In 1995, Diane Purkiss made the observation that 'there have been surprisingly few attempts to read women witnesses' depositions at witch trials as texts authored by early modern women, texts that illustrate women's ideas about witches and witchcraft'. The reason for this became apparent soon after witch trials ceased. The perception, apparent from the early eighteenth century, was that depositions of women in trials of witchcraft were either fraudulent, or the product of some deeply-seated psychological illness, lending itself to the description 'hysteria'. These explanations persisted for several centuries and are still put forward today.

In current witchcraft historiography, women's depositions against female witches are problematic. Female accusers appear to be women enthusiastically, often voluntarily, serving the interests of a 'patriarchal' persecution of women. Women's depositions against witches have frequently been rendered irrelevant by a focus on elite male theorists of witchcraft. Alternatively, they have achieved an ambiguous status whereby they are a source of information for the accusation of female witches, but do not receive sustained investigation in their own right. Lastly, the fact that many depositions are produced by illiterate village women and recorded by male court officials, in response to male judicial questioning, has made the authorship of such material ambiguous. All this has further undermined the credibility of female witness statements.

Attempts have been made to explain the behaviour of accusers, particularly bewitched accusers, in witchcraft trials but generally as a phenomenon separate from the content of the accusations themselves. Female witness statements are read for physical symptoms, for evidence of dysfunctional psychology, and not for what the internal narrative might say of the accuser's ideas of witchcraft. In some instances, women's depositions have been sidelined because of fantastic descriptions of supernatural beings who appear to accuse and bewitch, and other elements which are regarded as evidence of a disturbed or irrational state of mind.

Most explanations of accusers' behaviour take their cue from medical models. Heavily influenced by psychoanalytic theory, these models argue female accusers, particularly those with profound symptoms, such as seeing visions or suffering afflications, were traumatised individuals unable to control
their bodies or voices. In this, female accusers occupy a social position not
dissimilar to the witch—female individuals who are coerced into deviant social
behaviour by an exclusive community dominated by male social power.

I take issue with these explanations because they site the agency of the female
accuser away from the woman or girl in question. The motivation for accusing
witches is not the result of a woman’s personal agenda, but rather because she
has become diseased. However, the majority of women involved in trials of
witchcraft did so as accusers or witnesses. Indeed, there are many more female
accusers than there are female witches. In many cases, witchcraft accusations
come from women; in a great many other cases, men make accusations of
witchcraft on the basis of the bewitchment of their womenfolk. To relegate the
actions of this many women to some form of illness seems to me unsatisfactory
and superficial.

Bearing this in mind, I will discuss the role of women in accusing men of
witchcraft. I take as my examples cases of male witchcraft from the Salem trials
of 1692, which I will describe only briefly. I will give an account of the
historiography of these accusers, then offer an alternative analysis to that which I
have found elsewhere.

On 19 August 1692, four men were executed for witchcraft in Salem Village.
These were not the marginal, impoverished female witches of twentieth-century
historiography; rather, these men were among the leading citizens of the village
community. One, George Burroughs, had been the minister in the Salem Village
a decade before. Another, John Proctor, was richer than all his accusers when he
died. John Willard had married into a Salem Village family several years earlier
and had become a prosperous land speculator. George Jacobs Sr was the elderly
patriarch of a village family, and had lived in Salem Village for thirty-three
years. All these men were convicted and executed because nine young women,
aged between eleven and twenty, testified that these men were witches and had
afflicted them.

The beginnings of the witch trials are to be found in the activities of these
young accusers. In the winter of 1691-92 the girls were part of fortune-telling
sessions in the kitchen of the minister’s house. Two of the group lived in the
house. Betty Parris, aged nine, was the daughter of the incumbent, Samuel Parris.
Abigail Williams, aged eleven, was Parris’s niece. These girls, with other young
women, had gathered in the Parris kitchen with the family’s Barbadian slave,
Tituba. The original task had been to see what trade their future husbands would
have, but one participant saw a ‘spectre in a coffin’ in an improvised crystal ball.
Shortly after, Betty and Abigail were taken with strange ‘fits’.

For over a month, Samuel Parris fasted and prayed over the two girls. Eventually the Rubicon was crossed by a medical doctor, William Griggs.
According to his learned opinion an ‘evil hand’ lay upon the children, and he
gravely suspected witchcraft. The girl’s fits continued, now diagnosed as
bewitchment. Parris, and others, urged them to name their tormentors. Tituba
and two elderly pauper women were the first named. Other young women
became bewitched and accusations began to escalate. Between early 1692 and January 1693 approximately two hundred persons
were accused and arrested for witchcraft. Of these, nineteen where executed—
five men and fourteen women. Witchcraft accusations spread from Salem
Village to neighbouring Andover, then throughout the colony. Eventually the accusers seem to have overreached themselves, accusing the sons of a former governor and the current governor’s wife, as well as representatives of elite merchant society and respected clergy in Salem Town and Boston. Accusations at the top of colonial society seem to have finally undermined the Salem accuser’s credibility. The impetus to find witches was slowed before rapidly reversing into public displays of shame and contrition.

Young women remained active accusers throughout the witch trials. Carol Karlsen identified twenty-four accusers aged sixteen to twenty. To these can be added Abigail Williams and Ann Putnam Jr, aged under sixteen. Betty Parris, aged nine, was removed from the Village after her first accusations. A core group of eight young women were involved in all of the executions. Abigail Williams and Ann Putnam Jr, the two youngest girls, were involved in at least seventeen capital cases each.

Three out of four of these male witches were accused by young women who lived, or had lived, in their households as maidservants. John Proctor was accused by Mary Warren, who claimed that he had made her a witch, George Jacobs Sr was accused by Sarah Churchill, and George Burroughs by Mercy Lewis. All three girls were orphaned and this was the reason for their servitude. John Willard was also accused by young women, but there is no evidence that any were in service in his household.

In all of these cases, there are significant episodes in which the young female accusers are afflicted in the presence of the male witch, most notably during examinations, when having the young women in court created scenes difficult to credit in modern terms. In John Willard’s case the account of his examination begins with his accusers in fits in the court room:

When the warrant was read, he looked upon severall & they fell into fits ... Elizabeth Hubbard testified against him & he looked upon her, & she fell into a fit ... Mary Warren cried out, oh! he bites me ... Ann Putnam cried out much of him ... John Indian cried out he cuts me ... Susannah Sheldon said there is the black man whispering in his ear, & he should not confesse ... Mary Warren was in a great fit ... They ... testified that the dead, those he had murdered, were all about him ... Susannah Sheldon & Mary Warren testified that now his appearance comes from his body & afflicts them.

John Proctor was accused during his wife Elizabeth’s examination. When he was brought into court, the result was bedlam:

By reason of fits upon John Indian and Abigail and Mary Walcot, they cried out there is Goodman Proctor very often. And Abigail said there is Goodman Proctor in the magistrate’s lap. At the same time Mary Walcot was sitting by knitting, we asked her if she saw Goodman Proctor, but she was deaf and dumb, yet still was knitting. Then Mary recovered herself and confirmed what Abigail had said, that Goodman Proctor she saw in the magistrate’s lap. Then John cried out to the Dog under the Table to come away for Goodman Proctor was upon his
back. But so great were the interruptions of John and Abigail by fits, that we were fain to send them both away.\textsuperscript{13}

George Jacobs’s examination was also punctuated by the fits of the accusers:

The bewitched fell into most grievous fits and screechings when he came in.
Is this the man that hurts you?
Abigail Williams cried out this is the man and fell into a violent fit.
Ann Putnam said this is the man, and he hurts her, and brings the book to her, and would have her write in the book, and she should be well ...
Mercy Lewis is this the man?
This is the man (after much interruption by fits) he almost kills me ...
Mary Walcott is this the man?
After much interruption by fits she said this is the man, he used to come with two staves and beat her with one of them ... Ann Putnam and Abigail Williams had each of them a pin stuck in their hands, and they said it was this old Jacobs.\textsuperscript{14}

More details of the girls’ affliction, inside and outside the court room, are provided by clerical observers of the Salem trials. The Reverend John Hale, minister at neighbouring Beverley was one. Initially a supporter of the trials, Hale changed his mind after his wife was accused. During his days as a believer, he penned the following account:

These Children were bitten and pinched by invisible agents; their arms, necks, and backs turned this way and that way, and returned back again, so as it was impossible for them to do of themselves, and beyond the power of any Epileptick Fits, or natural Disease to effect. Sometimes they were taken dumb, their mouths stopped, their throats choked, their limbs wracked and tormented so as might move an heart of stone, to sympathise with them.\textsuperscript{15}

Deodat Lawson, who had been the minister in Salem Village between 1684–88, was one of the first observers to see the afflicted young women in 1692. He visited Salem Village on 19 March and witnessed Abigail Williams’s bewitchment:

In the ... Evening I went to give Mr P[arris] a visit ... When I was there, his Kins-woman, Abigail Williams, (about twelve years of age), had a grievous fit; she was first hurryed with Violence to and fro in the room, (though Mrs Ingersol endeavoured to hold her) sometimes making as if she would fly, stretching up her arms as high as she could, and crying, Whish! Whish! Whish! ... After that, she run to the Fire, and begun to throw Fire Brands, about the house; and run against the Back, as if she would run up Chimney, and ... she had attempted to go into the Fire in other Fits.\textsuperscript{16}
Lawson, like so many others, was convinced of the supernatural source of the young women’s affliction because of their ‘unnatural’ symptoms:

Their Motions in their Fits are Preternatural, both as to the manner, which is so strange as a well person could not Screw their Body into; and as to the violence ... being much beyond the Ordinary force of the same person when they are in their right mind.

The eyes of some of them in their fits are exceeding fast closed, and if you ask them a question they can give no answer, and I do believe they cannot hear at that time."17

The above description illustrates the type of accusations made by the young accusers in 1692. While these were not the only charges brought against these men (adult men and women also testified) this type of evidence formed the basis for the indictments on which the men were tried, and for which they were executed. In most cases of witchcraft in Salem Village in 1692, male and female, the young accusers present testimony that is a variation of the type I have described. In only one case, that of George Burroughs, is there a substantial difference. Burroughs, the young accusers claimed, was the leader of the witches. The one who sat with the devil at the witches meetings, and who would be King in Hell when the devil threw down the kingdom of Christ and established the kingdom of Satan. Salem Village had been chosen for the Devil’s seat because of the several decades of severe factional dispute. This chronic contention centred on the appointment of ministers, like Burroughs and Lawson, and embroiled their successor, Samuel Parris, in 1692.

While contemporaries understood this behaviour as ‘preternatural’, succeeding generations have been less happy with the idea that the devil walked the world during the Salem trials. Over the several hundred years since the trials, alternative explanations have been offered. In 1764 Thomas Hutchinson set a trend when he wrote that the young female accusers committed fraud. He wrote:

A little attention must force the conviction that the whole scene of fraud and imposture began by young girls, who at first perhaps thought of nothing more then being pitied and indulged, and continued by adult persons, who afraid of being accused themselves [and] rather than confess their fraud, suffered the lives of so many innocents to be taken away, through the credulity of judges and juries."18

In the twentieth century, historians preferred explanations of psychological illness. In 1972 Chadwick Hansen offered this opinion:

The behaviour of the afflicted persons was not fraudulent but pathological. They were hysterics, and in the clinical rather than the popular sense of the term. These people were not merely over excited; they were mentally-ill."19

In 1987 Carol Karlsen undertook the first substantive study of witchcraft in colonial New England to proceed from feminist understandings of women’s
Young female accusers are particularly silent within feminist frameworks. In analyses that argue women’s subservience to male social power, young women are not assumed to have social agency. This silence is compounded because women this age are barely visible in the historical record. That so many become visible in the Salem trials, and elsewhere, through the event of possession, is of great interest.

Femaleness and youth combine to create a historical view of young women, particularly these young women, that regards them as completely in the thrall of male-centred community. Thus for Karlsen the young female accusers:

confirm the only reality the culture allowed, the reality articulated by their ministers and affirmed by most men and women in their communities. There were only two kinds of women; godly women and witches. If witches symbolised female resistance to this dualism, so too did the possessed. But the possessed represented female capitulation.

Karlsen does identify an element of rebellion against the social power of men over women in the behaviour of these young accusers. But her argument relies, finally, on the polarities of male-power versus female-powerlessness, and within this logic she cannot conclude with anything but the re-affirmation of male social dominance.

The young female accusers are treated as a group of faceless ‘girls’, without intrinsic historical characteristics, or contribution. Without personality, character or substance; they are labile, lending themselves readily to adaptation into any argument. Bernard Rosenthal identifies something of this malleability when he says:

Our guesses, of course, are governed by the cultural interests of our day. With the ascendance of Freud, we offered complex models of hysteria. When we learned about hallucinogenic drugs, we discovered ergot.

Rosenthal identifies the contemporary concern with child abuse and convincingly applies it to the testimony concerning the death of Ann Putnam Jr’s six-week old sister, Sarah. Ann accused John Willard of whipping this baby to death. Rosenthal hypothesises that Ann Putnam Jr was expressing an instance of child abuse. Rosenthal concludes: ‘although I would not want to defend the thesis that the behaviour of Ann Putnam Jr grew from such abuse, broader theories have been developed from less evidence’.

While I believe Rosenthal correct in his suggestion, I would also reiterate that these women are routinely conceived as pathological, even in hypothesis. Historians seem loath to regard these young accusers as behaving in ways that made perfect sense to those around them, and to seek a social context for this behaviour.

The youth of the women has inspired a focus on sexuality, particularly adolescent sexuality. In 1949 Marion L. Starkey offered the particularly ill-informed opinion that the ‘young girls lived in dread of spectral rape by the incubus and of giving birth to a demon child’.

Forty years later, in The New
York Times, Arthur Miller described 'the ravings of a klatch of repressed prepubescent girls who, fearing for their implicitly sexual revolt, began convincing themselves they had been perverted by Satan'. This remark helps us to understand Miller's portrayal of the young accusers in *The Crucible*.

Modern feminist studies keep the young women's sexuality central to their interpretations of young accusers. Young women's sexual identity is seen as being repressed and controlled by the (male) community at large. Hence Karlsen can argue that young women's economic opportunities could be decreased by sexual 'mistakes', but has to concede 'if single possessed women were of an age when sexual issues were paramount, no evidence suggests that they were sexually active before or during their possession'.

I would agree with John Demos who wrote in 1970 that 'most striking of all is the absence of allusions to sex; there is no nakedness, no promiscuity, no obscene contact with the Devil'. In the writings of contemporaries, like John Hale and Deodat Lawson, and in the surviving court material, there is a marked de-sexualising of these young women. They are usually referred to as the 'poor afflicted persons', but also as 'the children', though some were eighteen or twenty. I would prefer to regard the young accusers as social beings, whose behaviour is socially constructed and culturally supported. I am not seeking to provide what Rosenthal calls a 'governing explanation', but rather to illustrate social aspects of this extraordinary behaviour, and the currency such behaviour had in 1692.

First, it needs to be emphasised that these young women were operating within a long tradition of afflicted or possessed young women whose behaviour was understood as either bewitchment or diabolic possession. New England saw several celebrated cases in the first century of settlement. In 1671 Elizabeth Knapp, a young woman of Watertown, Massachusetts became possessed. She recovered under the care of Rev. Samuel Willard. Cotton Mather ministered to the bewitched Goodwin children in 1688. An elderly Irish washerwoman, Goodwife Glover, was executed for bewitching them. Mather published an account of the case in 1689. In 1693 there occurred the case of Margaret Rule, who also recovered under the care of Mather. In all these cases, the symptoms of affliction/possession were remarkably similar to those displayed by the young female accusers at Salem.

In England, too, this type of behaviour was well known. In 1589, for example, in the village of Warboys, Huntingdonshire, the five young daughters and the maidervants in the household of Sir Robert Throckmorton became similarly bewitched. J. A. Sharpe has considered this case, one of the most celebrated in England. Sharpe fits the Throckmorton case into a pattern in south-east England, where between 1574 and 1593, a series of tracts were published that 'dealt with what was clearly one of the emerging themes in English witchcraft narratives, that of children or adolescents suffering from witchcraft induced diseases'.

I wish to emphasise that the young women of Salem were not behaving in random ways. Instead, these young accusers were re-enacting an established ritual of affliction and accusation, one that was well-known and recognised in New England and England. Despite its theological and legal ambiguities, it had a popular currency that should not be underrated. This is not the dim, dark
reaches of popular belief. The witchcraft accusations made by the young female accusers at Salem occurred in a popular arena that understood them, in a legal system that provided a means of redress, within a theology that justified and proved their validity.

In Salem Village in 1692, while witnessing the early days of the witch-trials, Deodat Lawson preached a sermon in the Village meeting house. The text of the sermon survives. In its published form it ran to fifty pages, so what I offer here is the merest extract. Lawson believed God unleashed this trouble on Salem Village. The Devil, with God's permission, had come among them to 'set up his kingdom'. The Devil's 'tyrannical fury we see thus exerted against the bodies and minds of these afflicted persons'. This sermon, notable for its martial tone, issues a call to arms against an 'infernal foe'. The devils come 'armed and mustering' amongst the Villagers. Lawson is:

this day commanded to call and cry an alarm unto you: Arm, Arm. Arm! ... we may resist the fiery darts of the wicked ... Let us admit no parley, give no quarter ... Satan, the worst of all our enemies, is called in Scripture a dragon, to note his malice; a serpent, to note his subtlety; a lion, to note his strength.

Lawson believes that the villagers must 'exercise true spiritual sympathy' with the young female accusers, who suffer 'Satan's malice' by divine permission. Further, those who witness their affliction must remember there is a divine precept that urges compassion—'Remember them that suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body ... Oh, pity, pity them! for the hand of the Lord hath touched them, and the malice of devils hath fallen upon them'.

In Lawson's text, the young accusers in their visible suffering have taken upon themselves, or have had visited upon them, the punishment of their community. Their afflicted bodies represent the afflicted body of Salem Village 'wracked and tormented' by sin. Factious Salem Village, in the early months of 1692, was receiving an object lesson in the consequences of a corrupt body politic. Salem Village had called down the devil's wrath by allowing the sins of contention and conflict to run riot. The young accusers were before their eyes as the embodiment of Satan's affliction. Being female added weight to their credibility, given the special relationship the daughters of Eve had to wickedness. In their torments at the hands of witches, they represented the tortured body of the village community, corrupted by internal conflict and sin, with a painful self-consciousness of depravity. These young women demonstrated the dark side of Puritan divinity, a divinity which included the wrath of God, who could and did visit his children with the fury of Satan, so they may better learn His lessons and mend their ways.

This concern over sinful communities had a resonance beyond the boundaries of Salem Village. The eldest of the young accusers, Mary Warren, aged twenty, was born in 1672. The two decades of her life saw the end of a dream of 'New-England', that while never a complete reality, between settlement and 1675 gave the appearance of such. In 1675, however, all this came to a sudden end, and New England suffered a series of disasters.
Calamity began with the outbreak of Metacomet's War in 1675-76. The Native American peoples of the region had reached the conclusion that English settlement posed a fundamental threat to their survival. When in 1675 a Plymouth court convicted three Wampanoag men for the murder of Native American converts, their leader Metacomet ordered attacks. From mid-1675 through 1676, Native Americans devastated the interior of New England, coming within twenty miles of Boston. The English won, but not before they had sustained terrible losses. One in every sixteen men of military age died in the course of a two-year conflict. At the end of the war 'twelve towns had been completely destroyed and half the towns in New England badly damaged. The war cost almost one hundred thousand pounds and all but crippled the colonial economy'. For the remainder of the century, Native American attack was a constant threat.

This disaster was followed by others. In 1677-78 many fell victim to a smallpox epidemic. In the 1670s and 1680s, the colony was at odds with the English crown over the revocation of the original charter and the imposition of a Royal Governor over the Dominion of New England. The establishment of Royal controls over the colony, particularly in affairs of trade and land title, was resisted by the colonists. The new governor, Edmond Andros, whose royalist style alone was enough to dismay most Puritans, failed to protect settlements from Native Americans, and pursued a failed campaign against them in Maine in 1688-89.

In response to the Glorious Revolution in England, the colonists rose in 1689 and overthrew Andros, but this did nothing to alleviate the situation. The ascension of William of Orange to the English throne inspired a declaration of war from the French in Canada, who actively assisted Native American raids on New English settlements. Morale in the colonies reached a new low in 1690 when a New English expedition against Quebec was a disaster, and at the same time a smallpox epidemic raged. In the summer of 1691, native Americans attacked the towns of Lancaster, Brookfield and Billerica.

In May 1692, a new charter was returned to New England. While this charter preserved some major tenets of colonial freedom, it also asserted that tolerance be extended to Quakers and Anglicans, and other dissenters. A direct blow to theocratic New Englanders. Richard Godbeer concludes that all these 'interrelated, alien, and intrusive forces, which the colonists equated with witchcraft, converged on a local level in Salem Village and Andover'. Andover was attacked by Native American forces in 1689 and 1691. In Salem Village there were many social and familial connections between accused witches and Quakers. 'Wherever New Englanders lived during these years, they experienced fear and uncertainty'. And none more so than the young accusers in the Salem trials. The manifold calamities of the latter seventeenth century had a specific impact in the lives of these young women.

The young female accusers in the Salem trials were all singlewomen. At an age when they would be awaiting marriage, judging their prospects on the basis of community and economy, particularly the availability of young men with land and a house, or a trade. Many of the young female accusers in the Salem trials were also servants, a common enough occupation for young singlewomen in early New England while they awaited marriage and child-bearing. However for
the young women in 1692 it was extremely uncertain when this conclusion to servitude would occur, indeed if it would occur at all.

The economic disaster of Native American war had taken its toll. In order to be marriageable, young women had to have dowries, and destroyed or diminished estates did not provide them. Failure to marry could extend servitude for a very long time. Sarah Churchill, for example, did not marry until she was thirty-seven. Mercy Lewis married at twenty-eight. It is entirely feasible they remained in servitude from 1692. We know Mercy Lewis was in service with George Burroughs in 1680. Her period of service could well have lasted two decades.

The marriage prospects for young women were seriously confounded by another factor. The period 1680–1710 saw unparalleled population growth in New England, as the original colonies outgrew themselves. Despite the unplumbed vastness of the American continent, the original Puritan colonies suffered a serious shortage of land and, without access to land, marriage was impossible for many. Overpopulation increased the age at which women married and the numbers of women who never married. Young men exacerbated the situation by marrying away from the community, in search of better material conditions. Carol Karlsen wrote that ‘most young females coming of age in these towns faced a more uncertain future than that faced by their brothers—or that faced years before by their mothers and grandmothers’.

These economic factors decreasing marriage prospects for young women were particularly relevant to the entire group of young female accusers in Salem Village in 1692. Karlsen found twenty-four young afflicted accusers in the Salem trials, all of whom were over sixteen and singlewomen. Of these, seventeen had lost one or both their parents. Thirteen had lost their fathers. In early New England, organisation of families was unrelievedly patriarchal. It was fathers who provided dowries and negotiated marriages. Without fathers these young women had to rely on their masters, who could also be relatives, to find husbands for them.

These parental deaths were largely from Native American attacks. Sarah Churchill and Mercy Lewis, for example, had lived in the outlying settlements in Maine. Carol Karlsen states that as a group:

these young orphans played the most dramatic role in the events of 1692, naming as the cause of their plight not only the people their neighbours already assumed were witches but others never before suspected ... Some of these previously unknown witches were people the possessed had known, seen or heard of in their former Maine communities.

I find this loss of fathers to be one of the most salient aspects of the group of afflicted accusers in 1692. Just as the bodies of the young accusers symbolised the conflicted polity of Salem Village, their fatherless status, while having economic and social ramifications, made them particularly iconic. I believe the accusations against Proctor, Jacobs, Burroughs and Willard can be explored through this theme. Demographically, these male witches represented first and second generation men. Proctor was sixty at death. Jacobs is described as
elderly and grey-headed. Burroughs was forty, and John Willard about thirty-eight. The young accusers represented the third generation; those coming of age in last decade of the seventeenth century. To their young accusers, Willard, Proctor, Burroughs and Jacobs all represented their father's and grandfather's generations.

One of the most apparent characteristics of the witchcraft cases brought by these young women against these men are the elements of aggression and violence. In each case there are instances of an act of violence or verbal hostility. All the young women were subject to violent affliction by spectres of these male witches in court, which in some cases apparently resulted in physical injuries. Other episodes of violent spectral affliction, such as drowning, beating, pinching and biting, occurred in and out of court. There are episodes of 'real' violence, particularly in the case of John Willard, who was accused of beating his wife. George Burroughs, it was claimed, was 'Infamous for the Barborous usage of his two late Wives, all the country over'. And in all cases, multiple accusations of murder from shades of the dead, including multiple accusations of infanticide. Further, Willard, Jacobs and Proctor were open in their scorn for the witch court, and met its inquiry with overt aggression and hostility.

The American historian John Demos has considered anger, witchcraft and Puritan community. In a study of Plymouth Colony, he concluded:

> It has long been assumed that the people of this time and culture were peculiarly concerned—'neurotic', if you will—about all aspects of sex ... Perhaps though [it was] a different bug bear in ... their psyches—namely, a tight cluster of anxieties about aggression ... Here it seems was the one area of emotional and interpersonal life about which the Puritans were most concerned, confused, conflicted.48

From this, Demos extrapolates an 'adult theme' of chronic contention, an apparent over-concern with situations of conflict and dispute. Certainly the court records of early America provide ample confirmation that New Englanders were particularly contentious.49 John Demos has also considered witchcraft in early New England, and specifically the connections between witchcraft and anger. He writes that witches 'gave free rein to a whole gamut of hostile and aggressive feelings'. This, he writes, 'provide[s] strong support for the general proposition that the psychological conflicts underlying the early New England belief in witchcraft had much more to do with aggressive impulses that with libidinal ones'.50 This convergence of anger, fathers and grandfathers, and male witchcraft in the accusations of the afflicted young women in Salem Village is suggestive of a broader theme within Puritan culture at the end of the seventeenth century.

The 'interrelated, alien and intrusive forces' that had wreaked such havoc in the lives of the young accusers were all masculine forces. Angry men had surrounded these young women all their lives, whether in attacking forces of Native Americans, or the warring factions of Salem Village. But Salem Village was troubled by masculine forces beyond the spectres of angry male witches or attacking Native Americans. Salem Village, indeed all of New England, lived in the shadow of the legendary founding fathers, whose 'errand in the wilderness'
to create God's society for God's chosen people, was a golden future and spiritual mission specifically feared lost by the apostasy of the third generation. The distress caused by the many disasters of the 1680s and 1690s was underscored by an obsessive anxiety about the third generation falling away from Puritanism and its tenets.

The loss of this golden future meant more to the young women of Salem Village than it did perhaps to other members of the community. For them, the loss of future was a hard reality. They were orphaned singlewomen, of marriageable age, schooled in Puritan social roles for women, but bereft of the community structures which supported these expectations of marriage, family and household. These young women were heirs to a society that had ceased to exist, living in a community clinging to a myth of ideal Puritan society.

These young women were fatherless; bereft of possibly the most important shaper of Puritan experience. So was New English community at large. The clerical literature of these closing decades of early modern America shows a community mourning for lost fathers. In finality it was not just human fathers whose loss was being felt, but rather the loss of God's fatherhood. The freedom with which the Devil assaulted Salem Village, and the manifold disasters of the period 1675–1700, were understood as a measure of God's anger that his chosen people had fallen from His laws into apostasy: a divine, masculine anger symbolised by the assaults of these male witches. The young accusers in the 1692 trials were representatives of the third generation. They felt themselves subject to the Devil's attacks because, as the clergy constantly reiterated, they were the 'children' who had fallen into apostasy, whose failure to experience the crucial conversion experience and become full members of churches was interpreted as a wilful subversion of the original Puritan mission.

Further, this third generation was articulately blamed by their parents for the corruption and loss of Puritan community. Second-generation clergymen constantly reiterated a theme of declension, and expounded the foundation mythology of the first generation, pointing out, in detail and at length, the failures and shortcomings of the third generation. The parental generation actively blamed its own failure to make a theological vision thrive upon its children. The third generation of New Englanders were being forced to confront the deepest fear of Puritanism, articulated since its English origins—that God's society was lost, His laws unobserved and the Devil given free rein against sinful children who would never see heaven, never be saved.

Such was the world of the young accusers in Salem Village in 1692. These young women were not malignant or mentally ill. In the accusations of the young afflicted accusers, aimed at specific men in the community, significant themes from the culture and economy of late seventeenth-century New England combine. The representation by the young accusers of the male witches is deeply symbolic of the forces that had shattered their lives, and made their future a dark and haunted place, having more in common with the Kingdom of Satan, than the visible kingdom of God. A future in which they were condemned to servitude for masters whose presence underscored their father's absence, and who they themselves constructed as witches—the first servants of the Devil. That in Salem Village, in 1692, these young women should articulate enormous fear of being attacked by 'interrelated, alien and intrusive forces' does not seem to
me to be a response from pathology, rather it is a response that integrates the various aspects of experience and beliefs of those who were living a long-predicted community nightmare.

Finally, my point is about historiography rather than about history. I wish to remove interpretations of female accusers in witchcraft trials from the traditional categories of feminist analysis predicated on polarised understandings of gender. I want to be able to move beyond analyses that assume men have a monopoly on social power, and subjugate women as a result of this monopoly. I believe that I have demonstrated that women, even young women, should not be understood as social beings unable to initiate or pursue individual interests, bound by their gender to serve patriarchal culture in a never-ending, self-perpetuating logic of female subjugation. Women, I would argue, even in a patriarchal past, were not blank canvases on which male vested interest was inscribed. If we continue to regard female accusers in witchcraft trials as people who could never fully self-determine within social, economic, religious and moral community, I think we run the risk of replicating in feminist theory the basic categories of male elites in the early modern period—women owned by male community, created by male community and controlled by male community.

Part of the difficulty in finding new approaches to female accusers is the persistence of the view that popular witchcraft prosecution was pathological, an irrational deviation from the central project of achieving modernity in early modern society. I tend to agree with Robert Muchembled who, some years ago, made the point that witchcraft prosecution should be seen in relation to normal social operation, as endemic rather than epidemic. While popular witchcraft accusation remains seen as irrational it is very difficult to argue that the many female accusers were acting in coherent ways.

Within the current understandings of women and their involvement in witchcraft trials, it is very difficult to ascribe accusing women an agenda of their own, or vested interest, or social agency. In the drama of witchcraft cases, it is the female victims who have held the attention of historians for the last two decades. I would argue for a shift in focus to deal with the idea that women who accused witches did so, not as a result of some deep and abiding, historically contiguous, psychological dysfunction peculiar to women, but in response to the forces that shaped their lives, and the belief systems in which they lived. I find it immensely unsatisfactory to pursue only two lines of inquiry concerning women's involvement in witchcraft trials. Women are either abused, powerless and marginalised witches, or the hysterical, traumatised, patriarchally-identified accusers, whose actions are understood either in terms of disease and dysfunction, and themselves as traitors to their sex.

Appendix:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age at Accusation</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abigail Williams</td>
<td>11 years</td>
<td>orphan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann Putnam Jr</td>
<td>13 years</td>
<td>parents living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Hubbard</td>
<td>17 years</td>
<td>orphan?/servant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Booth</td>
<td>18 years</td>
<td>family living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susannah Sheldon</td>
<td>18 years</td>
<td>father dead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Walcott</td>
<td>18 years</td>
<td>mother dead</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ELIZABETH KENT

Mercy Lewis	19 years	orphan/servant
Mary Warren	20 years	orphan/servant
Sarah Churchill	20 years	orphan/servant

All young female accusers, Salem Village, 1692 = 26
One or both parents dead = 17
Fathers dead = 13

ENDNOTES

1 I would like to thank the following people for assistance with this paper: the 17th Century Seminar at La Trobe University, particularly those present at the first airing of these ideas. For more immediate input, I would like to thank Charles Zika, Annie Harper, Graham Willett and Joy Damousi. I would also like to thank the Postgraduate Seminar in the History Dept., Melbourne University, who have embraced the black arts with great enthusiasm.
5 Purkiss, ‘Women’s Stories’, p. 408.
8 Rosenthal, Salem Story, p. 41.
9 For the names and ages of the core group see Appendix. I have added Sarah Churchill as she was responsible for accusations against her master, George Jacobs Sr.
10 Rosenthal, Salem Story, p. 41.
11 John Indian was the husband of Tituba, and also a slave. There were some male afflicted accusers in the Salem trials though very few.
12 P. Boyer & S. Nissenbaum, The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692, 3 vols., Da Capo Press, New York, 1977, pp. 823-6 (hereafter SWP). In all cases where I quote from court testimony, I have silently editorialised. These documents are very complex and, as many were taken in the court as events proceeded, contain interwoven narratives of witchcraft accusation. I have made the meaning clearer in all cases.
17 Lawson, Brief and True Narrative, in Burr, p. 162.


Karslen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England*, Vintage, New York, 1987, p. 251. Karslen uses the term ‘possessed’ to describe the affliction of these young women. I would emphasise that ‘affliction’ and ‘possession’ were understood as different phenomena in this culture. ‘Affliction’ was caused by an attack of a witch, whereas ‘possession’ involved the inhabitation of a woman’s body by a demonic spirit, usually without the medium of a witch.


Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, Chapter Seven: Brands pluck’d out of the Burning.


Godbeer, *The Devil’s Dominion*, pp. 184–8. Billerica was the home of Martha Carrier, who was also executed on 19 August. Her family were blamed for bringing smallpox to Andover.

Godbeer, *The Devil’s Dominion*, pp. 188–204.

Godbeer, *The Devil’s Dominion*, p. 186.
Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, p. 228. Karlsen also notes that Mary Watkins accused herself of witchcraft and then asked to be sold into servitude in Virginia. Virginia had a serious women-shortage for much of its early years, it could be her prospects would be ‘better’ on the Chesapeake.


Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, p. 229.


