

New Horizons in English Studies 9/2024

## CULTURE & MEDIA



Kamila Klavia Bagińska

UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW, POLAND

KK.BAGINSKA@STUDENT.UW.EDU.PL

[HTTPS://ORCID.ORG/0009-0007-6390-0822](https://orcid.org/0009-0007-6390-0822)

---

### Disrupted Patriarchy – Powers of Pregnant Women in Halsey’s *If I Can’t Have Love, I Want Power* (2021)

**Abstract.** Horror movies are the main contradictors of the cultural characterization of pregnancy as a blissful and positive experience. The representation of characters within the genre withdraws from that practice and offers stories where gestating women disrupt the patriarchal order through an attempt to reclaim their autonomy. In this work, I analyze the issue of horror pregnancy and the numerous binaries that try to define women in the patriarchal structures. This work proposes that Halsey’s independent movie *If I Can’t Have Love, I Want Power* (2021) is a story of a woman who does not conform to misogynistic categories through mystical pregnancy. I will trace the evolution of the binaries that began with Freud’s Madonna Whore Dichotomy to Erin Harrington’s “Good” and “Bad” Mother theory to delineate that Halsey’s movie is a contemporary attempt to reintroduce and reframe the theories about women’s sexuality and identity. While referencing the conclusions of feminist scholars like Shulamith Firestone and Betty Friedan, I present how the patriarchal culture often excludes, demonizes, and limits pregnant women’s significance as individuals. A close reading of the scenes and the soundtrack to the movie suggests that *If I Can’t Have Love, I Want Power* uses the trope of horror pregnancy to point out the patriarchal discrimination of pregnant women’s empowerment. In that, the feminist interpretation of Halsey’s movie breaks down the stereotype of a monstrous gestating woman to present that pregnancy can come with a form of power.

**Keywords:** pregnancy, patriarchy, abject fetus, monstrous woman, reproductive rights, abortion, film

## Introduction

In the 20th and 21st centuries, American culture characterizes pregnancy by a set of binaries. The experience is usually divided into two contradicting categories – the ideal and horror. As seen in popular movies and TV series like *9 Months* (1995), *What to Expect When You're Expecting* (2012), or *Jane The Virgin* (2014-2019), gestation is a condition that generally evokes optimistic experiences for pregnant women and positively influences their surroundings. Even though the popular narratives about pregnancy focus primarily on descriptions of gestation as a hyper-feminine experience situated in romantic narratives, there are stories of pregnancies that fall far from this stereotypical vision. Erin Harrington categorized the genre that abandons the idyllic vision of gestation and explores the horrors of female reproductivity as “gynaehorror” (Harrington 2017, 3). Within those narratives, gestation and women’s part in it receive recognition from both physical and psychological perspectives, which helps to understand the perpetuated patterns of duality in the representation of gestation.

The cultural split in the representation of pregnancy in American visual narratives connects with the patriarchal perceptions of the condition. It produces two opposite visions of gestation, one of which is blissful and the other abject. Patriarchy’s most desired projection of pregnancy is based on conformity to misogynistic ideologies about womanhood. Within the blissful descriptions, the woman is selfless, nurturing, and delighted about being pregnant. Nevertheless, the patriarchal strictness with the submissive vision of gestating women negates any other descriptions of the condition. Representation of pregnancy that does not conform to the stereotypical standards is treated as dangerous for the patriarchal system and thus rejected. The horror genre explores the elements, reasons, and consequences of the culturally denied abject pregnancy. The primary interest of horror movies is incorporating the two conflicting ideas – terror and joy – which I conceptualize in this essay as “horror pregnancy.”

This essay analyzes the independent movie *If I Can't Have Love, I Want Power* (2021), directed by Colin Tilley and written by Ashley Frangipane, known widely as an American singer-songwriter Halsey. The film accompanies the 2021 album of the same name, also created by Halsey and produced by Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross of Nine Inch Nails. The film’s construction resembles a series of music videos integrated into a full-length movie narrative, with the soundtrack consisting of several songs from Halsey’s long-play album. *If I Can't Have Love, I Want Power* manifests a larger cultural trend of using a record of the same artist as a backdrop for the feature film. Similar projects that focus on the inseparability of sound and visuals already appeared in Pink Floyd’s *The Wall* (1982), Micheal Jackson’s *Moonwalker* (1988), and recently in Janelle Monae’s *Dirty Computer [Emotion Picture]* (2018).

Halsey’s movie introduces the story of a young Queen, Lila, who becomes pregnant through the intervention of the demon Lilith. The narrative, situated within a fantasy Middle Ages, follows the tragic and paranormal events she struggles with throughout the pregnancy until the end, when she is executed by beheading. The suspenseful and

mysterious mood of the movie constructs the process that Lila has to go through as a horror experience in terms of the mental and physical pain that she faces. The difficulties that the main character goes through could be read as a reflection of contemporary struggles with bodily autonomy and reproductive health.

Numerous scholars such as Sarah Arnold, Erin Harrington, and Kelly Oliver have extensively debated the representation of gestating people in horror narratives, which opened the discussion about pregnant women in the patriarchal societal system. Thus, it is necessary to contextualize the ominous pregnancy within a larger framework of the relations between pregnant women and the patriarchal system to understand the perpetuated patterns of discrimination.

This essay explores the complexity of the cultural phenomena of how pregnancy and gestating women are demonized in patriarchal perspectives. I argue that the monstrous description of gestation and the stereotype of a submissive woman can be deconstructed. *If I Can't Have Love, I Want Power* presents pregnancy as an empowering condition, exposing Queen Lila's potential. The "power of pregnancy," as a regain of one's independence in gestation, can be found in the stories about disruptive women. The struggle of imposed female association with monstrosity and witchcraft has its reason in the pregnant women's "power of creation" that intimidates men. Through the transgression of the patriarchal fears about pregnancy, there is a possibility of escaping the misogynistic standards and reevaluating the position of gestating women.

I want to delineate the pattern of long-lasting misogynistic descriptions and stereotypes imposed on gestating women. The analysis of this problem will focus on several aspects that contribute to portraying pregnancy as both a monstrous and solely feminine experience in social terms. I want to trace how the gendered position of pregnant women leads to the duality of their identities in Western culture and how pregnant women cope with that situation.

Starting with Madonna Whore Complex, I want to present the duality in the descriptions of women as either sexual objects or archetypal mothers that appear in a patriarchal culture. Freud's theory will be evaluated through the lens of feminist scholars who have criticized the sexist ideologies underpinning his work. In this essay, the Madonna Whore Dichotomy works as an example of the early 20th-century theory that perpetuated inaccurate models of woman's sexuality. The evaluation of the duality of female characters through the perspective of the 21st century's film theories on horror pregnancy will reveal the critique of the dichotomic portrayals of sexuality, motherhood, and gestation.

To extend the context, I will delineate which types of pregnant women fit into the "Good Mother" and the "Bad Mother" categories in relation to Arnold's theory in *Maternal Horror Film: Melodrama and Motherhood* (2013). My implementation of claims about "Good" and "Bad" motherhood in gestation narratives occurs because of the patriarchal inseparability of pregnancy and maternity. I will present the inaccuracy of coding gestating women as the ones who are already mothers.

Moreover, I will explore the demonization of pregnant women in horror narratives, which resembles the sociocultural problems of patriarchal fear of gestation. Showing

that pregnancy is often associated with magic and paranormal activity, I will introduce the connection to the monstrous feminine. By analyzing Halsey's movie through the lens of the presented cultural theories about monstrous femininity, the aspect of associating gestation with occultism will reveal itself as inaccurate.

I will conclude the examination of the monstrous feminine concerning pregnancy horror movies by adding another element of duality in the representation of women. In the example of *If I Can't Have Love, I Want Power*, I want to explore the portrayal of a woman as a disruptive character associated with gestation, which is visible in both Queen Lila's ability to create a new life and Lilith's involvement in the process. What is at stake here is to show the transgressiveness of Halsey's movie in relation to the presented cultural theories. With the film's multiple contexts, it opposes misogynist theories about women perpetuated in the mystical pregnancy.

Lastly, I want to analyze the title of Halsey's movie through the already presented cultural theories about pregnancy. The clash of "Love" and "Power" in Halsey's gestation narrative has a deeper symbolic meaning, suggesting a woman's choice while pregnant in the patriarchal system. The investigation of that matter will be contextualized within the plot of *If I Can't Have Love, I Want Power*, in which I present the main character's approach to the presented duality of "Love" and "Power." The analysis of the title will complete the essay's main points and give the ultimate answer to the movie's message regarding pregnant women in patriarchal cultures.

### **Madonna Whore Dichotomy**

The misogynist representation of women within their sexual realm revolves around the theory called Madonna Whore Syndrome. In the context of the horror pregnancy narratives, Freud's theory works only as a historical context that delineates the gendered and chauvinist claims about female sexuality. Knowing the Madonna Whore Dichotomy helps understand the later split in the representation of pregnant women, mothers, and women in general. The duality of representation of women appeared first in 1912 when Sigmund Freud reported on cases of the "guilty conscience" in male patients. In those medical cases, men could not feel full sexual arousal while simultaneously having "loving feelings" for the woman with whom they had intercourse (Bernstein 2011, 106). What Freud established from his observations is that male impotence exists because of the anxiety and guilt that patients had because of having too similar feelings toward their partners as to those that they felt for their mothers during infancy (Bernstein 2011, 106). The only case in which the anxiety can be minimalized is imagining the woman as the opposite of the "virtuous mother," for instance, "a whore" (Bernstein 2011, 107). Following the theory, establishing a functioning relationship with a woman could happen only with the proposed dichotomy of a female. Thus, Madonna Whore Complex polarizes the sexual perception of women and categorizes them as either mothers or sexual objects, which opens misogynist interpretations.

Freud's theory introduces prejudice for the idea that women can be represented outside their sexuality or ability to reproduce. The symbolical "Madonna" is the "pure" woman with nurturing motherly characteristics, whereas the "Whore" is the embodiment of promiscuity and the general degradation of the female character. This concept "manifests as a tendency for men to view women one-dimensionally," which is a flawed patriarchal vision of femininity (Tuch 2010, 150). The representational split to the category of either a mother or femme fatale detaches pregnant women from being perceived as individuals and not only gestating bodies.

During the second wave of feminism, the critique of Freud for his sexist ideologies began to progress, and many scholars attempted to reshape the gendered position of women. In *The Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963, Betty Friedan extensively questions the application of Freud's ideas to the descriptions of femininity. She commented that the Freudian idea negatively affected many American women as it disguises the past suggestions that women are "less than human, unable to think like men, [and] born merely to breed and serve men" (Friedan 1963, 95). Another feminist scholar, Schulamith Firestone, mentioned that despite Freud's theories and methods being proven inaccurate or ineffective, "the old conceptions" still circulated in the 1970s (Firestone 1970, 42). The accounts of those feminist critics confirm that Freudianism was harmful to the general perception of women. Kate Millet reports that in reconsidering those theories, it is essential to take into consideration that Freud did not consider the "limiting circumstances" imposed on women by society but claimed them as a "universal feminine tendency" (Millett 1978, 407). In 21st-century culture, the inaccuracy of Freudian analysis is largely accepted within the feminist community, and the case of female identity evolves to present the empowered position of women.

The Madonna Whore Complex, as well as many other claims by Freud, is an outdated theory that disrupted feminist thought extensively enough to appear in popular culture narratives even in the 2020s. Scholars of the 21st century still comment on the incorrectness of the misogynist perception of women in movies, such as the monstrous feminine, which takes the form of criticism of the false descriptions imposed on women. Halsey's *If I Can't Have Love, I Want Power* tells the story of a pregnant woman seeking emancipation in a fictional medieval setting. The narrative's equal emphasis on gestation and the individuality of the main character juxtaposes the two culturally conflicting ideas of a "pure mother" and an "emancipated woman" as equally important. The film comments that the strict duality of the "Madonna" and the "Whore" is inaccurate and that the two realms not only coexist peacefully but intertwine with each other.

### Good Mother and Bad Mother

Just as the feminist critiques of the Madonna Whore Dichotomy, the concept of the "Good" and "Bad" Mother in horror movies presented by Arnold (2013) deconstructs the patriarchal means of categorization of women. The qualities of the two oppos-

ing constructs of motherhood reflect the duality of a female character that is often produced through the lens of misogynistic descriptions of motherhood. The “Good Mother” embodies conformity to the idea of a “virtuous mother.” She is “constructed within dominant patriarchal culture,” which indicates her selflessness and almost masochistic self-sacrifice for the sake of her child (Arnold 2013, 37). Like the Biblical Madonna, she is an archetype of the mother and is dominated by the paternal figure. In opposition to her portrayal is the category of the “Bad Mother.” This type of motherhood allows the mother to be represented independently of her role in the family, giving her much more independence than the “good” motherhood assumes. Arnold claims that the “Bad Mother” is a product of the “patriarchal imaginary” because of the transgressive nature of her resistance to the patriarchal system (2013, 69). The duality of the description of the two opposing portrayals of the mother is visible in the dichotomic and often corresponding characteristics of the “Good Mother” and “Bad Mother,” such as nurturing versus neglecting, dependent versus autonomous, or symbolically good versus bad.

The compliance with the “good mother” role exists mainly within what Creed named “patriarchal and phallogocentric ideology,” which eliminates any female disruptiveness for the sake of its existence (Creed 1993, 15). The cultural dismissal of women who do not treat their pregnancies as the center of their existence in horror pregnancy movies manifests in f.e. coding of the reproductive organs as inferior to humanity, like *vagina dentata*. What is at stake here for women is either agreeing to perform the restrictive “ideal motherhood” to be less dangerous with their sexuality or being perceived as an embodiment of the “monstrous feminine.”

What can be assumed from the descriptions of the “good” and “bad” types of motherhood is that Arnold’s concept deconstructs the Madonna Whore Complex. The characteristics of the “Good” and “Bad” mothers comment on the Freudian construct of female sexuality within a family that recognizes the “castrated, powerless and domesticated” mothers and their absolute opposite (Arnold 2013, 48). Arnold points out that the tendencies in broader culture to present a “Bad” mother figure in horror movies actually show a character that rejects the “traditional function of self-sacrifice and devotion,” for which she is often punished (Arnold 2013, 68). The *Maternal Horror Film* delineates that the binary motherhood types, similar to the Madonna Whore Dichotomy, are inaccurate to function as a correct division of female characters.

In *If I Can’t Have Love, I Want Power*, there is a visible indication that Queen Lila could be categorized as the “Bad Mother” or Freudian “Whore.” Her sexuality is explored throughout the movie in her pre-pregnancy lifestyle and defined by the Royal family as promiscuous and improper in the eyes of the aristocracy. Lila is not a passive character like the “Good Mother” and does not allow herself to be overshadowed by a man. The concept is taken to the extreme as the Queen kills the King while possessed by Lilith. Even after getting pregnant, Lila’s actions still are a source of friction for the Royals. Her personality does not fit the patriarchal standards defining “good and virtuous” motherhood.

## Demonization of Pregnant Women and Abortion Debate

Women who do not perform within the patriarchal standards can also be characterized in horror movies through the lens of the “monstrous feminine.” Barbara Creed – who first delineated monstrosity in portrayals of women – argued that the representation of a woman as “monstrous” is defined mainly in relation to female sexuality (Creed 1993, 212). One of the reasons for the “monstrous” imagining of a pregnant female, in general, derives from the fear of female reproductive organs and their capacities to “create” new life. Creed reports Joseph Campbell’s argument that women were the first ones accused of being involved in witchcraft because of their “mysterious ability to create new life” (Creed 1993, 100). In the Middle Ages patriarchal societies, pregnancy was a state producing a lot of intimidation, as there was much more “natural philosophy, magic, and alchemy than of medicine” surrounding pregnancy (Green 2000, 23-24). Along with the lack of correct knowledge, a cultural element contributed to the misogynistic descriptions of pregnancy. Kelly Oliver evaluates the matter concerning the negative characterization of pregnancy in Freudian thought. The author brings up the suggestion of Julia Kristeva that “women’s life-giving capacities and fundamental role in the continuation of the species make them threatening to a patriarchal order that can never confine such power” (Oliver 2012, 125). The main problem that Kristeva and Oliver acknowledge is that the demonization of pregnant women happens because male-centric societies are not able to reproduce but, at the same time, do not want to recognize a strong female position in the reproduction process.

In Halsey’s movie, the exaggerated concept of getting involuntarily pregnant through demonic intervention might suggest the matters of bodily autonomy, abjection of the pregnant body, and the abortion rights debate that speaks to Kristeva’s suggestion. The subversion of Kristeva’s theory of abjection (1982) in *If I Can’t Have Love, I Want Power* appears in the main character’s pregnancy with a demonic fetus. Moreover, the aspect of involuntary conception hints that the film corresponds with the discussion about women’s reproductive health.

From the 21st century’s perspective, the case of *Roe v. Wade*, which ensured access to legal abortion, captures the spirit of cultural individualism that ascended in the 1970s for reflecting women’s freedom of choice regarding pregnancy (Ziegler 2018, 16). Horror gestation movies from the late 1960s and 1970s, such as Polański’s *Rosemary’s Baby* (1968), might be read as a form of commentary on the reproductive health debates and answer to the rising “social power” of fetuses in America (Hoffman 2011, 240). The anxieties over the sociopolitical changes regarding the marginalization of pregnant women because of their physical state remained in the film industry. The circumstances surrounding the release of *If I Can’t Have Love, I Want Power* suggest its commentary on the current issues with rights to accessible reproductive health services. Before the release of Halsey’s movie, abortion laws have gone under a series of restrictions across the US (American Progress). Eventually, on June 24, 2022, *Roe v. Wade* was overturned, resulting in the nationwide abortion ban (Guttmacher).

Compared to the sociopolitical and cultural changes, Halsey's movie shares anxieties similar to those of the 1970s over women's position and control over their bodies. Thus, the permanence of the reproductive health debate is still commented on through the horror genre. Horror pregnancy narratives depict the abject fetus and abject pregnant bodies as a part of the cultural fear of women's reproductive capacities and the autonomy of the gestation process. Correspondingly, Lila's story comments on the reproductive rights debate and the criminalization of abortion in contemporary patriarchal societal structures.

### Gothic Mode of Storytelling: Magic

The outdated treatment of pregnancy as a condition associated with "mysterious powers of creating new life" is presented directly in the plot of *If I Can't Have Love, I Want Power*. Incorporating the elements of magic, witchcraft, and paranormality within a fictional Medieval kingdom plays with the real-life past misconception that gestation is associated with metaphysical powers. In the movie, before Queen Lila finds out she is pregnant, she stumbles upon a small hut in the middle of the forest. The place turns out to be the home of a blind female Seer. The strange woman touches terrified Lila's stomach and starts to make rhythmic breathing sounds. The Queen quickly picks up the Seer's manner, and they both perform chant-like breathing sounds. The scene's suspense is interrupted by the departure of the frightened Queen. Only later in the movie, when laboring Lila finds shelter in the Seer's hut, it turns out that the chant was a breathing exercise now useful for her. In that sense, the strange woman that the main character stumbled upon at the beginning of the movie is the only help during the delivery of the child.

According to the accounts of contemporary scholars, midwifery was associated with witchcraft in catholic societies in the Middle Ages. Creed reports that in the 14th century, being a midwife was performed only by "witches" (Creed 1993, 100). Fisher extends Creed's argument by adding that often, regardless if the birth was successful or not, "midwives might still be charged with selling an infant's soul to the devil" (Fischer 2015, 445). In contemporary gestation stories, the association of pregnancy and the act of birth with witchcraft is reversed by pointing out the patriarchal fear of women's superiority during gestation and birth. In the end, the female Seer, who initially was hinted to be just a witch, is the only person who helps Lila give birth. Thus, *If I Can't Have Love, I Want Power* opposes the patriarchal associations of pregnancy and childbirth with occultism by pointing out the positive aspect of female capabilities.

The final deconstruction of the patriarchal means that occurs in Halsey's movie is the implementation of Lilith as both an impregnating demon and an alter-ego of Queen Lila. There are several indications that the she-demon might be the main character's doppelgänger. The similarity lies not only in the convergence of the names of the two women or in their identical appearance. In the first scene of discovering the

dead King in the chamber, Lila sees Lilith's reflection in the mirror instead of her own. She quickly realizes that the woman mimicking her gestures is not a reflection but a demon who can exit the mirror from the side. Throughout the rest of the movie, Lilith follows Lila, barely revealing herself, to appear again during the birth scene. The plot unravels that the Queen (possessed by the demon) is responsible for the King's death. The acts of killing forced by Lilith do not end on that, as in the last scenes of the movie, Lilith kills the aristocrats and everyone associated with them after the beheading of Lila. The "monstrosity" of a woman is embodied in the character of the she-demon, yet the movie concludes her character as the one bringing justice in a discriminatory and abusive society.

Using horror and gothic themes in pregnancy horror films means the possibility of portraying pregnancy as dangerous, scary, or abject, which addresses the limitations and stereotypical representation of pregnant women. The style offers a handful of motifs like paranormality, isolation, or violence that could be read as symbols and comments on the socio-cultural changes in American society. Arnold argued that especially horror films from the 1990s onwards can be characterized by the "acceptance of patriarchy's decline" previously appearing solely in melodrama (Arnold 2013, 29). Pregnancy horror movies, as a product of cultural change, signalize the gradual abandonment of "idealized" gestation perpetuated by the patriarchal model of society. Halsey's *If I Can't Have Love, I Want Power* uses the gothic mode of storytelling, implementing Lilith's character to comment on the changing portrayal of gestation and gestating women, suggesting that there is a need and a possibility to address the "scary" and abject elements, which in patriarchal cultures are usually omitted as part of the experience.

### Love and Power

In Halsey's movie, the film's title shows the complexity of maintaining autonomy and position as a qualified future mother. The film's name introduces two ideas of "Love" and "Power" that, within the horror context of the movie, can exist together. Under the symbolic "Love" hides the general association of pregnancy with calmness, harmony, selflessness, and unconditional mother's love toward the future offspring. On the other hand, the contrasting symbolical "Power" suggests independence, strength, and even dominance. Similarly to the duality of Madonna and the Whore or "Good Mother" and "Bad Mother," "Love" and "Power" present contradicting and opposing concepts that navigate a pregnant woman's life.

The clash of the two symbols, read within the story of the movie, implies that the protagonist has a choice to either comply with the patriarchal society's standards or live against them. As the title suggests, if one cannot possess symbolical "love," they choose "power" as the second choice. In Lila's story, the disobedience of the rules the aristocracy sets results in the death sentence for the Queen's transgressiveness toward

the system. Regardless of her pregnancy and the prospect of being a mother, the protagonist will not relinquish her autonomy. Even if the continuous disobedience will result in her death, Lila makes a conscious choice not to give in to the patriarchal concept of motherhood.

Considering the mystical aspect of the story, the protagonist's disruptive nature is even more emphasized by a demon's intervention. Lilith possessed the Queen and forced her to kill the King. Nevertheless, she also impregnated Lila, which is deeply inconvenient for the aristocracy, as the male offspring of the Queen will be the heir to the throne. Considering the Aristocrat's negative attitude toward the Queen, having her son as the next king is inconvenient. As it turns out, the demonic impregnation is an asset in Lila's choice to disturb the patriarchal society. Regarding the mystical aspect of Lila's pregnancy, the choice of the symbolic "Power" (keeping one's independence) appears to happen through the symbolic "Love" (becoming a mother).

The song titled "I'm not a woman, I'm a god," which plays at the end of the movie, is an accurate representation of the duality of "Love" and "Power" while gestating. The uptempo, electronic music, and strong, distorted vocals create an energized atmosphere despite the preparations for Lila's beheading in the scene. The song opens with a chorus: "I am not a woman, I'm a god / I am not a martyr, I'm a problem / I am not a legend, I'm a fraud / So keep your heart 'cause I already got one" (Halsey 2021). The statement Halsey sings carries feminist undertones in a powerful claim about one's feelings of superiority combined with a self-consciousness that creates an effect of the duality of self-perception during gestation.

Regarding *If I Can't Have Love, I Want Power*, the song's reading suggests Lila's anxieties about whether her choice to remain disruptive and autonomous is right. The lyrics focus on dualities like "martyr" and "problem" or "legend" and "fraud," which are also visible concerning the ever-present cultural duality of representation of women described earlier in this essay. The choice of "Love" or "Power" appears the most because of the consequences of Lila's decision and is even more emphasized by "I'm not a woman, I'm a god," playing just before Queen's death. The song suggests Halsey's main character's fears that the feelings of making the right choice overcome. Pregnancy is undoubtedly an important experience for Lila, not for its stereotypical qualities like "one's fulfillment," but because it establishes a strong sense of rightful defiance toward an oppressive patriarchal system in the protagonist.

In Halsey's pregnancy narrative, the symbolical "Love" and "Power" simultaneously constitute the duality of choice pregnant women experience and the mutual influence of the two symbols. The movie's message about the pregnant woman's choice between compliance and transgression in patriarchal societies appears absolute. Within the misogynistic descriptions of pregnancy, gestating women cannot exist both as "independent" and "caring." Through the contrasting characteristics and symbols, the movie comments on the inaccuracy of binaries about pregnant women's qualities. Dichotomies are pointed out as negative because they simplify pregnancy, female sexuality, or women in general for the convenience of the patriarchal system. Halsey's preg-

nancy story transgresses the perpetuated absolute dualities for their limiting nature and presents a new model of a woman who finds her autonomy through pregnancy. The horror mode of storytelling emphasizes Lila's interpersonal change, producing an alternative way of portraying gestating women as "powerful."

## Conclusions

The analysis of the relations between pregnant people and patriarchal cultural structures reveals the pattern of the distorted portrayal of gestation. The deconstruction of the stereotypes that a pregnant woman is associated with "monstrosity," dark magic, derives from the polarized perceptions about her persona. *If I Can't Have Love, I Want Power* offers a story of a woman disturbing the patriarchal system to emphasize that her condition is not submissive but empowering. The liberation of the pregnant character appears through the disruptive nature of Queen Lila's character. To establish independence from the misogynistic portrayals of gestation, the character must face the patterns of demonization and polarization of the female persona in a patriarchal culture.

The demonization of pregnancy occurs through several polarized descriptions, such as the portrayals of female sexuality in Madonna Whore Dichotomy. Freudian theory that women's existence is defined only through the symbolical "Madonna" or "Whore" was one of the first academically conceptualized patterns that, from a contemporary perspective, is highly inaccurate. In the texts of numerous female scholars like Firestone, Friedan, and Millett, Freud's theory is criticized for its lack of consideration of the female historical limitations and for producing harmful imagining about the role of women in society.

As another comment on the inaccuracy of Freudian theories, Arnold attempts to deconstruct the idea by presenting a pattern of categorization of women in horror movies. The author presents the duality of motherhood in the two opposing models – The Good Mother and the Bad Mother. By delineating the "instability" of the concepts, it is visible that, similarly to Madonna Whore Complex, the two-dimensional portrayal of women functions only within the patriarchal societal models.

The consequence of producing the solely negative female character as the "Whore" or "Bad Mother" has its consequence in the general demonization of women in pregnancy narratives. The concept of the "monstrous feminine" derives from the fear of the nature of the female capacity to reproduce, which was a "mystical" experience in patriarchal descriptions. The association of gestation with magic can be traced through different concepts, like the witchcraft accusation of midwives in the Middle Ages. The case of implying occultic characteristics of pregnancy is explored in *If I Can't Have Love, I Want Power* in the characters of the Seer and Lilith. Both women are an embodiment of the cultural fears that gestation is a product of involvement with the dark powers.

In that sense, Halsey's movie reevaluates the negative portrayals of pregnancy and shows the complexity of the matter. The narrative presents that there is no clear divi-

sion between “good” and “bad” within a single gestating character. The film aims to delineate the ambivalence of pregnant people. If that complexity is acknowledged, then the female position as an independent character could be regained in the same way as it occurs in the case of Queen Lila. Ultimately, in Halsey’s movie, the transgressiveness of the past misconceptions about gestating women occurs through the disturbance of the established patriarchal standards for women through the character of pregnant Queen Lila. In that, the demonized description of gestation and pregnant women also has empowering potential as it manifests one’s independence outside of the culturally preserved patterns.

Despite many demonized descriptions of the condition and themselves, pregnant women in movies like *If I Can’t Have Love, I Want Power* are an embodiment of reclaiming one’s independence and embracing the ways in which gestation is a personally empowering condition. The imposed female association with monstrosity lies in the misogynistic theories such as Madonna Whore Syndrome that propose inaccurately polarized descriptions of a woman’s sexuality. In horror movies, this duality is presented in the tropes of the “Good” or “Bad” Mothers, which works as a critique of the instability of Freudian ideologies. The monstrous feminine is an embodiment of the patriarchal fears about the female ability to reproduce, which often is underpinned by the association of pregnancy with magic and witchcraft.

The analysis of *If I Can’t Have Love, I Want Power* reveals that the movie follows certain canonical patterns of portraying pregnant women, yet the feminist reading of the film suggests liberation from most of the problematic concepts achieved through the female victory over the patriarchal society. Halsey’s movie presents a story that, despite the seeming reproduction of the known motifs from classical pregnancy horror movies, implements modern aspects of the institution of pregnancy. The concept that horror pregnancy has only its downsides is deconstructed through the suggestion that ominous gestation can be a way of escaping the misogynistic means of situating gestating women as irrelevant. In that, Halsey’s movie proves there is an ongoing shift in the portrayal of pregnant people that could be the next step in the research of horror pregnancy and gestating women.

### References:

- American Progress. “State Abortion Legislation in 2021: A Review of Positive and Negative Actions.” Last modified September 21, 2021. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/state-abortion-legislation-2021/>
- Arnold, Sarah. 2013. *Maternal Horror Film: Melodrama and Motherhood*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137014122>
- Bernstein, W. M. 2011. *A Basic Theory of Neuropsychanalysis*. London: Karnac.
- Creed, Barbara. 1993. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film Feminism Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge.

- Firestone, Schulamith. 1970. *The Dialectic of Sex : The Case for Feminist Revolution*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Fischer, Lucy. 2015. "Birth Traumas: Parturition and Horror in *Rosemary's Baby*." In *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, ed. Grant Barry Keith, 446-448. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Friedan, Betty. 1963. *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: Norton.
- Green, Monica H. 2000. "From "Diseases of Women" to "Secrets of Women": The Transformation of Gynecological Literature in the Later Middle Ages." *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 30: 5–39.
- Gutmacher Institute. "US Supreme Court Overturns Roe v. Wade." Last modified June 24, 2022. <https://www.gutmacher.org/news-release/2022/us-supreme-court-overturms-roe-v-wade>.
- Halsey. 2021. *If I Can't Have Love, I Want Power*. With Trent Reznor, Atticus Ross, Jonathan Carter Cunningham. Capitol Records, Spotify. <https://open.spotify.com/album/3sq0hRtIT-2SYeYajr5Cx22?si=5T2mCSQIR2KNO-eqV4JXtg>.
- Harrington, Erin. 2018. *Women, Monstrosity and Horror Film: Gynaehorror*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315546568>
- Hoffman, A. Robin. 2011. "How to See the Horror: The Hostile Fetus in *Rosemary's Baby* and *Alien*." *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory* 22, no. 3: 239-261. DOI: 10.1080/10436928.2011.596386.
- Kristeva, Julia. 1982. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press).
- Millett, Kate. 1978. *Sexual Politics*. New York: Ballantine.
- Oliver, Kelly. 2012. *Knock Me Up, Knock Me Down: Images of Pregnancy in Hollywood Films*, 26-120. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Tilley, Colin, director. Created by Halsey. 2021. *If I Can't Have Love, I Want Power*. Imax, Capitol Records. Moment House. 53 min.
- Tuch, Richard. 2010. "Murder on the Mind: Tyrannical Power and Other Points along the Perverse Spectrum." *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 91, no. 1: 141-162.
- Ziegler, Mary. *Beyond Abortion: Roe V. Wade and the Battle for Privacy*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xww&AN=1723015&site=ehost-live>.