spend less time in your head and more time in your heart, your skin, your hands and your feet.”

Each of these statements embrace acts of self-care as forms of individual willpower, social justice, and the abolishment of shame. This embrace of self-care still reifies a neoliberal individualism, that each person can commit social change, radically shifting society, which aligns with the individualist history of the Satanic milieu. Some of these self-care tips also resemble similar regulations within larger Satanic social organizations within the Satanic milieu, like the Satanic Temple. Individual agency, bodily autonomy, the eradication of shame, and the support for diversity and the uniqueness of experiences can be found in both movements, whether the fractious online Satanic movements or the solidified and codified Temple.⁵²

DISCUSSION

While engaging in digital acts of transgression away from mainstream evangelical sexual ethics, gay Satanists engage in technologies that produce both liberative and constrictive potentials for practitioners. Practitioners offline and online engage with legal, ethical, and governmental expectations that produce vigilant subjects who reject mainstream sexual ethics and recognize the surveillance power of social media. They often appeal to magic, performing sexual rituals, calling upon demon possession during sex, and centralizing many of their religious claims on the enhanced performance of

⁵² This is not by accident. Since this twitter post was published in April of 2020 and the Tenets of the Satanic Temple have been publicly available since 2013, Satan’s Favorite Demon could simply be mimicking and expanding on the Satanic Temple’s ideologies surrounding contemporary Satanisms.

Satanic sexuality. Satanists enact these forms of online and offline ritual as an extension of a sexual ethic that they see as transgressive and individualistic.

Theorizing through the relationships of these social systems and sexual magic, Hugh Urban argues that “the violation of sexual codes, in other words, is a kind of master key for the violation of codes on other levels, from economics to spirituality to political revolution.”⁵³ This sexual magic is a construction of sexuality at the intersections of sex and spirituality which fortifies other aspects of religious life, not merely a private sexuality, but also a public and visual religio-sexual practice. This concept also theorizes a center of transgression, one greatly connected to the practices of Satanism(s), which centralizes personal individualism while also connecting to a common opposition to contemporary Christian political and social dominance, promoting oppositional discourses that fortify the Satanic-figure as supportive of sexual diversity and a release of all sexualized taboos and inhibitions.

Susan Sontag’s constructions of transgression approach the liberatory forms of epistemological constructions within the pornographic imagination, a space she theorizes through the works of Marquis de Sade, stating that “He who transgresses not only breaks a rule. He goes somewhere that the others are not; and he knows something the others don’t know.”⁵⁴ Similar to this construction of a pornographic and transgressive epistemology, transgressive sexual constructions of the religious by these gay Satanic

⁵³ Hugh B. Urban, *Magia Sexualis: Sex, Magic, and Liberation in Modern Western Esotericism* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 222.

⁵⁴ Susan Sontag, “The Pornographic Imagination,” in *Styles of Radical Will* (New York, NY: Picador, 1967), 71.

practitioners might allow for newer Satanic and religio-sexual epistemologies, newer Satanic knowledges, as these practitioners allow themselves to attend to their sexual arousal and lust, rejecting contemporary mainstream ethics and moralities.

While transgression is a helpful tool to unpack feelings of agency and liberation, satanic practitioners on Twitter are constrained by their choice to create pornographic Satanic worlds on this specific social media site. When describing Twitter as a social media site, Angela Nagle describes it as its own enforceable panopticon, “in which the many lived in fear of the observation from the eagle eye of an offended organizer of public shaming... the particular incarnations of the online left and right that exist today are undoubtedly a product of this strange period of ultra puritanism.”⁵⁵ While many practitioners reject the notion of shame, the idea of Twitter being its own panopticon is quite useful to understand how sexually transgressive acts are not only liberatory but also constricted by surveillance and self-censorship. While Foucault’s original representation of the panopticon is involuntary and based in prison systems,⁵⁶ social media sites produce their own imperatives of engagement online, as Satanists reach for community in isolation. This Twitter panopticon can be understood through this metaphor by examining the interrelations of censorship and surveillance on the social media sites, through top-down censorship paid for by the social media company, through their enforcement of their Terms of Service, through their requests to have Twitter users declare certain

⁵⁵ Angela Nagle, *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from 4CHAN and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2017), 8.

⁵⁶ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1995).

content unsuitable through their reporting network,⁵⁷ and the bottom-up practice of techniques of self-censorship the gay pornographic Satanic practitioners imbibe in when producing the archivable worlds that are their pages. Each of these possible punishments of the threat of closure, suspension, and deletion restrict the user from fully being their virtual Satanic self; instead, they must navigate this space by making multiple accounts, linking outside websites created by more notable practitioners, and linking less censored pages (like those affiliated with Tumblr mirror sites like BDSMIr.com and tumbl.com). Each of these actions form their own exchanges of personhood, surveillance capitalism, and community construction, which are to be understood within this globalized, countercultural, transcultural religious landscape. Thus, while this act of transgression can dramatically change the lives of these Satanists, eradicating their shame and embracing their feelings of lust, these practitioners are still consistently constricted when aiming to create religio-sexual community in the virtual sphere. Thus, in the virtual sphere as well as in the physical one, the act of transgression is both a liberatory and constrictive religious act, one with the possibility of freeing the practitioner of anxiety and shame, while also threatening the practitioner with exclusion, legal action, or social isolation.

Practitioners also claim individualism as key to their Satanic approach, especially as these queer Satanic practitioners do not practice in an organized fashion like the

⁵⁷ On their rules and policies pages, Twitter states that “you can report this content for review in-app as follows: 1. Select **Report Tweet** from the icon. 2. Select **It displays a sensitive photo or video**. 3. Select the relevant option depending on what you are reporting” (<https://help.twitter.com/en/rules-and-policies/media-policy>). If enough people report a tweet, Twitter may take down the tweet before reviewing the violation; however, if only a few people report the tweet, Twitter often reviews the case before removal. Each of these forms of removal can be appealed by request from the user affected.

Church of Satan or the Satanic Temple, instead forming communities and spaces of connectedness on various social media platforms. These forms of connection dislodge claims of individualism, as they interact with a more amorphous social structure online. Practitioners like Thrall use this individualist discourse to support larger social movements like the right to one's own bodily autonomy, and what he argues are 'lives outside of procreation,' a similar discourse to Gay Liberation movements,⁵⁸ the Radical Faeries,⁵⁹ feminist movements,⁶⁰ and other social movements that push for bodily autonomy. Thus, while self-religion, a term coined by Paul Heelas⁶¹ to understand the New Age movement as centered on self-help and spiritual care of oneself as distinct from religious movements that center the community or collective, is often centered on individualism and personal willpower, gay Satanists still receive benefits from larger radical social movements, and also contribute popular support to them. These men often retweeted commentaries from the Church of Satan, the Satanic Temple, the Church of Priapus, and other more structured organizations which also push bodily autonomy, even as they may not lay claim to these movements. Thus, as many other scholars have questioned within 'spiritual but not religious' communities,⁶² a claim to individualism is

⁵⁸ Stuart Feather, *Blowing the Lid: Gay Liberation, Sexual Revolution and Radical Queens* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2016).

⁵⁹ Peter Hennen, *Faeries, Bears, and Leathermen: Men in Community Queering the Masculine* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

⁶⁰ Mary Ziegler, *Abortion and the Law in America: Roe v. Wade to the Present* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

⁶¹ Paul Heelas, *The New Age Movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1996).

⁶² Bruce A. Greer and Wade Clark Roof, "'Desperately Seeking Sheila': Locating Religious Privatism in American Society," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 31, no. 3 (1992): 346-352. Nancy T. Ammerman, "Spiritual but not Religious? Beyond Binary Choices in the Study of Religion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 52, no. 2 (2013): 258-278.

always already informed by a larger social structure, and for these Satanists, several social structures that inform their (a)theologies and practices include offline and online Satanic communities, conservative Evangelical communities and their sexual politics, and the social media-based companies' Terms of Service agreements themselves. These interactions within and between each of these social systems allows Satanists to engage the liberative and constrictive potentials for gay Satanic living in the digital sphere.

CONCLUSION

These gay Satanists and their engagements with religio-sexual transgression in cyberspace raise additional questions about the relationship of religion and sex, Satanism and sexuality, and queer formations of religious ritual and imagery. While these particular Satanists might be unique in their employment of pornographic consumption and distribution as religious ritual, their desires to co-constitute their religious practice as sexual and their sexual practice as religious is not. Under this framework, Gay Satanists, Devadasis, and Evangelical Christians each engage in co-constitutions of religious and sexual identity formation. Thus, as scholars, we must ponder and theorize with the ways gay men, and queer people more generally, use discourses of sexuality to explicate their religious identity and practice, who simultaneously use religious discourses to explicate their sexual identity and practice.⁶³

⁶³ Scholars and religious practitioners have articulated separations of these categories, often relying on the assumption which Melissa Wilcox has repeatedly laid out: "straight people can own religion; queer people can't, unless perhaps we do it just like straights." This approach asks scholars to think differently about queer and trans people in our engagements with religion, sexuality, and gender as intimately interwoven projects, particularly as queer and transgender people engage with religious identities and practices that

Scholars must do more to engage not just the rejections of explicit sexuality within religious movements, but also the ways religious movements creatively reimagine explicit sexuality as part and parcel of their religious worlds. While discussing the very different context of South Asian *devadāsīs* (traditional temple dancers) and the moralizing critiques and colonial and post-colonial reforms issued against them, Lucinda Ramberg argues:

“if sex is mixed up in that religion, then it must not be religion. All of this is familiar and consistent with modern and secular presumptions about the domains of human existence as discrete from each other (politics and religion) as well as the privatization and interiorization of both sex and religion. This logic, in my experience, is also manifest in the operations of academic fields and modes of inquiry, in which sex and religion rarely come into the same conversation. Yet they are always wrapped up together, implicating each other.”⁶⁴

While gay phallocentric Satanism is unique to cyberspace and digital globalization, these movements are special moments to call for the reinvestigation into all religious movements, even where certain forms of sexuality are deemed negative. How might scholars find pornography, religious ecstasy, and pleasure within religious movements that are not commonly assumed to be overtly sexual? Ramberg again argues “all rites and religions have sexuality: they mobilize and organize sexual economies, distributions of fertility, the limits and possibilities of public pleasures, and the shape of our desires. Forms of secularity and religiosity both invest themselves in bodies and pleasure; they

may not be familiar to their straight and cisgender religious counterparts. Melissa Wilcox, “Words Kill: Sex and the Definition of US Religion,” *American Religion* 1, no. 1 (2019): 8.

⁶⁴ Lucinda Ramberg, *Given to the Goddess: South Indian Devadasis and the Sexuality of Religion* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 222.

shape the possibilities we are given over, or give ourselves, to.”⁶⁵ As mentioned earlier, gay Satanists, Devadasis, and Evangelical Christians each engage in co-constitutions of religious and sexual identity formation. These communities and all other religious groups engage the sexual, the erotic, and the obscene as sites of religio-sexual formation, a process necessary for scholars to study more extensively.

As part and parcel of this space of research, we also must truly examine the liberative possibilities of pornographic epistemologies. Scholars within the study of religion must engage the pornographic as a sincere space of religious ritual and symbology and a worthy sector of analysis within the discipline. For many actors within pornography, including Muslim adult performer Nadia Ali, explicit sexuality opens new avenues to examining the spiritual or religious modes of engaging with the world, relying on new liberative discourses, where “porn values are not from these perspectives limited to vice and sinfulness but can provide a morally viable, religiously reasonable way to live life that can, in fact, save you, while letting you enjoy sex and sexual fantasies...”⁶⁶ Gary Laderman sees these moments of pornographic consumption and production as sites of religious and sexual ecstasy, where “the sexual ecstasies for those performing as well as those watching porn open the body to sensations and transportations that transcend everyday physical experiences and routines, a form of transcendence for some that can only be captured through religious language and ritual.”⁶⁷ Like the pornographic actors

⁶⁵ Lucinda Ramberg, *Given to the Goddess: South Indian Devadasis and the Sexuality of Religion* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 222.

⁶⁶ Gary Laderman, *Sacred Matters: Celebrity Worship, Sexual Ecstasies, the Living Dead, and Other Signs of Religious Life in the United States* (New York: The New Press, 2009), 148.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 143-44.

that Laderman discusses in his text, gay Satanists like Reverend Harrison or Dimitris Satanás take seriously both the religious and the sexual as places to perform cyber-Satanism, a place where queerness, the phallus, explicit sexuality, the devil, demons, sexual and religious transgression, and Christian inversion each provide avenues to engage a new explicitly religio-sexual epistemology. Gay Satanists on Twitter consume and produce these pornographic knowledges, learning of new forms of sexual practice, fetish, kink, and ritual which can then be enfolded into their sexual lives as pornographic viewers, consumers, producers, and writers. As such, Twitter and other social media sites are productive spaces for Satanists and other religio-sexual practitioners to form epistemologies, navigating sexual liberation, religious ecstasy, social activism, and consumerist limitations.

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