

The Muting of Witches

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This critical study looks at witches and how society silences their voices. Using Kramarae's Muted Group Theory as a framework, nine participants shared their stories of how their lives are affected by their religious beliefs. The researchers found that the witches had issues that affected their work, family, and educational lives.

Throughout history, different cultures and groups have struggled for power, with one group often prevailing over another (Hall, 1992). One effect of this process is that the narratives of the hegemonic or dominant group become widely accepted, while the voices and experiences of the subjugated are diminished and become silent (Ardener, 1978). Women make up one group that has been traditionally silenced within many cultures. According to Van Vuuren (1973), they have been historically subjugated by the Judeo-Christian institution, in which many churches, "imposed a conviction of male supremacy and superiority on Western world women," and labeled those who sought empowerment from this oppression and spoke against it as witches and/or, "sexual consorts of the devil" (p. 249). In her symposium on women's based academic communication programs, Cherise Kramarae (1996) reveals that to this day, many women still feel that it is not always safe or prudent to speak—especially in terms that contradict Euro-White perspectives.

This particular work examines how, like Kramarae's constrained women, modern witches in the United States sometimes find it wiser and easier to remain silent rather than contradict or directly oppose dominant societal, often Euro-white, Christian-based, values. This study offers insight into the muting of marginalized groups through a brief review of cultural studies concepts, Muted Group Theory, and then a further examination of the silencing of witches within mainstream society and some of its dominant structures or institutions. An in-depth perspective will be offered from the point of view of the American, female witch, by means of the qualitative interview. Through the use of a critical analytical framework largely based on Kramarae's (1981) Muted Group Theory and a semi-structured interviewing method, several themes emerge which will be discussed later in the paper.

The rationale for this study comes from both a perceived gap in the literature and a desire to shed light on an intercultural issue that affects the first author's personal experiences. The muting of witches is both an intercultural and critical studies issue because it involves a subordinate culture that interacts with a larger culture often dominated by different spiritual beliefs and values. As a witch, Shorey locates herself within this marginalized group, and feels that she has been stigmatized because of her spiritual beliefs. For many of the years that she has been following the spiritual path of the Goddess she has avoided talking about that aspect of her identity, except with those who are "open-minded" or have similar practices. As a result, while participating in dominant societal institutions such as school, work, and even within family, her voice and experience as a witch have been silenced. As a member of the group she and Wickelgren are studying, she is also operating as an interpretive scholar and openly acknowledging her bias, taking her experiences and allowing it to guide the research.

The communication discipline has devoted much thought that sheds light on this study. Because this study falls under the rubric of a critical look into the lives of witches, it is necessary to examine the communication discipline's literature surrounding critical cultural perspectives and Muted Group Theory, and also review the general literature surrounding the Goddess and witches so that we may form research questions.

Literature Review

Critical Cultural Perspectives

The subjugation and silencing of sub-cultures or marginalized groups by a dominant group and its hegemonic structures is not a new phenomenon. Critical and cultural studies examine issues of power, subordination, and representation, considering culture to be a struggle in which there is a "dynamic interplay between the lived experiences of people and the larger social forces" (Halualani, Fassett, Anh Morrison, & Shaou-Whea Dodge, 2006, p. 76). Frow and Morris (2000) explain that cultural studies has been traditionally pre-occupied with hegemonic forces in society and struggles between groups over competing narratives of identity. They also emphasize the importance of recognizing the many identities of a person and avoiding essentialist notions tied to their location in a group, whether it be because of race, religion, sexuality, gender, etc. This is a theme that comes up in our research on the muting of witches.

Orbe (1998) uses the word *co-culture* to describe what others call subcultures, which, within the United States, exist based on sex, race, and religion, among other things. He describes co-cultural communication as the interaction between underrepresented and dominant groups. Prior research on intercultural communication between these groups has focused on the experiences of females, racial/ethnic groups, persons with limited physical or developmental abilities, working class groups and neighborhoods, gay and bisexual people, young people, and the elderly and retired persons (Orbe, 1994). Orbe (1998) makes no mention of studies of communicative interaction between persons who follow alternative spiritual paths, such as witchcraft, and those of dominant groups, such as Christians. He does emphasize that the majority of research has focused on the perspective of dominant groups, and argues for the need to hypothesize from the perspective of marginalized groups.

Muted Group Theory

Muted Group Theory was first proposed by anthropologists Shirley Ardener (1975), and Edwin Ardener (1978), in order to look at social hierarchies within societies that favor some groups over others. Ardener (1978), posits that groups operating at the pinnacle of the social order largely determine the communication system of the whole society, leaving marginalized groups essentially voiceless since their lived experiences are not represented in the dominant structures of this system (Orbe, 1998). This theory was later implemented by communication scholars to focus on the experiences of women (Kramarae, 1981) and African American men (Orbe, 1994). These scholars also examine how members of muted groups use

communication practices to prevail over efforts to render them inarticulate (Orbe, 1998).

Kramarae (2005) suggests that in many situations women are more guarded in their communication than men, including what they can say and when, and with the reactions they bring to an interaction. She continues that men have been the primary creators of accepted language practices constructed to convey their experiences, leaving women constrained. Kramarae (2005) acknowledges that similar issues exist for other groups in society that experience asymmetrical relationships. Muted Group Theory proposes that marginalized groups have little power to share their ideas without being chastised, silenced or discriminated, and their speech is disregarded and disrespected by those in dominant groups. Furthermore, their experiences are not represented accurately in mainstream culture and are interpreted to them by others (Kramarae, 2005).

Wood (2005) compares Muted Group Theory to Feminist Standpoint Theory, writing that the aim of the former is to call attention to the muting of women's voices and their experiences as a result. She also describes how it is concerned with the reformation of language so that women's experiences, from their perspectives, can be accurately represented (Wood, 2005). Similarly, Standpoint Theory is situated within the work of feminist scholars, and explores the experiences of persons in subordinate positions, from their perspective (Orbe, 1994).

Mearns, Oetzel, Torres, Derkacs, and Ginossar (2004) cite Kramarae's (1981) Muted Group Theory as a framework for understanding silencing in the workplace. They argue that conversations about mistreatment are frequently muted at work. They also speculate that power is not exclusive to hierarchy in the organization but is also influenced by gender, race, and socioeconomic standing. These findings suggest that similar processes of muting marginalized groups occur within other societal institutions.

Spirituality, the Goddess and Witches

It seems that many of the critical concepts reviewed, such as co-cultures, muted groups, standpoint theory, cultural studies, are largely focused on race, class, gender, sexuality, age and ethnicity. There does not appear to be adequate research in the communication field on groups muted or subjugated because of their spiritual beliefs outside mainstream religious dogma—even though spiritual persecution has been going on since the advent of religion. The last part of this review focuses on literature about women and the feminine divine, but does not cover the silencing of women who follow this path. However, feminism and the Goddess is an area that should be reviewed since the intercultural concept of muting is being applied to witches who center their beliefs on the empowerment of women and the worship of Mother Earth.

For the purpose of this study, witches are defined as persons following the path of the Goddess or the feminine divine, such as Wiccans and Dianic Wiccans, pagans and neo-pagans, and feminist spiritualists (Reis, 1998). Some have argued that Mother Mary is a relic of the time of prevalent worship of goddesses preceding Christianity (Daly, 1998). Although the connection between Mary and the Goddess will not be explored here because it is not cogent to the research, it is worth noting that the worship of the Goddess and Christian deities

is not exclusive to each other.

Graham (1999) writes that the Goddess, the supreme deity for witches, has received attention from many feminists of different religions and theoretical inclinations who view her as a symbol of rebirth and empowerment. Advocates of the Goddess claim that she dislocates, “patriarchal polarizations...that have traditionally sanctioned the domination and exploitation of the natural environment, and by association, the subordination of women” (p. 422). Kramarae (1996) suggests that Euro-Westerners have learned to separate and rank themselves above nature and its plants, minerals, and animals. Witches celebrate a return to the worship of Mother Earth. Unlike the remote Christian God, far removed from the planet and associated with life after death, the Goddess is connected to the cycles of nature, life, death, and renewal in this lifetime (Graham, 1999).

Through the lens of Muted Group Theory, this study aims to examine the experience of female witches who have been silenced within mainstream society. Although a goal of Muted Group Theory is to reform language so that women’s experiences can be accurately articulated from their point of view, this study will not be looking to deconstruct or transform language. The focus here is to bring light to the experience of a traditionally underrepresented and muted group, and their intercultural interactions within the structures of the dominant culture. This leads us to the following research question.

RQ1: How do witches respond to perceived silencing communication from members of dominant cultures?

As a witch, Shorey has felt the effects of silencing from three elements of her life—family, school, and work. These three dominant societal institutions represented areas of silencing that occurred and were used to establish a stepping stone to view life from a witch’s perspective. We hope to illustrate that witches are what Ardener (1978) and Kramarae (1981) refer to as a muted group, or what Orbe (1998) would call a non-dominant, co-culture, that has lived “traditionally without societal power” and, in order to survive, has had to “communicate within oppressive dominant structures” (p. 1).

Method

Justification

As mentioned above, one goal of this study is to give witches a voice. In accordance with this objective, interviewing seems a logical choice as the most appropriate method. As mentioned earlier, Orbe (1998) states that the majority of the research on the communication between underrepresented and dominant groups has focused on the viewpoint of the dominant group, and emphasizes the need to research from the marginalized group’s perspective. Interviewing can aid in filling this gap; in addition to encouraging and facilitating their narratives, interviewing witches will assist in creating a study that examines their inarticulation, as marginalized group, from their standpoint. Considering that their accounts are often muted within society, interviews may serve as one of the few outlets for them to express

themselves and genuinely be heard. It will also give other witches an ability to see the voice of the witch in print, hopefully giving them a historical glimpse of their experience. In addition, giving the participants a voice humanizes them, allowing readers to look past the stigma of witchcraft, and empathize with them as women, who besides their spiritual path, can live very normal lives by societal standards.

Participants

Nine participants shared their ideas for this research. Most of the women have at some point been members of the Christian religion, although two stated they were raised with no religious affiliation. Eight of the participants were women who identified themselves as witches, although one female stated that she was not currently practicing. All participants were Caucasian and living in New England.

Two participants were members of the first author's group, interviewed for a pilot study for a class. The decision to produce a full study was made, and these participants were asked to name persons they thought might be interested in participating in the study. These recommendations produced other participants and as they were interviewed, they were asked to name others. This technique has been called a "snowball effect" and is a recognized technique of participant recruitment in the interpretive interviewing literature (e.g., Granovetter, 1977).

Because many of the participants were known to the first author, it was decided that comprehensive information about the participants would not be shared. While all of the women interviewed were willing to be open, some expressed concern over repercussions about the ideas shared. It was for this reason that we decided to give only brief descriptions of the women.

Data Collection

The interviews were semi-structured consisting of open-ended questions. Participants were interviewed for a minimum of 45 minutes each. The interviews allowed for direct conversation and were useful for interpretive research since Shorey was able to see how her questions, interactions, and choice of language affected their responses. She believed that her participants were more open and honest with her since they are peers in a women's group and practice spiritually together. Although they used their own words and memories to express their experiences, some meanings were shared and she often revealed her own feelings in response to their answers. At times the interviews were more like a conversation, and she only tried to redirect the flow of ideas during times of silence or when they were done telling a story.

Data

The purpose of this study was to examine, from their perspective, how witches are silenced within public communicative systems, and how they use specific communication

practices to overcome attempts to make them inarticulate. The interviews provided illustrations of the hegemonic process of muting within different societal structures, such as family, work, and education,, and how these individuals deal with it.

As mentioned above, all participants experienced silencing within their families. Kelly, originally from a conservative, religious family based in a small town in Illinois, was in her early 30s when she first revealed her spiritual beliefs to her family. Although an adult, she was immediately chastised, ostracized, and was not allowed to talk about or attempt to validate her choice. The family told her she was going to hell and read her passages from the Bible—meeting her with prayers and verses, articulated with the purpose of silencing her—every time she tried to open her mouth. In an ultimate act of muting, her mother banned her from talking to any other members of the family, including her grandmother to whom Kelly was very close. Her mother and sister felt they must, in Kelly’s words, “keep her a dark secret.” Kelly explained that to this day she is muted by her family, or in a larger sense, by the Christian church, whose values her family has taken up and used to oppress her. Being a witch is a “topic that is still not discussed to this day,” for, her family believes, that by even talking about it you are letting the devil in, or “letting evil slip into the situation.” In this case, she confessed, it is easier to avoid any expression of herself as a witch because her family is an institution where the lived experiences of witches are not even acknowledged.

Stacey felt pressures from her father about how she was raising her young children. She stated:

My father thought I wasn’t teaching my children morals because I wasn’t giving them what he felt was a religious enough base. He’s Catholic and he felt that because I wasn’t giving them a Catholic upbringing with CCD and in the Catholic Church and my children would be moral-less. When somebody irritates me I go, “Okay.” Open a door or window and get this to a place that I am better at and more comfortable. However, more focused and qualified energy, I’m going for that but then for some reason I’m immoral. (To him, it is) because I’m not Christian. Although my father believes in revenge—getting back.

She said that he used every trick in the book to get her to not share her beliefs with others.

Ellen and Cassie (mother and daughter witches) also experienced silencing from Ellen’s husband (Cassie’s father) and his side of the family. While married to Cassie’s father, Ellen could not talk about her beliefs in her home. While divorcing, he even tried to use her beliefs against her in court. Cassie, although undecided about her personal beliefs, could not explore or talk about witchcraft with her mom for fear her dad would find out. She was, as Kramarae (1996) describes, a woman constrained in her speech, partly out of fear of the reaction it would elicit.

Meanwhile, Ellen’s side of the family had always embraced that they had a *gift*, but viewed it as appropriate to talk about and practice only in a way that was connected to Christianity, for they were Irish-Catholics. Ellen said that since her grandmother was from Ireland, the family associated card and tea leaf readings to old Irish traditions where it was all right to talk about mystical things and use psychic gifts, referred to as the *fey*. This was

something that was deemed acceptable for Christians in the old country. Ellen had to communicate her experience as a psychic to her family through language that was acceptable under Christianity. The day Ellen said she was a witch and no longer Christian was the day she was silenced in talking about her practice as a psychic. She explained that it was the *witch language* she used about her identity and practice that was the problem, not what she was actually doing. She compared it to Maypoles, a pagan celebration of spring that was co-opted by Christians. It was always considered innocent and fun if done by Christians and described in their terms, but wrong if done by witches or pagans. It is all in the words or names. This was one of the first times she realized that she could overcome and avoid silencing by articulating herself through the language of the dominant culture (in this case Christianity). This was a way in which she, as a member of a muted group could use communication practices to prevail over efforts to mute her.

All participants experienced silencing in the workplace. While working as a psychic in Salem, Massachusetts, Ellen's car was stolen and set on fire by radical Christians in an effort to make her stop reading and teaching about witchcraft. During the 1980s, she saw females in Salem have their hair set on fire by these religious groups, who would also surround witches, while they were walking down the street with their children, and chant at them. These actions muted witches in the area for a period of time. She also explained how in Salem where people were fascinated with her because she was different—she was treated as what cultural studies scholars would term an *other*, a foreign and fascinating object of interest (Hall, 1992). Tourists and (non-witch) citizens of Salem would sometimes act like she was a strange creature on exhibit, asking to take a picture with her or touch her so they could say that they had “touched a real witch.”

While working at another job as a bartender, male patrons often tried to silence Ellen by calling her a “lesbian witch,” and “bitch.” She described them as men “offended that she was a woman in power,” who automatically assumed that she was gay since she didn't want to have sex with them. She quickly discovered that she was in a masculine domain that was not accepting of anyone who was different—the kind of place where people were beaten for being different. Ellen had to adapt her communication style and start cursing and yelling in order to be heard. In short, she took on the masculine communication style of the rowdy culture that dominated the bar, in order to survive and be able to articulate herself there.

Cassie, who worked in sales while in her 20s, had an experience that made her decide to never talk about being a witch at work again. A male co-worker who was ten years her senior, found out that she was a witch. He put her on the spot, and declared, “That's evil!” in front of everyone in the office. Cassie felt that she was forced to justify that part of her identity. Before she was even given the chance, however, her male co-worker called his father who was a pastor, and put Cassie on the phone with him so she could be told that her religion was “bad.” Infuriated yet intrigued by this challenge, she took the call. Cassie explained that she used Christian phrases and imagery—the language of the dominant group—so that she could articulate herself in a way that she would be heard. Also, instead of explaining that she practices “witchcraft,” a word that has dark and ominous connotations, she described her beliefs in terms of Celtic traditions and explained that a psychic gift has been in her family for several generations. She explained that she feels witches have to adapt and use language that

makes the people around them comfortable. When she did this, her co-worker and his father, the pastor, became more comfortable with her spirituality and stopped persecuting her. Ellen voiced the same tactic; she had to often use language and references that were common within mainstream society and aligned with dominant Christian ideologies, in order to get a point across. All participants confessed that often times it was better to just altogether avoid using the word witch to describe themselves since it evoked a negative reaction in people.

Kelly had a work experience similar to that of Cassie; being put on the spot while doing retail sales. She happened to mention that she was a witch in the break room to some co-workers and, all of a sudden, it “exploded into a bigger thing than it was.” Her supervisor, the merchandise manager, pointed her out to the rest of the room as a witch and then proceeded to demean her and belittle her experience as a witch by sarcastically asking if she could put a spell on his wife and turn her into a toad. Similar to Meares et. al.’s (2004) findings in their study of silencing in the workplace, Kelly was muted in talking about her identity, and later muted in discussing the resulting harassment. This experience led Kelly to make a decision, much like Cassie, to remain silent about her experience as a witch in the workplace in the future. After that, she was considered by some to be a joke, and by others to be the subject of awe. Some female co-workers actually approached her, in all seriousness, and asked her to give them spells to get pregnant or to find love. This is an instant where Kelly, as a witch, was being treated, like Ellen in Salem, as an exotic other. She was somewhat avoided and considered foreign because of her beliefs, yet secretly turned to for those in need of answers and solutions. For the most part, however, Kelly explained that people thought, that as a witch, she was a “blood drinking, devil worshipping, naked-under-the-moon dancing person.” Like Kramarae’s (2005) description of those within muted groups, Kelly found that her experiences as a witch were not accurately represented in mainstream culture, such as within the workplace, and were often interpreted to her by others through misguided frames of reference. Most times, she did not get the chance to explain that she was not what people thought she was. Instead, they chose how to define her. She voiced that it is often too difficult and annoying to try and justify yourself and validate your experience to people who have already decided that you are wrong and evil. This was a reoccurring theme throughout the interviews.

Many of the witches felt that their relationships at work were not worth the stress of openly talking about their faith, choosing to stay silent rather than face ridicule. Silence, however, did not stop at the level of language. Laurie explained that she had issues with what she wore to work. On a day that she chose to wear a pentacle, she reported a colleague who noticed it and said, “What is that you’re wearing? Is that what I think it is? You’re one of those witches.”

For these witches, their voluntary silence was not always oppressive, but self-selected. Michelle explained one technique that many witches seemed to use. “For the most part, I don’t hide—I don’t volunteer my information, but if somebody asks, or if something should come up, I don’t usually hide.” The participants expressed their occasional muteness as an act of both self-preservation and defiance. They did not, and should not, have to rationalize their experience or explain themselves to anyone—so they just avoided telling people that they were witches. Cassie articulated that she understood that as a group, witches lacked a unified

voice, but that she did not want to be a representative of a religion that was thousands of years old. She expressed that she did not want to be labeled and associated with the beliefs, principles, traits and characteristics of every witch—especially since they are not all the same. Cassie also emphasized that she should not have to stand at the pulpit and defend her choices, nor should she have to be put on the spot to explain what being a witch is. Kelly reinforced this idea, expressing that the public needs to be educated so individual witches do not have to take up the burden of defining their practice and vindicating their choice of religion every time they come out about that part of their identity. Again, they understand that their choosing to be silent, along with the lack of role models, accurate representations and narratives in mainstream society, leads to the overall muting of their group. Yet, they do not blame themselves or other witches for being silent—they both attribute it to self preservation and blame male-dominated religious narratives that have oppressed women and witches for centuries. Kelly felt that the “male hierarchy, fear-based,” Christian religion has oppressed any diversion from believing in the church. She continued, “They’ve done such a good job that no one really knows why they’re afraid—they just are, of anything that’s not Christian.”

Vonnegut (1992) writes how the language of a certain culture or society does not serve all its speakers equally. Because words and norms have been created by men, the dominant group, women, who are the subordinate group, cannot as effortlessly express their experiences as men can, and are therefore muted. When interviewing Cassie, the same kind of theme kept emerging: that witches cannot easily explain their practice, belief system and experiences because many narratives about spirituality are grounded in Christianity. During interviews with Cassie, Ellen and Kelly, all voiced their perception that for many Americans of European descent, their entire comprehension of religion is wrapped around Christianity. So to even try and explain a religion (witchcraft) to people who have not learned about it—or have only been taught misconceptions about it—seems futile. It was clear that when they did talk about being witches, they were often perceived and responded to based on essentialized notions about their identity as a witch. Once people knew they were witches, they failed to perceive the many facets of their characters and personalities and often focused on that one aspect of them—their location in that group.

A Generational Trend?

Lastly it should be noted that the location of the participants in three different generations may have affected their experiences and responses. Ellen came out as a witch in a time when it was almost unsafe to. Living through times of both extreme oppression and more open acceptance, she revealed that she used to feel like part of a minority group but that everything has changed in the last 20 years. She argued, “Witchcraft is the fastest growing religion in the U.S....before [I] had to stay quiet, hidden,” but not so much anymore. Cassie, the youngest witch, experienced the least oppression and silencing. When talking about being muted, she felt she had more power over it and that it was more of a choice than the imposition of a dominant group. Cassie argues that it is different for her children’s generation, where institutions such as elementary schools are no longer propagating certain beliefs or acknowledging specific holidays.

Conclusions

Analysis of these semi-structured interviews reveals several findings. We posited that the silencing of witches occurred in three venues of life—education, work, and family.

Education

Ironically, the first author was the only one who reported issues of silencing while in school because she was the only one of the participants who was practicing while in school. As a Master's student, she felt that her beliefs were not consistent with the beliefs of the academy and she did not acknowledge being a witch until the final presentation in the final class period of her education. We expanded the scope of the work, recruited participants, and worked together on the study. She presented the findings of a pilot study about the silencing of witches for intercultural communication, and her instructor, the second author of this work, encouraged her to flesh out a full blown study and present her work to an on-campus panel on women in communication, and eventually write this article for submission to the academy. Shorey's ideas were not part of the pilot study presented in class, and when the two authors of this study decided to expand to construct a full blown research program, it was decided that her story was important to the data. Not feeling comfortable recording her ideas in ethnographic form, she asked to be interviewed like the other participants. Shorey explained a self-censoring feeling in the beginnings of her work for her Master's degree. Even though being a witch was a central part of her being, she held back about that important aspect sensing that her instructors and her fellow students might not understand her way of thinking. She felt it was safer to remain quiet about being a witch. When talking about the project for her intercultural communication course that led to this paper, she explained that the project allowed her to remain anonymous. The instructor allowed the students to explore other cultures, and reports about the progress of her work raised little suspicion because many students chose "odd cultures." It was easy to let other students believe she chose the topic because it was interesting, not because she was a witch herself.

The day of the final presentation was a day of coming out in many ways. Afterwards, she reported it was more cathartic for her than for the other members of the class. The weight off her shoulders was a relief that she needed and she reported that it gave her a sense of belonging that she felt was missing from her classmates. She received positive feedback from these students she had shared the classroom with for the past year and a half.

None of the other witches spoke of experiences while in school. One interviewee did talk about a specific educational institution that recognized religious groups in its rules about missing work for holidays. Michelle mentioned a university that allowed individuals to take holidays of non-dominant religious groups off and not be penalized. When Shorey asked what university did that, Michelle went to a Wiccan website on-line that listed the institution—Marshall University. They read the information on the website and concluded that Marshall allows Wiccans the right to take off holidays without penalty as long as they declare their religious beliefs with the university. Both women expressed surprise to have an institution of higher learning willing to recognize their beliefs.

The final touches of this project were being applied as a new school year was beginning. As the first author was perusing the school calendar for holidays that affected class, he noticed that Wiccan holidays were included on Suffolk University's school calendar. In an interview with the University Chaplain, Reverend Amy Fisher, she explained, "I have included Wiccan holidays in the information I provide since I came to Suffolk in the early 1990s. This is the first year that they have included them. Why—I am not sure" (A. Fisher, personal communication, September 25, 2009).

Work

First, trends of silencing seem to predominantly occur in work settings where the lived experiences of witches are often not represented. We did not find consistent trends in silencing within school, but this may be attributed to the fact that only the lead author was actively practicing witchcraft while in school. For all of the participants, family and work were institutions where they had some of their worst experiences of discrimination, oppression, and silencing.

As members of a group traditionally without societal power, our participants have had to learn to communicate within the oppressive dominant structures of family and work, in order to endure. This leads to the second finding: that witches often have to use the language of the dominant group in order to be heard by those within its central societal structures. This directly correlates to Muted Group Theory's stance that since the dominant group controls the forms through which consciousness can be expressed, muted groups must mediate their viewpoints through these forms (Dickie, 1987). Participants described the conscious use of this tactic in order to articulate their experiences within dominant structures. Specifically, they detailed using language that people of Christian-based religions understood, so that they could express themselves.

The third finding was that witches who choose to remain inarticulate within these societal structures, often do so in order to avoid persecution and stereotypes. Participants described how they did not want to have to defend their beliefs or be characterized by essentialist notions about witches. They felt that although being a witch is only a part of their identity, once revealed, it becomes an all-encompassing stigma. To them, it is one aspect of their lives, and they have many other identities: daughter, sister, mother, grandmother, friend, wife, working-professional, etc. Furthermore, they showed a strong desire to avoid taking on unifying essentialist notions of witchcraft and tying them to the whole of their identity—what Frow and Morris (2000) describe as the effort to avoid totalizing ideas of culture. Although they are members of a subculture, it is easier for them to blend in with the larger culture than to identify with their group under unifying principles that make them stand out in society.

Through a critical/cultural lens and Muted Group Theory framework, this study explored the ways in which witches were muted and how they dealt with this silencing within dominant societal structures. It did have some limitations, and therefore, further research should be prescribed. First, the age groups of the women, ranged from thirties to mid-fifties. Other age groups such as teenagers, may have different experiences, and should be examined. The generational factor should also be given more consideration. The level of repression and

silencing may be tapering off throughout the generations, and research should be done to measure the correlation between generation and degree of oppression within a group. There may be similar literature on early domination and muting of other subjugated groups and how it got better for later generations (with women or African Americans, for example). Further research should also be done with a more varied ethnic/racial sample. All of the participants were white, middle class women. The experience of the African American or male witch is probably completely different and should be explored.

Another limitation is that the participants belong to the same women's group and therefore, share similar perspectives and practices. Cassie explained that like Christianity, there are many sects of witchcraft and it is not all the same. There are pagans, Wiccans, and witches that have all different kinds of covens, rituals, and forms of worship. In the future, research may yield different results by interviewing followers of different forms of witchcraft and using participants who do not know each other or practice together. While discussing the project in a chat room, the second author met four different gay men who identified themselves as witches. The discussion led to the reading of this project by the male witches, and one of them suggested that female witches were the most vocal opponents of these men calling themselves witches. The female witches seemed to use the same silencing technique on the male witches that they complained of receiving from society in general.

Trends of silencing were not found in school settings as predicted, due to the fact that none of the women were practicing witches while in school; therefore, participants who attended school while openly being witches should be interviewed. It would also be interesting to see if trends in silencing differ in junior high, high school, college, and graduate school.

Since this study is focused solely on the experiences of witches living in New England it is also important to acknowledge that interviewing individuals in other regions of the United States is crucial to understanding how witches' experiences are articulated and silenced within American society. A triangulation of methods, such as using interviews and surveys could be used to reach a large population and allow for more generalized results.

In conclusion, Kramarae (1996) calls for a new communication curriculum where the university can serve as a utopia for women and other marginalized groups to express themselves and find a voice. Vonnegut (1992) also argues that rhetoric produced by muted groups should be featured more in academic courses—that institutions of higher education should be more receptive to research highlighting the oppression of largely ignored groups. This study offers fresh insight into a group whose voice is often not heard and the processes which silence it. However, this is only a start in understanding the process of muting on traditionally ignored groups such as witches.

The lack of formal research on the experiences of witches as a muted group may be further contributing to the silencing of their narratives. As Cassie voiced, "Persecution doesn't go away, and if we don't educate the public, history could repeat itself." She continued that millions of "witches were killed globally during the crusades...yet no one seems to recognize it." Hopefully this call to further research will be heeded, so that witches, like other groups of women can, in Gloria Anzaldúa's words, "overcome the tradition of silence" (1990, p. 207).

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