

Radboud University Nijmegen

Magic Meets the Mundane in *Practical Magic's* Costume Design
and Fan Fashion Practices

*Implications of subcultural trend and identity formation through the analysis of fan fashion from
the film Practical Magic*

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Master Thesis Creative Industries

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1 July 2025

Word Count: 16308

Abstract

This thesis explores how fan fashion inspired by *Practical Magic* (1998) operates at the intersection of fandom, fashion expression, and subcultural style. It examines how film costume functions both within cinematic narrative and beyond the screen through contemporary online fan practices in TikTok videos under the hashtag #practicalmagicoutfits. Drawing from theories on performativity, identity, and subculture—most notably those of Erving Goffman and Dick Hebdige—this study investigates how fans reinterpret the film’s “everyday” witchy aesthetic to reflect personal and communal identities. Chapter one offers a contrapuntal reading of the costumes worn by Sally and Gillian Owens, revealing how their outfits subtly construct the archetype of the witch through symbolic and narrative significations. Chapter two shifts focus to online fan fashion practices, demonstrating how fans translate these everyday costumes into everyday looks that blur the line between fan and fashion expression. The thesis proposes that such practices constitute a distinct form of “fan fashion,” separate from cosplay, defined by its transformative and everyday nature. By situating fan fashion within broader aesthetic trends such as “witchy” and “whimsigoth” styles, the study argues that fan engagement is also present in subtle, stylized forms of self-presentation. Ultimately, this thesis contributes to emerging discussions in fan and fashion studies by interrogating how everyday costume design and the fan practices that flow from it shape modern subcultural and fan identities.

Key words: Fan Fashion, Everyday Costume, Practical Magic, Identity Performance, Subcultural Identity, The Archetype of the Witch.

Over the last decades, the presence of social media has allowed fans to express themselves more temporally and freely. This has altered and shaped the ways in which fans engage with the source material. You no longer need to be a 'hardcore' fan, nor do you need to express yourself in a spectacular way to show your fan identity. As media fans draw upon mass media as a source for their everyday life, the possibility for mundane acts of fan expression seems evermore present (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 1). Fan identity can be performed and mediated through a transformative use of fashion inspired by films and series, which is called cosplay. More recently, however, popular fashion styles inspired by films or series seem to be integrated or absorbed into more general fashion trends and aesthetics, turning cosplay into an ambiguous practice. This is the case for *Practical Magic* (Griffin Dunne, 1998) and its 'everyday' witchy costumes.

The archetype of the witch has long been prevalent in history and in contemporary times has evolved into a cultural staple with commodified attributes, which are used as a "vehicle for capital" (Joshi and Brooks 60-61). This has allowed a 'witchy' fashion aesthetic to rise that is shaped by the way in which the witch is portrayed by pop culture. *Practical Magic* can be considered as one of the instigators and reference points for this certain aesthetic, which raises questions on the interpretation of fashion activities by its fans. How and where should we identify the fans that are not simply embodying a character, but use the 'vibe' of a film or series to match their own style? When the inspiration is clear, but the execution is loose, how should that be qualified within fan and fashion studies? And most importantly, if these people are engaging casually, temporally or indirectly with these films and series, should the emphasis be on their fan identity or their fashion identity? More of these 'everyday' practices of fan engagement ask for a reevaluation of fan identity and performance. This

thesis positions itself in between a person's fan identity and fashion style and the larger fan community versus the individual. As our sense of self is affected by the media we consume, the clothes we wear reflect and signal belonging. In today's highly individualized world, recognizing a fan on the streets has become harder, while online spaces offer outlets for fans to express their fan identity. A noticeable way of doing this is by sharing their fan dressing activities through short videos in online spaces. This practice can be called *fan fashion*. A considerable amount of these videos exists on social media amongst a range of fandoms. Commonly disguised under fashion trends, the people in these types of videos show you their wardrobe or outfit of the day. To an outsider this person might seem like a fashion influencer, or someone partaking in a fashion trend. Although this can be true, there are examples in which the person expresses their inspiration from other pop cultural phenomena related to fashion, such as films or tv shows. At the base of some more common fashion aesthetics are films that brought about or keep influencing these styles. The fashion trend that is often described through hashtags and captions as the *witchy* or *whimsigoth* trend refers to an aesthetic of dark, gothic themes with whimsical tendencies and gives off the same impression as a lot of *Practical Magic's* film costumes.

The 1990s and 2000s saw a cycle of films and series concerned with women and the supernatural, such as *Death Becomes Her* (1992), *Hocus Pocus* (1993), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1992, 1997-2003), *The Craft* (1996), *Charmed* (1998-2006), *Twitches* (2005) and *Practical Magic* (1998). In these two decades, media conglomerates realized that "a sanitized branding of women's empowerment was a major money-maker" (Hartless and Smith 321). *Practical Magic* stars Sandra Bullock and Nicole Kidman, who portray witch sisters Sally and Gillian Owens. They were dressed in 'everyday costume' that set the

tone for a newfound portrayal of the witch in cinema. Together with its contemporaries, *Practical Magic* instigated a ‘witchy’ aesthetic that has remained influential in the 2020s. In 2024, Warner Bros., *Practical Magic*’s production company, announced a sequel to the beloved film and it recently got an official release date for the fall of 2026. Momentum for the film thus seems to have never wavered. The upcoming sequel allows for the perfect moment to investigate the ongoing influence of *Practical Magic*’s style and costumes on contemporary fashion trends. By exploring the performance of online fan identity through fashion choices related to the film, I will establish that the film has generated a subcultural identity that coopts into the broader ‘witchy’ and ‘whimsigoth’ fashion trend. Costume designer Deborah Nadoolman Landis once said that “Costume designers don’t make icons, the public makes icons”, and that is exactly what these fans prove (Bartlett 28).

Through my analysis, I aim to provide a better understanding of the process of costume adaptation and how fans engage with film through clothing, in turn providing more clarification and new perspectives to the subject of contemporary engagement with costume in film that does not necessarily fall under the term ‘cosplay’. This subject was inspired by Lauren Boumaroun’s recent dissertation “Everyday Cosplay: Costume Adaptation and the Fan Fashion Industry”, on the notion of fan fashion. Whereas her dissertation seeks out to position the creative labor of costume designers and fans that goes into everyday styles into the broader fan fashion industry, my thesis will focus on the individual and communal identities produced by everyday interpretations of film costumes and their relation to fashion trends. With a focus on *Practical Magic*’s costumes, questions around the position of the cultural archetype of the witch in these everyday looks, guide this thesis. This thesis explores fans’ performativity and adaptability of

fashion connected to the witch that allows it to be classified in fashion trends with specific 'aesthetics'. At the end, I will have argued how *Practical Magic* fan fashion is associated with more widespread notions and aesthetics surrounding the archetype of the witch. To explore this topic, the following research question was formulated:

How can fan fashion inspired by Practical Magic (1998) be understood within the tension between fandom, aesthetic fashion expression and subcultural style and what does this reveal about the classification of fan fashion as a cultural practice?

Subsequently, two sub-questions are proposed that form the two chapters of this thesis. The first chapter will answer the question *How do the costumes in the film Practical Magic (1998) use symbolic significations to create a visual identity of the witch?* Examining the 'everyday costumes' worn by main characters Sally and Gillian Owens, this chapter utilizes theory from fashion studies scholars Jane Gaines and Stella Bruzzi to point out the ways in which costume functions within and outside of the narrative, supplied with film theory by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson. This chapter connects this costume analysis to the various positions of the cultural trope of the witch in order to see how the costume design in *Practical Magic* uses associated symbolic references in their costumes to depict the witch. This costume analysis will provide insight into how the costumes narrative meaning and construction of the characters, while also asking what symbolic meanings of the witch it beholds through a contrapuntal reading. In doing so, the chapter provides the visual and thematic foundation on which the second chapter builds.

The second chapter focuses on online fan practices of individuals engaging with *Practical Magic* through fashion, using the hashtag #practicalmagicoutfits. It asks the

following question: *How is the witchy look of Practical Magic (1998) reinterpreted by fans through fan fashion under the hashtag #practicalmagicoutfits?* By asking how the established iconography is reinterpreted by fans to create fannish iconographies, it examines the tension between fashion and fan identity, while further exploring how fan fashion practices overlap with subcultural aesthetics and fashion trends. Bridging the areas of fan culture, subcultural formations and fashion aesthetics, it also provides insight into how we can reconsider and redefine the appropriation and translation of film costumes through fashion.

Literature review

This literature review outlines key scholarly discussions within film, fashion and fan studies. While much of the existing literature emphasizes the spectacular, performative aspects of costume and cosplay, this review also highlights emerging attention to more everyday or ordinary forms of fan expression. In doing so, it examines how fan fashion specifically, relates to fashion identity, identity performance, and subcultural belonging. In the field of film costume, most work is based around costumes that disrupt the narrative or play with the idea of gender roles, as is evident from seminal works from Jane Gaines, *Fabrications*, and Stella Bruzzi with *Undressing Cinema*. A costume designer's job is not only to dress a character, but to visually create how a character is perceived. In doing so, it serves the paradox that a successful costume is meant to be invisible, which renders the costume designers influence invisible as well (Boumaroun 18). As a result, the creativity of costume designers is often undervalued, and so are more of their

'everyday' creations. These expectations and connotations of costume that are considered everyday are evident in the general argument made by author Jane Gaines in her chapter 'Costume and Narrative: How Dress Tells the Woman's Story', namely that costumes in film are meant to serve the narrative only (Gaines 181). More specifically, Gaines argues that costumes are meant not to distract the audience from the film itself and therefore do not retain the autonomous object of interest, but instead serve characters and narratives (Gaines 181). She points out that in Classical Hollywood costumes are "costume must be justified or motivated by characterization" (Gaines 192). She further states that through costume in cinema, women specifically, can be turned into commodities, valueless except for their appearance, where they become 'signs', stripped of their own identity (Gaines 205-206).

In the view of Stella Bruzzi in *Undressing Cinema: Clothing and Identity in the Movies*, Gaines misses an important point, namely that costumes could also "impose rather than absorb meaning" (xiv). More specifically, Bruzzi believes that costumes in film cannot only be recipients of meaning, but can also ascribe meaning beyond the script and screen and in doing so they exist "as a discourse not wholly dependent on the structures of narrative and character for signification" (Bruzzi xvi). It can be a representation for identity or liberation, performativity or all of the above. Gaines argues, however, that costumes are "bound to character and body" where it is "socialized, conventionalized, tamed", suggesting that if costume distracts the narrative, it can break the illusion of realism (Gaines 193). This means that costume helps us to understand the character by expressing, for example, their mood or what class they belong to, but that it should also be natural enough to not be perceived as the main object of interest. However, according to Bruzzi, clothing and fashion in cinema not only help us

understand the ways in which the viewer should interpretate the narrative or images, but also that clothes “do not acquire significance only in relation to the body or character” (xvii). Bruzzi’s point thus gives us the ability to read into more complicated symbolic meanings that go beyond the character and screen.

Although the arguments given by Gaines and Bruzzi are relevant to the field of costume design, both authors are concerned with spectacular costume design. Highlighting the importance and rich meanings of ‘everyday’ costume worn by characters in film and television, Josette Wolthuis notes the significance of these types of costumes in our process of meaning-making, both of and beyond the text (14). In her dissertation “Dressing For Television: Costume, Fashion and Seriality”, she notes the absence of research into costume ‘not deemed worthy’ because of their ordinary quality and vows for more research to fill this gap in the literature (Wolthuis 24). Costume design is every bit intentional and deliberate, so to make a look seem ‘everyday’ still conveys certain meanings. Wolthuis highlights how constructing the ‘everyday’ in television costume, such as through casual or professional dress that the audience recognizes, is often diminished as ‘just clothing’ and to only superficially represent fashion, instead of a product of costume design (Wolthuis 87). Reproducing an everyday look through costume makes the characters feel closer to home, and in doing so conveys cultural ideas about identity through clothing (Wolthuis 88). By both giving the viewer insight into the characters as well as moving them in their own personal style, costume serves multiple functions.

Following Bruzzi’s understanding that film costume contributes to the representation of identity, the archetype of the witch becomes relevant to this thesis’ case study, *Practical Magic*. The witch is a recurring figure in both popular culture and

folklore, and has carried various political and feminist connotations over time. As Justyna Sempruch notes, the witch has served as a metaphor for gendered representations and feminist struggles in the Global North (1). Within this framework, costume does not merely support narrative, but participates in the cultural construction of such archetypes. In the case of *Practical Magic*, how the witch is costumed then offers a symbolic function, offering insight into how gender, identity, and power are negotiated visually. The other way around, the cultural impact of these depictions of the witch are appropriated by subcultural groups for their own identity formation. In her dissertation “Modern myth in performance: claiming identity through a reading of fantasy witchcraft” Jessica Gray states that for Wiccan practitioners, costuming the idea of Witchcraft crosses a line from acting or play into performance of identity (150). Practitioners, otherwise known as Witches, take “what they like from characters and styles and personalize them to perform as their most magical selves” (Gray 151). This is illustrated more specifically in the case of *Practical Magic* in Julie Schuttens article “Invoking Practical Magic: New Social Movements, Hidden Populations, and the Public Screen”. Described as “pagan friendly”, *Practical Magic* reflects ideologies and practices central to Neo-Paganist religions (Schuttens 332). By discussing the relation between media and movements’ identity, Gray states that *Practical Magic* can be a way for people to participate in the movement, which is no longer confined to spaces such as gatherings and protests (Schuttens 336). Followers of certain neo-pagan movements use the consumption of media as a ‘cover’ for practicing the movement’s ideologies because they might divert from what is socially acceptable. This shows that the available costumes are appropriated by fans, but also by actual witches. While simultaneously encouraging fan fashion practices it also stimulates the positive view of Witch and

Wiccan culture, and can then be both worn to express fan identity as well as religious identity, even if that identity stays hidden to outsiders.

In a similar context to the field of film costume is the notion of subcultures proposed by Dick Hebdige in his seminal work *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, which is preoccupied with ‘spectacularity’ in categorizing subcultures by their resistance or deviation from normalcy. By doing this, the subcultural style is often highlighted as disruptive and abnormal. Subcultural signification is then strongly dependent on their stylization, as it is the place where meaning is negotiated through their divergence from normalization (Hebdige 3-18). Tying subcultural affiliation to fashion identity, Maria Mackinney-Valentin, in her book *Fashioning Identity: Status Ambivalence in Contemporary Fashion* also states that subcultural identification is defined by the practice of stylization (101). However, instead of seeing subcultural identification as confined to “transient style communities”, the new media landscape allows subcultural expression and communication to spread itself throughout all corners of the globe, where its impact is no longer that of a marginal community (Mackinney-Valentin 102). Henry Jenkins argues along this line in the introduction to his book *Popular Culture and The Civic Imagination*, where he defines the concept of popular culture as both the commercial success of things that are popular to the masses, but also a concept that can refer to “niche, subcultural, and folk forms that may never achieve mass appeal” (Jenkins, *Popular Culture* 8). What is regarded popular or subcultural is then not static and differs from one place to another and from person to person. Jenkins furthermore states that popular culture “might be better understood in terms of how everyday symbols are assigned meanings within particular contexts” (Jenkins, *Popular Culture* 9). In this regard, the example of fan fashion expressions that draw inspiration from *Practical Magic* decades

after its release exemplify how fans actualize cultural artifacts in day to day life and identify with it. The film is then remembered mostly by the autonomous fan culture that has formed itself around this mainstream media text.

More recent literature highlights the relationship between subculture and fan studies, such as the work of Crawford and Hancock in their book *Cosplay and the Art of Play*. They note that more recent research within media studies asks for either a different term or a redefinition of the concept. Instead of interpreting subculture as being a 'resistance' against the mainstream, they focus on Hodkinson's four dimensions of consistent distinctiveness, identity, commitment and autonomy and relate it to cosplay (Crawford and Hancock 89). Stating that cosplay is closely tied to popular culture, it is a form of popular culture that is still "quite niche and marginal" within any specific cultural setting (Crawford and Hancock 109). Since not all subcultures engage with cultural texts and artifacts that are outside of the mainstream, they also do not have to have subversive meanings (Crawford and Hancock 109-110).

These perspectives show how the notion of fashion identity has often been theorized through concepts of performativity that align with the views of sociologist Erving Goffman and feminist scholar Judith Butler: both Goffman and Butler see identity as being fluid and performative. Their notions of performativity offer ways to understand how and why people use clothing to express themselves. Adding Bruzzi's point on costumes influence can help us explore how fans use costume in their fan identity expressions. In the chapter on identity and cosplay Crawford and Hancock also look at the perspectives of Goffman and Butler to offer a more concrete understanding of cosplay practices. In Efrat Tseëlon's chapter on Erving Goffman in the book *Thinking Through Fashion*, he adapts Goffman's idea of the expression of the self in everyday life,

where fashion can be seen as performance through which identity is mediated (Tseëlon 150). Similarly, Mackinney-Valentin states that identity is socially constructed through fashion, where appearance is identity (Mackinney-Valentin 4). She goes on to explain that it is “about how we choose to look at a given time as part of staging who we are or who we would like others to think we are” (Mackinney-Valentin 4). This can turn us both “fashionably unique or part of a crowd” (Mackinney-Valentin 4). In Goffman’s framework, clothes are part of the ‘personal front’ that constitutes a person through which an identity can be performed (Tseëlon 153). Our appearance and image create and signal a social order to ourselves and others, and thus are seen as necessary aspects of identity (Tseëlon 154). According to Goffman, identity is not “a state of being” but “acts of doing” which means it is social and fluid, but also shaped by and perpetuated through “the repetition of behavioral scripts in an interactive social process” (Tseëlon 154). This would mean that how we dress is not only about self-expression, but is also about how we want to be seen or feel like we should be perceived. This suggests identity is not fixed, but created symbiotically in social patterns. Tseëlon argues that Goffman’s notion of performativity renders people as both recipients as well as the ones carrying out sartorial implications that are dependent on our own need to be recognized as well as the social obligations of others (Tseëlon 151). The social aspect and performance of identity in the case study of the *Practical Magic* inspired fan fashions thus allows for the perfect implementation of this framework.

Turning to the field of fan studies, the idea of fans actively participating in fan culture has often been referred to as “participatory culture”, a term coined by Henry Jenkins, which refers broadly to all fan related activities and behavior (*Textual Poachers* 46). Crawford and Hancock, however, offer the additional interpretation that the

contemporary concept of social life has allowed people to take on more of a “DIY identity” as well allowing them to keep re-inventing themselves (148). By viewing a participatory culture in the similar vein as the concept of subculture, they argue that participation is not always clearly definable, or even publicly visible in fans, as belonging is not required full time (Crawford and Hancock 88). This vision of more temporal, mundane aspects of identity offer handles for fan fashion practices. Fashion practices within fandoms are often described through the concept of cosplay. This is a transformational practice that relies on iconography (Nielsen 210). There are, however, a lot of nuances in how fans engage with fashion and with film costumes from their favorite films and series. For example, the more embedded in the fandom, the more abstract the symbols from the source text can become (Nielsen 211). To put all of this under the term ‘cosplay’ would be a loss to these underlying distinctions. Here, the concept of fan fashion emerges. In her 2023 dissertation “Everyday Cosplay: Costume Adaptation and the Fan Fashion Industry”, Lauren Boumaroun states that the terrain of comparing fan fashion and cosplay is difficult and worth exploring. She explains how there is not yet clarity in where fan fashion ends and cosplay begins. In an increasingly individualized and digital world, how we consider and act out our personas online and through clothing is central to our sense of self. Additionally, this ever-intensifying temporal and spatial convergence of spaces and media—including how its produced, distributed and consumed—make the ways in which we determine and mediate belonging more complex. As we use clothing to both set ourselves apart and signal group affiliation, the question arises if film is still influential on our identity formation. Fan fashion opens up our understanding of ourselves both individually and as part of group and can thus aid in our understanding of contemporary fans more generally.

The notion of fan fashion, however, lacks a solid description. Whereas in *The Cambridge Dictionary*, the definition of cosplay is “the hobby of dressing as and pretending to be a character from a film, TV programme, comic book, etc.”, a definition of the concept ‘fan fashion’ does not exist yet (“Cosplay”). This opens up multiple ways in which to understand and interpret fan fashion. In the introduction to her dissertation *Everyday Cosplay: Costume Adaptation and the Fan Fashion Industry*, Lauren Boumaroun coins the term “cosplay continuum”, which resembles the spectrum on which the engagement with film through clothing can be interpreted (5). This ranges from “faithful replicas to creative reworkings that bear minimal resemblance to the original source” (Boumaroun 5). Boumaroun adapts cosplay as a broader concept which can encompass different types of fan expressions, such as fan fashion. She points out that fan fashion is “a unique subculture and community within fan culture” itself, suggesting that the ‘everydayness’ of it is what makes it different from cosplay (Boumaroun 27). This view is different from Crawford and Hancock, who put cosplay as an all-encompassing term that refers to both the mundane or everyday as well as the spectacular (105). They lack to make the distinction between a ‘full’ cosplay and more loosely inspired fan fashion, rather suggesting that because subcultural affiliation does not have to be present fulltime, a fans inclusion in the subculture is not always easily identifiable, as it does not necessarily have to be visible externally (Crawford and Hancock 105). Although this is a good point to consider, using the concept of cosplay to denote even the everyday or mundane aspects of subcultural belonging lacks the certain specificity that Boumaroun gives in her explanation of fan fashion. Additionally to her idea of fan fashion as its own subculture, Boumaroun also understands fan fashion as a type of “paratextual clothing”, which refers to Jonathan Gray’s notion of ‘paratexts’.

Paratexts are fan-created or related materials that shape how we interpret, understand, and assign meaning or value to a film or television show (Boumaroun 105). Interpreting fan fashion as a paratext is one way of looking at the exact nature of these fan fashioning activities. When considered paratexts, fan fashion expressions become visible ‘maps of meaning’ on how to understand the film or television show. These paratexts rely on the iconography of the primary source. In “The Iconography of Fan Art”, EJ Nielsen provides anchors on how to interpret fan art through its visual components. The iconographic choices of the fans help us understand the fandom and its fans as it reveals “their priorities, biases, and understandings of the original media” (Nielsen 208). Fan art—in this case fan fashion—serves as a paratext and artifact created by a fan community (Nielsen 219).

Similar to Boumaroun’s notion of fan fashion is the term of “everyday cosplay” used by fan scholar Elizabeth Affuso, who considers it the creation of “looks” featured in the film or series by fans with “using commercially available products” (188). These expressions are not held up to their accuracy of reproduction, but the integration of it into everyday life (Affuso 188). Although screen accuracy is very important to cosplayers, iconography allows for a more diverse and transformational cosplay expression as it allows cosplay to be readable without being entirely accurate and authentic (Nielsen 218). In the case of fan fashion, less importance of screen accuracy might be what sets it apart from cosplay. The fantasy genre lends itself especially well for fan fashion practices, because fantasy films engage the viewer on a psychological and symbolic level, providing the opportunity to experience ideas outside of the boundaries of everyday reality (Fowkes 9). The fantasy’s genre imaginative re-visionings are not a denial of reality but offer “an escape into a spiritual or inner journey” (Fowkes 9).

Through fan fashion practices, the fan can then allow themselves to inhabit imaginative experiences outside of what they think is possible while using products that are at hand. As fantasy films' content allows viewers to more explicitly escape into an alternate universe, fan fashion practices in this genre can be tangible entryways into the story world (Boumaroun 105; Fowkes 7). Considering this, taking inspiration from *Practical Magic* and linking it to the 'witchy' and 'whimsigoth' aesthetic could be considered a renegotiation of 'out of this world' experiences without having to socially and visually prove yourself as a fan.

Theoretical Framework

This theoretical framework outlines the key concepts used in the following two chapters to analyze the film costumes of *Practical Magic* and the inspired fashion practices by fans online. Drawing on theories of the cultural function of costume, this framework provides us with the tools to understand the meanings of film costume within its narrative and beyond the screen. To examine how film costume is then adapted and to contextualize how fan fashion functions as both identity expression and cultural practice, theory on fashion and fan identity is extrapolated for the analysis of chapter two.

Drawing most notably on Gaines and Bruzzi, the first chapter of this thesis examines how film costume constructs identity, forming a foundation for analyzing the visual portrayal of the witch archetype in *Practical Magic*. As costume is part of the mise-en-scène of a film—together with setting, lighting, performance and staging—its

functions range from setting the tone for a scene to giving an explanation of the character (Bordwell and Thompson 141). By looking at the film costumes of *Practical Magic* through Gaines' lens, I will point out their narrative and characteristic functions. Talking about spectacular costume, Gaines states how costume's texture and color have an expressive capacity (205). A character's feelings can be expressed through enriched textures, where materials such as velvet, wool jersey, chiffon or satin are frequently used for a film's heroine (Gaines 208). An important insight drawn from the literature is, however, that clothing in film can also have a signifying meaning beyond the screen. Therefore, I particularly adopt Bruzzi's idea of contrapuntal meaning (3). Additional to helping the viewer understand the character or narrative, clothes can have their own inherent or symbolic meaning that does not rely on the narrative, but can also be at odds with the narrative. Basing my analysis on the combination of these approaches to film costume while connecting them to the long history of the archetype of the witch, I am able to derive insights that allow me to understand how the costumes visually create the iconography of the witch in *Practical Magic*.

The second chapter of this thesis makes use of the established iconography of the *Practical Magic* witch to analyze how fans use and reinterpret the film costumes. When fans create or display practices of fan fashion or cosplay, they become what Jenkins calls 'poachers'. By considering fans textual poachers, they are seen as "active producers and manipulators of meanings" which means they use elements from a original media text to create their own new media texts (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 23). These fans rely on the iconography of the costumes for their own interpretations of *Practical Magic* fan fashion. The goal is not to duplicate the character, but to adjust it with the fans own elements (Nielsen 217). By taking parts of *Practical Magic's* costumes and incorporating them in

their own style, these fans show how this practice tells us something about their cultural and social identity that is “complex, fluid and subject to reinvention” (Crawford and Hancock 150). This makes it a transformative and everyday practice, which is consistent with Boumaroun’s notion of fan fashion as a practice that integrates the story and characters into someone’s identity and everyday life (69). This fashion practice relies on the temporality and adaptability of their fan identity. Understanding that the significance of fan fashion is not about becoming more of our true self, but *trying on* a new self, online spaces offer places to express these parts of ourselves (Crawford and Hancock 151). The idea of the temporal fan identity offers us to look at it through Tsëelon’s adaptation of Goffman’s ‘presentation of the self’. This framework understands the performance of identity through a distinctive inner and outer, where the fan identity is present within the body, but can be exposed, if the fan chooses so, through “acts of doing” (Tsëelon 154). Additionally, it suggests that even though visibly present, fan fashion does not need to be immersive, site-specific or a full-time commitment (Crawford and Hancock 112-113). By analyzing the way fans use *Practical Magic*’s visual iconography to create their own fan fashions, we can understand the community’s understanding of *Practical Magic*.

By understanding *Practical Magic* fans who engage in fan fashion as a subculture, it becomes crucial to consider how this classification subjects them to Hebdige’s assertion that subcultures are inevitably recuperated by the mainstream. Subculture’s alternative identity is shaped by historical conditions and thus time specific. As subcultures are present in the leisure sphere and communicate through commodities, their subcultural signs or aesthetics are eventually transformed into mass produced objects (Hebdige 94-95). As subcultures shift over time, previously marginal fan fashion practices—such as those inspired by *Practical Magic*—can develop into broader

mainstream trends. In this light, the rise of witchy and whimsigoth fashion may be seen as a natural evolution of the *Practical Magic* fan aesthetic. The use of subcultural theory then allows me to ask why this remediation of cultural artifacts happens and what it means for broader fashion aesthetics.

Method

To find answers to my research questions, I applied a mixed methodology approach to the subject of film costume and fan fashion. To establish how *Practical Magic* visually constructs iconography of the witch and to identify the thematic underpinnings of this representation, a focused costume analysis of Sally and Gillian Owens was undertaken. Highlighting key moments when the costume served as either—or both—a visual storyteller and a contrapuntal signifier, this analysis shows how specific sartorial choices contribute to the creation of the *Practical Magic* witch. As more ‘everyday’ film costumes tend to blend in with the narrative, I looked at the subtle ways in which these costumes use texture or color to reveal parts of the narrative, emotional status and character’s development. Additionally, the costumes’ inherent and signifying meanings were related back to previously existing iconographies of the archetype of the witch. Through this detailed inspection of the costume elements that constitute the *Practical Magic* witch, an iconography that is both culturally resonant and narratively expressive was established and these findings were used to underscore the analysis central to chapter two.

Chapter two follows an unobtrusive multimodal netnographic approach to fan videos on TikTok by analyzing the iconographic choices of fans. Through nonparticipant observation, five publicly available videos were chosen for a closer reading as a parameter for this analysis (Drouin 69). More videos would result in a loss of in-depth

research as the scope for this analysis was limited. The selection of the five chosen videos was guided by the core analytical aims of this chapter. This meant that the videos were chosen based on commonly recurring patterns that revealed the range in which both *Practical Magic's* iconography and the fannish iconographies were present. For this collection, I did not look at popularity metrics such as follower count or likes, nor the time period in which they were posted, but selected them based on visibly identifiable iconographic markers or transformative use of clothing. I examined these five videos with a strong focus on the visual and textual aspect of these posts to establish how these fans can be identified and make use of the iconography. To better understand these iconographic choices originated, I connected them to Goffman's framework of identity. Through this observational and iconographical analysis, I was able to understand how these fans use *Practical Magic's* costumes to create and shape fan fashion.

Chapter 1

The Wardrobe of Witches: Redressing the Contemporary Witch Through Costume Design in *Practical Magic* (1998)

At its release in 1998, the film *Practical Magic*, directed by Griffin Dunne and based on a five part book series, was not particularly successful—earning back only two-thirds of the initial budget in the box office. However, once it became available on DVD and later online streaming, it became popular and quickly gained cult status. Often described as a guilty pleasure, most of the popularity came from its feminist perspective on sisterhood and its visually compelling design, particularly in costume and setting. *Practical Magic* follows the lives of witches and sisters Sally (Sandra Bullock) and Gillian Owens (Nicole Kidman), who are often credited for their heartfelt portrayal of sisterly love and bringing a popular ‘witchy’ aesthetic to the screen. Films about magic and witchcraft have been present in cinema since the beginning of the medium, with prominent notice of films in the early 20th century such as *Witchcraft* (1916) and *Häxan* (1922). The witch was established as a cultural trope and saw a resurgence in the 1950s and 1960s, as well as a more recent renegotiation of its portrayal in the late 1980s and 1990s. Different interpretations of the witch on screen, from the iconic *The Wizard Of Oz* (1939) during Hollywood’s Golden Age to contemporary indie cinematic features such as *The Love Witch* (2016), acknowledge the variety of the witch’s portrayal. *Practical magic* was released in an age of “witch essentialism”, where *witchiness* was no longer an external factor, but an inherent trait of the witch (Hartless and Smith 321). *Practical Magic’s*

construction of the witch and her wardrobe are representative of how the archetype of the witch and its relation to popular culture has evolved and been reclaimed through time. This chapter maps out how the witch emerged as a cultural trope and relates these influences to the costume design of witch sisters Sally and Gillian Owens. By analyzing how their costumes shape their identities through narrative and symbolic functions, this chapter answers how the themes found in the costumes create a witchy aesthetic using the following question:

How do the costumes in Practical Magic (1998) use symbolic significations to create a visual identity of the witch?

The Film and Its Context

Although labeled a romantic comedy, *Practical Magic* falls in line with a broader 1990s fantasy film trend centralizing women and the supernatural that adopts horror and romance elements. Fantasy's elusiveness makes it hard to pin down as a genre, but central is that it breaks with our sense of reality (Fowkes 2). The film trend established a more modern depiction of witches by using subtle fantasy themes to depict a mundane sort of witchcraft and magic (Fowkes 2-3). In doing so, it familiarized the audience with the domestication of witches in popular culture that became present from the 1960s onward (Gibson 157). *Practical Magic* follows Sally and Gillian Owens, descendants of a long line of witches cursed to doom any man who dares fall in love with an Owens woman to die an untimely death. The girls grow up in their aunts' house and seem opposites in every way. Sally never wants to fall in love, while Gillian "can't wait to fall in love" (*Practical Magic*, dir. Dunne, 00:06:50-00:06:55). When they grow up, Gillian leaves the house to venture on her own with men she does not love. In the meantime, Sally

finds and loses love, but gains two young daughters. When Sally rescues Gillian from her abusive boyfriend Jimmy Angelov (Goran Višnjić), the two accidentally end up killing him with the poisonous plant belladonna. In a desperate attempt to reverse the damage, the two use magic to bring him back from the death, but this inevitably fails and they bury him in their backyard. Unfortunately, detective Gary Hallet (Aidan Quinn) shows up to investigate Angelov's disappearance, and Sally finds herself conflicted with keeping up appearances while starting to catch feelings for this handsome detective. It turns out, however, that the spirit of Jimmy Angelov has possessed Gillian and has to be banished through a séance that involves a coven of local women, who, after treating the Owens sisters as outcasts for years, come to their help. Together with the women and her aunts, Sally is able to banish Jimmy for good, and in the end the news reaches the sisters to tell them Jimmy's disappearance and death has been labeled an accident. The sisters' love for each other and their unbreakable bond seems to break the curse that has so long haunted the Owens women. This overview of the film shows how it is not laced completely in fantasy and conveys key themes of sisterhood, loss, domestic abuse and female empowerment.

The Witch On and Off Screen

To understand how *Practical Magic* came to be such an influential performance of the witch—so much even that its sequel is set for release in the fall of 2026—it is critical to understand the evolution of the witch in the Global North as a cultural archetype—both on screen and beyond—to have come from a more traditional portrayal set in dominant and negative connotations into an empowering and feminist symbol. Early depictions of the witch in cinemas connote the stereotype of a monstrous and powerful villain. This depiction came from the fear of empowered women as having to be a camouflaged

monster (Gibson 153). This meant that by being “beautiful and seductive” they must have also been “deadly and thoroughly evil” (Gibson 153). The filmic witch was therefore put out to be an unpredictable and difficult woman, who was exploitable and never met her full potential or power (Gibson 155). The witch was portrayed as a *femme fatale* and her magic served only as a threat or entertainment and was ultimately disempowered by the narrative arc (Gibson 153). The *femme fatale* is a label and stereotype in Hollywood put on women characters that use their sexuality in transgressive ways to further their own “selfish aims and ambitions”, as often presented in film noir (Neale 194). Through tropes of “illegibility, deceit and enigmatic untrustworthiness” they were fit into a model of the evil, inscrutable woman who cannot be humanized (Neale 194; Grossman 203). This poses the women off as seductive and therefore lacking female agency and empowerment. This image of the witch made the actresses playing these parts end up being objectified themselves (Gibson 155). It persists in the culture to scapegoat women whose lives fall outside of what society deems conventional and thus blurs the line between fiction and reality (Grossman 206). The undermining of these tropes on screen then tells us something about how society views women. A more critical reading of the *femme fatale* would thus offer more insight and nuance into the complexity and psychological depth of the woman figure portrayed on screen.

This disempowerment and commodification happening mid century was gently turning to a more liberalist agenda, as the witch as a cultural trope gained newfound popularity due to various sociocultural factors in the Global North, amongst which the rise of 1960s counterculture and the second wave feminist movement (Brown 276). On screen, the image of the witch was used to disguise discourses around gender, economic or racial prejudices while upholding a certain fictionality through the witch’s persona

(Gibson 156). This allowed multiple iconographies of the witch to emerge, ranging from the conservative, girl-next-door figure with “pretty, modern pastel dresses and make-up” to witches who wore “strident kaftans and magical robes” resembling a drag queen with “bright blue eyeshadow and scarlet lipstick” (Gibson 156). Through film costumes that ranged from eye-catching fashion styles to a very unobtrusive style, two different sides of the witch could be inhabited, which Gibson noted as the “official and the subversive” side of a witch (Gibson 157). The traditional attire associated with the archetype of the witch—the pointed hat, the broom and the cape or cloak—are what Jessica Gray calls the “paraphernalia of the fantasy witch image” and refer back to folkloristic depictions of witches and wizards (64, 141). Gray notes that in contemporary, religious practices of witchcraft such as Wicca, the witch in real life cannot be easily distinguished from a non-Witch through clothing, stating that “in general, Witches look like everyone else” (Gray 65). Although magical clothing is one of the identity markers of Wiccan practices, it serves a psychological function: with clothes, you can create a persona to hide or reveal the ‘real’ you (Gray 156).

The 1970s saw a rise in the commercialization of witches in Hollywood films, known as the “Wiccan Influx”, from which point on the association of the witch had left underground feminist circles and became a staple amongst widespread mainstream popular culture (Brown 282). Offscreen, especially in the music scene, the witch was adapted as an empowering gendered cultural trope and was thematized through neo-paganism and feminist spirituality, which centralized self-actualization and a person’s connection to the natural world (Brown 277). Through what Brown calls the archetype of “the witchy diva”—actualized by, amongst others, singer Stevie Nicks—the symbolic position of the witch was utilized by women to critique operations of the patriarchy

(Brown 276). Using her witchy stage persona and wardrobe of “flowing gypsy robes, flaring sleeves and unruly blond locks”, she embodied someone who was both sexy and rebellious (Brown 283). This helped to transform the trope of the witch into a “marketable, uniquely feminine rock ‘n’ roll identity” while at the same time she was able to show her resistance to gender based cultural restraints (Brown 28). The commodification of the witch went hand in hand with a trend of young women who “adorned themselves in crystals, wide-brimmed hats, and diaphanous gowns, embracing such commodified, ‘witchy’ fashions as symbolic of feminine sexual and cultural liberation” (Brown 283). The witch’s filmic depiction grew associated with campy aesthetics and a bohemian social scene (Gibson 155). The archetype of the witch was thus used as a mode of political and spiritual empowerment as well as a resistance against gender norms. The traditional depiction of the witch on screen—evil and in need to be conformed to heteropatriarchal views—was subverted in the 1990s. This new generation of witches knew a tension between conservative and progressive views of the witch in which witchcraft was the representative of female power and sexual freedom (Gibson 157). The witch could no longer be separated from her *witchiness* as, in most of the films during these years, she emerged as being “born this witch” (Hartless and Smith 321). Against the backdrop of a postfeminist ‘girl power’ movement, the witch became the symbol for women’s empowerment and could be both good and powerful (Hartless and Smith 321). However, this archetype turned into a controlling image of naturalized inequality, as the empowered witch did not necessarily become “agentic in their romantic relationships or liberated from gender norms” (Hartless and Smith 322). She was expected to be feminine and after romantic pursuits rather than her own self-actualization (Hartless and Smith 322). The establishment of the witch in popular culture

and her representation over the course of film history conversed her from a 'hag' into a 'superwoman', which can be interpreted as "a therapeutic performance translating fixed identity into a site of continuous negotiation of the subject in process" (Sempruch 1). Hartless and Smith note, however, that the history of the witch should not be seen "as a linear and progressive narrative", but as a place where old and new frameworks coexist (326). Although this shows the witch has become a cultural staple and feminist icon from the 1940s to early 2000s, Gibson states that this witch was "usually straight, white, conventionally beautiful and safely contained within family—ideally, marriage and motherhood—and the consumer culture of the middle class" (160). Only more recently has popular culture embraced a level of moral ambiguity with regards to the witch through the "bad bitch witch" archetype, where long read subtextual empowerment is finally actualized (Hartless and Smith 324). As we move into the portrayal of the witch sisters in *Practical Magic*, we are guided by these long histories of the witch's iconography on and offscreen. This leaves us the with examining the role film costume has in the representation of the witch.

Invisible Costume Design

The costumes worn by Sally and Gillian in *Practical Magic* can be interpreted as 'everyday costume', which relates to costumes that seem mundane and ordinary and do not attract much attention to them. This falls in line with Gaines' interpretation that costumes are meant to serve the character and narrative of the film. Bordwell and Thompson categorize this as the 'causal' role of costume for the film plot (119). This means that costumes offer an insight into the characters, revealing a character's identity or indicating their occupation, status, class or culture. Less obvious are the ways in which costumes can become motifs, suggesting a part of the character's personality, their

changing attitude or characterization of emotions (Bordwell and Thompson 119). This characterization through costumes can help the audience in how they should interpret the characters. Additionally, costumes help to narrate the plot as a big part of their function is the visual storytelling, aiding as a pictorial cue that can confirm the audience in their expectations (Bordwell and Thompson 149). But this storytelling through costume can happen in its own right and can be at odds with the image or story, creating a tension with the narrative (Bruzzi 6). The costume can be its own kind of performance, as they are imbued with signification apart from the character that wears it, in turn allowing it—at times—to suggest more than what the plot reveals. These moments, referred to by Bruzzi as contrapuntal, state that costume can assert its own meaning that can challenge or subvert what the film is trying to say, and thus explain certain aesthetic and symbolic choices (3). The characters of Sally and Gillian both fall in line with a longer history of the visual representation of witches shaped by feminist perspectives starting in the early 20th century. Although costume may appear natural or ordinary, it is still constructed. The infrequent wardrobe changes—switching out only a few items while rotating between items for the larger part—may then highlight the everydayness of their styles, but also contributes to how the realism itself is staged. While the everyday clothing worn by Sally and Gillian seems congruent with the domestic setting of the film in a small town in America, the costumes themselves also become visual storytellers that ground the film in magical realism through their contrapuntal meaning.

The Dichotomy of The Witch

In line with this theoretical framework, many of the costumes—although seeming at first glance integrated in the narrative and characters—hold an additional, contrapuntal reading that reveals deeper layers of meaning. Immediately apparent is the fact that the

audience might not recognize the sisters as witches through their costume, because they do not adhere to the visual binary of goodness versus wickedness associated with the witch. Instead, they inhabit an in-between identity, allowing for a more complex and interpretive view on their identity and reminiscent of the idea that ‘real’ witches in religious practices are not differentiable from others.

The first time the audience is introduced to grown up Sally and Gillian, their different personalities are immediately foregrounded through the use of costume. Standing together on a balcony, Sally wears a light pink bathrobe with purple flowers, while Gillian climbs down the balcony’s edge in a blue crop top and black mini skirt. Sally’s sartorial choice of the bathrobe ties her to home, as it is an item worn inside the house. Gillian’s outfit contrasts with Sally’s, as she is fully dressed in the middle of the night to escape her aunts house, which is emphasized by her saying “I hate it here. I want to go where, where no one’s even heard of us” (*Practical Magic*, dir. Dunne, 00:08:50-00:08:56).



Figure 1. “Gillian and Sally on the balcony.” *Practical Magic* (00:08:52).

The sisters here are portrayed as total opposites, with Sally conveying a stay-at-home attitude while Gillian is the wild spirit. Although the costumes serve the characters

and their personalities, there is also a contrapuntal reading in these costumes. The stark differences in costume creates a dichotomy that positions the two sisters as opposite archetypes of the witch that came forward in the 1960s. The distinction between the sisters' personalities is what Gibson calls the "devoted wife and mother versus free spirit" trope, is further reflected through the stylization of their wardrobe (157). Sally, with her homely costume, represents the 'domesticated' witch whereas Gillian, wearing striking blue and dark colors, becomes the 'subversive' type. This first deeper meaning and clear dichotomy at the start of the film sets the tone for the interpretation of the rest of the sisters' costumes. Sally becomes the archetype of a more conservative witch, embedded in safety expressed through homely outfits and modest clothing, reflecting her personality as the grounded one of the two sisters—having never left her hometown—as well as showing her maternal nature. Gillian, on the other hand, embodies the subversive witch that relents in freedom in rebellion, which is expressed through a reclamation of her femininity and sexual freedom as well as her wanderlust nature.

Standing Out and Fitting In Through Costume

A closer look at Sally's character points out how the conservative, girl-next-door witch of the 1960s has been reinterpreted through her costumes. Sally, a widow who has stayed put in her small town all those years, is dressed in modest and comfortable clothing, wearing straight denim jeans or maxi skirts and dresses and oversized shirts, jackets and sweats. Her wardrobe further consists of natural fabrics, earth tones and modest silhouettes. These outfits also seem to follow the narrative plot, indicating Sally's loss of her husband. Here the narrative of the film is driven mostly by Sally's costumes, as the audience never actually sees her husband die, but can tell from her comfortable

clothes—donning leggings, pajama pants and bathrobes in grey and dark blue colors—that she is homebound and grieving. For a short period after her husband's passing, Sally is also seen wearing more oversized and unisex silhouettes, which indicate her husband's absence and her longing for him, by wearing items that could be passed on from him to her. During Sally's emotional shift after tragedy, the costume functioned as part of the narrative.

She is often dressed casually and comfortably, showing her maternal nature as well as her reluctance for standing out. When she attends her daughters' school for a phone tree meeting, she dresses similar to the other moms, but her costume also suggests a contrapuntal meaning. The moms in the scene wear soft colors, greens and pastels, with a range of different silhouettes. Wearing a green midi dress with green embroidery in the shape of ferns, and a fitted white cardigan with a green flower and leaf pattern, Sally does not necessarily stand out (see figures 2 and 3). The pattern on her cardigan looks quite similar to the lemon verbena plant—which is also the name of her store where she sells her homemade bath and body products. It highlights her connection to the natural world, which is an attribute of the witch that emerged in 1960s counterculture, as practitioners of neo-pagan religions sought a more harmonious relationship with the natural world and resisted conformity to patriarchal norms (Brown 277). At one point in the film, she tells detective Hallet that her products are her craft, suggesting her magic and witchcraft are embodied through the production of these products. Her costume thus indicates her magical lineage and witch nature and—against her will—sets her apart from the other moms. In this contrapuntal discourse, the usually noted spectacularity is absent, as the costume is not distractive of the narrative.

However, knowing Sally's witchy nature, the costume does against her character by implying non-conformity to societal rules when all she wants is to fit in.



Figure 2. "Gillian and Sally at school." *Practical Magic* 00:46:39.



Figure 3. "Sally and the mothers at school." *Practical Magic* 00:45:42

In contrast, this scene serves as a good example of how Gillian is visually and narratively positioned as the 'other', with her costumes playing a central role. In this scene, Gillian wears sleek black pants with a chain belt and a sensual velvet green crop top—visually the very opposite of the moms (see figure 4). She is often dressed in sleek, figure-revealing outfits, such as low waisted fitted jeans, crop tops and chokers, mini skirts and dresses, while other items such as the leather jacket represent her rebellious personality. Gillian is portrayed as impulsive, seductive and rebellious, traits reflected in

her glamorous and mysterious clothing style. Rich and dark colors such as red, green and black dominate her wardrobe. She is pitted against the other women in town because the way she dresses and acts is explicitly sexual. She is ostracized for it as they look down on her witchy nature or see it as dangerously sexual.



Figure 4. "Gillian at the phone tree meeting." *Practical Magic* 00:46:16.

The witch's iconography has a long history of being subjected to the male gaze that frames her as a femme fatale or seductress. This historical 'othering' is visually presented through Gillian. She represents the witch as seductress—dressing for the male gaze and suffering at the hands of men who exploit her sexuality. The narrative punishes her for it by falling victim to sexual abuse and becoming possessed by the spirit of Jimmy Angelov. When she gets the news that a detective is searching for Jimmy Angelov, she wears a short velvet dress, leaning into her sexual feminine energy to influence him. The rich texture of the velvet indicates her heightened feelings as she is afraid to be punished for her crime. Her costume thus falls in line with the stereotypical femme fatale who uses a mask of femininity to further her own gain. However, there are also moments that undermine the convention of Gillian as 'just' a femme fatale and the contrapuntal interpretation of Gillian as the seductress archetype should be treated with nuance. She wields her sexuality as an extension of her magical powers, using her hyper

femininity as a weapon. The women in the town are wary of the sisters, and Gillian is aware of how she and Sally are perceived. Her costumes do not render her powerless, but allow her to deliberately provoke and challenge the town's norms by owning her sexual freedom. At times, this seems at odds with her emotional fragility, and she is dependent on Sally to rescue her, who wields her powers to save her sister, even though she was reluctant to use them at first in fear of being othered herself. As Sempruch notes, the witch is in itself always a fantasized sign, as it is a product of male oppression and a signifier of female resistance, producing a representation of cinematic femininity (2). In this sense, Gillian's costumes both align with and subvert this notion.

Gillian shares similarities with Sally's wardrobe, as both sisters are seen wearing oversized silhouettes, maxi skirts and knitted pieces. The maxi skirts, floral prints, foreign influences and gemstones gesture to 1970s bohemianism, the time in which the archetype of the witch was being reclaimed as a feminist icon, linking the sisters to a broader history of spiritual and cultural resistance. Gillian's wardrobe differs from Sally in the materials—silky, velvety and flowy with more vibrant colors, often the color green. While the travel inspired costumes, including a sarong and wrap around skirt with batik print, narratively represent Gillian's wanderlust and free-spirited nature, symbolically, they allude to her freedom and detachment from small town norms.

Conforming To The Witch They Want

Through the use of costume, Gillian's maturity is further narratively explained. The comparison of her first two outfits—the blue crop top and black mini skirt and the black singlet and sarong—to the last two outfits she is seen wearing—a long light blue dress that covers everything from her neck down and a mint colored cotton blouse and

beige sunhat combination— suggests a maturity of her style. Her style has evolved from more revealing and daring clothes in bold colors to a complete opposite of modest and homey outfits in soft pastel colors. This complete change in appearance reflects a change in her personality, which is reinforced by her saying “What wouldn’t I do... for the right guy” (*Practical Magic*, dir. Dunne, 01:38:03-01:38:08). Her outfits capture her shift in personality by implying that her wild days are over and she is settling down, as she is seen tending the garden and wearing gardening gloves and a protective hat. This promotes, on a contrapuntal level, the idea that Gillian has conformed to the domesticated witch archetype, like her sister. Moreover, it proves Hartless and Smith’s point of the millennial witch as having limited romantic agency. Although narratively this transformation may seem like a positive turn of events, it ultimately reinforces the idea that a ‘domesticated’ witch is a ‘happy’ witch. Hartless and Smith point out, however, that the confines of the millennial witch are subtler. In Gillian’s case, this means that she is policed on giving up parts of her femininity. Although she escapes the stigma of the ‘evil witch’, this newfound identity is still part of a trope that has been upheld since the 1960s. The film then promotes a controlling image of the witch as someone who is still bound to a rigid set of rules accompanied by the patriarchy and heteronormativity. Offering some nuance to this interpretation is that the positive narrative construction of being lifted from a curse so they can have their respective happy endings. Essentially, this shows how both sisters have finally acknowledged that they are simply ‘born that witch’.

Dressing Up As The Witch

A final contrapuntal meaning in the costumes can be derived from the films closing scene, as the sisters celebrate Halloween in their town. Standing on the roof of

their house, they are dressed in what Gray has called the fantasy witch's attire. This stereotypical witchy attire is congruent with a contemporary Halloween costume—long black dresses and capes along with pointy hats. The camera then closes in on the sisters' shoes, and they are seen wearing red and white striped socks in their black shoes. This detail is a subtle reference to the filmic figure of the Wicked Witch of The East from *The Wizard Of Oz* (1939) who is known for wearing striped socks. Through the costuming of the socks together with the fantastical outfit, the film seems to mock the stereotypical dress donned by others—outsiders, non-witches—to claim some sort of witch identity. It shows how the fantasy image of the witch is false and misleading, as for the rest of the film, both Sally and Gillian never dressed like this. Instead they wear ordinary and everyday clothing, just like everyone else.

Conclusion

This chapter set out to understand how the costumes in *Practical Magic* create the visual identity of the witch by focusing on the ways in which the costumes of Sally and Gillian both served the narrative and referenced earlier witchy depictions. Several themes came forward that set the tone for a newfound portrayal of witches as your 'everyday' type of woman. By understanding the archetype of the witch not as a fixed identity but a variety of intersectional and feminist perspectives, evidence of multiple tropes was revealed in Sally and Gillian's costumes. Firstly, we have seen that the sisters fit within the dichotomy of the domesticated versus subversive witch. While Sally is reluctant in honoring her magical abilities and wants to fit in, her costume sometimes revealed her witchy identity without disrupting the narrative. Gillian was, on the other hand, distinctly othered through her costume by wearing rich textures and colors and items that reflect her rebellious nature. Secondly, both the sisters' costumes draw on the themes of

bohemianism, recalling the harmonious connection of the witch with nature through the use of earthy colors, soft textures and flower and plant motifs. Additional to the concept of the witch as an 'everyday' figure emerged with the rise of neopagan movements, who's witches dress similar to everyone else. Sally and Gillian's wardrobe reimagines the witch not as evil and disempowered, but complex, stylish and most of all ordinary. This provides the foundation for the next chapter, that explores how the costumes of Sally and Gillian are recreated and translated to off-screen styles amongst fans.

Chapter 2

Normal Is a Virtue: Everyday Fan Fashion Through The Hashtag

#PracticalMagicOutfits

Dressing as a witch might be common to do on Halloween, but for *Practical Magic* fans, dressing the part can easily be an everyday thing. Through the hashtag of #practicalmagicoutfits, these fans engage with the film's costume by proposing their own reinterpretations to an online audience. The costume analysis in chapter one created the overview of the visual identity of the *Practical Magic* witch through costume design. These findings showed how the costumes of characters Sally and Gillian Owens have stylistic influences tied to historical connotations and depictions of the witch. This chapter shifts from how to interpret costumes, to how costumes are interpreted—and more importantly, how they are creatively reinterpreted. Boumaroun states that “clothing provides the vocabulary for a language that is spoken by the individual through their personal style” (Boumaroun 162). A costume designer bridges the fields of fashion and film, and Juddiana Markovsky's portrayal of the witch in *Practical Magic* has transcended the screen into long-lasting fashion trends and an array of cosplay practices, which is the focus of this chapter. Although the dominance of the Internet in popularizing fashion has dwarfed the influence of film and television, the recuperation of *Practical Magic's* costumes through fan fashion practices and similar more widespread fashion trends shows how it is still able to create a lasting impact on the audience (Church Gibson 364). As fan's reception is not isolated, but shaped partially by a desire for further interaction

with a larger social and cultural community, the contemporary engagement with *Practical Magic* through fan fashion facilitates a fan community which is useful to understand (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 76). Sally and Gillian's everyday costume makes the fans that wear fan fashion hard to spot in 'real' life, but through online engagement with the hashtag #practicalmagicoutfits, fans can reference the inspiration behind their outfits back to the film, and in doing so practice an evident form of fan identification through dress. This chapter explores how the fan expressions via fashion through the #practicalmagicoutfits hashtag reflect or reinterpret the film's themes. This means that I will look at how these fans use the visual iconography of *Practical Magic* to build their own fan identity. Additionally, this chapter explores how these fan fashion practices relate to the more widespread witchy and whimsigoth fashion aesthetics. "Witchy" is a general term for what a witch commonly looks like, while *witchiness* can be understood as an interpretation of all things having to do with witchcraft (Joshi and Brooks 68). As what it means to be a witch has become highly contested, the "witchy" aesthetic on social media forms an example of how this identity is turned into a highly commodified product (Joshi and Brooks 60). The term whimsigoth is often considered and used very similarly to witchy and can be regarded as having the same set of aesthetics and values. The creation of this neologism further proves the how the cultural symbol of the witch has been reclaimed, subverted and exploited (Joshi and Brooks 60). As the witch remains a popular topic on social media, what it means to be a witch and practice witchcraft is continuously redefined in online spaces, where it signifies cultural belonging (Joshi and Brooks 61). Connecting these insights to *Practical Magic* fan fashion allows me to understand how fans reflect or reinterpret themes from the costumes and fully grasp the ranges to which these fan expressions go.

How to Interpret the Fan, the Outfit and the Icon

To signify fan fashion in these videos, it is first important to think critically about the notion of fan fashion. This chapter adopts Boumaroun's idea of cosplay, who sees cosplay as a spectrum under which different subcultures exist (5). Interpreting cosplay as a spectrum on which different interpretations of engagement with film through clothing exists, this chapter positions fan fashion as its own subculture apart from cosplay, while also acknowledging that it can be hard to distinguish between the two if they are derived from more 'ordinary' costume. Fan fashion is, just like cosplay, a paratext. This means that fans derive inspiration from authentic cultural artifacts—in this case film costume—to create transformational works that help us understand how *they* understand the film. These transformational works serve as the visual vocabulary that allows identification without requiring mimesis (Nielsen 217). In doing so, fans rely on the iconography to captivate what they are referencing to and make it recognizable to the viewer. Using iconography to understand the practice of fan fashion is useful because fan fashion can ask for a more liberal interpretation of the source material and can therefore rely a lot on iconographic choices. The goal of this chapter is to understand how fans use the films iconography to establish their own fannish iconographies, and how these are used to build a fan community that adds to the transmedia story world of *Practical Magic*.

Although fan studies a discipline of its own, it often overlaps with subcultural studies. A fan culture can perform as a subculture—as both are groups with distinct identities that rely on the practice of stylization to differ themselves from others and establish identification. This chapter understands the people who make videos under the hashtag of #practicalmagicoutfits as fans of the film, allowing the online spaces where these videos are posted to become fan sites. These online videos are the case studies of

this chapter and exemplify the expressions of fan fashion practices. In these videos, the fans are the textual poachers—creating outfits inspired by the costumes in *Practical Magic* that are distinctly transformative and influenced by their own sartorial choices. These choices can be congruent or incongruent with the costumes of practical magic and become the iconography of this fandom. Fans can even create visual references into an iconography that is not fully supported by the original text—the canon— if nothing is supplied for them, highlighting the importance of iconography in the development of fan art and cosplay within the fandom itself (Nielsen 215). By understanding fan fashion as a “means of transcultural communication”, we are able to understand the fan community who produces and shares it (Nielsen 208). As these choices are personal, a fans own identity and fashion style becomes apparent in the reiterations or reinterpretations of the costumes into their outfits. The fist chapter of this thesis discussed the key themes of sisterhood, witchcraft and feminine power in *Practical Magic*, which were found in the costumes’ references to femininity, nature and bohemianism. Recurring silhouettes such as the crop top, maxi skirt and midi dress, and textures in the cardigans and crocheted items were reminiscent of this bohemianism whereas certain accessories—tiny sunglasses and chokers—revealed the 1990s zeitgeist of the film’s production. The color palette used for the costumes referred back to nature due to its natural, muted and earthy colors such as dark greens, browns and light blues. These recurring themes and sartorial items provide the fans with recognizable visual elements and partly form the film’s iconography. Which items and how they are reused through fan fashion can then indicate how these practices should be interpreted and what the fans mean by it. To constitute the *Practical Magic* fan fashion identity is then to examine the use of iconography created by the fans.

Fan Fashion In Online Spaces

The hashtag #practicalmagicoutfits circles around on social media, with its foremost attributers being TikTok and Instagram. When scouting out these two platforms, I concluded that many fans tend to upload their videos firstly to TikTok, after which they post the same video on Instagram. Therefore, this analysis is solely based on TikTok videos for the representation of the fan fashion practices. Through an unobtrusive netnographic approach I observed a digital community's discourse from within the community through nonparticipant observation (Drouin 69). I applied an iconographic analysis that allowed me to understand the fan community's use of the film costumes' iconography, as iconographic choices tell us something about how the fandom understands the characters and media text, with a closer analysis on five fan videos (Nielsen 215-16). The hashtag #practicalmagicoutfits is one example of fans using the film *Practical Magic* as inspiration for their own sartorial performance. The hashtag search generated 176 posts on TikTok, not all of which carrying the hashtag directly, while almost every video was about both *Practical Magic* and fashion practices (“#practicalmagicoutfits”). This suggests the possibility of more of these videos existing outside of this hashtag search, as not all fan art is labeled as so, because it is for example considered self-explanatory (Nielsen 219).

Additionally, the found videos carried similar hashtags such as both #practicalmagic and #outfitinspo or #outfitideas, which can be interpreted as the same as #practicalmagicoutfits, but broken up into two separate hashtags. This can also indicate the fans longing for more engagement by using more widespread hashtags on TikTok, as #practicalmagic evidently generated over 70 thousand videos, and #outfitinspo produced more than 10 million results (“#practicalmagic” and

“#outfitinspo”). So, although not all videos under the hashtag #practicalmagicoutfits contain this actual hashtag, the algorithm selects these for viewing because of very similar hashtags and content and their relation to of *Practical Magic*. Other hashtags which were commonly found amongst the videos were #witchy, #witchcraft, #whimsical, #witchyoutfit, #whimsigoth, #fallfashion or #90sfashion. A more elaborate analysis could look into those hashtags and probably find a larger array of videos in the same style as those found under #practicalmagicoutfits.

Creative Reinterpretations of *Practical Magic*'s Costumes Through Fan Fashion

The posts under the hashtag feature videos of fans engaging with the costume from *Practical Magic* through their own stylization of certain clothing items in their own closet or items they have seen online. Sometimes, fans get even more creative, with one fan making their own skirt from deadstock fabric inspired by a skirt Gillian wore and another fan who created four different *Practical Magic* inspired outfits with one skirt (“#practicalmagicoutfits”). Another noteworthy observation is that most videos are recorded indoors. The domestic setting for the recording of these videos further adds to the evocation of an everyday practice. Fans enhance the witchy setting of these videos at a great number of times through audio choices. Using samples from *Practical Magic*'s audio, one particular quote by Sally is commonly lip-synced by the fans in their videos. For music choices, fans frequently use samples from the band Fleetwood Mac. Their lead singer, Stevie Nicks, is often associated with the archetype of the witch. As the Wiccan Influx at the beginning of the 1970s saw a trend of young, rebellious women dressing in commodified witchy fashions, Stevie Nicks is often credited for this rise in *witchiness*' popularity (Brown 276). Given this cultural association, Nicks addition to the soundtrack of *Practical Magic* with her song *Crystal* further highlights the interconnectedness

between broader witch aesthetics and *Practical Magic*. These findings in the prior “lurking” stage allowed me to understand the community and get a general sense of the type of videos connected to the hashtag (Drouin 69). What comes forth through this lurking, is how fan expression is not an isolated piece of media to be analyzed; they are representative for fan communities and individual fan content creators as well as strongly connected to broader communities and aesthetics.

The five chosen videos by users @zares.spooks, @luvjessicablair, @spellsnstardust, @magicwithmegd and @valeriaa_324 explicitly engage with *Practical Magic* inspired outfits. In the captions these users state how much they love the film, or express their excitement for the upcoming sequel. The videos themselves further contain a banner that reads along the lines of ‘outfits inspired by Practical Magic’. While @luvjessicablair and @magiwithmegd use stills of the specific costume and scene from the film to show their exact inspiration behind the outfit choices, @zares.spooks, @spellsnstardust and @valeriaa_324 rely more on the viewers inherent knowledge of the costumes and iconography to connect their outfits to *Practical Magic*. With the ‘everyday’ look of the costumes of *Practical Magic*, the recognition of a fan through fan fashion can be even less obvious than through cosplay. The direct reference back to the scenes exaggerates the relation to these costumes and implies a type of copying that would seem congruent with the notion of cosplay. However, the use of the term ‘inspired by’ and the domestic setting of these practices highlight the everydayness and casualness that align more with the notion of fan fashion. Additionally, there is no urge to copy exactly, as the mundanity of the items used in the costumes allows for both easy replication and many similar items to convey a similar tone. This shows how unobtrusive costume design can become popular not because of the usually noted spectacularity but

because of their relatability. This mundane quality of the costumes of *Practical Magic* has allowed it to successfully reference itself to more widespread witchy and whimsigoth fashion aesthetics.

Clothes and Their Meaning in The Fan Fashion Videos

All five users seemingly engage with the costumes of both Sally and Gillian—or not reference any specific character at all in the case of @zaires.spooks and @spellsnstardust. Hence the name ‘Practical Magic outfits’ and not ‘Sally Owens outfits’ or ‘Gillian Owens outfits’. It seems that for fan fashion expressions of *Practical Magic*, the lack of resemblance to a character is not a problem and neither a requirement because the emphasis lies with the iconographic fashion choices. It thus distances itself more from a specific character—and with it the accompanied idea of cosplay—but expands the fictional world and its aesthetics into the smaller, simpler things of everyday life.

Through these practices the lines between a clear fan performance—as is always the case with cosplay—and following a fashion trend, are more blurred. In doing so, these fan fashion practices are in line with what Crawford and Hancock state is a reinterpretation of the source material rather than a representation (127). Of greater significance is how identity is performed or mediated through clothing, not the static cosplaying of a certain character. The transformative nature of fan fashion is thus dependent on how fans interpret the film’s costumes to create their outfits. The iconography this creates then informs us how we can interpret the fans, while the mundane quality also allows for non-identification from outsiders and the possibility to exist without representational accuracy. In doing so, their performance becomes what Mackinney-Valentin calls the “status ploy” (47). This is a sartorial trick intended for

people who understand fashion, while deliberately misguiding those who are less familiar with deciphering dress codes. Seeing these fan fashions in such a way allows the fans to have agency in the way they are perceived.

The videos show how fans select, emphasize and sometimes reinterpret certain motifs in the costumes. Across the five videos, certain outfits reappear that clearly reference key elements of the original costumes, indicating that these particular looks and styles have become fan favorites. The outfit combination of a white crop top, jeans shorts and knee-high boots is evident in three of the videos and refers to a scene in *Practical Magic* with Sally. It embodies the moment Sally runs through her town in the outfit to meet her husband. In this scene, Sally is technically wearing green rainboots—not black boots—and the crop top has a flower emblem on the front. Even though none of the fans have the exact outfit Sally wore, the outfit is both simple and iconic enough to make them understand that this is the way in which they can best recreate it. The recreation of this specific costume can then be a way for the fans to convey romantic longing, as they hope for something similar to Sally's romantic happiness. Although it is not a visual citation of the costume of Sally, it is still recognizable in what it is referencing to due to the shapes and colors of the full outfit.

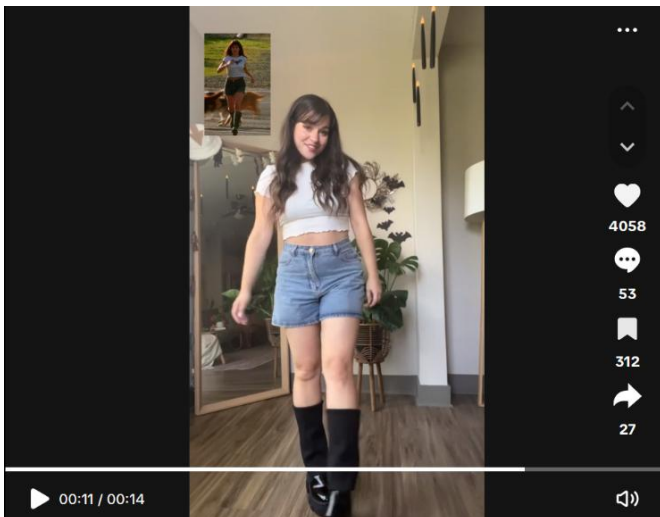


Figure 5. Still from TikTok user @magicwithmegd.

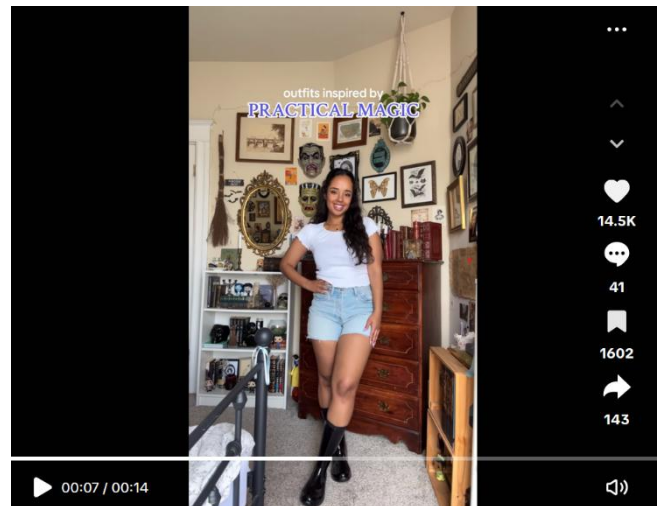


Figure 6. Still from TikTok user @zaire.spoons.

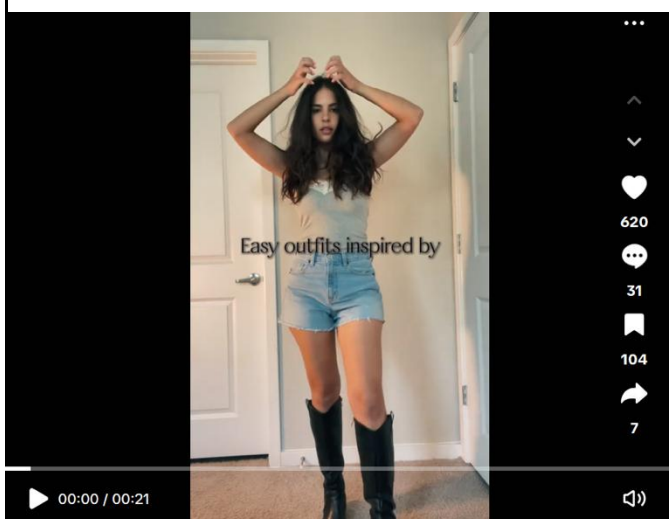


Figure 7. Still from TikTok user @spellsn Stardust.

Another recurring outfit amongst the fan videos is the combination of a long, white, patterned dress with a cardigan. As a direct reference, it resembles Sally's costume in the scene where she meets detective Hallet in her shop. It was established in the first chapter how this outfit refers to Sally's witchy nature in its use of floral prints and earthy colors. The scene, which takes place in Sally's shop Verbena, adds to this inherent *witchiness* because Sally's witchcraft is found in the products she makes and sells. A fan wearing this might then feel in touch with nature and a sense of quiet power by channeling Sally's subtle magic through domestic, nature-rooted aesthetics. The outfit

becomes more than a costume reference; it allows the fan to embody a form of everyday witchcraft that feels both grounded and enchanting. Here, these fan fashion expressions create a tangible connection to the characters that allows fans to extend the film into their everyday lives (Boumaroun 105). Within this specific combination, however, lies a certain ambiguity, as it can also serve as a reference to Sally's wardrobe in general, who is often seen wearing the combination of a long dress and cardigan throughout the film. As is evident from @magicwithmegd's video, if a fan does not have the desired flower-printed dress and green cardigan, a plain white dress and light brown cardigan fulfill as substitutes. The use of iconography here allows the fan to be identified with the character of Sally without having to fully embody her or have an exact replica of her costume. In the videos with the reference stills from the film, it is easy to denote which costumes the fans are referring to, and these videos seem keener on re-making the specific costumes worn in the film. Other videos, which @spellsnstardust, @valeriaa_324 and @zaires.spooks are good examples of, tend to stray more from the actual recreation of specific scenes, to taking aspects of the costumes to create their own visual iconography. Instead of specific outfits, they use items that can be considered similar in shape, color or fabric choice to the existing costumes or broader themes of *Practical Magic*. As patterns or colors can indicate a specific character, looser interpretations of outfits can still successfully reference the film (Nielsen 217). @valeriaa_324's use of flower printed maxi skirts are reminiscent of Sally and Gillian because multiple times throughout the film, they wear skirts with the same shape and similar patterns. @spellsnstardust's chain belt calls to resemble Gillian's outfit which she wore to support Sally at the phone tree meeting—even though @spellsnstardust pairs it with a maxi skirt while Gillian wore it with fitted pants. This stylistic choice reinterprets

90s fashion into a bohemian look. The color blue, which appears in the outfits of both @zares.spooks and @valeriaa_324, gestures towards Sally's grieving process. In the hands of fans, however, this color takes on new meaning: connected to Sally's original character arc, it evokes emotional transformation. These more interpretative motif reoccurrences demonstrate how fans use visual language to refer and reimagine the film costumes.

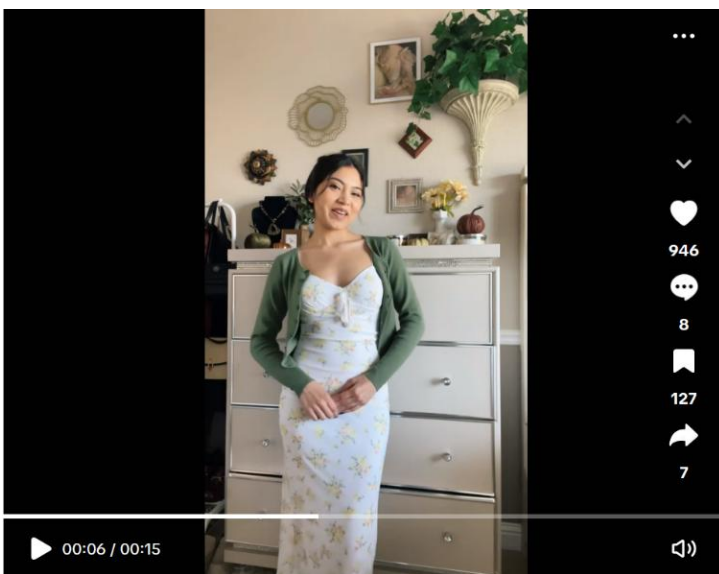


Figure 10. Still from TikTok user @valeriaa_324.

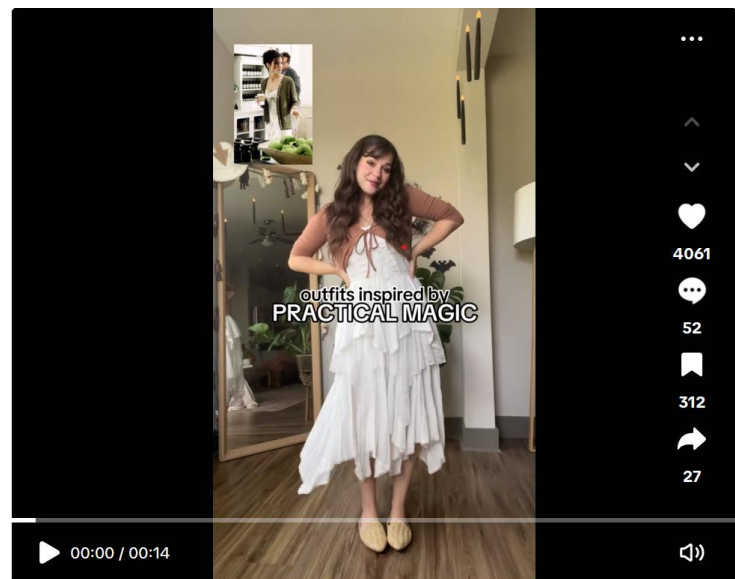


Figure 8. Still from TikTok user @magicwithmegd.

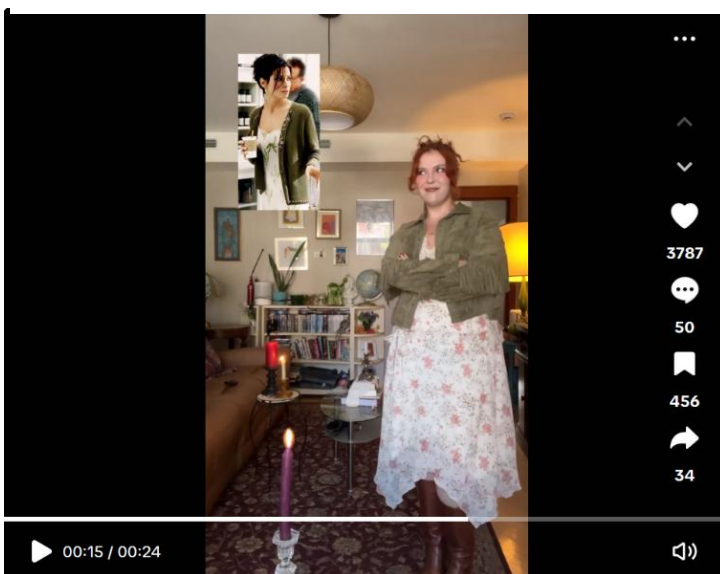


Figure 9. Still from TikTok user @luvjessicablair.

A favored outfit of Gillian's that fans frequently reference to is the one she wears during the breakfast scene with detective Hallet. Here Gillian, who wears a dark brown knitted cardigan with embroidered flowers, a light brown batik wrap skirt, and small black sunglasses, is brewing a potion to make Hallet go away. The scene conveys a symbolic layer: Gillian's cozy textures and earthy tones hide her mischievous nature and intent. It offers fans to make use of this subversion in their own way. Through this lens, fans rely on the iconography of shapes, textures and layered references to convey their own interpretation of the costume. For instance, @magicwithmegd merges her essence of the look into a beige knitted sweater adorned with big embroidered flowers, paired with a flowing white maxi skirt and light brown boots, emphasizing softness and earthiness. @luvjessicablair, on the other hand, takes a moodier swing at the costume as she styles a dark brown sweater with delicate, small leaves together with a sleek red, velvet maxiskirt and black boots. Notably, she completes the look with small black sunglasses and even goes as far as to carry a book, mimicking Gillian's original pose and evoking more resemblance. At the same time, though, she chooses to add a brown leather bag to the outfit, even though in the original costume Gillian never wore a bag with this outfit. By adding her own element to the inspired outfit, she performs her own identity apart from Gillian's. The range between these two fan fashion expressions of the same costume further signals that fan fashion is not just the static recreation of a character, as it navigates the tension between the fan's appearance and intention. Instead, it signals that fan fashion is a fluid and ambiguous performance in which the fan's own identity is part of how their interpretation manifests itself and can thus differ from person to person. This close analysis of the looks from the five fan videos shows that some fans take more creative liberty in the recreation of the costumes, while others

are more obvious in their references or try harder to mimic outfits worn in specific scenes. It is clear, though, that the most favored ones to recreate are the ones easiest to replicate and the most ordinary out of all of them. These findings further suggest that while *Practical Magic* fan dress may appear simple or ordinary, the significance lies in a more personal and internal engagement, which I will further explore by looking at how fans use fashion to signal identification and express their own identity.

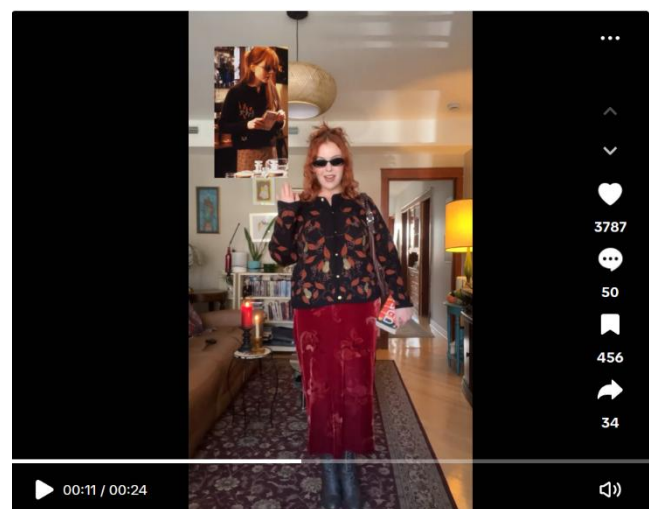
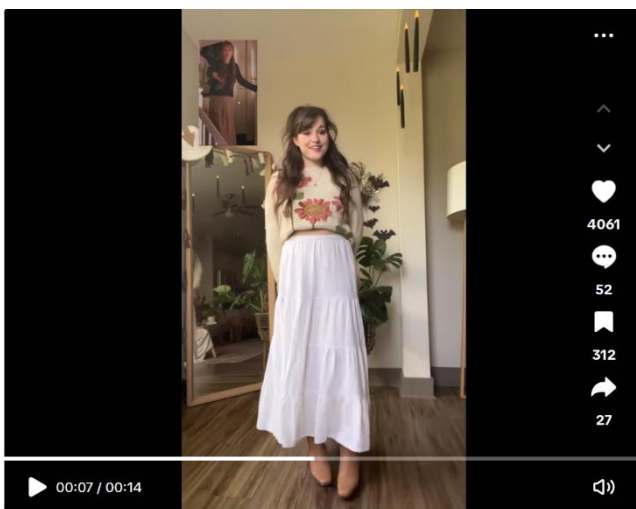


Figure 11. Still from TikTok user @magicwithmegd. Figure 12. Still from TikTok user @luvjessicablair.

Identity Formation and Self-Representation in Practical Magic Fan Fashion

Through social media platforms, the bodily appearance of identity takes center stage.

Goffman's theory is particularly relevant here, as it gives us a clear distinction of how the representation of the self is mediated through a front and back stage (Tseëlon 153-154).

In the videos, the fans explicitly show their fan identity by performing through references and under hashtags that connect their outfits to the fandom and film. Outside of these online spaces, in everyday life, the distinction of a *Practical Magic* fan that practices fan fashion is barely noticeable or even unnoticeable. As cosplaying practices are always

temporal and space-specific, fan fashion suggests a lower engagement with fandom through sartorial choices that can be worn in day to day life. Instead of being immersive, it is adaptable and customizable, which makes it suitable for the everyday. This means that while visually expressive and reflective of the fan's own identity, essentially, it performs in cue with social expectations and connotations. The subtlety in which these references then emerge without the online environment to contextualize it, can make these fan practices socially unrecognizable. Although it may visually resemble more widespread witchy or whimsigoth aesthetics, to outsiders, it is almost impossible to distinguish it as an act of *Practical Magic* fan fashion. This lack of clear visibility does not diminish the presence, truth or authenticity of fan identity. Through Goffman's lens, this embodied performance through an "acts of doing" is still a meaningful part of identity (Tseëlon 154). In this context, the "back stage" performance, where fans privately engage with *Practical Magic* fashion, is especially valuable as it determines how the fan visualizes their interpretation (Tseëlon 154). While a visible online fan community does exist around *Practical Magic* fashion, it remains closely tied to broader witchy aesthetics, emphasizing mood, imagery, and symbolic alignment over explicit fan signaling.

As these fan fashion practices engage with the archetype of the witch, whose commodified imagery reflects complex cultural and spiritual identities, their fashion identity signals cultural belonging. In a similar vein to how the complexity of attributing commodified objects to witchcraft in itself reflects the complexity of the witch, the dissection of *Practical Magic* fan fashion also proves an ambiguous nature (Joshi and Brooks 68). Since both feminist symbolism and religious connotations continue to influence the archetype of the witch, fan fashion inspired by *Practical Magic* might appeal to more minority groups than just its fans. As minority groups read mainstream texts

according to their own subcultural identities, the witch in *Practical Magic* has become a representation for practitioners of neo-pagan movements. Pointed out in her article “Invoking Practical Magic”, Schutten notes how, for *Practical Magic* specifically, practitioners are able to hide or signal their spiritual identities behind the mask of a fan. By becoming a fan of a media or film that embodies certain identities or political ideologies and consuming “knick-knacks” and publicly displaying symbols, people can align with the movement or display religious identity (Schutten 332). The wearing of fan fashion inspired by *Practical Magic* can then, to certain people, be an act of solidarity with a neo-pagan movement or be a front to hide their religious identity as an actual witch. Through a performance of the fantasy image of the witch, practitioners can claim and reinterpret the sign as a symbol of power (Gray 163). By re-signifying parts of this image, they are able to disrupt the expectations of mainstream identity definitions (Gray 163). The recognition and use of pop culture can for practitioners be one of the “most creative, contemporary and effective source of magical practice” (Gray 167). These practices allow for religious practitioners to have a much more immediate symbolic significance than “distant and removed mythology of an ancient past” might have (Gray 168). This way, fan fashion becomes an everyday practice that conceals instances of resistance and activism.

Subcultural Style Crossovers with Fan Fashion of Practical Magic

Considering this, *Practical Magic* fan fashion operates as a constructed practice that draws from both spiritual identity and broader witchy and whimsigoth aesthetics, allowing fans to take on multiple expressive roles. Since most of the fans draw from their own closets to create looks that fit in with Sally and Gillian’s wardrobe, they express both their fandom and their individual fashion identity. This type of fan engagement with

costume can be interpreted in two ways: on the one hand as an extension of the fan identity into daily life through a permanent visual connection with a fictional world, performed through their fashion identity, on the other hand, it suggests a moderation of fan identity, which becomes unrecognizable, to conform to a more widely used and accepted set of aesthetics. Not all signification is, however, intentional, which means that fans who engage with fan fashion of *Practical Magic* might not be aware of the history of and connotations with the archetype of the witch (Hebdige 101). Similarly, the people that engage solely with the aesthetic trends of ‘witchy’ and ‘whimsigoth’ fashion, consciously or unconsciously, use various intertexts and paratexts connected to popular readings of the witch. As the reach of these latter trends is more widespread, their followers become an interpretive community that is able to define the way in which certain parts of popular culture should be read or interpreted, but the frequent use of hashtags of witchy and whimsigoth fashion found under the *Practical Magic* fan fashion videos also shows that these trends align with the same values and aesthetics as the fans choices.

The overlap between fans’ reinterpretations of *Practical Magic’s* costumes and the witchy and whimsigoth aesthetic mark clear stages of the process of subcultural commodification to the mainstream. Just like the archetype of the witch found a way to be brandished into a commodity—reinvented to suit the current status quo—the styles associated with it follow the same fate. As subcultures emerge as a meaningful intermediate between the parent culture and the dominant ideology by proposing an alternative, in-between identity formed by historical conditions, it is arguable that *Practical Magic’s* specific referral is let loose to conform to more common and widespread trends as the time moves on (Hebdige 82, 88). As subcultural style evolves,

it's signs and aesthetics are transformed and adopted by the dominant groups in society, feeding and creating trends that are picked up by the mainstream (Hebdige 94). In fact, as subcultural material is subjected to historical change, it is logical that trend formations of witchy and whimsigoth fashion are seen as the natural evolution of the *Practical Magic* fashion style.

Conclusion

Thus, *Practical Magic's* fan fashion expressions create a witchy aesthetic signals multiple social meanings. An iconographic reading tells us that these outfits are evoke emotions of romantic longing and subtle empowerment. The hashtag of #practicalmagicoutfits promotes a diverse range of fan fashion practices which are mostly concerned with the everyday. These fans often do not self-identify as a fan in their videos, but show how they are guided by specific moments and outfits, where clothes take the center stage. While the everyday costume does not ask for much adaptation, it is seen how the fan's own fashion identity further shapes the outcome of these fan fashion expressions. By embracing these more liberal interpretations and through self-association with the witchy and whimsigoth aesthetic through hashtags, these fans become carriers and recipients of multiple meanings. In doing so, these fans are able to access a wider audience as well as establish a community with like-minded fans.

Conclusion

This thesis has addressed the ordinary and everyday practice of fan fashion in the fields of subcultural studies, fan studies and fashion studies, where the ‘spectacular’ has dominated for a long time. Through the case study of fan fashion inspired by *Practical Magic*, these fields were proven to intersect as both the archetype of the witch as well as the fan’s own identity were revealed to be important aspects of this practice.

In analyzing the costume designs of *Practical Magic*, it became clear that the outfits of Sally and Gillian were comprised of different cultural portrayals of the witch that repeated and reinterpreted how the fantasy genre historically positioned the witch. The textures, colors and silhouettes of the costumes were revealed to hold, at times, contrapuntal meanings by going against the characters’ natures, even though they were not considered disruptive. These everyday costumes created a sense of familiarity and presented an image of the witch that is very much like ourselves. Identifying themes in the everyday costumes worn by Sally and Gillian was the first step to understanding how these could be interpreted by fans. More than just a practical mise-en-scène element, the costumes in *Practical Magic* play a key part in the conversation of the witch as a cultural archetype.

Practical Magic fan fashion demonstrates that everyday costume impacts the ways in which fans engage with fashion and therefore asks us to reconsider preconceived notions of cosplay. Instead, the performance of *Practical Magic* fan fashion can be understood as a subcultural practice that negotiates multiple positions—between spirituality, individual alignment, and broader witchy or whimsigoth aesthetic formations. In the case of *Practical Magic*, Boumaroun’s notion of fan fashion underscores how the

outfits created by fans involve subtler references to the costumes, turning the fans into fan fashion stylists. Using the iconography of the film established in the first chapter, the second chapter showed how fans made use of recurring sartorial items worn by both Sally and Gillian to create their own reinterpretations of the costumes via fan fashion. They prove that clothing from one's own closet can become the product of fan fashion by styling it accordingly. This has allowed fans to easily replicate the costumes and adapt them for everyday wear. In turn, the fan's own fashion identity proved influential in the interpretation of the costumes. This meant that the fans chose pieces that reflected their personal style while also trying to stay true to the costumes. By using their own clothes to make these outfits, they perform their own fashion identity adjacent to the role of the fan. Through Goffman's framework, we saw that the 'back' stage is where most of the fan performance takes place, as the signals conveyed on the person's 'personal front' can be hard to read. Though visibly expressive, *Practical Magic* fan fashion is thus often subtle and primarily meaningful to the fan's internal experience rather than immediately recognizable to outsiders. In online spaces though, they can express their creations to an audience that will 'get it'.

This shows how fan fashion can be an ambiguous play of fan identity but also as a performance that is very much fan-centered. It further proves, especially for *Practical Magic*, that it is hard to point out what type of fan engages with fan fashion. The person can be regarded as a 'casual fan', since the inspiration from the costumes in *Practical Magic* is oftentimes diluted and simplified. On the other hand, they could also be regarded as 'niche fans', because they engage with the fandom daily and operate through signs that are not obvious unless you are very familiar with the iconography and references. It has also shown that fan fashion as a cultural practice touches on more

aspects than cosplay would, specifically because it is more of an everyday practice, and therefore blurs the lines between multiple aspects regarding subcultural identity, fan identity and fashion identity. *Practical Magic* fan fashion thus mediates both subcultural belonging through an associated aesthetic and an envisioning of a fan's own individual identity.

It is fruitful to devote more research to fandoms that rely on 'everyday costume' as their inspiration, since this thesis has shown that it allows for different types of fan engagement with costume. As is evident in the case of *Practical Magic*, these everyday costumes aid in the creation of a low threshold for fans to engage with the source material, that allows more casual practices to go unnoticed. Therefore, they deserve the same level of serious attention that academics have given to the spectacular or disruptive.

Lastly, this thesis concluded that in the case of *Practical Magic* inspired fan fashion, there is a tension between commodification and representation. Due to the archetype of the witch, the fan fashion produced by *Practical Magic*'s fans embodies a representation of the witch in popular culture. The everyday costume as well as this connotation with the witch has helped these fan fashion expressions to be in close relation to a more general witchy and whimsigoth aesthetic. At the same time, embodying and practicing a *Practical Magic* fan identity allows practitioners of spiritual movements to identify with broader ideologies present in the film. For them, becoming a fan allows them to align with their spiritual identity. Since *Practical Magic* is closely aligned with more widespread and commodified witchy aesthetics, it is wise to consider how these aesthetics can both weaken and reinforce the position and representation of witchcraft practitioners. Further research could be done on this specific point of tension.

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