



The Rise of the Modern Witch: Analyzing Devon Cole's 'W.I.T.C.H.' in Feminist Discourse

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Abstract

This scholarly investigation critically examines Devon Cole's song, "W.I.T.C.H.," within the framework of feminist discourse and its implications for women's autonomy over their bodies. The study pursues two primary objectives: firstly, it examines Cole's lyrical portrayal of witches as emblematic of "Women In Total Control of Herself," and secondly, it assesses the resonance of these lyrics with established feminist theories, particularly within the context of Reproductive Justice. This inquiry is contemporarily situated amidst pivotal developments such as the 2022 Roe vs. Wade decision reversal and the emergence of stringent anti-abortion legislation. The enduring symbol of the witch has consistently persisted as a representation of feminist resistance, retaining its relevance in contemporary popular culture. Artists like Cole strategically leverage feminist theories to infuse their creative works with social commentary, thereby facilitating the dissemination of gender-related concerns. By employing the witch symbol, Cole and her contemporaries actively challenge prevailing societal norms, engendering meaningful dialogues on issues pertaining to women's rights and autonomy. In sum, this paper illuminates the focal point of its analysis, Devon Cole's "W.I.T.C.H.," within the broader context of feminist theory. It underscores the significance of the feminist reinterpretation of the witch archetype and its pertinence to contemporary gender-related matters while also acknowledging the broader sociopolitical backdrop against which this discourse unfolds.

Keywords: Bodily Autonomy, feminist resistance, popular culture, Reproductive Justice, witch archetype

1 Introduction: The Resurgence of the Witch

In her TikTok hit single “W.I.T.C.H.,” Devon Cole (2022) delves into significant themes of feminist resistance (Woltal, 2022). Cole cleverly uses the acronym W.I.T.C.H. to represent a “Woman In Total Control of Herself” (0:23-0:28).

This idea is not new, as ancient myths and traditions have depicted witches as feminist freedom fighters, healers, and scholars. Matilda Joselyn Gage (1893) expressed this perspective in her book *Women, Church, and State*, and it has continued to be embraced by Anglo-European traditions since the 1960s (Davies, 2023). Musicians have also incorporated the power of the witch into their songs, from the *Symphonie fantastique* to Yoko Ono’s “Yes I’m A Witch” (Sollée, 2017). Furthermore, witches have a historical connection to feminist concepts such as Reproductive Justice, abortion, midwifery, and Bodily Autonomy (Ehrenreich & English, 2010). By examining how pop culture portrays the witch, we can see how feminist theory is utilized as a form of resistance against patriarchy. The study pursues two primary objectives: firstly, it examines Cole’s lyrical portrayal of witches as emblematic of “Women In Total Control of Herself,” and secondly, it assesses the resonance of these lyrics with established feminist theories, particularly within the context of Reproductive Justice. This inquiry is contemporarily situated amidst pivotal developments such as the 2022 Roe vs. Wade decision reversal and the emergence of stringent anti-abortion legislation (Bustos, 2023; Nash & Ephross, 2022). Anti-abortion laws affect not only cis-gender women but also trans-women, trans-men, historically marginalized individuals, non-binary individuals, LGBTQ+ individuals, etc. This attack on marginalized individuals’ rights has brought feminist issues to a crescendo across the country and reinforces the potent feminist concept that “the personal is political” (Hanisch, 2021). The witch symbolizes power and strength in feminist resistance to patriarchy. In today’s political climate, where Bodily Autonomy is threatened, it is crucial to explore the witch archetype’s resurgence in popular culture.

2 Literature Review

This literature review explores the multifaceted symbolism and significance of witches in various contexts, including their historical persecution, their role as healers, and their connection to Reproductive Justice. The mythos of the witch has a rich history that extends beyond Anglo-European cultures, and they have been both revered and feared throughout time. The witch burnings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, known as the Burning Times, represented a violent assault on powerful women and their autonomy, driven by patriarchal systems and religious justifications (Sollée, 2017; Starhawk, 2021). The association of witches with healing and medicine further challenged the patriarchal order and the dominance of the Church (Gage, 1893). The concept of Reproductive Justice is explored in this literature review and is linked to the idea of witches as symbols of power and physical autonomy (Eaton & Stephens, 2020; Ross & Solinger, 2017). Finally, the inclusion of lived experiences and subjective perspectives in feminist theory is emphasized as a means of making theory more accessible and relevant (hooks, 1991). By delving into these themes, this literature review aims to shed light on the enduring fascination and significance of witches in contemporary discourse.

2.1 Witches, The Church, and Witch Burnings

The witch archetype has a diverse and extensive history across various cultures worldwide. While this paper focuses on Anglo-European witches, it is important to acknowledge the global presence of witches throughout time. The witch embodies both power and wickedness, carrying multifaceted meanings. In popular culture, efforts have been made to reclaim and restore the witch’s lore, while patriarchal systems perceive the witch as a danger and subject her to

persecution. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Europe witnessed the Burning Times, a period marked by widespread witch burnings and the murder of hundreds of thousands of individuals, predominantly women (Starhawk, 2021). The Burning Times aimed to suppress women's power, sensuality, and healing practices, contributing to the dominance of male authority. The influential manual, *The Malleus Maleficarum* (1486), portrayed witches as driven by insatiable lust and associated with immorality, solidifying their persecution (Sollée, 2017). This gynocidal murder was justified by the notion of witches' alleged connection to the devil and their seductive nature (Daly, 2016). The witch hunts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries transformed the perception of witches from societal outcasts to dangerous threats. A recurring theme prevalent in the theoretical discourse on sexuality, extending from the era following *The Malleus Maleficarum* (1486), is the implicit and frequently emphatic assumption that a woman's perilous allure and her dominant influence stem primarily from her perceived capacity for destructive sensuality (Rountree, 1997). A fundamental concern for those engaged in the pursuit of witches was the precise delineation of the concepts of a witch and witchcraft, which, over time, shifted. Bodin (1580) articulated a definition of a witch as someone who consciously seeks to achieve something through diabolical methods. Belief in the existence of the devil emerges as a fundamental element in the context of witchcraft within its European manifestations (Fudge, 2006). This belief system ties into the argument put forth by Daly (2016), suggesting that witches were frequently women who defied conventional norms by rejecting marriage and resisting assimilation into patriarchal structures, rendering them objects of fear and eradication. Understanding this historical context is crucial to comprehending the persistent use of the witch as a mythical symbol. The witch represents power, agency, and sovereignty, explaining its repeated invocation by feminist movements and pop culture artists. Simultaneously, the witch burnings expose the dark roots of patriarchy, wherein powerful women are targeted and murdered when perceived as challenging patriarchal order. The mythos of the witch has a deep and rich history. From Marie Laveau, the 19th-century Voodoo queen, to Yamauba, the Japanese crone, the mythology of witches has been woven throughout cultures and has served as a figure to both inspire and ignite fear (Sollée, 2017). The witch holds both power and wickedness and through this dichotomy, she has come to represent a diverse array of meanings. In certain instances, the witch is held in high esteem, as evidenced by various examples in popular culture that seek to restore the witch's lore. However, within patriarchal systems, the witch is viewed as a danger and is pursued and executed (Daly, 2016). This desire for control, projected onto women, persists as a recurrent motif in these scholarly deliberations and is essential to analyze as it manifests in the present. The historical backdrop outlined in "Witches, The Church, and Witch Burnings" lays the foundation for comprehending the intricate perceptions and roles of witches in society. In the forthcoming section on "Witches as Healers," this exploration delves into the multifaceted nature of these figures. Here, the literature examines how witches were intricately connected with midwifery and medical practices, shedding light on how their profound knowledge of healing became a source of persecution. This transition highlights the profound paradox surrounding witches and underscores their enduring significance within the realms of both persecution and healing.

2.2 Witches as Healers

In *Woman, Church, and State*, Gage (1893) recounts the connection between witches and the Church and asserts that a foundational belief taught by the Church was that women were out to destroy all forms of religion because of their wickedness and their most potent weapon was thought to be witchcraft. While churches feared witches due to their proclaimed "wickedness," Gage perceptively notes that "The witch was in reality the profoundest thinker, the most advanced scientist of those ages" (p. 157). The witches' intellect and tenacity challenged patriarchal dogma, which relegated women to subordinate roles, and therefore, witches

represented opposition to the Church. In another vital commentary, Gage recounts that witches were connected with medicine and that witch murder was justified by the Church due to certain wise women's "superior medical and surgical knowledge" (p. 157). Rountree (1977) notes that midwives were perceived as custodians of knowledge concerning contraception and abortion, thereby empowering women to exercise agency over their reproductive capacities and circumvent the ecclesiastical authority's involvement in matters of procreation. Ehrenreich and English (2010) also recount, in *Witches, Midwives, & Nurses*, how witches were associated with medical knowledge. In the text, the authors recount how witches were connected to midwifery and medicine, and because of their healing capabilities, they were perceived as a threat to the Catholic Church. The authors state, "The witch was a triple threat to the Church: she was a woman, [...] part of an organized underground of peasant women [and...] a healer" (p. 49). The witches' curative abilities stood in stark contrast to European medicine, which reduced medicine to a secular science and attempted to eradicate feminine healers. Many historians, including scholars such as Keith Thomas (1971) and Gustav Henningsen (1986), have extensively documented a compelling association between women who faced accusations of witchcraft and those esteemed as knowledgeable figures within their respective communities. These sagacious women frequently assumed multifaceted roles as healers, midwives, trusted advisors, diviners, and practitioners of traditional mystical and magical arts, thereby contributing to the intricate tapestry of community life (Rountree, 1977). Throughout this essay, the witch is connected to various themes and holds a significant role as a symbol of healing. Building upon the exploration of the complex roles of witches as healers and the historical significance of their medical knowledge, the focus now shifts to the feminist theory of Reproductive Justice. This connection facilitates a bridge between the historical context and contemporary gender issues, with a specific emphasis on the intersection of reproductive rights and autonomy within the feminist discourse.

2.3 Reproductive Justice

Reproductive Justice is an essential concept in feminism that connects to Bodily Autonomy and reclaiming power, as seen in the new "generation witch" (Solleé, 2017, p. 10). The origins of the Reproductive Justice framework can be traced back to the early 1990s, stemming from the advocacy efforts of grassroots health organizations led by women of color in the United States. Initially developed to emphasize the intersections between reproductive health and social justice, Reproductive Justice subsequently evolved into an essential tool for community leaders. It offered valuable guidance for recognizing the interconnectedness of reproductive oppression within the broader context of the human rights struggle (Eaton & Stephens, 2020). Ross and Solinger (2017) define Reproductive Justice and include three core principles: "(1) the right not to have a child; (2) the right to have a child; and (3) the right to parent children in safe and healthy environments" (p. 9). Reproductive Justice is fundamental to asserting power over our bodies and pushes against patriarchal beliefs that seek to control women and other marginalized individuals' bodies and strip them of Bodily Autonomy. This stripping of autonomy can be seen in the current anti-abortion legislature surging through the United States after the cataclysmic overturning of *Roe vs. Wade* in 2022 (Bustos, 2023; Nash & Ephross, 2022). The concept of Reproductive Justice is directly related to the song "W.I.T.C.H.," and this theory is further discussed in the section "My Body, My Choice." This theory can serve as a basis for comprehending the concept of Bodily Autonomy, signifying that one's body belongs to oneself emphasizing individual ownership and agency over one's own body (O'Brien & Newport, 2023). Bodily Autonomy, as Christian (2023) asserts, places agency squarely in the hands of the individual, advocating for self-autonomy. Witches, as highlighted in the preceding section on "Witches as Healers," encapsulate these fundamental feminist principles. They symbolize freedom, power, and independence, all of which align closely with the core tenets

of Reproductive Justice and Bodily Autonomy threatened by the overturning of *Roe vs. Wade*. Echoing these concerns, Albaladejo (2016) articulates in “A ‘Witch Hunt Against Poor Women’” that across the Americas, abortion legislation is adversely affecting the well-being and safety of women. The stringent reproductive policies prevalent in nations like El Salvador, Colombia, the United States, and beyond are compelling women to resort to unsafe procedures. This confluence of ideas underscores the significance of Bodily Autonomy and the enduring relevance of the witch archetype in the context of contemporary gender-related issues, which affirms the next section of the literature review that emphasizes the importance of generating “Theory from Lived Experience.” By generating this type of embodied theory, individuals can explore concepts such as Reproductive Justice and apply them to their personal lives.

2.4 Theory from Lived Experience

In academia, subjective writing is frequently discouraged, and objective writing is preferred, yet many feminist writers continue to question this constricting idea and highlight the value of including subjectivity in writing. In *Theory as Liberatory Practice*, hooks (1991) critiques academia and writes that theory is often used in academic settings to create a hierarchy of intellectual competence. In this hierarchy, the only work considered truly theoretical is abstract, jargonistic, challenging to comprehend, and contains complex references that are often not sufficiently explained. Hooks remarks on the importance of generating theory through lived experiences and asserts that when we theorize from lived experiences, “theory [can] be a healing place” as opposed to a space that often leaves individuals “stumbling bleary-eyed from classroom settings feeling [confused and] humiliated” (pp. 2, 5). Therefore, we need to recognize and honor theory that emerges from lived experiences in order to make feminist theories accessible and applicable. Theory can be generated in infinite ways, from poetry, art, storytelling, conversation, music, etc. As we will see in the “W.I.T.C.H.” lyrical analysis section “My Body, My Choice,” feminist theories are frequently incorporated into artistic works in order to connect individuals to academic concepts (Cole, 2022). One prominent way that individuals are able to connect with accessible feminist theories in artistic work is through the use of social media and hashtags, which will be explored in the section “The Rise of the Modern Witch” through the focus on WitchTok (TikTok 2023, B; Walker, 2020). In this digital age, social media platforms have revolutionized the dissemination of theories by breaking down traditional barriers to knowledge accessibility. They provide a dynamic space where diverse voices can participate in meaningful discussions, share insights, and contribute to the evolution of feminist discourse. Specifically, platforms like TikTok have emerged as powerful tools for democratizing the exchange of ideas. They enable users to create and share content that not only introduces complex theories but also makes them relatable and engaging to a wider audience. With an understanding of the transformative potential of social media platforms and their role in facilitating the dissemination of feminist theories, this paper will delve into a specific case study that exemplifies the power of these platforms in contemporary feminist discourse. In the following section, “The Rise of the Modern Witch,” I will explore how artists like Devon Cole have harnessed the capabilities of TikTok to amplify their creative expressions and engage with a global audience.

3 The Rise of the Modern Witch

Cole’s song “W.I.T.C.H.” was released on July 7th, 2022, under Artista Records. However, prior to its release, Cole garnered significant attention on TikTok by sharing teaser videos featuring snippets of the song’s lyrics (Woltal, 2022). This pre-release strategy on TikTok proved successful, as highlighted by Major (2022), who reported that Cole amassed over 40 million views on the platform and received approximately 300,000 pre-saves for the song. The

song's popularity has continued to grow on TikTok, with users creating more than 23,000 videos in which they dance and embrace the empowering messages conveyed by Cole's poignant lyrics (TikTok, 2023, A). It is worth noting that Cole's (2022) use of the acronym "W.I.T.C.H." to represent "Woman In Total Control of Herself" is not a novel invention. The history behind the transformation of the word "witch" into an acronym is significant and will be explored in depth in subsequent sections. Moreover, the song "W.I.T.C.H." has resonated with various feminist organizations, indicating its impact and presence within these communities. This section will further delve into the emergence of the modern witch archetype and its manifestation in contemporary popular culture and online techno-communities.

3.1 The W.I.T.C.H.(s) Emerge

Daly and Caputi (1987) note that the acronym "W.I.T.C.H." has been used for several radical feminist groups. Some examples listed in the text are the Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell (1968), the Women's Inspirational Terrorist Conspiracy from Harvard (1972), and the Wild Independent Thinking Crones and Hags (1985). The Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell crafted the "W.I.T.C.H. Manifesto" featured in *Burn It Down* (2020). In the manifesto, the organization writes that witches were "the original [...] resistance fighters" and fought against the subjugation of women (p. 603). Further on, the authors write that witches were the original abolitionists and birth-control practitioners and dared to be liberated, a concept that was explored earlier in the "Witches as Healers" portion of the literature review. This concept of female liberation and Bodily Autonomy is imperative to the paper, and the manifesto notes that because of witches' intelligence, rebellion, and sexual freedom, "this possibly explains why [they were] burned" (p. 603). The Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell created public demonstrations known as "zaps," which combined various elements such as protest, poetry, and witchcraft. Rountree (1997) writes that an essential element of the organization was fighting against capitalism and class inequities. The group performed several hexes during their time, from hexing the inauguration of Richard Nixon to protesting the Chicago Transit Authority's fare increase. Several branches emerged throughout the country and altered the acronym to represent the core concepts of each specific group, such as the Women Inspired to Commit Herstory and Women's Independent Taxpayers, Consumers, and Homemakers. The term "witch" symbolizes a woman who refuses to conform to patriarchal norms, essentially challenging the established political order. If a witch is defined as a woman who resists complying with male expectations, she represents an early manifestation of feminism, and contemporary feminists can be seen as the latest embodiments of this tradition which will be explored in "The Modern Witch: From Sluts to Swift." This perspective served as a catalyst for activist movements like the Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell (WITCH), which advocated for women's rights and autonomy by embracing the provocative identity of the witch (Zwissler, 2018).

3.2 The Modern Witch: From Sluts to Swift

The legacy of the Burning Times endures in contemporary society, manifesting in the continued censure of women expressing sensuality or asserting their agency. Audre Lorde (1978) discerningly addresses the patriarchal suppression of female sensuality, observing that "Women so empowered are [seen as] dangerous. So we are taught to separate the erotic" (p. 55). This separation of sensuality from empowered women can be traced to the historical linkage of witches with seduction and sensuality, as documented in *The Malleus Maleficarum* (Kramer & Sprenger, 1486). Sollée (2017) astutely parallels the terms "witches" and "sluts," positing that "slut" has evolved into the "witch" of the twenty-first century, thus exploring the intersections of these labels (p. 6). The witch archetype epitomizes a "Woman In Total Control

of Herself” (Cole, 2022), a figure possessing not only Bodily Autonomy but also the power to govern her reproductive choices. In this context, Reproductive Justice theory comes to the fore, accentuating the significance of autonomy in reproductive decisions, encompassing choices concerning contraception, abortion, and healthcare. The term “slut,” often laden with derogatory connotations, can be reclaimed to denote individuals who exercise agency over their bodies and embrace their sensuality. This dual association with power underscores the patriarchal apprehension of both “sluts” and “witches,” as these figures symbolize autonomy, tenacity, and defiance. Sollée (2017) delves further into the renaissance of the modern witch, introducing the concept of a “generation witch,” where empowerment forms the crux of their appeal (p. 10). This “generation witch” radiates power and channels it into art and music, inspiring others along the way. In the realm of contemporary popular culture, artists like Cole, renowned for her composition “W.I.T.C.H.,” and Beyoncé in *Lemonade*, strategically evoke and harness the symbolical might of the witch. As astutely elucidated by Sollée (2017), this cultural resurgence underscores that “the witch is back,” emerging across myriad facets of contemporary popular culture (p. 128). To render a more academically grounded interpretation, it is imperative to scrutinize these artistic expressions through the lens of established feminist theories and frameworks. Notably, Taylor Swift (2020) dedicated an entire album, *willow (the witch collection)*, to this iconic symbol. The album houses multiple renditions of the song “willow,” each infused with a distinct magical essence. This artistic endeavor can be analyzed within the purview of feminist discourse, unveiling its reconfiguration of the witch archetype as a symbol of empowerment, agency, and resistance. Furthermore, Kimmortal’s (2019) composition “Sad Femme Club” serves as a feminist anthem that seamlessly intertwines themes of Bodily Autonomy with the symbolism of witchcraft. Kimmortal lyrically asserts, “Expert of self/They pray to moon, she raps in spells” (1:51-1:53), adroitly blending the notion of self-mastery with the mystical realm of spellcasting. This fusion not only underscores the enduring prevalence of witchy symbolism in contemporary culture but also accentuates its role in advancing feminist narratives. Consequently, the sustained resurgence of the witch archetype in popular culture invites thorough analysis through the multifaceted lens of feminist theory, which illuminates its enduring allure and its capacity to symbolize empowerment, resilience, and transformation. One space where the new “generation witch” is emerging is through #WitchTok, which will be explored further in the upcoming section. This platform was pivotal in the proliferation of Cole’s (2022) song “W.I.T.C.H.” and allowed it to amass a vibrant community of techno-witches.

3.3 WitchTok

Witches are rising in popularity through the hashtag #WitchTok. As of April 2023, the hashtag #WitchTok had 41 billion views on TikTok (2023, B). The hashtag has thousands of videos created, spanning from topics such as practical household magic to casting spells on ex-lovers (King, 2022). The hashtag creates a community or web of people who come together to share a common goal. By normalizing witchcraft, individuals can explore their relationship around magic and connect with others. Witchcraft is on the rise and has permeated mainstream culture through #WitchTok (Walker, 2020). This form of social media is incredibly potent with its short videos that catch people’s attention, and through this platform, Cole was able to launch her song for the world to engage with. Users were able to take her song and interact with it, creating videos casting themselves as witches and embodying the song lyrics. One individual with the username “@jonesforpresident2024” (2023) created a video that received 96,300 likes. Jones was dancing to the song “W.I.T.C.H.” and announced her run for the 2024 presidential election, claiming that “it’s time for change, and we can make it happen.” Another TikTok user, “@3kidsandabroomstick,” posted a video using the song and demonstrated “quick witchy ways [...] to protect my space” (2023). This creative video showed various

mystical tips, from cleansing their home with juniper to placing brooms above doorways. These individuals, along with many others, used the song “W.I.T.C.H.” to reclaim their power, embrace magic, and advocate for change. Cole’s song created a unique community of individuals coming together to amplify the song lyrics, generate their interpretations of the song, and advocate for women’s and other marginalized individuals’ rights. This digital resurgence of witchcraft on platforms like TikTok serves as a contemporary manifestation of the age-old symbol of the witch, aligning with feminist principles and setting the stage for a deeper exploration of the song “W.I.T.C.H.” in the context of feminist theories.

4 My Body My Choice: What does it mean to be a “Woman In Total Control of Herself” (“W.I.T.C.H.”)

In this section, an analysis of the song “W.I.T.C.H.” will be conducted to explore its alignment with feminist theories, specifically Reproductive Justice and Bodily Autonomy. By examining the song’s lyrics in relation to feminist frameworks, the objective is to highlight how the artist, Cole, evokes the mythical figure of the witch and integrates feminist concepts to generate profound theoretical insights. Cole affirms this connection in an interview with Arunarsirakul (2022), stating, “‘W.I.T.C.H.’ is a song that reclaims the witch as a symbol of women’s resistance. It celebrates women’s strength, autonomy, and rebellion – traits that contradict the patriarchal idea of what a woman should be.” This statement by the artist underscores the explicit link between the song “W.I.T.C.H.” and the concept of the witch as a symbol of women’s resistance, aligning with Gage’s (1893) assertions in *Women, Church, and State*. Cole’s song lyrics tap into a rich feminist history that embraces the witch archetype and channels her powers as a means of challenging patriarchal structures.

4.1 Reclaiming Power

In the clever bridge to “W.I.T.C.H.,” Cole sings, “And she don’t wanna be anybody else/She’s a woman in total control of herself/It’s such a wonder to be under her spell/ What a woman, in total control of herself” (2022, 0:20-0:35). In this section, the artist transforms the word “witch” to mean a “Woman In Total Control of Herself” (W.I.T.C.H.) and also uses the word “spell” in order to further ground the song into the realm of witchcraft. Often, spells are associated with magic and power and are a “set of words known by Crones to have Be-Speaking power” (Daly & Caputi, 1987, p. 165). Cole uses the “Be-Speaking power” of TikTok in order to cast these words out to her community and, in doing so, casts off the patriarchy. Being a “W.I.T.C.H.” represents Bodily Autonomy because she has the power to control her body, which further connects to the concept of Reproductive Justice (Ross & Solinger, 2017). Cole is articulating a discourse where women are in control. This concept is being targeted daily with more restrictive anti-abortion legislation being proposed, such as the extreme proposal by South Carolina legislatures in 2022 for the death penalty for individuals who receive an abortion (Bustos, 2023). Anti-abortion rhetoric aims to displace Bodily Autonomy and instead place it in state governmental control, forcing women to give birth akin to the disturbing dystopian narratives prophesized in *The Handmaid’s Tale* (Atwood, 1985). Lyons (2022) affirms, “We must remember that there is a clear pattern [...] of lawmakers standardizing womanhood as a factory for reproduction.” In order to challenge being a “factory for reproduction,” feminist theories and feminist pop culture songs such as “W.I.T.C.H.” remind us of the importance of Bodily Autonomy and having total control of ourselves and our choices. Cole notes the connection of witches to Bodily Autonomy and states in an interview, “Some say that witches were the original resistance fighters, healers, abortionists, and there was and is a great deal of paranoia around that” (Arunarsirakul, 2022). It is imperative to remember this “paranoia” Cole is speaking about because it was this paranoia and fear that led to the gynocide

of witches in the past, and the same paranoia that weaving through modern patriarchal paradigms seeking to control women's bodies and suppress powerful women. The "resistance fighters" were witches, and this fight can still be seen through pop culture lyrics that call upon the mythos of the witch to conjure her fiery essence.

4.2 Embracing the Dark

Another vital lyric in the song "W.I.T.C.H." is, "Come out and play, it's fun in the dark" (Cole, 2022, 1:22-1:25). In this verse, Cole is critiquing the fear of darkness perpetuated in Western myth-making. Often, darkness is associated with sin and evil, as demonstrated in the film *Star Wars: A New Hope*, which sets up a dichotomy between good and evil—light and dark (Caputi, 2004). Other times, darkness is associated with temptation and sensuality, as seen with the iconic character Ursula, the sea witch, from *The Little Mermaid*, who dwells in a dark, womb-like cave practicing magic. Patriarchal myth creates a dichotomy between the goddess (light) and the monster (dark), splitting these parts and fearing the monstrous female. As Caputi (2004) notes, "Following patriarchal paradigms, popular stereotypes reflect the splitting of the goddess's *perfection* or 'wholeness,' into warring oppositions. One side, the 'light' [...] the other, the 'dark'" (p. 322). This fracturing is demonstrated clearly in movies such as *Moana*, which splits the goddess and monster into two parts: TeKa, the peaceful earth mother, and Tefiti, the dark, volcanic, vengeful woman (Clements et al., 2016). Cole's song lyrics draw attention to this fracturing of women and proposes a counter-narrative, that "it's fun in the dark," which points to embracing the dark feminine instead of subjugating her. By embracing and celebrating the darkness, we can rejoin the light with the dark and recognize that the goddess and monster are one.

4.3 Women in Charge

Cole (2022) asks the potent question in her song, "Why you're so scared of a woman in charge?" (1:26-1:30). These lyrics directly connect to several women who have run for positions of power and have been met with opposition, ridicule, and fear. An example of this terror of women in power is demonstrated in paraphernalia that emerged during Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign, which accused her of being a witch and a "castrating bitch" (Caputi, 2018, pp. 29-30). Caputi astutely points out that this sexist frame "holds that when a woman is empowered, a man is necessarily disempowered," and therefore, female force is seen as emasculating to men (p. 29). Cole's song lyrics echo this perpetual tale that Caputi is recounting of men fearing women in power. By questioning this fear, Cole is evoking consciousness-raising in the listener. The listener begins to realize the preposterousness of a system that subjugates women and fears women in charge due to the false rationale that if women are empowered, men are then disempowered, a zero-sum proposition. This fear of powerful women is a concept woven through patriarchal mythology in "prick tales" such as Medusa, the powerful goddess/monster who was murdered by Perseus, or in *The Little Mermaid*, where Prince Eric plunges his phallic ship into the powerful sea goddess/monster Ursula (Caputi, 2004; Harraway, 2016). Each story recounts the patriarchal tale of fearing the goddess/monster and reinforces gynocide akin to that of the sixteenth and seventeenth-century witch burnings (Starhawk, 2021).

While patriarchal narratives continue to reinforce the domination of powerful women, a growing number of feminist musicians are subverting these norms and embracing their own inherent strengths. A notable instance of such empowerment can be found in the song "Mother," performed by Megan Trainor (2022), where she passionately sings the lyrics, "I am your mother/You listen to me" (0:09-0:13). This anthem serves as a powerful statement as Trainor reclaims her agency, demanding to be heard and listened to. By asserting, "You listen

to me,” Trainor firmly establishes her position of authority and affirms her right to be acknowledged and respected. Another song gaining attention is “Flowers” by Miley Cyrus (2023). In this song, Cyrus sings, “I can take myself dancing/ And I can hold my own hand/ Yeah, I can love me better than you can” (0:50-1:01). Here we can see how Cyrus is also asserting her power and self-dependency. In the song, she takes herself out and supports herself by proclaiming, “I can hold my own hand,” agency is no longer in a man to provide Cyrus with self-worth and validation but instead in her ability to support and nurture herself. In Cole’s song, she is calling out the patriarchal worldview of female subjugation and fear of power, and as we can see, several pop singers have also been questioning this paradigm and asserting ways to reclaim their own power. As Cole (2022) notes in her song, ““Am I bad to the bone ’cause I get what I want?/Mama said it ain’t no crime” (0:43-0:51). Getting what you want and reclaiming your power is emphasized in these lines through the rhetorical question, can Cole get what she wants and the response, “Mama said it ain’t no crime.” This ancient wisdom of reclaiming power and wisdom being passed down from the mother, or divine feminine, is a concept Cole brings forth in these potent lyrics. She is flipping the script of what is considered a “crime” here. Instead of witches being burned for being too powerful, intelligent, and sensual as the *Malleus Maleficarum* urged, these modern witches are challenging the criminalization of witches and instead affirming that being assertive and getting what they want is not a crime and that power is within them, roaring, and ready to emerge (Kramer & Sprenger, 1486).

5 Conclusion: Amplifying Feminist Theories

As we can see through this paper, Cole’s (2022) song “W.I.T.C.H.” amplifies feminist theories such as Reproductive Justice and Bodily Autonomy and calls upon the mythos of the witch—a figure who has shown up repeatedly throughout pop culture and in feminist movements. The witch is passionate, loud, and bubbling with power, ready to cast off the patriarchy with their spells. We must continue to explore how the witch archetype resurges throughout popular culture because, through this lens, we can understand complex feminist theories and make these theories accessible. Through accessibility, theories become disseminated and available to those who often need them the most. As hooks (1991) notes, “Work by women of color and marginalized groups of white women [...], especially if written in a manner that renders it accessible to a broad reading public [...] is often de-legitimized in academic settings” (p. 4). We must challenge the delegitimization of alternative forms of theory-making in order to move towards a more just, and therefore a more feminist, concept of knowledge production in academia. Theory can be woven through art, music, film, etc., and artists are generating meaningful and impactful works that find ways to harness cultural power (Rodriguez, 2020). We must pay attention to the stories we tell through art because, as Rodriguez states, “The stories we tell will determine whether our society declines and self-destructs or whether we can heal and thrive” (p. 126). Stories such as the one told in Cole’s song of honoring the witch’s power and remembering that women can be in total control of themselves is an impactful message. It reminds us that amidst threats to Bodily Autonomy, witches and all marginalized individuals must come together, fight injustices, and reclaim their powers. Artists such as Cole are impactful storytellers and utilize critical tools such as TikTok to amplify their messages in techno-communities such as #WitchTok. The witch must continue to be summoned and woven throughout popular culture to remind us of the beauty within her wickedness, the intelligence within her spell casting, and the magic she conjures with her desires.

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