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Wave Feminism and the Shaping of Tarot

Morgan Vonder Haar

Introduction

Tarot cards have been firmly enshrined in the Western World as devices for fortune-telling and divination, garnering a legacy of fascination for the curious minded. Today, a standard tarot deck contains seventy-eight cards which are split into two categories, the Major Arcana and the Minor Arcana. The first twenty-two cards are considered to be the Major Arcana, painted with fantastical figures, symbols and allegorical images. Labeled numbers zero through twenty-one, the cards depict a journey through the world, with archetypes representing grand cosmic templates and patterns that yield counsel to those that seek their wisdom. The Minor Arcana contains the remaining fifty-six cards which, in modern decks, are usually painted with symbols and are split into four categories: the Suit of Batons or Wands, the Suit of Cups, the Suit of Swords and the Suit of Coins.¹ The Major and Minor Arcana work together in order to convey to the querent the situations, problems, and solutions which affect their past, present or future circumstances. The meaning of each card is solely dependent on one's teachings or inner spiritual guidance through the interpretation of the card's symbolism. The images picked for each tarot card reading are laid down and 'selected' by the soul, offering an infinite number of combinations.

Tarot is a tool for spiritual and religious practices that has morphed depending on the group utilizing it. This essay defines spirituality as a part of the world's religions, referring "to personal and group practices and experiences, exercises, and faith in relation to the divine, sacred transcendent, or

¹ Alfred Douglas, *The Tarot: The Origins, Meanings, and Uses of Cards* (New York: Penguin Books Inc., 1972).

ultimate meaning.”² Spirituality is considered to be a movement rather than a set belief system. In regard to religious feminism, spirituality is concerned with empowerment, nature, a revisionary view of the world and an emphasis on female images of the divine.³ Spirituality has many different sects, occultism being one of them. This essay examines the prominent women who shaped feminist occultism through their contributions to tarot, as well explores the impacts of how the practice of tarot within religious feminism has been a tool used to subvert traditional gender conventions. Occultism is recognized as “the human desire to access hidden knowledge or principles” that are inaccessible through traditional religion and science, acting as a branch of spirituality within the Western world.⁴ Religious feminist movements throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have had different goals and ideologies, which will be discussed throughout this paper in regard to the practice of tarot. The first religious feminist movement worked to establish men and women as equal authorities of spirituality, allowing for collaborative study, which ultimately created a traditional wealth of knowledge for future movements. The mid-late twentieth-century movements focused on elevating the voices of women to create practices that represent their experiences. This essay will argue that tarot allowed women during Second Wave Train Feminism to reclaim spiritual separatism and directly react against masculine archetypes and expectations from traditional occult scholarship to create a new version of tarot that encompasses women’s religious experiences and identities.

The experiences of women and spirituality have been infected with gender inequality, which has created space for the rise of religious feminism. Religious feminism has shaped “new narratives, images, rituals, prayers, and practices that validate women’s religious identities and experiences,” that deserve to be recognized within historical scholarship and as a part of the Wave Feminist movements.⁵ Wave Feminism, originally conceptualized by Martha Lear in 1968, captures the forward and backward movement of women’s activism in the United States to gain social and political change. This essay will use Wave Feminism to discuss feminist movements in the Western, English-speaking countries of England and the United States with

regard to tarot. First Wave Feminism takes place from 1848 to 1920, underscoring the suffrage movement and newly found economic independence. Second Wave Feminism during the 1960s and 70s moved to gain greater access to employment, reproductive rights and equal status amongst men.⁶ Third Wave Feminism began in the 1990s, working within and against social systems in hopes to reform its foundations, including Women of Color and non-binary gender identities.⁷ Fourth Wave Feminism is the continuation of Third Wave ideologies, starting around 2011, through the power of the Internet and social media which created an easier spread of feminist values.⁸ Wave Feminism has been criticized as being reductive to only White women’s experiences and activism within the nineteenth and twentieth century, but has been a great framework to teach feminism in United States history due to its ability to compress it into easily understood blocks. The consequence of this framework is the notion that feminist activism only occurs in dramatic waves, with periods of nothingness in between. In reality, women’s movements and activism are hardly stagnant and continue to persevere within and outside of Wave Feminism. Feminism encompasses both collective and individual action, with the “belief that women and men are inherently of equal worth...with the understanding that gender always intersects with other social hierarchies.”⁹

With this flaw in traditional scholarship of Wave Feminism, this paper will examine religious feminism and tarot as a part of a Wave Train.¹⁰ Waves in the ocean are frequent, one after another in a train, and within feminist activism there are a multitude of groups striving for different goals. Rather than considering First Wave Feminism as one wave, this paper will examine it as a Wave Train, with religious feminist work as one of those waves. This framework persists through Second, Third and Fourth Wave Feminism. Tarot is then considered to be one wave within this wave train in regard to its position within feminist epistemology. The people working with feminist ideologies and tarot are not monolithic, which allows tarot to act as its own wave within the wave train. Scholar Dorothy Sue Cobble agrees that “out on the sea of women’s reform, there is little still water in sight,” as women’s movements continue to liberate those under oppressive circumstances.¹¹

2 Dawn Llewellyn, *Reading, Feminism, and Spirituality*, (New York, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 23.

3 Llewellyn, *Reading, Feminism, and Spirituality*, 23.

4 Kevin Todd McLaren, “Pharaonic Occultism: The Relationship of Esotericism and Egyptology, 1875-1930,” (master’s thesis, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, 2016), 12.

5 Llewellyn, *Reading, Feminism, and Spirituality*, 10.

6 Rory Dicker, *A History of U.S. Feminisms*, (Berkeley, California: Seal Press, 2016), 5-6.

7 Dicker, *A History of U.S. Feminisms*, 109.

8 Dicker, *A History of U.S. Feminisms*, 141.

9 Kathleen A. Laughlin, et al, “Is it Time to Jump Ship? Historians Rethink the Waves Metaphor,” *Feminist Formations* 22, no. 1 (2010) 78.

10 Laughlin, “Is it Time to Jump Ship? Historians Rethink the Waves Metaphor,” 79.

11 Laughlin, “Is it Time to Jump Ship? Historians Rethink the Waves Metaphor,” 87.

The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and the women associated with the organization set up the First Wave of spiritual feminism, allowing tarot to be shaped by their artwork and philosophies. This secret society authorized the equal status and involvement of female members, unlike many other parallel societies at the time, which provided the necessary elements for tarot to grow as a spiritual device. Although the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was not the utmost feminist society, it created the foundation for women to permeate spiritual circles. Tarot within the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was cultivated by women during First Wave Train Feminism, creating opportunities for equal status, political power, recognition and independence from traditional society.

The shaping of tarot was spearheaded by British figures such as Pamela Colman Smith, Frieda Harris and Madeline Montalban, many of whom had familial or academic ties to the United States. However, tarot existed and spread throughout the United States through female mystics such as Madame Marcia Champney. Tarot thrived for female spiritualists and mediums throughout the First Wave Train, offering women an avenue in which to explore their spiritual beliefs and social dynamics on their own terms, but it was met with some resistance from other social and political movements. While the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and other parallel societies participated in a relatively closed spiritual practice, many mediums and spiritualists worked alone.

The women within and adjacent to the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn created an extensive foundation for future generations of women to explore and excel in the utilization of tarot. Each of the aforementioned women promoted the benefits of being involved in counter-cultural religion, creating an atmosphere that ultimately inspired others to pick up the cards and connect with the spiritual world. Pamela Colman Smith and Lady Frieda Harris created two of the most well-known tarot decks, both of which are still in print in the twenty-first century, initially modeled off of Moina Mathers'. Florence Farr and Madeline Montalban created occultist education available for the women and the public, using tarot as a way to expand gender dynamics within the First Wave Train. Their roles in the physical creation of tarot elevated their own spiritual practice and bridged the work of their colleagues with their artistic and literary abilities. Although these women spent their occultist careers in the United Kingdom, their influence was felt in the United States, permeating mediumship and divination practices throughout the country. Their work and scholarship were the foundation for the First Wave of tarot and allowed women like Madame Marcia Champney to gain power through her psychic abilities.

Tarot In The Second Wave Train

Women during the mid-late twentieth century were propelled by the foundation provided by First Wave Train Feminism which granted women, usually British White women, the opportunity to have acknowledgment and opportunities within occultism and counter-cultural spiritual movements. However, the movement towards a more equal status within spirituality was a continued goal for activists in Second Wave Train Feminism in the United States, moving away from the First Wave's British figures. This Second Wave shaped tarot through reactions against masculine archetypes and expectations from traditional religious society that did not promote the needs of women. Instead of creating inclusive tarot decks in regard to gender, race and sexuality, many feminist activists worked to obtain spiritual separatism to protect their journey to enlightenment and women's religious history outside Abrahamic religions. This was in reaction to "the propaganda of misogynistic texts" of previous occult scholarship, which "resulted in the removal of female leadership and power...by portraying the female body...as contaminating and evil."¹² The Second Wave worked to reclaim the female image and move away from the civilized obedience expected of women. This section will discuss the influence of spiritual collectives Billie Potts and Jean Freer and tarot's introduction into popular culture.

While the First Wave of tarot was brought about through an emboldened interest in historical occult practices, like Egyptology and astrology, it was brought to an end quite quickly, only to be revived again in the 1960s. The World Wars and the Great Depression in the twentieth century as well as governmental backlash brought significant changes to tarot, turning people's focus away from the spiritual and towards survival.¹³ Another surge in tarot and occultism arose again in popularity during the 1960s and 1970s, which was shaped by social and cultural changes including the "human potential movement, the feminist movement, the rise of ecological awareness, and the turn to nonwestern religions."¹⁴ A growth in spiritual expansion was met by eager young people, creating New Age and Neopagan religious movements, directly rooted in Victorian occultism as seen within the Golden Dawn. These interests convened around people, books, institutes, and/or communes, some of which lasted while others lost momentum. Emerging from this counter-culture came a "loosely connected network of individuals and

¹² Lisa Regina Skura, "The Female Image on the Sola Busca Tarot," (PhD. diss., Pacifica Graduate Institute, 2021), 7.

¹³ Sarah M. Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 68.

¹⁴ Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America*, 67.

communities that proceeded to grow into a more mainstream movement.”¹⁵ Tarot and the occult were at the forefront of these movements, providing the idea that salvation was possible through the discovery of a divine inner self. The New Age and Neopagan movements allowed for a personalized religious experience that rejected standard, institutionalized religion.

Tarot and subsequently the occult acted as a perfect forum for feminists to rebel against conservative society, allowing feminists “to reassert meaningful community in ecstasy in a rationalistic, hyper-organized world.”¹⁶ These spiritual communities aimed to change the imbalances brought by traditional religions and rigid gender roles. They were influenced by two historical movements—feminism and sexual liberation. Gender and sexuality offered an avenue of healing and transformation through expression, as these religious movements embraced the masculine and feminine.¹⁷ New Age and Neopagan movements promoted women to take on leadership positions within these circles that otherwise weren’t allowed in Christianity or Judaism, whose practices often oppressed women through patriarchal language. In response, tarot and spirituality were reshaped through herstory, the feminist critique of traditional history, reviving goddess-worshipping matriarchies to explore their divine inner self.¹⁸ These counter-cultural religious movements set the framework through which to view this wave of tarot, moving occultism under the umbrella of divine femininity, ruled by ancient goddesses and practiced by feminists and others outcast by traditional society.

In Second Wave Train Feminism, the call to celebrate and worship goddesses was at the core of feminist spirituality, its origins coming from Zsuzsanna Budapest. She was a Hungarian exile who founded the Susan B. Anthony Coven in 1971 Los Angeles. Aware of her long familial traditions with herbalism and witchcraft, Budapest brought this with her to the United States, creating a feminist form of Wicca, “Wimmins Religion.”¹⁹ Budapest’s claim to celebrate an ancient goddess came from an idea that the goddess’s existence was destroyed from history by the hands of men. This informed her decision to call “for women-only covens and rituals because [Budapest] believed women needed a spirituality to call their own and

15 Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America*, 68.

16 Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America*, 76.

17 Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America*, 115.

18 Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America*, 118.

19 Diamond, “Jeane F. Diamond’s Life Story.”

one that allowed them direct access to their creator and source of spiritual power.”²⁰ Lisa Kröger and Melanie R. Anderson critiqued Budapest for her narrow ideas about gender that specifically excluded individuals that were not sexed female at birth, not allowing them to partake in women-centered religious organizations or practices.²¹ Although Budapest has been criticized for anti-trans rhetoric and practices, believing that women are only encompassed by their assigned sex at birth, her ideas allowed for the restoration of a matriarchal way of living that was central to the transformation of tarot in the Second Wave.



Figure 1: Billie Potts in Southern Oregon, 1979. Photographed by Ruth Mountaingrove, University of Oregon Libraries.

Billie Luisi-Potts, like many other women throughout history, is a relatively unknown American feminist activist. Her work in tarot, herbalism, and historical scholarship has gone relatively unnoticed by those who have not stumbled upon her work or met her in East Coast feminist circles. Her early life consisted of reshaping tarot through *A New Women’s Tarot* in 1977 and then *The Amazon Tarot* deck in

20 Freer, *A New Feminist Tarot*, 15.

21 Freer, *A New Feminist Tarot*, 17.



Figure 2: A mix of cards from the Amazon (Elf and Dragons Press, 1979) and New Amazon (Hecuba's Daughters, 1984) Tarot decks, created by Billie Potts, Susan Weed and River Nightwomoon in collaboration with Lizzie Brown, Tee Corinne, Liza Cowan, Alix Dobkin, M.L. George, Noel Giordano, Prairie Jackson, Ruth Mountaingrove, Carol Newhouse, Airstream Nightwomoon, Pat Swart, and Hawk Wood.

1979, both published by Elf and Dragons Press in New York. Schooled in Crowley's system of tarot, Potts executed the first attempt to visually reclaim tarot.²² Outside of her influence in feminist tarot, she has written books on herbalism, pottery, and famous women throughout United States history. She became the longest-serving Executive Director of the National Women's Hall of Fame in Seneca Falls, New York.²³ Despite her very influential life within spiritual commu-

nities and intersectional feminism, not much is publicly available about her life. A New Women's Tarot was attributed to Luisi-Potts as well as women in the Catskill Mountains of New York State who, from context, can be assumed to be other feminist spiritualists. Potts is an American-Ashkenazic Jew, an identity that has been central in creating a life as a lesbian separatist. Potts' lesbian separatism is "womon-identification" with lesbians as her priority and works to minimize the energy given to men and their systems. Separatism defines and builds individual and group identity while ensuring the survival of minority groups.²⁴ Potts' work with tarot was directly impacted by her identity as a Jewish-American and lesbian, promoting her collaborative and transformative tarot, The Amazon Tarot deck.

The pamphlet entitled *A New Women's Tarot* produced by Billie Potts is a representation of the changing spiritual, political and social needs of women during Second Wave Train Feminism through the reshaping of tarot cards. *A New Women's Tarot* is an information pamphlet used to prompt feminist esoteric practices and a fusion of intersectional identities. Its main purpose is to center women in the reinterpretation of tarot, changing male titles and imagery to recreate the reality of womanhood. Rather than prompt its use to a wide audience or occultist groups, it is meant to be useful to women already practicing tarot or those interested in this type of practice. Specifically, this source targets those who are unsatisfied with the available current decks like Rider-Waite or Thoth, because of their White, Christianized illustrations and sexist creators, making it hard for women to fully relate to male titles and situations found in these decks.²⁵ Its creation was meant to build on *Witch's Tarot*, created by Ellen Cannon Reed as a pagan-friendly deck and guide. Though, ultimately, this pamphlet was bought/sold to fundraise for the creation of Potts' own feminist tarot deck which, in turn, addressed the spiritual needs of women, amplified the influence of the ancient goddess, and incorporated astrology, numerology, and herbalism. Potts claimed that "women coming to the use of the Tarot have a veritable mountain of sexism and sexist interpretation to overcome," but, when recreated, feminist tarot will be more approachable and relatable.²⁶

The goddess-inspired tarot guide and the subsequent deck are meant to be relevant to practicing women, using their experiences, realities, and histories at the forefront of the cards' meanings and illustrations. This pamphlet recognizes previous feelings of powerlessness, not having a proper spiritual

²² Jean Freer, *A New Feminist Tarot*, (London, U.K.: Lamia Publications, 1987), 19.

²³ "Wise Woman Billie Luisi Potts Bio," *Flashsilvermoon*, Feb. 2010 <http://flashsilvermoon.com/2010/blog/wise-womans-festival/wise-woman-billie-luisi-potts-bio>.

²⁴ Billie Luisi Potts, "Owning Jewish Separatism and Lesbian Separatism," *For Lesbians Only: A Separatist Anthology* (London, U.K.: Onlywomen Press, 1988) 149.

²⁵ Billie Potts, *A New Women's Tarot*, (Woodstock, New York: Elf and Dragons Press, 1977), 5.

²⁶ Potts, *A New Women's Tarot*, 5.

'gift' or teacher within feminist esoteric communities, and calls for the need to reclaim their spiritual power. There is an inherent desire to have women turn to tarot rather than turn away because of the popular patriarchal decks. Tarot is a counter-cultural religious experience and requires radical reinterpretation. The deck is an important spiritual tool and discipline that must be repossessed by women because, "they are not a product of religious revelation in the conventional sense, but expressions of feeling, intuition, dream work and the working toward discovery of spiritual herstory that we are all engaged in."²⁷ *A New Women's Tarot* reshapes the use and understanding of tarot with feminist spirituality, situating itself during the height of Second Wave Train Feminism. It highlights the growing religious independence of women as well as the growing feminine scholarship and influence over tarot and esoteric circles. The shift from a more traditional tarot to one solely influenced by women amplifies the reasons and wants for changes that center women's narratives in spirituality. Spiritualist women want more representation and domination over the religious tools they use, unmuddled by Christianity, sexism, and unattainable forms of occultist power as seen within the influence of the men.

Jean Freer, otherwise known as Jeane Diamond, is another feminist tarot practitioner that, while she is relatively unknown in her New Age works, is nonetheless a representative of the Second Wave. Freer spent her youth in California, attending the University of California, Berkeley, initially working with anti-war protesters in the 1960s. Soon after her education, Freer moved to London where she became a feminist, "searching for equal rights of wymn, [where she] explored the realms of religion and spirituality, becoming a Wiccan priestess in the Dianic tradition."²⁸ Unlike Billie Potts, who was schooled in Crowley's occultist system, Freer worked alongside Zsuzsanna Budapest and other feminist icons to lead public rituals as well as train others. She was initiated in the Susan B. Anthony Coven in 1973, giving Freer the authority to establish herself as spiritual leader, committed to teaching women how to organize their energy. This spiritual background gave Freer the ability to begin cementing herself as a knowledgeable tarot diviner in 1979, practicing in a shop at Glastonbury High Street.²⁹ Here, Freer developed her abilities and began developing *A New Feminist Tarot*, inspired by Billie Potts and other feminist New Agers.

²⁷ Potts, *A New Women's Tarot*, 3.

²⁸ Jeane F. Diamond, "Jeane F. Diamond's Life Story," *Free Spiritual Counselling*, date accessed Feb. 27 2023, <https://freer.org/biography/>.

²⁹ Diamond, "Jeane F. Diamond's Life Story."

The tarot guide, *A New Feminist Tarot*, worked with the feminist principles and goals of the Second Wave Train which established a need to reclaim the Western occult tradition. While this work offers only a feminist framework around tarot rather than a new deck, it is meant to guide feminist New Agers to combine women's values with spirituality. *A New Feminist Tarot* begins by criticizing Aleister Crowley as "a renowned misogynist committed to sex magic. He changed the Strength card in the tarot deck to Lust, and glorified women only in her aspect of the sacred whore."³⁰ Outraged by the traditional occult scholarship introduced by the Golden Dawn, Freer maintains that tarot should and can be used to take back personal power and implement positive change to the feminist community. Tarot, rather than being caged by the patriarchy, can be reclaimed to meet the needs of women to achieve healing on a larger scale. Freer and her associates believe that tarot is a useful tool in reclaiming and developing psychic powers. By using tarot decks, it reflects "an oral tradition of womyn-loving times which is being reclaimed and brought up to date by womyn returning to goddess," leading to spiritual regeneration.³¹ No longer is tarot used to establish enlightenment within secret societies, as it was developed in the First Wave. The Second Wave of tarot brought forth the goals of revitalizing the intuition and powers of new generations, calling onto the past for strength in the ancient goddess. Women were to no longer be silenced by the dominant masculine culture that decided the future of occult tradition. Jean Freer, as well as Billie Potts, recognized the separate needs of women and Queer folx and created literature to rally behind. Although the two came from two separate schools of spiritual tradition, their works paralleled each other, associating pagan goddesses with the cards and removing major male archetypes from the Major Arcana. While Freer advocated for decks without the Minor Arcana kings for lesbians, she did understand the value of retaining them. Men continue to persist in society, and their presence in the lives of women could not be overlooked. Despite this, the feminist analysis of tarot offered by Freer created a space solely for women in the New Age.

Not only did tarot penetrate the feminist movement through covert action, but its perception in popular culture and media helped transform tarot into an inherently feminine spiritual tool. Len Lakofka is not a user or practitioner of tarot, but was an American writer of material for the role-playing game *Dungeons and Dragons*. He was an influential figure in the game's development and was intimately involved in the creation of game guides. The "Notes on Women and

³⁰ Freer, *A New Feminist Tarot*, 15.

³¹ Freer, *A New Feminist Tarot*, 17.

Magic—Bringing the Distaff Gamer into D & D” is a result of his work, focusing on the aspects of female character integration of the game, including the use of magic and tarot cards. Women and their female characters could participate in the fighter, magic user, thief and cleric classes. It is unclear whether women could play as a male character or were solely restricted to a female character and vice versa. However, the language used by Lakofka suggests that women were meant to play as female characters as a way to introduce women into this previously male-exclusive fantasy game. Compared to male counterparts, women were the only users that needed beauty as an aspect of their character and were the only ones who could partake in “tarot readings” within the game. This source offers perspectives on women within the White gaming world while also depicting the incorporation of tarot with a complete misunderstanding of its proper use. In this source, tarot is only used for yes/no questions which must be exact and precise, and the answers can only be Yes, Probably Yes, Probably No and No. Tarot outside of Dungeons and Dragons is not meant to give definite answers, but is a reflection of the external and internal circumstances of the reader and querent.³² Although not particularly useful in understanding tarot, it offers a great view into how men and gaming culture interpreted women and spiritual practices in the midst of Second Wave Train Feminism. Tarot’s inclusion in *Dungeons and Dragons* creates the image that the decks have not only seeped its way into New Age and Neopagan spiritual practices but have also entered popular culture. The game, during the height of its popularity, was seen to be a “boys’ game,” that, although not explicitly, excluded women and girls from playing.³³ However the entrance of female characters, even with the binary notions of gender and sex, highlights the changing attitudes towards women and their engagement with the occult. Tarot in the Second Wave was morphed into a tool for women to explore their spirituality, which, in turn, was reflected in popular culture. Rather than women permeating male spaces to access tarot, the cards became a point of access to attract women into those spaces.

The Second Wave acts as a huge turning point for tarot and feminist action, as the counter-cultural religious movements turned their focus onto prevailing women’s lives. Tarot, from this point on, acts as a tool widely seen in the media with women. This wave established tarot as being further associated with women and

female spaces, as it attempted to remove predominantly male scholarship from the core of its creation. Billie Potts and Jean Freer offer a window into this discourse, fully participating in religious feminism to reflect their lifestyles and promote healing within their communities. Their scholarship and printed works center the female body and experiences, calling upon pagan religions from a pre-Christianized society to gain authority in spirituality in the Second Wave. Although their work is incredibly important to tarot’s history, the anti-trans rhetoric and binary perspectives of gender which specifically barred trans folk for entering their religious separatist spaces or partaking in their rituals create a need for another wave of tarot as well as another Wave Train Feminism to reshape the cards into a more inclusive tool of divination.

Conclusion

Contemporary tarot has been built upon the pervasive work of its foremothers during the First and Second Wave, engaging with diviners depending on their needs interpersonally and privately. Tarot has engaged with feminist movements throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, resulting in the creation of new decks and scholarship. Its influence has become incredibly accessible and important to new generations in the Third and Fourth Wave Train.

It is worth acknowledging that scholarship and archived works focus mostly on cisgender, White women despite many scholars working to remove tarot’s direct association with male, occult organizations. White women have historically been allowed more acknowledgment within history because of their proximity to White men and have had a great ability to interact with counter-cultural religions with less backlash due to this association. Undoubtedly, White women have had the opportunity to be more public-facing with regard to spirituality and other feminist movements because of systematic oppression faced by People of Color and Queer identities.

The Second Wave of tarot was integral to religious feminism, reacting against the sexist attitudes of earlier occultism; however, the focus on binary gender dynamics led to a non-inclusive atmosphere. The preference of cisgender women and overt exclusion of trans women and non-binary folks acted directly against the push toward goals of equality within religious feminism. As a result, Third and Fourth Wave feminists pushed for a new tarot, one that works with growing feminist epistemology in order to center the experiences and needs of the wider population. Feminist epistemology “studies the ways in which gender does and ought to influence our conceptions of knowledge, knowers, and prac-

³² Len Lakofka, “Notes on Women and Magic - Bringing the Distaff Gamer into D & D,” *The Dragon* 1, no. 3 (1976) 8.

³³ Kröger, *Toil and Trouble: A Women’s History of the Occult*, 190.

tices of inquiry and justification.”³⁴ This feminist theory identifies that the practice of knowledge disadvantages women and other subordinated groups, and as such strives to reform them. The Third and Fourth wave of tarot presents new decks and scholarship that highlight their interests, cognitive styles and theories without reproducing social hierarchies. In distancing themselves from abstract academic feminists and separatist women’s culture, this new shaping of tarot focused on the inclusion of multiple identities and experiences that differ from cis-gender, White lifestyles.

Feminists during the Third and Fourth Wave work to connect tarot to a stronger movement for gender, racial and economic justice. Different from the First and Second Wave, this movement focuses on the commitment to multiplicity, encompassing a large range of concerns such as the environment, economic welfare, carceral inequality as well as representation in popular culture.³⁵ Not only is this wave reacting against past movements, but it is embracing an anti-positivist approach to life. Positivism is a philosophical system that promotes an understanding that all knowledge is scientifically justifiable.³⁶ Tarot works to understand experiences of the past, present and future through mysticism and intuition rather than with science, understanding the world through stars, symbols and mythology. Feminist epistemology allowed for the creation and perseverance of Third Wave ideology within tarot, ultimately shaping it anew once again.

As a reaction to this patriarchal tarot and its history, Wave feminists have actively shaped tarot in a way that could not be ignored. The First Wave feminists physically created the decks, though were not properly acknowledged for their contributions to the scholarship. Their creative works and subsequent knowledge around tarot did play into the patriarchal occultist arena, having misogyny woven in, especially with these hierarchical secret societies. Despite this, their presence in the work is undeniable and foundational for tarot. The Second Wave feminists worked in direct reaction to tarot’s previous scholarship around its domination of nature and women. No longer are women considered passive guides of tarot, but they have established themselves as the creators of a new tarot. Their work comes from religions that celebrate the female divine and pagan goddesses. Second

Wave feminists, while centering female narratives, disregarded Queer and racial identities, creating harmful rhetoric around tarot. This leads to the responses of the Third Wave feminists, whose goals come from creating a community to transcend capitalist, colonialist society through rejecting scholarship that is not representative. In tandem with the Third Wave, the Fourth Wave Feminists use the Internet and social media to spread feminist theory and rhetoric to a wider audience. Social media like YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and TikTok give feminist tarot practitioners a space to safely discuss their counter-cultural religious practices as well as create a large community for People of Color and Queer folx. The access to information and community surrounding tarot is shaped, not by hierarchies and hidden knowledge of the past, but by diversity and acceptance propelled by the social zeitgeist of the twenty-first century.

It is worth acknowledging the lack of scholarship around Queer and non-white identities when focusing on the development of tarot. As the scholarship for tarot continues to grow, it is pivotal to appreciate and recognize expanding the identities around its creation. While this essay focuses on the pervasive work of women, there are Queer and non-White people that need to be further examined in regard to their impact around tarot, especially within the later Wave Trains movements. Contemporary culture continues to promote inclusive and representative tarot, and historical scholarship needs to reflect those attitudes. Generation Z and the Internet are changing the ways in which historians can document and explore popular culture. In doing so, there can be scholarship that acknowledges and highlights the work of women, the LGBTQ+ community and non-White identities. Preserving the work of these communities will create a fuller picture of tarot as a divination practice and those who partake in it.

As tarot continues to transform through its users, it is important to acknowledge those who have had a fundamental hand in its shaping. Tarot continues to gain popularity for its beautiful artwork and as an avenue for spiritual healing, which makes the cards and their history worth preserving and documenting. The examination of the querent’s life through the cards, the opportunity for community building, and the possibility to connect with the past and ancestors are just some of the few benefits of using tarot. Tarot has given women and Queer people a space for spiritual authority and clarity, bringing internal reflection for entire communities. Its popularity has allowed people to build and shape tarot into a practice that offers a path of resistance against social norms.

³⁴ Elizabeth Anderson, “Feminist Epistemology and Philosophy of Science,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Aug. 9, 2020, date accessed Feb. 27 2023, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-epistemology/>.

³⁵ Dicker, *A History of U.S. Feminisms*, 127.

³⁶ Olúfemi Taiwò, “Being-in-the-Room Privilege: Elite Capture and Epistemic Difference,” *The Philosopher* (2022), <https://www.thephilosopher1923.org/post/being-in-the-room-privilege-elite-capture-and-epistemic-deference>.

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