What do you see in your head when I say “Witch?”
Sorcery and Witchcraft
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Define these terms and explain the types of societies that practice these supernatural rites
Sorcery and Witchcraft

Are commonly seen as compelling (causing) the supernatural to do harm (black magic)

This does not mean that witches or people who practice Wicca, practice sorcery or witchcraft

sorcery  the compulsion of the supernatural by manipulation of substances that contain mana

witchcraft  the compulsion of the supernatural by words or emotion

In most religious rituals one asks the supernatural, with magic one compels the supernatural.
Witches are the embodiment of all that is evil within a society.
The Navajo Indians of the American Southwest believed in witches called *skinwalkers* who would transform into wolves or coyotes at night in order to stalk their victims. Skinwalkers were said to assemble secretly in order to concoct a poison made from corpses that they used to kill their enemies. They were thought to fly through the air at night to blow the corpse poison into the smoke holes of their victims' hogans.

The Azande, of the Sudan, witches were said to possess a magical power called MANGU. People that possessed mangu were said to hold special feasts where they would coat themselves with a special ointment which made them invisible, which allows them to seize the souls of their victims. They were also said to have sexual relations with demons.

The Status of Witches and Sorcerers

• Witches and sorcerers have low status, they are seen as bad because they cause harm

• The “title” of witch or sorcerer is not typically given to oneself, society does

• The rituals of witches and sorcerers are done in private unlike “religious” rituals
Functions Sorcery and Witchcraft

**Cognitive/intellectual**

Humans don’t like coincidence or accidents

blame misfortune on witches
Functions Sorcery and Witchcraft

Cognitive/intellectual

Often times, individuals within a society are called on to combat these powers
Functions Sorcery and Witchcraft

Sociological

The belief in witches keeps people “in line”

SOCIAL CONTROL

Witches are the embodiment of all that is bad. You follow the rules because you don’t want to be accused

You are nice to all people, because you don’t know who the witches are... “She turned me into a newt”
Functions of Witchcraft and Sorcery

Psychological

Witchcraft/magic may give people the belief that they can prevent death. This could alleviate stress about a person’s mortality.

Scapegoating allows you to blame others for your shortcomings and gives you hope that your problems can be solved. (comfort)
Cross Cultural Coincidence?
Societies Prone to Witchcraft

How could the following be linked to a belief in witchcraft?

- Lack of judicial system (or simplistic)
- Usually these societies are pre-industrial
- Lots of interpersonal contact
- Limited control of surrounding
- Large stressor in the society

Think about the Salem Witch Trials
Who generally gets accused?

- Ages of 40-60 (seen as elderly in the Middle Ages)
- Mostly women 80%
- People who had been accused of other crimes
- Low economic or social status
- Anyone connected with medicine (especially midwives)
- Deviants

The weakest people within society are easiest to accuse. Low status or undesirable