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DISORGANIZED RELIGION:

An Exploration of the Neopagan Craft in Canada

by

SIAN LEE MACDONALD REID

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
June 2001

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the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
acceptance of the thesis

**Disorganized Religion: An Exploration of the
Neopagan Craft in Canada**

submitted by Sian Lee MacDonald Reid, B.A. Hons, M.A.

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Thesis Supervisor

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Abstract

This study explores the growing phenomenon of neopaganism in Canada. Neopagans consider themselves to be part of a decentralized religious movement characterized by the symbolic centrality of nature and a sense of direct, unmediated connection with the divine, however conceived. People express and explore this connection through a variety of meditative, ritual, devotional, mythological, creative and magical processes, which are elective rather than prescribed.

Through survey research, employing a mail-in questionnaire distributed through a national pagan magazine (n=187), and semi-structured interviews with a self-selected group of participants (n=18), this work achieves three things: it situates neopagans and their observable demographic characteristics in relation to those of other Canadians; it situates neopaganism within the broader context of the Canadian religious landscape; and it situates the way in which neopagans narratively construct themselves and their communities within the context of the social features of late modernity.

Neopaganism emerges, in this analysis, as a fluid, transformational discourse, providing a symbolic language that can be appropriated and manipulated by practitioners to effect meaningful transformation in both self and surroundings through individual interpretive agency. The sense of community among neopagans is best exemplified by Maffesoli's concept of the neotribe (1996). Despite the variations in specific beliefs and practices of groups

and individuals, there are aesthetic, ethical and emotional continuities between them that participants recognize as constituting a collective sensibility that distinguishes them from other communities.

These characteristics position neopaganism as a form of religious expression well suited to the conditions of late modernity. However, the increasing push towards institutionalization as a means to achieve legal recognition as a religion and to enable a wider range of services to be provided to participants threatens to diminish the transformative potential of the Craft by undermining the internal logic upon which the movement legitimates itself.

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Percentage of respondents who indicated that their parents had a religious affiliation while the respondent was growing up who described their parent's religious involvement as...

Chapter One: Neopagan Witchcraft and the Study of Religion

This study sets out to gain insights about those people in Canada who choose to identify themselves as 'pagan', 'neopagan', 'Wiccan' or 'Craft'. These are all terms people use to describe themselves and their relationship to a broad constellation of beliefs and practices. Most of my respondents identified with some form of neopagan witchcraft, and all of them implicitly, by completing the survey, acknowledged that they were within the 'pagan sphere', practicing something they defined as 'Craft'. This analysis will focus primarily on neopagan witchcraft, as its self-identified practitioners formed by far the largest segment of my data.

Neopagans generally consider themselves to be part of a spiritual movement that, although it may be modern in its immediate origins, has its roots in the mystical traditions of earlier times.¹ Mysticism, in the Craft, is usually taken to be a sense of direct, unmediated connection with the divine, however conceived. People connect with this mystical and celebratory impulse through a variety of meditative, ritual, devotional, mythological, creative and magical processes. The choice and combination of these processes and practices is largely left to the individuals who adopt them. This leads to a syncretic and

¹ I use the term 'movement' in an evocative, rather than a technical, manner. Several scholars, notably Bainbridge (1997) and Dawson (1998) define 'religious movement' in a way that excludes the Craft. Here, however, I use the term as one might use 'Romantic movement', to suggest the diffusion and adoption of a similar sentiment, expressive style and ethical orientation among the 'disorganized' individuals who identify with it.

evolving set of religious and spiritual practices with no over-arching system of formal organization.

In terms of absolute numbers, there are comparatively few people involved in the Craft in Canada. The 1981 Census of Canada showed 2295 people listing their religious affiliation as 'pagan'; the 1991 census saw that number increase to 5530. Despite the fact that the raw numbers have more than doubled, those identifying as 'pagan' still represent only .02% of the Canadian population.² The small number of people involved in these religious practices, combined with their lack of formal organization, has probably contributed to the fact that they have been largely ignored by those surveying the Canadian religious scene. Neopaganism gets no mention at all in the overviews of Canadian religion done by Hans Mol (1985) or Reginald Bibby (1987). In Bibby's follow-up volume (1993), it is discussed, but only in the context of teenage involvement with 'witchcraft and Satanism'.³

Even among those who make it their particular goal to theorize about and study new religious movements (NRMs), neopaganism is often either ignored or disparaged, although interest in NRMs more generally has been steadily increasing since the 1960s. For example, two of the more influential theorists in the sociology of religion comment,

² I have reason to believe that these numbers are somewhat understated, for reasons that will be discussed in Chapter 3; however, they are not sufficiently understated to change the point being made here.

³ It is important to note that although Bibby does make it clear that he understands that the two types of groups have different beliefs and practices, he still chooses to lump them together for the purposes of discussing whether large numbers of teenagers are being seduced by occult groups.

Most cults in America do not conform to our expectation of what a really successful faith of the future would be like. Many of the current cults, such as the various witchcraft and pagan groups, have reacted to secularization by a headlong plunge back into magic. They reject the whole scientific culture as well as Christian-Judaic religious traditions. They succeed in gathering a few members because they claim to offer extremely efficacious compensators. They unblushingly promise to give the individual the power to harness supernatural powers to manipulate the natural world. In our judgment, these cults are reactionary and have little future. (Stark and Bainbridge 1985:455)

Dawson classifies most neopagan spiritual activity as being in the organizational category of the 'audience cult' (1998:36) and typologically characterized primarily by its association with the occult revival, thus placing it in the same category as the Church of Satan (1998:14). Dawson's volume, although acknowledging that too much of the study of NRMs has been focused on those that are formally organized and fairly large, continues in this tradition. He does not, however, diminish the significance of NRMs in general, noting that despite the small numbers involved in these religious and spiritual forms at any given time, they may represent a significant response to the cultural forces of increased secularization. "[M]any NRMs may be engaged in the process of adapting religion to the conditions of the modern world but in ways that ensure rather than diminish their continuing cultural significance" (1998:29).

William Bainbridge not only concedes the importance of the neopagan and other unorthodox groups which he classifies under the general rubric of the 'New Age', but also argues persuasively for their overall cultural significance in North America. "[T]he New Age also influences the widespread crazy quilt that we call modern culture in general, thus shaping the background against which religious denominations exist" (1997:368). He also notes that, "with its ties to

pseudoscience and Asian religion, the New Age is clearly the most formidable thorough-going religious counterculture that currently exists in modern society" (1997:391).

Both Dawson and Bainbridge present insights and directions that are particularly valuable in approaching the study of neopaganism in Canada because they take seriously both the idea that these religious beliefs and practices are meaningful and rational to the individual, rather than postulating that participants are somehow pathological or deluded, and the idea that these beliefs and practices are both influenced by and influence the cultural contexts in which they are found. With these as basic premises, research on the Craft can move away from simply passing judgment as to whether neopaganism is 'normal' or 'healthy' and focus instead on the ways in which it encounters and addresses some of the fundamental issues around the changing ideas of community, sociality and identity in our modern, Western cultural context. This study seeks to explore some of the possible factors contributing to the growth of neopaganism in Canada during the last two decades, and to offer some speculation about the directions it may take in the future and the challenges that will accompany them.

Contemporary Neopagan Witchcraft: A Brief History of the Movement

With the weight of the cultural prejudice surrounding the word 'witchcraft', it might be seen as surprising that any movement would choose the term to describe itself when not compelled to do so. The designation can be seen as a misnomer, based upon either a historical misunderstanding or a historical misrepresentation, depending on which version of the 'facts' one chooses to

believe. However, the word 'witchcraft' has become a common, if sometimes contested, description and self-identification for a proportionally large subsection of the neopagan and goddess spirituality movement. Contemporary witchcraft, also known as Wicca or the Craft, considers itself to be a pagan religious movement that draws upon pre-Christian folklore and mythology for its inspiration. The historical difficulty which gives rise to the explosive nomenclature is that, for many years after it first became visible in the 1950s, Wicca insisted that it was a pre-Christian nature religion – a survival rather than a revival. Although it is probably not possible to completely disprove this assertion, it is nevertheless regarded as very dubious in scholarly circles today (Rose 1962; Kelly 1982, 1991; Russell 1980; York 1999; Hutton 1999). Over the course of the past fifteen years, the claims of some branches of neopagan witchcraft to unbroken historical lineage dating back to prehistoric times have been increasingly challenged among their practitioners as well.

It is certainly possible to understand why an essentially new religious movement should have chosen to burden itself with such a negative and unwieldy label if one looks at the context in which it first arose. The historical justification lies with Margaret Murray.⁴ A noted Egyptologist and British professor, two of the books she published, *The Witch-cult in Western Europe*

⁴ Klaitis notes, "Although the popular reputation of Murray's works remains remarkably strong, no serious student of the subject accepts her evidence. Her theories nevertheless continue to provide an imagined historical foundation for members of witchcults today. Such modern witches practice a kind of pagan worship of Mother Earth. They reject completely a belief in Satan and have no connection with the supposed devil-worshipping witches of witch-hunt lore." (Klaitis 1985:10).

(1921), and *God of the Witches* (1933), developed her theory that those burned during the witch-craze of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were in fact members of an organized pan-European, pre-Christian pagan fertility cult. Although Murray was not the first scholar to treat the theme of witchcraft as a survival of pre-Christian forms⁵, fortuitous timing meant that her works were well received by Britain's occult community, which, in the 20s and 30s, was quite taken with 'secret traditions' (Wood 2001:48).

It is certain that Gerald Gardner, the man to whom modern witchcraft, and by extension much of the modern neopagan revival, owes its impetus, had read Margaret Murray.⁶ Wood notes that Gardner was a member of the Folklore Society at the same time as was Murray (2001:46) and the preface to his groundbreaking 1954 work, *Witchcraft Today*, was written by Murray herself.

⁵ Wood notes that the essay by statistician Karl Pearson "Woman as Witch: Evidence of Mother-Right in the Customs of Mediaeval Witchcraft" which appeared in 1897, anticipates many of the substantial themes that later appear in Murray's work (2001:49).

⁶ For example, Gardner states, "among the most common charges against witches is that they denied or repudiated the Christian religion. All I can say is, I and my friends have never seen or heard of such denial or repudiation. My opinion is that in the early days everyone was of the old faith and regularly worshipped the old gods before they were initiated. To people like the Romans and Romano-Britons it would only be worshipping their own gods who had become identified with Celtic ones, so there would be nothing to repudiate.

"Possibly during the persecution times if unknown people turned up at a big religious meeting they would be questioned to see if they were spies and might be asked to deny Christianity, as a sort of test. They would never initiate anyone, take him into the circle, unless they knew him well as one of the old faith. When the persecution grew fierce, the cult dived underground and practically only children, born and bred into the cult, were ever initiated." (Gardner 1954:43) Thus, Murray's work gave Gardner a 'legitimate' historical framework, and Gardner's work 'proved' Murray's theory.

Gardner was a British customs agent and amateur anthropologist who had been stationed in Malaya. He retired to Britain in 1936 and became involved with the occult/theosophical scene. These are easily verifiable facts and little contested. Less verifiable is Gardner's assertion that he was initiated into a witch-coven, which preserved traditions from the pre-craze era, in 1939. He claims that the rituals he learned while a member of this coven formed the basis for the rituals that later appear in his own 'Book of Shadows'.⁷ This claim, and the constellation of historical assertions surrounding it, is far more contested among neopagans.

Aidan Kelly (1991) argues that there is nothing present in the Gardnerian Book of Shadows that shows any evidence of its purported antiquity; most of the material can be attributed to Gardner's familiarity with the works of Murray, Frazer, Leland and the British magical societies. Kelly asserts that most of the rituals, in their final forms, were likely written in the mid to late 1950s by Doreen Valiente, an associate of Gardner, who wrote with a much more goddess-oriented focus, á la Robert Graves (Kelly 1982, 1991).⁸ Kelly's position is that

⁷ A 'Book of Shadows' (often abbreviated in speech to BoSh) is the collection of rituals and ritual fragments used by an individual witch or by a coven. In traditional groups, there will be a BoSh that is passed from initiator to each initiate that represents the coven's inheritance. The coven may also keep a separate BoSh recording its own innovations, and most individuals also keep one of their private workings. The term 'Book of Shadows' is widely used in both the Goddess Spirituality and eclectic frameworks as well for the working collection of rituals of an individual or coven.

⁸ This is supported by Valiente's admission that she did write much of the material in the Book of Shadows. She asserts, however, that she worked with Gardner on constructing the rituals, and she is personally convinced that he was basing them on 'traditional' material from the group into which he was initiated *although she never saw any of this material herself*. (Valiente 1989)

Gardner was a brilliant innovator who, together with several other colleagues, created a viable, living, pagan religion out of scraps of folklore, esoteric traditions and Romantic sensibility. He asserts that there was no "New Forest Coven" preserving ancient lore, and that Gardner used 'disinformation techniques' (1991:171-3) in order to conceal what he himself probably considered to be a minor and wholly justifiable deception.⁹ This position has not endeared Kelly to a great many Gardnerians, some of whom dislike the implication that Gardner was lying, and some of whom accuse him of misrepresenting or taking liberties with his materials, misrepresenting himself or his work, and betraying confidences. Less radically revisionist theories speculate that there was some kind of esoteric group operating in the New Forest with which Gardner was involved and it was they, rather than him, who constructed the basis of the movement that has since become Gardnerian witchcraft. In this scenario, Gardner was deceived along with everyone else. Another speculation is that Gardner received a sort of religious sentiment, orientation and spiritual philosophy from this pre-existing group, and merely recast it in his own words. This seems to be the view of Doreen Valiente, at least as late as 1989, even while she candidly admits that Gardner was willing to dissemble about other things (1989:41-2).

⁹ Since 1991, Kelly has come to believe that there may have been a New Forest Coven, founded around 1935, to which Gardner came as a somewhat later member. He remains firm in his conviction, however, that this coven was a new creation using relatively contemporary materials and was not preserving the remnants of some British pre-Christian tradition (Aidan Kelly, personal communication).

This aside, it is not difficult to imagine that, in an age when Murray's theories were very much in vogue, it would be tempting for an individual trying to develop a pagan magic and nature-based religion, especially in England, to embrace the prevailing intellectual climate and call it 'witchcraft'. The Witchcraft Act of 1735 was repealed in 1951 and replaced with the Fraudulent Mediums Act.¹⁰ Calling oneself a witch was no longer a crime in England. The connection with the persecuted pagans of Murray's theory lent to the movement a historical legitimacy that it would not have otherwise possessed.¹¹ The designation 'witchcraft' has been retained, despite its uncomfortable associations, both by those who continue to accept its Murrayite claims of origin (Crowley 1989; Skelton 1990; Valiente 1978; Crowther 1981; Farrar and Farrar 1981), and by those who are merely used to it, and can find no term they like better (Buckland 1986; Warren-Clarke 1987). It is also used by some, usually feminists or those practicing in goddess-spirituality settings, in a political sense, to call attention to the marginalized status of women's power (Budapest 1979; Starhawk 1979).

¹⁰ Valiente attributes the repeal of the Witchcraft Act to the efforts of organizations such as the Spiritualists National Union, who mobilized after the trial and conviction of Helen Duncan under that act in 1944 (1989:9-11).

¹¹ The difficulty of basing the movement's legitimacy claims on a dubiously historical basis has been acutely felt as historical scholarship has refuted those claims, and in dismissing them, has dismissed the whole movement as a lie and a hoax. This dismissal of the Craft is not entirely justified, as its historical claims have little bearing on its actual religious function, as perceived from within. Russell notes, "That Gardner (or Crowley) invented the religion does not invalidate it. Every religion has a founder, and much that surrounds the origin of any religion is historically suspect. Lack of historicity does not necessarily deprive a religion of its insight." (Russell 1980:154)

Others within the same general religious framework have opted to use the less controversial labels Wicca or Craft (for example, Cunningham 1988).

Even among those who no longer believe the historical assertions to be absolutely factual, variations of the Murrayite account continue to be disseminated, as myth rather than history. Often, outsiders to the movement have difficulty discerning between these uses -- a mythopoeic history sounds and reads much like a factual history, and both Craft writers and those reporting on the movement are often very vague about which kind of account they are giving (see especially: Crowley 1989; Marron 1989). Thus the often valid and well-supported criticisms of neopagan witchcraft's historical claims continue. The persistence of clearly dubious historical assertions has been exacerbated by many participants' ignorance about the development of Gardnerian witchcraft. A certain loss of historical context occurred when neopagan witchcraft crossed the Atlantic and began to become more available through print. English witches who worked with Gardner or his associates tended to know that Doreen Valiente had been instrumental in the creation of most of the *Book of Shadows*, whereas North Americans, by and large, did not know that the two were even associated until 1979, when the book in which Valiente stated that Gardner had initiated her (Valiente 1978:14) became available in North America. Kelly notes how surprised Valiente was when she was apprised of this fact (1991:xxii).¹²

¹² In fact, this ignorance of Valiente's central role in writing what have become many of the 'standard' Craft ritual pieces has caused her no end of copyright hassles, as authors believing them to be 'ancient and traditional' and therefore public domain, incorporated them into their commercially published materials, providing her with neither credit nor recompense.

In trying to separate what is essentially their 'myth of origin' from the documentable historical record, modern witches find themselves in much the same position as Christians were in the nineteenth century, when science first made it possible to question the Bible's validity as a literal historical document. These questions, and the inherent unprovability of much of the Biblical history, have not led the Christian churches to jettison the Bible, but instead to the possibility of its adoption as a metaphorical, rather than a literal truth. The Murrayite history is slowly coming to be viewed in the same way by witches (Adler 1986; Cunningham 1988). An understanding of witchcraft's history is important, not only in order to gain insight into the movement's construction of itself, but also to help to situate it in the rapidly changing intellectual climate of the time. Historian Ron Hutton explores the social and intellectual influences on British neopagan witchcraft at some length. He concludes that regardless of which account of Gardnerian origins is ultimately 'true', the movement itself is the belated offspring of nineteenth century romanticism and draws on the wealth of eclectic sources characteristic of that time. He comments,

Even if he [Gardner] had compiled the rituals himself and founded the first modern pagan coven, however, it would still not be wholly just to describe him as having 'invented' or 'made up' modern pagan witchcraft. In religious terms, it might be said that he was contacted by a divine force which had been manifesting with increasing strength during the previous two hundred years, and that it worked through him to remarkable effect. A secular way of saying the same thing, more commonly found among historians, is that cultural forces which had been developing for a couple of centuries combined in his emotions and ideas to produce a powerful, and extreme, response to the needs which they represented. (1999:239-40)

Elements of neopagan 'community'

Paganism or neopaganism, the terms are used almost interchangeably according to individual preference, is a loose umbrella category into which a variety of groups fall.¹³ These tend to have affinities based on their constructions of the sacred as immanent in the self and the world, their orientation to living well in the present rather than preparing for a future after death, and their acceptance of the possibility of circumstances, events, and forces not explainable through conventional scientific discourse. Graham Harvey (1997), in his overview of paganism in Britain, discusses druids, witches, goddess-spirituality practitioners, magicians, shamanic practitioners, and eco-pagans each in their own chapters, while acknowledging that the lines between them, and

¹³ There is a range of taxonomic divisions that have been applied to neopagan witchcraft groups, depending on the analysis being done. Rabinovitch (1992) uses the groupings 'Religionist', 'Ecopagan' and 'God/dess Celebrant' to characterize groups oriented towards personal transformation, global transformation, and societal transformation, respectively. Rabinovitch also includes an 'eclectic' category for those who represent a hybrid of the other types. Waldron (2001) is more concerned to classify groups according to their relationship to their orientation and use of history as a form of legitimating narrative. He divides the neopagan witchcraft movement into 'antiquarian' (groups relying on traditional forms of historiography to provide empirical veracity and historical legitimacy, also groups who use historical material as a basis for reconstructing specific ethnic or national practices), 'traditionalist' (hierarchical groups descended from ritual magic practices of 19th century Europe, more concerned with the precision and purity of their ritual and magical activity as a means of legitimating themselves than about the empirical veracity of their historical claims), 'new age / eclectic' (groups drawing heavily on the 'collective unconscious' theory of Carl Jung, postulating that authenticity is to be found more in the universal realm of symbol than in empirically verifiable historical accounts) and 'eco-feminist' (groups concerned with the potential ability of historical representations to empower women rather than their strict historical accuracy).

their memberships, are often not exclusive. These same kinds of groupings can be seen in Canadian neopaganism. The 'neopagan witchcraft' cluster, in which I also include those goddess-spirituality, eco-pagan and 'non-denominational pagan' groups who are indebted to witchcraft for much of the structure, if not the content, of their practice, tends to be the dominant type of paganism in many parts of Canada. Neopagan witchcraft is not a homogenous movement. Although the categorization of neopagan groups is merely a heuristic device, of much more use to the researcher in facilitating analysis than to the practitioners in facilitating practice, in my experience, there are three broad categories of groups. Although there is a considerable amount of borrowing and overlap in both ideology and practice, most groups can be said to be oriented predominantly to one of the three categories.

First, there are traditional groups. These, strictly speaking, are groups whose priesthood claim to be able to trace their initiation trees back in an unbroken and unambiguous fashion to Gerald Gardner (Gardnerians). In a broader sense, the traditional category also includes Alexandrians, whose structure and practices are very similar to that of Gardnerians, but whose line of descent is different, and a few other groups who have maintained, without significant alteration, neopagan mystery-based practices that cannot be reliably attributed to Gardner's influence, for more than a single generation. In general, 'traditionals' must learn their Craft directly by apprenticeship in the context of a group. Traditionals also tend to place a higher relative value on 'received' knowledge, that is, the texts, techniques and practices that are transmitted through their 'lines', than do most other groups.

The second kind of group is the 'Goddess-spirituality' type group. These often arise out of a feminist sensibility, and address themselves much more specifically to women's spiritual needs and women's particular perspectives. They generally place more emphasis on the Goddess than the God in worship, sometimes excluding the God altogether, and are more likely than other groups to be gender-exclusive in their rituals. Quite often, these groups are involved in different networks than those of other neopagan groups, gravitating to other events and locations that have a more explicitly woman-centered, and implicitly feminist, concern and Goddess focus. It is not uncommon for individual women to be involved in both a Goddess spirituality group and a traditional or eclectic group, because they perceive that different needs are being met by each. Goddess spirituality groups are indebted to more traditional witchcraft in varying degrees. Because witchcraft was first becoming visible in North America at about the same time as feminists began to challenge the patriarchal visions of the mainstream churches and to look for different ways to express their spirituality and their relationship to the sacred, its focus on the Goddess and a central role for the woman as priestess offered one possible alternative. Some women found that the structured, formal, hierarchical system did not go far enough towards meeting what they perceived to be their spiritual needs. To address this, they incorporated different materials from a variety of sources including ancient mythologies, archeological findings, the writings of feminist theologians and historians, and the practices of indigenous cultures elsewhere in the world, until in many cases, the 'traditional' material which provided the initial framework was almost totally obscured.

The last, and broadest, category of neopagan witches is 'eclectic'. Eclectics constitute the majority of neopagan witches in most parts of Canada. They are a residual category, what remains when you bracket off the traditionals and the Goddess spirituality groups. Their practices are too diverse to easily characterize and blend into the other categories in some cases. For example, people who have learned about traditional Craft from books, and who practice it rigorously, may be indistinguishable to an outsider from traditionals. These are eclectics on the traditional end of the spectrum. However, both they, and the traditionals themselves, recognize that there is a difference between them, even if it is only that of the oral history that is available to one group and not the other. There are also groups that resemble Goddess spirituality groups, but who recognize and celebrate the divine male (even if in a lesser role) and/or who include men. These are eclectics more on the Goddess spirituality side. There are a whole range of other practices and positionings in the eclectic category as well. Eclectics tend to be characterized by religious beliefs and practices that are an amalgam of things they have learned from others, things that they have read, and things that they have borrowed from other systems (whether high magic, deep ecology or philosophical Buddhism) which are constantly being re-assessed and revised, but which have most of the structural elements (sabbat celebrations, esbat celebrations, circle casting, quarter calls, invocation to the God and Goddess, cakes and wine) of British traditional witchcraft.

Central Tenets of Neopagan Witchcraft: A Brief Overview

Contemporary witches do not draw upon the stereotypes perpetuated during the witch-craze of the Renaissance and Reformation in formulating their beliefs or practice.¹⁴ The only common element between the contemporary witches and their historical counterparts is magic. Historical witches were accused of malevolent magic; modern witches claim that magic exists and that they can, and do, use it. They would deny that it is necessarily malevolent, but acknowledge that it can be, in the hands of an essentially unethical practitioner (Skelton 1990; Adler 1986; Farrar and Farrar 1984; Valiente 1978; Weinstein 1979). This association with magic, taken in conjunction with the label 'witch', probably explains much of the continued attribution of historical stereotypes to modern witches. As Eliot Rose notes, there is still a tendency to presume the whole of the cult where one of its elements exists (1962:33).

It is much easier to describe what modern witchcraft is not than to describe what it is, as it is a decentralized movement with no sacred texts and little consistent dogma. The label 'witch' continues to be descriptive rather than normative to most of those who use it as a term of self-identification. There will be individuals within the movement who will not hesitate to take issue with any

¹⁴ Because of the early belief in the veracity of the Murrayite history, however, some of the terms used are the same. For example, most witches refer to the eight seasonal festivals as 'sabbats' and the thirteen (or twenty-six, depending on the tradition) lunar meetings as 'esbats'.

generalization a study chooses to present; however, this is a built-in problem with any generalization. The picture presented below is by no means exhaustive, and is a distillation of the most common elements contained in many of the books on modern witchcraft to be found in the bibliography. For this reason, specific citations have been omitted, as they would necessarily be either unwieldy or arbitrary.¹⁵

Modern witches consider themselves to be members of a pagan religious movement or spiritual tradition that draws upon pre-Christian traditions, usually of Europe and the Middle East, but occasionally of other locales as well. They reject the concept of devil-worship as a Christian innovation. They worship a divine principle that is considered to be immanent and whose representations generally resolve themselves into a God and a Goddess. These can be a god and goddess of any pantheon, in any aspect, depending on the season of the year and/or the nature of the working (celebratory, healing, divinatory, etc). Some groups, especially those working out of a feminist consciousness, will place more emphasis on the goddess images and the ideas of female power contained therein, sometimes rejecting references to male gods altogether. Even in groups that are more balanced in their use of gendered references to the divine, the references to women and female aspects of divinity are both more positive and more prevalent than those found in the major Western religious traditions. In

¹⁵ There are three good overviews available of the neopagan movement today. *Drawing Down the Moon* (1986) by Margot Adler is primarily concerned with the American scene, *Witches, Pagans and Magic in the New Age* (1989) by Kevin Marron deals exclusively with Canada, and *Contemporary Paganism* (1997) by Graham Harvey focuses on Britain.

some traditions of witchcraft, the coven leader must be female, and in most others, it is just as likely to be a woman as a man. This gives women access to status and authority that is denied them in many other religions.

The major religious observances (sabbats) center on the seasonal cycles, although there is neither a set mythology nor a set format connected with these observances. Individuals and groups are free to make their observances meaningful in any way that seems appropriate. The idea that the divine is immanent and the focus on the physical seasons as a framework for worship produces a sense among witches that the earth itself is sacred. This may, in some cases, lead to explicit environmental activism.

Witches believe that there is both a non-material and a material reality, and that the two are interconnected. They do not assert the superiority of one reality over the other. Most believe in 'magic' although definitions of that word vary.¹⁶ Many assert that magic can be used for healing, in much the same way that Christian 'faith healers' believe that the power of the Holy Spirit can heal. Witches subscribe to the general moral principle "An' harm ye none, do what ye will" and leave the specific application of it to the individual. This very contextual

¹⁶ Most definitions of magic prevalent among witches are variations on the formulations of two early twentieth century high magicians – Aleister Crowley and William Butler. Crowley's definition is "Magic is the Art and Science of causing change to occur in accordance with Will"; Butler's is "Magic is the art of effecting change in consciousness at will." (Bonewits 1971:28-30) The emphasis seems to be on causing change to occur through methods that cannot be explained by physical laws of causation. Many who would not deny that magic exists, however, would assert that it is a psychological metaphor, and does not necessarily have an 'objective' physical reality.

morality extends into the beliefs surrounding sexuality. Human sexuality is not stigmatized in any way; it is viewed as natural, and subject to the same sort of caveats that apply to any other natural ability. Witches also tend to believe in some variety of karma. This is often referred to as 'the law of returns' and refers to a belief that everything one does will return on one, at least in equal measure, and some would say three-fold. This can occur either in this life or in another life; most witches believe in reincarnation.

Where the notion of time is linear in historical religions such as Christianity, it is cyclical in witchcraft. Christianity begins with a historical event, and works through history on its way to another event, the final judgment. Similarly, Christians are born, work through their lives in a linear fashion, die and face a final judgment. There is no second chance. In witchcraft, this life is viewed as just one in a series of lives, just as this spring is one in a series of springs. After death, one may face some kind of judgment, but will eventually be reborn to build on the knowledge of past mistakes and to gather new learning. There are an infinite number of chances.

As a movement, witches publish but do not proselytize. As they tend to believe that all religions fulfill the same essential function, and that the differences between them are largely differences of 'how' and not of 'what', there is no ideological push to make converts. Among witches, there is a very high level of tolerance for religious differences, probably arising at least in part from the wide variety of practice within the decentralized movement itself, and partially from the consciousness of the cultural marginality of their beliefs.

There is a very explicit focus in witchcraft on self-knowledge and personal development. Many of the rituals, meditations, visualizations and other techniques, both those considered to be primarily 'magical' and those considered primarily 'spiritual' by those who care to make those distinctions, are directed at increasing the individual's level of self-knowledge and sense of personal direction and empowerment. In this sense, the movement has much in common with the new, spiritually oriented psychotherapies. It is at least partially as a result of the practices that can grow up around this orientation, such as tarot reading, participation in meditation seminars, past life workshops and the like, that neopagan witchcraft has become identified by some theorists as a 'client' or 'audience' cult.

Many of the elements explicitly embodied in neopagan witchcraft are qualitatively different from those that neopagans perceive as being offered by more mainstream religions. Philosophical acceptance of gender equality, individual responsibility and the importance of the natural world, however, are not alien or marginal positions in our present culture. What makes neopagan witchcraft interesting is the way in which it explicitly integrates these contemporary concerns in a system that is both practical and spiritual. All of our current religions must confront these issues, and the niche that neopagan witchcraft is able to occupy in what some in the sociology of religion refer to as the 'religious marketplace' (see for example Bibby 1987, 1993; Finke 1997; Stark and Bainbridge 1985, 1987; among others) makes it an interesting area of study, particularly when secularization theorists (Berger 1969; Wilson 1966) have been heralding the inevitable decline of religion as a central element of human life for

more than three decades. Neopagan witchcraft has become steadily stronger during those same three decades, suggesting that although there is undoubtedly a secularization process occurring, spiritual explanations and orientations still have a place in the modern world, and it is possible to have religious forms that are able to adapt and to address modern social realities without losing their salience for their practitioners. My research is intended to be exploratory, exploring both the neopagan movement and its practitioners themselves and also the ways in which the broader social trends of late modernity are played out within the neopagan sphere.

In Chapter Two, I discuss the difficulties inherent in attempting to study neopagans, the mixed blessings involved in being a member of the group studied while engaging in research, and the methodological steps taken in the research process to address these issues. I also discuss how the questions incorporated in the survey instrument are related to existing questions in the literature surrounding new religious movements more generally, as well as how the survey was developed, distributed and analyzed, and how participants in the interview phase were selected.

My aim in Chapter Three is to give an overview of the basic demographic characteristics of the survey sample. I discuss how these compare to those of the Canadian population more generally, and to other samples taken within neopagan populations. It is my hope that by adding another descriptive slice to the existing literature on neopagan witchcraft, subsequent researchers will have a basis upon which to build more detailed studies, as well as a comparison group

that might permit them to gauge changes in the characteristics of neopagan adherents over time.

Chapter Four takes as its central theme the concept of 'conversion' and how neopagans frame and describe their involvement in the Craft. Although most neopagan practitioners have clearly come into the Craft from elsewhere, they reject the traditional language of 'conversion' when describing their experiences. I examine how some of the 'activist paradigm' constructions of conversion that have been articulated within the sociology of religion literature during the past 20 years provide a close approximation to the process that neopagan adherents describe in their own narratives, despite participants' aversion to the term itself. The data concerning participants' prior religious socializations, and the extent to which they credit other people and books in facilitating and maintaining both their initial and their ongoing involvement and commitment to the Craft, are presented. I discuss some of the rational choice propositions concerning the adoption and maintenance of deviant perspectives and examine the extent to which my survey data would seem to support or challenge these. I also highlight the difficulties in applying a set of theoretical precepts designed to predict the operation of religious organizations to the decentralized neopagan movement.

In Chapter Five, I continue with the exploration into the tension that surrounds the application of religious language to the Craft and participants' often ambivalent reactions to the characterization of the Craft as a religion. I

examine the contradictions inherent in maintaining institutional definitions of religion that do not correspond to the academic definitions of the phenomenon, and how these contradictions are reflected in neopagans' sense of ambiguity about their legal status and protected practitioners of a religion under the provisions of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I also examine the ways in which the interview participants construct their own beliefs and practices in relation to the way in which they construct other religions, noting similarities when they are talking about the functions of religion, and differences when they discuss both structure and substantive content. Efforts to establish greater levels of formal organization and institutionalization within the Craft are presented, and the arguments both for and against further institutionalization¹⁷ are explored. There is a widespread suspicion of centralized organization and the potential it contains to reproduce relations of hierarchy, hegemony and dominance that makes institutionalization a particularly contested terrain within the neopagan movement.

My focus in Chapter Six is the idea of magic, both as it is developed by neopagans and how it is constructed in the broader academic and popular cultures. Where magic tends to be treated as a particular type of mechanism to produce given ends, conflated with spellwork and separated from religion in

¹⁷ 'Institutionalization' is meant throughout this research to imply the process through which expert systems are differentiated out of a more amorphous social grouping, as well as the process through which these expert systems become routinized, formalized and bureaucratized in order to deal with other formal organizations.

traditional sociological and anthropological works, Craft practitioners tend to discuss it as a form of transformative discourse, embedded in their religious practices, and related in kind to prayer. Neopagan constructions of magic that take magic as residing in the context of magical working, the process of training and the mental attitude of spellwork also permit magical practice to function as a therapeutic discourse, effecting a transformation in self-evaluation comparable to that found in other forms of religious and secular therapy.

Chapter Seven gives a broad overview of the condition of organized religion in Canada, drawing on research done by Bibby (1987, 1993). He suggests that although both membership and attendance are down in most organized religions, Canadians are nonetheless still interested in both God and the supernatural. Because levels of neopagan affiliation have been increasing while organized religions have been showing a decline, I turn to a rational choice analysis of the religious marketplace in order to account for the difference. I suggest that an increase in the visibility and availability of neopagan groups and materials over time, combined with a decrease in the level of stigma associated with identifying oneself as neopagan is largely responsible for the increased levels of affiliation reported between the 1981 and 1991 census.

In Chapter Eight, I examine the extent to which neopaganism can be considered either a modern or a postmodern phenomenon, and the way in which it has been characterized in other studies addressing that point. Employing a thematic approach, which explores the construction of certain key elements such as time, history, truth, nature, and sociality, I examine the extent

to which the perspectives articulated by neopagan authors are congruent with modern and postmodern approaches to society, truth, knowledge and meaning. I conclude that neopaganism displays far more continuity with the central intellectual and moral strands characteristic of modernity than with the more epistemologically radicalized position taken by postmodern writers, and should be considered a religion of 'late modernity' rather than one of 'postmodernity'.

Following the line of analysis begun in Chapter Eight, Chapter Nine explores the possible future of the Craft. Very basic demographic analysis suggests that, all other things being equal, the Craft will show another increase in its number of adherents on the 2001 census and that trend will continue through the 2011 census. I augment these predictions with an analysis of the features of neopaganism that make it especially well suited to continue into the particular social and cultural environment of late modernity, and explore the possible difficulties that could be posed by the increasing push inside neopaganism towards developing more formally organized structures. I conclude that the greatest challenge that the Craft faces in continuing the success it has had providing individuals with a creative, sacralized response to the existential and ethical questions posed by modernity will be to create a form of social adaptation capable of accommodating the level of growth neopaganism has experienced and allowing for the differentiation of expert systems without undermining the basis upon which it legitimates itself.

Chapter Two: Methodology

The research and analysis in this project attempts to accomplish two sometimes complimentary and sometimes conflicting objectives. First, it tries to establish a broad Canadian context in which neopaganism can be understood; second, it tries to explore participants' understandings of their involvement in the Craft and its place in their lives. In the first instance, I rely on the information given to me by my survey respondents, data gathered by Statistics Canada, the data and analysis of other Canadian sociologists of religion, and the predictions and propositions offered by theorists of the 'rational choice' school. In the second instance, I employ the methods advocated by the 'grounded theory' school, revisiting the write-in sections of my questionnaire, doing semi-structured interviews, talking to participants about the ideas emerging from my work, and reflecting on my own varied experiences in the Craft.

These are not inherently complementary approaches. Orthodox rational choice theorists (Stark 1997, Stark and Bainbridge 1987) insist that one must begin one's research with underived axioms about human nature and the human condition, and proceed to deductively generate testable propositions and predictions. It is a top-down approach that privileges supposedly universal principles and subsumes individual voice. Process is understood in terms of outcomes rather than as a valuable element of the understanding itself. Grounded theorists (Glaser and Strauss 1967) argue from the other direction, that knowledge must proceed inductively, from understanding the intricacies and particularities of situations, and that only then can one begin to generalize,

grounding those generalizations in the embodied and enacted realities of substantive material. Both approaches attempt to generate theory that will expand our understanding of a broader range of social phenomena.

These two approaches have generated methods that are appropriate to different kinds of questions. Grounded theory, and qualitative research more generally, is particularly apt when trying to understand the constitutive elements of a worldview, the internal relationships between aspects of a lived world. It has the potential to illuminate not only the 'how' questions, but also give insight into the participants' 'why'. Neitz and Mueser argue forcefully for the appropriateness of using qualitative approaches to illuminate what they call 'communities of choice', of which neopaganism would be one.

Yet understanding what it is about communities of choice that attracts adherents is not easily achieved by referring to market structures. How these groups build and maintain ties, how they produce meaning in the face of the human limitations of cognitive, moral and physical abilities, and how they inspire individuals to participate in activities which are not in their transparent self-interest are questions better addressed by qualitative approaches. (1997:106)

In this essay, they are specifically cautioning against relying solely on rational choice theory in studying religion from a sociological perspective. They do not dismiss its explanatory capacity entirely, but recognize that it has a limited ability to elaborate the world as participants experience it. This criticism is, I believe, entirely valid. However, rational choice theory continues to provide a valuable set of theoretical tools for situating specificities within broader generalities. It allows an analysis to introduce factors that may not be an acknowledged part of

the participants' worldviews, in order to permit a more nuanced understanding of the environment in which those specificities are experienced and those worldviews are constructed. It tries to set some abstract limiting conditions, recognizing that these will play out differently in different situations. Rational choice theory provides conceptual tools to help describe, predict and explain the structural outcomes of individual choices, taken collectively. I believe it is a useful framework in which to try to organize qualitative data, as do some of its other proponents. Lawrence Young comments,

The point is that while phenomenologically grounded descriptions of religious experience may be accurate, contributing to our understanding of the nature of religion in a way that rings true, it is the supply-side version of rational choice theory which describes the conditions under which both mass and virtuosi forms of religious experience are most likely to flourish. Rational choice theory helps us to predict which segments of the population are most likely to be exposed to the sacred as a result of an active, lively religious market, while the phenomenological images provide a discourse or language that helps us understand or sense why the encounter with the sacred is perceived to be rewarding. (1997:143)

Any given theoretical standpoint is appropriate only to certain types of questions. Endeavouring to restrict my inquiries to the questions appropriate to a single standpoint would distort the world of the participants to an unacceptable degree. Hence, this work takes a somewhat bifurcated approach, employing concepts, methods and theoretical perspectives when I believe they illuminate something interesting or valuable, challenging them when I believe they obscure or mislead. My allegiance, both as a researcher and as a participant, is to my data and to the people those data represent, rather than to any single theoretical

standpoint, and so I have woven together concepts and methods in a way that I believe will illuminate both some of the externally observable and internally experienced elements of the neopagan Craft.

Studying What You Know: Epistemological, Methodological and Ethical Issues

Before I became a researcher studying neopaganism, I was a student of neopaganism, not because it was an interesting example of religious adaptation in the culture of late modernity, but because it was the closest religious expression I had found to what I believed the universe to be like, and what I wanted the world to be. I came to the Craft a decade before I came to sociology, and the reflexivity with which I learned about the former was the reflexivity inherent in the Craft learning process itself, without the analytical and conceptual sophistication that I learned much later, in my socialization as a researcher. During the decade that intervened between my adoption of these two identities, I engaged in many of the activities that are typical of Craft practitioners: I read books on the Craft and related subjects such as magic, mythology and herbology; I did meditation, visualization and self-knowledge exercises, keeping record both of them, and of my reflections on them; I did spellwork and divination, also keeping detailed records; I wrote down dreams that seemed significant or were particularly clear; I participated in classes at my local occult shop and as I became more experienced I taught a few; I talked to people, mostly non-practitioners, about what it meant to me to be a witch and tried to dispel misconceptions where I could; I attended public rituals to celebrate and socialize; I went to the occasional festival; I wrote and performed sabbats and esbats, and

recorded the feedback I got from others who participated in them; I contributed to a pagan newsletter; I took a first degree initiation and then, three years later, a second degree; I ran a coven; I taught and initiated students; some or all of which is just part of learning to be, and being priesthood in the Craft. I have seven lined physics notebooks of handwritten notes, feedback, correspondence and diary entries, and another two thick unlined notebooks full of handcopied rituals and ritual elements that are the textual record of my own personal development inside the Craft context. These records extend from 1983 until 1992.

Unlike many researchers who study the Craft, and certainly unlike Helen Berger (1999) and Tanya Luhrmann (1989), both of whom produced insightful ethnographies, I began my research with a Craft identity firmly entrenched. There was no way that I could go back and re-experience my own socialization from the perspective of a researcher. This realization, and the identity issues that brought it about, were instrumental in guiding the type of research I chose to undertake, as well as highlighting some of the epistemological, methodological and ethical considerations of which I would have to make special note.

Epistemologically, the chief issue was to problematize my own 'taken for granted' worldview. This is an issue addressed fairly extensively in the theoretical literature. Gadamer, for one, points out that no one approaches an object of study without preconceptions. The structure of knowledge and human knowing dictates that preconceptions, what he calls prejudices or fore-meanings, will arise simply out of one's ability to use a human language and one's position

in a historical tradition (1975:191). He suggests addressing the problem of the inevitability of prejudice by problematizing one's relationship to one's own perspective. That does not mean to say that one can divest one's self of it, as the 'objectivity' of the scientific method would seem to dictate, but merely that one is required, if one is to attain understanding, to treat an object as something foreign and in need of understanding even when it seems familiar. This has required the explicit and ongoing acknowledgment that my own perspective is not only simply one interpretation of the lived universe, but also only one of many possible perspectives that could have been derived from my own peculiar experiences.

Gadamer likens the process of understanding to the process of translation, whereby meaning that exists in one language must be conveyed in a different language. The trick to translation is not only to convey the literal meaning of the words, which often obscures the meaning, but the sense of the work as a whole. The context of a work cannot just be reproduced pristinely so that we can experience it in exactly the same terms that the author or another reader experienced it, it must in translation acquire part of the context of the horizon into which it comes, if it is to be understood (1975:236-241). Gadamer asserts that the process of understanding is a conversation in which two parties come to an agreement about the object.

The danger inherent in the study of phenomena in which one is involved is the facile assumption that one already enjoys such an agreement. This assumption of an already shared meaning prevents one from grasping the

meaning given to the object by the other. This formulation of meaning solely within one's own horizon makes understanding impossible. Because I shared a certain vocabulary with the subjects of my study, I could not therefore assume that I automatically knew what they were saying. My own usages and experiences could not be taken as normative, although I recognized them as that which constructed, and continues to construct, my own fore-meanings.

Language is an especially contested domain within the Craft, and the process of trying to understand my respondents required that I consciously bracket off my own assumptions in order to make the attempt to enter into their understandings and their worldviews.

The methodological and ethical issues were intertwined, and each informed many of my decisions about the research design and process. Some of these issues arose out of my own experience as a research subject, before I was ever a researcher, and were heightened and amplified as I became socialized to research norms. The study in which I was a subject was done by someone who, like me, had a history of involvement in the Craft community before it became their research interest. This individual produced an ethnography, the chief figures or 'key informants' of which were the most active figures in the community studied. The events discussed in the work took place up to three years before this individual adopted the identity of a researcher. When the study became available to members of the community that had been studied,¹⁸ many of the individuals discussed were happy neither with what was represented, nor

¹⁸ For all but one of the informants, this was after the study had been submitted and evaluated.

how those representations were made. Some believed that there were strategic omissions in the data so that they would better fit the interpretive paradigm; others felt that relationships they had believed to be personal (and with good reason, since the individual had not been identified as a researcher when they were entered into) had been exploited and betrayed. This individual's credibility both as a member of the neopagan community and as a researcher was damaged by the way in which the study had been carried out.

Because of this experience, I was determined to minimize any possible ambiguity about my role by giving respondents clear indications of when our relationship was in the researcher-subject mode, rather than that of co-participants. This was the primary motivating factor in both my use of formalized settings for my interviews and my decision not to use participant observation as a data gathering technique.¹⁹ I consistently presented myself, in all correspondence and conversations inviting participation in the research, as an active researcher on neopaganism, who was incidentally also Craft, so that it was almost impossible to mistake my intentions. During the interview stage, I made a point of candidly answering questions about both my Craft background and training, and my academic orientations and interests. I also proactively divulged information about my current and former associations inside the Craft community, particularly with the large neopagan organizations, whenever the conversation turned in that direction. As some participants had very negative

¹⁹ This is in stark contrast to the methods employed by Berger (1999), who indicates that she tended to conduct her interviews after ritual gatherings and at festivals, without the use of a tape recorder, making field notes after the fact.

feelings about some of these organizations, I did not wish them to believe that they had been 'tricked' into making negative comments, or be uncomfortable subsequently, if they learned that I was acquainted with prominent members of those organizations. I did this to give my participants confidence about the extent to which they would be exposed by the research, but also to protect myself and my other identity as a trustworthy member of the neopagan community. Although I have been neither active nor visible as a practitioner in the broader community while my research has been going on, I maintain friendships within that sphere, and still support the principles that guide interaction within it. Because of this, I wish to retain the option to return at some future time with my reputation intact.

The 'presentation of self' (Goffman 1956) conveyed through the material elements of the research (questionnaire, covering letters etc.) combined with the professional stance that I have endeavoured to take throughout the research process, are particularly important elements of gaining access to Craft participants. There is no central agency to which researchers can apply for a sample of participants; there are no permanent, dedicated buildings around which researchers can lurk; there are few ordained clergy to 'represent' the religion. Those organizations that do facilitate networking among neopagans are unwilling to release information about their memberships, because to do so would damage their credibility with the communities they are trying to serve. Neopagans tend to put a fairly high premium on keeping their affiliation confidential because of the stigma and negative stereotypes that are sometimes associated with the practice. It would therefore have been ethically indefensible

for me to, for example, ask interview participants if they could give me the names of other people who might wish to be interviewed. I was compelled to wait until people with whom the research had been discussed, or who remembered the research from its questionnaire stage, contacted me and expressed an interest in further participation. My willingness to make myself public, using my legal name and home address on the initial questionnaires, despite the possibility of negative attention or reprisals, helped to establish my intentions as sincere. One interview participant, when asked about the motivation for her continued participation, commented:

...that was, for what it's worth, that was probably one reason, or one of several factors that encouraged me to participate in the survey, that you did that. Um, that not only... that it was just your home address. ...I guess that it was something that encouraged me to think that you would be able to carry this through, that you would do it. That there was a certain level of commitment there.
(Deanne)

Research Design Considerations

The present research project unfolded in stages. Building on my familiarity with neopaganism, and neopagan witchcraft in particular, a structured, exploratory survey was initiated. The survey component of the research was designed to collect basic demographic and religious history information and to record, in very general terms, some of the respondents' impressions about the motivations for their participation in the Craft. It was intended to yield preliminary data that could be explored and expanded during the subsequent, semi-structured interview stage.

The survey was designed with two key considerations in mind: comparability with existing data and ease of completion. Thus, wherever

possible, questions were taken directly from the 1991 Census of Canada or from Rabinovitch's 1991 interview schedule, allowing me to maximize my comparability on the basic demographic items and on the sensitive questions relating to history of victimization. Borrowing questions from the Census conferred the additional advantage of knowing that, for those items, there was an existing question wording and coding strategy that had been rigorously tested by a group of experts.

The survey questions were divided into five sections: You and the Craft; You and Your Other Interests; You and Your Family; You and Your Personal History; and General Information about You. Following standard practice for mail-in surveys, the demographic questions occurred at the end and the most interesting and relevant section, You and the Craft, at the beginning. A copy of the survey questionnaire can be found in Appendix A. Many of the survey questions were designed to explore and elaborate some of the concerns of the existing literature, particularly religious conversion and NRM works, while others were intended to aid in forming a descriptive picture of neopagan practitioners. Among the theoretical issues explored were the relative importance of literature and interpersonal involvements, the relative importance of belief (commitment) and behaviour (involvement) to the practitioners, and the extent to which the individuals can be said to possess what some would argue are 'predisposing conditions' for involvement in a new religious movement.

Interpersonal Contact and Literature

Many researchers investigating conversion to NRMs have stressed the importance of social networks and affective ties in facilitating recruitment (Lofland and Stark 1965; Pitt 1991; Stark and Bainbridge 1980; Snow and Phillips 1980; Gartrell and Shannon 1985; Greil 1977; Iannaccone 1995; Ellison 1995, among others). Only Lofland and Skonovd (1981:376) seriously discuss a 'motif' of conversion that proceeds primarily without social contact. They refer to it as the 'intellectual' mode of conversion. As existing groups are not always available to the individual interested in neopaganism, and the proportion of neopagans in the Canadian population is quite small, the survey included items that would explore the extent to which interaction with others was instrumental in the acquisition of a Craft identity.

A new religious identification, it is argued, is easier to maintain in a supportive environment of like-minded people (Sherkat 1997; Stark and Bainbridge 1987), and that this is especially the case with 'marginal' or 'deviant' religious movements (Gartrell and Shannon 1985; Greil and Rudy 1984; Snow and Phillips 1980). For this reason, questions about the extent to which the individual had practiced their Craft in the company of others were included. There were also questions about the perceived religious orientations of the respondent's domestic partner²⁰ and five closest friends. The respondents were asked if they would consider these people to be either 'Craft' or 'pagan'. Each

²⁰ The term 'domestic partner' has been preferred to 'spouse' because of the normatively heterosexual overtones of the latter.

term was assessed separately because neopagan witchcraft is generally considered to be a subset of the broader category 'pagan' and to restrict the questions to whether or not the closest people in the respondents' social networks could be strictly described as Craft might lead to a mistaken impression that social networks are not important in reinforcing neopagan witchcraft beliefs and practices. In fact, the line dividing what people consider 'Craft' from what they consider simply 'pagan' is blurred and varies from person to person. The two items in combination, therefore, give a better measure of the extent of religious homogeneity within the respondents' social networks than either item alone.

The extent of this homogeneity is important because NRM researchers are not in agreement as to whether or not it is essential to the facilitation of cult conversion and the maintenance of cult beliefs. Lofland and Stark (1965:873) assert that the severing of extra-cult ties is a crucial step towards conversion. Greil (1977:118-19) also emphasizes the importance of a shared perspective between the convert and his or her 'significant reference others'. Greil and Rudy (1984:316) and Snow and Phillips (1980:442) contend that this is only the case with groups considered to be 'deviant'. The more 'mainstream' the cult group, the less likely that extra-cult attachments would need to be neutralized or severed. Snow and Phillips make the valid observation that the communal or non-communal tendencies of a group would have an effect on the extent to which extra-cult ties would be minimized. Gartrell and Shannon (1985:40-44) assert that it is only where friends and other significant people outside the movement are

inclined to evaluate the movement's beliefs negatively that the convert will be put into a position of either having to homogenize his or her social network, or leave the movement.

As part of the attempt to gauge respondents' perceptions of the environment in which they practice, there were several items asking about the individual's 'openness', that is, how willing the respondents were to present themselves as Craft and to discuss their beliefs with particular categories of others. There is an often-observed fear of persecution among many neopagans (Berger 1999:68; Eller 1993:219; Marron 1989; Rabinovitch 1992; Adler 1986) that can act, in part, to reinforce group boundaries and perpetuate a culture of secrecy, as well as serve as an indication of the level of tension practitioners experience with the surrounding culture.

As has been noted, existing neopagan groups and practitioners may not be available or apparent to individuals who are searching for an alternative spiritual practice. There is, however, a growing body of 'how to' literature directed at practicing and potential neopagans. It has been a common informal observation by both neopagans and those studying them (Rabinovitch 1992; Fry 1990; Adler 1986; Luhrmann 1989) that neopagans of all varieties are voracious readers. Frederick Lynch identifies books as a significant contributor to the conversions of those in an occult group he studied (1978:100); Roger Straus also provides an account of conversion which centrally incorporates an active search through a variety of media (1979:162); however most theoretical formulations of religious conversion and affiliation more generally, still rely more heavily on the

importance of personal contact. This has the potential to undervalue the importance of reading as a significant aspect of the identification and affiliation process in neopaganism.

Literature of all sorts also contributes to the ongoing construction of neopagan religion, in the sense of being a 'consumable commodity' (de Certeau 1984) from which practitioners can adopt, adapt, and re-produce images, ideas and practices. Literature may also serve to reinforce aspects of commitment to and involvement with neopaganism, either in conjunction with or in the absence of, a social network. The questionnaire included parallel items designed to gauge the relative influence respondents believed each of these had on their ongoing practice and religious identification. The availability of specifically neopagan literature can also create a sense of 'community' among geographically dispersed practitioners by connecting them to unknown 'others' through a shared self-identification. Berger (1999) also notes that the literature of the neopagan movement is one of the channels that facilitates routinization and homogenization among unrelated groups.

Belief and Behaviour

Another important theoretical debate in the study of new religious movements is centered on the relative importance and priority in time of accepting the beliefs of a group and displaying their characteristic behaviours. The more traditional macrostructural approaches to religious conversion, such as the process models based on the work of Lofland and Stark (1965), take for granted the assumption that a change in belief is a necessary precursor to a

change in behaviour. That is, an individual will not begin to act as a member of a religious group, to engage in its practice, until s/he has been convinced of the correctness or utility of the beliefs that justify the practice. The microinterpretive approaches to conversion have challenged that assumption. For example, Balch and Taylor's (1978) covert participant observation study of a UFO cult suggested to them that most of their subjects did not necessarily accept the beliefs of the cult, but made a conscious decision to behave as members in order to 'try it out'. If they perceived real benefits arising out of their behaviour, then they might conclude there 'was something to it' and begin to modify their beliefs. If not, they would simply leave and look for something else. Thus, Balch and Taylor are able to argue, the appearance of conformity to beliefs does not imply belief or that any re-orientation of root reality has taken place. The belief-behaviour division in conversion studies, as well as in other studies of religious devotion such as Glock and Stark (1965), Lenski (1961) and Bibby (1987), also suggest that it is an error to equate these two dimensions, and thus, as in the case of books and people, parallel questions were asked.

The terms 'involvement' and 'commitment' were used throughout the questionnaire instead of 'behaviour' and 'belief' because they better reflect the neopagan approach to their religion, in which such terms as 'belief' are suspect, and represent to many the artificial dualities of Western rationalism. Perhaps the best expression of this suspicion about the appropriateness of "belief" is found in Starhawk, who writes:

People often ask me if I *believe* in the Goddess. I reply 'Do you believe in rocks?' It is extremely difficult for most Westerners to grasp the concept of a manifest deity. The phrase 'believe in' itself implies that we cannot *know* the Goddess, that She is somehow intangible, incomprehensible. But we do not *believe in* rocks – we may see them, touch them, dig them out of our gardens, or stop small children from throwing them at each other. We know them; we connect with them. (1979:77)

The choice of 'commitment' as the term to suggest the individual's investment in their self-identification as Craft and in the neopagan worldview was prompted by a comment by de Certeau. "As a first approximation, I define 'belief' not as the object of believing (a dogma, a programme, etc.) but as the subject's investment in a proposition, the act of saying it and considering it as true – in other words, a 'modality' of the assertion and not its content" (1984:178). Because respondents were permitted to self-identify as Craft practitioners, without being provided with a set of normative categories against which to judge themselves, normative statements about their beliefs were also avoided throughout the questionnaire. The concern for 'belief' in this research is not motivated by the substance of that belief, but for the strength of the conviction that the individual perceives to lie behind it.

Predisposing Conditions

Research on religion in general often focuses on what makes some people more likely to be attracted to religion than others. A wide variety of 'predisposing conditions' have been suggested, some that apply to religion in general, some that apply to 'non-mainstream' religions only, and some that

apply only to specific types of non-mainstream religion. In almost all cases, these 'predisposing conditions' are seen as neither necessary nor sufficient to effect a religious affiliation, which is seen to take place in a complex and interactive individual space.

Some of these predisposing conditions can be found in the participant's own religious history. First, it is the contention of some writers that parental religious activities are an important predictor of subsequent religious beliefs and activities on the part of their children. For example, Bibby states "Religion is learned in childhood family settings and is present in rites of passage associated with life's crucial events" (1987:55). It is often asserted that the mother's religious activities are a more powerful predictor than the father's. Second, Lofland and Stark postulate that an existing orientation to a religious problem solving perspective, that is some form of prior religious socialization, is one of the necessary components to the conversion to a deviant religious movement (1965:867-68). Third, Stark and Bainbridge suggest that the most likely people to become involved in a new religious movement of the 'cult' type are the "unchurched" (1985:311), that is, those who do not already possess a satisfactory religious framework. The questionnaire contained items asking about the level of involvement and commitment to religion displayed by each of the respondent's parents as the respondent was growing up, as well as which religious denominations or traditions were involved.

It has been speculated that neopagan movements in general, and neopagan witchcraft in particular, drew its membership disproportionately from the ranks of former Jews, Anglicans and Catholics. The logic behind this

speculation was that witchcraft is often very ritually oriented in its practice and would therefore have more appeal to those who were socialized into a religious tradition that involved a large amount of formal ritual. Adler notes that Gordon Melton was a key proponent of this idea in the early 1980s (1986:311). The opposing speculation, drawing on relative deprivation theory, was that neopagan groups would be composed of those who had previously lacked religious ritualizations and for whom they would therefore have a more profound appeal. Subsequent surveys and interviews suggest that the profile of neopagan witchcraft membership very closely parallels that of the general religious profile of the country as described by the census, with the exception that Jews tended to be slightly over represented (Adler 1986; Rabinovitch 1992). This may be an artifact of either small response bases, or the usage of a convenience / snowball sample by authors who are themselves Jewish.

The questionnaire also asked respondents if they had been involved with religions other than the Craft, in order to see if there was a pattern of 'seekership' or a 'conversion career' in the sense advanced by Richardson (1982). Using Richardson's framework, one would expect to find that people in the Craft had some history of other religious involvements. Eliade (1976), however, suggests that involvement in occult and witchcraft groups represents a revolt against the Western religious establishment that is not necessarily grounded in previous participation in those institutions, but rather against what they are perceived to represent. Eliade's position parallels that which is found in some Craft literature, which rejects Western religious traditions as the embodiments of

patriarchy, domination, rationalism or dualism (Valiente 1989; Starhawk 1979; Budapest 1979; among others). Both positions may contain elements of truth, as a previous religious identification does not necessarily mean a high degree of involvement or participation in the tradition identified.

Another predisposing condition for recruitment to 'cults' that is often advanced, particularly by those hostile to such groups, is psychological instability or emotional vulnerability. Much of the anti-cult literature focuses on the emotional susceptibility of converts, asserting that these movements prey disproportionately on those who are not entirely emotionally or mentally competent (Galanter 1985, 1980; Conway and Siegelman 1982, 1978). Variations on this argument are that involvement in cult movements produces emotional disturbances where none previously existed or exacerbates existing ones. This was used frequently in the late 1970s and early 1980s to justify forcible deprogramming. However, it has also been the contention of other studies on neopagan witchcraft, and the informal observation of many neopagans themselves, that many people who become involved in the Craft come from the ranks of the 'walking wounded' and that the religion, among its other appeals, has a therapeutic value (Rabinovitch 1992; Reid 1996; Berger 1999; Luhrmann 1989; Eller 1993). Questions addressing whether the respondent had experienced physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, whether they perceived their childhood to have been 'happy', whether they had undergone therapy (and if so, what for) and whether or not they had ever been arrested (and what for) were included in an attempt to illuminate these issues.

Other conditions that are suggested to facilitate recruitment to or affiliation with 'deviant' religious movements arise from social investment and relative deprivation theories. In the first, it is suggested that those with 'less to lose' will be more likely to view non-traditional or stigmatized religious movements as a real option for them (Stark and Bainbridge 1985,1987; Sherkat 1997). This social 'marginality', it is asserted, can arise from a number of often inter-related circumstances. One of the most frequently advanced is youth, as adolescents and young adults in this society are comparatively free of social obligations, often having left or soon to leave their family of origin, but not yet having a family of affiliation, not yet fully integrated into the job market, still being comparatively mobile, and being expected, in some senses, to be testing the boundaries and meanings that they received during their upbringing.

Dawson comments,

Part of the reason for the disproportionate representation of adolescents and young adults in NRMs is simply that this segment of the population is relatively free of other social and economic commitments. They have the time and the opportunity to indulge their spiritual appetites and to experiment with alternative ways of living. (1998:81)

Adolescence and young adulthood have always been viewed as especially likely times for individual conversion, even in more mainstream religions, and it is frequently noted by those writing about NRMs that they are disproportionately comprised of young people. The questionnaire contains items asking about current age, age at first involvement and length of involvement in order to explore these more general assertions.

Youth is not, however, the only factor advanced in constructing social marginality. Employment status, strength of family attachments and social networks, geographical mobility and other life choices are also considered. It is sometimes asserted that a willingness to reject one strongly held social norm might be an indicator of a willingness to reject others, and that those involved in 'deviant' religious practice might be considered cultural innovators (Tiryakian 1974). Another argument on a similar premise is that once an individual has rejected one important social norm, the rejection of others becomes comparatively less costly. Several questions concerning life circumstances and lifestyle choices, including household composition, sexual orientation, marital status, and employment status were included to aid in assessing the extent to which respondents might be considered, or might consider themselves, to have limited social investment.

Related to the social investment theories are those that postulate that those attracted to NRMs in general are more likely than those who are not to be experiencing some form of relative deprivation (Glock 1964). Relative deprivation is distinguished from absolute deprivation as being based primarily in the separation between the individual's reasonable expectations and their perception of their actual condition, rather than in the objective measurable conditions of their lives. This is the explanation Eller (1993) advances for the preponderance of middle-class women involved in the feminist spirituality movement. She asserts that the simple fact of being women and experiencing the constraints that American society still places on women relatively deprives

the participants of power that the 'American dream' suggests they are entitled to expect. Dawson (1998), however, disputes that relative deprivation is a useful theoretical construction to explain either the rise of NRMs or the composition of their membership, because the condition of relative deprivation alone does not effectively discriminate between joiners and non-joiners. Dawson is, perhaps, overly harsh in his dismissal; although a sense of relative deprivation does not entirely discriminate between joiners and non-joiners, it may explain an important part of the appeal of a group to certain segments of the population, which, taken in conjunction with other factors, might provide a more satisfactory explanation. Stark and Bainbridge (1985) suggest that non-mainstream religious groups might provide a venue for alternative status attainment, a hypothesis grounded in relative deprivation theory.

Organization of the Research Process

The survey instrument was developed in several stages. A draft version was produced based on my own experience of the movement, informal conversations with other practitioners from a range of traditions, and extensive reading both in the substantive area and in survey methodology. That version was submitted for commentary both to my advisory committee and to two other members of the department who have had experience with survey research. As a result of their comments, a second draft of the survey was produced. This version was given to six test subjects, who varied substantially in terms of tradition(s) practiced, occupation, length of involvement, level of education, etc. The comments produced by this group on the clarity and

relevance of the questionnaire were incorporated into a third draft. This version was approved by the ethics committee in July 1995. It was published as a removable supplement to the Canadian neopagan magazine *Hecate's Loom* in their Samhain (October) 1995 edition.

This publication was chosen because it styled itself as national rather than local, was not affiliated with any particular neopagan group or tradition, and was available both through occult and magical supply shops and by subscription across Canada, meaning that it would have a better chance of reaching those practicing solitary and those outside the major urban areas. Circulation at that time was 1500, although some of those copies would have remained unsold, and some would have gone to people who did not qualify to complete the survey either because they did not self-identify as Craft, or because they lived outside of Canada. A follow up advertisement was run in the magazine's subsequent issue, Imbolg (February) 1996, encouraging readers who had not already done so to complete and return the questionnaires. Loose copies of the survey were also made available to neopagan organizations in Montreal, Calgary and Victoria, at their request, and at both the Wiccanfest and Avalon East pagan festivals, although inclement weather prevented their wide distribution at the outdoor events. In all a total of 1750 original surveys were circulated. One hundred and eighty-seven were received back by September 1996, after which the postage-paid mailing account was terminated and no further responses were accepted. Some of these responses were clearly photocopies of an original questionnaire.

The surveys were coded by question, rather than by questionnaire. That is, all the surveys were coded on a question or group of questions at once, rather than coding one whole questionnaire and then another whole questionnaire. This was done to increase coding reliability, especially on the open-ended questions, by doing all the similar items in one sitting, rather than spreading them over the whole course of the coding. The questions were not coded in the order that they appeared on the questionnaire; the forced choice questions were coded first, and then the more complex write in responses. All surveys were coded by the researcher only because of assurances given to participants that neither the completed survey questionnaires nor the raw data files would be made available to anyone else, for any reason. This protection of confidentiality was required because some people's personal information, taken in conjunction with other questions on the survey, would be sufficient to identify them to others.

A funnel approach was used to develop categories for the open questions. All of the participants' responses were noted, in their own words, and groupings were made of similar responses, retaining as much nuance as possible. This often resulted in very extensive code lists. These codes were then grouped into much broader 'overview' categories for the purposes of discussion, but not collapsed in the data set. In order to help offset researcher bias in the development of overview categories, assistance was solicited from another respondent with a social sciences background and a very different Craft history. A partial code list is available in Appendix B. Six months after the initial coding

was complete, a check code was run by selecting ten percent of the surveys and re-coding them on paper, without reference to the survey database. The re-codings were checked against the originals, and a very high degree of reliability (greater than 80% on individual codes, greater than 90% on overview categories) was achieved. It can therefore be safely assumed that the attribution of items to coding categories is internally consistent, as only one person was coding, and attributions remained stable over time.

After the questionnaires were coded, and basic descriptive information about the sample had been obtained, an interview schedule was devised to further elaborate some of the patterns that emerged in the open ended questions, especially the ones having to do with the appeal of the Craft, and to explore questions of interest that had emerged from the literature, but for which the questionnaire format was too limiting. The schedule was intended to be a framework around which discussion could emerge, rather than a limiting structure. A copy of the interview schedule is included in Appendix C.

Only those practitioners who had completed a questionnaire were eligible for the interview stage of the research. Because the survey itself was non-random, and could not be guaranteed to be representative of the Craft overall, allowing those who were outside the original sample to participate in interviews would have raised the possibility that the interview sample and the survey sample did not in any way intersect, making it difficult to use one to elaborate the other. The covering letter on the questionnaire specified that there would be a subsequent phase of interview research, and invited people to volunteer

themselves to be contacted later. I received 35 requests to participate at that time, some of which gave me a mailing address, some of which gave an email address, and some of which gave a phone number.

Unfortunately, almost three years intervened between the release of the questionnaire and the beginning of the interview process. During this period, *Hecate's Loom* ceased to publish, which rendered my initial plan of issuing follow-up advertisements re-inviting people to contact me useless. No comparable nationally circulated print publication had taken its place. I prepared a package containing a covering letter reminding people of the research and their previous desire to participate further, a copy of the interview schedule, a consent form and a self-addressed stamped envelope, and sent it to the 23 people for whom I had addresses. There were four people for whom I had an email address; those were sent electronic copies of the covering letter, with an invitation to reply with a regular mailing address in order to be sent a package. Six people had given me only phone numbers, none of which were current when I tried to call. The remaining two people had not given me sufficient information to reach them in any of these ways. Of the 23 packages initially mailed out, nine were returned 'moved no forwarding address,' eight people returned consent forms and were subsequently interviewed, and six vanished altogether. Two of the email addresses were invalid, but the owners of the other two requested packages and were interviewed. The remaining eight previous respondents contacted me to volunteer when they heard from other participants that I was now doing interviews. Interviews were carried out between May and September 1998.

Half of the interviews were done in person, half over the phone. For those interviews that were done face-to-face, the participant was invited to choose the location in which they would be most comfortable. As a result, one interview took place in a respondent's home, two in my home, two in the dining hall at Wiccanfest, three in various university campus locations, and one in a local Starbucks. In three of these cases, the recording equipment failed, and the interviews were reconstructed from memory and notes taken at the time. In these cases, the respondents reviewed the subsequent transcripts to ensure their accuracy. All of the telephone interviews were successfully taped and were conducted at times arranged in advance with the participants. Interviews ranged in length from about 25 minutes to just under three hours. Half of the interview participants knew me in some capacity other than that of researcher at the time of the interviews.

The interview sample differed from the overall survey sample in several noticeable ways. First, the ratio of male to female participants was different; in the survey there were 3 women for every man responding, while the interview sample was more balanced, 11 women and 7 men. The geographical distribution was also different. British Columbia residents had been strongly represented among the survey respondents, however, because of a number of factors, including the demise of *Hecate's Loom* (which had been based in BC), my own lack of personal contacts on the West Coast, and the unfortunate fact that all of my original BC interview volunteers had moved, I was unable to get any interview participants from British Columbia. Ontario residents are over-

represented among the interview volunteers: 14 of 18. Many of the volunteers have also been involved in some form of what I will loosely term 'pagan advocacy', that is, they may hold positions of responsibility in large pagan organizations, facilitate communication between neopagan and state organizations, provide information on neopaganism or witchcraft to the media, to schools or to the law enforcement system, run a pagan newsletter, BBS, or social event, or have done so in the past. This would suggest that they are likely more articulate and comfortable talking about their views of the Craft than other, less obvious participants might be. It also suggests that they may have had more opportunities to polish the 'retrospectively reconstructed' versions of their personal narratives, which can pose problems if those narratives are taken as unproblematic facts, rather than as participant narratives informed by the norms of their current associations and worldview (Beckford 1978; Snow and Phillips 1980; Snow and Machalek 1983; Luhrmann 1989). It is perhaps unsurprising that many of the interview volunteers have this orientation, since people who have been working towards educating the public about neopaganism and witchcraft are likely to see this research as one means that will contribute to fulfilling that goal. Several of the respondents expressed this sentiment explicitly.

...I think it's important research to be done. If we take a look at the 'what would I change in the way of public perceptions', this research that you're doing now can go a long way towards establishing credibility for this particular new religious movement... and I think that's a very good thing to be happening. (Daniel)

...I think it's really important. I think it's important for everybody... to learn, I mean everybody, everybody in Canada, everybody in the United States, across the whole continent. This is not something to be feared. ... We need to demystify it in some ways. I mean, the mysticism involved with Wicca is wonderful, but in some ways it's also very detrimental. And, we need research like this to be put out of universities, and in all kinds of places, in journals, to be published, that tells the truth about this. (Sarah)

...the information's got to get out there. You know, I've looked at it, and you're doing something that has to present the information, if only to an academic community, that alternate spiritualities exist and uh, have validity, at least to their practitioners, if not to the general community. (Paul)

The fact that participants have their own vested interests in the outcome of this research has been borne in mind throughout the analysis, however, because I have extensive experience in the neopagan community, it is likely that tremendously skewed narratives would be fairly obvious to me, and I believe that the interview participants were conscious of that. This is an important analytic consideration, because it is not unknown, at least anecdotally, for neopagans to deliberately mislead researchers whom they mistrust, dislike or with whose perceived agendas they disagree (nat-rel discussion, July 1998).²¹

²¹ 'Nat-rel' is the abbreviation used throughout to denote the Nature Religions Scholars mailing list, which is operated out of the University of Southern Colorado. Subscribers include employed academics and graduate students from a variety of disciplines, who either study nature religion in some form or are practitioners (or both), as well as other practitioners with an interest in keeping current with the ongoing research. I joined the list in late June 1998, having been referred to it by British Craft author and psychology professor, Vivienne Crowley.

Summary

This project combines rational choice and grounded theory approaches in order to present an account of the Craft that is sensitive both to the perceptions and experiences of its practitioners and to the wider social context in which these are located. The research process, from the initial design phase through its subsequent implementation and analysis stages, has been fundamentally guided by my simultaneous location in the roles of participant and researcher. My existing familiarity with some of the dynamics of neopaganism had to be bracketed and recognized as only one possible manifestation of a wide range of potential dynamics, and not presumed to be typical.

Methodologically, my pre-existing identity as a Craft practitioner required me to make certain accommodations to safeguard the confidence of my research participants. In order to clearly reinforce that the interaction and communication around the research was in researcher-subject mode rather than being a private exchange between coreligionists, the survey document contained mostly forced choice and limited response questions, and the interviews were semi-structured, held in formalized settings and were either taped, or notes were taken openly during the proceedings. I proactively discussed my current and former associations inside the Craft community during interviews, particularly those involving any of the large neopagan organizations, and also answered questions about my background, training and interests, both in the Craft and in the academy, in an attempt to minimize the possibility of it being felt that I had somehow misrepresented myself.

The maintenance of a professionally credible stance, sensitive to the potential concerns of participants was particularly important during this research because it had a direct effect on my ability to obtain participation, especially during the interview stage. I was wholly dependent on the goodwill of respondents in securing interviews, as there are no available membership or mailing lists I could use to solicit subjects. Individuals who volunteered did so based on their perception of the project's merit; some then also referred others to me.

The project was organized in two distinct stages, the first involving a structured survey designed to generate a general demographic overview of participants, as well as to explore some of the central theoretical issues raised in the religious conversion and NRM literature, such as the importance of interpersonal contacts with others affiliated with the movement, consumption of movement or movement-positive literature, the relative importance of belief and behaviour in the construction of the participant's religious identity, and the received presence or absence of 'predisposing conditions' for religious conversion in the respondent's life.

The second stage of the research involved semi-structured interviews with a subset of the original respondents in order to give those participants an opportunity to reflect on what had been discovered during the survey stage, as well as to elaborate their own perceptions of their Craft, its place in their lives, and its reception in the broader population. This allowed participants' voices to emerge from the research in a way in which the survey alone would not have permitted, leading to a more balanced overall presentation.

Chapter Three: Characteristics of the Neopagan Respondents

This chapter provides a broad overview of the Craft sample that was obtained from the survey by comparing its characteristics to known features of the Canadian population as a whole and to selected religious subgroups. The purpose of the chapter is to discuss the extent to which this sample differs from the Canadian population and from other religious groups in order to provide a demographic and social context in which the sample can be understood. The characteristics of the present sample will also be compared to those of another sample (Rabinovitch 1992) likely drawn from the same population, in order to assess the extent of the consistency between the samples. Comparisons will also be made to the American samples obtained by Helen Berger (1999), Loretta Orion (1995, survey conducted in 1985) and Jorgensen and Russell (1999), where relevant. The expectations of some of the rational choice theorists, particularly Stark and Bainbridge and Dawson, about the characteristics that are apt to be typical of small, new and / or cult groups will also be discussed in relation to the data presented.

As has been discussed previously, Craft practitioners are not easy to sample in a systematic fashion, and therefore, very little is known with any certainty about their demographic characteristics. The survey employed in this study was a self-administered mail-in questionnaire, which produced a convenience sample from which descriptive statistics were generated. In the absence of known parameters, and with no way to systematically survey the population, a series of different samples from the same population is likely to be

the best way to gauge the generalizability of any of the characteristics of this population. This study presents one sample. Rabinovitch (1992) presents another sample. Rabinovitch's research was conducted in the summer of 1991 and consisted of face-to-face interviews with Craft practitioners across Canada. The sixty-seven interviews, which she taped, formed her sample. Because she did not wish to conduct research in communities where she was already known, her interviews took place outside of Ontario. Her sample was self-selected, and therefore is subject to the same constraints as the present sample. Because the two samples are independent, congruity between them will provide a better indicator of the possible generalizability of an observation than would either sample alone.

Information on the characteristics of the Canadian population has been drawn from the Census of Canada. Two different censuses have been used to provide appropriate comparisons. The use of more than one general census is necessary because information on religious affiliation is collected only on the decade census, which means that the most recent information available comes from the 1991 census. In all comparisons where a breakdown by religious affiliation is not necessary, the figures from the 1996 census have been used, because they are more comparable to those generated on the present survey, which was conducted in 1995-1996.

Use of the Census of Canada provides certain challenges in the present context. Beyond collecting information about religious identification only every second census, the way in which the information is reported by Statistics Canada

makes isolating characteristics of Canadian neopagans very difficult. Except in the actual denominational population information, responses that Statistics Canada codes as 'pagan' are subsumed under the overview category of 'para-religious groups', and reported together with the responses of other, probably very different, groups. In 1991, the census lists 5,530 people as 'pagan'. This means they coded 1,106 responses as 'pagan', as religious affiliation is required only on the long form of the survey, which is distributed to every fifth household. 'Para-religious groups' encompasses 28,155 responses, including 10,840 practitioners of 'Amerindian or Inuit religion'. Although the information provided by Statistics Canada is not explicit about this, it is not unreasonable to expect that a great many practitioners of North American aboriginal spiritualities are aboriginals themselves. Aboriginal people in Canada display several distinct characteristics, a number of which are notably different than those revealed in my sample. For example, it is known that First Nations people have a tendency to leave school earlier than other Canadians. This is clearly not the case with my neopagan respondents, as will be discussed further below. Having encountered the 'para-religious groups' categorization in previous research, my questionnaire included an item asking if the respondent is a registered Indian as defined by the Indian Act. Not a single respondent answered 'yes'. Collapsing individual items into the category 'para-religious groups' likely obscures substantial variation between them, and limits the category's usefulness in helping to identify important characteristics of the groups that comprise it.

It is also possible that the Census fails to capture a significant portion of the Canadian population identifying itself with various forms of neopaganism. One of the items on the present study asked respondents, all of whom indicated that they self-identify as Craft practitioners²² in the act of completing the survey, how they would list their religion on the Census of Canada. Seventy-five percent of respondents indicated that they would list something that would most likely be coded as 'pagan', for example 'pagan', 'neopagan' or 'witchcraft'. The remaining twenty-five percent gave a variety of responses, including their religion of origin, or another more mainstream religious tradition with which they are also involved. Given these responses, the Census most likely under-represents the number of Canadians involved in this movement because practitioners may put forward an alternate or additional identification for 'official' purposes. Many neopagans are still reluctant to make their religious identification known to the 'authorities', especially when the confidentiality measures used by Statistics Canada in conducting and analysing the census may be poorly understood. However, despite its limitations in allowing characteristics of the Canadian 'pagan' population to be identified, the Census remains the pre-eminent source of information about characteristics of the Canadian population generally, and provides a strong basis for comparisons with my sample.

²² Most people who consider themselves 'Craft' will also accede to some form of the label 'pagan'. It is not known what the range of responses Statistics Canada chooses to consider 'pagan' comprises, therefore, it is assumed here that 'pagan' is the appropriate Census category for my respondents.

Basic Features of the Sample

Female to Male Response Ratio

The most immediately evident characteristic of my sample that clearly does not conform to that of the Canadian population more generally is its breakdown by sex. Seventy-five percent of the surveys that were returned were completed by women. The Census of Canada reports their religious affiliation data by sex, and they received responses indicating that 54.1 percent of pagans were women, while 45.9 percent were men. This also indicates a disproportionate female representation in neopaganism, but one that is much less extreme than the one produced by my sample. Because the imbalance between the number of men and women in the sample was so striking, it was one of the items that merited additional follow-up in the interview portion of the study.

Interview participants were informed that the survey had generated a 3:1 ratio of female to male respondents and asked if this ratio reflected their own experience in the Craft. Although a few people agreed that this was the appropriate ratio, many more disagreed, or qualified the observation in some way. In particular, they noted that while 3:1 may be an accurate macroscopic ratio, it obscured important distinctions in affiliation between types of groups. British Traditional groups, it was suggested by both those practicing both inside and outside the British Traditional sphere, tend to be either balanced in their male to female ratios, or to contain slightly more men. Many of the Goddess

spirituality groups are restricted to women, and although they may have some membership overlap with the rest of the local neopagan community, that overlap is not complete. These groups often do not participate 'en masse' in non-feminist pagan events, so a large number of pagan-identified women, who are known to be 'out there', are not visible to other members of the broad community. One participant summed it up this way:

We do know of people who are involved in the um, the women's spirituality end of it, but they are much more resistant towards making contact with the other groups. And perhaps, I guess, a fear of losing some of the intimacy, or privacy, with what they do, or that kind of thing. And that's totally valid... (Aidan)

Another participant, who has experience in both the Goddess spirituality and eclectic branches of neopaganism, suggested that the Census might miss counting those exclusively involved with Goddess spirituality more often than others. She commented:

There are a lot more men who feel comfortable declaring on a sheet of paper that they're pagan than women. Um... but my experience is, that because of the, the, the women's spirituality movement, the whole Goddess movement, there are a lot more women um... exploring spiritualities similar to paganism, similar to Wicca, that blend in and out, that don't leave their religion of origin, but add, but modify it with Goddess worship. (Francine)

One woman commented that although seeing three women for every man in many neopagan settings was about right, she would expect to see much the same thing if she dropped by an early morning Catholic mass. Her point was that the people one sees as involved as in a religion may not be fully representative of all the people identifying with the religion because of different levels of involvement in the observable aspects of that religion.

Looking in more depth at the sample, 25 people gave clear indications that they were involved in feminist or Goddess spirituality focused practices (13.6% of the sample). All of these people were women (18.2% of the female respondents). If these people were removed from the sample, those remaining would still be 70 percent female and 30 percent male. So, although those practitioners who work exclusively with other women are clearly present in the sample, they do not appear to be present in sufficiently overwhelming numbers to entirely account for the skew. Admittedly, 25 is probably the most conservative estimate for the number of women involved in deliberately gender-exclusive practices in my sample, as it counts only those who clearly so labeled themselves. Some of the named traditions that I cannot immediately categorize or trace may also be feminist-oriented, and some of the people who listed simply 'solitary' or 'eclectic' may also maintain a Goddess focus. However, even given those ambiguities, I would like to suggest, based on both the information from the survey and from the observations of my interview participants, that the observed difference between the numbers of women and men involved in the Craft is a real difference, and not merely a fluke of the sample, although the magnitude of that difference requires further investigation. Interestingly, Jorgensen and Russell report that their 1996 American survey research (n=643) produced a sample consisting of 56.8 percent women, 42.3 percent men and 9 percent unknown (no response) (1999:333). Their survey, however, was distributed almost entirely at gender-inclusive neopagan festival events and may substantially under-represent the number of women involved in more gender-exclusive practices.

Loretta Orion's questionnaire (n=189) produced a sample consisting of 38 percent men, 58 percent women and 4 percent who identified themselves as androgynous, by which Orion assumes they mean that they reject conventional gender categories. This breakdown, she notes, corresponds fairly well to her field observations, in which she noticed approximately two women for every man present (1995:62).

Despite the persistent observations by my interview participants that men appear more likely to be involved in traditional groups and in large pagan organizations than in other types of eclectic venues, examination of the survey sample fails to bear this out. A similar proportion of the men and women (12.5% and 11.6% respectively) indicated that they were practicing in a Traditional framework, while 10.4 percent of men and 6.5 percent of women reported practicing in one of the large pagan organizations. It is not possible, with the data generated by this research, to say definitively which of these observed situations more closely reflects the actual overall composition of the Craft in Canada.

Geographical Distribution

Table 1 shows the population of Canada by region, according to the 1991 Census, the number of 'pagans' the Census reports in each region, and the distribution of the survey sample.

The most notable elements of the table are the under-representation of pagans relative to the population in Quebec, and their over-representation in British Columbia. The first is not unexpected. As the Craft tends to be a

primarily English-language phenomenon, possibly because of the lack of quality French-language materials, and as the majority of Quebec residents are francophone, it is not difficult to predict that the pagan population in Quebec would be lower than the overall population of Quebec would seem to warrant.

TABLE 1

Geographical distribution of Canadian population, the 1991 census subcategory 'pagan', and the survey sample, by region
(1991 census data – Statistics Canada)

Region	Category		
	Canadians	'Pagans'	Sample
Maritimes %	2,299,480 (8.5%)	255 (4.6%)	16 (8.6%)
PQ %	6,810,300 (25.2%)	215 (3.9%)	19 (10.2%)
ON %	9,977,050 (37%)	2,280 (41.2%)	70 (37.6%)
Prairies %	4,574,610 (17%)	900 (16.3%)	22 (11.8%)
BC %	3,247,505 (12%)	1,860 (33.6%)	59 (31.7%)
North %	85,085 (0.3%)	20 (0.4%)	0 (0%)
n= %	26,994,045 (100%)	5,530 (100%)	186* (99.9%)

* 1 missing response

One interview participant elaborated on the difficulties of language, beyond that of the simple unavailability of resources, facing francophone Craft practitioners:

...there's no term in French for a post-menopausal woman, which means that you cannot say 'crone' and mean it in the same way that you mean it in English. Um, you cannot say 'the wheel of the year' in quite the way that you say it in English. Um, um, uh... so mother-maiden-crone is a problem, because 'maiden' is also a problem, um, you have, uh, there are all kinds of difficulties. ... there are things so specifically Anglo-Saxon, not even Celtic, if it were Celtic, there would be no problems in French; after all, there's

Brittany, there's Normandy, there's Poitou, there's Marseilles ... but the Anglo-Saxon stuff that's come in, that people assume is Celtic, is untranslatable. Or, if it is translatable, ends up feeling weird, so yes, English is a liturgical language for francophones in Canada. Except for those covens that have taken it as a point of, of, uh, how would one say, uh, spiritual necessity okay, to translate, no, not to translate, because that doesn't work... to find culturally and linguistically valid equivalents. (Francine)

So Craft practice in francophone areas may be hampered not only by general difficulties in getting information, but by those characteristics of neopagan witchcraft, in particular, that derive from its specifically English cultural origins.

The situation in British Columbia is less obviously explained. Only twelve percent of the Canadian population was living in BC in 1991, yet both Statistics Canada and my subsequent sample show more than thirty percent of all pagans living in that province. Stark and Bainbridge suggest one possible explanation for this discrepancy. They hypothesize, given their observations about the operation of religious economies, that "cults will abound where conventional churches are weakest" (1985:438). As it is more useful to think of the Craft as a constellation of small, inter-related 'cults' than it is to consider it as a single 'organization', this hypothesis, if true, would apply in the case of British Columbia. In Bibby's 1993 analysis of the Canadian religious economy, he noted that religious affiliation rates, as well as self-reported service attendance rates, are lower in that province than they are anywhere else in Canada. He notes that there is a,

... unique aversion to organized religion in British Columbia. A core of about 20% of people in B.C. are actively involved in religious groups. But after that, the situation departs from the

pattern in other regions. Only an additional roughly 10% of the people in that West Coast paradise are even marginally involved with the churches -- well below the levels elsewhere. The rest are either inactive or not affiliated. (1993:173)

The lack of involvement by people in organized religion leaves open the possibility that they might be attracted by a less 'organized' alternative spirituality, if one takes as true the assertion that many people will persist in wanting answers to questions that are unanswerable within a fully secularized framework, even if the answers provided by the mainstream religious organizations are unpersuasive. Bainbridge also notes the relative success of new religious movements on the Pacific coasts of both the United States and Canada, and speculates that the level of geographical mobility within those regions contributes to both the weakness of conventional denominations and the failure of new religions to become substantial movements, despite their prevalence (1997:413).

In terms of the geographical environment in which respondents were living, 54.8 percent of my respondents indicated that they were living in 'urban' settings, another 21.5 percent considered themselves to be living in a 'suburban' area, and 11.8 percent selected each of 'small town' and 'rural'. These terms were not defined in any way on the survey instrument, and so responses reflect only the respondents' own definitions of their surroundings. Rabinovitch reports that 31 percent of her sample was urban and 10 percent was rural. She does not supply information about what the remaining 59 percent of her sample considered their immediate environment to be (1992:28-9). Because she conducted all her interviews outside of Ontario, and therefore outside of the

pagan communities of such large cities as Toronto, Ottawa and Hamilton, she may simply have captured a greater proportion of non-urban residents, or she may have qualified 'urban' in a restrictive way that is not evident in her reports. Orion reports that 51 percent of her respondents indicated that they were living in an urban setting, 30 percent in a suburban one, and 19 percent in a rural area (1995:59). My respondents were also asked about the nature of the environment in which they had spent most of their time growing up. Almost twice as many people had grown up in small towns than live in them now, and fewer than half as many people reported growing up in urban environments than reside in them currently. Overall, 43.2 percent of my respondents considered themselves to be living in the same sort of immediate environment as that in which they grew up.

That many Craft practitioners live in cities is unsurprising. In 1995, Statistics Canada reports that 58.8 percent of the Canadian population lived in a census metropolitan area (CMA) with a population in excess of 200,000.²³ In addition, Stark and Bainbridge (1987) suggest, through the intersection of a number of hypotheses, that cosmopolitan areas will tend to have a richer diversity of religious competition than will more socially homogenous areas,

²³ This does not mean that this is the total number of people living in urban environments. A CMA includes the urban core of an area, as well as the adjacent suburban and rural areas that are economically entwined with that urban core. Therefore, in the case of the Ottawa-Hull CMA, the downtowns, as well as adjoining suburban areas such as Nepean and Kanata, and more rural areas such as Goulbourn are included in the population counts. There are also urban cores in smaller CMAs such as Regina, which are not included in the 58.8% figure. The broader number is included not so much for its strict comparability, but simply to illustrate that the concentration in heavily developed areas is by no means unusual among Canadians more generally.

thus making them particularly apt venues for the operation of cult movements that do not require high levels of social isolation. Bibby also notes that the rate of active involvement in traditional organized religions in major Canadian urban centers is considerably lower than in towns with populations of less than 10,000 (1993:173-4).

Age Distribution

It is often asserted that those people involved in new religious movements will tend to be younger than the general population because the social obligations of youths are less than those of their older counterparts, and because young people are therefore less affected by stigma or sanctions that may accrue to a deviant religious identification (Dawson 1998; Stark and Bainbridge 1985, 1987). There are, in fact, a disproportionate number of younger people in my sample compared to the population profile as a whole, or even when compared to that of those citing other religious identifications. Table 2 shows the proportions of those in four different age ranges from a variety of denominational identifications (as given on the 1991 census) and in my sample. Because the Census reports its age breakdowns by decade, the table has been constructed using only those twenty and over in each denomination. This is to avoid undue skew in the proportions, since my survey was not organized as a census, and therefore counts only the individual completing the survey. This results in minor children not being counted in my sample. Because the Census age ranges of under 10 and 10-19 were unlikely to be adequately or accurately

represented in my sample, I deemed it more comparable to use only adult identifiers across the range of religious traditions selected.

TABLE 2

Percentage of adults in four age ranges in Canada, in selected religious identifications and in the survey sample (1991 census data – Statistics Canada)

Group	<u>Age Range</u>				Total
	20 - 29	30 - 39	40 - 49	over 50	
All Canadians n=	22.2% (4,318,490)	24.5% (4,754,950)	19.1% (3,718,570)	34.2% (6,640,505)	100% (19,432,515)
Catholic n=	22.9% (2,033,560)	24.8% (2,201,125)	19.3% (1,707,925)	33% (2,924,445)	100% (8,867,055)
United Church n=	16.7% (388,340)	22.1% (513,575)	19.1% (443,675)	42% (973,425)	99.9% (2,319,015)
Pentecostal n=	25.8% (73,130)	26.3% (74,625)	19.8% (56,140)	28.2% (79,945)	100.1% (283,480)
Jew n=	15.4% (36,360)	20.9% (49,470)	20.6% (48,780)	43.1% (101,825)	100% (236,435)
Unitarian n=	9.9% (1,310)	20.4% (2,715)	20.4% (2,715)	49.2% (6,540)	99.9% (13,280)
No Religion n=	29.5% (666,835)	30.3% (684,730)	19.3% (436,285)	21% (475,435)	100.1% (2,263,285)
Survey Sample n=	36.5% (65)	32.6% (58)	23.6% (42)	7.3% (13)	100% (178)*

*1 missing response, eight responses from individuals younger than 20

As can be seen from this table, whereas the pattern in many religious identifications is that younger adults are under-represented in comparison to their proportions in the overall population, and those over 50 are somewhat over-represented, my sample shows a marked under-representation of those over 50. Rabinovitch's sample had an even more extreme distribution. She reports 46 percent of her respondents as between 20 and 30; 30 percent between

31 and 40; 16 percent between 41 and 50, and 7 percent over 50. Rabinovitch did not interview minors for reasons having to do with the dynamics of ethics and consent.

In addition to being asked their age at the time of the survey, respondents were asked the age at which they first became involved with the Craft. These responses support the speculation that people are most likely to become involved in NRMs when they are fairly young.

TABLE 3
Age at first involvement with the Craft

Age	N	%
10 and under	11	5.9%
11 to 15	26	14.1%
16 to 20	42	22.7%
21 to 25	34	18.4%
26 to 30	26	14.1%
31 to 35	17	9.2%
36 to 40	15	8.1%
over 40	14	7.5%
Total	185*	100%

* 2 missing responses

However, they do not support the assumption, found for example in Bibby (1993), that the Craft is, by and large, a teenage phenomenon. Less than half of the respondents (42.7%) reported having become involved by age twenty. The remainder became involved later, although it should be noted that approximately 75 percent of the sample was involved in the Craft by the time they were 30.

The length of time respondents reported having been involved in the Craft varied (Table 4, below). These figures are similar to those reported for Jorgensen and Russell's American sample.

TABLE 4
Length of reported involvement with the Craft

Length (years)	N	%
less than 1	17	9.3%
1 to 5	76	41.8%
6 to 10	32	17.6%
11 to 15	23	12.6%
16 to 20	8	4.4%
over 20	26	14.3%
Total	182*	100%

* 5 missing responses

Jorgensen and Russell indicate that 7.2 percent of their respondents had been involved for less than one year, 38.5 percent had been involved for between one and five years, 20.1 percent had been involved for between five and nine years, and 31.6 percent had been involved for ten or more years (1999:333).

Those, such as Dawson (1998), who characterize the Craft as part of the client cult environment of the New Age would expect that involvement would be sporadic, and of limited duration, although there might be continued involvement in the general milieu. The way in which the survey item gauging length of involvement was worded does not allow me to comment on that particular assertion, because the notion of what constituted 'involvement' was left open to the interpretation of the individual respondent, and there were no restrictions made as to 'continuous involvement in a single group' or 'active involvement' and the threshold at which any given individual will consider

themselves 'involved' will vary. For example, when asked specifically about how they first became involved in the Craft, respondents chose a variety of markers. About 45 percent of respondents tied the beginning of their involvement back to reading about the Craft, often indicating that it was when they ceased simply to read and also began to 'try' that they considered themselves involved rather than just 'interested'. Sixteen percent indicated that their involvement began when they began to either interact with other practitioners as practitioners rather than simply as friends (i.e.: talking with them about the Craft and its techniques over coffee, rather than just having coffee) or to engage in specific practices on their own; and 17.7 percent considered their attendance at a ritual to have marked the beginning of their involvement.

Despite its limitations, however, Table Four does indicate that while half of the sample considered themselves to have been involved for five years or less, almost a fifth of the respondents had been involved for more than 15 years. Rabinovitch's sample (n=63) reflected a similar, although less pronounced, bias towards those somewhat new to the movement. Her data show 32 percent of her informants to have been involved for less than five years; 41 percent to have been involved between five and ten years; 11 percent to have been involved for between ten and twenty years; and 16 percent to have been involved for more than twenty years. Because Rabinovitch was doing face to face interviews, some of the discrepancy seen in the numbers of less experienced informants may be the result of those people being slightly more intimidated about talking to her because of their lack of 'experience' and 'qualification'. It could also represent a

slight upsurge in new involvement between 1991, when her interviews were conducted, and 1995, when the survey was released. However, given the small sample sizes in both cases, it may well be a normal variation in the sample.

The under-representation of those with more than 15 years involvement in the Craft could, however, represent a real tendency. This may reflect the effects either of attrition, whereby people discover that the movement cannot satisfy the needs of their more mature, 'settled' lives, or what Stark and Bainbridge refer to as 'social evaporation', whereby those whose fortunes and circumstances are not improved by their choice of religious practice fall away from it in pursuit of some more effective way of gaining compensators and rewards (1987:330). Alternatively, it could also reflect the relatively greater barriers to involvement that were present at the time that segment of the sample would have become involved. These 'supply-side' barriers will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7. It is difficult to gauge the effects of attrition within the neopagan movement; presumably, if a sample were taken in another five years, there would be a greater number of people in the 'over 15 years' category if the effects of attrition were minimal and the proportions that currently exist are accurately represented by my data.

Education and School Attendance

In his review of the literature dealing with the characteristics of those who join NRMs, Dawson notes that, in nearly all cases, the education levels to be found in 'cult-type' (innovative or imported) NRMs are higher than those found in the surrounding populations (1998:87-88). This is in contrast to the findings for

schismatic sectarian groups, whose memberships tend to be less educated than those of their parent organizations (Bainbridge 1997:165). The expectation of higher than average education levels is borne out by my sample. Table 5 shows the highest degree or diploma obtained by Canadians generally (1996 census data) and by my survey respondents. In an effort to make the two groups as comparable as possible, I have eliminated data from those 65 and older because these individuals are both under-represented in my sample, and more likely than other age cohorts not to have completed a secondary education.

TABLE 5
Highest degree or diploma attained by individuals between 15 and 64 years of age for Canada and the survey sample
(1996 census data – Statistics Canada)

Degree or Diploma	<u>Canada</u>		<u>Survey</u>	
	n =	%	n =	%
none	6,239,285	32.2	11	5.9
secondary	4,772,670	24.7	25	13.5
trades	2,115,895	10.9	20	10.8
non-university	2,960,185	15.3	51	27.6
university	3,261,125	16.9	78	42.2
total	19,349,155	100	185*	100

* 2 missing responses

The Craft practitioners who responded to the survey were much less likely to have left school before finishing high school than the general population, and were much more likely to have a college or university education. Rabinovitch reports that 42 percent of her interview sample also possessed one or more completed university degrees (1992:34). In her study of American neopagans, which produced more than 2,000 responses, Berger reports that 65.4 percent of her respondents claimed to have at least a college

degree, and that 16.1 percent had completed post-graduate work (1999:8-9). Jorgensen and Russell (1999) indicate that 26.7 percent of their respondents claimed to have completed at least an undergraduate degree, while 18.8 percent claimed to hold an MA or PhD. Orion reports that 31.7 percent of her respondents claimed to have completed a Bachelor's degree, and an additional 27 percent claimed to hold an MA or PhD (1995:67), so this phenomenon would not appear to be limited to Canada.

TABLE 6

Percentage of those 15 years of age and older attending school for Canada, selected religious identifications, and the survey sample (1991 census data – Statistics Canada)

Group	Not attending	Full-time	Part-time	Total
All Canadians n=	82.3% (17,523,570)	11.9% (2,537,715)	5.8% (1,243,450)	100% (21,304,735)
Catholic n=	82% (7,983,805)	12% (1,168,285)	6% (589,140)	100% (9,741,230)
United Church n=	85.3% (2,143,400)	9.9% (248,735)	4.8% (121,695)	100% (2,513,830)
Jews n=	82% (255,615)	12.8% (32,800)	5.1% (13,130)	99.9% (255,540)
Para-religious groups* n=	75.2% (16,730)	15.4% (3,425)	9.4% (2,100)	100% (22,255)
No Religion n=	78.6% (1,939,425)	14.3% (353,900)	7% (173,095)	99.9% (2,466,420)
Survey n=	61.6% (114)	20.5% (38)	17.8% (33)	99.9% (185)**

* note: 'para-religious groups' includes 'pagans' among others

** 2 missing responses

In addition, a greater proportion of my respondents were still attending school, either full-time or part-time, than is the case for either Canadians in general, or Canadians having other religious identifications. Table 6 shows the

school attendance rates, for those 15 years of age and older, for the Canadian population and selected religious identifications (1991 census data) and for the survey sample. The explanation often advanced for the higher than average education levels to be found in cults has to do with the amount of novel culture that must be learned, digested and interpreted by cult members (Bainbridge 1997; Stark and Bainbridge 1985; Dawson 1998). Because the features of cult movements often include a lack of continuity with the surrounding religious traditions and/or a lack of cultural continuity with the surrounding population, successful socialization as a 'cult member' requires a commitment to educating one's self in the ways of the cult. This can be seen in the Craft when one looks at the role books play in facilitating involvement. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

Legal Marital Status and Family Income

Among the propositions that Stark and Bainbridge (1987) advance about those more likely to become members of a new religious group include a series dealing with 'low stakes in conformity' and a lack of 'social relationships'. Their elaboration of these ideas will be discussed further below. However, among the indicators that can be used as a partial gauge of an individual's 'stakes in conformity' are their marital status and their income. The first indicates a commitment to another person, whose opinion and needs will then act to restrict the environment of choice for the individual, and the second can indicate the extent to which the individual is integrated into the labour market, with its

concomitant limitations. Income can also be used as a very imperfect indicator of relative deprivation, albeit only of a material nature, another explanatory concept upon which Stark and Bainbridge tend to rely.

Given the expectation of 'low stakes in conformity', one might predict that the proportion of married individuals would be lower among Craft practitioners than in the surrounding society. The sample data does not support that proposition. Table 7 shows the percentage of both Canadians and survey respondents aged 15 to 59 in each of Statistics Canada's 'marital status' categories.

TABLE 7

Comparison of the marital status of Canadians between 15 and 59 with that of the survey sample in the same age range (1996 census data – Statistics Canada)

Marital Status	<u>Canadians</u>		<u>Survey</u>	
	n =	%	n =	%
married*	10,718,710	58.8	102	55.1
separated	491,180	2.7	5	2.7
divorced	946,655	5.2	23	12.4
widowed	180,485	1	0	0
never married	5,892,860	32.3	55	29.7
total	18,229,895	100	185**	99.9

*married includes both those legally married and those in common law relationships

** 1 missing response, one individual older than 59

The only category in which there is a large discrepancy between the overall population and the sample is in the percentage of divorced individuals. This may simply be the result of sampling error, or it could be the indirect reflection of the fact that the institution of marriage, in and of itself, is not specifically supported

in neopagan witchcraft²⁴, and divorce is not discouraged in the general ideology. This means that pressure to legally marry and to stay married through difficult times is more likely to come from social sources outside of the Craft, such as family, than it is to originate within it.

In terms of family income, Statistics Canada gives the median Canadian family income in 1995 as \$46,951. This is considerably higher than the median family income in the survey sample, which was approximately \$35,000.²⁵ Table 8 shows the percentage of respondents by their family income, compared with that of Canadian families overall. The median personal income of respondents was approximately \$17,500. This number conceals a gendered discrepancy; the median personal income for men was approximately \$23,000, while that for

²⁴ No ritual for a 'handfasting' (which is the approximate equivalent in neopagan witchcraft to a wedding) exists in Gerald Gardner's original *Book of Shadows* (Kelly 1991). However, the concept was present at least by 1970, because a handfasting ritual is described by Stewart Farrar in *What Witches Do* (1971). He emphasizes the range of meanings that can be attached to a handfasting. "Like so much in Wicca, a handfasting means what the witches concerned choose to make it mean. At one extreme, they may intend it as a ceremonial announcement to their friends of the Craft that they are living together and wish to be treated as a couple unless and until they change their minds. At the other, the intention is even more permanent than 'till death do us part', because it involves the concept of 'soul-mates' -- a continuing relationship through all subsequent reincarnations." (1971:185) In a later book, it is noted that the ritual he described in that text, as well as all other handfasting rituals the Farrars have seen, are clearly recent in origin, although they often incorporate older, folkloric elements (1981:160).

²⁵ n = 171. This question had an abnormally high number of missing responses, probably due to the fact that it was placed immediately after the question on personal income, and respondents may have assumed I would simply figure out that the two should be the same given the previous responses to, for example, questions on living arrangements. Rather than make inferences from other areas of the questionnaire, I chose to code conservatively, and if the information was not given in the family income question, I coded it as missing.

women was only \$13,000. An examination of the personal income data plotted against the family income data also indicates that the survey respondent was often not the household's main income earner (their personal income was less than half of that reported as family income). This is unsurprising, as three-quarters of respondents were women, and women, especially women of childbearing age, often report lower incomes than their male counterparts.

TABLE 8
Percentage of Canadians and survey sample reporting
selected family income categories
(1996 census data – Statistics Canada)

Family Income (\$)	Canadians	Survey
less than 10,000	5.6%	8.8%
10,000 to 19,999	10.2%	19.3%
20,000 to 29,999	12.9%	15.8%
30,000 to 39,999	12.7%	9.9%
40,000 to 49,999	12.4%	9.4%
50,000 to 59,999	11.3%	12.9%
60,000 to 74,999	12.8%	9.4%
over 75,000	22.1%	14.6%
Total	100%	100.1%

However, the comparatively low family and personal incomes reported on the survey could also be seen to lend credence to Rabinovitch's observation that neopagans, while educated, are often underemployed. The survey item asking about the performance of paid work for most of the previous year indicated that 54.6 percent (101) of respondents worked full time (more than 30 hours per week) for most of the previous year, while 35.1 percent (65) worked part time (less than 30 hours per week). Only 10.3 percent (19) indicated that they did not perform paid work for most of the previous year. This means that 89.7 percent

of the survey respondents were employed at some level during the previous year. For the comparable age group (15-64) in the same year, Statistics Canada indicated that 67.5 percent of Canadians were employed, 7.6 percent were unemployed, and 24 percent were not in the labour force. This apparent attachment to part-time and less well-paid positions might be taken by rational choice theorists to imply lower than average stakes in conformity as well as relative deprivation compared to others of similar educational backgrounds.

Other Noteworthy Features

Among the most striking features to emerge in the personal information given by respondents was the number of individuals citing sexual orientations other than heterosexual. The Census of Canada, to date, has not collected this information, and so a national figure that could act as a baseline is not available, however both Rabinovitch's study and the present one collected this information, presented below in Table 9.

TABLE 9
Sexual orientation reported by respondents to Rabinovitch (1992) and the present study

Sexual Orientation	<u>Rabinovitch</u>		<u>Survey</u>	
	n =	%	n =	%
heterosexual	43	64%	129	70.1%
homosexual	15	22%	9	4.9%
bisexual	9	14%	46	25%
total	67	100%	184*	100%

* 3 missing responses

Rabinovitch did not report her results by sex and so the proportion of men and women in each of her categories cannot be determined. However, in the survey responses, men were much more likely than women to identify themselves as

homosexual (10.2% of men vs. only 2.9% of women) and much less likely to identify themselves as bisexual (14.3% of men vs. 28.5% of women). Berger's American study found similar proportions; she cites 68 percent reporting heterosexual, 9.4 percent reporting homosexual and 18.7 percent reporting bisexual. Interestingly, she notes that 4 percent of her respondents listed 'other' but does not otherwise comment on this (1999:43). Orion also notes an "unusually high percentage" of neopagans reporting sexual orientations other than heterosexual. In her case, the sample was 61 percent heterosexual, 11 percent homosexual, and 28 percent bisexual (1995:62). The proportion of respondents reporting an 'alternative' sexual orientation is notable because it may also be a partial indicator of 'low stakes in conformity' as defined by Stark and Bainbridge. Since the dominant culture in Canada supports heterosexuality, a rejection of that standard and the adoption of an alternative one might make it less costly for individuals to also make other 'alternative' choices, such as membership in a cult movement.

Following Rabinovitch's original interview schedule, the survey also asked respondents about their perception of their home life as they were growing up. Rabinovitch's findings on these questions were probably the most provocative and disturbing aspects of her thesis. During her interview process, she discovered that only one of the forty women she interviewed, and only seven of the twenty-seven men, reported believing that they had a 'happy, normal' childhood. Of the 59 people reporting some kind of difficulty, 29 (43% of

her sample) indicated that they had one or more parents who were substance dependent, 46 (69%) reported physical, verbal or emotional abuse, and 22 (33%) indicated that they were survivors of incest (1992:99).

The results from the present study are not so extreme. When asked if they considered themselves to have had a 'happy, normal home life' while growing up, 56.5 percent (105) of my respondents answered 'yes', while 43.5 percent (81) answered 'no'. Women answered 'no' on this question more often than men (48.2% of women vs. 29.2% of men). Eighty-five people answered the break out questions associated with this item, asking them to specify if a parent or guardian had been physically abusive, emotionally abusive, or substance dependent. These terms were not defined in the questions, leaving it open to the respondents to interpret and label their own perceptions of their experiences. Forty-two people (22.5% of the sample) considered a parent or guardian to have been physically abusive; 77 people (41.2%) considered a parent or guardian to have been emotionally abusive; and 41 people (21.9%) indicated that one or more of their parents or guardians had been substance dependent.

Another question asked respondents if they had ever been sexually abused or assaulted. Twenty-five percent of men and 56.5 percent of women answered 'yes' to this question. It must be noted that, as in the previous questions, no definition of 'sexually abused or assaulted' was given with the item, so responses can be expected to cover a wide variety of types of occurrence. Of the 90 people who indicated they had been the victims of some form of sexual abuse or assault, 75.5 percent (68) reported that it had occurred

prior to their involvement in the Craft, 11.1 percent (10) reported that it had occurred since they became involved in the Craft, and 13.3 percent reported that there had been instances both prior to and subsequent to their involvement. The relationship between the experience of abuse and the benefits of choosing a neopagan religious path, particularly as it relates to magical practice, has been explored at length in another paper (Reid 1996), however, it is also relevant to the appeal of the movement overall, which will be discussed in Chapter Six.

Differences between the Survey and Interview Respondents

The interview participants were a self-selected sample of the survey respondents, as described in the previous chapter. They were overwhelmingly from Ontario (14 of 18) and women were less obviously over-represented than they had been in the survey responses (11 women and 7 men). No one had been involved in the Craft for less than three years (the length of time that had elapsed between the surveys and the interviews) and most of the participants had been involved for a good deal longer (Table 10).

TABLE 10
Length of reported involvement in the Craft for the interview and survey samples

Involvement (years)	<u>Interviews</u>		<u>Survey</u>	
	n =	%	n =	%
5 or fewer	1	5.6	93	51.1
6 to 10	8	44.4	32	17.6
11 to 15	4	22.2	23	12.6
16 to 20	2	11.1	8	4.4
over 20	3	16.7	26	14.3
total	18	100	182*	100

* 5 missing responses

Their reflections on their Craft, and the sophistication of those reflections, should therefore be taken as those of the more experienced members of the Craft, and might not be fully representative of the ways in which less longstanding members, whom the survey would suggest form the bulk of the Craft population, might express themselves.

Interview participants were also slightly more clustered in the 30 to 39 year old age range than was the survey sample overall.

TABLE 11

Percentage of adults in four age ranges in the interview and the survey samples

Group	Age Range				Total
	20 - 29	30 - 39	40 - 49	over 50	
Interview Sample n=	27.8% (5)	44.4% (8)	16.7% (3)	11.1% (2)	100% (18)
Survey Sample n=	36.5% (65)	32.6% (58)	23.6% (42)	7.3% (13)	100% (178)*

* 1 missing response, eight responses from individuals younger than 20

Traditional and eclectic types of Craft dominated among interview participants. No one interviewed worked only in the gender-exclusive segments of the Goddess spirituality community, although several participants had some involvements there. Seven people described themselves as coming out of a traditional lineage, and having their primary identification as traditionals, although five of these people also indicated that they incorporate many eclectic elements into their personal practices, or occasionally work in more eclectic venues. The remaining 11 people described themselves as eclectics, some giving additional modifications. One participant noted that they practice primarily within a large pagan organization; one said that her focus was on the Goddess

spirituality side; one person indicated having been exclusively solitary; and two people highlighted that their particular eclecticism drew heavily on the traditional strands of neopagan witchcraft.

Interview participants also tended to share a belief that it would be a benefit to the Craft and its practitioners if more good information about them were to be collected and made available to the public. This was evident in two ways: first through their tendency to have worked or be working in Craft 'public relations' (making themselves available to the media to be interviewed, giving information seminars in schools or libraries, working to get legal or clerical privileges for neopagans, or facilitating pagan networking venues, for example). Fourteen of the 18 people interviewed indicated, in the course of conversation during the interview that they were, or had been, involved in these kinds of activities. The other way in which this orientation was evident was in the ways in which they described their motivations for participating in the interview process. They often expressed sentiments such as 'helping people with their research is important', 'good research is the only way that we are ever going to be taken seriously' and 'it is important that we have ways to find out about each other, and that other people have ways to find out about us.' Participants expressed their frustration at the negative stereotypes surrounding paganism generally, and the lack of safe and credible venues for debunking these stereotypes. For many of the interview participants, the current research was seen as another opportunity to further their own desires to see the Craft 'normalized' as a religious choice for Canadians.

Rational Choice Theory and Predictions in Craft Populations

Although the foregoing description of the Craft sample obtained with the 1995 survey superficially seems to support some of the very general rational choice propositions about the kinds of people who will tend to be attracted to cult movements, such convergences should be regarded cautiously. Attempts to generate specific predictions, about neopaganism in particular, based on Stark and Bainbridge's 1987 propositions, are much more complex than they might initially seem, and may be less useful.

Several of the concepts that are crucial for predicting the composition and trajectory of a religious organization are difficult to apply to the highly diffuse constellation of individuals and groups that make up the Craft. Chief among them is the distinction between 'high-tension' and 'low-tension' religious organizations. Stark and Bainbridge characterize 'tension' as follows: "Tension with the surrounding sociocultural environment is equivalent to subcultural deviance, marked by difference, antagonism and separation" (1987:338). High levels of tension with the surrounding environment can be produced in a number of different ways. Iannaccone (1997) discusses the ways in which 'costly demands', which raise the level of tension between the group and the surrounding environment can be used to help maintain a high level of commitment among group members by reducing 'free rider' problems²⁶. Among the things he considers to be 'costly demands' are all of those that

²⁶ Free-riders, in Iannaccone's terms, are those individuals who merely wish to consume the benefits produced by the group, without devoting a proportional amount of time and effort to their production.

require sacrifice or incur stigma, such as heavy tithing, distinctive modes of dress, or witnessing door to door. However, tension does not have to be produced so blatantly. To the extent that a religious group shares the values of the dominant culture and adapts itself to its requirements, it is in low tension with that culture. To the extent that the dominant values are rejected, and the group refuses to conform, the group is in high tension with its environment. These are two poles of a continuum, however, and it can be difficult to place neopaganism with any exactness.

Helen Berger makes a compelling case for the essential congruity of the functional values of neopaganism and those of modern North American society by emphasizing the ways in which both are products of the application of the fundamental premises of Enlightenment thought in late modernity. "The emphasis on globalism, the belief in personal and social transformation, and the use of noninstrumental rationality place Wicca firmly within the Enlightenment tradition." (1999:6) The details of her analysis rely heavily on Giddens' structuration theory and the work of James Beckford; her central point is that neopagan witchcraft embodies the attempt to re-embed moral issues through lifestyle choices (1999:6), a process that is undertaken by almost everyone in modern society as the guiding role of tradition recedes. The substantive content of both the moral issues and the lifestyle choices may not be identical with those of the wider society, but the process is the same. Neopaganism, therefore, retains a great deal of what Bainbridge (1997) describes as 'cultural continuity'. This may contribute to the absence of 'conversion' feelings among neopagans, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Neopaganism does not, however,

have very much 'religious continuity' with its environment, which is to say that the symbols, narratives and practices of the dominant religious traditions are not carried over into the Craft.²⁷ This would suggest a higher than average level of tension. Also, the existence of negative stereotypes about the practice of neopaganism and about neopagans themselves in the broader culture, even though in many cases those stereotypes are outdated and inaccurate, acts to make the Craft a potentially high cost religious choice, which Stark and Bainbridge would suggest means that it is in high tension with its environment. Neopaganism, in general, notably lacks the physical encapsulation that they note often accompanies extremely high-tension movements. Participants rarely live communally or work for a neopagan organization as a feature of the practice, and contact with 'outsiders' is neither discouraged nor regulated.

The overall level of tension produced by a Craft affiliation, however, is difficult to gauge. It is far too simplistic to say that because the potential to experience stigma or sanctions exists, it is therefore in high tension with the surrounding culture. The extent to which tension is experienced by any individual can vary according to a number of factors. One, which Stark and Bainbridge acknowledge, is the extent to which deviant religious organizations of all sorts are suppressed, or experience negative sanctions. They note that in areas where religious pluralism is more established, deviant religious

²⁷ Examination of many of the folk practices of Christianity, as well as some of the lesser-known mystical and ethical writings would reveal more continuity than most neopagans or Christians would readily acknowledge, however the level of theological sophistication required to abstract those similarities is not widespread in either population.

identifications will tend to be less costly. They also note that cosmopolitan areas are more likely to have established religious pluralism. So the level of tension experienced by practitioners in a small town will be different than that experienced by their counterparts on a university campus in a large city.

The extent to which groups are willing to accommodate themselves to the dominant religious structures and vocabulary also varies. Large pagan organizations, especially those seeking legally granted privileges tend to conform to the requirements of the organizations that regulate the granting of those privileges. They are inclined to emphasize that the Craft is another religious choice, *like* the ones that are already recognized. On the other hand, there are groups who choose to emphasize a more exclusive focus, that the Craft is *unlike* other religious choices that are available. This sense of ambiguity in terms of the Craft's relationship to the broader religious environment comes out clearly in many of the interviews, and will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Five. Also, it is possible for an individual to manage the level of tension that they personally experience simply by concealing their religious identification, or by choosing to describe it in ways that do not immediately suggest negative stereotypes. So, although it is probably safe to assert that the Craft tends not to be a low-tension religious choice, it is difficult to assess how high tension a choice it might be. Even if 'high tension' were adequately operationalized, which it has not been in Stark and Bainbridge's theoretical material, the external markers of tension would still be entirely insufficient to gauge if and how tension is experienced by participants.

Other concepts used by rational choice theorists to generate predictions are similarly flawed. Among those are the related concepts 'low stakes in conformity' and 'relative deprivation'. Stark and Bainbridge assert that "Persons with low stakes in conformity are relatively deprived in terms of rewards, compensators, and self esteem" (1987:191). Stakes in conformity are defined as "attachments, investments, involvements and beliefs" (1987:190). They consider 'relative deprivation' in terms of three conditions; that the individual is not receiving the same level of reward in their exchanges as they have received in the past; that the individual perceives they are receiving a lower level of reward than is received by others in similar exchanges; or that the reward being received does not reflect the perceived market value of the exchange (1987:207). More simply put, there is a discrepancy between the individual's expectations and their perception of their own situation. Whether or not the expectations are 'reasonable' or justified by the available information is not relevant to this formulation. As Dawson notes, the concept of relative deprivation is, at its heart, descriptive rather than analytical. It is sufficiently broad as to include almost everyone in some sense, and therefore does not adequately distinguish between those who choose to involve themselves in new religious movements and those who do not, nor does it explain the variation in relative deprivation within individual groups (1998:77). 'Low stakes in conformity' is similarly difficult to operationalize effectively, particularly since an individual's investment in conformity is likely to result as much from their subjective temperament as from the observable conditions of their lives.

Probably the greatest dilemma encountered when one tries to apply Stark and Bainbridge's deductively generated propositions about religion to the Craft is that those propositions were developed to explain religious organizations. They are quite explicit about what a 'religious organization' is: "Religious organizations are social enterprises whose primary purpose is to create, maintain, and exchange supernaturally-based general compensators" (1987:326). In Chapter Five, neopaganism's clear ability to qualify under Stark and Bainbridge's definition of religion will be discussed, however, in the present context, it is their notion of 'organization' which is problematic. What a 'religious organization' would be in a Craft context is vague. Certainly the large pagan organizations would qualify, because they have definite inception points and recognizable organizational structures, however, their leadership is unable to dictate standards outside of their group boundaries, and the majority of those who self-identify as Craft seem to do so outside of the pagan organizations. Stark and Bainbridge's propositions are difficult to apply to neopaganism because it is a 'disorganized' religion. This disorganization seems fundamental to the way in which it is understood by its participants, and will be elaborated in subsequent chapters.

Summary

Statistics Canada's census data provide no useful information about neopagans in Canada, beyond their numbers and geographical distribution, because of the way the categories are collapsed for the purposes of analysis. This

makes any determination of the representativeness of the sample using a national baseline impossible. In general, the Craft sample obtained by the survey is younger, better educated and more likely to be in school than the Canadian population more generally. The survey respondents were predominantly female, and this likely reflects a real tendency in the population. Respondents report lower family incomes than the Canadian average, but marriage or cohabitation rates are similar. Geographically they are under-represented in Quebec and over-represented in BC, and the majority report living in urban or suburban areas. There is a high reported level of both alternative sexual orientation and experience of abuse in the sample. The majority of respondents reported becoming involved in the Craft while fairly young, with 75 percent involved by the time they were 30.

Rational choice theorists have elaborated some concepts that can be used to descriptively examine the Craft. They would appear to have less overall explanatory value than some of their proponents claim. The propositions that have been deductively derived from these concepts are less useful than the concepts themselves because they have been predicated on the existence of an organized religious framework. Examination of the observable elements of individuals and religious movements may reveal general patterns of involvement, but can reflect only the researcher's evaluations of those elements, which may be at considerable variance with the interpretations given to them by participants.

Chapter Four: 'Conversion' and the Craft

This chapter examines the ways in which participants come to acquire their identities as Craft practitioners. It focuses primarily on their prior religious socializations, the modes through which they became aware of and involved in their Craft, and those elements of the neopagan movement that they remember as being particularly appealing. These aspects of people's movement into a Craft identity are interesting because they overlap with the most studied areas of 'conversion' to religious movements overall, and will highlight the ways in which the process in the Craft both unfolds and is conceptualized differently than the way in which 'conversion' is presented in much of the sociology of religion literature.

The decision participants make to identify themselves as Craft practitioners is intrinsically sociologically interesting simply due to its apparent cultural deviance. Adherence to organized religion is declining in Canada (Bibby 1993) and being 'religious' is coming to be seen as deviant in and of itself. Neopaganism is additionally deviant, because it incorporates elements into its religious worldview (polytheism, pantheism, animism, immanent divinity, moral relativism, magic) that are rejected by both the dominant religious and secular cultures. Those espousing such beliefs can experience stigma or sanctions from those around them, which, in rational choice terms, adds additional costs to 'membership', over and above the costs intrinsic to the practice itself. Also, because of its decentralization and 'disorganization', it is more difficult to find other neopagans than it would be to join a mainstream church. Despite this, as

the previous chapter notes, those participants who responded to the survey do not appear, demographically, to be radically different from those around them. They are young and relatively well educated, predominantly urban, and may be slightly underemployed. None of these factors inherently suggest a predisposition to a costly and non-standard religious identification.

One of the key indicators used by rational choice theoretical approaches to religious economies to assess the likelihood of the presence of cults in an area is the extent to which the population is 'unchurched'. The assertion is made that the more 'unchurched' a population, the greater the likelihood that there will be a cult presence; or, cults will tend to be most abundant where the conventional churches are weakest (Stark and Bainbridge 1985, 1987). This is an aggregate observation, based upon official church membership and attendance levels in given geographical regions. The logic behind it is that where a substantial proportion of the population has no active institutional religious involvement, there is a structural availability of potential cult members. The assumption that underlies this is that those who are active enough in their current religious traditions to be counted as members are unlikely to be available for recruitment to a deviant religious organization (1985:398). This leads to a related proposition, at the level of the individual, that cults will draw their membership primarily from among the 'unchurched'. Like many of the propositions generated by Stark and Bainbridge's deductive theory of religion, this one is less useful than it initially appears. What it says, literally, is that people who are active, committed members of a traditional religious organization are unlikely to become members of a cult while they are in that state. However, Stark and Bainbridge's notion of

the meaning of 'unchurched', as revealed in their discussions, does not seem to end strictly at the absence of church membership. Although no list of characteristics is given that would allow someone to say definitively that an individual qualified as 'unchurched', they seem to conceptualize it as being made up of a constellation of factors.

The first, and the one they discuss most explicitly, is church membership. However, some comments indicate that 'membership' is not a sufficiently strict distinguishing criterion, at least not in the sense of 'self-identified membership'. They also appear to believe that individuals must have some level of knowledge about the religious affiliation they claim as their own. For example, in describing a series of surveys they did of students, they comment,

... we frequently have found the denomination students claim as their own to be wildly misspelled... Such people are unchurched. This does not mean that they are irreligious... But non-membership does mean a lack of systematic support for belief and a lack of organized social expression of faith. (1985:70)

They later suggest that the extent to which a denomination is secularized, that is the extent to which it has abstracted, generalized, and diluted its supernaturally-based rewards and compensators in order to conform more closely to the dominant non-religious social values, will also have an effect on the extent to which members can be viewed as structurally available to be recruited by another organization. Religious offerings that are not unique and exclusive, they assert, have a weaker ability to hold members. The most secular edges of liberal denominations, they seem to say, are the equivalent of 'unchurched.'

The category 'unchurched' would therefore seem to contain a great variety of people with a wide range of approaches to religion and spirituality

more generally. Although Stark and Bainbridge indicate that the 'unchurched' are not necessarily irreligious, it is certainly true that the irreligious are unchurched. Those with social attachments to a denomination that are not supported by an understanding of the religion it represents could be characterized as unchurched. Those who are temporarily between congregations, due to mobility for example, but who are well educated in their faith and committed to it, will be counted as unchurched for the amount of time it takes them to find a new congregation. Members of liberal denominations are, in some cases, characterized as unchurched. Those who have a strong traditional religious faith that they choose to express outside of religious organizations are unchurched. Those who have never adopted a religious identification or membership because they lack religious socialization are unchurched. Not all of these people are equally likely to join a cult, despite their 'unchurched' status, and some of them are probably as unlikely to do so as those who are more thoroughly 'churched'.

At the level of the individual, 'unchurched' is an unhelpful category. Without an understanding of how individuals come to be in an 'unchurched' space, and what quarter of the 'unchurched' map they occupy, researchers can say little about whether or not any given cult attracts people with a certain cluster of experiences and attitudes about religion more than others. This reinforces the need for diligent, substantive qualitative research to breathe life and meaning into formal, deductive and substantively empty concepts.

Religious Socialization of the Survey Respondents

When asked if they had been involved with any other religions before the Craft, approximately 75 percent of the sample indicated that they had been. The religious traditions listed were overwhelmingly Christian; 92 percent of those who indicated that they had been involved in other religions listed at least one Christian denomination in their backgrounds. The denominations mentioned most often were Catholic groups (18.3%)²⁸ and mainstream Protestant groups (20.4%).²⁹ This is not surprising, as 70 percent of Canadians gave those identifications during the 1991 census. However, the percentage of those who indicated that they had no previous religious involvements, almost 25 percent of the sample, is notable because only half that percentage indicated no religious affiliation in Canada more generally.³⁰ This could be seen to give some support

²⁸ Percentages in brackets here represent only those respondents who listed these affiliations singly in the religious background question. Those who listed multiple previous identifications were coded differently. These percentages will therefore underrepresent the total number of respondents who had been involved with these denominations at one time or another.

²⁹ This classification follows Bibby (1993). He considers the 'mainstream Protestant' denominations to be Anglican, United Church of Canada, Presbyterian, and Lutheran.

³⁰ Jorgensen and Russell, although they did inquire about their respondents' religious backgrounds, do not report a 'none' category. Instead, they note:

"The results of our question about the former religious backgrounds of Neopagans indicated that: 38.3% were Protestants, 27.2% were Catholics, 5% were Jews, 20.8% were something else, and 9.7% did not answer this item or they responded to multiple categories. We therefore conclude that American Neopagans are somewhat less likely to be former Protestants, as likely to be former Catholics, and more likely to be former Jews or something else, than might be expected if their previous religious backgrounds mirrored the religious affiliations of the larger population." (1999:332)

to the idea that novel religious groups may appeal particularly to those without previous religious involvements.

However, the bulk of respondents did indicate previous religious involvements. In fact, almost 25 percent of respondents indicated that they had been involved with more than one religious group before the Craft. This could indicate a pattern of religious seekership, the implications of which will be discussed further along in this chapter. Respondents were also asked specifically about their childhood religious socializations and whether or not they felt that an effort had been made to raise them inside a religious tradition. Seventy-eight percent of respondents (145) indicated that they believed that some such effort had been made, while 22 percent did not. Questions were also asked about the levels of commitment and involvement of the respondents' parents in their religion of choice. 'Commitment' throughout the survey, refers to investment in the beliefs of the tradition, where 'involvement' refers to the level of religious activity. The responses are summarized in Tables 12 and 13.

TABLE 12

Percentage of respondents who indicated that their parents had a religious affiliation while the respondent was growing up who described their parent's commitment to their religious beliefs as...

Response	<u>Mother</u>		<u>Father</u>	
	%	n =	%	n =
very committed	39.4	61	29.8	34
somewhat committed	33.5	52	29.8	34
not really committed	24.5	38	28.9	33
not at all committed	0.6	1	8.8	10
did not reply	1.9	3	2.6	3
total	99.9	155	99.9	114

Several observations can be made from this table. First, respondents perceived their mothers as having a religious affiliation more often than their fathers (155 mothers vs. 114 fathers).³¹ Second, a larger proportion of mothers were perceived to be 'very committed' to their beliefs than fathers. Last, 'very committed' parents were a minority among both fathers and mothers.

Table 13 shows a similar pattern. Even fewer parents were perceived to be 'very active' than those who were perceived to be 'very committed', and 'not at all active' parents were more numerous than 'not at all committed' ones.

TABLE 13

Percentage of respondents who indicated that their parents had a religious affiliation while the respondent was growing up who described their parent's religious involvement as...

Response	<u>Mother</u>		<u>Father</u>	
	%	n =	%	n =
very active	25.8	40	23.7	27
somewhat active	36.1	56	23.7	27
not really active	30.3	47	33.3	38
not at all active	7.7	12	17.5	20
did not reply	—	0	1.8	2
total	99.9	155	99.9	114

In terms of the overall sample, and not just those people whose parents had a religious affiliation, only 32.6 percent of respondents grew up in a household where they believed the mother was very committed to her religious beliefs, and only 18.2 percent where the father was. Only 21.3 percent of respondents

³¹ Thirty people indicated that their mothers had no religious affiliation and 2 people answered 'not applicable'. Sixty-one people answered that their fathers had no religious affiliation and 12 people answered 'not applicable'.

perceived their mother's religious involvement as 'very active', and only 14.4 percent, their father's.³² The majority of respondents would probably be characterized by Stark and Bainbridge as having had a largely 'unchurched' religious upbringing, despite the fact that 78 percent of them believe that some effort was made to raise them within a religious tradition.

It is important to underline here that, from the perspective of Stark and Bainbridge's theory, neopagan adherents continue to be 'unchurched', however educated they are about their religious choice and however involved they are in their practice, unless they are counted on the official membership roles of a large pagan organization. This is because Stark and Bainbridge continue to insist on an organizational structure as the precondition for an 'organized social expression of faith'. This might be adequate and useful for their purposes, however it falls short of what is necessary here, especially since the term 'unchurched' suggests a weak attachment to one's religious identification, which the interview subjects did not display, regardless of their perceived level of current involvement.

One interview participant described his 'lack of involvement' in Craft practices in the past few years in terms of not wanting to spend a lot of time doing structured study and meditation, writing rituals, or teaching others. He noted that because he was not really 'putting in the effort required to keep things going', he had left the coven with which he had been working because it would have placed an unfair burden on them were he to remain. I asked him if

³² 8.6% of respondents considered both their parents' levels of commitment to have been 'very high'; 7.5% of respondents considered both their parent's levels of involvement to be 'very high'.

he felt 'any less Craft' now than he had when he was more active. He answered, "Not in the slightest. On the other hand, I mean, I'm sure there's a lot of people out there who think of themselves as Christian that um, basically get to church only for weddings and funerals..." (Michael). He also observed, however, that he felt that he was not getting as much out of his Craft as he had been when he was more active, simply because he was not putting as much in. Another participant commented that, since having children, she was no longer working in a group and that really, at the moment, she didn't consider herself to be 'working' Craft as much as simply 'being' Craft. When asked what she meant by that, she said, "That I'm living in accordance with my view of the universe and my values and my understanding of life... but I'm not doing sabbats or esbats or spellwork, because that's not where my life is at right now." When asked where her life was, she invoked a central neopagan metaphor to help elaborate the way in which her family life, in the sense of having small children, had shifted her understanding of her priorities.

But my outlook hasn't changed... just my observances. I go back to the wheel of the year again. Spring is for beginnings, summer is for hectic work in the fields and growth, fall is for taking stock and reaping the rewards, winter is for rest and introspection. Well, this just ain't winter! [laughing] So now I'll do the busy, active summer thing and raise my family... someday the wheel will turn and I'll have time for the other stuff again. It's not going anywhere... (Carrie)

Both Carrie and Michael retain strong religious identifications, although neither is currently actively engaged in most of the distinctive practices of neopagans.

Neopaganism does not emphasize the overwhelmingly 'congregational' form of religious expression presupposed by Stark and Bainbridge's

constructions, although it would be a mistake to therefore assert that the social expression of one's beliefs is therefore unimportant, or that the lack of social organization means that neopaganism is necessarily an 'audience' or 'client' cult rather than a full-fledged cult movement.³³ The focus that neopaganism places on the individual, however, means that the 'social expression of faith' is organized not around an administrative framework, but is negotiated by the individual around how they interpret the central tenets of neopagan philosophy. It is, ideally, enacted more in routine sociality, in the regular interactions of the individual practitioner and his or her physical and social environment, than in formal group settings orchestrated for that purpose. One interview participant commented,

Everyone talks about the experience of going to the church on Sunday, or whenever one goes to the church, sitting in the pew, listening to the minister, and then leaving. Then you do it again the next week. That's not a range of religious experiences... that's one religious experience, repeated over and over again. The Craft is more experiential. It allows religion to be here, in this meadow, in the sun, listening to the wind in the poplars. This is a religious experience. Religion is about what we do in our lives. (Edward)

³³ Stark and Bainbridge (1985) describe audience and client cults as follows: "The most diffuse and least organized kind [of cult] is an *audience cult*. Sometimes members of this audience actually may gather to hear a lecture. But there are virtually no aspects of formal organization to these activities, and membership remains at most a consumer activity. Indeed, cult audiences often do not gather physically but consume cult doctrines entirely through magazines, books, newspapers, radio, and television.

More organized than audience cults are what can be characterized as *client cults*. Here the relationship between those promulgating cult doctrine and those partaking of it most closely resembles the relationship between therapist and patient or between consultant and client. Considerable organization may be found among those offering the cult service, but the clients remain little organized. Furthermore, no successful effort is made to weld the clients into a social movement. Indeed, client involvement is often so partial that clients often retain an active commitment to another religious movement or institution." (26)

For many of the interview participants, their earlier experiences of other religions and their perceptions of mainstream religion more generally provide a narrative foil for describing what they perceive to be the appeals of the Craft.

During the interview stage, although there was no question that asked about it specifically, only four people made no reference at all to their religious upbringing, or to their religious trajectory before having come to the Craft. Most participants seemed to consider it an important element to include in offering an explanatory narrative of how and why they came to be where they are. This was as true for those coming from no religious background as it was for those with a strong religious socialization.

Karen: [pause] Umm... and it's also given me a, not just fitting in with the natural cycles of nature, but it's also given me a community where I feel more accepted.

Sian: Than...?

Karen: [pause] Than...[chuckling]... Well, I guess because I grew up in a mostly, um, atheist household, that, that um, that I *have* a religious community, that I *have* an identification, that, like I said before, that there's a place for me.

John: Well, you have to look at my own personal religious trajectory to understand that... and that Craft was about the fourth flippin' thing that I tried...

Carrie: I'll start sort of at the beginning, although I don't guarantee that I'll be able to keep up the chronological order thing. When I was a teenager, I went through all the standard teenage angst things. I was in a sort of spiritual seeker mode. I went to protestant-type Christian youth groups and to my local United Church, and that wasn't it. In fact, I felt even weirder, because some of the things I really believed in weren't accepted by the mainline Protestants. So I turned Catholic for a while... my parents were seriously unimpressed by that. And it was better in some ways. I liked the high Catholic rituals... I still do, especially if they're in Latin and I can't understand what the priest is saying...

but the Catholics seemed really anti-woman, and that isn't where I was at.

Interview participants did not describe their involvement in the Craft as going from 'being' something to 'being' something else. Their narratives are organized around their unfolding understanding of themselves and their search for a spiritual context in which they felt they belonged. They describe a process of progressive 'becoming', a personal evolution and refinement of their understanding of their own spirituality through the examination of other modes of religious life. The extent to which they experienced these other worldviews as illuminating or deficient with reference to their own biographies helped these individuals to clarify their spiritual and philosophical priorities. They do not describe themselves as having 'become' Craft as much as they choose to underline that they found expressed in the Craft the essence of what they already understood and believed about themselves and their worlds. Said one, "Um, there was never an 'ah-hah, that's what I need to be doing' rather 'ah-hah, there are others who do it too!'" (Francine). Another commented, "Wicca just made, just *made sense* to me. It was sort of like somebody meeting the people who all already thought the way that I did" (Karen).

Initial Appeals of the Craft

Various writers have suggested reasons why people might find Craft practices appealing. These appeals are not mutually exclusive and often, the author's choice of which of the assorted appeals they wish to consider central fundamentally directs the work that they do. Cynthia Eller (1993) studied

'feminist spirituality', an area with considerable, although not complete, overlap with the neopagan Craft. Her focus both implies and requires that the expression of feminist ideals in a spiritual framework be a fundamental appeal of the religious practice of those she studied. Generally, this revolves around the celebration of a Goddess and the aspects of inner divinity that reside and are expressed within women's experiences of the world. Eller's demarcation of what she was defining as 'feminist spirituality' was guided by several key considerations: that the movement is separatist, inasmuch as it is focused on and directed towards women; that it is centered outside of traditional religions; and that it is feminist, "believing that either women's condition or the general state of gender roles in society as we find them are unsatisfactory or need to be changed" (1993:7). Observers of neopagan groups almost always cite the presence of a Goddess figure as one of the main draws of the philosophy, especially for women. Outsiders often mistakenly conflate neopagan witchcraft and feminist spirituality because of the strong feminist leanings of key authors, such as Starhawk. As was discussed in earlier chapters, there are those who self-identify as Craft who are separatist in their philosophies and practices, but for the purposes of this research, these are a subset of a broader population, rather than being the entire population, as was the case in Eller's study.

In the survey, respondents were asked to list what they recalled as being the three things that appealed to them the most when they first became involved in the Craft. 'The presence of a Goddess' was mentioned by 24.6 percent of all respondents, however, when examined more closely, it was mentioned far more

often by women than by men (30% of women vs. 12.5% of men). 'The balance between the God and Goddess' was cited by 13 percent of women and 4.2 percent of men. 'Positive images of women and femaleness, positive valuation of women's experiences' was cited by 15.9 percent of women, and only 2.1 percent of men. The idea of a powerful and, at the very least equal, Goddess, with all of the imagery and ritual elements associated with that, and all of the implied messages about the worth of women and their place in the world is clearly a powerful initial attraction, especially, it appears, for women, just as the literature insists. The overwhelming gender bias in these responses was the strongest seen in any of the 'appeals' items. Interestingly, it is also in the 'presence of the Goddess' response where the most dramatic drop appears between the question asking about the things that appealed most initially, and the things that appeal most now.

The proportion of respondents citing that as one of the top three appeals to them now halves for both men and women (6.3% of men and 15.9% of women). This does not necessarily mean that the Goddess is valued less by participants as time passes, but probably indicates that elements of the Craft that were not apparent at the time of initial involvement, particularly those involving interaction with other people and other experiential aspects of the practice, have come to be valued by participants as the length of their involvement increases.

Other items that were cited frequently as initial appeals of the Craft centered around the Craft's approach to the centrality of the individual in determining beliefs and practices, and in being the locus of both responsibility

and transformation. Approximately 13 percent of respondents, comparable proportions of men and women, gave the flexibility of beliefs and practices and/or the range of traditions to choose from as an initial appeal. The empowerment of the individual to make choices about and/or changes in their life was cited by 14.5 percent of women, but only 2.1 percent of men. This supports Eller's thesis that, relative to men, women experience a sense of disempowerment within and alienation from the conditions of their lives, which makes a practice that redefines them as central to the process of their own self-determination particularly appealing (1993:209-12). Personal moral responsibility and/or the absence of prescribed 'sin' were listed by 20.8 percent of men and 12.3 percent of women. Many of these elements emerged more forcefully from the interview narratives than from the survey responses, and will be explored more thoroughly in the chapters that follow.

Another initial appeal cited very often by both men and women was the sense of connection with nature that they perceive as a defining element of the neopagan Craft. Approximately a third of both men and women listed this as an initial appeal, and that proportion remained fairly constant when respondents were asked to list what most appealed to them currently. The central celebrations of neopagan witchcraft and many of the other pagan traditions that can be subsumed under the description 'Craft' are linked not to the conventional calendar, but to the movements of the sun and the moon. They are associated with the changing seasons, and often use 'natural' images such as rainstorms, thunder, fire, the heat of the sun, caves etcetera, to provide both a sense of the fundamental connection of the celebration about to be undertaken with the

'natural' world (where nature is presented as wilderness), and also to provide indicators of the symbolic content being invoked.³⁴ The sense that the earth itself is sacred and provides a tangible connection to all those who have lived on it across time is perceived by many of those who identify themselves as Craft as something that has fallen out of Western religious consciousness. One interview participant, in trying to explain both what was different about the Craft and what was appealing about that difference, said,

That it is you know, focused on the environment to a great degree. Um... um... focused on the Earth, and that... there is a certain amount of conscience that is... about the world around us. And whether that is, as, you know, in a very direct way, through being involved in the environmental movement, or in a less direct way, more indirect way, of using the Earth as a metaphor, and using the lessons, the spiritual lessons, that the Earth gives us. Um... there's much more emphasis on the connection with the Earth. (Don)

There is a sense among some people involved in the Craft that it is a more ecologically sustainable religious ideology than those that have been promulgated by other Western religions.

Despite the strong association in both popular and academic cultures³⁵ between neopaganism of all kinds, and witchcraft in particular, with magic, only 10 percent of survey respondents listed magic or magical healing as an initial appeal. It was equally likely to be given by men and women. Again, this does

³⁴ The opening portion of an eclectic witchcraft ritual, containing a circle casting, a set of quarter purifications, a set of quarter calls, and a God and Goddess call, are included as an example of this sort of usage, in Appendix D.

³⁵ Tanya Luhrmann's *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft* (1989) took the practice of magic as the criterion by which she selected her study population. Most of those with whom she interacted during the course of her participant observation study appear also to have been neopagan, however it is around their acceptance and practice of magic that she organizes her analysis.

not mean that magic was not appealing, merely that most respondents made the choice not to list it in their top three. This may be a partial reflection of socialization in the pagan community, where people who are perceived as having become involved simply in the hopes of gaining arcane magical powers are often seen as shallow, opportunistic and a bad reflection on other Craft practitioners. One participant commented,

There are people who get involved in the Craft for the ma-a-a-a-gic. And sometimes they come around and become nice people who are pleasant to work with, and sometimes they just stay, well, you know, jerks. If we could get rid of that impression of magic among the people who get involved in Wicca, we'll be making real steps towards getting rid of it everywhere else. (Edward)

The idea of magic in the context of the Craft, and the norms surrounding it are discussed in depth in Chapter Six.

Becoming Involved

Much of the literature examining conversion to new religious movements emphasizes the importance of personal contact with members in facilitating the decision to 'convert' (Lofland and Stark 1965; Stark and Bainbridge 1985, 1987; Dawson 1998; Snow and Phillips 1980; Gartrell and Shannon 1985). Religious products presented by those with whom one has already established a history of positive exchanges, one perspective elaborates, are likely to be viewed as more credible and therefore less risky than religious products that come without such an endorsement (Iannaccone 1995). Also, the evaluation of a belief or practice by one's significant others, those with whom one conducts important exchanges, is likely to have an effect on the cost of adopting those beliefs or practices (Sherkat

1997; Gartrell and Shannon 1985). In addition, if one adopts the standpoint that religious conversion is a form of secondary socialization (Long and Hadden 1983; Kilbourne and Richardson 1988; Thumma 1991), observance of and interaction with others will be instrumental in guiding the individual to an understanding of the norms and conventions of the group, broadly defined. Because there are very few neopagan practitioners relative to the population in general, survey respondents were asked about several aspects of their level of contact with other practitioners, both initially and on an ongoing basis, to gauge the ways in which these dynamics might apply in a Craft context.

Survey respondents were asked how they first came to be aware of the Craft.³⁶ The majority of their responses centered on other people or books. Family members, friends and acquaintances were cited as the first source of awareness about the Craft in 28.8 percent of responses; books were cited in 30.2 percent of responses. 'Friends and books', listed as a single, not easily divisible item, was given in another 5.5 percent of responses. Women listed a greater number of sources for their first awareness than did men, for example, no men reported that their first awareness of the Craft arose through participation in feminist activities, however this variation is at least partially explained by the greater number of women in the sample, and therefore the potential for greater variety. Interestingly, 15 people said that they could not remember how they

³⁶ In 32 cases, more than one response was given. Both responses were coded. Percentages that follow are therefore those of the total number of responses given.

first became aware of the Craft, or had just somehow always known about it. All of these were women.

When asked to rate on a four-point scale how important each of books and other people were in first getting them involved in the Craft, the perceived importance of books becomes particularly clear. While 62.4 percent of respondents indicated that books were 'very important' in getting them involved, only 38.7 percent said that other people had been 'very important' in getting them involved. The centrality of books is also apparent when respondents were asked to list how they first became involved in the Craft, as opposed to merely aware of it. Responses involving books³⁷ were given by 45 percent of respondents. This points to a feature of the Craft that differentiates it in practice from many more mainstream religions; despite the fact that it bills itself as being 'not book based', inasmuch as it does not have a central authoritative text, participants often rely more heavily on books than they can on other people to provide them with information about the Craft, ideas about practice, and the norms of Craft life. The material encountered in books often provides the bricks out of which participants construct their idea of Craft, and their identities as Craft practitioners. The disembodied and idealized way in which people can first encounter the Craft in books can lead to tensions and conflicts as they encounter other Craft participants later in their careers.

³⁷ Coded in several different categories: read books; read books and started alone; started alone then read books; read books and then found people; found people and then read books.

This pattern of engaging in extensive research on one's own before encountering a group is consistent with what Lofland and Skonovd (1981) describe as an 'intellectual' motif of conversion, a subset of what James Richardson (1985) defines as an 'activist' and Roger Straus (1979) defines as an 'accomplished' conversion. Lofland and Skonovd write,

The 'intellectual' mode of conversion commences with individual, private investigation of possible 'new grounds of being', alternative theodicies, personal fulfillment etc. by reading books, watching television, attending lectures and other impersonal or 'disembodied' ways in which it is increasingly possible *sans* social involvement to become acquainted with alternative ideologies and ways of life... The emotional tone of the experience seems best characterised as one of 'illumination.' Furthermore, and most importantly, a reasonably high level of belief occurs prior to actual participation in the religion's ritual and organizational activities. (1981:374)

Frederick Lynch (1978) describes his participant observation experience with a group he called 'the Church of the Sun' in the United States. He situates it as part of the 'occult subculture' rather than as neopagan or Craft, and the sketch he provides of the beliefs and practices of the group suggest that it was more 'Western Mysteries' focused than 'nature religion' focused, and that it lacked a central emphasis on the divine feminine.³⁸ However, the descriptive

³⁸ This distinction is modeled partially on Luhrmann (1989). She categorized the magical groups she encountered into four rough 'types': "Witchcraft 'covens' are small groups, run by high priestesses, which claim to practice a pre-Christian nature religion. Western Mysteries fraternities are run by 'adepts': in the rituals they are meant to have access to spiritual 'contacts' who guide them in solemn ceremonies. Ad hoc ritual magic groups are organized outside of witchcraft of a Western Mysteries lineage, sometimes around a particular mythological theme. Non-initiated paganism includes study groups, lecture courses, workshops, and general gatherings..." (32). In Luhrmann's terms, the 'Church of the Sun' might also be an ad hoc ritual magic group; it is difficult to tell from the information given in the article. Also, because Luhrmann's work was done in England, she is able to draw a much clearer distinction between 'witchcraft' [British traditional], and 'non-initiated paganism' than would be possible in North America.

demographics he cites are similar to those found in my sample (predominantly white, better than average education, previous religious attachments, overwhelmingly middle class), and the model he elaborates for conversion and commitment has significant similarities to the dynamics that appear to be involved in adopting a Craft identity. Lynch notes that for about two-thirds of his interview participants, reading in occult areas preceded their involvement in the Church of the Sun, often by many years. "Retrospectively, they regarded the reading of such a book or books as an important 'turning point' in their lives" (1978:100). However, Lynch says that active involvement in the occult subculture did not follow immediately upon reading books, but usually followed a subsequent occurrence of either a personal mystical or psychic experience, or an encounter with a group of other people with similar interests. Sometimes, he notes, the process is reversed, a psychic experience will prompt reading in occult areas. Either way, he suggests that both an intellectual curiosity about occult matters and something to cause a sense of resonance with one's own life are necessary components of 'conversion and commitment' to the occult subculture. Books, he suggests, help to produce a receptive environment for involvement, familiarizing potential participants with concepts and ideas that will later be central to the groups with which they affiliate; they are, in some senses, a necessary, but not sufficient condition. The occult group becomes a fluid locus of identity that allows the individual to further their already existing interests.

The reading in which Craft participants engage probably serves a similar purpose, but I would also suggest that it goes beyond what Lynch reports. Many Western Mysteries texts emphasize 'being taught' and there is a focus on

'schools', and 'teachings' that fosters a belief that one should ideally do this sort of work under the direction of more experienced others. "The best and safest way to learn the art of Ritual Magic is to enter a school of good repute and work under the tuition of someone who is a practising magician" admonishes one text, interestingly, one designed to instruct those lacking in such resources (Ashcroft-Nowicki 1986). Increasing numbers of such books are being written, directed at those with no ready access to one of the esoteric organizations (Ashcroft-Nowicki 1986, 1987; Green 1988; Bardon 1971). Often, the authors themselves have been trained in, or maintain connections with, one of the Mystery schools.³⁹ Tanya Luhrmann documents some of the interconnections between those Western Mysteries schools still operating in England (1989:56-57). She also notes, "The people who join these adept-led groups must want to combine personal power with service under the command of others. They must like the idea of a disciplined course of study, and they must be willing to tolerate a fairly strict hierarchy" (59).

In most neopagan texts, there is explicit acknowledgment that although more experienced others may be desirable, they are not always available, and that a suitably dedicated individual, working alone, can achieve the same level of insight into the universe and personal development, can celebrate the same turnings of the year, as one who is working in a group (see for example,

³⁹ Among the best known 'esoteric organizations' are the Golden Dawn, the Servants of Light, the Ordo Templi Orientalis, and the Society of the Inner Light.

Cunningham 1989, 1993; Valiente 1978; Farrar and Farrar 1981; Green 1991).⁴⁰ A group of like-minded individuals is not as central to an individual's move from what Lynch refers to as 'latent' to 'active' status in the Craft as it appears to have been in the Western Mysteries organization he observed. In addition, Lynch seems to have defined 'latent' and 'active' in a way that presupposes that the change between them will be accompanied by the affiliation with a group of people, rather than framing it in terms of the participant's identity or view of themselves. This is unfortunate in terms of comparability with the present research, but reflects the concern for 'process' models that dominated the study of NRM conversion at the time his research was conducted.

Despite the number of practitioners who flagged reading as the beginning of their involvement, others did highlight interactions with people, and some presented the two in ways that defied separation into a 'priority in time' or 'priority of importance' order. Fifteen percent of people indicated that they considered themselves to have become involved in the Craft through direct interaction with other practitioners (talked with other pagans; began studies with a practitioner; interviewed practitioners; sought out an existing group). Another 12.3 percent said they had either 'read books and then found people' or 'found people and then read books'. Some 17.7 percent considered the beginning of

⁴⁰ Like anything in the Craft, there are those who take issue with this attitude. Specifically, there are segments within the British Traditional style of practice who insist that the only way to achieve a genuine connection to the Mysteries embodied in witchcraft is to be taught them in the context of a group with an unblemished lineage back to Gardner himself.

their involvement to have been marked by their attendance at a ritual, which also would have involved interaction with other practitioners.

However, survey respondents did not necessarily perceive working with other people as centrally important to maintaining either their involvement in or commitment to, the Craft. Although 18.9 percent of respondents said working with people was 'very important' in maintaining their involvement, 17.8 percent said it was 'not at all important'. Only 5.4 percent of respondents said that working with other people was 'very important' in maintaining their commitment to the Craft, while 45.7 percent said it was 'not at all' important. This suggests that participants see their ongoing identification as Craft as something that resides within themselves, and is not a function of their membership in a group.

This perception among participants exists despite both scholarly observation and theorizing about the importance of interaction with supportive others in the maintenance of 'deviant' identities (Lofland and Stark 1965; Greil and Rudy 1984; Snow and Phillips 1980), and the literature of the movement itself, which often focuses on the coven as a teaching and support structure. Starhawk writes, "The coven is a Witches' support group, consciousness-raising group, psychic study center, clergy-training program, College of Mysteries, surrogate clan and religious congregation, all rolled into one" (1979:35). Judy Harrow writes, "Covens serve many functions. We worship with our covens, and regard them as our second chance families. They are support groups for our

magical and spiritual development, and training groups for our future clergy”

(1999:xi). Helen Berger observes,

The coven is the primary avenue for training neophytes to be members of the Neo-Pagan community. Although information about ritual techniques and magical incantations is available in books and journals and on the Internet, it is in the cocoon of the coven that most Witches are trained to be members of the larger Neo-Pagan community. The friendships that develop in the coven help to foster a mystical worldview, feminist and ecological political concerns, and other lifestyle choices. (1999:124)

Berger uses Greil and Rudy's (1984) concept of a 'social cocoon' in reference to the coven, as she perceives it. She argues that although membership in a coven, unlike life on a commune, does not remove the individual from interaction with the secular world, it does increase the frequency and intensity of interactions between members of that community of choice (1999:55). It also increases the likelihood of experiencing positive reinforcement for one's spiritual beliefs both through the process of working with others and through sharing in their accounts of their experiences. Tanya Luhrmann, in her account of her intense participant observation in the London magical community, notes that, regardless of the objective truth or fallacy of the premises on which magical practice is based, involvement in its training and its rituals will produce powerful 'spiritual' experiences for most participants (1989:174). These experiences reinforce the desire to accept and rationalize the explanations offered for them. Berger's 'coven as social cocoon' discussion seems to be based on the idea that one is most likely to learn to have these experiences while working intensively in the company of others. Thus where belief might have motivated participation,

participation then reinforces belief, and conversely, the experience of participation might bring about experiences that foster belief where it was not initially present. The priority in time of the belief-behaviour sequence is difficult to disentangle in a Craft context, where both are equally possible, and where, because of its diffuse nature, it is problematic to designate exactly what either 'belief' or 'behaviour' entails.

Eighty percent of survey respondents indicated that they had worked with a group at some point in their Craft careers. Sixty percent were doing so at the time they completed the survey.⁴¹ However, when asked what percentage of the time they had spent in the Craft was spent working with one or more other people, almost 30 percent of respondents said 20 percent or less, and just over 60 percent said 50 percent or less. Only 7 percent of respondents said that they had worked with others more than 90 percent of the time. Clearly, despite their obvious utility, much of the Craft life of many participants is carried on outside of, or between, groups. Jorgensen and Russell support these observations. They report that 45.9 percent of their respondents considered themselves to be primarily solitary practitioners, while 47.7 percent considered themselves to be working primarily in a group. They go on to note:

Our participant observation indicates further that Neopagans frequently alternate between solitary practice and group participation. Some individuals primarily are solitary practitioners, except perhaps for their involvement in festivals or selected collective rituals. A substantial majority of these people participate

⁴¹ Berger (1999) reports that 50.4% of her respondents were solo practitioners at the time they completed her survey.

in groups, supplemented by solitary acts of magic and worship for more or less extended periods of time over the course of their religious careers. Neopagan organizations are, moreover, exceptionally precarious: They constantly are being created, reorganized, disorganized and recreated. Neopagans therefore commonly are solitary practitioners for more or less extended periods of time while they are in between collective affiliations. (1999:333)

Nor does it appear that survey respondents are socially encapsulated, able to maintain their 'deviant' worldview simply by surrounding themselves only with others of like mind. Despite Helen Berger's observation that coven life tends to occupy more and more of members' time, leaving comparatively less time to socialize with non-coven members and therefore possibly reducing the frequency and intensity of those interactions, most of the survey respondents seemed to maintain important affective relationships with those whom they did not consider to be inside the Craft or pagan spheres. When asked to consider their closest friends, 70 percent of respondents said that less than half of them were Craft, and 60 percent said that less than half were pagan. More than 30 percent of respondents indicated that 10 percent or fewer of their close friends were Craft, and only 6.5 percent said that they considered more than 80 percent of their friends to be Craft. When questioned about their domestic partners, 65 percent of those who had domestic partners indicated those individuals were not Craft, although when asked if they considered their domestic partners to be pagan, 65 percent said 'yes'. Thirty-four percent of those who had partners considered those partners to be neither pagan nor Craft. This does not sound like a saturated or necessarily homogenous social network.

'Conversion' to the Craft

Paul Heelas, in his study of New Age religious movements, denies that a move into a New Age or neopagan framework constitutes 'conversion'. He writes, "...when people make decisions on the basis of their expressivist values or therapeutic experiences, they are not converting in any significant sense of the term. There are too many similarities between what they already believe and what they are moving on to" (1996:197). Margot Adler's influential book, *Drawing Down the Moon* (1979) contains a chapter titled "A Religion without Converts." In it, she relates her own spiritual journey towards the Craft, and elaborates those of others she has met and interviewed. Superficially, Adler's assertion that people do not convert to the Craft is problematic because it is clear that most people do not begin their lives in the Craft and even fewer had done so in the seventies than might be the case today. Among my survey respondents, only three indicated that they had been raised in Craft families. However, Adler's attitude about what 'conversion' entails and the ideological points that she makes in her chapter are still echoed in the Craft community today. Having had a sense of this before I even began, I studiously avoided the use of the word 'conversion' throughout the surveys and interviews unless I was specifically questioned about the academic context of my research. 'Conversion' is a loaded and pejorative term among neopagans and one that they reject in describing their own experiences. This rejection is based upon a particular understanding both of conversion and of other religions more generally. The general features that neopagans ascribe to other religions in an attempt to

distinguish their own will be discussed in Chapter Five; the conversion / affiliation process and its theoretical correlates will be the subject of the remainder of this chapter.

Eugene Gallagher (1994) takes issue with Adler's assertions about conversion. He examines Adler's material, as she presents it, and notes "...how strongly Adler's accounts of those who have made the journey into neo-Paganism resemble the tales of converts from other religious traditions" (1994:851). Gallagher suggests that Adler's rejection of the term 'conversion' to describe the process through which individuals come to identify themselves as neopagan practitioners is fundamentally rooted in a construction of conversion that presupposes a passive self. This idea that 'conversion' is essentially something that happens 'to' someone, that is orchestrated from outside and involves both elements of threat and duress (you will burn in hell as an unbeliever) and that involves an individual having to renounce certain beliefs or aspects of their pre-conversion self in order to conform to a worldview and moral order determined independently of them, is pervasive among neopagans. In interviews, individuals specifically chose to highlight aspects of conjunction and continuity between the Craft and their previously existing identities and beliefs, and to emphasize the freely chosen and self-reflexive nature of their path.

The philosophy, in general, was what I believed anyways. The Craft gave me a way to talk about what I already believed. Sure, not all of it was familiar... there was a learning curve as I picked up elemental correspondences and sabbats and mythology and all the rest of the things that go into the Craft way of talking about the universe, but none of it seemed really alien, it just wasn't stuff I might have come up with on my own. (Carrie)

...when I came to paganism... there is a sense of coming home, there is a sense of actually being able to place a name onto a way of thinking and a way of looking at the world that you've had, that I've had, for, for, you know, a number of years, and just didn't realize that there was a way of describing it... (Don)

...I don't have the experience of having *joined* Craft. ... Um, I don't have the sense of being converted... convinced, maybe, but not converted. Um, I've had beliefs affirmed, challenged, but certainly not imposed on me. (Francine)

I wonder if that sense of having been that way all along is why most Wiccans don't like the term 'conversion'... because they haven't changed anything...? (Andrea)

Gallagher notes that there are models of conversion that presuppose an active self; he cites William James (1903) and Stark and Bainbridge. Interestingly, he does not cite James Richardson, who has probably done the most elaborated body of work on an alternative model of conversion that constructs the convert as an active agent.

Richardson argues that the approach to conversion as something that 'happens to' an individual is the legacy of Christian conversion discourse, which treats the conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus as the prototype for all conversion. He considers this the 'old paradigm' for conversion research. He and Brock Kilbourne state,

The Pauline experience and similar passivist conversions are usually described by the following characteristics: 1) sudden and dramatic, 2) irrational or magical in nature; 3) involving a powerful, external, and impersonal force, 4) usually a single event, 5) the negation of the old self and the affirmation of the new self, 6) change from one static state to another static state, 7) typically occurs during adolescence and is a 'good thing' and 8) behaviour change usually follows belief change (1988:1-2).

They contrast this with the 'new paradigm' of the activist conversion, the prototype for which is the 'seeker'.

Rather than being pushed around by powerful, unseen, and uncontrollable forces, the seeker is an active agent. The seeker is generally characterized by the following: 1) volition, 2) autonomy, 3) search for meaning and purpose, 4) multiple conversions or conversion careers, 5) rational interpretation of experiences, 6) gradual and continuous conversion(s), 7) negotiation between the individual and the potential membership group, and 8) belief change that follows behavior change, as the individual learns the role of being a new convert (1988:2).

This latter description of conversion incorporates many more of the elements featured in neopagan accounts of their involvement in the Craft, particularly those involving participants' previous religious explorations, discussed above, and their experiences with other religions, discussed in Chapter Five.

Another feature of this approach to conversion that makes it more suitable to elaborate the idea of neopagan 'conversion' is its focus on the individual, rather than the group, as its unit of analysis. Thus, unlike theorists such as Stark and Bainbridge (1980, 1981, 1985, 1987) who work out of a 'rational choice' framework, theorists who follow Kilbourne and Richardson do not try to identify what the group has to offer the individual, and then assume that all of the individuals involved in the group must share some or all of the characteristics they have identified. They do not approach conversion from the perspective of recruitment to a group, but instead from the standpoint of the individual searching for meaning who utilizes the group as a resource (Straus 1979:158). These researchers extend the notion of religious conversion beyond its formulation as a process model by Lofland and Stark (1965), which ended at

recruitment, and look at conversion as an ongoing phenomenon, recognizing that recruits do not always stay in the groups in which they become involved, and that any theory of religious conversion must be able to account for those who leave and where they go. However, even this approach to conversion makes affiliation with a group of like-minded others more central to the identity of the convert than would seem to be the case with Craft participants, who, as was mentioned earlier, tend to retain their self-identification as participants even when they are not actively involved with a group, or even with specific ritual or spellwork practices independent of a group.

Dawson (1990) takes an interesting approach to the theoretical elaboration of 'active' conversions. He stresses the relationship between rational, or self-reflexive actions, and the principle of activity stressed by such researchers as Richardson. Although this focus on rational action might lead him to be classified with the 'rational choice' theorists descending from Homans, he aligns himself with a different philosophical school. He writes,

...I propose that a preferable form of rational action theory for the study of conversions should be fashioned from the tradition of social theorists who associated goal-directed activity with a human drive towards self-realization or wholeness (e.g. Herder, Fichte, Hegel, J.S. Mill, the later British and American Hegelians, Green, Hocking, Cooley, Mead, and Dewey; cf. Mandelbaum 1987). (143)

Dawson equates rationality with reflexivity (153). He takes fully rational human action as an ideal limiting case, and proposes that conversions may be considered more or less active according to their degree of departure from that ideal case (1990:147). Using a variation of role theory, he suggests that attitudinal (as

opposed to behavioral) converts can be distinguished by a high degree of 'role-person merger', and that a conversion should be considered 'active' if that merger has proceeded reflexively (155). 'Role-person merger' is described as "...the fusion of one's subjective sense of self with the expectations of a particular role" (144). Following Ralph Turner (1978) he lists four propositions for assessing if role-person merger has taken place.

1. the failure of role compartmentalization;
2. resistance to abandoning a role despite available, advantageous and viable alternatives;
3. the thorough acquisition of attitudes and beliefs appropriate to the role;
4. the tumultuous character of the process of learning and adopting such a role as compared with roles which are merely situational resources. (Turner 1978:3-4 in Dawson 1990: 155)

'Role-person merger' is one way to account for Craft participants' tendency to cast themselves as always having been Craft, even before they had encountered explicit articulations of it. Said one,

All my life I have been involved, I just didn't know it consciously until around 1988, when I, I finally found the name and more of a manifestation, and I said 'ah! that's what it is!'... (Martha)

The individual's sense of their own identity has become so enmeshed with their idea of themselves as a Craft practitioner that the two can no longer be distinguished retrospectively, thus producing the kind of biographical reconstruction discussed in Snow and Phillips (1980) and Snow and Machalek (1983). However, Dawson's attempt to relate these role-theory insights specifically to conversion and the 'convert role' is problematic in a neopagan setting, where there is no 'convert role' separate from a 'participant role'. The

strength of Dawson's discussion, at least with regards to the Craft, rests in the way in which it takes into account the individual's reflexive definition of themselves. The centrality of reflexivity, characterized as self-knowledge or personal development, is apparent in almost all Craft 'instructional' material aimed at beginners (Cunningham 1989; Crowley 1989; Starhawk 1979).

However, it is in Snow and Machalek's schema (1983) that one finds a characterization of the 'convert' that is clearly applicable to neopagans. Snow and Machalek, unlike many conversion researchers, do not address the process or causes of conversion in their study. Instead, they take as their starting point the continued inability of conversion researchers to distinguish between converts and non-converts. They reject the mere behaviour of switching religious groups as a reliable indicator of conversion, and are suspicious of convert's self reports of their status. They suggest that the 'change' that all researchers agree must be present in order for a conversion to have taken place is located in the 'universe of discourse' of the convert (1983:265). Therefore, converts should display properties in their talk and reasoning that are absent from the talk and reasoning of the non-convert. Based on an analysis of their conversations with members of the Nicherin Shoshu Buddhist organization (NSA), Snow and Machalek propose four 'rhetorical indicators' as formal properties which will act to distinguish the convert as a social type distinct from other social types. These are: biographical reconstruction, adoption of a master attribution scheme, suspension of analogical reasoning, and embracement of a master role (1983:266).

Biographical reconstruction involves the editing and reinterpretation of one's biographical narrative to reflect the norms and interpretive categories offered by the new religious worldview. For example, someone who came into the Craft in their twenties recounting a story about an incident that happened as a child that made her feel 'close to the Goddess, even though she did not know it at the time' is engaging in biographical reconstruction, applying categories to a past experience which would not have been available to describe that experience at the time, but which reinforce and legitimize the current worldview. Several participants volunteered stories of this type during their interviews.

'Adoption of a master attribution scheme', for Snow and Machalek, has to do with the way in which subjects make causal inferences. They write,

... one causal scheme or vocabulary of motives informs all causal attributions. A single locus of causality is simultaneously sharpened and generalized. Feelings, behaviour and events that were previously inexplicable or accounted for by reference to a number of causal schemes are now interpreted from the standpoint of one pervasive scheme. (1983:270)

While the current research was not structured to analyze participants' tendencies in making causal attributions, there is certainly a vocabulary of metaphor that arises out of their spiritual convictions that participants use to explain and make sense of the broader context of their lives.

...you feel differently about it [the things you do everyday]. Like when you're cleaning the house, and can feel like you're purifying and cleansing, and getting rid of all the negative, old stuff, and bringing in new stuff, and I think that it definitely does put a different slant on day to day activities. (Jennifer)

I find it [the Craft] is also helpful in explaining, um, things to my children. You know, my daughter asked me why, why is it summer, and we talk about the natural cycles of the earth. And

she, she really likes the idea of a God and a Goddess, and uh, even she, at four and a half, can see the natural cycles of the planet... (Karen)

The Craft embodies the image of the wheel of the year... that spring will happen over and over again... and there's something reassuring about that... but it also means that things that you have to do over and over again, like cooking and cleaning and laundry, can have some value in the wider scheme of things. (Carrie)

'Suspension of analogic reasoning', which Snow and Machalek take to be assigning a central primacy to one's own world view that excludes the ability to recognize that other beliefs and practices may perform the same functions equally well, is not evident in my interviews. Perhaps because of the syncretic and personal nature of the Craft, as well as the ideology of tolerance for the beliefs and practices of others that it makes explicit, interview participants did not make 'fundamentalist' statements about believing they were in possession of 'the one true way', although a number of them did note that there were pockets of that attitude around. Several participants commented that the way they had chosen for themselves was the best way for them, but acknowledged that others could find other ways equally fulfilling and satisfying. One described it this way, "I think that all religions are different from each other, and at the same time, they're all the same, because it's people, always people. Right? People make religions." She went on to say later, "I think that people can [get a sense of community, friendship and satisfying spiritual experiences from other religions] I don't think that I could have" (Bronwen). Another noted,

...the Craft tries to make the world meaningful. It tries to give you a framework through which you can understand your life. All religions try to do that. Choosing a religion is a matter of finding a

philosophy and a practice and a symbol set that works for you... that resonates. I don't think that the Craft is any different from Buddhism or Hinduism or Judaism or anything else if you look at it that way. (Carrie)

When asked if she could have gotten the same sorts of benefits she perceived she had derived from the Craft from another religion, she responded,

Well, I looked at other religions, really I did, and nothing seemed to fit for me. Maybe if I'd kept looking, I would have found something. ...So for me, no, I don't think so... but that doesn't mean I don't think that other people can't find their... I don't know... their... whatever... that way. (Carrie)

This suggests that participants maintain a reflexive sense of relativism about their own religious identity that would not support the suspension of analogic reasoning.

Snow and Machalek's final criterion, the embracement of a master role, would seem to have a great deal in common with Dawson's notion of a role-person merger. What they add to Dawson's conceptualization is that all other 'roles' that the 'convert' enacts are subordinate in their mind to that of their religious identity. Their other identities are interpreted through their identity of 'religious practitioner'. The way in which interview participants tend to discuss their understandings of the 'everyday' aspects of their lives as being informed by their religious outlook supports the supposition that their religious identification may be functioning as a master role.

Staples and Mauss (1987) undertake to test and modify Snow and Machalek's assertions, taking as their subjects a group of Christian evangelicals. These researchers reconceptualize the value of examining the narrative style of 'converts':

... we think also that a focus on the language and rhetoric of converts is a useful direction to pursue, not so much because it allows us indirect access to consciousness, but rather because it is through language that individuals transform themselves. That is, we take what is referred to as a 'functionalist' approach to language... Thus, where Snow and Machalek view particular kinds of language and rhetoric as observable indicators of some underlying change in consciousness, we view particular kinds of language and rhetoric as methods used by subjects to achieve self-transformation (137-38).

Unlike Snow and Machalek, Staples and Mauss examine the conversations of two groups of evangelicals, one group which self-identified as converts, and one that did not. Because Snow and Machalek examined a recently imported movement, it was reasonable for them to assume that those who were deeply involved were not so involved because of a lifelong association with the movement. What Staples and Mauss report, as a result of their analysis, is that three of the Snow and Machalek indicators of conversion do not distinguish between religious conversion and religious commitment. The only indicator found consistently in their convert group, while being absent in their non-convert group, was biographical reconstruction. Staples and Mauss assert, therefore, that it is the process of biographical reconstruction that characterizes the religiously converted and not the religiously committed. Their logic appears to be that it is only the convert group that needs to transform their identities through reinterpreting their biographies. Staples and Mauss' findings are important simply because they underline the presence of a characteristic that is shared between neopagans and converts to other types of religions, even though neopagans reject the idea of 'conversion' and the label of 'convert.'

Summary

The rational choice proposition that cults will draw their membership disproportionately from among the unchurched can be neither definitively supported nor undercut by the analysis of this sample, due to the vague way in which 'unchurched' is presented. Of the survey respondents, 75 percent indicated some religious involvement before the Craft. Seventy-eight percent believed that some effort had been made to raise them within a religious tradition, although only a minority of those indicated that either parent had been either 'very committed to' or 'very involved in' their own religion of choice. The proportion of respondents who indicated they had no previous religious involvements, 25 percent, is about twice that of the Canadian population who indicated 'no religion' on the 1991 census.

Because neopagans do not tend to practice an institutionalized form of religious expression, it is difficult to characterize them as either 'churched' or 'unchurched'. These distinctions largely lose their analytical value outside of the congregational settings in which they were originally employed. Strength of attachment to the Craft is not adequately gauged by group membership. Even while unattached to any formal group or while not engaging in the distinctive ritual or magical practices associated with the Craft, participants retain a strong religious identification that is rooted in their perception of themselves rather than being based on their affiliations or enacted observances.

Among the initial appeals of the Craft cited by the survey participants were those related to the presence of a Goddess figure and those related to the centrality of nature in the spiritual ideology. The former appeals are cited more often by women than men, while the latter are given by both equally. Magic, despite its strong popular association with witchcraft, was listed as one of the top three initial appeals by only 10 percent of respondents. Those interviewed emphasized that it was the congruity between these elements and what they already believed about the spiritual landscape that attracted them to the Craft. The novelty was seeing these elements acknowledged in a religious framework, rather than in the substance of the elements themselves.

Survey respondents listed 'friends' and 'books' in about equal numbers when asked how they first became aware of the Craft. Books are a central element in the dynamics of involvement in neopaganism; many more people rated books as having been 'very important' in getting them involved than gave 'other people' that status. Because other practitioners are sometimes difficult to find, the material found in books often provides the framework for an individual's construction of their Craft practice, and their subsequent expectations of neopagan 'community'. Interaction with other practitioners is not perceived by respondents to be as central to their ongoing involvement and commitment as some of the conversion literature would suggest.

Extensive individual research and an active participation in the selection and construction of one's religious identity is discussed in the religious conversion literature, particularly by those who advocate viewing 'conversion'

as an active and reflexive process. This theoretical elaboration of conversion better matches neopagan narratives of how their involvement in the Craft came about; these narratives consistently emphasize the freely chosen nature of their religious identification. This emphasis may be, in part, a response to the popular notion of 'brainwashing' as the root cause of cult involvement, but it is also related to the idea, prevalent among neopagans, that 'conversion' involves a passive self, acted upon by irresistible forces from without. Particularly relevant among the existing conversion articles are those by Dawson (1990), Snow and Machalek (1983) and Staples and Mauss (1987), because of the ways in which they focus attention on the individual's perception and narration of their 'role', their identity as a religious practitioner. This is valuable in a neopagan context because it provides a basis for analysis that is easily separable from an individual's interaction with an organized group. Many of the process models derived from Lofland and Stark (1965) cannot accommodate a 'convert' existing in isolation, without face-to-face contact with other practitioners. Despite neopagans' flat rejection of the traditional vocabulary of conversion, examination of those theoretical pieces that begin with the assumption of the primacy of human agency reveals that the ways in which neopagans come to make and express their religious choices is not entirely unlike what can be seen in other religions. This suggests a functional similarity between the Craft and other religious choices that is often obscured by their apparent substantive differences.

Chapter Five: The Craft as a Religion

Neopagan practitioners are often somewhat ambivalent about applying the term 'religion' to their Craft activities. They characterize themselves as 'religious' or 'spiritually-oriented' people, and tend to assert that their beliefs and practices should be accorded the same protection and respect given to other religious traditions. However, most are also prepared to delineate the ways in which they find neopaganism to be radically different from other, more organized, religions in terms of both the structure of the practice and the substantive beliefs embodied within it.

This ambivalence reflects, in part, a tension between the definitions of religion present in ordinary social and academic discourse, which sometimes define religion as a set of relations through which the individual situates him or herself with regards to the numinous, and sometimes as a set of established structures through which those relations are defined and facilitated. To understand neopagans' uneasiness with the idea of religion, the connotative implications of the word must first be examined through both a sociological and an institutional lens and compared with neopagans' own understandings of their particular practice.

Sociological Definitions of Religion

The primary difficulty in terms of whether or not to define something as a 'religion' comes in choosing an appropriate definition. There is a great deal of discussion in the fields of sociology and anthropology as to what 'religion', as a

category of human belief and practice, actually is, and how it functions in society. These definitions are not always harmonious, although they do tend to indicate certain general features which are necessary, if not perhaps sufficient, in order to ascribe the status of 'religion' to a phenomenon. These discussions, which attempt to provide inclusive definitions and descriptive norms, are different from those found in theology, which aim to provide exclusive definitions and prescriptive norms. Definitions of religion in the social sciences focus on something other than the manifest content of a given religion, often having to do with the role 'religion' plays in the socially constructed space inhabited by individual actors.

Many scholars have built on, or modified, Durkheim's classic formulation:

A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden -- beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them. (Durkheim, 1976:47)

Although the necessity for a 'Church', in the precise terms that Durkheim goes on to describe it, is disputed, the notion that religion has to do with relationships to that which can be defined as 'sacred' persists. Charles Glock and Rodney Stark, speaking of functional theorists' approaches to the definition of religion, write, "Their various formulations can be synthesized into the following generalization: *Religion, or what societies hold to be sacred, comprises an institutionalized system of symbols, beliefs, values and practices focused on questions of ultimate meaning.*" (1965:4, emphasis in original) They go on to describe 'ultimate meaning' as "...those matters pertaining to the nature, meaning, and often

purpose, of reality – a rationale for existence and a view of the world." (1965:4-5)

They note that,

... a system of ultimate meaning would likely provide answers to questions about man's nature, purpose, origin, fate, and the like. The proposition being advanced is that things related to matters of ultimate meaning... will be regarded as sacred. In particular, things will be regarded as sacred as they provide, or symbolize, solutions to questions of ultimate meaning. (1965:5)

Both Durkheim and the functional theorists who follow him consider the shared social nature of religion to be the most important aspect of the practice.

Milton Yinger, for example, characterizes religion as that which helps human beings to reconcile themselves to the difficulties inherent in their mortal, social state.

Religion, then, can be defined as a system of beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people struggles with these ultimate problems of human life. It expresses their refusal to capitulate to death, to give up in the face of frustration, to allow hostility to tear apart their human associations. The quality of being religious, seen from the individual point of view, implies two things: first, a belief that evil, pain, bewilderment and injustice are fundamental facts of existence; and second, a set of practices and related sanctified beliefs that express a conviction that man can ultimately be saved from those facts. (1970:7)

Clifford Geertz chooses a different emphasis in his definition of religion.

He asserts that religion is:

...a system of symbols which acts to 2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by 3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and 4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that 5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. (1973:90)

Geertz prefers to place his emphasis on the ontological and existential framework provided by religion as a symbolic language, and the role that

framework subsequently plays in directing the reflexive activities of individuals. The notion that religion is shared is still present however, in his deliberate use of a collective rather than a singular subject. What is significant about the range present in these various definitions of religion is that they all, in some way, postulate that religion is a form of shared discourse concerning existential and ontological questions. A purely 'private' religion, in which only a single individual participates, therefore becomes an impossibility. However, all individuals are responsible for negotiating their own relationship to the collectively available religious discourses. For the purposes of this research, the process through which individuals negotiate their relationship to a religious discourse is what is meant by 'spirituality'.

Existential concerns and questions about meaning are dealt with by other systems than the religious, however, so a definition of religion must advance a feature that would act to distinguish 'religion' from other forms of what Glock and Stark refer to as 'value orientations' (1965:9). The feature most often advanced is reference to the supernatural. Glock and Stark write, "...all value orientations [which] include some statement affirming the existence of a supernatural being, world, or force, and predicate their ultimate solutions on this assumption... We shall call... *religious perspectives*" (1965:10-11)⁴². Crysdale and Wheatcroft assert that "...the central tenet of religion [is] that there is an ultimate

⁴² Glock and Stark contrast these with what they refer to as 'humanist approaches' that "do not posit a supernatural, but limit their statements about ultimate meaning to the material world, although often to past or future versions of it" (1965:11).

dimension of reality which pertains to the observable, empirical world, but also reaches beyond it to realms of thought and experience not subject to scientific validation" (1976:7). Stark and Bainbridge are fairly unequivocal, stating:

We are prepared to assert that there can be no wholly naturalistic religion; that a religion lacking in supernatural assumptions is no religion at all... *religions involve some conception of a supernatural being, world or force, and the notion that the supernatural is active, that events and conditions here on earth are influenced by the supernatural.* (emphasis in original, 1985:3-5)

Thus, building on the definitions offered by the dominant theoretical perspectives, I would suggest that for a phenomenon to be classified as 'religion', it must represent a shared discourse that utilizes a symbolic system in order to explain or make meaningful the world in which human beings live in a manner centrally informed by some conception of the supernatural. It must also implicitly or explicitly define what is acceptable moral conduct, and provide a basis for community. Since a general overview of Craft beliefs was given in Chapter One, it will not be repeated here; instead, the section will focus on neopaganism's approximation of the criteria set out above, based on those earlier descriptions.

Neopaganism generally, and neopagan witchcraft in particular, would seem to possess all of the sociologically identified characteristics of a religion, albeit in a non-institutionalized format. First of all, its adherents tend to self-identify as members of a religious movement; that is, they themselves frequently identify what they are doing as 'religion', or as 'religious', or are

unwilling to dispute the label when it is applied by others. Neopaganism also embodies an integral notion of the 'supernatural'. Many strands of the Craft employ invocations to the God and Goddess, and many of those that do not nonetheless believe that there is a life force, a power or a sacrality that permeates and connects all things. They believe in a non-material, 'etheric' reality that exists alongside conventionally observable reality. This other reality is experienced through intuition, trance, dreams, meditations and ecstatic states, or as an undercurrent in daily life. This non-material reality can be influenced according to its own logic, by non-material means. Many in the Craft would deny these are 'supernatural' elements, despite the fact that they fit conventional substantive definitions of such, preferring to assert instead that the conventional notion of 'natural' does not extend far enough. The dominant secular classification system, however, would group these ideas in the category of 'supernatural' and this then can give rise to the possibility of supernaturally-based rewards and compensators, as outlined by Stark and Bainbridge (1987).

The human world, and one's individual life within it, is made meaningful through the notion that what happens in the world is not random, that it is ultimately overseen by some personal or impersonal force that serves to keep the 'balance'. This belief supports the related concepts of karma and of the spiral of life, death and rebirth. The first concept introduces the idea that all of one's activities are meaningful, and that the positive or negative energies generated by these actions will return on their originator. The spiral of death and rebirth connects the individual to the observable cycle of the seasons, by postulating that

ultimately, the individual 'soul' or 'life energy' experiences the same simultaneous change and continuity pattern that is observable in the passage of the seasons. This also prevents the notion of karma from being seriously undermined when those who act for ill prosper, by presenting the possibility that the negative energy they have accumulated will be visited upon them in a future life. These notions also provide the foundation for the moral and ethical position of neopaganism, which is expressed in witchcraft as "An' harm ye none, do what ye will." Morality becomes situational inasmuch as it is the responsibility of individuals to reflect upon the possible consequences of their actions, however, it is not entirely relative, because there is an idea that the possibility of definable harm exists outside of the definition or intention of the individual committing the action. 'Harm' is judged ultimately by the same force responsible for maintaining balance in the universe. Michael York summarizes neopaganism's religious orientation by noting,

In general, Neo-paganism may be summed up as comprising an animistic, pantheistic and pluralistic religious orientation that is non-doctrinaire but employs traditional pagan metaphors (myths, foci, and rituals) or modern reconstructions of them as a means of celebrating a this-worldly emphasis either on a solitary basis or with others of a like mind. It stresses self-responsibility, self-development, individual exegesis, and full freedom of self-determination, the experience of ritual and ecstasy and an ecological preoccupation with the well-being of the planet regarded as a living entity. The interconnectedness of all life-forms and the habitat is a central belief. Other concerns include tolerance, respect for diversity, healing, and the use of non-malevolent forms of 'magic'. Its ethics are pragmatic and grounded in the concept of honour (1995:136).

It would appear that neopaganism deals with questions of ultimate reality, such as birth, death, and existence, in such a manner as to try to make them both

meaningful and comprehensible; that it reaches beyond the observable physical reality to "realms of thought and experience not subject to scientific validation" (Crysdale and Wheatcroft, 1976:7); it expresses its answers to existential questions symbolically, and with reference to supernatural assumptions, and provides a moral code that can act as a basis for community. Thus, it would appear to fulfill all of the standard sociological criteria for designation as a religion.

Institutional Definitions of Religion

Institutional definitions of religion are produced by those organizations that have a need to clarify the rights and obligations of 'religions' and those belonging to or identifying with them, and to regulate those aspects of social life in which religion has traditionally played a role. Because these definitions focus on the role of religion as one form of social phenomenon in the broader social order, rather than on the role of religion in the belief structure or worldview of the individual, these definitions draw strongly on the 'socially organized and expressed', institutionalized elements of those sociological definitions of religion that were discussed previously. In essence, much of the Canadian legislation in place to govern 'religion', in fact exists to regulate the operation of 'churches', those collective and institutionalized extensions of religious belief and practice. The institutional definitions of religion both implicitly and explicitly present in this legislation conflate the existence of a religion with the existence of a formal boundary-maintaining structure through which that religion is administered.

As a result of this focus on the organizational structure through which a religion is administered and delivered, there has been an ongoing debate, both inside and outside of Canadian courtrooms, as to the legal status of neopagan witchcraft as a 'religion'. There are known cases, albeit few, where Craft people have requested recognition of their status as practicing members of a religion, and have had that recognition withheld or denied. In March 1988, Charles Arnold, a neopagan witch from Toronto, had an application to solemnize marriages as a member of the clergy refused by the Office of the Registrar General. The reason given to the press by the deputy registrar for the refusal was that "conflicting information had been presented about the process of ordination in Arnold's religion" (Ottawa Citizen, March 16/88:D18). That conflicting information about 'ordination' might have been forthcoming from different sources would surprise no one with any level of familiarity with the neopagan witchcraft movement. The fact that this could be used as grounds to reject an application merely underlines the institutional commitment to upholding the status quo, in this case, consistent, centralized, organized religions. Arnold had previously won a grievance before the Ontario Human Rights Commission against his employer, Humber College, for refusing to allow him to take May 1 (Beltaine) and November 1 (the day after Samhain, a celebration that frequently runs through the night) as paid religious holidays. The ruling in that case stated, "Wicca is obviously a religion" (Ottawa Citizen, Dec 10/87:A5).

Another discrimination case involving witchcraft was filed with the British Columbia Human Rights Commission. Sam Wagar, head of the

Congregationalist Witchcraft Association, a small pagan networking group along the lines of the much older and larger Covenant of the Goddess in the United States, was acclaimed as the New Democratic Party's candidate in the Matsqui riding for the February 1994 by-election. Wagar had his nomination canceled by the party when his religious affiliation became known. The constituency ordered a second candidacy meeting, at which another candidate took the nomination by two votes. The cancellation of his original acclamation and some comments made by other members of the provincial NDP prompted Wagar's discrimination claim. The BC Human Rights Commission never ruled in Wagar's case, because he chose to settle just before the beginning of public hearings, having already had it determined that the case was legitimate and having undergone attempts to mediate an acceptable solution. He received apologies from both the provincial NDP and his local constituency office and a small amount of financial compensation in early September 1995 (Sam Wagar, personal communication).

In a different bid for recognition as a religion, Richard and Tamarra James, the founders of the Wiccan Church of Canada (WCC), applied to Revenue Canada for registration as a charitable organization because they considered their organization to contribute to 'the advancement of religion', one of the charitable purposes outlined in the applicable Revenue Canada documents (T-4063). After waiting more than three years for a decision, their application was denied in September 1986. The lawyer for the WCC told the media that the reason that the church had been given for the denial was that "Revenue Canada

did not accept it as a religion" (Ottawa Citizen, July 11/87:F3). Representatives from Revenue Canada declined to comment, citing federal confidentiality legislation. Although the WCC's initial intention was to appeal, financial considerations caused them to abandon the plan at that time. More recently, Tamarra James has again been making public statements about the WCC's potential re-applications for status with the various departments involved. Comments made to the media would suggest that she remains frustrated with the bureaucratic procedures that have consistently denied the WCC 'legitimate' status as a religion. She notes, "At one point, they (Revenue Canada) told us we could get tax-free status if we had the right to perform marriages... Then they (Ontario) told us we could perform marriages if we had tax-free status" (Ottawa Citizen, February 27/99:A3). The article also indicates that Revenue Canada continues to refrain from commenting on the WCC's case directly, instead noting that other non-mainstream religious groups have been given recognition as charities.

Neopagans can often obtain a place on ecumenical religious councils, form campus clubs at colleges and universities, and some pagan organizations have obtained access to prisons to do chaplaincy work. None of these forms of recognition, however, establish any sort of legal standing for neopaganism. Governments seem willing to accord neopagans the same individual protections as the practitioners of other religions, but not the same institutional standing. From an administrative standpoint, this makes a great deal of sense, since the bulk of neopaganism is not organized in an easily regulated, centralized fashion.

However, it leaves a great deal of ambiguity in the minds of practitioners, many of whom are uncertain about the extent to which they are protected from harassment and discrimination for their beliefs and practices, or the extent to which their employers or others are required to make accommodations for them under Canadian law.

Several interview participants related stories about how the ambiguous status of neopaganism had affected them, usually when I asked them why they had decided to participate in the interview process. One recalled,

...at the hospital, when they ask your religion, you can now put down Wicca. [pause] First of all, I asked to get it changed, they'd been putting me down as 'none'. And I'd say, no, it's Wicca... and 'what's Wicca' and I ended up, it took me half a day... I tromped around the hospital and saw this administrator, and he said 'no, you have to go talk to the person who looks after the computer programming' and that person said 'well, I don't have the authority'... And I went back to this one and that one and um... finally I photocopied a couple things and, and sent it to them, and within, like, instantly, they were back to me saying, 'yes, we have checked other hospitals and we've checked the human rights guidelines, and we were wrong and you were right and we're really sorry, and from now on, you can come to the hospital and be a Wiccan.' (Martha)

For Martha, the issue was the legitimacy of her religious identification. She wanted her records to reflect her definition of her religion, and not a label ascribed to her by an intake person with insufficient information. Drawing upon her familiarity with the practices already established in other districts, Martha was able to get the practice at her local hospital changed, but she expresses frustration at being compelled to perform that education function simply so that she could expect to be treated the way in which she perceives members of more

established religions are treated without question. Another interview participant relates an encounter she had with a professor.

When I was going to university, we had a, a final on November first. And I said, 'I can't do this.' And he's like, 'what do you mean?' And I said, 'this is like a religious holiday; this is like the biggest holiday of the year. I can't do this.' And he just went, 'Too bad.' And I was like 'Too bad? Look... I mean, you give someone else time off for different holidays and I'll like write the final before the final, you know?'... 'It's not like I want extra time... You know, I'll write the final beforehand, but can I please have these two days where I'm not going to be around?' And they're like 'No.' Well fine. So I didn't write the final. I passed, barely, in that course. But... it was... that kind of thing. You know, when you come in and say this, you know, is something important. And... people are afraid to ask for these kind of things... (Sarah)

Sarah wanted an actual accommodation of her religious practices and could not obtain it. She did not believe that she had the resources or the supporting evidence to appeal her professor's decision, although she perceived it as arbitrary and discriminatory. She later asserted quite forcefully that she believes that legitimate research into neopaganism will provide people in the sorts of situations in which she found herself with tangible support for their requests to be treated with the same consideration as those made by members of other religions.

Paul described what happened when he became more publicly visible as a Craft practitioner.

Well, I lost one job because of it too. I was working for um, an organization that [description], and the um, director there didn't quite care for the fact that I'd hit the newspaper at Samhain, and she wanted me to clear my public appearances with her. ... And, well, the job description, well, I didn't get much of a chance to do the job I was actually hired to do after that, and uh, then was called on the carpet for not doing it, because she kept pushing me to do

these other, 'special' projects. So I was forced out of a job over it, I'd say... (Paul)

Although Paul believed that the way in which he was handled by his supervisors after his religious beliefs became known was probably grounds for a human rights complaint, he decided not to proceed with one because he did not wish to damage the reputation of an organization he still considered to be doing important service work in his community.

Bronwen received a threatening letter while she was managing an occult book and supply store in a major urban center in the 1990s. She complained to the police about the letter.

I went to the police with the letter, because it was so threatening, and made me nervous, and I called before I went, because, I thought, there's no way they're going to tell me to come in, and the guy was 'oh yes, definitely, come in right away, we'll fingerprint it' and he was very, very helpful. Unfortunately, the guy at the desk was like, 'well, you own an occult shop, you should expect this'. And I thought 'OOOOOH Bastard!' I was so mad! (Bronwen)

Bronwen did not accept the notion that her occupation, and by extension, her religious identification, should be used to diminish the salience of the threats she had received. She was also frustrated that the two responses she received from the police were so contradictory. In all four of the cases mentioned, interview participants cited the general population's lack of knowledge about neopaganism as a religious choice as being the primary contributing factor to the problems they encountered. They also believed that a greater level of legal recognition for neopaganism would facilitate broader public education about the Craft, while simultaneously acknowledging that legal recognition was unlikely to be achieved

without broader public awareness, a sort of Catch-22 situation. Clearly, when considering the rights and protections to which they believe they should be entitled, neopagans tend to frame their understanding of their religious choice as being equivalent to the religious choices of other Canadians. However, they will also deny that their religion is like other religions, leading to a tension between a desire to appropriate the religious language and the legitimacy it confers, while repudiating the cultural and institutional baggage that they perceive as attached to 'religion' more generally.

Substance, Structure and Function: Neopagans Talk About Religion

During the course of the interviews, each participant was asked 'Is the Craft different from other religions?' This was the most explicit invitation that participants received to discuss the Craft in relation to their perceptions of other religions; however, it was not the only place in which they did so. Participants' perceptions of other religions were often invoked as a sort of narrative foil when they explained what they believed were the appeals of the Craft, or what benefits they believed they personally derived from it. Sometimes comparisons were made explicitly; sometimes they were there only by implication. Most of the specific elements highlighted by participants as marking the Craft as different from other religions could be classified as substantive or structural, that is differences in the content of beliefs, practices and / or explanation of the universe, or differences in the overall organization of the practice. In classical terms, participants cited differences in the 'accidental' attributes of the Craft, rather than highlighting 'essential' differences, which would mark the Craft as

something entirely other than religious. In fact, many participants made comments that underscored a belief that their choice of a religious identification as Craft was functionally the same, from an individual point of view, as the choice of any other religious identification. One participant comments,

I see it [the Craft] as *a* symbolic language in which I am fluent. And, it's one symbolic language among several. In many respects, I have come to a place where I've been able to reclaim some of the Catholic symbols, in a way that can actually be used. And I find that the Buddhist symbol set is also very practical in certain situations. (Daniel)

Daniel disembeds the idea of 'religion' in this particular context, from that of religious organization, and characterizes all forms of religion equally as symbolic languages. Each of these languages has the potential to provide insight through its own particular perspective. He does not single out the Craft as being better or worse than other traditions; all are viewed as partial. He simply acknowledges that the Craft highlights different aspects of truth and meaning than do other religions. This idea that all religions are merely the forms through which philosophical ideas and mystical experiences are expressed is echoed in other interviews.

I think that everybody needs some sort of philosophy or spirituality. Religion is the structure and the trappings that we place on the mystical and spiritual practices, and those are just tools, it's the mysticism and the philosophy and that that is the most important aspect of it all. (Beth)

...There's organizational, structural differences, definitely... Um, doctrinal differences? [deleted for identification reasons] ... I've looked at so many religious systems, I'm not sure that Wicca is so very different from other religions... (Francine)

Most of the interview participants appeared to subscribe to the position that, however different the Craft appeared from other religions, it was a way through which one could approach a relationship with the sacred, and therefore functionally equivalent to other religious approaches or traditions.

Substantive Differences

Despite the general underlying acceptance that Craft practice is a religious or spiritual activity in much the same way as other religions are as well, all eighteen participants mentioned substantive differences between the Craft and other religions during their interviews. The one mentioned most frequently was the presence of a Goddess or the recognition of a feminine dimension of spirituality. This came up, in some context, in every interview, often when discussing the appeals of the Craft.

Jon Bloch, in his analysis of interviews done with American neopagans and 'New Agers', also notes the prevalence of discussion of the Goddess and the divine feminine among his subjects (1998:69-72).⁴³ He observes a difference in the way in which his female and male subjects frame their explanations of the role and importance of the divine feminine. He suggests that while women are inclined to speak of Goddess spirituality in terms of larger gender inequalities

⁴³ Bloch's interview format first allowed participants to talk freely about their spiritual journey, and then used set questions to encourage participants to explore particular themes. One of the prompts in the word association segment of the second stage of the interview was 'Goddess', so some of the discussion he records would have occurred in response to that prompt. However, he also mentions that all of his female subjects and five of his eleven male subjects brought up the Goddess in the open, unprompted segment of the interview.

and as a means of obtaining “self-validation by having a female image of the divine with which to identify” (70), men are less likely to make reference to patriarchal social structures, and tend to discuss the Goddess “more as an expressive or nurturing force that aided one’s immediate self” (71). Bloch’s observations about the way in which his female participants talked about the Goddess are congruent with Cynthia Eller’s discussion of the Goddess as a source of empowerment for spiritual feminists. “What the goddess does for women is to give them power in their femaleness, not apart from it, to make womanhood itself a powerful quantity. It is a divine redemption of femaleness” (Eller 1993:213). This sentiment is also apparent among my female interview participants.

I think that Wicca, and I’m talking about British Traditional Wicca here, because that’s what I know, gives women a forum where they can have a role that is feminine, but at the same time powerful. They don’t have to trade their femininity for power and authority; the High Priestess, as the representative of the Goddess and as the first among equals, can embody both those aspects without there being a contradiction. I think that is a really strong appeal for women in the kind of society we find ourselves in, where there is such a dichotomy between femininity and power.
(Andrea)

Although Andrea is involved in British Traditional Wicca, which is perceived by many other neopagans as being structured, hierarchical and somehow ‘less true’ to the feminist ideals that permeate much of the rest of the neopagan movement, she expresses the same reaffirmation of her gender identification and reclamation of power for it that Eller describes as central to her exclusively ‘spiritual feminist’ respondents.

Another interview participant spoke about her experience of the empowerment afforded to women through the invitation to think of divinity as female.

... many years ago at university, one of the courses I was taking, one of the, one of the um... projects was to create the expression of a religious ritual or experience. And a half dozen of the women got together, and what they wrote was what their perception of a women's Goddess ritual would be. And they had all of us who chose to participate, which was most of us, in a circle, and you turned to the woman on your left, and you said 'Thou art Goddess' and when you did this, you handed them what was basically a 1950s, silver-plated sugar bowl, with two handles. And as you handed it to them by one handle, she held the other, and you tipped it so that they could look in. And when you looked into the sugar bowl, the secret of the sugar bowl was that there was a little pocket mirror in the bottom, so when the woman next to you said 'Thou art Goddess' and you looked in, you saw your own reflection. And that really, to me, is, is my best description of the experience of self-empowerment. (Judith)

Many of the women interviewed also chose to frame their speculation about the appeals of the Craft to men through their own commitment to notions of gender equality and social change. One commented, "I don't think that all men want a patriarchal society, or expect power" (Bronwen). Another took a more Jungian approach,

I think men become involved with... in the Goddess worship. Because, I think it harkens upon their own subconscious need that there are... and can be a feminine aspect to who and what they are and a feminine that's around them, rather than... a superiority, or being cut off from the other half. They are now... it allows them to become more in tune with it. I think patriarchy has screwed up more men than it has with women because men were... because men grew up and were taught men were superior, and therefore they have to act in certain 'manly' ways, which really don't, don't help them, because they don't... because they're not allowed to express or connect with their own femininity, which is essentially part of them, the anima and animus aspect again. Or the little black

dot in the white um, spiral thing. You know, they're not allowed to connect with that. You know, but in Goddess worship, they are.
(Beth)

Sometimes, women expressed both the sense of women's empowerment and the potential liberation of both men and women from the intellectual and spiritual limitations imposed by the dominant patriarchal system by asserting the necessity for a re-visioning of gender norms.

... for both men and women... [sigh]... um, it... requires a, a, an attitude adjustment. Or a re-visioning of themselves, and of what male is and of what female is. Whether you're male or female, you still have to get a re-visioning of, of, you still encounter, and you still have to go through a re-visioning of both what male and female are. ... And I think that a primary difficulty that men have in being involved in, in the Craft, is the um... is that dislocation between what they experience in their spiritual lives, and what they experience, or what the contexts are that they are having to work in outside, um, you know, in the other world, in the world we all kind of live in. (Deanne)

One participant described a summer solstice celebration to demonstrate how the Craft could recognize and honour the divine masculine without either diminishing the role of the Goddess or unwittingly appropriating patriarchal norms.

... when we come to the summer solstice, which to me is like... one of the ones that the men find the most significant, because to me it's, it's, it's the sacrificing God, which, when you come across it in Christianity, is presented in a very different way. But, the way it is in the, the Sun God, he's like, so essential, to growth and birth and the fertility of the land... and the land becomes fertile and he keeps continue to grow in his power and grow in his power, and then you come to Midsummer and... well, if he kept getting more and more powerful, he would scorch the Earth, and it would all die. And it's, he realizes that 'look, I could continue to grow in power, but I would kill the Great Mother, with my power. So I have to voluntarily step back, from power and dominance, and uh, eventually die, and by my death, I'm ensuring that life will

continue.' And to me, it's when we start with, when we lost this mythology, when we lost uh, acknowledging this in ritual, the voluntary sacrifice of the God-King, the stepping back from power and dominance... the men say, 'yes, I could dominate you, but I'm not going to, because I know if I do, I'm going to kill you. I will kill your spirit, if not your body. I will step back from domination, I will step back from this, this power that I could have'... because that's not... not... you know, if I do that, I'll be killing the Great Mother instead of honouring her. And I think that's the story of patriarchy, of men ceased to step back from power and dominance, and instead power and dominance were celebrated and rewarded and held up as a cultural ideal, and that's what patriarchy is. So, to me, the summer solstice celebration is, particularly for men, is, I mean, we acknowledge your sacrifice, we acknowledge what you're doing, and we honour you for it, just as you honour me as a woman for my life and birth giving... I honour you for your life giving by your death. (Martha)

Martha supports her egalitarian and complementary view of ideal gender roles for men and women in modern society through her interpretation of the Wheel of the Year mythology and her enactment of it in ritual. This particular construction allows her both to celebrate the divine feminine and women's empowerment while simultaneously celebrating the different, but equally indispensable function of the divine masculine and, by extension, of the human men who are the most visible reminders of it. This approach is different from that taken by some spiritual feminists, who focus on the Goddess to the exclusion of the God, and believe that women should focus on women's spirituality, and that men can fend for themselves (Eller 1993; Budapest 1979).

When the men I interviewed spoke about the Goddess and her importance to men, they tended to do so in the context of emphasizing the importance of the balance between the masculine and feminine aspects of the divine, rather than focusing solely on the role of the Goddess. One commented,

I think that one of the reasons why um, men become involved is that they feel that there um...is a lack of balance, is a lack of the feminine within the divine, and they don't necessarily see that replacing the masculine, by the feminine and the Goddess, without a God, is particularly balanced. (Don)

Another said,

I think that I already said it's a matter of balance. It's not just women who need a female image of the divine. Men are drawn to the feminine qualities of the deity as well. They encounter women in their day-to-day lives, as mothers and sisters and wives and co-workers... they need some way to find that same female presence in their spiritual lives. And then there's the God... who isn't the same as GOD... There are more ways for men to encounter themselves as men, as whole people, as whole spiritual people, inside the Craft... (Edward)

Edward's construction of the importance of the feminine aspect of the divine is informed by the Craft idea of symbolic parallelism, usually expressed in the phrase "As above, so below; as in the universe, so within the soul." Deity must be experienced as both male and female because human beings are experienced as both male and female, and to separate one half of that lived reality and exclude it from the spiritual is to create a spiritual landscape that is incapable of modeling important aspects of human existence. Human beings understand the divine through their experience of everyday life, and so if their perception of the divine is one-sided and exclusive, then by extension, their enactment of life in the material realm will be so as well. It can then be argued that the adoption of the balanced view of the divine presented by the Craft provides the symbolic resources to facilitate thinking that will be able to begin to address the social limitations and imbalances experienced by both sexes as a consequence of the patriarchal social system.

Men are trapped by the same [socially constructed, patriarchal] boundaries that women are. The definitions are just as enslaving as they are to women. By being cast as the master as so many of the standard religions do, it puts a burden on men that isn't valid either. And the expectation of meeting these goals of superiority and domination don't fit a lot of men, like, it doesn't ride right in the heart. So finding, being able to take a step off from the mainstream, and, uh, find a spiritual path that's balanced for them, works a lot better. (Paul)

Symbolic parallelism creates a situation in which religious belief can be construed as a form of social action.

... you take a look at the current [Christian, patriarchal] symbol set that's dominant, and uh, men are really rather strongly advantaged by the structure. Especially powerful men; people who have wealth, people who have power... why change it, I've got everything... But... men are strongly advantaged, makes it harder to notice that changes need happening. Doesn't mean that men can't come to recognize that changes need happening and that there are better ways, that there might be better ways of doing things, or at least fairer ways of doing things, or whatever... But that, um, some men may recognize that uh, either this symbol set isn't meeting my needs, or that although the symbol set is doing, doing really good for me, that I, uh, don't think it's really a good way of doing things. (Daniel)

Craft practitioners tend to be idealists, believing that changes in the symbolic categories of thought can create changes in the lived reality of situations. It is this basic premise that also underlies much of neopagan thinking about the nature of magic, which will be discussed in Chapter Six.

The Craft was also characterized, by both survey respondents and interview participants, as having a far greater degree of doctrinal latitude than was perceived to be the case in other religions. They considered the Craft to be more tolerant of diversity with regards to belief and practice, less prescriptive, and more adaptable to individual needs and preferences. On the survey, people

were asked to list the three things that appealed to them most about the Craft when they first became involved, and what appealed to them now. Almost 20 percent of all the responses to the first question had to do with the individual and personal orientation of the Craft: the flexibility of the beliefs; the requirement for the individual to take full responsibility for their morality and their life choices; the requirement to engage in self-reflexive and personal development practices; the empowerment of the individual to make choices and changes in their life; and the facilitation of a deeply personal relationship with the sacred, unencumbered by intermediaries. Twenty-three percent of the responses received to the second question highlighted the same elements. Two thirds of the interview participants also raised these points as indicating a basic orientation that served to distinguish the Craft from other Western religions.

... just in the basic belief, I mean, [the Craft] it's not all hell-fire and brimstone and you're going to hell unless you do this, this and this. It's like what they say is true. You can do what you want, as long as you don't harm anyone. ...it's just more beneficial because it's not so black and white. Like with, I find with the regular church, it's either right or it's wrong. ...it's just so cut and dried. There's no, there's no leeway. Like I find, with the Craft, there's a lot more grey area. ... You see, I was always taught, and I went through Sunday school, and I had religious education in school and stuff, and it's 'okay, this is what you believe. This is how you live. This is what you do.' It's not, 'okay, you could do this, but you could also do that.' [pause] It's just that it's very rigid in its outlook. (Jennifer)

Jennifer contrasts her perception of the lack of fixity and dogma in the Craft with what she has experienced as an overdetermined and limiting framework provided by Christianity. Another participant comments,

It's close enough to what I think that it works for me. There's enough flexibility in there too. It [the Craft] um, doesn't tell me

that 'no, you can't think that way because this is not how WE all think'. It's like, 'no, well, if you think that way, it's fine'. And I know that, um, maybe my views on magic are quite different from other people's views on magic, and I know that um... um... my views on divinity are different than my coven, than my coveners... Um, but that doesn't stop us from working together, and that doesn't stop us from getting our own experience out of what we're doing, and um, and I, and there's a great deal of encouragement... (Don)

Don emphasizes that participation in the Craft is not contingent on accommodating one's own beliefs to those of others. There is sufficient flexibility that it is possible for people with a range of opinions and orientations to work together closely.

Because of this emphasis on tolerance for diversity and difference among practitioners, the Craft is perceived as much less doctrinally and liturgically homogenous than other religions, particularly Western religions.

I think the primary difference between the Craft and the other religions that I'm familiar with is that it is um, it's a new religion, uh, because it's a lot less defined, it gives you a lot more input into defining it for yourself, uh, which means that a lot more than other religions, you realize that the um, the Craft as it is for you is not going to be the Craft as it is for somebody else with whom you don't circle intimately. It could be significantly different. Whereas um, once I've been to, um, one United Church, I can go to virtually any other United Church and I'd be surprised if I noticed anything different other than the decor and the total size of the population. I can even go from there to other similar flavours of religion, like born-again Christians and so on, and um, at first I won't notice that many differences. (Michael)

Another participant commented,

But choose, choose your mainstream, you know, your mainstream Christianity, pick a sect, bring in X number of that sect, ask them the same kinds of questions, and I think that you would get a fairly homogeneous view of 'what is God, what is Jesus, what is the Holy Spirit, how do you interact with them, what do they mean to you? How do they act in your daily life, like, how do you interact with

Jesus?' Um... I don't think that you'd be able to find that if you brought in, um, 20 Gardnerians of different covens. Heck, I'm not sure you could bring in 10 Gardnerians from the SAME coven... and get the same thing. (Judith)

This same diversity and lack of fixed doctrine, however, was used by one interview participant as evidence that the Craft is not a religion at all. When invited to elaborate, he explained,

Uh, the Craft, in my experience, understanding, the way I define it when I speak, the Craft is uh, a means of approaching deity, but it's uh, not a religion in that it doesn't have a set of parameters or doctrines, it doesn't have a common ritual base. Craft includes myself, it includes Wiccans, it includes Strega, like the Craft, to my mind, can even, does even involve some Christian witches... the practice of drawing energy from one's self, from the earth, from the cosmos, from deity, from the elements, to create change, isn't bounded by a religion. It simply um, a craft, an understanding, a means of drawing together the power, usually within a positive spiritual context, but in some cases, no. (Paul)

The version of religion that Paul repudiates here is prescriptive. Because the Craft does not prescribe a necessary set of parameters, doctrines or rituals as preconditions to the use of its techniques for generating religious experiences, and because of the broad latitude of possible worldviews with which these techniques are compatible, Paul rejects the label of 'religion', although he is slightly more comfortable with 'spirituality'. He perceives 'religion' as a restrictive, limiting and normative category. Paul is also one of the few interview participants who did not conflate their description of the Craft with that of neopagan witchcraft, which he did allow had enough consistency in the seasonal celebrations and overall worldview to be considered a religion. Religion, from Paul's perspective, is not defined in terms of the presence of

supernatural elements, or striving for a relationship with deity, it is defined by the presence of consistency, dogma and structure. Other participants, who were unwilling to dispute my implicit identification of the Craft as 'religion' were clearly equally uncomfortable with thinking of the Craft in the same terms that they had come to associate with more conventional religious choices.

Structural Differences

Seventeen of the eighteen interview participants mentioned structural differences that distinguished the Craft from other religions. Most often noted were the size of neopagan groups, which, even in the case of the largest pagan organizations are still smaller than most parish churches, and the fully decentralized nature of the practice. In many cases, these comparisons arose not only when participants were asked how the Craft is different from other religions, but also when they were invited to talk about their involvement in neopaganism and what sorts of benefits they had derived from it. People identified the external structure and embedded hierarchies of traditional religions as limiting to their personal freedom, autonomy, and expression and framed their own personal rejection of them in those terms.

... it's [the Craft has] allowed me to grow as a person... in a way that I don't think that Judaism, that's the religion I was part of and the culture I was part of before I made the change, would have allowed me to... (Beth)

I saw no reason that as an adult heterosexual woman, I could not be religiously involved in the practice of my parish. When that was denied me, it was literally as though I'd been, you know, thrown out of doors. Um... I did feel dispossessed. I felt disinherited, and um, and it's wonderful that, uh, that my religious, how would you say, I guess, um, that I can more openly express the mysticism I do feel [in the Craft], let's put it that way. (Francine)

...Or if you want to uh...[sigh] if you want to understand what's happening, you have to go to the priest, and the priest will interpret it for you officially, and this is the one true way that it can be interpreted, which is, I mean it's one of the reasons that I left Christianity... Um... all of those bullshit kinds of interpretations... And...[pause] I think that there's a lot of that... it's power over meaning... meaning and behaviour construction. (John)

Beth and Francine's concerns, when elaborated, center on their disempowerment as spiritually self-determining actors, by virtue of their sex, by the patriarchal religions in which they were raised. John's rejection of the Christianity in which he was brought up is also rooted in a sense of disempowerment, but one that is not sex-specific. The centralized determination of dogma and ritual observance common to traditional organized religion is perceived, by many Craft participants, to vest spiritual and moral authority outside of the individual practitioner. The ability to re-appropriate that authority and spiritual responsibility is part of the process of individual empowerment that many participants cite as one of the Craft's chief appeals. The ability to retain that flexible and individual focus is perceived by many Craft participants to be essentially embedded in the structural elements of the Craft as it is practiced. Some practitioners fear that the institutional accommodations necessary to bridge neopagans' sense of their beliefs and practices as 'religious' and the bureaucratic expectations of 'religion' for the purposes of regulation and protection are sufficient to fundamentally undermine neopaganism, by allowing those features they dislike about more traditional religions to accrue to it.

The Institutionalization Dilemma

Most of the Craft practitioners interviewed indicated that they would like to see neopaganism emerge as an acceptable, unremarkable, religious choice for Canadians. They would like to feel confident that they were entitled to the same level of protection from discrimination under the law, and that their religious beliefs and practices could not be used against them in, for example, custody hearings, unless it could be demonstrated that specific practices were relevant to the matter. They would like to be able to expect the same level of accommodation for their beliefs and practices that is extended to other religions. "You know," one interview participant commented, "I'd like to get to a point where the religion listings could have 'Wiccan meeting' right after 'Bahai lecture' and no one would care" (Andrea). Some would like access to the same tax treatments available to members of conventional denominations who give money to their religious organizations, or to obtain the right to perform legally binding marriages for members of the Craft community. These are slightly more controversial, with some participants concerned about the implications of the adaptations that might be involved in moving towards legally regulated, as opposed to merely legally recognized, status.

Some of these concerns involve the extent to which these two elements would be intertwined. If some of the large pagan organizations were able to obtain 'church' status and the ability to marry their adherents, would this result in legal recognition for paganism being extended only to their membership as well? This possibility makes the majority of Craft practitioners, who are not affiliated with such organizations, very uncomfortable, because the perception of

many is that if such recognition is given to the large organizations, it will reside with them exclusively, effectively creating two classes of pagans: those whose practice has legal standing and those whose practice does not. This would force those who want the benefits of legal standing to affiliate with and conform to the practices of the larger organizations, which fundamentally violates the organizational principle of coven autonomy around which much of neopaganism is based.

The necessity for this sort of 'inorganic' accommodation is also unlikely to sit well with those who already believe that the large pagan organizations are attempting to assert a kind of hegemony, simply by being much more prominent in the public view and therefore in a better position to influence the emerging media discourse around neopaganism as a religion. One participant recalled an exchange she had had with a large pagan organization some years before:

They [organization] sent word around that, that we could have, that they were going to get legal status and, legal status, and that if any of us wanted that legal protection extended to us, they would do that, provided that we handed in our Books of Shadows to them. (Deanne)

It is this sort of interference that is feared by many neopagans should only some forms of neopaganism be recognized as 'legitimate'. In that situation, most would rather see no institutionally recognized forms of paganism at all than contend with the sort of split within the community that could lead to one group being able to exert hegemonic authority.

Other concerns revolve around the potential or observed effects of importing structures, procedures, language and expectations from mainstream religions into the Craft. One respondent described her interaction, after having been solitary for a few years, with a large pagan organization trying to establish itself legally,

And you talk about how, I mean, how you have to be a third level initiate, and all this other stuff, and I'm going, 'no, I've never been initiated by anybody, I self-initiated myself because there was no one around at the time', and well, I'm not sure I'm 'qualified' to do anything yet, but at the same time, I feel I'm very connected... And yet, at the same time, compared to some, you know, if I was going to go talk to someone from a different sphere, you know, like [pagan organization], they'd be like, 'no, you have to go through this level of initiation, and you have to do this and you have to do this...' And I'm going, 'well, no I don't'. I don't have to do any of that kind of stuff... (Sarah)

Sarah perceives the larger organization as trying to disempower her as an effective spiritual actor by diminishing the relevance of the work she had done and the experience she had gained outside of their immediate context. She understands that the organization has to ensure that the people who represent it 'measure up' because it is looking for government recognition, but she still regards it as an unfortunate side effect of expanding beyond the intimacy of the coven.

[pagan organization] is recognized by the state, and there's a hierarchy in there... They're becoming very, very stuck on themselves. They're becoming very 'this is the way we do it', very dogmatic, I guess. And I found that that was one of the things that really, really attracted me to the Craft, was that there wasn't a lot of 'this is how it is, this is the only way it is, and there are no other options,' kind of thing. But actually, because the more it becomes institutionalized, the more it becomes like a religion. ... I don't think it [Craft groups] should become huge, you know, where there's membership in one church or one organization of you know, say a thousand or something [pause] because then I think you lose the connectedness that you feel with one another. ... You

lose that whole personal aspect of it, which I think is really important to the Craft. I think it's one of the most important things, that it's personal, it's not, you know, you go into church and you sit, you kneel, you stand, you sit, you kneel, you pray, you sing, you chant... (Sarah)

As groups strive to become more respectable and appeal to a broader population, they can easily become more 'church'-like. The best Canadian example of this is provided by the Wiccan Church of Canada. Despite its ambitious name, this group is based in Toronto and has few adherents outside of southern Ontario. The WCC was founded in 1979 by Tamarra and Richard James, and has also had branch temples in Toronto, Oitawa, Hamilton and Kitchener-Waterloo. It is a provincially incorporated group and has made many more accommodations with the existing legislation than have most others. The WCC has a statement of purpose, a set of by-laws, and a formalized curriculum for classes and private study leading to presentation before the committee of priesthood, which decides upon matters of initiation (James 1987). Unlike most covens, the WCC needs to concern itself with matters such as renting or finding space for its rituals and classes, some of which are attended by fifty to a hundred people. Instead of meeting on the actual dates of the sabbats and esbats, the WCC holds regular Sunday evening circles and conducts weekly classes, both of which are completely open to the public. There are also small, officially sanctioned covens within the membership, but participation in these is by invitation only.

The WCC leadership acknowledges their departures from the way in which neopagan witchcraft groups are generally run, but believe they are justified because these alterations allow the Craft to be made available to more people. Others disagree. One interview participant commented,

...I think that what you name it, it becomes. ... Um, and you know, we shape what we name. Names, names connect with whatever is close to it, or whatever... resonates with it within a person or in an animal, or in an organization, and, and, and sings that song, and no other songs. Um, and so you can, you can... it can obliterate other things, it can shape... So I have a problem with the word, with the word 'church' there. Um, I think that, um, I cannot in my head imagine a word, the word Wicca or Witchcraft and 'church' in the same breath, let alone in the same title, or sentence. Um, I have even more serious problems with what comes out of that, which is 'we meet Sundays, or Fridays, or whatever, uh, we have a laity, we have a priesthood, we have people exalting themselves over other people'... (Deanne)

The WCC is not run on a traditional coven structure, but rather on a modified 'church' structure,⁴⁴ where heavy emphasis is put on the division between the priesthood (initiated by the church) and uninitiated worshippers, or initiates from other traditions.⁴⁵ It is the WCC priesthood, along with the elected Board of Directors, who make decisions on behalf of the Church. In a coven system, most decisions are arrived at through discussion among the entire

⁴⁴ Wiccan Church of Canada literature refers to it as a 'pagan temple structure.'

⁴⁵ In member temple areas (those outside Toronto) the WCC sometimes allows non-WCC initiates to conduct rituals and classes when there is a severe shortage of adequately trained WCC people. This is considered a less than ideal situation, however, and if non-WCC people appear to be getting too influential, the policy of Oddysian teachers and ritual leaders only is re-imposed. In one instance, recognizing that the resources of their own initiates were strained in member temple areas, the WCC devised an ordination ritual to incorporate non-Oddysian initiates into the Wiccan Church of Canada priesthood without requiring them to undergo an initiation ritual in that tradition. This was the first indication that the WCC had given of any separation between leadership in the Church and training by the Church. I am aware of only one such ordination having been performed. The individual involved subsequently resigned her position because she felt that her involvement was being used by the Church leadership in order for them to represent themselves to government officials as more 'multi-traditional' and 'authoritative' in the wider pagan community than they actually were. She also developed differences with them over elements of their pastoral practices.

membership, although it might fall to one or two people to make the final choice based on what they have heard. Comments by founder Tamarra James would indicate that part of the WCC's purpose is to recognize that not everyone wants, or has time, to take the responsibility of becoming priesthood, and that no one should be excluded from neopagan worship forms because of this. She believes that the distinction between clergy (the people who organize and perform rituals and teach classes) and laity (the people who attend rituals and classes) is a valuable tool in the promotion of inclusion, rather than being a way of alienating people through the imposition of a hierarchy.⁴⁶

Again, many Craft practitioners do not agree with this position, citing the creation of a 'laity' as one of the chief dangers posed by institutionalization. The concept of 'priesthood', in neopagan witchcraft especially, does not imply a laity in the same way that laity is understood in Christian practice. Vivianne Crowley, a British Traditional priestess, writes:

Wicca offers not entry into a congregation of followers, but initiation into the priesthood of the mysteries. ...It does not offer a form of exoteric religion which is suitable for the many, but a spiritual discipline and path which is the way of a few, albeit an increasingly large few. In offering entry to the priesthood, Wicca offers a form of spiritual training which develops our self-knowledge and understanding so that we can in turn facilitate the spiritual growth of others. (1989:10)

And, in general, those Craft practitioners with Traditional backgrounds tend to emphasize and formalize the idea of 'priesthood' more than eclectic and Goddess-spirituality practitioners, for whom the self-directed aspects of religious

⁴⁶ personal communication, Tamarra James.

development are often paramount. The role of priesthood, in much of the Craft, is to assist others in facilitating their own spiritual development; it is an acknowledgment of a greater level of experience on a continuum of potential, not an indication that those in the priesthood are in a different relationship to divinity than other practitioners.⁴⁷ Elements of 'priesthood' considered in this manner, are intrinsic to the practice itself. The priesthood are in no way considered to be intermediaries between other individuals and the divine, and cannot, by virtue of their status, confer special spiritual 'gifts'.⁴⁸ Some practitioners, conscious of the status hierarchy that can be implied by such terms as 'High Priest' and 'High Priestess' have chosen not to use them at all, and have opted for more neutral sounding terms. One respondent described the way in which the group to which she belongs acknowledged her leadership:

So when I came back here, my own circle did a, did an initiation for me, and part of that was... asking me to be the Keeper of the Circle, and acknowledging me as the leader. Because I wanted, wanted some form of... agreement, with the circle that, that not that it was hierarchy or that I was the high priestess or any of that kind of stuff, but that, that I... that if there is a Keeper of the Circle, then

⁴⁷ This approach to the concept of priesthood is neither unique to, nor did it originate with, Craft practitioners. Even within Christianity, the concepts of 'priesthood' and 'ministry' are contested, with a spectrum of possibilities ranging from those found in orthodox Catholicism to those found in the Society of Friends. The perception neopagans tend to have of the relationship between clergy and laity in Christianity derives primarily from the traditional 'high church' models of Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism, combined with the missionary fervour of evangelical Methodism.

⁴⁸ In some forms of neopaganism, members of the priesthood may possess special expertise or skill, often in divinatory techniques, that they will exercise on behalf of other members of their community. Graham Harvey discusses this with regard to Asatru in particular (1997:60). However, this exercise of skill is still fundamentally different than, for example, the granting of absolution by a Catholic priest.

who is it? And if it's me, then let's say that, and you know, the time will come when I will step back from that and, and, then there will be someone else who will be Keeper of the Circle, but I wanted a form of legitimization and a form of embodiment for that. Um, not to have authority so much as just to have an acknowledgment of 'I'm here, and this is what I'm doing, and we all agree on this.' And it's given a sense of groundedness to the circle and a sense of stability, and like I said, we don't have this hierarchy, I like the word Keeper, because it's not hierarchical... (Martha)

Martha views her leadership as an achieved status arising out of the consent of her group, rather than an ascribed one, arising out of her possession of certain mystical qualities. When asked about how her group organized its leadership, another eclectic responded,

I don't want to be the witch queen who tells you when to pee and when to drink, and, you know, put up your hand to leave. It's just not like that at all. ... Essentially, we have leadership, because otherwise nothing would get done. [chuckles] Um, everyone has a say. I will write rituals, but we will have meetings beforehand, so if anybody has something specific they want done, I'll try to work it in, or if they want a speaking role, I'll give them a speaking role, that sort of thing. ...I will always accept suggestions, and will try to use them as often as I can. And that's just writing ritual. When we're there, we're very close knit as a group, and so we tend to look after each other. (Bronwen)

Bronwen's comments betray her level of discomfort with the more structured, more hierarchical leadership structure she perceives as being present in the Traditional Craft, wherein the term 'witch queen' originates.

The concern Craft practitioners express about vesting religious authority at too much of a remove from the individual is framed by Weber as a conflict between 'virtuoso' and 'mass' religiosity. Religious virtuosity, according to Weber is "the charisma that makes possible the continuous maintenance in everyday life of the distinctive religious mood which assures the lasting certainty

of grace" (1922:162). Much of neopaganism, especially the more traditional strands, constructs itself as a virtuoso religion, comprised of a spiritually engaged and attuned elite who work diligently and responsibly at their own spiritual advancement without recourse to intermediaries. Weber postulates that it will always be in the interest of bureaucratized religion to suppress charismatic and virtuoso religiosities that derive their source of spiritual sanctification outside of the institutional structure because those tendencies undermine the institution's ability to present itself as the source of a unique commodity. He writes,

Now, every hierocratic and official authority of a 'church' -- that is, a community organized by officials into an institution which bestows gifts of grace -- fights principally against all virtuoso-religion and against its autonomous development. For the church, being the holder of institutionalized grace, seeks to organize the religiosity of the masses and to put its own officially monopolized and mediated sacred values in place of the autonomous and religious status qualifications of the religious virtuosos. (1946:288)

Another concern about the division between priesthood and laity, from a neopagan perspective, arises around what is then 'appropriate' for the laity to see, do, or understand. Much of neopagan witchcraft movement, especially as one moves towards the more Traditional end of the spectrum, constructs itself as an esoteric Mystery tradition. When the mystical aspect, the training in the Mysteries and the more advanced ritual techniques are separated out and reserved for those either already in the priesthood, or in the priesthood training stream, the bulk of the 'laity' are presented with an exoteric, celebratory form of worship, which some practitioners believe distorts the nature of the religious practice overall, and can result in successively 'emptier' forms of it being

promulgated. One interview participant considers this to be a problem not only with the large pagan organizations, but also with the eclectic neopagan community more generally.

I think that the proliferation of so-called 'traditions', mostly started by people who have had some British Traditional training, really dilutes the Mysteries. There's nothing to prevent people who've only had part of their training from setting up shop and taking students, and those students may be honestly looking for Wicca, and willing to train and willing to work hard, but they just aren't going to get the whole picture. And people who would really benefit from being Gardnerian or Alexandrian either don't find it, or find it late when they've picked up all sorts of bad habits. A lot of eclectic rituals are very nice, but they're very surface, they don't reach deep into the Mysteries, and I'm afraid that with the eclectic community growing so much faster than the traditional community, that we may get to the point where the Mysteries are lost altogether. (Andrea)

Another interview subject identifies a paternalistic attitude towards those in the 'laity' that can arise out of this division.

Not only is there that split [between the priesthood and the laity] but there is also the concept of hidden, esoteric stuff which they [priesthood of large pagan organization] rely on and that the laity, the laity are not to be freaked. [pause] I mean, you do not freak the laity. You do not do things that actually cause there to be manifestations in public rituals because the little kiddies might freak [sarcastically]. You don't do full power rituals... (John)

These tendencies can be seen to undermine neopaganism's focus on the potential of each individual to achieve personal transformation through a direct relationship with the divine and through the celebration of the Mysteries that act as the symbolic framework for that transformation, through an importation of normative cultural expectations about 'priesthood' that arise out of a primarily Christian context.

The difficulty of negotiating these expectations of 'priesthood' and 'clergy' can be compounded when government recognition of neopagan clergy is actually attained. Although this has not been an issue in most parts of Canada, several congregationally organized neopagan organizations in the United States are able to designate members as 'clergy' recognized by their state governments. One American priestess wrote about her experience of being 'clergy' and why she subsequently decided to resign, on a private mailing list of academics working in nature religion areas. Her comments are illuminating, and highlight some of the difficulties inherent in trying to incorporate a non-Craft definition of 'clergy' into regular neopagan practices.

Five years ago, I received ordination in a legal Pagan church. ...I'd been an active member of that church and an initiated Witch for about five years before that, but I began to find my spiritual identity drifting in some unexpected ways once I had my legal papers. At the same time, my church also began to experience some semantic drift in how it used the word "minister", at first, adopted to simply serve as an almost humorous acknowledgment of the analogous role to Christian clergy, and, over time, increasingly coming to mean more or less the same stuff as what the Protestant traditions of our youth meant by the word "minister". There began to be an expectation, originally foreign to us, of specifically *pastoral duty* in being the legal representative of the church.

I was finding, in fact, that claiming the name led to a real feeling that I ought to be playing the game. And my church was too. We began talking about pastoral counseling, pastoral outreach, pastoral duties.

Pastoral. There is SO much in that word. What the heck is a "pastor"...? It's the old Christian idea of the shepherd, and the flock, right? And with it comes a sort of noblesse oblige idea, that some of us are of a higher order than others -- human sheep herders, not herded sheep, and know better than those others what they need. Now, that might be a reasonable notion in a Christianity full of concepts like an elect, a rapture, or a chosen

people, but how much sense does it make in the context of a coven, a small, intimate working group of peers?

An example of the kind of baggage that comes with uncritical acceptance of ideas from Christianity like "clergy", "ministry" or "pastoral care" comes, ironically enough, in the recommendation letter my coven recently received from my good friend, L., upon our applying to the Covenant of the Goddess. Her words at first made me glow with deep pride. I admit it, this is exactly the way I want to be perceived! It wasn't until much later that I discerned the poison in the apple. I'll quote the passage in question to those of you not in COG:

"P.B. [husband and priest] and Cat were introduced to me two and a half years ago by a mutual friend, B., when I moved to the area with my terminally ill husband. P. and Cat take their roles as clergy very seriously, and this includes aiding a member of the Community when called upon. With only this introduction and the knowledge that I was to soon need a support system, they and their whole coven adopted us. It was not unusual to have someone from [coven] show up with dinner made or to have them arrive in force to help with the yardwork. When [husband] died, they were there to help me, with grief counseling and love, through the difficult transition. Their compassion is exemplary..."

While this is WONDERFUL praise, it's also, loathe though I am to admit it, more than a trifle distorted. I didn't make any visits to L. after the first one as "clergy". I went as her *friend*. And I didn't counsel her in her grief, I held her in my arms, rubbed her back, and rocked her like a baby while she cried. And notice how the generous care and love of my coven got coopted by the fact that P. and I lead the group, are the "clergy"? We, as pastors, get the credit. They, as sheep -- ???

I was not able to claim any of this as pastoral service when I gave my annual ministry report to my church that year. It felt absolutely wrong to make use of my being-in-relation with L. as a measure of my *performance* of a *role*.

... And so, I am no longer a minister. I've given up my ordination in my old church, because I see it as distorting my vision of *Pagan* leadership, and specifically being a Wiccan High Priestess. As High Priestess, I am NOT focusing my energy on all comers, but only on those few who put in as much as they receive. This is radically different from any concept of "ministry" coming out of mainstream Protestant thought. While it's not a point of view incompatible with legal ordination, per se, I have come to realize

that, for me at least, terms like “clergy” and “minister” are spiritually wrong turns on my path. (Cat)⁴⁹

Cat found that identifying herself as ‘official’ clergy caused the interpretations of her activities by those around her to change in ways with which she was uncomfortable. She was being given credit for them, but not as an individual person, only as the holder of a role. She experienced this as fundamentally depersonalizing, because followed to its logical conclusion in classical Weberian bureaucratic theory, the role could be held just as well by another, with the same outcomes. Her unique and personal contribution had been somehow negated. She rejects the notion that her actions were motivated by the expectations and exigencies of her pastoral role, and did not wish to be put in a position where that form of ‘pastoral service’ could be expected or demanded of her simply by virtue of her bearing a ‘clergy’ label. She emphasizes that her chosen responsibility is only to those who put back in as much as they take out, thus reinforcing the expectation of equal participation by all adherents that is prevalent in much of neopaganism.⁵⁰

Helen Berger discusses the institutionalization impulse in American neopagan witchcraft quite extensively, locating it as part of a wider tendency towards what she calls a “routinization of creativity” (1999:100-122). This is the

⁴⁹ Nat-Rel mailing list August 14, 1998. Used with permission. Names have been edited to improve anonymity.

⁵⁰ This does not mean that every participant is expected to contribute in exactly the same way, merely that every participant must contribute in the ways that they can at the time.

process through which neopagan groups are tending to become more homogenous through greater awareness of each other and greater exchange of ideas, information and techniques both through direct interaction and through various media (books, magazines, internet). She considers the routinization that she has observed in neopagan witchcraft to be "consistent with the growth of homogeneity in other organizational spheres of late modernity" (102).

She discusses several of the avenues institutionalization has taken in the neopagan communities she has observed. She describes the formation of Circle Sanctuary, one of the few pagan churches that has managed to acquire a land base. Circle runs festivals on its land, as well as seminars and workshops. It produces a newsletter with a wide circulation (15,000) and is active both as a networking and pagan advocacy group.⁵¹ EarthSpirit Community, the

⁵¹ Although Margot Adler (1986) presents Selena Fox, founder of Circle Sanctuary, primarily within a neopagan witchcraft context, and Circle was identified throughout most of the 80s as a Wiccan church, Michael York (1995) provides evidence that Fox's self-identification is becoming more broadly pagan, and expanding beyond the 'witchcraft' framework. Quoting from an issue of Circle Network News (Winter 89/90:5), York cites Fox as saying, "I am narrowing the focus of my magic and concentrating on Planetary Healing... I no longer consider myself primarily a Wiccan priestess. I have founded a new religion and invented some new names. The name of this new Nature Religion is the Naturean religion, also known as the Church of Nature, the Nature Mystic Movement and the Mystic Nature Church. It is a spiritual environment religion..." (1995:138n13). This movement away from a narrow definition of neopaganism as Wicca, at least from Fox's perspective, is consistent with discussion I had with her at the American Academy of Religion meeting in 1994, where she seemed quite interested in developing a form of paganism that would be 'true' to the land on which it was being practiced, rather than importing and adapting paganisms from elsewhere. She was especially concerned about the ethical implications of non-natives living in North America appropriating native spiritual traditions, and the ways in which that potential cultural damage that could be caused by this might be mitigated. (field notes, November 1994)

motivating and organizing force behind several New England pagan festivals, including Rites of Spring, has tried intermittently to gather enough community financial support to be able to offer adequate salaries to their now mostly volunteer staff, and to be able to purchase land in order to reduce their dependence on the costly rental of other sites, just as Circle had done almost a decade earlier. These attempts have been met with mixed reaction. "When ESC requested funds, some members sent money and supported the creation of an endowment to provide staff salaries. Others feared that this would result in a paid clergy, the formation of a hierarchy, and a decrease in coven autonomy" (107). These are the same reservations expressed by many of my interview participants about the nascent institutionalization attempts in Canada.

Another avenue described by Berger is the formation of the Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans (CUUPs). She highlights this as an interesting development, because it gives those pursuing neopagan forms of spirituality the ability to associate with an existing group that already possesses an organizational framework, a capital base, and a seminary training program within the context of a syncretic, liberal religious ideology. 'Unitarian' is also a much less stigmatized religious identification than 'witch' for those who are concerned about how their children will be treated in schools and other interactions with the broader social community. Berger does not present this partnership as completely unproblematic, citing several instances where more Christian-oriented UU congregations have objected to any association with CUUPs, or CUUPs' use of their facilities.

CUUPs does not appear to be as established in Canada as it is in the United States, probably owing in part to the much lower population levels in Canada. The CUUPs website does not list any Canadian chapters.⁵² Groups may be operating informally, without the benefit of official chapter status, and still other congregations may be using some of the CUUPs produced materials to supplement their regular congregational practice, without having any formal or semi-formal pagan identified group. One of the barriers in fostering a closer relationship between Canadian Unitarian Universalists and neopagans could arise out of the apparently disparate demographic situations of the two groups. As was indicated in Chapter Three, my survey indicated that almost 70 percent of Craft respondents were younger than forty, whereas almost half of the Unitarian Universalist membership recorded on the 1991 census was 50 or older. This variation could be an indicator of significant cultural differences, needs and interests that would have to be carefully addressed in order that neither group end up feeling marginalized or dispossessed.

Other Canadian neopagan organizations are unaffiliated with any existing mainstream church body and have a range of primary orientations. There are official and semi-official structures that exist to organize and facilitate community events and networking. The organizing committees for Wic-Can Fest, the Avalon East Pagan Festival, and the Kaleidoscope Gathering, as well as the Toronto Pagan Pub Moot, the Ottawa Pagan Brunch and the Calgary Coffee

⁵² As of March 27, 2001. At the end of 1999, one Canadian chapter was listed: NUUMoon in Thunder Bay, Ontario.

Cauldrons are all examples of this. These events exist to promote social interaction among those who already identify with the Craft, and social opportunities for those who wish to do so. Their energies are focused inwards on their immediate pagan communities.

The Pagan Federation of Canada (PFPC) is also a networking organization for neopagans, but one that also includes as central parts of its mandate the dissemination of accurate information about neopaganism to the broader Canadian community and the recognition of neopaganism as a legitimate religious choice. The Pagan Federation is not, however, seeking to have itself recognized as a church in the more traditional sense. The PFPC exists primarily as an information and networking resource, although it has, at times, also coordinated a prison visitor program in Eastern Ontario. The organization itself neither trains nor initiates practitioners, nor does it run public rituals as part of its mandate.

Individuals over the age of 18 can join the PFPC upon payment of a \$20 yearly fee. This entitles them to receive a newsletter intermittently, and to vote in the annual Board of Directors elections.⁵³ Pagan groups or covens cannot apply for membership in the PFPC as such, only individuals may hold membership status. In applying for membership, individuals are indicating their

⁵³ The nature of the newsletter varies. Sometimes, it is produced by the PFPC itself, but more often, it is a newsletter already being offered through other avenues. For a time, before it ceased publication, a PFPC membership included a subscription to *Hecate's Loom*. Since that time, it has included a subscription to *8Sabbats* (Montreal) or another relevant regional newsletter.

agreement with the three basic principles of the Pagan Federation: 1. Love for and kinship with Nature; 2. If it harms none, do what you will; 3. If gender is attributed to any aspect of the Divine, both the feminine and the masculine are acknowledged. These principles are the same, although worded slightly differently, as those to which the parent organization of the PFPC subscribes. The Pagan Federation of Canada is a member organization of the Pagan Federation International, which began in Great Britain in 1971. The Pagan Federation's main web site gives contact information for member organizations in the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Scandinavia, the United States, Germany, and Switzerland, as well as Canada.⁵⁴ There is also a Pagan Federation web site in South Africa, although it is difficult to determine if it is directly affiliated with the British organization.

Differently oriented yet again are the Covenant of Gaia Church of Alberta, the Congregationalist Witchcraft Association and the Temple of the Lady. These organizations are seeking both the recognition of neopaganism as a valid religious choice, recognition for themselves as churches, and some role in a more public neopagan ministry. These groups are organized in a congregational, 'non-denominational' fashion, allowing affiliation by individuals or groups⁵⁵ subject to agreement with a Statement of Belief or set of Articles of

⁵⁴ As of March 28, 2001.

⁵⁵ Membership in the Temple of the Lady is held only by individuals.

Faith.⁵⁶ This codification of the fundamental beliefs of the religion is a requirement of the provincial governments for registration as a religious organization. The Congregationalist Witchcraft Association was founded in British Columbia in 1991 by members of Pagans for Peace, a group originally based in Toronto. Currently, they claim to have members in six provinces, and active temples in Ontario and British Columbia.⁵⁷ The Covenant of Gaia Church of Alberta, based in Calgary, also began in the early 1990s, and is a legally recognized church in Alberta. The Temple of the Lady, the bulk of whose membership is in British Columbia, was incorporated in the fall of 1990.

All of these organizations are modeled, in whole or in part, on the Covenant of the Goddess (COG), an American organization comprised of various neopagan witchcraft groups that was founded in California in 1975. It was established partially in order to combat persecution and harassment, and partially in order to obtain legal rights and privileges for witches; these remain its chief goals today. In 1985, the Covenant of the Goddess had approximately 70 member 'congregations', and a budget of \$10,000 (Adler 1986:103-105). In March 2000, COG's membership had increased to 139 member covens and 92 solitary practitioners.⁵⁸ In addition, in 1998 COG implemented an Associates Program, which would allow groups that do not qualify for regular membership

⁵⁶ The Articles of Faith of the Covenant of Gaia Church of Alberta and the Statement of Shared Beliefs and Ethics of the Congregationalist Witchcraft Association are given in Appendix E.

⁵⁷ Congregationalist Witchcraft Association website. As of February 28, 2000.

⁵⁸ Macha Nightmare, personal communication.

because of an inability to fulfill all of the membership criteria, to obtain non-voting associate status in COG.⁵⁹ This has the potential to increase COG's overall membership levels somewhat more rapidly, although since the program's first full year in operation will be Samhain 1999 to Samhain 2000, the numbers of those who have officially joined under this program are not yet available.

The Covenant of the Goddess produces a newsletter eight times yearly, runs a members-only email list, and sponsors a national festival each summer, at which they also hold their annual general meeting. Attendance at the festival is not restricted to COG members, although participation in the business meeting is. Donations to the Covenant of the Goddess are tax-deductible in the United States, and the organization can issue ministerial credentials to qualified individuals upon request, which allow them to solemnize marriages in many of the more liberal states. This congregational form of institutionalization is favoured by many neopagans because it separates the organization itself from the substance of training and practice, and in that way preserves the principle of coven autonomy around which neopaganism is traditionally structured. The

⁵⁹ Criteria for full coven membership in the Covenant of the Goddess include: acknowledgment and worship of the Old Gods, or the Goddess; ethics compatible with those set out by the Covenant; having met monthly or more often for at least six months; having at least three members who qualify under the Covenant's definition of 'priesthood' at least one of whom must meet the more stringent criteria for 'elder'; being a cohesive and self-perpetuating group; and being recommended without reservation by two active members of the Covenant. These conditions must be maintained in order to continue coven membership from year to year. Payment of yearly dues, as set out in the previous year's General Meeting, is also required to maintain active status.

Covenant of the Goddess, for example, as an organization, neither trains nor initiates individuals; only member covens perform those functions.

The last major organizational style seen among neopagan organizations in Canada is that represented by both the Wiccan Church of Canada and the Aquarian Tabernacle Church. Both of these are traditions in their own right, and not umbrella organizations linking groups practicing a variety of traditions. Therefore, membership in these bodies implies agreement with the beliefs and practices as set out by their specific traditions. The Wiccan Church of Canada is Canadian in origin, and has been operating since 1979, primarily in Ontario. The Aquarian Tabernacle Church in British Columbia, which was incorporated in 1994, is affiliated with the American church of the same name based in Washington and founded in 1979. Both of these traditions operate with a distinction between priesthood and laity, and train and initiate within their own frameworks. The ATC's American operation also runs a seminary that has recently been accredited to issue degrees in ministry. Some neopagans object to any form of neopaganism that separates priesthood and laity, and see these groups as not representative of the broader trends in neopaganism on that basis. There are therefore concerns that attaching legal recognition only to those groups will be problematic for the majority of pagans who do not belong to them. Most, when asked, will state that they do not have a problem with having either the WCC or the ATC legally recognized as 'churches' so long as they are

two of a variety of legally recognized options for neopagans, and not the only ones.⁶⁰

Summary

Craft practitioners simultaneously try to appropriate and reject the language of religion. The temptation to appropriate is fueled by the status, legitimacy and protection that recognition as a religion would confer. The appropriation is supported by the functional similarities between the way in which neopaganism provides a meaningful worldview through which individuals can relate themselves to their lives and their universe, and the ways in which other religious traditions do the same. Because they tend to construct one's religious affiliation, or lack thereof, almost entirely as a matter of personal choice, many neopagans believe that all such choices should be treated equally. The rejection of the concept of religion, or the temptation to distance Craft

⁶⁰ In British Columbia, there has been some tension between the 'non-denominationally pagan' Temple of the Lady and the ATC around the provision of institutionally recognized public ministry services (prison ministry, hospital chaplaincy, legal handfastings, university chaplaincy). Although many of these were once provided by individuals endorsed by the Temple of the Lady (who were, in some cases, also involved with the ATC), they have increasingly come to be dominated by ATC members. As the ATC has become more established with the institutional regulating bodies as the organization providing ministry services, non-ATC pagans are finding it more difficult to gain permission to perform these ministries, even when they had been doing so previously. They are also experiencing difficulty getting procedural information on gaining access to these ministries from the organizations that arrange for interfaith services. There is some speculation that the ATC is being preferred simply because it more closely resembles other institutionally organized religions than does the Temple of the Lady - in that ATC adheres to an initiate and clerical hierarchy and ToL does not - rather than as a result of a comparison of the relative ability of either organization to provide actual service.

practice from it, arises primarily out of a conflation of the word 'religion' with organized Western religions perceived as hierarchical, patriarchal, exoteric, normative and prescriptive, with which many participants have had negative experiences, and to which all have had at least some exposure. Participants often highlight the decentralization, lack of doctrine, symbolic gender complementarity, holistic, mystical and practical aspects of the Craft to underline the perceived significance of these differences.

Institutionalization and the formation of more broadly based neopagan organizations is often perceived as somewhat problematic, because although such organizations might be able to further the acceptance of neopaganism as a religion in the first sense, they are seen to be susceptible to co-optation by the dominant and normative expectations exerted by the notion of religion in the second sense. It is certain that institutionalization attempts will continue as long as there are those willing to organize and administer them, and it is almost equally certain that those unwilling to support these efforts directly will still be glad of any gains that are made in the areas of legal protection and recognition. The majority of neopagan activity in Canada, however, is likely to continue in a primarily decentralized and 'dis'-organized sphere where the emphasis remains on Craft practice as a means through which the individual is empowered to construct a spirituality from the range of available options provided by neopagan religious discourse.

Chapter Six: Magic in the Craft

It is difficult to undertake any examination of the Craft without dealing with the idea of magic, with which it is almost synonymous in general public perception. Magic fascinates the Western mind. Echoes of it resonate through our myths, our fairytales and our accounts of religious miracles. Examinations and analyses of magic have been a mainstay of both sociological and anthropological research since the formative days of those disciplines and yet it remains a marginalized practice, acknowledged but dismissed by those whose conceptualizations define the acceptable boundaries of our social world. The assertion of the existence of magic and the practice of magic as a specific activity within the neopagan Craft are among the things that differentiate it most obviously at first glance from other Western religious traditions. Magic is also one of the elements that marginalizes and stigmatizes the religious movement in the eyes of the broader society, which tends to maintain either a sensationalized or pathologized view of it. Magic is fine for those who do not know any better or who live in a different social and cultural world, says the often unarticulated status quo, but it does not belong in the modern urban West, alongside dishwashers, subway trains, and nuclear power plants. This construction of magic as primitive, illusory and archaic is not shared by its neopagan practitioners.

Modern Western magical belief and practice, often described as 'occult belief', are not something that fit neatly into most descriptions of how the modern world operates. 'Occult belief' is used as a catch-all category for

characterizing beliefs and practices that are perceived as ranging from the irrational to the absurd. Marcello Truzzi notes,

In many ways, the occult is a residual category, a wastebasket for knowledge claims that are deviant in some way, that do not fit the established claims of science or religion. And once such a knowledge claim gains acceptance within establishment science or religion, it loses its status as an occultism. (1976:245)

Magic is not perceived as a valid or effective way of dealing with life or the universe, because it is not culturally acknowledged as being a form of discourse that represents legitimate truth claims. Singer and Benassi characterize occult beliefs as a kind of dysfunctional thinking when they comment “The psychological mechanisms involved in occult beliefs may represent more dramatic forms of some mundane pathologies of reasoning... occult beliefs, which are at the outer limits of irrationality, may throw some light on more ordinary reasoning pathologies” (1989:383-4).

These traditional, and deeply ingrained associations between magic and what is ‘irrational’, ‘deviant’ or ‘pathological’ are grossly oversimplified. They arise out of a one-dimensional view of magic that considers only the relationship of the apparent means to the purported ends of a given working. This approach fails both to contextualize the working and to account for what might make the beliefs or practices persuasive at the level of the individual. To assert that occult belief and / or magical practice represents a reasoning pathology is to imply that those who subscribe to it are guilty of defective reasoning, without allowing for features of their subjective experience which might explain why magical practices are not only reasonable, but a healthy and progressive way of making sense of

the universe. The use of magic in the context of neopaganism challenges the traditional analysis of magic, by suggesting that magical practice is more about the practitioner than it is about the specific acts themselves. Further, magical practice is only the most obvious distillation of a set of attitudes and beliefs about the empowerment of the individual that pervades neopagan spirituality more generally. Magical practice in the context of the Craft is perceived by its practitioners to produce outcomes very different than those traditionally presumed to be its goal.

Traditional Social Science: The Instrumental Approach

Sociologists and anthropologists, and to a certain extent theologians, have gone to extraordinary lengths to distinguish between the often blurred and overlapping concepts of science, religion and magic, as though to avoid delegitimizing the former two by some accidental association with the latter. Durkheim, Weber and Malinowski all address this debate in some depth, and their example is followed by subsequent generations of researchers and theorists. To overgeneralize and oversimplify the results of these early discussions, the distinctions emerge approximately as follows: Science provides explanations for natural phenomena that can be rigorously tested and empirically proven to be correct or incorrect, and thus provides a means of making accurate statements about the objectively-given world. Religion addresses existential quandaries, issues of morality and meaning, and provides explanations about a subjectively experienced world which cannot be empirically tested and which proceed from assumptions about some kind of supernatural

force or realm. Magic is seen to be uneasily caught in the gulf between the two, purporting to effect and describe the natural world, but through means which, because they do not respond well to empirical testing, can only be characterized as somehow super- or supra-natural. Tanya Luhrmann, in her study of the contemporary British magical scene, characterizes most sociocultural approaches to magic as relying on either an 'intellectualist' argument, "which explained magic as based upon mistaken belief" (Tylor, Frazer) or a 'symbolist' argument, "which explained away the magic by showing how it had little to do with belief" (Durkheim, Leach, Douglas) (1989:347). These tendencies are still found in much of the current discussion on the subject of magic.

To take only one example, Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge distinguish between religion and magic on fairly traditional Durkheimian grounds, asserting that "magic does not concern itself with the meaning of the universe, but only with the manipulation of the universe for specific goals" (1985:30). They define this distinction by differentiating between the kind of compensators offered by religion, and those offered by magic.

A compensator is the belief that a reward will be obtained in the distant future or in some other context which cannot be immediately verified. ... In our system, compensators fall along a continuum from the general to the specific. Specific compensators promise specific, limited reward. The most general compensators promise a great array of rewards or rewards of vast scope. A shaman's promise that, if certain ritual procedures are followed, a person will be cured of warts is a specific compensator. The promise of a happy life is a general compensator. (Stark and Bainbridge 1985:6-7, emphasis in original)

Using this definition of compensator, they assert that "magic deals in relatively specific compensators, and religion always includes the most general

compensators" (1985:30). They define religions as "*human organizations primarily engaged in providing general compensators based on supernatural assumptions*" (1985:8, emphasis in original).

In distinguishing between magic and science, Stark and Bainbridge are unabashedly Weberian, relying upon the adequacy of the explanations provided given verifiable and replicable knowledge about an objectively given world.

...because magic deals in specific compensators, it often becomes subject to empirical verification. This means that magic is chronically vulnerable to disproof. Claims that a particular spell will cure warts or repel bullets can be falsified by direct tests. ... The empirical vulnerability of magic also helps us identify the line between magic and science. Here we fully agree with Max Weber (1963:2), who distinguished magic from science on the basis of the results of empirical testing: "Only we, judging from the standpoint of our modern views of nature, can distinguish objectively in such behavior those attributes of causality which are 'correct' from those which are 'fallacious,' and then designate the fallacious attributions of causation as irrational, and the corresponding acts as 'magic'." Magic flourishes when humans lack effective and economical means for such testing. Indeed, it can be said that we developed science by learning how to evaluate specific explanations offered by magic. (1985:31)

In the end, they "reserve the term *magic* for compensators that are offered as correct explanations without regard for empirical evaluations and that, when evaluated, are found wanting" (1985:32). Thus, Stark and Bainbridge would seem to land firmly in Luhmann's 'intellectualist' category, defining magic in terms of inadequate or mistaken beliefs. Because of this focus on the perceived fundamental error of magical thought, Stark and Bainbridge persistently dismiss magic as having any value, especially within the context of modern religion, which is their primary area of examination.

That the most central compensators of religion are immune to disconfirmation, while the compensators of magic often are disconfirmed, has a profound sociological implication. It leads to the conclusion that there will be a marked tendency for religion and magic to become differentiated, for religious organizations not to deal in magic, and for specialists dealing only in magic to appear in societies. ... Although the primitive, part-time priest will deal in both, as societies become more complex, the priesthood will move away from providing magical services, for to provide magic is to risk not only the failure of these services but the implication that, if their magic is false, perhaps their theology is too. Churches do not really need magic, even though a substantial demand for magic persists. Let others with less to lose run the risks of dealing in magic. (1985:110)

In our judgment, faiths suited to the future will contain no magic, only religion. This will not, of course, allow them to escape in the long run the forces of secularization -- all successful faiths are fated to be tamed by the world. But faiths containing only religion will be immune to scientific attack and thus will avoid the accelerated secularization in effect during recent centuries. (1985:456)

Modern magic pretends to be science or common sense, and thus is seldom recognized for what it is; mainline religious denominations are well rid of it. (1985:528)

By defining magical belief and practice in the way in which they do, Stark and Bainbridge drastically limit the possible explanations for magic's persuasiveness. They reduce magic to being an instrumental procedure, a means of obtaining a certain specified goal. They focus their attention on the end of a magical working: whether or not the stated aim was achieved and whether there could be a scientific explanation for that achievement. They view magic as an isolated act. This is a traditional approach, but, in terms of examining modern Western magic, probably a misleading one. It assumes that magic is performed in order to achieve the ends set out in the working, and that the desirability of those ends accounts for the persuasiveness of magical practice. However, it

would appear that, in the case of magic as it is performed within the context of neopaganism, although the ends are desired, it is nonetheless the process of becoming magical and performing magic that is of the greatest significance, and not necessarily the achievement of the specified ends of any given working.

New Directions: Tanya Luhrmann

Neopagans generally consider themselves to be members of a decentralized, pagan religious movement, which draws upon pre-Christian folklore, and mythology for its inspiration, and which centrally features magic in its worldview (Adler 1986; Crowley 1989; Marron 1989; Starhawk 1979; Skelton 1990). Examining magic in the context of neopaganism, and especially neopagan witchcraft, is interesting because it is a modern Western movement (Kelly 1990; Luhrmann 1989). By and large, witches were brought up in the scientific, progressive twentieth century, and not raised in a "primitive" culture, which advocated or practiced magic as a routine matter. This apparent dissonance between magical belief and modern culture is what sparked Tanya Luhrmann's doctoral research at Cambridge University in England, which was subsequently incorporated into *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft*. Luhrmann comments,

Magicians are ordinary, well-educated, usually middle-class people. They are not psychotically deluded, and they are not driven to practice by socio-economic desperation. (1989:7)

I became interested in modern magic because these particular people seemed to pose difficulties for the standard interpretations of magic. Modern magicians are sophisticated, educated people. They know of a way of explaining nature -- science -- which has been remarkably successful in its explanation and remarkably antagonistic towards ritualistic magic. They do not come from a

background which accepts magic easily and their rites are novel creations; their magic cannot be explained as some burden of the past. They are clearly equipped with the mental equipment to think non-magically. (1989:10)

Luhrmann takes these observations about magical practitioners and turns them into a solid ethnography of modern magic in contemporary England. Her goal is to explain the manner in which magical ideas go from being alien to being accepted and she does this with great facility, drawing upon detailed participant-observation research of the neopagan magical community in London and its environs. Luhrmann's approach to the issue of magic, treating magical practice as part of an interpretative process which acts to both nurture and explain changes in individual experience, rather than as a series of isolated goal-driven acts, is superior to the 'ends-oriented' interpretation offered by more traditional social scientists inasmuch as it allows her a great deal more flexibility to answer her "classic anthropological question: why do they practice magic when, according to observers, the magic doesn't work" (1989:4). Luhrmann's key insight is that the manner in which an individual becomes magical, the magical 'context' is as integral a part of the practice of magic as any ends-oriented spell.

Neopagans talk about Magic

Craft practitioners are aware of the ways in which magic is constructed in the popular culture that surrounds them and the way in which these constructions become conflated in people's minds with what neopagans do. Like the word 'witch', the word 'magic' has acquired a constellation of both

denotative and connotative meanings, which it is difficult for those seeking to reorient the word to overcome. When asked what public perception he would change about the Craft if he could, one interview participant replied:

That it's all about ma-a-a-a-gic. And that if you become a witch, you'll learn all about ma-a-a-a-gic, and you'll be able to cause spectacular, unnatural things to happen. [pause] The whole Hollywood notion of ma-a-a-a-gic as something you can wave a wand or wiggle your nose and have lightning flash and thunder rumble. We'd all be a lot better off if that idea of magic just went away, disappeared. Then people could start seeing magic for what it is. (Edward)

Participants also acknowledge that this particular view of magic is not entirely absent inside the Craft, and that some individuals still attempt to use magic as part of their own personal power trip. One comments,

...Um... and then there are some [men] who are quite blatant about uh, 'well, it's [the Craft is] about magic, it's about power,'. And when they say it they're not talking about reclaiming... They are quite literally saying, you know, that the magical idea of, that you impose your will and even the Gods must answer to your will, that kind of ultimate coercion, so to speak. (Francine)

Edward continues his commentary with, "The people who want ma-a-a-a-gic aren't reverent. They want the power, but not the connection or the responsibility... they try to use it for... sort of personal aggrandizement." In general however, neopagans attempt to move away from the culturally dominant, sensationalized and stereotyped versions of magic in their own constructions of the practice. Individuals who obviously embrace these notions, or who act in ways that will reinforce them to the broader public, can be met with disapproval. One participant describes her exasperation with a segment of the young population:

...you have the little 'baby goths', you know, the 'gothlings' that's what they're called, you know, who've watched the movie *The Craft*, and who want to call Memnon, or whatever they call him in the movie, so that they can have the same powers, and things like that... You just kind of want to take them, and slap them silly, and tell them to go and take off their stupid makeup and false teeth and go... and pentacles that are upside down, and go and get a life! (Beth)

Another recounts a 'publicity stunt' she recalls having been done by a publicly prominent witch:

[individual] cast a spell on, in public on um, I can't even remember who it was, probably the [sports team]. ...And the person who was my teacher said, 'You know, these people are going to do us more harm than the Inquisition did.' And I think he was exaggerating, he knew he was exaggerating, but I think he had a point. (Deanne)

The difficulties many practitioners have experienced in having a religious identification that fundamentally includes the possibility of a real and potent version of magic taken seriously has led them to develop ways of talking about magic so that magic becomes analogous or equivalent to other, more accepted, social and religious practices. For example, in the interview excerpt below, Edward describes magic as a form of prayer:

Edward: Magic is prayer, pure and simple. We pray, and sometimes we thank the Gods for their gifts, and sometimes we ask for their assistance. It may be assistance with a relationship, or with money or school, or a problem we're trying to work through... but it isn't an instant solution, it's prayer...

Sian: Like the practice in a lot of Latin-American Catholic areas of writing your wish on a slip of paper, and taking it to the church, and slipping it under a lit candle in front of an altar or shrine...?

Edward: Yes, exactly like that. Magic and prayer have become separated in our culture, and magic has taken the worst of it.

Edward is underlining a similarity between what neopagans describe as 'magic' and what more mainstream religious traditions designate as 'prayer'. Both, he asserts, involve a request for assistance from a deity, spiritual figure, or entity. He does not, in his conversation with me, address the differences between the way in which magic is often conceptualized by pagans and the way in which 'prayer' is constructed in the mainstream. Among those are the nature of the petitioner as an active, participating force whose skill and competence will figure into the eventual success or failure of the 'request', and the dismissal or devaluation of those devotional practices most closely resembling 'spellwork' as 'superstitious' by many of the more mainstream religious traditions. Edward's analogy is an attempt to 'normalize' magical practice and thereby reduce the level of stigma associated with it, by making it sound like something known and familiar.

Loretta Orion, in her study of American neopagan witches, also rejects a division between magic and prayer. She explicitly defines magic as a form of religious activity:

... magic is a religious practice undertaken by individuals, alone or in concert, on their own or another's behalf to effect some transformation in themselves or the environment. These actions may be based on the society's shared religion or an alternative belief system that serves as the religion of the magician. (1995:5)

She also notes, "When individuals pray or make offerings in an effort to bring about some change in themselves or their environment -- in terms of the distinction I am making -- they are performing magic" (ibid). Orion asserts that

the perceived differences between magical practice in mainstream religions and magical practice in neopaganism are the entirely artificial results of a value judgment arising out of prejudice against alternative belief systems.⁶¹

Other participants attempt to explain magic in ways that do not centrally feature supernatural assumptions of any sort. One notes,

... possibly I've been taking more a pure scientific approach, and uh, this works for clear scientific reasons, over and above any possible magical reasons, and the, clear, and the psycho-social argument was uh, sufficient to, was sufficient to say 'this is worth doing.' Whether it, whether it has any function from the perspective of supernatural, or direct intervention of Gods or such, if that's, if that is indeed the case, then so much the better, but the psychological argument justifies it all on its own, so why worry about the rest? (Daniel)

Another explains at length,

...the actual subtle operation of all things, of all sentient beings, at least, in fact occurs as a reflection of their own subconscious expectations, and intentions, towards things in life. Any event that they actually care about emotionally will be influenced by their subconscious expectations with a focusing their thoughts and energies, and so on. A large component of magic is manipulating that train of thought and intention, and focus, towards the healthy and the positive, instead of focusing on 'oh, I'm going to fail' or 'oh, I think something bad's going to happen to me' or 'oh, I'm going

⁶¹ Orion characterizes 'magic' and 'prayer' in similar ways, rather than 'magic' and 'miracles'. There are several significant differences that separate the way in which neopagans think about magic and how Christianity constructs miracles. Miracles, in the Catholic Church as least, must be authenticated and recognized by a legitimating religious authority to qualify for that designation. The location of the agency which performs the miracle is in the divine and not in the individual through whom the miracle is manifest. The Biblical miracles attributed to Jesus, which would appear to be anomalous inasmuch as they seem to involve both control and agency vested in Jesus himself, can be explained by the notion that Jesus was the Son of God, and therefore shared that element of divine agency. Interestingly, those elements of control and agency often lead neopagan and occult writers to characterize Jesus as a magician. For example, Weinstein 1979:208, Farrar and Farrar 1984:177-78, Skelton 1990:27.

to break a leg if I take a chance and go skydiving,' or whatever. And of course, you focus on that, and my belief is, you literally make that, you alter physical reality, in subtle ways you can't see, in order to make that come true, if you hold that in your mind for long enough. So magical process is the process of altering that, you know, will, that, you know, you may have heard the term 'true will' being used, that's the process of altering that inner will and expectation towards things that you perceive as being positive, and toward openness and to growth and so on. (Aidan)

Both of these accounts invoke the culturally accepted idea of the subconscious as being the primary locus through which magic operates. This mode of framing 'magic' reduces the level of cultural discontinuity associated with the practice and brings the idea of 'magic' more in line with conventional wisdom on personal transformation.

Magic as a Transformative Process

The magical act, as neopagan practitioners conceptualize it, is difficult to separate from the magical context: those spiritual beliefs and personal practices that make the magical act both possible and plausible. Doing magic is a fundamentally transformative activity, one that first transforms the practitioner, and then, potentially, the practitioner's world. Doreen Valiente comments, "Many people take up the study of occultism because they want to develop psychic or magical powers, in order to change their lives. There is nothing wrong with this, provided they understand one thing: *the only way you can really change your life is by changing yourself*" (1975:16). This focus on the element of personal change inherent in magic is evident in the interview participants' discussions of magic as well.

I think to a certain degree, it [magic] has to do with, with generating some kind of social change, generating some kind of social energy. Um, that, you know, if I, if I do a magical ritual, um, to, cause something to happen, that's, that's changing myself in some way, and acknowledging that there is a change, or there needs to be a change, in myself. (Don)

Daniel: ...I was seeing the power of Craft as a symbol set, a religious symbol set, a means in which you can manipulate a symbol set, through ritual, to create changes in self, and indirectly, in world. ...

Sian: Now, would you call that magic?

Daniel: [pause] Um... I wouldn't put the label on it. Other people would have no trouble seeing it as magic; I would have no objection to people labeling it that...

Magic is about power and control. Most definitions of magic prevalent in the Craft are variations on the formulations of two early twentieth century ritual magicians -- Aleister Crowley and William Butler. Crowley's definition is "Magic is the Art and Science of causing change to occur in accordance with Will"; Butler's is "Magic is the art of effecting change in consciousness at will" (Bonewits 1971:28-30). Magic is an unorthodox way in which to cause change, but it is not a replacement for other forms of action. It is meant to complement rather than replace other activities. Starhawk cautions,

Energy pursues the path of least resistance. Material results are far more easily achieved through physical actions than through magical workings. It is simpler to lock your door than to protect your home with psychic seals. No magic spell is going to bring results unless the channels are open in the material world. A job spell is useless unless you also go out and look for a job. A healing spell is no substitute for medical care. (1979:113)

Orion also comments upon this suspension of boundaries within neopagan constructions of magic, noting, "There is no clear distinction between symbolic and empirical action in the Neopagan conception of magic" (1995:112).

Modern magic is founded upon a specific set of assumptions that are different from the default assumptions of contemporary Western society. The fundamental assumption from which all neopagan magic proceeds is an idealistic one: that thought can affect matter, without the intervention of the thinker's conscious and deliberate acts (Luhrmann 1989:117).⁶² Magic, as described in neopagan literature, is the projection of the Will into the world, in order to cause change.⁶³ "Will is understood by Neo-Pagans as the focusing of desire and the Immanent Deity to achieve goals" (Rabinovitch 1992:87). Will is not the same thing as desire; Will is something that must be trained into being. Belief in one's ability to perform magic involves coming to accept a belief that one is capable of causing change (that one is powerful) and that the change will occur according to one's Will (that one is in control).

In neopaganism, effectiveness at magic is believed to be the result of study and practice. Often magic is presented as an ongoing discipline, the foundation of which is self-knowledge. Starhawk writes,

The magical and psychic aspects of the Craft are concerned with awakening the starlight vision, as I like to call it, and training it to be a useful tool. ... Starlight vision is a natural potential inherent in each of us, but much work is required to develop and train it. ... But the final price of freedom is the willingness to face that most frightening of all beings, one's own self. (1979:18-19)

⁶² This assumption is not unique to neopaganism; it can also be found in other traditions where 'faith healing' is practiced, and in such New Age transformational philosophies as Transcendental Meditation.

⁶³ 'Will' is capitalized here when used to refer to magical Will, in order to emphasize that this is considered to be different from, but related to, the individual's everyday determination to get things done. Starhawk makes the distinction this way: "Will is very much akin to what Victorian schoolmasters called 'character': honesty, self-discipline, commitment, and conviction." (1979:111)

Marian Green, a British magician, comments,

The reason for concentrating on understanding yourself first of all is because you form the core and base upon which your magical training is founded. The more secure this foundation is, the stronger and higher you can build. If you are aware of your own feelings or reactions to a given situation then you will be able to understand the feelings of others. You will become a crystal-clear mirror in which you may see other people reflected. By seeing yourself in your true colours, you will be able to judge others, and knowing your own faults and failings, give them a fair hearing. (1983:19)

Neopagan magical training begins with knowing one's self, and training one's Will. If these things have not been addressed, it is not believed that any spell one might attempt will have any hope of success. 'Knowing one's self' is a complex, introspective process, and training guides suggest a variety of different exercises to facilitate it (Starhawk 1979; Warren-Clarke 1987; Green 1983, 1985). All of these exercises have similar ends in view: to raise awareness about one's own thoughts, beliefs and reactions to events, and to make one more aware of one's feelings and intuitions. Neopagan magicians believe that through increasing self-knowledge, one increases the effectiveness of one's magical Will, by removing unintended and counterproductive baggage.

All of these activities have accepted secular equivalents in psychotherapy and other varieties of self-help programs. Many also have counterparts in the pastoral programs offered by more mainstream religions. Where neopagan magical activities appear the most alien to outside observers is in their extensive use of material elements in spellwork.⁶⁴ Where the assertion that a change in a

⁶⁴ 'Material elements' in this context means candles, oils, herbs, cords, coloured cloths, robes, poppets or any other physical component used in a spell.

practitioner's mental focus can produce a change in the way in which they interact with their environment and the reactions they thereby experience from their environment can be given some credibility through psychological research, the notion that the combination of certain specified material elements is sufficient to produce such a change provokes accusations of chicanery. It is also a misrepresentation of the way in which most neopagans think about spellwork, which itself is only one part of the magical process.

Craft practitioners tend to explain the use of physical elements in spellwork in two ways, which are not mutually exclusive. The first is a primarily psychological explanation: that the material elements are simply aids to the practitioner's concentration. Practitioners, through their course of magical study, have learned to associate certain colours, scents, stones, symbols or plants with particular types of energies and end goals, and creating a physical environment saturated with these elements will help individuals to achieve the focus required to attain their desired ends through the spellwork. For example, Scott Cunningham writes:

Magic is the use of the natural forces of nature to bring about needed changes. To help attract, arouse and direct these energies the magician makes use of tools. ...The manipulation of these tools, coupled with a driving need, is often enough to work the magic. ...Obviously, planting a stone in the ground, holding a leaf or drawing a picture of an automobile, in and of themselves, do nothing. It is when such actions are performed in an emotionally charged state that changes are wrought and magic is truly done. (1983:5)

The second explanation refers more strongly back to the holistic neopagan worldview. Objects do not simply suggest moods and energies; they embody them or are attuned to them in some fundamental way. Manipulation

of the objects is therefore a microcosmic way of manipulating the broader energies to which they are connected. Orion discusses the explanation of the use of material components given by Circle's Selena Fox. "All things, including rocks, are alive with vibratory energy, Selena believes. Each species has a distinct physical configuration and a unique essence or vibratory rate of the life force..." (1995:108). She expands this observation with reference to the central concern of her study, which is neopagan approaches to health, healing and medicine.

According to Neopagans, sympathetic magic operates on the theory that the vibratory rates of certain herbs and minerals are beneficial to specific organ systems with which their vibratory rates are in harmony, or sympathy, in humans and animals. In this therapeutic process, the plants and minerals are believed to transmit their vibratory energy directly, independently of the magician or any symbolic communication with the subject of the spell. (1995:124)

Starhawk does not utilize the 'vibratory energy' terminology, but she also expresses the idea that material objects can be intrinsically magical. While acknowledging that all tools are essentially nothing more than mnemonic devices, she goes on to comment, "Particular objects, shapes, colors, scents and images do work better than others to embody particular ideas" (1979:110). This explanation invokes the more culturally alien notion that objects possess qualities beyond their visible physical attributes. However, neither the 'mnemonic' nor the 'intrinsic' explanation wholly discounts the primary importance of the practitioner's Will, through which the energies involved must be directed for any effect to occur. "Props may be useful," Starhawk notes, "but it is the mind that works magic" (1979:110).

Therapeutic Aspects of Magical Practice

One of the interesting findings of both Rabinovitch's 1992 research and the present survey was the proportion of respondents indicating the experience of past sexual abuse or assault. These proportions are given in detail in Chapter Three. It is informative therefore, to note how closely the techniques and themes prevalent in self-help literature directed at survivors of sexual abuse mirror those found in the neopagan magical literature.⁶⁵

Among the common observations about abuse survivors is that they tend to have low self-esteem and a severely curtailed sense of agency (Bass & Davis, 1988; Kelly, 1988; Johnson, 1991). Bass and Davis comment, "When you were abused, your boundaries, your right to say no, your sense of control in the world, were violated. You were powerless. The abuse humiliated you, gave you the message that you were of little value. Nothing you did could stop it" (1988:34). Low self-esteem perpetuates the feelings of powerlessness and lack of control that were learned through the abusive situation, or series of situations, even after the abuse has stopped.

Magic, in a neopagan context, as was noted above, is predicated around the ideas of power and control. The development of the magical Will requires

⁶⁵ Orion gives a description of a ritual specifically aimed at addressing the need for healing experienced by neopagan survivors of sexual trauma (1995:188-191). The ritual, a 'reconsecration of the womb' was developed and taught by British magician, Dolores Ashcroft-Nowicki. Orion notes that, in her subsequent observations, the ritual was most effective when it was performed in an environment where the assumptions and language of neopagan ritual were shared by all present. She also notes "...for those who share a religious perspective, such simple efforts to help are a vast and inexpensive source of great benefit" (1995:191).

one to internalize the belief that one possesses both potency and agency, attributes Bass and Davis argue are often missing from the construction of self possessed by survivors of abuse. Will is developed through an intense process of self-examination in order to enable the individual to understand and transform potentially counterproductive modes of thought and action. The survivor literature also advocates this process. It encourages intense self-examination, a re-valuation of feelings and an acknowledgment of needs, which, because they were never acknowledged as valid in the context of an abusive situation, were suppressed, and half forgotten.

Magical training encourages one to accept intuition as a valid form of knowing and to acknowledge fears and desires so that they will not interfere with Will. Bass and Davis, speaking to survivors, comment, "The best guide for healing is your own inner voice. Learning to trust your own perceptions, feelings and intuitions forms a new basis for action in the world" (1988:59). They recognize that survivors are often curiously detached from their own inner workings, because reflection upon them is painful, and they encourage an examination of the way in which one's subconscious speaks to them in their daily life.

Within all of us, there is an inner voice that can tell us how we feel... Everyone experiences her inner voice differently. You may have bad dreams. You may get headaches. You may become exhausted. You may have a sudden urge to binge on crackers. Or you may notice that you've cleaned the house twice in two days. The important thing is not what you experience, but that you recognize it as a message. (1988:117)

Bass and Davis also provide exercises, none of which would look out of place in a handbook of magical training.

But neither magic nor healing is presented as a purely rational process, which can be accomplished through logical analysis. Both the neopagan magical literature and the survivor literature put a heavy emphasis on the non-rational, usually portrayed as an 'inner child' or a 'Younger Self'. Starhawk identifies the 'Younger Self' with the unconscious, writing,

In the Faery Tradition of Witchcraft, the unconscious mind is called the Younger Self; the conscious mind is called Talking Self. Because they function through different modes of awareness, communication between the two is difficult. It is as if they speak different languages. It is Younger Self that directly experiences the world, though the holistic awareness of the right hemisphere. Sensations, emotions, basic drives, image memory, intuition and diffuse perception are functions of Younger Self... (1979:21)

Reaching the Younger Self, Starhawk says, is done through symbol, story and play. The conceptualization of the 'inner child' in the self-help literature is less figurative, but strongly related. Because many survivors were abused when they were young, they were stripped of the innocence commonly associated with childhood and were forced to develop coping mechanisms which locked off parts of their personalities. In order to heal, they must re-discover and re-integrate those parts of their personality. "Many survivors have lost touch with their own vulnerability. Getting in touch with the child within can help you feel compassion, more anger at your abuser, and a greater intimacy with others" (Bass and Davis 1988:58-59). Among the ways that are suggested to reach the 'inner child' are play, and 'rituals' or role-plays designed to give the inner child a sense of safety and security. These role-plays look startlingly like the 'working section' of a magical ritual and serve a similar psycho-dramatic purpose; they encourage the participant to alter their consciousness in order to work towards change.

The cornerstones of magical technique, which are believed to strengthen and hone one's Will, are meditation and visualization. Meditation is required to train the mind to still extraneous thoughts, so that one can remain focused on a working without undue distractions. Visualization is required to form a clear 'mental picture' of the desired ends of a magical working, and to be able to sustain that 'picture' throughout the course of the spell or ritual, even while one is doing something else, like dancing or chanting. Warren-Clarke describes the use of these techniques as follows: "As the process of meditation is to still the mind whilst relaxing the body, so the process of visualization is to utilize that peaceful and relaxed state for the creation of new states and increased awareness through controlled and conscious creation" (1987:19). Marian Green makes the distinction between the goals of meditation and visualization by saying,

Meditation is an altered state of consciousness in which you cease to be concerned with the time and place in which you are sitting and enter a world of information affecting various senses. It is an inward-looking, waiting and perceiving state in which impressions and feelings can make themselves felt. It is an essentially passive activity, for apart from continuing to maintain a relaxed and attentive state, you are not directing the material that comes to you. Creative visualization, on the other hand, is a method of directing what you see and of creating, from fragments already in your memory, a new place or condition. It is the most important key to practical magical work and allows you to direct your Will effectively, through the images you create. (1983:37)

The two techniques are usually practiced in tandem, because without the ability to still extraneous thoughts that comes with meditation, effective visualization is difficult due to the everyday distractions of normal consciousness. All magical training and neopagan witchcraft texts emphasize the centrality of these skills, and the necessity for continual practice.

Survivor literature also emphasizes the value of these techniques in contributing to one's ability to heal. Meditation allows individuals to have some control over their thoughts, which can be very beneficial when experiencing such common side effects of abuse as anxiety attacks and flashbacks. Working faithfully at meditation means taking a certain amount of 'time-out' for one's self every day, and reinforces the notion that the individual deserves that time. It is frequently difficult for survivors to allow themselves to do anything just for themselves, as they have internalized the belief that they are not valuable (Bass and Davis 1988; Finney 1992; Johnson 1991).

Visualization is also advocated, sometimes effusively. Lynne Finney writes,

For survivors of abuse, visualization is a mini-miracle. You can work with your therapist to change negative behaviour patterns by clearly picturing the behaviour you would like to have. You can obtain things you want through visualization and gain confidence in your ability to control your world. You can learn a new sport and meet new friends. And you can create a world of peace and beauty for yourself when you need a respite from thoughts about your abuse. It is a technique worth trying because it can help you change your world in many ways. (1992:293)

Karen Johnson discusses a behavioral therapy technique used for treating anxiety, 'systematic desensitization', that operates through 'imaging' or visualizing, anxiety-provoking situations in order to build a kind of tolerance to them. "By enduring, or 'surviving' her anxiety, she will gradually overcome her phobia -- at least in her mind. Eventually, her visual mastery can then be translated into real life circumstances" (1991:282). Although Johnson, a trained psychologist, stops short of the claims made by magicians that visualization, in

the context of spellwork, can affect the material world to the extent that it can help to provide tangible goods such as money, she certainly acknowledges that a change in the imagination can translate into a change in the 'objective' world, one of the central claims of neopagan magic.

Magical practice also incorporates the creation of boundaries, which is identified as an important element of healing from abuse. Bass and Davis comment, "The capacity to set limits is essential to feeling good about yourself. Many survivors have not known how to define their own time, to protect their bodies, to put themselves first, to say no" (1988:182). Magical practice addresses these particular issues very directly. For instance, magical work is generally done within a 'circle'. A 'circle' is an area of physical space that has been temporarily set apart and designated as 'safe'. 'Safe' or 'special' places are probably a feature of everyone's childhood experience, but they are especially significant for those who underwent abuse at a young age, because they represented what little freedom and self-determination could be mustered. Luhrmann notices the similarity between the magician's idea of a 'circle' and the 'safe spaces' of childhood, without recognizing the significance of her observation. She writes, "The magic circle chalks out a space which magicians idealize as special and different, a mixture of the safe and the sacred. ... It is curiously like the imaginative sacrality of childhood, the special spot behind the armchair, under the desk, out in the woods, the secret place where fairy tales are almost true and *adults are forbidden to enter*" (1989:226, emphasis mine). The setting of magical practice re-creates and re-enforces feelings of safety and control.

Magic also provides more explicit protection and boundary setting tools. Just as a 'circle' can be cast around a limited area for the purposes of spell-work, ritual, or meditation, so an entire living space can be 'sealed' against negative influence. 'Wards' can be set in a room, or around a bed, to protect the sleeper. A person can work to develop 'psychic shielding' to protect themselves from the ill-wishing of others, or the 'psychic white noise' of day-to-day life. Whether or not these spells have any independent, 'objective' effect, they are psychologically powerful. They reinforce the notions that one is not helpless, that one has the ability to take steps to protect one's self, and that one's living space can be safe and secure, all very important to survivors of abuse.

It is evident, then, that the techniques considered to be central in magical training have discursive parallels in other self-transformational discourses that are recognized as therapeutic. This is not to suggest that magical practice or a neopagan worldview more generally are consciously chosen by practitioners as a form of therapy, but rather that those elements of the Craft which emphasize and reinforce the ideas of potency, agency and personal transformation have the potential to produce positive effects for practitioners, particularly for those who may have most obviously had cause to perceive themselves as previously disempowered. These positive outcomes are not necessarily related to the individual's success or failure in specific applications of spellwork, but arise out of the process through which they reorient their perceptions of themselves and the universe in which they live.

Magic, Identity and Self-Narrative

Magical practice, in a neopagan context, is a logical extension into focused action of a broader worldview that facilitates and supports that action. This worldview includes the convictions that the sacred is immanent in nature and in all living things, that all elements of the universe are holistically connected and imbued with energy, that there are both material and non-material realms of being and that events are meaningful and non-random. The decision to locate one's expression of these principles within the framework provided by neopagan language and symbolism constitutes the acquisition of a Craft identity, which then centrally informs participants' constructions of themselves, often offering them a sense of integration and belonging that they identify as having been absent in their lives previously. Orion, arguing from a Durkheimian standpoint, asserts that "magical practice is based on a very clear and sophisticated conception of the nature of the cosmos that unifies those who share that understanding into a group, or congregation" (1995:5).

Participants' sense of the intermingled nature of their personal identity and their Craft emerges in both the surveys and the interviews. When asked to rate how closely the statement "I always knew I had a religion; I never knew it had a name" came to describing their feelings when they first encountered the Craft, 58 percent of respondents said it was very close; 24 percent said it was somewhat close; 13 percent said it was not really close, and 5 percent said it was not at all close. When interviewed, many participants emphasized two things

about becoming involved in the Craft; the first was a sense that what they had always believed had been validated and given a name and a vocabulary, and the second was that the Craft had allowed them to move from a space in which they did not feel as though they belonged, to a space in which they felt they did. This space could be a social space, an intellectual space, an emotional space, or an ontological space, and often was some or all of these simultaneously.

... it's sort of made sense and order out of my universe, because um, Craft is based on the natural cycles of our planet, it's given me a place where I feel like I fit, which I didn't grow up with. ... it's also given me a, not just fitting in with the natural cycles of nature, but it's also given me a community where I feel more accepted.
(Karen)

[Without the Craft] I wouldn't be nearly as actualized. I would have this unnamed, longing, thing going on, and I would always feel that I was a freak and I was alone and nobody else ever had this stuff, and... you know, it's, it's a lot more difficult when you're all by yourself? Because just about everything in the society around you tells you that you're a freak and you're weird, and uh, you've got to be real careful talking about any of this with anybody... (Martha)

So I was fourteen the first time I was in a Craft ritual and... uh... Oh, I hate sounding like a cliché! [changes voice] 'It felt like coming home.' How many thousand times have you read that? Um... it had a huge resonance for me. Um... I was always liminal. I had been liminal damn near since I was born. ... And so... I found a community that I could interact with. Um, a community that was working very hard at showing me that, from the spiritual point of view, I belonged, I was important, I was more than just a cog in a large wheel, um, that my needs were important... (Judith)

...I'm not sure that the Craft brought me any beliefs or any behaviours that I didn't have before, but instead of them being almost a private perversion, um, it, it's something I can live as part of a community, where, uh, I don't have to justify the fact that I, I believe in, and want to act in certain ways. (Francine)

The Craft context that participants chose to adopt performed an integrative function, allowing them to meaningfully place themselves in an ontological context.

Most of those interviewed did indicate that they believed that coming into the Craft had changed them from the person they would have become if they had not encountered it. They generally, and unsurprisingly, believe that they are better and healthier people than they would have been without the Craft.

... I would have been extremely socially, I mean, I was extremely socially maladroit, and I think it would have gotten worse. I think I would have been the classic ivory-tower university professor type that nobody can talk to and you know, doesn't take baths for two months, and wears mismatched coloured socks, but my god, they're geniuses! (Judith)

... if I hadn't found the Craft, and I hadn't... become connected with, with myself, and found value within myself... I would have done things which I would find now totally abhorrent. And I'm sure I would have, because it would have been like this quest for power and this lust for validation in some other way. And... gah... it's changed my whole life, and I would never, ever want to go back to, you know, where I was. You know, where I was was fine for when I was there, and I needed to go through that, but at the same time, I would never go back there, ever. (Sarah)

[If I'd never encountered the Craft]... I'd probably be a disillusioned Lutheran minister. Actually, I'm not sure if the Craft, or if I just sort of found my way out of that route through... studying the Tao, but it's part of it. You know, I was heading that way, and I think that, um, it very possibly could have been where I was at, was paying lip service to something that didn't really fit. (Paul)

I think in a lot of ways, it's [the Craft] has made me a better and stronger person. If I'm thinking about the, uh, the basic law of the Craft, which is 'an harm none, do what you will', uh, I really do spend time going through my life when I make choices, like is this really going to harm someone, including myself. Um...[pause]... and I think that it's stopped me from making choices [laughing] that might not have been, uh, that I know *would* have been very unhealthy for me. (Karen)

The change that participants highlight as being the most significant result of their involvement in the Craft is not so much one of the content of their beliefs⁶⁶, values or personalities, but rather is one of interpretive context, how these things come to be understood and expressed. It provides individuals with a framework within which to reinterpret and re-evaluate themselves and their relationship to their subjectively experienced worlds. It does not negate previous unpleasant experiences, but it provides an interpretive mechanism through which these experiences can be transformed into elements that will help to support an individual's positive self-evaluation.

This shift in context is perhaps brought out most clearly in Carrie's story. Carrie describes herself as having had very poor social skills as a teenager, and as being prone to experiencing people as 'loud'.

I was really sensitive to how other people were feeling and it all sort of pressed in on me all the time. If I were to give a visual metaphor, it was like walking through a laser light show 24 hours a day. I just didn't want to be around a lot of other people. I just couldn't cope. I thought I was going crazy... I really did. I thought if I talked to anyone about what was going on, they'd lock me up and throw away the key. I was really frightened. (Carrie)

She describes how the Craft helped.

⁶⁶ Although elements of the neopagan worldview, such as the reverence of nature as sacred and the presence of feminine as well as masculine representations of divinity, are obviously appealing to participants, they are appealing because they are congruent with what those who come to be participants believe 'should' be the case. Participants often expressed how self-evident the broad concepts seemed, once they had encountered them, even where they are willing to dispute details.

Well, for one thing, it told me I wasn't crazy. It told me that people's feelings did radiate a kind of energy, and that there were ways you could tune in on this. Most Craft books tell you how to develop your intuition and your psychic sense... I did it backwards... I used the techniques to help me turn it off. The Craft provided me a framework where I wasn't crazy, I just wasn't in control, and it also provided me with a way to DO something about it... (Carrie)

Carrie exchanged her previous self-evaluation, 'crazy', one over which she felt she had no control, for a new one, 'out of control', for which she could develop coping skills. She still believed she could sense what people were feeling, but she no longer believed that this meant that there was something 'wrong' with her. She gained a level of comfort with herself that she had not had before, without having to deny or diminish significant parts of her biography and experience. Magical practice was the enactment of this newfound sense of control, but magical practice would not have been a plausible or effective way of achieving that control without a reinterpretation and re-evaluation of herself.

Many of those I interviewed voiced similar sentiments, that there had always been something about them that gave them the sense that they did not 'fit', and that it was only in the Craft where they felt at ease expressing all the varied elements that made up the person they understood themselves to be. One participant commented, "...I think that, that feeling out of place, that sense of anomie, is probably talked about more in the Craft than anywhere else" (John). The profound sense of finally having found a place that many participants express when they talk about the Craft is embedded in the often repeated phrase 'it felt like I had come home,' as though this is the place they 'should' have been all along, where they had always authentically existed.

'Place' and 'home', in this context, not only refer to a social and intellectual location, but to a wider sense of being a meaningful part of an ordered universe.

Well, I know that everything happens for a reason. Like, I had a cousin who committed suicide, and... it [my neopagan outlook] helped me... hard to explain, because there was no note, like, or anything given, no reason. And it's like 'okay, I know this happens, everything happens for a reason, I don't know what the reason is...' It just, it, it, gave me a framework... (Jennifer)

It's that notion that there is a continuity to, to a process of life, a continuity to creation and destruction, or birth and death, um... and to relate that, that sort of macrocosmic picture into the personal is to say that, if I'm feeling really shitty, is to say that 'you know, there will be a tomorrow. There will be ways to see through it. There's ways of returning to something else, of returning to better times, even though you know that there will be horrible things to come ahead too.' It's, it's, um... nothing is without any kind of reference into what has happened. And what we're doing now is not without any kind of reference as to what we'll be becoming... (Don)

I also got a sense of place [from the Craft]... where I fit with the rest of the universe. Somewhere in there, I also got a sense of... I don't know what the right word is... destiny isn't quite right... I got the sense that the things that were happening in my life were happening for a reason. That even the bad things were trying to show me something, and that if I didn't get it that round, bad things would just continue to happen until I got hip. (Carrie)

It is probably for this reason that 'conversion' vocabulary is rejected so vehemently by neopagans, because it implies an essential difference between 'before' and 'now' which participants would rather obscure in favour of constructing their current identification as something that was always potentially present in them, and by extension, their universe as meaningful and non-random.

Magic as Metaphor

Magic, as it is practiced in the context of neopaganism, has little in common with what most sociologists and anthropologists describe as 'magic'. It is not an 'exchange commodity'. It does not foster 'client relationships'. Magic is not performed on a commission basis, for money or bartered goods. The performance of a spell, especially if done for another person, confers no necessary benefit on the magical practitioner other than satisfaction and, possibly, enhanced prestige. Traditional sociology is at a loss in trying to explain this kind of phenomenon within the boundaries of its established definitions.

Success at the spellwork which is what sociologists and anthropologists define as 'magic' is believed by modern witches to rest upon mastery of meditation and visualization techniques, which in its turn comes out of a long process of work, study and personal reflection. In the neopagan community, a person will be described as 'very magical' or 'very powerful' based on their degree of skill with these techniques and their mastery of a body of symbolic and esoteric lore, regardless of whether or not they are known to be engaging in spellwork. This perception of magic as residing in the process clearly undermines the traditional definitions of magic. In conflating 'magic' with spellwork, an end-oriented, instrumental tunnel vision, interpreters are missing the point. Magic is not a way to form a one-to-one relationship between an individual and an otherwise unattainable goal, it is an elaborate, dramatic metaphor for the relationship between an individual and the universe, and, like

all metaphors, it hovers on the boundary between the figuratively and the literally true, refusing to commit itself firmly on either side. Luhrmann notes,

In modern magic the fact that the same assertion is both play-claim (context-defining claim) and reality-claim (claimed true for the larger context of 'ordinary' reality) can allow magicians to waver between the literal and the metaphorical when casting a spell: literal, in that the spell is thought to do what the first-order theory says that it will do, and metaphorical, in that the spell is thought to do something else justified by the second-order theory – spiritual, psychotherapeutic, expressive or creative -- by representing an inner state in figurative form. This grants ambiguity, an ambiguity quite important for the magician. The seriousness of the claim of magical efficacy makes their practice seem serious and important, yet the play-claim allows the magician to justify magic on other grounds. Regardless of the veracity of its claims, they argue, magical practice is worthwhile because the experiential involvement is spiritually, morally, aesthetically or psychologically uplifting. (1989:333)

Despite her insight, Luhrmann does not go far enough. It is not only spells that are metaphorical, but all of the interwoven process that is neopagan magic.

The prevalence of the experience of past abuse among neopagan magicians should point the interpreter toward what might be perceived as valuable about the practice. Magical practice, and the training that is an integral part of it, provide a context in which life can be lived and experience can be understood. This context emphasizes wholeness, connections, self-knowledge, personal agency and transformative potential. In neopagan witchcraft, it is in examining the context, and not the content, of the practice that one finds the 'compensators' provided by magic, and its greatest appeal. The magical context specifically encourages attitudes that foster personal development and the transformation of self-evaluation. Magic is the art of changing consciousness at will. Magical practice demands that the practitioners believe in the force of their

own Will. It teaches that thinking about things in certain ways can make a difference. It encourages a person to set goals, and to act in very specific ways upon them. It re-empowers people who may have come to believe that they had no effective voice, and were incapable of influencing the universe in which they were compelled to live.

To label magic as necessarily regressive is to deny the possibility that it could represent a progressive development in an individual's worldview. To label magic as a reasoning pathology implies that the only valid mode of thinking is literally, logically and linearly. Magic, as it is practiced in contemporary witchcraft, is not presumed to rest upon a literal description of the universe, but a metaphorical one. In neopagan witchcraft, magic is not a collection of ends, it is an assortment of means; it operates on the internal landscape more than it does on the external world. In this sense, it has a great deal more in common with the transformational discourse of 'self-help' literature than it does with the sort of quasi-scientific instrumental methods for producing change in the external world, which are what is meant when most academics and social scientists refer to 'magic'. Neopagan magic is a re-empowering, wholeness-producing context, an invitation to reconsider harsh dismissals of magic, and to take a different perspective on what is being provided to the practitioner, and how.

Contemporary Western magic inhabits the shadowy realm of metaphor. When a poet says 'Beneath the waves of storm that lash and burn, / The currents of blind passion that appal, / To listen and keep watch till we discern / The tide

of sovereign truth that guides it all⁶⁷ they are attempting to give insight into the nature of the intangibles 'blind passion' and 'sovereign truth' through a comparison with more tangible water and storm imagery. The metaphor itself is a bridge between one and the other. Magic is related to science and religion in a similar fashion. Science describes a testable relationship of cause and effect in the material world. Religion provides an untestable meaning-context based in the supernatural. Both describe aspects of the universe in which the individual lives, but in very different terms. A metaphor describes one thing in terms of another, with the hopes of providing insight into both through a process of inference. In neopagan magic, the intangible in need of description is the untestable context, the world of invisible forces, multiple planes, primordial darkness, astral forms and magical Will. These elements provide the meaning structure through which the individual interprets their experience. Luhrmann notes,

Part of the reason people enjoy practicing magic is that it becomes a vehicle for self-expression. Myths and symbols fill magicians' reading and infiltrate their dreams; ... It is as if magicians learn a new language in which to talk about their world, and gain a new set of possibilities for organizing it. ... Magicians use symbolism to capture, express or articulate their experience, and in its mixture of precision and evocation it becomes tremendously important to them. (1989:244-45)

The scientific 'cause and effect' rhetoric of spellwork is like the water imagery of the metaphor; it is there to give shape to an intangible. In this way, neopagan magic can be seen as being closer to religion, in its provision of general

⁶⁷ Archibald Lampman, "The Largest Life III" from *Lampman's Sonnets*, ed. Margaret Coulby Whitridge. (Ottawa: Borealis Press, 1976) p. 117.

compensators such as a sense of personal potency, than to science, which seeks only to explain the material world. This is not to say that spells are not expected to work on the material world. They are, just as storms and waves are expected to exist, regardless of their application in a metaphorical context. However, changing the external landscape is not all that magic does, even if it sometimes sounds as though that is all it is meant to do. Magic changes the internal landscape as well. A spell is a way to express and manipulate the meaning context of life. If neopagan magic were only about ends, then repeated failures should be sufficient to delegitimize it. This is certainly the conclusion one can draw from Stark and Bainbridge. However, as Luhrmann's research makes eminently clear, repeated failure is not enough to delegitimize the practice, and indeed, magicians have developed a host of ways to turn what could be perceived as failures into successes.⁶⁸ She comments,

How is it possible for the magician to retain his faith in the face of constant failure? The succinct answer is that failure is perceived to be far from constant, and it is easily explained within the terms of the theory. Success is easy to establish: the goal of the ritual is often met by the natural process of healing; the freedom to use symbolically associated events and personal experience as evidence allows the magician to interpret almost any ritual as at least successfully raising major power. Failure, when identified, is ascribed to the particular magician, – and her belief, goal or technique – rather than to the general 'theory'... Magicians do not confront the spectre of constant failure. They banish it. (1989:141)

⁶⁸ Magicians are not alone in requiring a range of interpretative strategies to deal with 'failed' prophecies, predictions or activities designed to produce material ends that ultimately fail to appear. Tumminia (1989) discusses this phenomenon as it is demonstrated in the Uranian Academy of Science, whose leader predicted spaceship landings to occur at various times between 1974 and 1977, and a collection of other studies of 'failed prophecy' in NRMs is provided in Dawson (1999).

Neopagan magic, in practice, is not as clear-cut as some theorists would like. While appearing to provide specific compensators through the obvious device of spellwork, it also provides more general compensators through the network of training practices and beliefs underlying that spellwork. The content and the context cannot be easily divorced to fit some arbitrary definitional exigency.

Summary

Some traditional sociological and anthropological constructions of magic, focusing as they often do on magic as arising out of irrational or mistaken beliefs about the nature of an objectively-given world, do not capture the way in which magic is conceptualized by neopagans. The acceptance of magic's existence and the practice of it are constructed as integral components of a more far-reaching, transformative worldview that incorporates a religious and spiritual orientation that both re-enchants the physical world by imbuing it with energy and moral content, and re-empowers individuals by postulating them as potentially powerful and self-determining agents. This view requires that magical activity be viewed not in isolation, but as part of a broader interpretive context, which serves to render the activity both plausible and appealing.

Neopagan practitioners are aware that the general public retains a view of magic that is sensationalized and pathologized, and they respond to this with a variety of techniques designed to normalize magic by highlighting its similarities to more culturally accepted discourses, such as those of religion, science and psychology. Many express disapproval of self-identified pagans acting in ways that reinforce dominant stereotypes about magic and magicians.

That magic exists is a logical outgrowth of the idealist framework employed by neopagans to understand the world. They assert that thoughts have a real and potent existence and can affect matter without the direct intervention of the thinker's conscious and deliberate acts. Individuals are required, as part of participation in the magical process, to enhance the effectiveness of their thoughts by leaning to clarify and focus them, and to bring themselves more closely into alignment with the energies that pervade the sacred universe. This eventually produces individuals who believe that they are both capable of causing change, therefore powerful, and capable of directing the course of that change, thus, in control.

Neopagan magical practice shares elements of both practical technique and discourse with more mainstream therapeutic approaches that focus on the transformation of self-narrativizing in the pursuit of a more balanced, 'healed' personality. This potential for therapeutic efficacy is suggested by the large numbers of neopagans who report the experience of abuse and feelings of marginality and alienation prior to their involvement in the Craft. It is entirely independent of the actual effects or outcomes of spellwork because it operates through the individual's transformation of their own self-evaluation through a metaphorical narrative that cannot be delegitimized simply by reference to stated ends.

Chapter Seven: Neopaganism and the Canadian Religious Landscape

Among the most interesting aspects of neopaganism generally is simply that it appears to be growing, almost doubling its census-recorded affiliation between 1981 and 1991, at a time when mainstream religions in Canada are experiencing sharp declines. This chapter attempts to situate the growth of the neopagan movement against the broad backdrop of the religious landscape in Canada. Although the choice to adopt the religious identity of 'neopagan' is made by individuals with reference to their unique values and experiences, it is nonetheless made in a wider social context, which can influence the individual in a variety of ways. Among the factors contributing to this context and potentially affecting the choice of religious affiliation are the situation of mainstream, organized religions in Canada, the disembedding of traditionally 'religious' concerns from church organizations, the availability and visibility of neopaganism as an alternative to organized religion, and the degree to which neopaganism is perceived as a legitimate religious affiliation. These dimensions can be examined separately from detailed consideration of the reasons behind individual religious preferences and choices. In rational choice terms, these are 'supply side' rather than 'demand side' considerations.

Mainstream Organized Religion in Canada

Reginald Bibby has documented the decline in popular involvement in organized religion in two books (1987, 1993) based on his analysis of surveys he conducted among adults in 1975, 1980, 1985 and 1990 and among teenagers in

1984, 1988 and 1992, as well as the 1991 General Social Survey and census and Gallup poll data, both contemporary and historical. From these, he has produced a clear description of the broad trends in Canadian religious involvement over time, and it is to this description that I will primarily refer.

Bibby notes that religious affiliation among Canadians is still high, with 87.5 percent listing an affiliation on the 1991 census. However, affiliation is only an indirect indicator of what is going on in the churches themselves. The proportion of the Canadian population holding church membership and the proportion attending weekly services on a regular or semi-regular basis, according to Bibby's research, have been declining since the end of the Second World War (1987:12-16). In addition, those individuals most involved in, committed to, and financially supportive of Canadian churches tend to be those over 55. He notes that:

- Better than 40% are both local church members and weekly attenders, compared to around 25% of people in their late-30s to mid-50s and less than 20% of Canadians under the age of 35.
- The major financial contributors to the churches are people 55 and older. In 1990, for example, they gave more than all other younger Canadians combined.
- Almost five in ten of those who are 55+ say that religion is very important to them, versus just over two in ten of Canadians 35 to 54, and less than two in ten under 35. (1993:96-7)

Further, as those older people who are currently most active in the churches age and gradually die off, it is unlikely that younger cohorts are going to become more religiously involved, pick up the slack and fill in the empty pews, in part because these cohorts were less involved in the life of the church with their

families as children, and are therefore less likely to reproduce the pattern in their adult families with their children. As one indication of this tendency, Bibby cites Gallup poll comparisons:

In a 1957 Gallup poll almost three in four Canadians said they had gone to Sunday school when they were children; 60% said they had attended regularly. As of the early 1990s, that figure has dropped to one in four. Consequently, the question of whether Canadians are *returning* to church is increasingly irrelevant; an evergrowing majority have *never* been actively involved. (1993:19)

He notes that from a purely demographic standpoint, organized religion in Canada is headed for serious difficulties if it expects to maintain itself in its current form.

Despite this, however, Bibby places little credence in the arguments made by theorists such as Stark and Bainbridge that in those areas where membership levels in traditional religions are low, such as can be seen in British Columbia, membership in sects and cults will be stronger, due to the higher structural availability of potential recruits. Bibby notes that there may well be more people available to join such groups, but they still do not appear to be doing so in great numbers, certainly not in numbers that would suggest that religious membership overall is not in decline (1993:48-58). Stark and Bainbridge's assertion may be correct, argues Bibby, but it is peripheral, as it seems unlikely that the new religions will make any inroads whatsoever in replacing the old ones.

However, despite a falling away from traditional religions and only a lukewarm interest in new ones, Bibby also documents what he interprets to be a strong interest in 'religious questions', including supernatural or paranormal

events, what happens after death, and the existence of God, among both those Canadians who are involved in the churches, and those who are not. For example, according to his surveys:

- one in two Canadians claim they themselves have experienced precognition (1993:119);
- one in two Canadians claim they themselves have experienced mental telepathy (1993:119);
- the proportion of adult Canadians believing they will be reincarnated after death has risen from 7 percent in 1980 to 26 percent in 1990 (1993:127);
- the proportion of teenagers believing in reincarnation is even higher, 32 percent in 1992 (1993:127);
- four in ten Canadians agree that 'we can have contact with the spirit world' (1993:131);
- slightly more than 20 percent of Canadians believe that 'it is possible to communicate with the dead' (1993:131);
- 90 percent of Canadians maintain that either God is 'important' or is 'becoming more important' to them (1993:129);
- 21 percent of Canadians assert they have definitely 'personally experienced' God, while another 23 percent believe they may have had a similar experience.

Bibby takes this interest in supernatural and spiritual matters, combined with the documented decline in church membership and attendance, as evidence that organized religions are failing to maintain their position as the obvious and

natural venues through which to pursue these interests. He attributes this in part to the secularization of society more generally, but also to the routinization in church organization which has served to move the focus of 'church life' from the spiritual life of the people to the organizational life of the church. He comments,

There is good reason to believe that a considerable number of Canadians are failing to associate their interest in mystery and meaning with what religion historically has had to offer. ...In other words, Canadians are not in the market for churches. They are, however, very much in the market for the things religion historically has been about. (1993:177)

The spiritual concerns that organized religion has always ostensibly been about have become disembedded from church organizations and returned to the individual as matters of private contemplation as the churches have lost their status as special arbiters of truth and goodness. Bibby argues that this has occurred for a number of reasons. First, Canadians, he asserts, have responded to cultural pluralism by rejecting absolute truth claims and adopting a relativistic position, particularly where matters of morality, lifestyle and belief are concerned. He notes that on his 1990 survey, 65 percent of adult Canadians agreed that 'everything's relative' and 50 percent maintained that 'what is right or wrong is a matter of personal opinion'. Among teens in 1992, the proportion believing that right or wrong was a matter of personal opinion was 65 percent. He also observes that adults and youth involved in religious groups were no less likely to espouse these views than other Canadians (1993:67). Second, many of the most established churches in Canada have lost credibility and the confidence of the Canadian population due to the ongoing sex and abuse scandals with

which they have been associated. Last, increased secularization has resulted in many of the social improvement functions of the churches being either entirely taken over by governments or other non-profit organizations, or at very least, in competition for those sectors. Church membership has become one of many voluntary individual affiliations, competing not just with other potential religious identifications, but also with other social opportunities and service organizations.

The erosion of sweeping authority claims is discussed directly by Giddens (1991) as a feature of late modernity in the West. He asserts that traditional authority loses its overarching character in all spheres as knowledge systems become more abstracted from individuals, and is replaced by area expertise. This is especially damaging for religion, which sees the scope of what it can claim for itself dramatically reduced, while simultaneously being forced to compete with other 'expert' interpretations and explanations. Giddens also offers some explanation for the displacement of organized religion as a central location for the production of social identity, although only by extension, through his description of the sequestration of experience in late modernity.

Giddens argues that the day-to-day 'taken for grantedness' of modernity can only be achieved by the exclusion of those "fundamental existential issues which raise central moral dilemmas for human beings" (1991:156). He refers to the removal of phenomena such as madness, criminality, sickness, death, and sexuality from the visible routines of ordinary life as a 'sequestration of experience'. "The sequestration of experience means that, for many people, direct contact with events and situations which link the individual lifespan to

broad issues of morality and finitude are rare and fleeting” (1991:8). I would argue that those things that Bibby designates as ‘supernatural experiences’, such as a personal experience of God, also belong in the category of ‘sequestered’ experiences.

Secularization effectively removed mystical or supernatural experience from any central role in the organization of the public sphere, relegating spiritual experiences and their attendant moral questions to the institution of organized religion, much in the same way that madness has been relegated to the asylum and illness and death to the hospital. However, the continued progress of secularization and the mainstream churches’ attempts to accommodate themselves to an ever-increasingly non-religious public culture, have resulted in these experiences becoming further sequestered, moving out of the institutions designed to contain them and taking root in the most private sphere of all, the reflexively constructed narrative of the self. Spirituality, in Habermas’ terms, has moved entirely into the sphere of the lifeworld.

As a result, it has become a comparatively unregulated domain, not subject to the same sorts of structural constraints that surround, for example, an individual’s participation in the economy. Individuals are free to grapple with existential and spiritual concerns, but are no longer compelled to by the social structure. The meaning of life has become entirely separated, in a structural sense, from the ordinary living of life, so that it is possible to do the latter without any necessary reference to the former. Individuals who are dissatisfied with this fundamental divorce must find a way to re-embed moral relevance into

the process of living, and they must do so as individuals faced with competing options for generating purpose and meaning. It is in this context that the logic of neopaganism becomes compelling for some, postulating as it does a spirituality based on a personal, individual, non-prescriptive relationship with an immanent and pervasive divinity. Neopaganism fundamentally accepts that spirituality is reflexive and constructed within an individual's personal narrative, and that therefore, it can have no fixed and 'true' form. It is congruent with the dominant cultural logic of pluralism and conforms to the limitations imposed by sequestration. Thus, it presents itself as a mode through which individuals can construct their spirituality that is not encumbered by the ideological and physical trappings of the more mainstream religions, which have been forced by secularization to try to re-invent their own internal logic.

Religious Environments

Roger Finke (1997) provides a partial model of religious development based around supply-side religious factors. Although some of his assertions have been demonstrated to require limiting conditions (Olson and Hadaway, 1999), others contribute to an understanding of the growth of neopaganism. Central to Finke's model, which is based on earlier work with Rodney Stark (1988, 1992), and by Stark and Bainbridge (1987) is the notion that "the most significant changes in religion derive from shifting supply, not shifting demand" (1997:47). If there is no practical way to match supply with demand, the religious marketplace will remain comparatively unchanged.

Finke proposes that changes in religious regulation, that is, the extent to which religions are regulated by the state, will be the primary determinant in religious growth and decline, due to the effect that regulation has on competition. Competitive, pluralistic religious markets, by Finke's logic, will produce higher levels of overall religious involvement in the population than will less competitive or monopolistic markets. This is because there will be fewer barriers to supply, thus increasing the likelihood that a larger proportion of the religious demand will be met, and also because organizations that are forced to compete become more efficient and therefore more appealing organizations.

Olson and Hadaway (1999) have challenged the broad application of the premise that increased pluralism will result in increased levels of religious involvement. Using data from the 1991 Canadian census, they demonstrate a strong negative correlation between pluralistic religious markets and levels of religious affiliation. This correlation held true regardless of whether they examined census divisions or census subdivisions. They also suggest that some of the data used by Finke and Stark to support their original assertions had been subjected to inappropriate statistical controls, which, when corrected, also causes that data to show a negative, not positive, correlation between pluralism and levels of religious involvement. Olson and Hadaway postulate that the apparently negative relationship between pluralism and religious involvement levels might be explained by social networking factors that come into play as societies become more pluralistic.

First, highly pluralistic regions tend to also have a high degree of residential mobility, which can act to reduce the number of an individual's close social ties, and the number of close social ties is a variable they argue is strongly related to religious affiliation. Second, the likelihood of sharing a common religious identification with one's close social ties decreases with the number of possible identifications available. "Religious pluralism may reduce social reinforcement for religious involvement by reducing the number of close social ties individuals have with others who share a common religious identity" (1999:490). So although Finke's argument about the effects of pluralism in a religious marketplace cannot accurately predict the level of religious involvement in the population, other aspects of his model, particularly those relating to regulation, may still contribute to understanding why some groups grow or decline in a given environment, in this case, the growth of neopaganism in Canada over the past twenty years.

Finke begins from the premise that regulation functions to hinder competition. He identifies two types of regulation that operate in the religious marketplace: subsidy and suppression.

Both forms of regulation restrict competition in the market by defining the rules governing the operation of the religious economy. Subsidy rewards only selected religious groups, and suppression penalizes unauthorized groups. Each form of regulation changes the incentives and opportunities for producers and the options for consumers. (1997:50)

Subsidy, in terms of the Canadian religious economy, includes such things as property tax exemptions on church buildings and charitable deductions for donations that are available to more organized religions, while being difficult to

access for small, innovative, new religious groups. Suppression of religious groups in Canada is not legally overt, which means only that the government of Canada has not passed specific legislation to establish any one religion as 'official' nor to specifically ban the practice of any others.⁶⁹ However, constructions of 'religion' through, for example, the Marriage Acts and tax laws, as noted in Chapter Five, which effectively limit the ability of small, innovative spiritual movements to adopt the legitimate label of 'religion' act as indirect suppression. Lori Beaman argues,

[S]upport for freedom of religion as set out in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms is really support for a particular kind of religious expression and organization. Those religions that do not conform to 'traditional' models of religious practice are less likely to receive expansive protection for their spiritual goals. As a normalizing discourse, the law incorporates narrow definitions of what constitutes a religion worthy of constitutional protection. (2000:2)

She supports her assertion through an examination of some of the case law touching on Wiccans and witchcraft in Canada.

From the standpoint of what Finke refers to as 'consumer choice', the operation of religious regulation can affect the efficiency of religious organizations, that is, the extent to which religious producers are motivated to offer religious options that provide a good ratio of desired outcomes to required investment.

Churches produce a wide spectrum of social, spiritual, psychological, and even physical benefits for their members -- ranging from soup suppers to social groups to uplifting worship

⁶⁹ The funding of Catholic religious schools in Ontario, upheld under constitutional law, constitutes subsidy, rather than suppression, as the practice does not explicitly ban other religions or denominations from having schools, merely from having their schools supported with public funds.

and moral guidance. But churches also impose costs on their members, including money, time, strict behavioral demands, or confessing support for 'rigid' beliefs. More efficient churches provide a higher ratio of benefits to costs. (1997:53)

Although it is difficult to establish precisely who the religious 'producers' might be in a neopagan context, due to its fundamental decentralization, this set of propositions suggests that, all other things being equal, a reduction in membership costs should, at least initially, produce an increase in membership.⁷⁰

Iannaccone identifies social stigma as a cost of membership in high tension religious groups (1990). Therefore, one of the factors contributing to the increase in the number of people giving their religious identification as neopagan could be a decrease in the level of cultural stigma associated with the identification.

The Craft as a Stigmatized Identity

Erving Goffman describes a stigmatized individual as one who is disqualified from full social acceptance due to the possession of a characteristic or attribute that produces a discrepancy between their virtual social identity (that which is expected of persons in that category) and their actual social identity (constituted by the individual characteristics they in fact possess). The exact nature of stigma can be defined only contextually; it is resident in a set of relationships rather than in an attribute itself. Goffman divides the stigmatized

⁷⁰ When increased membership levels combined with decreased membership costs begin to affect the organization's ability to deliver the desired rewards associated with membership, it is suggested that defections to other groups will again bring membership levels down.

into two groups: the discredited, for whom the stigma-producing attribute is previously known or readily apparent; and the discreditable, whose possession of a stigma-producing quality is not readily apparent, but is potentially discoverable (1963:2-4). In this sense, neopagans are generally more likely to be discreditable than discredited; because their stigma-producing attribute, unlike those physical debilities that form the bulk of Goffman's discussion, does not have a necessary and inevitable physical correlate, participants have the potential for a good deal of latitude when controlling the extent to which it is associated with them.

Neopaganism is a stigmatized identity in Canada on two levels. The first, and more minor, is that neopaganism as a subset of religion is stigmatized in certain settings where to be religious at all is viewed with suspicion. Politicians, medical professionals, judges and teachers can be exposed to charges of lacking impartiality if they openly proclaim a set of strong religious beliefs. Belief in the 'supernatural' is also sometimes believed to be incongruous for physical scientists, whose commitment to the purely rational realm of scientific reason is assumed.

The more serious stigma of a Craft identity arises out of the continued conflation of contemporary neopagan beliefs and practices with those of the largely invented heretical diabolism persecuted in the Renaissance and Reformation (Klaits 1985; Russell 1980; Rose 1962). The popular notions that Craft practitioners worship the devil, have obscene and orgiastic meetings, cause others to sicken, die or merely suffer misfortune by magical means, kill animals,

blight crops, cause impotence, infertility and miscarriage, and are a threat to social order and the public good, reinforced by fundamentalist Christian preaching and popular horror movies, are all remnants of this centuries old construction of the enemies of the 'rule of God' (Kieckhefer 1976; Rose 1962; Russell 1980). Related to this way of discrediting neopagans is another, which does not rely on the assertion that neopagans actually perform any of the acts attributed to them by their critics, but rather on the assumption that anyone who believes that magic might even be possible, much less that they could perform it, or that a divine masculine should be balanced by a divine feminine, is deluded, less than fully rational, and therefore, somehow tainted.

Craft participants are aware that their religious identity is stigmatized. When asked what public perception about the Craft they would change if they could, participants responded to various elements of the general stigma under which they believe they operate. "I don't like being perceived as a Satan-worshipping, black-flowing robe wearing freak," Karen noted, laughing slightly. The exasperation with the ongoing identification between neopaganism and Satanism was evident in several interviews. For example, Sarah, who is unabashedly open about her affiliation, commented,

...I wear a pentacle on my finger and on my neck, and everywhere I go, people ask me questions about it and stuff, and often it's 'oh, you're a Satanist'. And I'm like, 'Well, no, I'm not, and if you ask about it, I'll tell you all about it.' And when they get to know me, they're kind of like, 'You're a really nice person, how could you be a Satanist?' And I'm like 'let's go back to the beginning...'

Participants acknowledge the existence of these misconceptions, even when they believe that their prevalence is decreasing. Deanne noted,

...when I look at public perceptions of the Craft, the first one that comes to mind is Satanism. You know, that it is about the devil, that it is evil, that... You know, that I think is being eroded, and being chipped away. I mean even the [local daily], never a notoriously liberal newspaper... will make distinctions between Wicca and Satanism. ... So the, that first knee-jerk response of Satanism is less, and I think that what's behind that um, you know, what people get now is really that it's about sex and drugs.

In the same vein, another interview participant commented,

...the whole idea of, the in league with the Devil and sacrifices and, and I think that, that that's not a general public perception... um... I think that might be a perception of a select minority of the public, but I don't think that that sort of reaction isn't out there, I think that there's becoming more and more a division between 'Satanism', and witchcraft, in the public. (Don)

Participants were also aware that some of the stigma under which they operate is reinforced the use of the words 'witch' and 'witchcraft' in self-identification and descriptions of beliefs and practices.

I'm not uncomfortable calling myself a witch. I'm uncomfortable with what people hear when I say 'I am a witch'. Because all of the deep-seated symbols in their head are like, Edith Hamilton, from uh, The Wizard of Oz, you know, 'are you a good witch, or a bad witch?' Um, and the Inquisition and Satan and, and eating babies, and ritual cannibalism, and, and, and the whole nine yards. (Judith)

...part of it is that, you know, anybody who believes that they can, um, you know, wiggle their nose and uh, fly through the air, uh, has got to be a kook. So, you know, obviously, somebody who is practicing the Craft I mean, they believe this, and therefore they've got to be a kook. It's um...I think it would help if we didn't really bill ourselves as witches, and quite frankly, I think we bill ourselves as witches more than the people, than people outside of the Craft bill us as witches. (Michael)

Most neopagans in my sample seem aware that the stigma is not universal, that is, they are not always and inevitably going to face negative consequences if their religious identification becomes known. There is a

pervasive sense, however, that it is not always possible to predict who will react negatively to the disclosure of their affiliation, and therefore, the possibility of negative responses throws a shadow across the way in which participants present themselves to the world. Stephen Pfohl notes,

Stigmatized persons who are 'wise' to their precarious social conditions may restrict themselves to the company of other stigmatized persons or to those sympathetic to their condition. In this way, they restrict the flow of information about themselves to those whom they can trust. (1985:291-292).

This sort of management practice can be seen among the survey respondents. When asked about how 'open' they were about their Craft affiliation inside the Craft community, of those who responded, slightly more than two-thirds indicated that they were 'very open', while only two percent replied that they were 'not at all open'.⁷¹ However, when asked how open they were about their Craft affiliation outside the Craft community, almost 10 percent said they were 'not at all open' while only 20 percent indicated they were 'very open'. The remainder replied that they were 'somewhat open' (40%) or 'not very open' (30%).⁷²

Survey respondents were also asked to indicate how likely they would be to discuss their religious beliefs in some depth if they were asked about them in a variety of circumstances. More than half (51%) said they would 'definitely' engage in such a discussion if asked at a party attended exclusively by friends.

⁷¹ There were eight missing responses to this question. Several respondents indicated in the margins that there was no Craft community around them in which they could be open.

⁷² Neither 'openness' item showed marked differences between the proportions of men and women selecting each answer.

Another 34 percent indicated they would 'probably' do so in that situation. Only two people replied that they would 'definitely not' answer the queries. When the scenario shifted to that of a party attended primarily by strangers, the number of people expressing a willingness to discuss religious beliefs declined, with only 9 percent indicating they would definitely do so, and another 38 percent saying they probably would. Sixteen percent replied that they would definitely not respond in that situation.

Respondents were also fairly receptive to talking about their religious beliefs with their family of origin, with 70 percent saying they would definitely (38%) or probably (32%) have the discussion. Ten percent indicated that they definitely would not. Members of other religions who were believed to be open-minded were even more likely to be approved, with over 90 percent of respondents saying they would definitely (37%) or probably (54%) discuss their beliefs. Again, only two people replied that they definitely would not do so. However, when it was believed that the member of another religion would be hostile, only one-third of respondents said they would definitely (6%) or probably (27%) discuss their beliefs, while 31 percent said they definitely would not.

Half of the respondents said they would definitely (18%) or probably (32%) have the discussion with co-workers, but fewer than 20 percent indicated that they would do the same with a prospective employer.⁷³ Just over 40 percent indicated that they would definitely (4%) or probably (37%) discuss their

⁷³ Several noted in the margins that questions about religious beliefs or involvements during a job interview violate provincial human rights codes.

religious beliefs with a casual acquaintance about whose possible reaction they were uncertain, but slightly fewer, 32 percent, would do so if that person were a neighbour. Finally, 46 percent said they would definitely (12%) or probably (34%) respond to questions about their religion posed by a police officer assessing their credibility as a witness. Twenty-eight percent replied that they definitely would not do so.

During the interview stage, participants described some of the concerns they have about the ways in which others perceive them, the ways in which they manage information about themselves and their religious identifications, and the ways in which they attempt to insulate themselves from the potentially negative ramifications of their religious choice.

I'm a lot less open about my Craft that I used to be. I own a house, my neighbours aren't going anywhere. My kids are going to have to go to school; I'd like the other parents to let their kids play with mine. My partner has a well-paying job we'd like him to keep, and we'd like the promotions to keep coming. (Carrie)

...there are some places where you are in the public, and you've really got to, you know, keep it down. And you've really got to keep it to yourself, and you can't really say anything. And if someone is pissed off at you about it who is in a position of authority over you, and they have no idea what you're talking about, and they're spouting bigotry, you can't really say too much, because you could get fired. You could lose your job. Your kids could be punished because of it. (Sarah)

I wear a pentacle around my neck, but most often it's under my clothing. If someone asks me, fine, no problem, but I'm not going to broadcast who or what I am by wearing like pagan jewellery all over the place and stuff like that... I don't work in an office or anything like that, where I have to worry. I'm really lucky about that. But I do know some people who, who are worried that if their co-workers found out, they'd get ridiculed and maybe lose their jobs and things like that. (Beth)

...it [my religious affiliation] has made my life increasingly more complicated, uh, as during some of my graduate work, I had trouble by the fact that if I was perceived to be involved with 'this cult' then my academic research would automatically be suspect, and so it left me in a position where I had to play this, this dual identity thing, and I told people that if they want to know what my religious beliefs are, they're going to have to wait until after I get my PhD. Because I will not let my belief system get in the way of my academics and my career. (Judith)

One participant described the physical precautions she takes to enable her to balance her need to make information available with her concerns for her personal security.

I do workshops on various kinds of spirituality, on Wicca sometimes, um, on what Wicca is about, um, out of my house. Uh, and I never have my address there. I have my phone number there, but even my phone number's unlisted, so there's no address in the phone book. So if people want to come and take a workshop, they have to call me. And, uh, I have a hundred and thirty five pound bullmastiff. (Deanne)

Another noted that he was fairly unconcerned about being widely known to be Craft because "I'm six foot six, nearly 200 pounds, so there's not too many people that are really going to take me on." (Paul)

Some of those interviewed expressed a sense that the possibility and severity of potential negative consequences was decreasing.

I think that there's an amount of secrecy, um, within the Craft, um, to go back to earlier things, that comes out of a certain insecurity, that you don't reveal who you are or what you're doing to anyone, for fear of prosecution. Um, and um, I think that's becoming less and less so... (Don)

I think to some extent that that it [persecution and discrimination] hasn't panned out as being a real problem. You know, it may be, most of the people I've met, who are concerned about that, if they

perceive this is going to be, especially nowadays, it's a fairly enlightened culture, certainly in Canada anyways. Um, I've met a lot of pagan parents who were serious professional people, and have done these things, and some have chosen to be very open about it, and really haven't had the problems. But for the people who've chosen not to be open about it, that was their big concern. Um...[sigh]... I haven't found that to be the case. I deal with a tremendous number of very professional clients, and I've worked for [national cultural agency] and so on, and [wife] is, well, ninety-five percent of her clients are serious businesspeople, and so on, and we have a pentacle hanging in the front of our house, and it's pretty obvious if you bother to look around the reception area... that she is into some mystical weirdness of some kind. Um, and now, maybe we just have clients who are tolerant, but I haven't found it to be a problem. Uh, I think perhaps, to some extent, people are sort of programmed, in our culture, that they are going to go through some social rejectedness if they are open about this kind of thing, and it seems to be less the case now. (Aidan)

These responses would seem to indicate that, on the whole, neopagans do not tend to broadcast their beliefs indiscriminately, and that they tend to look for contexts in which they can expect a certain degree of sympathy to their disclosures, whether because of a pre-existing personal relationship, a pre-existing acceptance of some form of religious explanation, or in which the consequences of disclosure are fairly benign (loss of a casual acquaintance, for example). However, both the survey and the interview responses also suggest that, while a certain level of discretion is being employed, most neopagans do not seem to be living in fear of being 'found out.' There is also some sense in which participants believe that the social ramifications of the discovery of their religious affiliation are less severe now than they might once have been.

Several of the interview participants expressed a certain level of ambivalence about the increased levels of acceptability and general tolerance of neopaganism overall, because of the possibility that it might become trivialized,

co-opted or diluted. "Right now," one participant commented acerbically, "Wicca is cute and trendy, and that will pass, but right now, it's annoying" (Andrea). When describing the way in which 'Disney-witch' stereotypes can make it difficult to educate people about the Craft, another participant added,

I don't know if I would want to change that or not, because in a way, it's its own kind of protection. Um... I am a child of the sixties and I saw what happened to, I mean, we were going to change the world, we really were, and it was going to be peace, love and groovy, and, the day I saw General Motors using psychedelic artwork to sell cars, I knew it was over, right? I knew the dream was over, uh, because it got totally co-opted. People started to make too much money off of it. It became this whole, you know, it became part, it was assimilated into pop culture, and it, it lost its drive, and it lost its authenticity and it lost its vision. I worry about that happening with Wicca. About it becoming too, too mainstream. That all the associations left over from the Malleus Maleficarum and the witch burnings and all that sort of stuff, there's so much stigma attached to Wicca, that it's a kind of protection. (Martha)

One noted a certain tokenism that has become attached to the inclusion of Craft practitioners in discussions of broader religious phenomena.

I've gotten comfortable with the degree of wanna-being. Wanna-be enthusiasm, so there seems to be a much higher drop out rate now than there used to be. Um, but that's a function of, of, you know, Chapters having a whole section on Wicca. It has a, a lot to do with movies like *The Craft*, being, uh, being, you know, on YTV, um, it's okay, I mean it's all right. Um... I'm very happy with Wicca having a very public face. Um, the more people think they know about us because they've had to deal with us being around, probably the more social space we'll have in which to be. ... I don't see Wicca as being 'in danger' vis-à-vis the media or the perception. Um, I guess I'm more upset about it being trivialized. Um, trivialized also as being 'oh, we need a Wiccan here in this article as well or we're not trendy ourselves.' (Francine)

Francine's comments underline the process that Finke and Iannaccone would lead one to expect: that a decrease in membership cost produced through

an increased supply of information and therefore avenues for involvement, will produce broader levels of involvement, however temporary. Francine points out that, in her observation, a larger proportion of the people who show some interest in the Craft appear to be 'dropping out' now than was the case when it was much more difficult to get involved. In the absence of reliable involvement numbers collected over a period of time, however, it is impossible to do anything but speculate as to whether the overall number of people staying with the practice has increased because of the greater exposure levels, even when the possibility of increased attrition is taken into account.

Factors Contributing to a Perceived Reduction in Stigma

It is difficult to assign a causal priority in time to the obviously interconnected elements of decreased stigma/increased public tolerance for neopaganism and witchcraft as a whole, increased availability of information about neopaganism, and an increase in the number of 'less threatening' pop culture representations of witches and witchcraft. Pop culture vehicles depicting witches as relatively benign are not entirely new -- there were Angela Lansbury's character in Disney's *Bedknobs and Broomsticks*, and Elizabeth Montgomery's character in television's *Bewitched*, to give somewhat older examples -- however, they do seem to be increasing, and some even incorporate neopagan elements into their portrayals, rather than simply reworking the older stereotypes.

One of the movies to have utilized a more 'neopagan' version of witchcraft was *The Craft*. Several interview participants mentioned this film, which was released in 1996, with some ambivalence. None thought that it was an accurate or reasonable portrayal of neopagan witchcraft, however some felt it was an improvement over the typical horror movie fare and unlikely to damage neopaganism's reputation, while others believed that it was more damaging than a less grounded, more patently outlandish portrayal would have been.

The plot of *The Craft* revolves around four high school aged girls in a California Catholic school who decide to practice witchcraft. All of these girls could, in one way or another, be characterized as 'outsiders': one is typically 'goth' in appearance, and has neglectful, alcoholic parents (Nancy); one has a disfiguring skin condition (Bonnie); one is black in a primarily white school (Rachelle); and the last is a new student, who, it is revealed as the movie progresses, has a history of hallucinations, psychosis and suicidal behaviour (Sarah). The first three girls seem to be indifferent students, unpopular, and given to shoplifting. The choice of protagonists could be taken to underscore the notion that the Craft appeals only to those slated to be outcasts anyway, that no 'normal' person would need to resort to such measures. It also implies that this is a phenomenon restricted to women.

The girls do rituals and spellwork that revolve primarily around their own wishes, for power, for healing, for retribution against the prejudiced, and for love. The spells work, in somewhat unintended ways. Nancy's stepfather has a heart attack and dies, both freeing Nancy from his heavy-handed expectations

and abuse, and leaving her and her mother with a modest insurance settlement. Bonnie's scarring heals, fulfilling her desire for external beauty, but she becomes more and more vain and self-centered. The girl who tormented Rachelle about being black finds that every time she makes a negative comment, her hair falls out, leaving her a depressed and hysterical wreck. The object of Sarah's attentions becomes obsessed with her, calling her home incessantly, professing his love and stalking her. None of the girls are capable of undoing the spells that they have set into motion.

Eventually, Sarah rebels against Nancy's increasingly monomaniacal quest for power and control, and wants to leave the group. This causes the other girls to band together against her, and to try to kill her through a combination of magical and mundane means. Sarah triumphs in the end; Rachelle and Bonnie lose their powers, and Nancy, unable to fathom that she is no longer the vessel of extraordinary powers and capable of imposing her will without restriction, is committed to an asylum.

Although the film depicts a wildly sensationalized version of magic – the girls have the power to change other's perceptions of their hair and eye colour, to fly through the air, to cause objects to float, and to produce convincing and long term hallucinations in others, for example – it is notable inasmuch as they did not gain these powers through pacts with the Devil, sacrifices, or any other anti-Christian acts, as is the norm in horror movies. The philosophy of magic, as expressed through the owner of an occult store where the girls obtain books and supplies, and to which Sarah flees when confronted with malevolent magical

attack, is congruent with that of the neopagan Craft. "...true magic is neither black nor white, it is both, because nature is both, loving and cruel all at the same time... whatever you send out, you get back times three... the only good or bad is in the heart of the witch; nature keeps its own balance."

There are also elements of the rituals shown in the movie that come directly from standard Wiccan materials. In one scene, each girl is informed that it is "better to rush upon this blade than enter this circle with fear in your heart" and is required to give the passwords "perfect love and perfect trust", both features of British Traditional first degree initiation rituals (Farrar and Farrar 1984:17, Kelly 1991:123). They also use the phrases 'as above, so below' and 'blessed be'. In another scene, the girls are doing a ritual at the seashore, and each girl invokes an elemental guardian. These invocations⁷⁴ are similar to many of those published or written by Craft practitioners (see the examples in Appendix D), and include the unusual phrase 'we summon and stir thee', which again is used primarily in British Traditional style rituals (Farrar and Farrar and Farrar 1981:39, Valiente 1978:157, Kelly 1991:123). Where in most Craft rituals there would then be an invocation to the God and Goddess, the film shows Nancy calling upon the "Serpent of Old, Ruler of the Deep, Guardian of the Bitter

⁷⁴ The general form of the film's elemental invocations is given in the first one: "Hail to the Guardians of the Watchtowers of the East, Powers of Air and Invention, hear us! Show us your power, we pray of thee. We invoke thee; teach us thy ways. We summon and stir thee."

South is identified with the "Powers of Fire and Feeling", West with the "Powers of Water and Intuition" and North with the "Powers of Mother and Earth".

Seas.” The absence of a feminine aspect of the divine, consistent throughout the movie, is one of the glaring differences between its portrayal of witchcraft and that of the neopagan movement more generally. Despite Nancy’s description, early in the film, of the spirit that witchcraft reveres, “it’s the trees, it’s the rocks, it’s the sun, it’s the moon... if God and the Devil were a football game Memnon would be the stadium they were playing in” the divine is always referred to in male terms.

Although there are discrepancies between the depiction of witchcraft in the movie *The Craft* and its actual contemporary practice, it can be argued that the concepts of the divine in nature, power from within and the existence of magic are presented in the movie as morally neutral, although potentially dangerous. The negative outcomes experienced by three of the girls are caused not by practice of witchcraft itself, but by pre-existing faults in their own characters that were magnified by that practice. This leaves open the possibility of a healthy, safe and spiritually rewarding practice of witchcraft. This movie, as well as popular television series such as *Sabrina* and *Charmed*, despite being far from accurate, can serve to generate interest that will inspire individuals to further research.

The availability of books allowing individuals to begin their own Craft practices or to found groups with their friends increased dramatically through the 1980s and 1990s. Not only were more such books being published, but they also became less relegated to specialty occult bookstores, which could usually be found only in large urban centers. By the late 1980s, books by authors such as the Farrars and Doreen Valiente were also becoming more available in

paperback formats, rather than exclusively in expensive hardcover editions. 'Big-box' bookstores, such as Chapters, generally have a section on Witchcraft and Neopaganism, although the quality and selection can vary widely, and the advent of on-line retailers such as Amazon.com, Chapters.ca and Indigo.ca means that individuals living where books on neopaganism would not previously have been available now have access to most titles in print, delivered to their homes.⁷⁵ When one considers the evidence presented in Chapter Four, that a large number of Craft practitioners credit books with having brought about their initial involvement, it would be reasonable to speculate that the increased availability and ease of obtaining books about the Craft would constitute a considerable reduction in the previous barriers to involvement for some people.

Information has also become easily available through online sources. Most of the large pagan organizations have websites, often linked to other sites. Some have bulletin boards or chat areas. There are a variety of Usenet groups devoted to the discussion of neopaganism or to neopagan networking, including

⁷⁵ I visited both the Chapters.ca website and the Indigo.ca website on September 13, 2000 in order to see how easy it would be to find books on the Craft. Both sites had 'Browse Topics' functions, which included, in the case of Chapters, Religion and Spirituality, and in the case of Indigo, Philosophy, Religion and Spirituality. Narrowing it further, one could select 'Occult and New Age' and then either 'Witchcraft and Wicca' or 'Magickal Studies' on the Chapters site, or 'Witchcraft and Wicca' on Indigo. This would produce a list of 20 books. On the Chapters site, 6 titles were listed in both the 'Witchcraft and Wicca' subsection and the 'Magickal Studies' subsection. Indigo's list contained 8 titles that were obviously historical studies. None of the titles listed most frequently on the survey respondents' 'most influential books' were found on either list, however, by using the sites' search engines, all of the 'top' titles were found, and were available to be ordered from either company.

alt.pagan, alt.pagan.contacts, alt.religion.wicca, and soc.religion.paganism. There are mailing lists and email loops with which one can become involved, some limited by tradition, geography or gender, others less restrictive. Simply going to a search engine armed with some basic terms can produce a wealth of useful leads for a novice. In a five-minute session on Google (www.google.com), I discovered that 'neopaganism' produced 3,820 hits, 'neopagan witchcraft' produced 2,750 hits, 'Asatru' (Norse heathenism) produced 21,300 hits, and 'Wicca' produced an astonishing 162,000 hits. The inability to locate information about the Craft is no longer a serious barrier to potential involvement, especially for the computer literate.

Institutionalization efforts, discussed in Chapter Five, have also resulted in some groups becoming more visible and therefore more accessible to newcomers. Neopagan festivals (Adler 1986; Pike 1996) also provide opportunities to make contacts, learn the norms of the broader pagan community, and explore both what is available and one's own interests, in an environment that can be presumed to be supportive. Festivals also allow individuals whose Craft practice has become irregular or intermittent to reconnect with the sort of experiences they associate with their religious affiliation, without being required to wholly orchestrate those experiences themselves. Court and tribunal rulings that have upheld Wicca, and neopaganism more generally, as valid religious expressions⁷⁶ can also increase the perceived legitimacy of the practice, as well as giving adherents something 'objective' at which to point when addressing their detractors.

⁷⁶ These are discussed in Chapter Five.

Summary

Neopaganism has doubled its census-recorded affiliation during a period when traditional organized religions are experiencing membership declines. At the same time, levels of interest in existential matters, the supernatural and the idea of deity are still high; the Canadian population simply seems less apt to associate these with the domain of the traditional churches. This could be taken as an indication that the forces of secularization which first moved religious concerns out of the sphere of civil discourse and into the sequestered environment of institutional religion have now further disembedded those concerns, leaving them to be constructed wholly within the lifeworld, as part of the individual narrative of the self. Because neopaganism is fundamentally disorganized, leaving its adherents to construct it according to their own preferences around a minimally specified framework, it could be expected to flourish under these conditions.

The numbers of people affiliating with neopaganism and other novel religious offerings, however, are in no way sufficient to offset the membership declines in traditional religious bodies. While new religious groups may be benefiting from a greater structural availability of potential adherents, there is little evidence that their cultural significance will be determined by the force of their numbers anytime in the foreseeable future. Neopaganism, as will be shown in the next chapter, draws its cultural significance from its ability to adapt to changing cultural conditions rather than on any ability to influence civil culture directly.

Rational choice theory postulates that growth in a particular religious sphere is more likely to be the result of a change in the overall level of the available supply of religious products than it is to be a function of a sweeping change in consumer demand. Supply, in turn, is influenced by the regulatory environment that surrounds a religious marketplace. Subsidy of some religious organizations, or active suppression of others, will both act to reduce the overall supply of religious products by making it difficult for some offerings to compete. Because neopaganism is decentralized, it is effectively 'produced' and reproduced explicitly through the activities of those who identify with it, therefore, anything that acts to reduce the barriers to individual involvement will effectively facilitate an increased 'supply' of neopaganism. In the past, two of the most significant barriers to involvement were the difficulties inherent in finding information about the Craft, and the stigma associated with the practice more generally.

Information about the Craft has become progressively more available over the past twenty years, as more books have been published and distribution of those available has become more widespread. Online retailers reduce the dependency on specialty bookstores that are only viable in large-market areas. There is also a great deal of information available on the internet, not only about aspects of the philosophy and practice, but about how to make contact with interested others.

Participants still believe that there is some stigma attached to their religious affiliation, that the potential for undesirable social consequences ranging from ridicule and scorn to ostracism to the possibility of job losses, loss

of custody, and refusal of housing to actual physical threat, exists. However, the majority of my respondents do not conceal their religious convictions from everyone, at all times. Participants base how much they say and to whom they say it on their assessment of the likelihood of experiencing negative consequences, and the perceived severity of those consequences. There is also a perception among much of my interview sample that the increased amount of information about neopaganism and witchcraft that has become available to the general public has acted to reduce the level of stigma associated with the identification by reducing the tendency for contemporary neopaganism to be conflated with heretical diabolism. In this environment, with the membership costs of a neopagan affiliation effectively decreasing, it would be reasonable to expect another substantial increase in affiliation levels on the 2001 census.

Chapter Eight: Modernity, Postmodernity and Neopaganism

The relationship between the upswing in the level of activities identified as neopagan or New Age and the contemporary cultural condition has been discussed by a number of authors over the past thirty years (Eliade 1976; Tiryakian 1974; Campbell 1972, 1978; Berger 1999; Bloch 1998; Luhrmann 1989; Orion 1995; York 1995; Heelas 1996; Carpenter 1996). These authors offer opinions on whether or not neopagan, New Age, and 'occult' movements are progressive or regressive, a reaction against the dominant culture or an adaptation to it, and, in the case of more recent treatments, whether the phenomena might be considered modern, postmodern or anti-modern.

Colin Campbell (1972, 1978) and Edward Tiryakian (1974) characterize the occult subculture, or the 'cultic milieu' to use Campbell's phrase, as an important cultural crucible out of which new social orientations and innovations can emerge. The milieu is seen as 'countercultural' in the sense that it is critical of what it perceives to be the dominant features of the broader culture, and in that way, is reactionary. The reaction, however, is not meant to move society back to what existed previously, but to move it ahead to a more satisfactory set of value orientations and ways of being. Both Campbell and Tiryakian characterize the occult subculture as essentially progressive. Tiryakian suggests that 'occult revivals' have been a feature of previous transitional eras, where there has been a shift from one major cultural paradigm to another. He cites the waning period of the Roman Empire and the Renaissance/Reformation as other historical periods in which a significant change in value orientation was accompanied by an occult revival (1974:274). Eliade (1976) also takes a historically situated stance,

placing the modern esoteric revival in the context of the broader interest in esoteric culture during the nineteenth century. Eliade's presentation of the occult revival situates it as a kind of optimistic utopian movement, a reaction against depersonalization and the desacralization of life and nature, fuelled by the sixties counterculture. He views it as significant as a representation of the individual's continuing quest for meaning and religion beyond what is institutionally on offer, but attaches no lasting cultural significance to any of the specific groups themselves. None of these authors makes pronouncements about modernity or postmodernity, although Tiryakian suggests that there is a transition from one era to another occurring.

Of the more recent authors, Bloch, York and Heelas tend to take the New Age and neopaganism to be two manifestations of the same broader trend, although acknowledging that there are differences between them as ideal types, while Berger, Orion and Carpenter deal with neopaganism specifically. Luhrmann takes as her focus the practice of magic, and thus her analysis is not limited to neopagans, but excludes those New Age practices that are not magically oriented. The various analyses offered in these works are contingent on their constructions of both modernity and postmodernity. Where modernity is characterized in a closed fashion, as it is in Orion and Carpenter, neopaganism is defined as postmodern; where modernity is perceived as a more open and ongoing process, authors are more likely to consider both the New Age and neopaganism to embody creative or radicalized continuities with the ideals of modern culture. This is the position taken explicitly by Heelas and Berger, and implicitly by York, Bloch and Luhrmann.

The bulk of Michael York's 1995 analysis of New Age and neopagan activities in Britain is devoted to determining where they could usefully be placed in the context of the various church-sect-cult typologies that are available. He does not explicitly discuss their placement as modern, anti-modern or postmodern, but does say in the introduction that he believes that,

...together they [the New Age and neopaganism] represent a theological perspective with particular sociological consequences, which have been largely absent from or ignored in the Judeo-Christian hegemony dominating the West. Under the strains of our consumer-oriented, technological, and industrialized society of role-playing as opposed to communities of interpersonal relationships... the New Age/Neo-pagan perspective shows signs of momentum and growing acceptance that might be interpreted as part of the broader social attempt, albeit limited, toward counterbalancing the prevailing tendencies. It is likewise in part a response to a dissatisfaction with more orthodox religious institutions to meet the challenges or growing impersonalization in our secularized and increasingly bureaucratic society. (1995:2)

This would suggest that York constructs these phenomena both as responses to existing conditions and as vectors of resistance to the dominant culture. This is also the position taken by Bloch (1998) with respect to the New Agers and neopagans he studies under the label of 'countercultural spiritualists'. He notes, "alternative spirituality is but one of many permutations of a contemporary flight away from highly rationalized organizational structure" (1998:9).

However, unlike York, Bloch devotes considerable attention to the cultural continuities that exist between the mainstream society and the countercultural spiritualists, particularly in the latter's selective appropriation of the legitimating discourse of science (1998:54-60). Bloch notes that countercultural spiritualists have not abandoned the values of the mainstream entirely, but reshape them in such a way as to act as a critique of the dominant social order.

This is also the point made in considerable depth by Heelas (1996). He frames his analysis of the New Age explicitly in terms of how it addresses both what he identifies as the 'uncertainties of modernity' and the 'certainties of modernity' and rejects any attempt to construct it as postmodern. Heelas considers the uncertainties of modernity to be intimately bound up with the challenges to identity construction posed by detraditionalization. This process is associated both with the deinstitutionalization of identity, that is, the extent to which an individual is expected to construct their personal identity in a way that is not centrally informed by the mediation of factors such as class, occupation, denomination, political party, race or nationality, and with the turn to a more expressivistic construction of personhood (1996:141-4). He cites Peter Berger's (1974) argument that, having rejected the iron cage of determination by the capitalistic social order, many people found the liberation of 'normlessness' too much to bear, and found themselves allying with the secondary institutions of the counterculture.

However, Heelas emphasizes that the rejection of overdetermination by the hegemonic social order does not necessarily imply a wholesale rejection of the values that act as its underpinnings. On the contrary, the New Age movement's appeal lies partially in its continuities with the values of modernity, even where it objects to the way in which those values have become expressed in the mainstream (1996:169). He argues against the appellation 'postmodern' as representing a fundamental misunderstanding of the character of modernity.

Currently, the New Age is not postmodern. To make that claim is to essentialize modernity, contradicting the non-essentializing outlook of the (supposedly) postmodern condition, and, by

treating modernity as one thing, failing to recognize that the New Age is a perpetuation – thinking of perhaps the most pertinent of cultural trajectories – of the counter-Enlightenment Romantic Movement. (1996:216-17)

Luhrmann describes magic as “the romantic intellectual’s religion, a religion demanding no explicit belief but ripe with symbolic and experiential fruits” (1989:341). Luhrmann’s ethnography identifies as central features of magic and magical practice many of the same qualities that are highlighted by postmodern writers as characterizing the turn to the postmodern: a sense of play and irony embodied in the experience and rationalization of activity, a skepticism towards truth-claims and scientific rationality, the centrality of the interpreting individual to the nature of a truth which can only be subjective. However, although she carefully avoids labeling anything as ‘modern’ or ‘postmodern’, she argues that magicians have not abandoned rationality, they have expanded its bases; they have not given up on truth claims, they merely refuse to rigidly tie their behaviour to the demonstrability of those claims. In this sense, they have not abandoned the ‘modern’ enterprise; they have reinterpreted it so that its Romantic elements come to the forefront.

Helen Berger explicitly identifies neopagan witchcraft as a thoroughly modern movement. “Wicca... is a religion of late modernity rather than post-modernity. Although all of these [New Age and neopagan] religions have components of postmodernity, they do not ultimately signify an epistemological break with Enlightenment thought” (1999:6). She bases her assessment of the modern character of neopagan witchcraft primarily around concepts developed by Giddens (1984, 1987, 1990, 1991). Of particular interest to Berger are Giddens’

notions of 'life politics' and 'pure relationships' because she believes that these offer insight not only into why neopaganism's appeal seems to be increasing at this historical moment, but also into why neopaganism takes the particular radically decentralized form that it does.

Giddens distinguishes life politics from emancipatory politics.

Emancipatory politics, he writes, is the politics of life chances (1991:214); it concerns itself with issues of liberation and empowerment and makes primary the ideals of justice, equality and participation (1991:213). This is the politics he associates with theorists such as Habermas and Rawls. Life politics is the politics of lifestyle and life choices, which presumes the previous existence of a certain level of emancipation, sufficient at least to permit a reflexive construction of self-identity. Life politics is the politics of self-actualization, and invites individuals to make central moral and existential issues as part of their inherently political life agenda. This, in turn, acts to re-embed these concerns, which were devalued in the earlier modern period by relativism and a skepticism towards knowledge claims, in the fabric of life and life activities. Berger comments, "Within Wicca the life politics of feminism, environmentalism, and sexual freedom that are interwoven with magical practices, rituals and chants are fostering the reembedding of moral issues" (1999:125-6).

Berger also considers Wicca to be an example of the operation of what Giddens (1991) characterizes as 'pure relationships'. These are reflexively organized relationships that are not anchored in or determined by the external conditions of social or economic life, and that are sought out and maintained solely for the benefits of the relationship itself, as experienced by the parties

involved. They are focused on intimacy and maintained through commitment and trust. Pure relationships allow for the exploration and construction of self-identity through a process of creating shared history with selected others (Giddens 1991:88-98). The fluid coven and small group structure that is found throughout Wicca, Berger asserts, is an example of the operation of an ethos of pure relationships resulting in an amorphous constellation of 'communities of choice'. The congruence between what Giddens identifies as central features of late modernity and the social forms and value orientations found in neopagan witchcraft causes Berger to resist the idea that Wicca represents a move into the realm of the postmodern.

Orion offers by far the weakest and most superficial argument about the relationship of neopaganism and postmodernity. She asserts that because both neopagans and postmodernists reject what they believe to be the undesirable outcomes of industrialization and modernity, neopaganism is postmodern (1995:102). This argument clearly employs an undistributed middle term. That postmodernists and neopagans have a characteristic in common does not make an identification between them either appropriate or accurate. Her portrayal also fails to distinguish between postmodernism, which would presumably be something beyond modernity, and anti-modernism, which would arise from a nostalgic desire to reinstate the natural and social order that is believed to have existed prior to modernity. It is also true, however, that the fact that Orion's assertion about neopaganism being postmodern is unconvincing in the context in which she presents it does not mean that it could not be a good interpretation of the situation.

Dennis Carpenter (1996) offers a more situated portrayal of neopaganism as a form of postmodern spirituality, following the usages of Griffin (1988, 1990) and Spretnak (1991). Griffin's postmodernity, as Carpenter presents it, would combine some of the elements of premodernity, including a non-dualistic relationship between human beings and nature, the deprivatization of spirituality and its reintegration into the political, aesthetic and moral spheres of life, and a focus on communitarian forms of social organization, with the improvements in the quality of life made possible through the technological advances of modernity (Carpenter 1996:39). Modern premises would not be entirely abandoned, but they would be revised to reflect a more egalitarian and sustainable vision of the world. This form of "constructive postmodernism" involves "a creative synthesis of modern and premodern truths and values, including premodern notions of divine reality, cosmic meaning, and an enchanted nature" (1996:39). Carpenter goes on to argue that many of the central features of neopaganism, including its emphases on the interconnectedness of the human and the non-human worlds, the characterization of the divine as immanent, the animism expressed by many practitioners, and the tendency for dualities (good/bad, sacred/profane, spirit/matter) to be rejected or transcended are congruent with Griffin's characterization of postmodern spirituality, and that therefore, neopaganism has the potential to become a postmodern spirituality. "To the extent that Pagans integrate premodern inspiration with efforts to solve the problems of modernity, they may be regarded as postmodern" (1996:68). However,

Carpenter also acknowledges that more study is needed to determine the extent to which neopagans are truly enacting these concerns in their spiritual practice, rather than merely possessing an ideology that would make such activities plausible.

Carpenter presents one version of postmodernity to which neopaganism might be said to have some natural affinities. The nature of postmodernity, however, is a slippery and contested terrain. For those examining the assorted writings about postmodernity from the 'outside', that is, without necessarily accepting the interpretations and the assumptions that guide them, it is clear that this is not a homogeneous body of work. There is no canon to which it all subscribes or to which it can be held accountable. In a sense, there is no 'postmodernity' per se, but rather, a range of 'postmodernities'. To grossly oversimplify the complexity of this intellectual constellation for the purposes of discussion, there seem to be two broad and related streams within the discourse of/on postmodernity. One is ontological and epistemological and focuses primarily on issues of knowledge, truth, history and language. It questions and challenges the fundamental assumptions of modern philosophy. The other is social and material, and describes the way in which living conditions, social relationships, institutions and individuals have changed or are different from the way in which they are described by or postulated in, modernist theories. The latter analyses are often framed as being about 'the postmodern condition' rather than being 'postmodern' in character. Both of these types of analyses, in turn, rely on particular characterizations of modernity.

The problem with pursuing this line of analysis, however, is that it tends to turn the discussion away from the phenomena under examination, whatever that might be, and refocus it on the extent to which the phenomena can be taken as an indicator of something else (Dawson 1998). In this case, the question would be framed as 'to what extent can the growth of neopagan spirituality be taken as a symptom of modern or postmodern trends in the broader culture?'

Nonetheless, such an analysis can help to situate the movement under question within the wider intellectual discourse on the social condition, and so it is hazardous to abandon it altogether. The discourses of modernity, postmodernity and neopaganism do treat many of the same themes, and examination of these may give some insight into the potential intellectual and social trajectory of the movement.

Relationships, Explanation, Truth and Knowledge

Modernist explanations and constructions focus on relationships, wholes, the identification of causes and effects, and the determination of truth in order to contribute to knowledge. Daniel Little nicely captures this approach when he writes, "...the character of social explanation: ... requires identifying causes, ... it flows from the analysis of the decision making of rational agents, and ... it requires interpretation of culturally specific norms, values and worldviews" (1991:2). This model of inquiry is reflected in the 'social facts' of Durkheim, the functionalism of Parsons, and even in the psychologies of Freud and Jung, whose descriptions of the workings of the sub/unconscious merely add another

explanatory dimension to the human psyche, without ever fundamentally challenging the idea that explanation is important.

In attempting to differentiate between 'modernists' and 'postmodernists' in the social sciences, Pauline Rosenau comments, "Those of a modern conviction seek to isolate elements, specify relationships and formulate a synthesis. Postmodernists do the opposite" (1992:8). Although her statement is not particularly useful as a set of criteria for identifying postmodernism, it points to the way in which the theorists and works that tend to be put into the postmodernist camp are concerned with 'the opposite' of modernity. Postmodernist examinations and constructions focus on differences, ambiguities and divergences. They are not concerned with synthesizing, grounding, or homogenizing the diversity of possible events and experiences. Kenneth Thompson notes, "If we are entering a post-modern age, then one of its most distinctive characteristics is a loss of rational and social coherence in favour of cultural images and social forms and identities marked by fragmentation, multiplicity, plurality and indeterminacy" (in Hall et. al. 1992:223). The whole is not organically unified; it is made up of elements that are related due to a humanly imposed proximity, rather than as a 'natural' outcome. This can be seen especially in postmodern architecture, which combines elements from widely ranging temporal and geographical locations into a single work, or in the postmodern art forms that center on the pastiche (for example, see Jameson 1991).

This is not to imply that postmodern authors deny the existence of relationships between elements, they simply use a different organizing principle to conceptualize and discuss these relationships. Modernist formulations have

cause and effect as their primary organizing principle; relationships exist, and detailed description of them will allow for generalization and then explanation and eventually prediction. Postmodern ideas about relationship are organized around the concept of intertextuality. Intertextuality is the notion that everything is related to everything else in dialectic, mutually modifying relationships so complex that it is impossible to ever specify them completely. Relationships do not exist in themselves, but rather they are the product of human intervention, imposed through language. It is only within language that relationships can be specified, and language therefore both describes and creates relationship. This moves the focus of analysis away from attempting to explain the way things are to examining the way in which things are portrayed. Detailed description of a set of relationships is still seen as desirable, but it becomes an end in itself, rather than a means to continue on towards explanation or prediction. French postmodernist Michel Maffesoli writes, "rather than trying to fool ourselves into thinking we can seize, explain, and exhaust an object, we must be content to describe its shape, its movements, hesitations, accomplishments and its various convulsions" (1996:5). He refers to this undertaking as 'recital', commenting:

This rather aesthetic theory of the recital is not designed for those who think it is possible to shed light on men's actions, much less is it for those who, confusing knowledge and politics, believe action is possible. It is rather a kind of quietism which is limited to recognizing that which is, which occurs, in a form of revaluing of the *primum vivere*. (1996:7)

The relationships examined by postmodernists may be comparable, but they are not interchangeable in a way that would allow them to be generalized.

Neopaganism, particularly the neopagan witchcraft practiced by the greater part of this study's respondents, is modernist in the sense that it focuses on relationships and inter-related wholes. The concept of 'balance' is central to many aspects of the myth and practice. Male must be balanced by female, darkness by light, earth by fire, air by water, and activity by rest. Too much of any one thing produces an imbalance, which affects everything else, in a way that suggests a Durkheimian organicism. Starhawk writes,

Existence is sustained by the on-off pulse, the alternating current of the two forces in perfect balance. Unchecked, the life force is cancer; unbridled, the death force is war and genocide. Together, they hold each other in the harmony that sustains life, in the perfect orbit that can be seen in the changing cycle of the seasons, in the ecological balance of the natural world, and in the progression of human life from birth through fulfillment to decline and death -- and then to rebirth. (1979:27)

This stress on relationship is more functionalist than intertextual in that there is a sense that it is both possible and desirable to bring things 'into balance' which would then produce a steady state, like Durkheim's 'social order'. That does not mean that nothing ever changes again, it simply means that all changes must be accompanied by the necessary adjustments to ensure the continuation of balance. Janet and Stewart Farrar make this point when they write of the effects of multiple incarnations. "The process of repeated reincarnation, therefore, is one of working out the karmic balance until a permanently healthy equilibrium is achieved. (A dynamic equilibrium, not a static one, be it noted)" (1984:121).

Postmodernists tend to assert that this whole quest for a steady, organically self-maintaining state is fundamentally misguided and inadequate. Jean Baudrillard puts it bluntly: "The universe is not dialectical: it moves towards the extremes, and not toward equilibrium; it is devoted to radical

antagonism, and not to reconciliation or synthesis" (1988:185). They are less likely to valorize a steady state, or believe that the outcome of change can be directed to a certain predetermined end. Postmodern theorists prefer to focus on the active processes through which contexts are created and experienced, without holding these up for judgment to a preconceived notion of 'balance'.

Modernist explanations imply the possibility of an 'answer', of 'truth'. It may be that all of the 'answers' we have hitherto produced are only approximations of the truth, but this is not because it is not possible to know, it is because we still lack the sophistication to take all of the relevant factors into account in seeking to produce our 'answer'. Postmodernist examinations reject the possibility of 'an answer'. Barry Smart comments,

Central to the postmodern condition is the notion that the legitimation procedures of knowledge have been eroded, and that the assumption at the heart of legislative reason of the possibility and/or acceptability of deriving prescriptions from denotative statements is no longer sustainable. (1993:119)

Because all knowledge is mediated through language and experience, no answer or set of observations, however sophisticated, is able to provide the same 'truth' to more than one person, or for more than one moment. There can be only interpretation. No understanding can be anything other than fleeting because the content of our experience continually modifies our interpretations of the known, thus changing the knowledge. This produces a situation within the postmodern condition where knowledge is not cumulative, and attempts at explanation are, by and large, irrelevant. Not only does what is known not stay known, but also all that is available to be known are unique and ungeneralizable expressions and situations.

Neopagan witchcraft recognizes the centrality of interpretation to knowledge and experience, but differs from many postmodern formulations in several significant ways. First, there is a sense of some ultimately unknowable absolute, of which all possible interpretations are reflections. Starhawk writes,

Witchcraft has always been a religion of poetry, not theology. The myths, legends, and teachings are recognized as metaphors for 'That-Which-Cannot-Be-Told,' the absolute reality our limited minds can never completely know. The mysteries of the absolute can never be explained -- only felt or intuited. Symbols and ritual acts are used to trigger altered states of awareness, in which insights that go beyond words are revealed. When we speak of 'the secrets that cannot be told,' we do not mean merely that rules prevent us from speaking freely. We mean that the inner knowledge literally cannot be expressed in words. It can only be conveyed by experience, and no one can legislate what insight another person may draw from any given experience. (1979:7)

Although generally, postmodernists do not deny that there may be knowledge that is not capturable within the realm of language-games, they find such knowledge uninteresting and irrelevant, precisely because of its ineffable nature, whereas neopagan witchcraft constructs it as central.

Second, knowledge about the self and the universe in neopagan witchcraft, especially in magic and spellwork, is sought in order to refine human control. Knowledge is the conduit through which power passes in order to effect change. "A spell is a symbolic act done in an altered state of consciousness, in order to cause a desired change. To cast a spell is to project energy through a symbol" writes Starhawk (1979:110). A key word here is 'desired'. It would be considered immoral and reckless, to say nothing of ineffective, to use magic in order to effect change without a clear end in mind. The end receives priority over the means. Starhawk continues,

The visualization we create in a spell should be that of the desired end – not necessarily the means by which it will come about. We picture the accident victim running on the beach – not the bones knitting. We keep our focus on our destination, without attempting to chart every movement we will make on the way. Spells usually work in unexpected ways. (1979:113-114)

Spellwork, in its essence, is a projection of human control. Scott Cunningham is explicit on this point.

[M]agic is a process in which Wiccans work in harmony with the universal power source which we envision as the Goddess and God, as well as with personal and Earth energies, to improve our lives and lend energy to the Earth. Magic is a method whereby individuals under none but self-determined predestination take control of their lives. (1989:20)

Postmodernists acknowledge that we can effect change, but deny the possibility of predicting or controlling the direction of that change. This idea is nicely illustrated in Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray's (1993) examination of the constellation of responses to an informal and unsanctioned campaign by women at an American university to list the names of date-rapists on the walls of the women's washrooms on campus. Change occurred, but it was not the change that was anticipated, nor was it necessarily desired. Instead of the alleged 'offenders' experiencing social sanctions, the 'vandals' were targeted for reprisals by the university administration.

The knowledge that neopagans collect, for spellwork, for ritual construction and for their own personal development, is eclectic. It is not all drawn from a single culture, time period or geographical location. In her manual for those beginning their Craft journey, Ly Warren-Clarke suggests,

Apart from the nature of things that interest you generally it is important that you accumulate as much knowledge of a diverse nature concerning the occult path as you can, as there is power in knowledge for its own sake. All manner of related subjects can only assist you in your work – things of an anthropological, religious, philosophic nature, works by other known occultists, material pertinent to affirm what you learn, ie. astrology, numerology, tarot, hermetics, qabalah, witchcraft, magick, herbalism and the healing arts in general, mythology, legend, history, general science, etc. (1987:72-73)

Because of the breadth and diversity of the sources, contradictions frequently occur among possible interpretations of an object or attribute. (Is the moon male or female? Are Rods in the Tarot deck air or fire? What is the appropriate colour for mourning? For growth?) That there are contradictions in no way invalidates the knowledge, in the way that it can in rigidly modernist systems, where only one of two contradictory options can be 'right'. Neopagan witchcraft holds that all interpretations are possible, and that it is the responsibility of the individual to make informed choices and to resolve the ambiguity in whatever way he or she finds comfortable. Warren-Clarke goes on to suggest,

With all of the information that you receive it is important that you take time to put the qualities of your own mind into action... All things are to be analysed and should lead to a balanced viewpoint based on your own judgment. No knowledge is ever wasted and it is necessary to know enough to trust your own findings. Ignorance is never bliss, and all material viewed can only extend your capacities of mind. (73)

This is not to say that there are not dogmatists in the Craft, some interpretations are more widely held than others, and every philosophical outlook seems to produce a minority of adherents who believe that their perspective is 'the one true way'. One interview participant noted,

I mean, one true way-ism, is uh, more fanaticism, fundamentalism, or whatever you call it, is endemic right now, and I still remember the first time I met some fundamentalist Craft people, it was really like, 'I can't believe this exists... I can't believe that people are acting like this.' They were scary! They reminded me of some of the Falwell clones... And they were Alexandrian, which was even worse... ex-Baptists, just sort of carried it on... all they were doing is that they'd taken the deep structure from the Baptist convention that they'd been members of, and translated it into Craft symbology. (John)

In general, however, these fundamentalist tendencies are perceived as being aberrant in a Craft context and are viewed with some frustration. Another participant commented,

There is uh, a fundamentalist movement, even within Craft, where my way, or our way, my way, is the right way. Uh, that I find... very grating, because I've really come to learn that there is no... one way to approach deity, or the practice of magic. Where one person can visualize in pictures, another gets it through a sense of feel, and I've seen people who have been denigrated because they can't visualize. You know, there's that 'one right and true way-ism' that is, is very much out there in the pagan community. (Paul)

So, the use to which knowledge is put in neopagan witchcraft is very modernist, but the idea of what knowledge is and can be has postmodernist overtones, especially in the senses of allowing ambiguity and being a pastiche. There are also overlaps with the postmodern critique of scientific rationality.

In the introduction to *Postmodernism and Social Theory*, Steven Seidman contends that "Central to postmodernism is its critique of the claim that scientific knowledge is universal and can be justified in a non-contextual way.

Postmodernists contend that standards of truth are context dependent" (1992:2).

Like the advocates of a move to postmodernity, many neopagan practitioners reject the idea that the only valid form of knowledge is scientific (intersubjective

and verifiable) and/or rational (conscious and conforming to the rules of Enlightenment thought). There is a strong emphasis in the Craft on intuitive and mystical knowledge. One interview participant discussed how intuitive knowledge, 'just knowing', affects how she does both ritual and spellwork.

I find that when I do stuff that people turn around and tell me was a particular spell or a particular blessing, a particular healing, it's not so much something that I plan specifically, like, I will help create a place, and invoke certain powers and certain blessings, and then stuff comes through me, and it flows through me, and a lot of the time, like, you plan a ritual and you reach a certain point and it just goes off in a totally different direction, and, you go with it, you follow it; you just know that's where you're supposed to go. And sure enough, when you go there, all these other things start happening... (Martha)

Another described what he perceives as the fundamentally experiential nature of knowledge in the Craft.

...what anyone experiences in ritual, in connection with the Earth, in connection with the web of life... can't be described. It's personal. It's a mystery. And the only way that you can know about it, is by experiencing it yourself, not by reading the words of someone else who has experienced it. (Don)

Intuition is considered to be a capacity like artistic ability or musical talent.

Everybody possesses some; some people have more than others; and everyone, regardless of natural ability, will improve with training and practice. Starhawk refers to this faculty as "starlight vision" and says, "Starlight vision is a natural potential inherent in each of us, but much work is required to develop and train it. ...Starlight vision, the 'other way of knowing', is the mode of perception of the unconscious, rather than the conscious mind" (1979:19). Many of the exercises given in witchcraft 'how to' books (not those focusing entirely on nuts

and bolts spellwork, but those dealing with 'religious' and 'magical' themes) are meant to develop the individual's awareness of their own intuitive knowledge, and to enhance their ability to think symbolically rather than literally. Witches assert that science itself is a metaphor. "Scientific knowledge, like religious knowledge, is a set of metaphors for a reality that can never be completely described or comprehended" (Starhawk 1979:190). The dominant position of science is thus relativized, and it must compete with other forms of narrative in order to gain acceptance for its explanations. This, as Seidman notes, is also a central dimension of the postmodern project.

Time and History

Modernist notions about time and history include the idea that time is linear; the future becomes the present, which, once lived, becomes the past. The future is unknowable, but changeable, while the past is knowable but unchangeable. Modernist history is the history of evolution and progress. Societies, technologies, and knowledges increase in complexity and become better as time goes on. This process is seen as inevitable, even when it is greeted with more ambivalence than enthusiasm. These views can be seen plainly in the works of many of the 'founding' sociologists, including both Marx and Durkheim. Modernist history emphasizes the big picture, the broad social forces and the organizing elites (government figures, military leaders, business tycoons, etc...) in order to try to understand how the past came to produce the present.

Postmodernists reject the construction of history as an objective examination of past events, as a story of evolution or progress. They deny the centrality of great men and great events. History is a narrative, a text like other texts, whose significance consists not in providing an objective picture of the past, but in the ways in which fragments of the narrative insert themselves into and intertextually influence the present. For the postmodernist, there can be no objective history because objectivity itself is not possible. Postmodern history changes the focus from the events themselves to the interpretation(s) of the events. It concerns itself with the small picture of day-to-day life rather than the big picture of the march of history. The relationship between the past, present and future in postmodern theory is much less straightforward than it is in its modern counterpart. The past is not knowable, and it is changeable because it exists only as interpretation, which is never fixed. Keith Tester comments,

... the postmodern condition is one in which the present is the only fact; the future is beyond the knowing and the past simply becomes a reservoir for sanitized certainties or profit making opportunities ...post-modernity is a milieu which is not so much without history but rather a milieu which deliberately refuses to accept the perceived requirements of linear time. (1993: 83 & 78)

The modernist notion of time, the postmodernists assert, creates time as a transcendent and abstract concept, without reference to actual daily life or lived experience. David Harvey comments, "neither space nor time can be assigned objective meanings independently of material processes... objective conceptions of time and space are necessarily created through material practices and processes which serve to reproduce social life" (1990:204). To Harvey's credit, he

acknowledges that this idea can also be found in classical modern sociologists such as Durkheim and Dilthey, so it is not unique to postmodernism, however, he also acknowledges that the postmodern condition radicalizes this notion by the way in which it collapses space and time into a moment of instantaneity. Space and time have become compressed by late capitalism in such a manner, he argues, that our experience of ourselves, our ways of interacting with the world in which we perceive ourselves to be, and our perceptions of the nature of that world itself have fundamentally altered.

Modern constructions of time can be interpreted by postmodernists of a Marxist leaning to be among the disciplining tools of production and thereby inherently oppressive. That oppression manifests itself in the cultural imperative to subordinate one's activities to the ordering potential of abstract time dictated by the needs of capitalist producers (shift schedules, etc.). Other writers see time as forcing a sundering between the life of the body and the life of the mind, because events can occur in the imagination 'instantaneously'. It also imposes a regularity on disparate events where no regularity is perceived. For example, an hour is always the same length, whether it is spent in a hospital lounge awaiting news of the outcome of a loved one's life-threatening surgery or at a lively and entertaining party. Postmodern theory, in all of its varied expressions, privileges lived time over abstract, linear time.

In neopaganism generally, the notion of time that is privileged is that of cyclical time, rooted in repeating events. Inasmuch as a spiral can be considered

a form of line, this is closer to a modern construction than a postmodern one.

What is important is not what changes, as it is in the modern framework, but what stays the same. The central metaphor for time and history, in witchcraft specifically, is the 'wheel of the year', around which celebrations are fixed.

Spring becomes summer, which becomes autumn, which becomes winter, which becomes spring, over and over with unfailing regularity. This kind of time is infinite, with no known beginning and no foreseeable end; it needs no 'history' to tell how the past became the present, because the present is no different from the way the past was or the way the future will be. In this way, the continuities that underlie change are highlighted, and the eternal is extracted from the ephemeral.

Human beings, however, need a sense of the passage of time to locate the intersecting narratives within their own biographies. Human, embodied time is not infinite. It begins at birth and ends with death. It is only a small arc on the circle, as if one could stop the wheel of the year after a single rotation. In fact, Craft practitioners often apply the seasonal metaphor to an individual's life, with birth and childhood being spring, early adulthood being summer, middle age being autumn, and old age and death being winter. In keeping with the wheel of the year metaphor, most neopagan witches believe in some kind of afterlife, often in reincarnation, which would start the cycle again and bring human time into harmony with 'Earth' time. Robin Skelton writes,

Death is not an ending but a beginning. It is a gateway. When we die, we move out of this time-space continuum into another dimension of which we know almost nothing. Witches believe in neither Heaven nor Hell, and for them, the concept of entering upon eternity is meaningless. We are all in eternity. We are all caught up in a never-ending life-process. This process may lead us, after one death, to return to this time-space continuum for another life. (1990:48)

Neopagan witches mark time with reference to actual, potentially observable, events. The turning of the wheel is ritually punctuated with celebrations on the solstices, equinoxes and quarter days. Whereas there is nothing other than convention to separate the last day of March from the first day of April, witches recognize lunar months, whose beginnings and endings are clear when one looks to the skies. Many workings are timed to coincide with a particular phase of the moon, rather than being set by a more conventional, day-planner driven method like 'the first Tuesday of the month'. This is not to suggest that neopagans do not follow a standard modern calendar, use day planners, or wear watches. As a small minority in this culture, most do, but they are also simultaneously operating with a second reference system rooted in the cycles of their religion.

Although the notion of time and its relationship to narrative and lived experience that is found in neopagan witchcraft is perhaps compatible with the postmodern turn away from abstract, imposed, linear time, it would be an error to assume that it springs from a postmodern turn of mind. More likely, this particular organization of time emerges from a romantic nostalgia for a

premodern worldview that neopagans believe was ruthlessly suppressed by the rise of the dominant Western Church and State hierarchies. This reconstruction of an agrarian, nature-based calendar is an effort to regain something that Western society is presumed once to have had, but lost. Tester identifies this sentiment as one of the defining features of nostalgia: "...nostalgia implies a longing for something which is far away or of former times" (1993:65). His interpretation of nostalgia is that it is more characteristic of modernity than of postmodernity. He comments,

...it is clear to see that nostalgia emerges in cultural circumstances in which society is seen as a milieu on the move from somewhere which is defining to somewhere else which is to be defined. In other words, nostalgia is a feature of modernity; it simultaneously provides fertile ground for certainty and deconstruction. It is one kind of response to the cultural conflict in modernity. (1993:64)

The nostalgic impulse in neopaganism can be seen in its often problematic relationship to historical narratives, both its own and those of the broader culture in which they are situated. Neopagans, and those practicing neopagan witchcraft in particular, vacillate between presenting their religion as a novel creation, presenting it as a survival of earlier practices, and presenting it as a revival of spiritual impulses that existed in previous human societies, but were suppressed or lost for one reason or another.

Feminist and goddess-oriented strands of neopaganism tend to point towards the destructive impact of patriarchy on a once, presumably pervasive, egalitarian and peaceful worship of the Great Goddess throughout

Europe.⁷⁷ Authors such as Merlin Stone (1976), Riane Eisler (1987) and even Starhawk (1979) selectively utilize archeological findings to support their assertions that Goddess worship was once the norm to which modern neopagans are only returning. Cynthia Eller first discusses the content of feminist spirituality's 'sacred history', in *Living in the Lap of the Goddess* (1993:150-184). She highlights the way in which historical materials such as archeological discoveries, medieval trial records and ethnographically observed or anthropologically reconstructed Goddess worship practices from cultures around the world, are interpreted as lending support to the ideological positions inherent in the spiritual feminist construction of the myth of the matriarchies. Eller returns to critique the usefulness of this construction of history in *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory* (2000). Her subtitle, "why an invented past won't give women a future", sums up the direction of her analysis. Her emphasis that it is an 'invented' past also underlines the elements of wishful nostalgia present in the

⁷⁷ Eller (2000:3) gives the contours of this narrative as follows:

In a time before written records, society was centered around women. Women were revered for their mysterious life-giving powers, honored as incarnations and priestesses of the great goddess. They reared their children to carry on their line, created both art and technology, and made important decisions for their communities.

Then a great transformation occurred – whether through a sudden cataclysm or a long, drawn-out sea change – and society was thereafter dominated by men. This is the culture and the mindset that we know as "patriarchy," and in which we live today.

What the future holds is not determined, and indeed depends most heavily on the actions that we take now: particularly as we become aware of our true history. But the pervasive hope is that the future will bring a time of peace, ecological balance, and harmony between the sexes, with women either recovering their past ascendancy, or at last establishing a truly egalitarian society under the aegis of the goddess.

myth-making. It is not to a literal past that these women aspire to return, but to a construction of that past that exists only as an unattainable ideal. This appropriation of the historical narrative affirms the perceived value and legitimating function of history, rather than rendering it solely as a matter of interpretation, in a more postmodern sense.

Other strands of neopaganism, while often also accepting elements of the myth of the Paleolithic Great Goddess, focus more of their historical attention on the suppression of indigenous paganisms by Western religions, and the Christian church in particular.⁷⁸ Even where the myth of intact pagan survivals is rejected outright, there is a sense in these strands that contemporary neopagan revivals and reconstructions are, in effect, attempting to recreate the religion and world that 'would have been' if not for the destructive intervention of a hierarchical and oppressive Christian regime. Again, these are not attempts to live in an

⁷⁸ Adler relates what she refers to as 'the myth of Wicca' which incorporates most of these elements, as follows:

Witchcraft is a religion that dates back to Paleolithic times, to the worship of the god of the hunt and the goddess of fertility. One can see remnants of it in cave paintings and in the figurines of goddesses that are many thousands of years old. This early religion was universal. The names changed from place to place but the basic deities were the same.

When Christianity came to Europe, its inroads were slow. Kings and nobles were converted first, but many folk continued to worship in both religions. Dwellers in rural areas, the "Pagans" and "Heathens", kept to the old ways. Churches were built on the sacred sites of the Old Religion. The names of the festivals were changed but the dates were kept. The old rites continued in folk festivals, and for many centuries Christian policy was one of slow cooptation. During the times of persecution the Church took the god of the Old Religion and – as is the habit with conquerors – turned him into the Christian devil. The Old Religion was forced underground, its only records set forth, in distorted form, by its enemies. Small families kept the religion alive, and, in 1951, after the Witchcraft Laws in England were repealed, it began to surface again. (1986:45-6)

actual past, but to try to imagine what it would be like if the fictional past had created the present in which we now live. Even the neopagan traditions that try to be the most historically rigorous, for example, some of the heathen Asatru organizations (Harvey 1997, Blain 1998) acknowledge that historical materials can provide them only with a foundation upon which to base their reconstructions. Again, although historical interpretation is being used here as a resource to stimulate creation, it is, in some ways, a privileged resource, acting to direct and define 'acceptable' expressions of creativity.

The moves toward focusing on a different construction of time and the creative use of history as a mythic resource in the Craft are facets of an effort to re-establish a lost unity between the individual and nature, and in that sense to re-enchant the world that Weber asserts modernity disenchanted. The focus of postmodern theory, in its construction of time and in its treatment of history as only one narrative of the possible, is an effort to move beyond the limits imposed by a modernity whose present and future are constrained by its past, not to re-institute what putatively existed before it. For many postmodernists, the latter project would be fundamentally regressive, and the reconstruction of history for the purpose of creating another set of normative expectations that are simply different from those that currently exist would be scarcely more desirable. The neopagan move away from linear time and its sometimes explicit but often implicit acceptance of historical narrative as a vehicle for the propagation of normative ideologies remains fundamentally modern in its outcomes.

The Individual and the Social

Michel Maffesoli (1996) uses the concept of the neo-tribe to describe the group structures and identifications that emerge under postmodern conditions. These replace in importance the more traditional modern groupings by kinship, class, ethnicity, religion, etc., at least in the sense that these latter are seen as ascribed categories. Maffesoli's formulation of 'community' in terms of an amorphous constellation of individuals united through a sense of shared aesthetic and 'feeling' rather than being a necessary result of geography, class, or political participation, is useful in coming to an understanding of how neopagan practitioners perceive themselves as being part of a community, even when they have few interactions with concrete others. What Maffesoli considers 'emotional communities', borrowing a term from Weber, or *tribus* (neo-tribes) are not as concerned with creating a particular future through collective action as much as they are with maintaining the 'ambience' that defines them through a participatory sense of 'being-together'. He writes,

...the community is characterized less by a project (*pro-jectum*) oriented towards the future than by the execution *in actu* of the 'being-together'. In everyday language, the communal ethic has the simplest of foundations: warmth, companionship – physical contact with one another. (1996:16)

This 'being-together', although it is perhaps most effective in situations where face to face contact is possible, can also be achieved to a degree simply through a sense that one shares the collective sensibility that identifies the broad contours of the community. Although Maffesoli discusses them most often in terms of sharing a particular physical territory, he also acknowledges that the shared

territory can be symbolic (1996:16). Neopagan groups, despite their variations in specific beliefs and practices, can be said to be an emotional community in Maffesoli's sense because there are aesthetic, moral, and emotional continuities between them that are perceived by participants to distinguish them from other communities. "This whole may be made up of a plurality of elements, but there is always a specific ambience uniting them all" (Maffesoli 1996:14). The existence of this collective sensibility and its capacity to make participants feel as though they are members of a community is suggested by the descriptions given by participants of their sense of belonging and 'coming home' upon encountering even literary depictions of neopaganism.⁷⁹

In fact, it appears to be in the realm of religion that Maffesoli finds the conceptual prototype for, and purest type of, neo-tribes more generally. When he speaks of 'religion', however, it is not of the institutional forms into which it has socially ossified, but more of the original spirit and sense of shared transcendence that gave rise to those institutions. He writes, "the word 'religion', if it is used to describe that which unites us as a community; it is less a content, which is the realm of faith, than a container, that is, a common matrix, a foundation of the 'being-together'" (1996:38). He relates the word 'religion' to the Latin '*re-ligare*' in the sense of a binding together of individuals into a broader aesthetic and ethical whole (1996:40), and comments: "It [religion] is the crucible in which all of the various manifestations of the 'being-together' are created.

⁷⁹ Examples of these are given in chapters four and six. Discussion of neopagan community can also be found in chapter five.

Ideals can, of course age, collective values become saturated, however religious feeling continually secretes that 'immanent transcendence' which explains the perdurability of societies across history" (1996:43).

It is impossible to explain the continued propensity for human association purely on causal or utilitarian grounds, Maffesoli believes. Like Durkheim before him, he postulates that the additional element required to account for this is shared sentiment, and that the form in which that is often expressed is that of religion (1996:41). It is here that Maffesoli departs most notably from Giddens' characterization of 'communities of choice' and 'pure relationships'. Although Giddens does ground these in 'shared interests and concerns', and insist that they are maintained through intimacy, it is still an intimacy that must be perceived as having 'benefits'. Giddens' formulation does not capture the nebulous collective sentiment that pervades Maffesoli's discussion, a sentiment that circumscribes the affective ground in which communities of choice will be sought.

One of the key elements in Maffesoli's concept of the neo-tribe is that of self-identification based upon individual choice. This is also present in Giddens' 'communities of choice'. In Maffesoli's case, however, the choice involved is not considered to be an expression of individualism, but of the desire, arising from sentiment rather than reason, to construct oneself in relation to something broader, like a tessera in a mosaic. There is both a separateness and a submersion. In this way, involvement in neopaganism can be seen not as a narcissistic, solipsistic withdrawal into the self, but instead as a creative attempt to dissolve some of the boundaries separating the self from the other, and from

nature more generally. The rationality that prevails for the participant in an emotional community is not instrumental rationality, focused on outcomes for the individual, but value-rationality, focused on maintaining the core sentiments of the emotional community.

The individual chooses to identify with an emotional community or neo-tribe based on a perception of shared sentiment or fellow feeling. These groups, unlike the social institutions of modernity, can exercise social control over her/him only so long as s/he gives assent. The neo-tribe has no coercive power upon which to draw should the individual become disillusioned or disaffected and withdraw their consent to be bound by the group's norms. Notes Bauman, "Neo-tribes 'exist' solely by individual decisions to sport the symbolic tags of tribal allegiance. They vanish once the decisions are revoked or the zeal and determination of 'members' fades out. They persevere only thanks to their continuing seductive capacity. They cannot outlive their power of attraction" (1992:137).

This is an accurate description of the structure of most neopagan groups, which can only coalesce around a fluid interplay of consent. Unlike most Western religious traditions, neopaganism has not historically had a base of adherents who were 'born into' the religion. Among neopagan witches, for example, it is not generally believed that an intelligent, informed choice can be made about religious affiliation until at least the early teen years, even if one is in the tiny minority to have been raised by neopagan parents. This leads to a condition where all neopagan witches acquire that identification as a result of

choice rather than default. Membership involves, first and foremost, an act of self-identification. In some groups, this takes the form of a ritual referred to as a dedication or initiation, however most writers stress that it is the character of the individual and not the presence or absence of the rite, that is most significant. Scott Cunningham writes, "True initiation isn't a rite performed by one human being upon another. ...Initiation is a process, gradual or instantaneous, of the individual's attunement with the Goddess and God. Many of the Wicca readily admit that the ritual initiation is the outer form only" (1989:74). Janet and Stewart Farrar give qualified agreement:

Wicca is a way of looking at the world, and of living in it... As such, it will be practiced by those who are naturally drawn to it, and this growth cannot be contained or limited by insistence on any Wiccan Apostolic Succession. If you are naturally drawn to it, your best course is to be initiated and trained by existing witches if that is possible. If it is not, you are perfectly justified in setting up shop on your own initiative... (1984:245)

The decentralized nature of the witchcraft movement produces a situation in which there is no 'graven in stone' method of selecting or maintaining leaders or of enforcing any uniform behaviour across groups.⁸⁰ Even in the most conservatively traditional strands of the Craft, it is acknowledged that 'those who cannot abide your rule will leave you', presumably either setting aside their

⁸⁰ Individual neopagan and heathen organizations often do have procedures in place for selecting their leadership and do try to restrict the use of their name to those who have agreed to be governed within their framework. However, they have limited capacity to prevent their names, or something closely resembling them, from being used in other contexts, other than what is available through an often unaffordable legal system, and they have no ability to prevent individuals from continuing to practice on their own once they have removed their consent to be governed by the group.

self-identification as neopagan witches altogether, finding another existing group to better meet their needs, attempting to start a new group, or continuing their practice as solitaires. All roles and expectations must be actively negotiated and agreed upon in an ongoing manner within each group, and groups are often small because of the level of interaction that is expected. Janet and Stewart Farrar, whom most neopagans would characterize as being on the more traditional end of the spectrum, write:

Most covens today regard thirteen as the workable maximum... the essence of coven working is the building up of a group mind, a Gestalt to which each member makes his or her own unique contribution, and in which each is continuously aware of the individuality and unique contribution of every other member. ...A fair parallel is a good jazz combo, which depends on a delicate balance of individual spontaneity, mutual awareness and a shared feeling about the kind of music they want to produce. It can only work with a few instrumentalists; if there are too many, the group enters the big band category... Mutually aware and mutually supportive, spontaneity is replaced by the prepared score and individually focused attention on a single conductor. (1984:180-1)

Starhawk, who is generally noted for her rejection of rigid structure and fixed hierarchy, concurs.

A coven... by tradition, never contains more than thirteen members. In such a small group, each person's presence or absence affects the rest. The group is colored by every individual's likes, dislikes, beliefs, and tastes. At the same time, the coven becomes an entity in itself, with a personality of its own... There is a quality of synergy about a strong coven. It is more than the sum of its parts; it is an energy pool on which its members can draw. (1979:35)

Citations of authority ('that's how I was taught... that's how this-or-that book says to do it') can carry little weight in a movement that recognizes no interpretation as absolutely correct. Margot Adler observes of witches,

Individuals may move freely between groups and form their own groups according to their needs... the volatility of groups reflects the needs of people who are growing and changing... They say that communities formed for mutual aid and sustenance should break apart when those needs no longer exist, or are met in different ways (1986:33).

This is consonant with Rosenau's somewhat less-than-flattering description of post-modern social movements.

Their membership is deliberately heterogeneous and cross cuts social categories such as class. They do not expect anything but part-time, temporary commitment from their membership. Lacking coherent organizational structures, they are decentered, local, disorganized, and fragmented. There is no stable post-modern leadership; leaders are often hard to identify at all. Modern social movements have long term strategies and expect to be around for decades, while post-modern social movements have no such view. They are a "network of waxing and waning groups and strategies" (Vester 1990:4). (1992:147)

Rosenau, as a staunch modernist, privileges 'purpose' as the motivating factor for association, a position theorists such as Maffesoli dismiss as misguided, believing that human association in itself is motivation enough.

The emphasis on individual choice and consent to be governed however is not sufficient to designate neopaganism as either modern or postmodern. These tendencies are, in themselves, neither inherently modern nor postmodern. They could be argued to be reflections of either liberal modernity, or of a more radical postmodernity. Neither of these philosophical strands sees the individual as irrevocably trapped in inalterable conditions. Liberal modernists assert that individuals can change their conditions through effort and will. Postmodernists say that individuals can change their interpretations of conditions, their interpretations of their identity and thus, the conditions of their existence. The

chief difference between the two strands is that liberal modernity recognizes objective structures, even if it predicates their existence on consent, whereas postmodernity recognizes only perception and interpretation. To oversimplify, liberal modernity enjoins a change in consciousness because it is a necessary precursor to a change in objective conditions; postmodernity enjoins a change in consciousness because there are no objective conditions. Although the latter argument is not unheard of, in general, neopagan witches tend towards the former position. Starhawk pragmatically notes,

... balance is necessary. There is a difference between magic and psychosis – and that difference lies in maintaining the ability to step back, at will, into ordinary consciousness, to return to the awareness that, as my high school health education teacher used to affirm in the height of the psychedelic era, ‘reality is that when you jump off a roof, you break your leg.’ (1979:23)

Morality and Ethics

The issue of ‘morality’, framed as ‘good/bad’ or ‘right/wrong’, is a difficult one to discuss in postmodern language because it relies implicitly upon assumptions that are not applicable in a postmodern framework. Rosenau, critical of the postmodern position, comments:

The demise of the author and of causality permits post-modernists also to hail an end to the burden of moral agency... Because no single human being can be held accountable in a situation in the sense of having causal input, no one ‘authors’ a text-event as such. For the social sciences, the death of the author results in removing responsibility from human subjects (Pinter 1987:47)... A condition of normative ambivalence, a moral vacuum, an absence of obligation or freedom from accountability may result; it depends on how one wishes to look at it. (1992:33)

Reading postmodernists such as Maffesoli and Bauman, however, suggests that Rosenau overstates her position somewhat. Maffesoli believes that all morality is concrete, the appropriate actions taken as defined by the group identity(s) one claims. It is neither a matter of good and evil nor of right and wrong, but more of consonance and dissonance. Maffesoli asserts that the shared sentiment that serves to define the *tribus* creates an ethical bond, a sense of solidarity that arises out of the desire to nurture and protect the group so defined (1996:16). Abstract statements of 'rules' and 'values' of the sort that are produced by institutions in the business of social control, he takes as both less relevant and less effective in both defining and producing contextually appropriate human interaction.

There are a number of pivotal concerns that appear in both postmodern and neopagan discussions of ethics. Both postmodern theorists and neopagan practitioners superficially appear to place a high value on the idea of tolerance, however they construct their concepts of tolerance in very different ways. On the postmodern side, Zygmunt Bauman writes,

Tolerance reaches its full potential only when it offers more than the acceptance of diversity and co-existence; when it calls for the emphatic admission of the *equivalence* of knowledge producing discourses; when it calls for a *dialogue*, vigilantly protected against monologicistic temptations; when it acknowledges not just the *otherness* of the other, but the legitimacy of the other's interests and the other's right to have such interests respected and, if possible, gratified. (emphasis in original, 1992:xxi-xxii)

His construction of tolerance demands more than acknowledgement of difference, or even of the acceptance, in a culturally relativist mode, of the legitimacy of difference; he calls for the engagement with difference. Bauman's tolerance is not content to merely let the other 'do its own thing', a hospitable space must be negotiated in which this can occur.

Most calls for tolerance in neopaganism are framed around the notion of religious tolerance. This is understandable coming from a population that perceives itself as an occasionally persecuted minority. Scott Cunningham, very pragmatically, notes, "Any and all religions are real, the genuine article, to their practitioners. There can never be one religion, prophet or savior that will satisfy all five billion humans. Each of us must find our ideal way to attune with Deity" (1989:18). This 'live and let live' injunction is considerably less engaged than Bauman's. Janet and Stewart Farrar also call for tolerance, but their tolerance has a judgmental edge. They write:

Paganism is essentially tolerant, and so are wise witches. They will fight bigotry or intolerance or religious persecution; they will criticize what they regard as warped applications of the religious spirit; they will certainly attack the hypocritical use of religious excuses to rationalize cruelty or greed, such as a dictator who wages war in the name of God, a terrorist who blows up religious opponents, or a guru who grows rich on his 'spiritual' charisma. But they will not attack a religion, or its followers, as such. If they do, they are no better than the witch-hunters. (1984:176)

The Farrars' tolerance extends only to not condemning an individual for their affiliation to any given religious group, and to not condemning a religious group as such. It does not extend to the tolerance of behaviours that they would find unacceptable were they occurring in the Farrars' own context. This is a rather ethnocentric and rigid construction of tolerance, but one that is not uncommon among neopagan writers, who do not espouse a morally relativist position as much as they do one based on a situational morality that is grounded in certain assumptions.

Morality, as practiced in contemporary neopaganism, is focused around fundamentally modernist premises: that traceable causality exists, and that every action one takes will have effects. The impetus in neopaganism to behave in a pro-social fashion is provided by the originally Eastern notion of karma. Simply put, you will eventually (in this life or another) experience the consequences of your actions. You bear the responsibility for the outcomes of the choices you have made. The implication inherent here is that thought and reflection should be able to reveal these outcomes to you. Were this not the case, there would be no pro-social effect; if it is not possible to determine whether being kind rather than cruel will produce a more 'positive' outcome, then there is no reason to choose one over the other except whim or expediency.

So although individuals are responsible for regulating their actions in accordance with their values (which is different in obvious ways from simply obeying the law) it is assumed that they do indeed possess values. The only 'doctrinal' guidance neopagan witchcraft, for example, provides is generally known as the Wiccan Rede, and it states simply 'An' harm ye none, do what ye will.' The values to which the individual refers then, are likely to be those of the emotional community to which s/he has chosen to align, thereby producing the pro-social effect from the standpoint of that group.

However, there is an underlying sense that the individual is not the final arbiter of right and wrong. There is a notion of judgment, of reckoning for harm done. The fact that an individual does not believe that pedophilia is wrong, that they deny that it causes harm, would not exonerate their practice in the eyes

of most neopagans. Therefore, the ultimate enforcement of karma (or the Law of Returns, as it is often called) lies somewhere outside the human. The exact nature of this moral force is left unspecified, as is its precise operation, but the idea that it exists acts to deter the most socially harmful effects of complete moral ambiguity or anarchy.

There are similarities between this stance and the one taken by Bauman in describing postmodern moral responsibility. He asserts that modern rule-based, legalistic morality is flawed and inadequate, in part because it removes the responsibility for moral decisions from moral actors and vests them in non-contextual, transcendent rules.

Only rules can be universal. One may legislate universal rule-dictated *duties*, but moral *responsibility* exists solely in interpellating the individual and being carried individually. Duties tend to make humans alike; responsibility is what makes them into individuals. Humanity is not captured in common denominators – it sinks and vanishes there. The morality of the moral subject does not, therefore, have the characteristic of a rule. One may say that the moral is what *resists* codification, socialization, universalization. (italics in original, 1993:54)

Bauman's response to the current moral condition is to assert that a re-personalization of morality is required.

Re-personalizing morality means returning moral responsibility from the finishing line (to which it was exiled) to the starting point (where it is at home) of the ethical process. We realize now – with a mixture of apprehension and hope – that unless moral responsibility was 'from the start,' somehow rooted in the very way we humans are – it would never be conjured up at a later stage by no matter how high-minded or high handed an effort. (1993:34-5)

Both Bauman's formulation and the situational morality enjoined by neopagan witches vest the responsibility for moral actions firmly with the individual, and acknowledge that the moral can only be determined contextually. Where they differ significantly is in how they construct the results of moral actions. As was discussed above, neopagans tend to subscribe to an idea of karma, implying that moral acts will be rewarded. Bauman, however, believes that any calculation of benefit or expectation of reciprocity undermines and invalidates the moral impulse (1993:54-58). Only by removing the transcendent element of neopaganism's moral reasoning could it be brought into line with Bauman's version of properly postmodern ethics.

A standard of moral behaviour, however, does not address the more fundamental question of human suffering, with which all religions must grapple. Judy Harrow divides neopaganism's characterization of suffering into two parts that could be roughly categorized as 'impersonally caused suffering' and 'humanly caused suffering'. She writes,

Much of human suffering comes from the impersonal processes of change, which are inherent in Nature. We experience such changes as pain and loss. ...Resentment and resistance to the inevitable only increases our suffering. ... The basis for all human-created evil... is a rip in the fabric of empathy. As long as we hold the consciousness that all life is not only Sacred, but fully interconnected, we know that to deprive others by taking more than our share is to hurt ourselves. The illusion of separateness is what makes greed possible. Malice, intentionally causing harm to others, follows frustrated greed. (1996:19-20)

Harrow then translates her analysis of suffering into a moral imperative consistent with the Wiccan Rede.

We suffer when we want more than our share from Nature. We cause suffering to others when we want more than our share from the human community. To want more than one's share, from humankind or from Nature, is the way of the dominator culture. Learning to live in balance, as part of a greater Whole, is the way to reduce the needless suffering we cause to ourselves and others. ... Empathy is the touchstone by which we discern whether our behavior may be harming others, and by which we keep our actions and our lives in balance. (20)

This formulation, despite its stress on the complex interconnectedness of the individual's relationship with the natural and social context of his/her life, is scarcely postmodern. The emphasis on the products of empathy as a means of gauging appropriate behaviour invites us to construct others in terms of our understandings of ourselves. It suppresses expressions of difference between the self and others because those othernesses can only become a basis for action when they have been filtered through an 'empathy' which has itself been constructed by understandings, values, and interpretations that may be foreign to the other. Empathy implies that the Other can be understood. Postmodern theory questions the possibility of understanding the Other, in the sense of the word as it is used by Weber and Dilthey, and is much more self-reflexively limiting, as it asserts that we can only understand our response to our apprehension of the Other. Thus, Harrow's description of witchcraft's response to suffering betrays a highly un-postmodern sensibility.

None of this, however, implies that neopagans cannot be understood as constituting a '*tribus*', in Maffesoli's sense. Although the postmodern ethicality is substantively empty, it is empty because it is waiting to be filled with the moral concerns of the small group. It is inevitable that small groups will produce ethical content from the norms that characterize belonging and from the

sentiment that is the foundation of the group's very existence. Maffesoli writes, "...beyond their apparent functionalism, all social groups contain a strong component of shared feeling. It is these feelings that give rise to this 'different morality' which I prefer to call here an ethical experience" (1996:16). What the postmodern theorists insist upon is not that moral responsibility be abolished, as Rosenau fears, but that it be re-embedded in the web of social relations rather than existing as an arbitrary, abstract standard beyond them. This relativizes moral positionings without rendering them illegitimate. What it does make illegitimate is the attempt to impose the moral logic of one *tribus* on another. It eliminates the possibility of an overarching value system that transcends sentiment. In that sense, it renders the concept of the justice system problematic by removing moral authority from the state, perhaps contributing to Rosenau's apprehension. The fact that the substantive content of neopagans' ethical bond does not appear to itself arise out of a postmodern sensibility, however, does not mean that it cannot be taken as part of a move towards a more fragmented, embedded and relativized moral and ethical existence of the kind Bauman and Maffesoli propose. The content of any given morality is irrelevant; it is the form of the sociality implied with which they are concerned.

Technology and Nature

In my readings about the postmodern condition, there is little sustained discussion of the 'natural world'. This could be because postmodernity has tended to construct itself against modernity, and modern philosophers had already instrumentalized nature as nothing more than raw materials. In the

course of modern philosophy, nature ceased to be content and was relegated to the role of context (Taylor 1989). Postmodern recastings of epistemology which treat everything as a produced text or textual act, do not have the potential to fundamentally alter this, although they do possess the capacity to broaden the categorizations away from those focused solely on production. The postmodern focus on consumption and commodification creates nature as another consumable item. The manner in which this item may be consumed varies. It can be consumed in a literal sense, as with forestry or mining, in an aesthetic sense (we must preserve nature's beauty, that is, the beauty found in nature by human beings) or as an element of sustainability (the survival of the planet is vitally important, presumably, to the human beings living on it). In each of these readings, nature is commodified, created as something that can be preserved, destroyed, bargained with, negotiated about, but not as something that exists 'for itself'. The centrality of interpretation, a uniquely human capacity, prevents any conceptualization of a nature that does not exist solely in reference to human beings.

The ideas of nature and the natural world are central to neopaganism. It is around the cycle of the seasons that the ritual celebrations and, to some extent, the mythology are fixed. The natural world is acknowledged to be a 'thing in itself' inasmuch as it existed before human beings and would presumably continue to exist if human beings vanished. Nature is content, rather than merely context, and that alone is sufficient to distinguish the neopagan idea of nature from its instrumental modern counterpart. However, to conflate the

possibility of 'nature in itself' with the way in which nature most often appears and is mobilized in, for example, neopagan witchcraft, would be misleading.

Despite what one might think, given the common description of witchcraft as a 'nature religion', very little ritual is actually performed in the outdoors, especially in such forbidding climates as Canada's. In contrast to what is suggested by the agrarian mythology, most practitioners are urban, and even of those who are rural, few make their livings off the land. It is not 'actual' nature that is central to witchcraft; it is the idea of nature. 'Real' nature is often cold, damp, inconvenient and full of bugs; nature as it is invoked in witchcraft's myth and ritual, even when it is described in its untamed and terrifying aspects, is nonetheless a nature that is created in the mind rather than one that is experienced through the body. Margot Adler illustrates this point, relating the experience of a small gathering of Wiccans on a New England beach.

Once, on a strange and unfamiliar shore a group of young and ignorant revivalist Witches were about to cast their circle and perform a rite. They were, like most modern Wiccans, city people, misplaced on this New England beach. They had brought candles in jars and incense and charcoal and wine and salt and their ritual knives and all the implements that most books on the modern Craft tell you to use. The wind was blowing strongly and the candles wouldn't stay lit. The charcoal ignited and blew quickly away. The moon vanished behind a cloud and all the implements were misplaced in the darkness. Next, the young people lost their sense of direction and suddenly found themselves confronting the elemental powers of nature, the gods of cold and wind and water and wandering. The land – once the site of far different ancient religious practices – began to exert its own presence and make its own demands upon the psyche. Frightened, they quickly made their way home. (1986:44)

The nature that is central to neopaganism is neither modern nor truly postmodern; it derives from Romantic, anti-modern strands of philosophy.

Rosemary Radford Ruether says of the Romantic Movement,

Whereas the Enlightenment used the word nature to mean the rational and even mathematical structure of reality, romanticism uses nature in juxtaposition to civilization. Nature is the irrational, the intuitive, the organic over against the machine culture. Romanticism celebrates what rationalists despised -- the underclasses of society. Women, peasants, native peoples, and paganism embody the intuitive 'soulful' types in contrast to the alienated urbanized intellectuals. (1983:42)

This characterization has much in common with some strands of postmodernism. It captures the focus on the margins and the interest in forms of knowledge other than the scientific and rational. Ruether specifically identifies feminist neopagan Wicca, the form with which she was most familiar through her work with alternative feminist theologies, with the legacy of the Romantics. This characterization could easily be expanded to include other forms of neopagan witchcraft, all of which rely implicitly on Romantic philosophy, and sometimes explicitly on Romantic material, such as the work of Yeats and the other 'Celtic twilight' poets and Robert Graves' *The White Goddess*. Charles Taylor also notes the continuing appeal of Romantic ideas. He writes,

And so among the great aspirations which come down to us from the Romantic era are those toward re-unification: bringing us back in contact with nature, healing the divisions within between reason and sensibility, overcoming the divisions between people, and creating community. These aspirations are still alive: although the Romantic religions of nature have died away, the idea of being open to nature within us and without us is still a very powerful one. (1989:384)

As far as neopagan witchcraft is concerned, Taylor may be premature in his obituary for the 'Romantic religions of nature.' So, although there may be

similarities between nature as it appears in witchcraft and nature as it is constructed in postmodernism, this is not the result of any identity between the two, rather it is a residual effect of their reliance on some of the same Romantic, anti-modern sources.

Despite the ostensible focus on 'nature', neopagan witchcraft is not anti-scientific, nor is it particularly anti-technological. Where it appears to be so, anything more than a cursory examination will reveal that it is not science and technology themselves that are opposed, but rather the hegemony of scientific knowledge and the exploitation of people or of the Earth through technology. Theos, a Gardnerian priestess from Long Island commented to Margot Adler that,

Technology by and of itself is not evil. What we should be concerned with is the misuse and prostitution of technology for dehumanizing or other purposes, which hits us in many areas of our lives -- nuclear weapons, automatic manufacturing processes which eliminate jobs, computers which store information that invades the privacy of one's life, chemical and bacteriological 'weapons,' and so on. (Adler 1986:393)

Doreen Valiente expressed the sentiment somewhat differently. She writes, "In a sense, the rebirth of witchcraft is a rebellion. It is being carried out by those young and old... who are... profoundly disillusioned with the scientists who promised us Utopia and gave us the nuclear bomb" (1989:207).

This identification with an idea of nature as pristine, uncreated and other-than-human and the ideal of re-connecting with this nature, seen throughout many Craft writings, act to establish the mechanized, technologized society in which most neopagans live as something that does not enter into the sphere of religious imagination. For many, 'nature' as it is idealized can only be

experienced through the mediation of technology: in film, television or magazine pictures, or by boarding an aircraft, train or car and journeying out of one's ordinary situation to the place where 'nature' is. Nature is the remote and mysterious, technology is the mundane and everyday.

The existence of technology frees the individual from much traditional drudgery and creates the leisure time that a religion like neopagan witchcraft requires for its study, meditation and rituals. Unlike the situation in religions such as Christianity, which grew up in circumstances where much more time and energy was required of the individual to meet basic survival needs, there is no elite priesthood class in neopagan witchcraft that devotes their time and energy to gaining the religiously-sanctioned knowledge and skills and deploying them on behalf of others. Vivianne Crowley observes, "Wicca offers not entry into a congregation of followers, but initiation into the priesthood of the mysteries" (1989:10). Neopaganism, like postmodernism, if one is to believe Tester, can only emerge in a post-scarcity economy (1993:140).

Neopagan witchcraft is quick to locate and identify the 'energies of the universe' in rocks, plants and stars; they are harder-pressed to do the same thing with toaster ovens, automobiles and hydroelectric dams. This creates a peculiarly inside-out situation to the one seen in classical modernity. Instead of nature being the context and raw materials for technology, technology becomes the context and raw materials for nature. This is a similar situation to that encountered by what Tester characterizes as 'nomad-like' postmodern groups (Maffesoli's neo-tribes) to technology. He notes,

...technology tends to come to take on that overwhelming and independent existence which had once been attributed to God or Nature. ...The technology which had been developed in an effort to establish and defend the fabricated order of modernity is, from the point of view of the post-modern, quite beyond the bounds of reflexivity. Technology confronts the post-modern as an independent system in its own right. (1993:85)

Tester argues that the materiality of technology and its persistence make it a particularly difficult subject for advocates of postmodernity. Technology does not necessarily alter or disappear when reflexive questioning reveals the shortcomings of its legitimations. It becomes for the postmodern something outside of the social and discursive, and thereby beyond the significant, just as it becomes outside the spiritualizable, and therefore beyond the significant for neopaganism.

Summary

Authors writing about the cultic milieu, the occult subculture, witchcraft and neopaganism more generally during the past thirty years have tended to highlight the ways in which, as religious or cultural expressions, they are a departure from the pattern established by Western organized religions. Some analyses read them as having substantial and significant epistemological and ideological continuities with the modern Enlightenment culture from which they have emerged and therefore as being modern themselves, while others choose to characterize them as harbingers of a new mode of postmodern religiosity. These positionings rely on an implicit diagnosis of the project of modernity and its inherent potentials. Those theorists who have tried to describe neopaganism

as postmodern take a restrictive view of modernity that limits it to being what it has been since the industrial revolution, and denies its potential to re-orient itself to serving a more egalitarian and ecologically stable impulse. These authors conflate opposition to the destructive and oppressive aspects of modernity, essentially resistance, with transcendence, or a move beyond the values of modernity. They also misunderstand the radical epistemological project of postmodernity.

To the extent that the neopagan Craft is a religion, it is not postmodern. There can be no religion based upon the epistemological premises of postmodernity. Religion, inasmuch as it attempts to relate disparate aspects of personal life, nature and society and to make them meaningful in the context of a single narrative or group of related narratives, is antithetical to the postmodern move away from totalizing narratives. Even the individual, in postmodern terms, is too complex and contradictory to achieve a narrative unity in this way. Neopaganism postulates an other-than-human power and order in the universe; the postmodern framework simply cannot accommodate this. Despite similarities in many tendencies, including important aspects of organization and sociality, neopagan witchcraft and postmodernity are alike not so much in what they are becoming but in what they are reacting against. Both chafe against the organized monolinearity of classical modernity. Both reject the homogenizing tendencies of the production economy, which creates people in the image of labour, in favour of a richer, multi-layered model based on expressive qualities and reflexive self-identities. Both are suspicious of the scientific enterprise and

the systematizing rationality that has produced it. Both problematize truth claims and relativize the basis of the dominant value structure. None of these similarities, however, is sufficient to allow one to be identified in terms of the other.

Neopaganism, like any other religion, can be subjected to postmodern uses, such as having aspects of its varied liturgy, artwork, philosophies and narratives disembedded from their original context and recombined in a pastiche that will invite reconsideration not only of the new product, but of the original; or analyzed as a form of cultural production. However, all subjects can be treated by postmodern analysis in this fashion, not simply those that are in some way already aligned. Neopaganism can also be examined in terms of the way in which it reflects aspects of a more postmodern way of understanding individuals and their relationships, focusing on interaction, sentiment and *puissance* rather than rational contractual undertakings structured through the institutions of power. However, a willingness to approach relationships and community in that fashion still fails to imply that those relationships are epistemologically postmodern.

Authors such as Heelas and Berger, whose understandings of modernity are based in a more flexible theoretical framework, such as that proposed by Giddens or Berman, are more inclined to identify the resistance that is embodied in neopagan and New Age religious expressions to those aspects of modernity that are perceived to be oppressive as part of the modern project itself. Berman defines modernism as “any attempt by modern men and women to become

subjects as well as objects of modernization, to get a grip on the modern world and make themselves at home in it" (1982:5). This can clearly include the active reshaping of the personal narrative of identity to create a sense of belonging and place that is a fundamental part of participants' experience of the Craft. If one accepts the position of Berman and Giddens, which is that modernity is a dynamic process through which new forms are constantly created and old ones destroyed, it is unnecessary to postulate a 'postmodern moment' in order to explain the detraditionalization of many forms of life, the instantaneity produced by contemporary communications technologies, and the skepticism accorded knowledge claims, as these are seen as simply arising out of the operation of that dynamic process. As long as the central contradictions of modernity continue, and continue as contested areas, Giddens does not believe that society has moved beyond modernity. Postmodernity, he writes, would represent a utopian resolution of the contested areas of modernity, a world system based on a post-scarcity system, multi-layered political participation, demilitarization and the humanization of technology (1990:164). This characterization of contemporary Western society as being in a continuing state of modernity is also that given by Wagner (1993) under the label 'extended liberal modernity'.

Neopagan ideology makes central some concerns that were marginalized in the dominant discourse of the twentieth century; however, there is a difference between being on the edge of a discourse and venturing outside of it. Neopaganism does not require the label 'postmodern' in order to be designated as a possible site of resistance nor to be utilized as an identity-constructing

resource. To characterize it as 'postmodern' ignores its essential continuity with many of the central intellectual and moral strands of classical modernity.

Neopaganism embodies a creative, sacralized response to the moral and existential questions that have arisen as the modern enterprise has unfolded, empowering the reflexively constituted self to symbolically construct itself as a situated and effective actor in a meaningful universe.

Chapter Nine: Conclusions

The description and analysis in the previous chapters lead inexorably back to the questions that motivated them: why has self-identified affiliation to the neopagan Craft increased in Canada during the past 30 years, and is this likely to continue? The survey undertaken for this research produced a snapshot of a sample in 1995, while subsequent interviews allowed participants to expand and reflect upon their understandings of their Craft and its place in their lives. Most of those captured in the survey and interview responses identified themselves as practicing within the 'neopagan witchcraft' dimension of neopaganism, and so the application of the analysis in this study to other types of neopagan orientations can be approached only cautiously, and would be better served by more in-depth studies of those groups.

Stark and Bainbridge dismiss "various pagan and witchcraft groups" as being "reactionary" and having "little future" (1985:455). If by that they mean that these groups are neither likely to attract a substantial proportion of those claiming some religious affiliation in Canada, nor are they likely to assert themselves as a major organized social force, I would agree. If, however, the implication is that affiliation to these groups is neither likely to continue to increase nor will the broader movement be able to sustain the appeal that it has for its existing adherents, then I must dissent.

The survey responses suggest that neopagan practitioners tend to be younger, better educated and more likely to be in school than the Canadian population more generally. Most were involved in the Craft by the time they

were 30. Like other Canadians, they tend to live in urban and suburban environments. They have strong labour force participation but a lower median family income than the Canadian average. The respondents were disproportionately female. All of these observations are echoed in other research on neopaganism (Adler 1986; Berger 1999; Orion 1995; Jorgensen and Russell 1999; Kirkpatrick et. al. 1986; Rabinovitch 1992). There are solid reasons to speculate that when the religious affiliation data are released from the upcoming 2001 Census of Canada, there will be a marked increase in the number of people listing some form of neopaganism as a religious affiliation and that the trend towards increasing affiliation will continue with the 2011 census.

My sample was taken in 1995, four years after the 1991 census, and fully one third of respondents indicated that they had been involved for three years or less. Barring high levels of attrition, this alone would point towards a probable increase in the number of self-identified neopagans. Attrition is difficult to gauge in the neopagan community because although group membership tends to be very unstable, individual religious identity persists, and this is what is captured by the census. This mirrors the condition of the more organized religions in Canada as well, for which nominal affiliation rates as recorded by the Census are much higher than either local congregational membership or attendance.

Forty-two percent of respondents indicated that they were involved in the Craft by the time they were 20, and 75 percent indicated that they were involved by the time they were 30. Over one-third of respondents (35%) indicated that

they had been born during what David Foot calls the 'baby bust': the years between 1967 and 1979. This is important because the 'baby bust' is a comparatively small cohort when contrasted to the boom that preceded it and the echo that followed it. In 1998, there were 5.6 million Canadians in the baby bust cohort, and 6.5 million in the 'echo' cohort (born from 1980 to 1995) (Foot 1998:28-30). This suggests that if the proportion of the 'under 30' category affiliating with neopaganism remains constant, the absolute numbers of people involved should increase as time passes, as the size of that population has increased from the bust to the echo. In addition, if one accepts the assumption of the rational choice theorists that religious preference is likely to remain stable in any given population (Iannaccone 1997), then participation rates in the neopagan movement by members of the smaller 'baby bust' cohort should actually be higher than those of the preceding, and larger, baby boom cohort, because of the changes that have occurred in the social environment surrounding neopaganism.

These changes include not only the increase in the number of neopagan groups, but also the substantial decline in barriers to affiliation and participation that has occurred since many of the more long-standing practitioners first became involved. When the front end and peak of Canada's baby boom (those born from 1947 to 1960, peaking in 1959) were in their late teens and early 20s, the supply of information about neopaganism was low, existing practitioners

were rare, and the stigma attached to being a witch was comparatively high.⁸¹

Therefore, despite their large numbers in the population more generally, it is to be expected that there are few Craft practitioners from this cohort, since although it is possible to affiliate later in life, one is then looking at having to overcome a longer overall investment in other worldviews, as well as face the comparative dearth of people in one's own age group and circumstances inside neopaganism itself. This would directly contradict what a 'human capital' approach to religious switching would suggest (Iannaccone 1990, 1997; Sherkat 1997).

Information became much more readily available in the early to mid 1980s, when the back-end boomers (Gen-X, born 1961-1966) were in their teens and early 20s. These people would have been in the 25-35 age range in 1995-96, when my survey was conducted.⁸² The back end boomers have only recently entered their peak child-bearing years, and so, for the first time in many pagan communities, there are children being raised in a Craft family context who will likely be themselves identified as 'pagan' or 'neopagan' on the millennium census. Helen Berger identifies the increasing phenomena of pagan families to be one of the most significant challenges to the traditional organization and orientation of neopagan witchcraft (1999:82-99).

⁸¹ Although neopagan witchcraft is only one subsection of the broader neopagan population, it remains the dominant one, particularly in this research.

⁸² 18.7 percent of respondents fit into the Gen-X group.

Despite the decline in church membership and attendance however, demand for rites of passage in the church, such as christenings, marriages and funerals, remains strong in the population at large (Bibby 1993:76-7). This can, in part, be attributed to a lack of well-known and easily available alternatives to involving an organized religion at these times, but it must also be partially attributed to a sense of 'religious memory', that is, an attachment to church activities or religious traditions as something that one remembers as having once been central.

Bibby describes this memory in aesthetic terms as having to do with feelings: feelings of family, feelings of belonging, feelings of familiarity, feelings of reverence, feelings of awe, which are correlated in people's minds with the religion in which they were raised, usually an organized Western religion. Whether or not the religion produced those feelings in the individual at the time is less relevant than the fact that they are produced retrospectively in memory. Re-involvement in organized religion after a lapse, Bibby suggests, can be an effort to recapture those remembered feelings or to try to produce them for one's children (1993:152-168). Dwindling levels of involvement in mainstream religions suggest that the religious memory of many Canadians, especially younger ones, will fade, as fewer and fewer of them will associate church involvement with their fond memories of family traditions.

Much of the active churchgoing population today is over 55 and younger people are not coming forward in large numbers to fill the pews left vacant as their parents and grandparents die. This has left the mainstream churches in a

financial dilemma. Unable to support their existing programs and infrastructure due to a declining resource base, they are not in a position to initiate new programs to woo those still nominally affiliated, but lapsed, individuals back into the congregational life of the church and thus perpetuate the cycle of religious memory, which Bibby believes is the Christian churches' best hope for survival and renewal. In effect, the mainstream churches are becoming fewer things to fewer people, a trend that is likely only to continue as some of the larger Christian churches are forced to take financial responsibility for cultural and sexual improprieties perpetrated through the residential school system. These financial settlements will further decimate the churches' resources, making it increasingly difficult to provide services even to their existing parishioners.

Bibby documents a continuing process of secularization in Canadian culture. Neither spiritual belief nor mystical experience have vanished, but they have increasingly been moved out of the spotlight of public life and public policy, first to be confined within institutional religion, then to become wholly optional elements in the construction of both our individual identities and our social vision. The issues of mortality, morality, meaning and relationship to our past and our future that religions have traditionally addressed have become recast as matters of personal opinion in a pluralistic religious and social environment. In Giddens' terms, they have become 'sequestered' and represent an aspect of society as a whole that has become 'repressed'. Giddens views the 'resurgence' of religious belief, by which he means the emergence of new forms of religion and spirituality rather than a return to traditional churches, as being part of a

wider movement towards re-creating and reconstructing 'tradition' in order to cope with the changing demands of modern social conditions. He comments,

New forms of religion and spirituality represent in a most basic sense a return of the repressed, since they directly address issues of the moral meaning of existence which modern institutions so thoroughly tend to dissolve. (1991:207)

This movement towards locating religion outside of the organizing structures of society has important implications for the development and viability of neopaganism that will be discussed further on in this chapter.

Neopaganism can be interpreted as one of the alternatives available to individuals who have either become disillusioned with mainstream, organized religion, or who were never socialized into it and are therefore more free to have their self-defined religious needs met elsewhere. However, this does not offer any explanation as to why neopaganism might be chosen over some other religious alternative, of which there are a wide variety available in Canada. Nor does a cohort analysis alone offer any insight into the appeal of neopaganism to its practitioners, how that appeal might evolve over time, or the essential 'fit' between neopaganism and the social and cultural environment in which it exists. A more challenging analysis of the likelihood of neopaganism finding a sustained following in the twenty-first century can be made by examining the relationship between neopaganism and the complex cultural contours of late modernity, especially where those have to do with the reflexive narrative of the self.

Giddens defines the 'narrative of the self' as "the story or stories by means of which self-identity is reflexively understood, both by the individual concerned and by others" (1991:244). He relates this to the 'reflexive project of

the self', which is "the process whereby self-identity is constituted by the reflexive ordering of self-narratives" (1991:243). Individuals, in a late modern context, transform both their understanding of themselves and the understandings of them available to others through their self-conscious narrative construction of their own identity. Reflexivity is more than simply a synonym for 'deliberate' or 'self-conscious' although both of those concepts are also subsumed within it. Reflexivity involves an acknowledgement of the tentativeness and fragility of the narratives we construct, the requirement to engage with others whose constructions are different than our own and the constant revision and refinement of our own narratives through these interactions. It is a process through which contradictions are continually confronted and no absolute certainty is possible. Individuals, in this environment, must negotiate a level of existential and ontological comfort for themselves while simultaneously acknowledging that their own existential constructions cannot easily be generalized.

Neopaganism is, first and foremost to its practitioners, a fluid, transformational narrative. Situated in the context of the modern construction of the reflexive individual, neopaganism provides a symbolic language that can be appropriated and manipulated to effect meaningful transformation in both self and surroundings through individual interpretive agency. The change that participants highlight as being the most significant result of their involvement in the Craft is not the content of their beliefs, values or personalities, but instead is one of interpretive context, of how these things come to be understood and

expressed. The Craft provides individuals with a framework within which it is possible to reinterpret and re-evaluate themselves and their relationship to their subjectively experienced worlds. This worldview includes the convictions that the sacred is immanent in nature and in all living things, that all elements of the universe are holistically connected and imbued with energy, that there are both material and non-material realms of being and that events are meaningful and non-random.

The location of one's expression of these principles within the framework provided by neopagan language and symbolism is what is meant by having a 'Craft identity', which then centrally informs participants' constructions of themselves, often offering them a sense of integration and belonging that they identify as having been absent in their lives up to that point. It does not negate previous unpleasant experiences; it provides an interpretive mechanism through which these experiences can be transformed into narrative elements that will help to support an individual's positive self-evaluation. Neopaganism acts as an identity-enhancing religious choice by allowing participants to perceive as positive those elements of their biography and personality that they had previously evaluated negatively. Luhrmann also notes this as an aspect of the therapeutic efficacy of magical practice in general. "[S]ymbolic redescription becomes a therapy, a way of making sense of the facts of their experience and of learning how to alter their attitudes towards those experiences or their manner of handling them" (1989:247-48).

The Craft allows people to retain a sense of continuity with their 'previous' self, while enabling them to enhance their self-worth and positive self-evaluation. It provides participants with a more satisfactory sense of "ontological security" (Giddens 1991:47-56) than the interpretive context out of which they had previously operated. What Snow and Machalek (1983) refer to as biographical reconstruction, and Giddens would characterize as the reflexive narrative of the self, is the chief mechanism used by Craft participants in order to effect their personal transformation. Techniques, such as magical practice, are tools that support this mechanism. Luhrmann comments, "It is as if magicians learn a new language in which to talk about their world, and gain a new set of possibilities for organizing it" (1989:245). The narrative reconstruction of the self is seen as a wholly legitimate process of allowing one to grow into becoming the person one actually wants to be rather than as a form of misrepresentation of the person one is at the moment. While 'biographical reconstruction' is not a term that would be used by participants, other terms such as 'reclaiming' and 're-shaping' describe the same process.

Interview participants did not describe their involvement in the Craft as precipitating a fundamental shift in states. Their narratives are organized around their sense of an unfolding understanding of themselves and their search for a spiritual context in which they felt they belonged. They describe a process of progressive 'becoming', a personal evolution and refinement of their understanding of their own spirituality through the examination of other modes

of religious life. Many of them engaged in what James Richardson (1982) would characterize as 'spiritual seekership' as part of a 'conversion career' before settling into a Craft identity. The extent to which they experienced the other worldviews they explored as illuminating or deficient with reference to their own biographies helped participants to clarify their spiritual and philosophical priorities. They do not describe themselves as having 'become' Craft as much as they emphasize that they found expressed in the Craft the essence of what they already understood and believed about themselves and their worlds.⁸³

In Chapter Three, the concept of 'stakes in conformity' was discussed. Stark and Bainbridge define 'stakes in conformity' as consisting of attachments, investments, involvements, and beliefs and use the concept in order to develop a series of propositions regarding the costs of deviance (1987:190). Implicit in Stark and Bainbridge's construction is that 'conformity' means conformity to the dominant cultural ideology, unless otherwise stated.⁸⁴ One way of understanding the appeal of neopaganism is to suggest that the individuals to whom it appeals do not have the same level of investment in the dominant

⁸³ It is not possible to tell, simply by examining participant narratives, to what extent the priority in time given to existing adherence to the principles of neopaganism would be observably the case to an outsider, and to what extent the acquisition and utilization of this narrative element is socialized by the norms of the group. It is, without doubt, discursively ubiquitous. To study the ongoing reflexive formation of participants' Craft narratives would require a series of observations of them from a point just before their involvement to a point sometime after; it cannot be captured in the context of retrospective reporting.

⁸⁴ In the case of a member of a religious community, for example, the individual's stakes in conformity with the norms of the 'outside' world can be low, while their stakes in conformity to the expectations of their community are high.

elements employed in constructing a conventional biographical narrative, possibly because they do not find that assembling a narrative within that framework results in a positive self-evaluation. This process can be seen in the way in which Carrie frames her biographical narrative in Chapter Six. She asserts that the Craft enabled her to exchange a negative evaluation of herself as 'crazy', an evaluation that she felt powerless to address or to change, for the more neutral evaluation 'out of control' through the adoption of a Craft worldview and vocabulary. In addition, framing herself as 'out of control' gave her back a sense of personal agency because the designation implicitly contains the idea that being 'in control' is possible. Carrie used the magical training techniques taught in the Craft to build and reinforce her own sense of stability and competence.

Stark and Bainbridge make the following propositions about self-evaluation⁸⁵:

P134 Every person seeks a positive self-evaluation.

P135 Persons desire a positive evaluation of the rewards they possess, including the explanations and the power-giving resources they possess.

P136 Explanations that imply positive evaluations of a person and the rewards the person possesses are themselves rewards, while explanations that imply negative evaluations are costs. (1987:196)

In Stark and Bainbridge's terms, the gain in positive self-evaluation associated with the adoption of a neopagan narrative, as well as the sense of reinforcement for that positive evaluation by the amorphous neopagan community to which

⁸⁵ Stark and Bainbridge define 'self-evaluation' as: "that person's determination of how valuable a reward he constitutes as an exchange partner" (1987:138).

one can perceive one belongs, must be sufficient to offset the stigma and disapproval one may potentially encounter from others for long-term affiliation to occur. The desire to protect this gain would then result in high stakes in conformity to the discursive expectations believed to be associated with, in this case, neopaganism.

This investment in the symbolic capital of 'countercultural spirituality' is the focus of Bloch's analysis of neopagans and New Agers. After examining the ways in which symbolic codes and ideology are explicitly and implicitly graven in the discourse of 'countercultural spiritualists', he observes,

Even when discussing limitations of their ideology, selves, or the countercultural spiritual community, the persons I interviewed spoke in ways that served to promote alternative spirituality and diminish competing claims from mainstream society. ...While speaking about their personal experiences and beliefs, it would seem that interviewees very much framed their narratives around their identities as countercultural spiritualists, and were at least implicitly and often explicitly critical of the dominant, mainstream viewpoint in comparison. Even when referring to mundane experiences, mainstream knowledge claims, or more legitimized mainstream religions, the alternative spiritual viewpoint dominated, whereby competing information claims were viewed as relatively positive or negative by countercultural spiritual standards. (1998:116)

The centrality of the symbolic and ideological content associated with neopagan religious identity to participants' narratives and explanations was also evident in the interviews conducted for this project, as both Dawson (1990) and Snow and Machalek (1983) would lead one to expect in the case of individuals who have chosen their religious identity rather than simply accepting the one into which they may have originally been socialized.

The extent to which the differences in discourse, narrative and symbolic representation that are found in the Craft reflect a fundamental departure from the values that underlie the project of modernity is questionable, however. Helen Berger makes a compelling case for neopagan witchcraft being a religion of late modernity rather than one of post-modernity, citing its retention of the centrality of an active subject, of the possibility and desirability of personal and social transformation, and its reliance on thoroughgoing reflexivity as evidence for her claims (1999:6-8). Paul Heelas makes similar points about the New Age, in which he subsumes neopaganism. "[T]he New Age is embedded in, whilst exemplifying, long-standing cultural trajectories" (1996:153). He cites the understanding of the self as autonomous and individual, "self-directing, authorial agents, relying on their own – inner – sources of authority, control and responsibility" (1996:155), as the most significant continuity from the Enlightenment to the New Age.

What Heelas refers to as 'the detraditionalization of the self' and Giddens discusses as the 'reflexive self' are produced by the dynamic inherent in the modern condition. The existential sureties once provided by traditional authority are replaced by a reliance on rational knowledge. This knowledge, however, is made relative by the pervasive doubt that is an intrinsic part of the modern order. Truth claims become working hypotheses, subject to revision as different claims are made. This dynamic also tends to separate questions of ultimate meaning and truth from those of day-to-day activity. It is in the context of facing this fundamental divorce of the existential from the activity of existing

that the logic of neopaganism exerts an appeal for some. Neopagan spirituality is based on a personal, individual, non-prescriptive relationship with an immanent and pervasive sacrality. It explicitly accepts that spirituality is reflexive and constructed within an individual's personal narrative, rather than presenting itself as something that exists 'outside' the practitioner as a 'code' or a set of beliefs. It is congruent with the dominant cultural logic of pluralism, because by accepting the premise that spirituality is constructed by the individual's relationship to the sacred, it also accepts that it can have no universal fixed and true form. Despite its obvious differences from mainstream culture and mainstream religion, neopaganism exemplifies some of the pervasive cultural directions of late modernity, not only in where it locates its construction of religious belief and identity, but also in how it reconfigures the notions of community and belonging.

Bloch discusses the relationship between the centrality of the autonomous individual and the desire for community among 'countercultural spiritualists' as a form of ideological strain. He examines the ways in which his interview participants address that strain when they discuss themselves and their beliefs. He notes that the responses to his question 'have you ever met anyone else who shares your beliefs' were particularly telling.

In effect, each person stated that he/she would never meet anyone who absolutely believed the same way, because each person was unique; however, there was a community of persons who reflected a certain common ground or overlap of belief. And this community was viewed as providing a means for sharing with others who fundamentally were fellow travelers despite superficial differences of belief. (1998:40)

Bloch locates the foundation of countercultural spiritual community in a sense of shared values and shared symbolic communications codes, in Giddens' terms, a common way of composing and structuring narrative. Neopagan community is created neither by participation in an organizing structure, nor by geographical proximity and face to face interaction, as is the case with most modern and pre-modern forms of community. Neopagan community is immediate in terms of representing to the individual a source of belonging, but it is often abstract in the sense of being founded on a sense of commonality with an Other who is not present, and is only presumed to exist. As Chapter Four notes, the presence of physical others who share a religious identity with the participant was not seen as important by most survey respondents to maintaining either their involvement with or their commitment to the Craft. This points to the operation of a more diffuse, abstract notion of community within neopaganism.

Maffesoli provides a model of community that potentially resolves the ideological strain identified by Bloch by suggesting that authentic sociality must transcend the isolated and self-contained territory of the autonomous individual. "[W]hereas individualist logic is founded on a separate and self-contained identity, the person (*persona*) can only find fulfillment in his relations with others" (1996:10). Maffesoli postulates that the rationalized 'social' of the modern period is coming to be replaced by an empathetic 'sociality' as we progress further into the postmodern condition (1996:11). Neopagans constitute an 'emotional community' or neotribe, in Maffesoli's terms, because despite the variations in the specific practices and beliefs of groups and individuals, there are

aesthetic, moral and emotional continuities between them that are perceived by participants as distinguishing them from other communities. This collective sensibility, which is articulated through the adoption of similar forms of narrative and symbolic expression, has the capacity to shore up the sense of ontological security that is produced by being able to place oneself in a relationship of similarity to others. It is the recognition, finally, of the potentially shared elements of the individual's perception of the spiritual landscape that produces the relief and sense of 'having come home' that so many participants report feeling even when the only depictions of neopaganism they had encountered at that point were literary ones. As Maffesoli explains,

[I]t may be said that the aesthetics of sentiment are in no way characterized by an individual or 'interior' experience, but on the contrary, by something essentially open to others, to the Other. This overture connotes the space, the locale, the proxemics of the common destiny. (1996:14-15)

As long as individuals labour under the impression that their beliefs are aberrant, held uniquely, they perceive themselves as separated from others and alienated from their surroundings. This is evident from the frequent descriptions participants give of themselves before they encountered the Craft as being 'outsiders', 'liminal' or 'not belonging' that were discussed in Chapter Six. Bloch also noted this narrative element among his interview subjects, indicating that some described themselves as having been 'born different' (1998:30-31).

The adoption of the wholly elective identification of 'neopagan' is not so much an expression of individualism, but of the desire, arising from value-rational rather than instrumental-rational premises, to construct oneself in

relation to like others. Involvement in neopaganism can therefore be seen not as the narcissistic, solipsistic withdrawal into the self that some of its critics suggest it represents, but as a creative attempt to dissolve some of the boundaries separating self from other, and the 'human' from the 'natural'. The collective sentiment evinced by neopagans revolves around the 're-enchantment' of both the natural world and of social relationships. This is accomplished by situating them all within a web of related, comprehensive symbolic narratives. This has the effect of allowing value-rational orientations to prevail in areas previously governed by purposive-rational logics, and creating a situation in which 'the earth' can exist as a silent, but present participant in moral discussion. Because ethical orientations are not taken to be pre-given in a Craft context, but are produced as part of a reflexive process, this re-enchantment does not necessarily result in a loss of rationality, as Weber suggests (1946:350-1).

The neopagan community, in general, also exemplifies other characteristics Maffesoli ascribes to neotribes. Neotribes are unstable, open communities defined by the participants' uncoerced agreement that they share a common sentiment which gives rise to an certain ethical experience, an orientation towards proper living that may not be shared with the broader social order. This is an accurate description of the amorphous, decentralized, unregulated nature of the broad neopagan community, out of which smaller groups characterized by closer proximal relationships coalesce and dissolve, leaving the collective sentiment, which is not dependent upon any particular individual or group of individuals, intact. It also suggests that the

decentralization that has been characteristic of neopaganism is a fundamental part of its vitality and its ability to provide people with a sense of identity not dependent on the organizing structures of power in society. This is significant when one considers the growing push towards institutionalization coming from within the neopagan movement itself.

The increasing desire expressed by some segments of the neopagan community for the development of more formal organizations designed to deliver 'services' such as lobbying, information coordination, spiritual counseling, pagan training and education, chaplaincy, and social organizing to the pagan community and through which they could be recognized legally as religious organizations, represents an area that is highly contested among pagans. Although most Craft practitioners would prefer to see neopagans offered more social acceptance and legal protection, as we saw in Chapter Five, there remains a deep and abiding suspicion that adopting the forms of the dominant institutional order is the best way for neopagans to achieve these aims. Helen Berger sees the move towards higher levels of organization as being an inevitable outcome of the increased number of adherents to the movement, the growth of information networks, the development of a professional ethic, and a greater desire for legitimacy as adherents begin to raise families in the Craft (1999:104). Using the framework articulated by Giddens, she views the differentiation of expert systems to be a part of the maturation process of the neopagan movement. Loretta Orion notes the tension that exists around institutionalization, but refuses to commit to an assessment of increased organization as either positive or negative. She believes that whether or not

neopagans end up being welcomed as colleagues by their counterparts in more established religions, the movement will continue to grow, both in the slow, organic way exemplified by the traditional lineage coven structure, and in the more explosive, experimental manner fostered in eclectic covens and by national and regional gatherings, which will, she asserts, become more numerous (1995:270).

I would suggest that the tension that characterizes the institutionalization debates is well founded and points to the potential for a crisis of legitimation within the neopagan movement. Jürgen Habermas (1975) uses the term 'legitimation crisis' to refer to a specific condition in late capitalist society in which the state must simultaneously ensure capital accumulation while maintaining mass loyalty. Unfortunately, the mechanisms through which the former is accomplished can lead to the diminution of the latter, and so the former must be concealed in order for the state to maintain its legitimacy. Clearly, this state / economic orientation is not directly applicable to neopaganism, however the logic of a legitimation crisis is. The ideology through which neopaganism has legitimated itself is that of individual autonomy and self-determination, which has led in turn to its existence as a decentralized neotribal religious movement existing in the sphere of the lifeworld.

Habermas characterizes the lifeworld as the realm of "culturally transmitted and linguistically organized stock of interpretative patterns" in which action and communication oriented towards mutual understanding are possible (1989:170-1). The structural components of the lifeworld are culture, society, and personality. To the extent that these are constructed within contexts

that are at least in theory negotiable among parties oriented to mutual understanding, they remain lifeworld functions, however rationalized and differentiated they become. Habermas explains,

In the relation of culture to society, structural differentiation is to be found in the gradual uncoupling of the institutional system from worldviews; in the relation of the personality to society, it is evinced in the extension of the scope of contingency for establishing interpersonal relationships; and in the relation of culture to personality, it is manifested in the fact that the renewal of traditions depends more and more on the individuals' readiness to criticize and their ability to innovate (1989:181).

Structural differentiation between the components of the lifeworld is seen by Habermas to be a desirable condition, releasing the full rational potential of communicative action (1989:180-1). Certainly in terms of the latter two points, neopaganism can be seen to be promoting the rationalization of the participants' lifeworlds by encouraging what Giddens characterizes as 'pure relationships' and by problematizing the individual's relationship to inherited interpretations through its emphasis on personal experience as the grounding for the legitimate creation of 'tradition'.

Habermas himself seems to take a somewhat dubious view of religion as a source of potential rationality. He sees 'mythical worldviews', which he perceives as being typical of tribal societies, as representing a state where, because the sociocultural world and the 'world as a whole' are not differentiated, there can be no critical standpoint taken of the legitimating narrative.

To the extent that the mythical understanding of the world actually steers action orientation, action oriented to mutual understanding and action oriented to success cannot yet be separated, and a participant's no cannot yet signify the critical rejection of a validity claim. Myth binds the critical potential of communicative action, stops up, so to speak, the source of inner contingencies springing from communication itself. (1989:193)

As society becomes increasingly complex, in Habermas' model, the need for mythic-interpretive frameworks and religious and metaphysical worldviews falls away, to be replaced by an ethics of conviction, rational natural law and civil religion, in the sense suggested by Bellah. He does not seem to consider a form of religion such as modern neopaganism, whose myth, symbol, narrative and action orientation is not experienced as a pre-social given, but rather is reflexively constructed through intersubjective discussion oriented towards mutual understanding.

Habermas also notes, however, that the lifeworld in modern societies co-exists with another set of structures he names the 'system'. The system consists of those "increasingly autonomous organizations [that] are connected with one another via delinguistified media of communication" (1989:189). Chief among these Habermas places the economic system, whose delinguistified medium is money, and the political order, whose delinguistified medium is power. Systemic mechanisms such as money and power must be anchored in the lifeworld by way of institutions. Where these institutions result in the logic of the systemic mechanism, which is perceived as outside of the sociocultural construction of the lifeworld, superceding the logic of communicative action in spheres where the latter has until then held sway, Habermas speaks of a 'colonization of the lifeworld'. Although he acknowledges that system rationalization and differentiation must proceed in concert with lifeworld rationalization and differentiation, when the former process has the effect of

reducing the lifeworld, which is the source of all social patterns, to the status of 'one subsystem among many' the potential for the rationality of the entire social system is compromised.

The suspicion that institutionalization will offer an anchor for the logic of systemic mechanisms such as exchange and bureaucracy in the neopagan lifeworld is the unarticulated theoretical premise underlying many of the hesitations expressed about Craft institutions more generally and discussed in Chapter Five. The widely held principle that one must not accept money for Craft instruction, articulated first in Gardner's 'Craft Laws'⁸⁶ and adopted subsequently by many other groups of all persuasions, is one of the normative barriers erected by neopagans to prevent the whole scale commercialization of the Craft, that is, its assimilation to the logic of exchange. Both Orion (1995) and Berger (1999) note that to the extent that expert systems differentiate out of the neopagan movement more generally, those who work within those systems believe that their work should be compensated financially. Many of the

⁸⁶ Aidan Kelly reports that the 'Old Laws' make their first appearance in Gardner's *Book of Shadows* in the version extant in 1961 (as opposed to the versions that can be reliably placed in 1949, 1953 and 1957). He gives the relevant passages as: "And quickly keep to the Old Law, never accept money for the use of the art. It is Christian priests and sorcerers who accept money for the use of their Arts, and they sell Dwale and evil love spells and pardons to let men escape from their sins. Be not as these. *Be not as these*. If you accept not money, you will be free of temptation to use the Art for evil causes" (1991:159) and "But if some brothers truly wrought it, 'tis right that they have their pay, and it be just, and this be not taking money for the use of the Art, but for good and honest work. And even the Christians say 'A labourer is worthy of his hire.' But if any brothers work willingly for the good of the craft without pay, 'tis but to their greater honour" (1991:155). Kelly also notes that there are two passages in Gardner's *The Meaning of Witchcraft* (1959) that express similar sentiments about taking money for the practice of the art.

individuals involved in pagan organizations and pagan advocacy work see that work as something separate from 'the use of the art' and therefore not subject to the same ethical prohibition against accepting direct financial recompense. It is already an accepted norm that neopagan craftspeople are entitled to receive fair value for their work, whether or not they are selling to a neopagan clientele.

The perceived institutional requirement to conform to government regulations outlining 'legitimate' religious forms and practices is seen by practitioners as not only potentially restricting the organization and structure of neopagan groups, but also as having the potential to restrict the scope of dialogue oriented towards mutual understanding through the routinization of creativity and the explicit or implicit regulation of symbolically expressed discourse. To the extent that Craft organizations are perceived to be subordinating the intersubjectively constructed and communicatively maintained discourse upon which the Craft is founded to an institution conforming to either the logic of exchange or that of efficiency, they will suffer a legitimation crisis. And, since neopaganism's status as a neotribe means that it possesses no sanctioning ability to coerce the disaffected into obedience, a widespread withdrawal of loyalty is destabilizing to the potential survival of the movement. In addition, as Bibby implies, the dominant cultural direction in Canada seems to be towards locating religious concerns increasingly within the lifeworld and disentangling them from their existing bureaucratic structures. Moving in the opposite direction and taking neopaganism from a position in which it is well adapted as a decentralized, informal affinity orientation existing within the confines of the lifeworld into a more formalized and bureaucratized structure

better able to conform to systemic imperatives would seem to be maladaptive in the long term, and hurt the Craft's chances of growing and surviving in an increasingly rationalized, some would say 'postmodern' environment.

Habermas, however, does not take the presence of institutional anchors for systemic mechanisms in the lifeworld to necessarily forecast a colonization of the latter. He retains the possibility that these institutions could serve as a channel for the influence of the lifeworld on formally organized domains of action (1989:217). In this way, the institutions offer a means to reclaim territory for the lifeworld by extending communicative logic and intersubjective value contexts into areas formerly organized solely according to their own logics. Expanding the potential base of application of the sentiment of 're-enchanting the world', that forms the core of the neopagan lifeworld and defines their 'collective sensibility', into the broader society would, on the surface, seem to be a natural social project for neopagans, and certainly Bloch (1998), Berger (1999), and Eller (1993) report that many of those to whom they spoke regarded their personal transformative practices as a means through which socially transformative processes could eventually be enacted.

Maffesoli, however, implies that sentiment cannot be effectively institutionalized. It cannot reside in the role system of a bureaucracy; it must be enacted and embodied in authentic sociality, which can only be carried out between persons. Where Habermas privileges discourse oriented towards mutual understanding as the foundation of rational community, Maffesoli privileges participation in a defining sentiment that is only articulated and refined through language as the foundation for a community in which rationality is not

the end goal. It is ultimately in the lifeworld that the vitality of the Craft, Maffesoli's *puissance*, is to be found. To the extent that institutionalization would diminish the centrality of lifeworld concerns in the Craft, it will undermine the transformative potential of neopaganism, and thus, its long-term survival. Neopagan organizations, therefore, if they are truly to serve the best interests of their communities, must resist the temptation to borrow existing structures, and reflexively invent themselves according to the imperatives dictated by the legitimating ideology of the Craft. It remains to be seen to what extent neopaganism will be able to avoid a legitimation crisis as the internal pressures to develop more formally organized subsystems increase.

The Craft worldview and ideology make central some concerns that were marginalized in the dominant discourse of the twentieth century and act both as identity-constructing resources and as sites of both adaptation and resistance to the pervasive currents of late modernity. The Craft embodies a creative, sacralized response to the ethical and existential questions that have arisen as modernity has unfolded, empowering the reflexively constituted self to symbolically construct itself as a situated and effective actor in a meaningful universe. The ongoing success of this movement, measured in terms of its ability to continue to provide a framework within which individuals find that they can satisfactorily address these concerns, will depend upon those within it creating a form of social adaptation that can accommodate both popular growth and the development of differentiated expert systems without doing violence to the internal logic that makes the Craft well adapted to the further radicalization of modernity.

Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire⁸⁷

Dear Members of the Canadian Neopagan Witchcraft Community:

My name is Síân Reid and I am a PhD candidate in the Department of Sociology at Carleton University in Ottawa. My area of study is neopagan witchcraft in Canada and I will be undertaking dissertation research over the next few years. I have been involved in the Craft for the past 12 years. The first stage of my research involves the distribution of a survey, which is printed here. It will be followed by some face to face and telephone interviewing with those of you who choose to volunteer.

What has struck me consistently, as I have done research leading up to this point, is how little good information there is available about participants in neopagan witchcraft in general, and Canadian neopagan witchcraft in particular.

Therefore, I'm looking for information on basic sociological variables such as age, income, marital status, education, area of residence, religious socialization (childhood), etc... I'm interested in who you are and what you do in your life, in very general terms, not in the specifics of what you do in circle or what you believe.

What sort of information do I hope to end up with? I'm hoping to be able to make some comparisons between the neopagan profile as it is revealed in my responses, and the general Canadian profile, as well as to profiles of members of other religious denominations. I hope to develop an understanding of neopagan witchcraft that locates it squarely in the literature regarding modern responses to religious questions, rather than the literature dealing with deviance, as is too often now the case. I hope to clarify the process and motivations through which

⁸⁷ Formatting in this Appendix is not identical to that of the original document due to space constraints.

people become involved, and remain involved, in the Craft. I hope to expose the variety of attitudes and coping strategies around being Craft in a cowan world.

This survey is anonymous; surveys are not numbered or marked in any way that would allow me to identify any individual respondent. I'm not interested in knowing your identity. In terms of how the data will be treated after they are collected, for reasons of confidentiality, I have made the decision not to make my raw data available to other researchers. I will produce tabulated data for them, if they are interested in specific breakdowns, but because of my own concerns that some people's answers might be distinctive enough to identify them to other people who know what they are looking for, my raw data will remain with me.

If you would currently identify yourself, in your own mind, as a practitioner of neopagan witchcraft, Wicca, or the Craft, under any of the labels in which these are sometimes presented, and you are resident in Canada, I would urge you to support this research by taking the time to complete and return this postage-paid questionnaire. Fold it in half and tape all the way along the other three edges. If it is not completely sealed, Canada Post will not deliver it. If you have previously completed the questionnaire, please pass this copy along to a friend. If you have any questions, require additional copies of this survey, or would like to volunteer for the interview stage of this study, please do not hesitate to contact me at one of the addresses below:

Department of Sociology, Carleton University
B750 Loeb Building, 1125 Colonel By Drive
Ottawa, ON. K1S 5B6

149 Thornbury Cres.
Nepean, ON.
K2G 6C3

slreid@ccs.carleton.ca

Important Notes: You are eligible to complete this questionnaire if:

- 1) *You currently identify yourself, in your own mind, as a practitioner of neopagan witchcraft, Wicca, or the Craft, under any of the labels in which these are sometimes presented; **AND***
- 2) *You are currently resident in Canada.*

4. Do you currently self-identify as a member of a religious tradition(s) other than the Craft?

☐ yes

☐ no

If yes, which one(s)? _____

5. How did you first come to be aware of the Craft? (school, friends, fiction books, movies, newspaper, etc..) _____

6. How did you first become involved in the Craft? (bought a book and just started, went to a meeting with friends, etc...) _____

7. To the best of your recollection, when you first became involved in the Craft, what were the three things that appealed to you most about it? (please keep descriptions brief, ten words or less per item)

8. What are the three things that appeal most to you now?

9. Were books important in getting you involved in the Craft?

(Circle one number only)

1 _____	2 _____	3 _____	4 _____
yes, very important	yes, somewhat important	no, not really important	no, not at all important

10. Are books important in maintaining your involvement in the Craft?

1 _____	2 _____	3 _____	4 _____
yes, very important	yes, somewhat important	no, not really important	no, not at all important

11. Are books important in maintaining your commitment to the Craft?

1 _____	2 _____	3 _____	4 _____
yes, very important	yes, somewhat important	no, not really important	no, not at all important

12. Which three books do you think have most influenced your Craft?

13. Were other people important in getting you involved in the Craft?

1 _____	2 _____	3 _____	4 _____
yes, very important	yes, somewhat important	no, not really important	no, not at all important

14. Would the statement "I always knew I had a religion; I never knew it had a name" come close to describing your feelings at encountering the Craft?

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____
 yes, very yes, somewhat no, not really no, not at all
 close close close close

15. If you had to put a label on the style or tradition of Craft you *currently* practice, what would it be? _____

16. What other styles or traditions of Craft, if any, have you practiced?

17. Have you ever been initiated?

☐ yes ☐ no ☐ not applicable

If yes, what is the highest level of initiation you have ever received?

18. Have you ever worked with a group? ☐ yes ☐ no

If yes, are you currently working with a group?

☐ yes ☐ no

If yes, are you currently working with multiple groups?

☐ yes ☐ no

On average, how large is the group with which you work the most frequently? _____

19. What percentage of the time you have spent in the Craft has been spent working with one or more other people? _____

20. Is working with other people important in maintaining your *involvement* in the Craft?

1 _____	2 _____	3 _____	4 _____
yes, very important	yes, somewhat important	no, not really important	no, not at all important

21. Is working with other people important to maintaining your commitment to the Craft?

1 _____	2 _____	3 _____	4 _____
yes, very important	yes, somewhat important	no, not really important	no, not at all important

22. Could you name five activities which are, to you, specifically Craft related?

23. On average, how much time do you spend on specifically Craft-related activities each week? (can be those you listed, or others)

24. How likely are you to discuss your religious beliefs in some depth, when asked... (Circle one for each scenario)

– at a party attended exclusively by friends?

1 _____	2 _____	3 _____	4 _____
definitely would	probably would	probably would not	definitely would not

– at a party attended primarily by strangers?

1	2	3	4
_____	_____	_____	_____
definitely would	probably would	probably would not	definitely would not

– with your co-workers?

1	2	3	4
_____	_____	_____	_____
definitely would	probably would	probably would not	definitely would not

– with your family of origin (mother, father, siblings, etc...)?

1	2	3	4
_____	_____	_____	_____
definitely would	probably would	probably would not	definitely would not

– with a member of another religion whom you believe will be open-minded?

1	2	3	4
_____	_____	_____	_____
definitely would	probably would	probably would not	definitely would not

– with a member of another religion whom you believe will be hostile?

1	2	3	4
_____	_____	_____	_____
definitely would	probably would	probably would not	definitely would not

– with a casual acquaintance about whose possible reaction you are uncertain?

1	2	3	4
_____	_____	_____	_____
definitely would	probably would	probably would not	definitely would not

– with a neighbour about whose possible reaction you are uncertain?

1	2	3	4
_____	_____	_____	_____
definitely would	probably would	probably would not	definitely would not

– with a prospective employer?

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4
 definitely probably probably definitely
 would would would not would not

– with a police officer assessing your credibility as a witness?

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4
 definitely probably probably definitely
 would would would not would not

25. How open are you about your Craft affiliation within the Craft community?

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4
 very open somewhat open not really open not at all open

26. How open are you about your Craft affiliation outside of the Craft community?

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4
 very open somewhat open not really open not at all open

27. How would you list your religion on the Canadian census?

You and Your Other Interests

28. How many books, on average, do you read per month (excluding books read during the regular course of your paid employment)? _____

29. Do you have regular access to a computer? ☐ yes ☐ no

IF YES: please continue with the section below, if no, go to q. 30.

Are there any restrictions on your access to the computer, or the kinds of things you can do with it? ☐ yes ☐ no

If yes, please list: _____

What do you use the computer for, other than your paid employment?
(word-processing, games, record-keeping, etc...)

Do you use a modem? ☐ yes ☐ no

If yes, what do you use it for, other than your paid employment?
(interactive chat, buy and sell, newsgroups, etc...) _____

Do you participate in any pagan BBSes or newsgroups? ☐ yes ☐ no

30. Do you subscribe to, or regularly purchase, any pagan periodicals?

☐ yes

☐ no

31. Outside of the Craft and your paid employment, what other activities, hobbies or organizations are you involved in? (name three, if possible)

You and Your Family

Important Note: *In the questions that follow, mother and father refer to the primary female and male caregivers with whom you lived while growing up. These do not have to be your biological parents.*

32. Were you adopted as a baby or a young child? ☐ yes ☐ no

33. Did your mother have any religious affiliation while you were growing up?

☐ yes

☐ no

☐ not applicable

IF YES, please continue with the section below, if not, go to q. 34.

What was this affiliation? (be as specific as you can -- orthodox Jewish is a better description than Jewish, evangelical Lutheran is a better description than Protestant) _____

How active would you say your mother's religious involvement was?

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4
 very active somewhat active not really active not active at all

How committed would you say your mother was to her religious beliefs?

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4
 very committed somewhat committed not really committed not at all committed

34. Did your father have any religious affiliation while you were growing up?

☐ yes ☐ no ☐ not applicable

IF YES, please continue with the section below, if not, go to q. 35.

What was this affiliation? (be as specific as you can -- orthodox Jewish is a better description than Jewish, evangelical Lutheran is a better description than Protestant) _____

How active would you say your father's religious involvement was?

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4
 very active somewhat active not really active not active at all

How committed would you say your father was to his religious beliefs?

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4
 very committed somewhat committed not really committed not at all committed

35. Would you say that there was some effort made to raise you within a religious tradition? ☐ yes ☐ no

36. Would you say that, in general, you had a happy, normal home life as you were growing up? ☐ yes ☐ no

IF NO, please complete the section below, if yes, continue to q. 37.

Do you consider any of your parents or guardians to have been physically abusive? ☐ yes ☐ no

Do you consider any of your parents or guardians to have been emotionally abusive? ☐ yes ☐ no

Were any of your parents or guardians substance-addicted (alcohol, illegal or prescription drugs)? ☐ yes ☐ no

You and Your Personal History

37. Of your closest friends, what percentage would you describe as Craft?

38. What percentage would you describe as pagan?

39. Do you have a spouse or domestic partner? ☐ yes ☐ no

IF YES, please complete the section below, if no, continue to q. 40.

Would you describe them as Craft? ☐ yes ☐ no

Would you describe them as pagan? ☐ yes ☐ no

40. Did you spend most of your time while growing up in areas you would characterize as (choose one):

- ☐ primarily urban ☐ primarily suburban
☐ primarily small town ☐ primarily rural?

Important Note: *The remaining questions in this section ask for 'sensitive' personal information. Although it is most useful to me if fully completed responses are returned, if you are uncomfortable with these questions, please either skip them entirely and proceed to the General Information About You section below, or only complete those with which you are comfortable.*

41. Have you ever been in therapy for longer than 6 months?

- ☐ yes ☐ no

IF YES, what for? (brief description only, eg. shyness, alcohol dependency, bereavement etc... personal details are not required)

Was this before or after you entered the Craft?

- ☐ before ☐ after ☐ both

42. Have you ever been sexually abused or assaulted?

- ☐ yes ☐ no

If yes, was it before or after you entered the Craft?

- ☐ before ☐ after ☐ both

43. Have you ever been arrested? ☐ yes ☐ no

If yes, what for? _____

Was this before or after you entered the Craft?

- ☐ before ☐ after ☐ both

General Information about You

Important Note: The information in this section is being collected for the purposes of comparing the respondents to this survey to other groups of Canadians. Under no circumstances will it be used as a means of identifying individual respondents.

44. Are you: ☐ male ☐ female ?

45. What is your year of birth? _____

46. What is your sexual orientation? (choose one)

- ☐ heterosexual ☐ homosexual ☐ bisexual

47. What is your legal marital status? (check only the most recent)

- ☐ legally married and not separated
☐ legally married and separated
☐ divorced
☐ widowed
☐ never married (single)

48. Are you currently living with a common-law partner? ☐ yes ☐ no

49. Are you a registered Indian as defined by the Indian Act of Canada?

☐ yes ☐ no

50. What province or territory do you currently live in? _____

51. Would you characterize the immediate area in which you live as:

☐ primarily urban ☐ primarily suburban
☐ primarily small town ☐ primarily rural

52. Who currently shares your present accommodation? (names are not required, only their relationship to you. eg. male spouse, child of male spouse from previous marriage, two children of current marriage, boyfriend of one child, unrelated boarder, etc...)

53. What is the highest grade (or year) or secondary (high school) or elementary school you ever attended? (Enter highest number, 1 - 13, of grades or years, excluding kindergarten)

grade _____ OR

☐ never attended school / attended kindergarten only

54. How many years of education have you completed at university?

☐ none

☐ less than one year (of completed courses)

_____ year(s)

55. In the past nine months, did you attend a school, college or university?

(Include attendance at elementary or secondary schools, business or trade schools, community colleges, institutes of technology, CEGEPs, etc., for courses that can be used as credits towards a certificate, diploma or degree.

Mark one box only)

☐ No, did not attend

☐ Yes, full time

☐ Yes, part time, day or evening

56. What certificates, diplomas or degrees have you ever obtained? (Include all qualifications obtained from secondary schools or trade schools and other post-secondary institutions. Mark as many boxes as apply.)

☐ none

☐ secondary / high school graduation certificate or equivalent

☐ trades certificate or diploma

☐ other non-university certificate or diploma

☐ university certificate or diploma below bachelor level

☐ bachelor degree(s) (eg. B.A., B.Sc., LL.B.)

☐ university certificate or diploma above bachelor level

☐ Master's degree(s) (eg. M.A., M.Sc., M.Ed.)

☐ degree in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine or optometry

☐ earned doctorate (eg. Ph.D., D.Sc., D.Ed.)

57. What kind(s) of paid work are you currently doing? (for example, medical lab technician, accounting clerk, manager of civil engineering dept, secondary school teacher, supervisor of data entry unit, food processing labourer, fishing guide.)
-
-

OR ☐ not performing paid work

58. Have your previous occupations differed from your present one?

☐ yes ☐ no

If yes, please list your previous three occupations:

59. During most of the past year, did you perform paid work full-time or part-time? (Mark one only)

☐ full-time (30 hours or more per week)
☐ part-time (less than 30 hours per week)
☐ did not perform paid work

60. During most of the past year, did you perform unpaid work full-time or part-time (eg. childcare, eldercare, volunteer work, etc...)

☐ full-time (30 hours or more per week)
☐ part-time (less than 30 hours per week)
☐ did not perform unpaid work

61. What is your best estimate of your personal income from all sources last year?

(Include employment income, tips, commissions, bonuses, pensions, dividends and interest, social assistance, scholarships, etc...)

☐ no income	☐ 25,000 - 29,999
☐ under \$2,000	☐ 30,000 - 34,999
☐ 2,000 - 4,999	☐ 35,000 - 39,999
☐ 5,000 - 9,999	☐ 40,000 - 44,999
☐ 10,000 - 14,999	☐ 45,000 - 49,999
☐ 15,000 - 19,999	☐ 50,000 - 59,999
☐ 20,000 - 24,999	☐ 60,000 - 74,999
	☐ 75,000 and over

62. What is your best estimate of your family income from all sources last year?

(Include as family for the purposes of this estimate those people who are related to you, by blood or marriage, and living at the same address)

☐ no income	☐ 25,000 - 29,999
☐ under \$2,000	☐ 30,000 - 34,999
☐ 2,000 - 4,999	☐ 35,000 - 39,999
☐ 5,000 - 9,999	☐ 40,000 - 44,999
☐ 10,000 - 14,999	☐ 45,000 - 49,999
☐ 15,000 - 19,999	☐ 50,000 - 59,999
☐ 20,000 - 24,999	☐ 60,000 - 74,999
	☐ 75,000 and over

63. Are you a Canadian citizen?

☐ yes

☐ no

64. Are you a citizen of a country other than Canada? ☐ yes ☐ no

IF YES, of which country(s)? _____

65. Were you born in Canada? ☐ yes ☐ no

IF NO, how long have you lived in Canada?

☐ less than one year OR _____ year(s)

Thank you for your time! Please feel free to make copies of this survey and distribute them to others whom you believe would be interested.

Appendix B: Partial Code List for Open-Ended Questions

Previous Religious Involvement Codes (questions 3, 4, 33 and 34)

A. Christians

a) Catholics

01 Catholic

b) Protestants

i. Mainliners (from Bibby 1993:108)

02 Anglican, Episcopalian, Church of England

03 Presbyterian

04 United Church of Canada

05 Lutheran

ii. Conservatives (adapted from Bibby 1993:108)

06 Brethren Church

07 Church of Christ

08 Salvation Army

09 Baptist or Southern Baptist

10 Pentecostal

11 Seventh Day Adventist

12 United Christian Fellowship

13 Alliance Missionary

14 Old Methodist

15 Mennonite

c) Other Christian

16 Quaker

17 Jehovah's Witness

18 Gnostic Christian

19 Christian – no denomination given

B. Non-Christians**a) Jews**

- 20 Orthodox Jewish
- 21 Reform Jewish
- 22 Jewish – no type specified

b) Eastern Religions

- 23 Buddhist
- 24 Taoist
- 25 Yoga discipline

c) Pagan / Wiccan

- 26 Wicca / Old Religion / pagan church
- 27 Asatru

d) Other Western Esoteric

- 28 New Age
- 29 Rosicrusian
- 30 Spiritualism
- 31 Thelema
- 32 Qabalist

e) Other Non-Christian

- 33 Unitarian Universalist
- 34 Bahai
- 35 Subud
- 36 Yoruba
- 37 Hare Krishna
- 38 Builders of the Adytum

C. Codes for Multiple Listings and Others

- 39 Multiple Christian
- 40 Multiple Non-Christian
- 41 Multiple Mixed

88 Not Applicable

99 No Response

How did you first become aware of the Craft? (Question 5)

A. People

01 family member

02 intimate friend (boyfriend, girlfriend, affianced, spouse)

03 friend or acquaintance

B. Books

04 Craft books

05 feminist books

06 fiction books

07 non-fiction

08 books (unspecified)

09 friends and books

C. Media

10 movies

11 television

12 magazine, radio or TV interview with practitioner

13 advertisements for Craft products or services

D. Locations or Events

14 pagan or occult bookstore

15 school class or project

16 feminist event or women's group

17 lecture by practitioner

18 public ritual

19 private ritual

E. Other

20 non-school research

- 21 mystical experience
- 22 can't remember / always knew
- 23 other

How did you first become involved in the Craft? (question 6)

A. People

- 01 talked with other pagans
- 02 studied with a Craft practitioner
- 03 interviewed practitioners
- 04 sought out an existing private group
- 05 started a group from scratch
- 06 worked solitary
- 07 raised Craft

B. Books

- 08 read books
- 09 read books and started alone
- 10 started alone and then read books
- 11 read books and then found people
- 12 found people and then read books
- 13 learned divination

C. Rituals and Events

- 14 went to a public ritual
- 15 was invited or taken to a public ritual
- 16 was invited or taken to a private ritual
- 17 was invited or taken to an unspecified ritual
- 18 women's group
- 19 Unitarian workshop
- 20 Other non-ritual gathering (festival, coffee cauldron, brunch)
- 21 Craft workshop or lecture

D. Other

- 22 mystical or psychic experience
- 23 always seem to have been involved
- 24 followed my heart / intuition
- 25 did research on related areas
- 26 other response

Appeals of the Craft (questions 7 and 8)

A. Gender

- 01 presence of a Goddess
- 02 balance between the Goddess and the God
- 03 equality between men and women / non-patriarchal
- 04 positive images / ideas about femaleness or women's experience
- 05 exploration of the positive male

B. People / Groups

- 06 the other people involved
- 07 sense of or involvement in pagan community
- 08 tolerance and respect for others / openmindedness of people
- 09 non-hierarchical / anti-authoritarian
- 10 ability to involve family / something the family did
- 11 small, intimate, connected groups
- 12 opportunities to share ideas and experience with likeminded others
- 13 enhanced or deepened capacity for relationships
- 14 can work in same sex or mixed sex groups
- 15 helping others
- 16 being priesthood / leadership role

- 17 don't have to join an organization
- C. Individual
- 18 flexibility of beliefs and practices / many traditions
- 19 empowerment of the individual to make choices and
changes in their lives and world
- 20 personal moral responsibility / lack of sin
- 21 requirement for or production of self-knowledge or
personal growth
- 22 personal relationship with deity / personal nature of practice
- 23 challenging / questioning / mentally stimulating /
freethinking orientation
- 24 self affirming and inward, not self denying and dogmatic
- D. Feelings
- 25 coming home / fit with my beliefs / just made sense
- 26 sense of connection with past / culture / heritage
- 27 sense of joy, peace or comfort it gives
- 28 sense of connection with or place in the universe /
belonging / wholeness
- 29 sense of recapturing awe and magic
- 30 sense of danger / exotic / mystery / secrecy
- 31 inspires or promotes creativity
- 32 space for healing / safe space
- 33 the positive energy
- 34 it's fun
- 35 the whole way of life
- E. Worldview
- 36 immanence of deity in self and world / reverence for all
living things
- 37 pantheism
- 38 nurturing, not vengeful, deity

- 39 connections with / centrality of / responsibility for nature
- 40 accepting attitudes towards sexuality / the body
- 41 balance and harmony / equality of all things
- 42 belief in reincarnation / lack of fear of death
- 43 political action as spiritual
- 44 holistic, integrating worldview
- 45 practicality of beliefs and practices in everyday life
- 46 simplicity of the belief system

F. Ritual and Magic

- 47 rituals
- 48 relationship of rituals to life cycles / natural cycles
- 49 ambience of ritual
- 50 everyone participates / no spectators
- 51 don't have to worship in a building / all nature is temple
- 52 magic / magical healing
- 53 divination
- 54 acceptance of or work with non-material reality or phenomena

G. Other

- 55 structured study
- 56 published material / books available
- 57 focus on or alignment with the moon
- 58 beauty and imagery of it
- 59 different from other religions
- 60 it works
- 61 other responses

Influential Books (question 12)

- 01 non-fiction by the Farrars
- 02 non-fiction by Valiente

- 03 non-fiction by Gardner (inc. Book of Shadows)
- 04 non-fiction by Buckland
- 05 non-fiction by Vivianne Crowley
- 06 Cunningham's "Solitary Practitioner"
- 07 other Cunningham
- 08 Spiral Dance
- 09 other Craft-instructional non-fiction
- 10 Drawing Down the Moon
- 11 other non-fiction by Starhawk
- 12 non-fiction by Z. Budapest
- 13 other feminist non-fiction
- 14 The Mists of Avalon
- 15 fiction by Starhawk
- 16 other fiction or poetry
- 17 book on magic / magical technique / spellwork
- 18 book on divination / divinatory technique
- 19 mythology book or book of commentary on mythology
- 20 book on history or archeology
- 21 book by / about Aleister Crowley
- 22 scripture or devotion from another tradition
- 23 book on Native spirituality
- 24 coven Book of Shadows or personal writings
- 25 other / unknown

Style or Tradition of Craft (questions 15 and 16)

A. British Traditionals (excluding solitaires)

- 01 Gardnerian
- 02 Alexandrian
- 03 Modified or eclectic Gardnerian

- 04 Modified or eclectic Alexandrian
- 05 British Traditional – unspecified
- B. Solitaries
 - 06 Solitary – unspecified
 - 07 Solitary eclectic
 - 08 Solitary womyn’s spirituality
 - 09 Celtic solitary
 - 10 Solitary Dianic
 - 11 Solitary British Traditional
 - 12 Solitary Italian
 - 13 Solitary Nature Worship
- C. Feminist (excluding solitaires)
 - 14 Feminist Goddess Spirituality
 - 15 Dianic
 - 16 Modified or eclectic Dianic
 - 17 Eco-feminist
 - 18 Feminist Celtic
 - 19 Feminist earth-based Wicca
 - 20 Reclaiming
- D. Ceremonial
 - 21 ceremonial
 - 22 Golden Dawn
 - 23 New Reformed Orthodox Order of the Golden Dawn
 - 24 Rosicrucian
 - 25 Thelema
 - 26 Enochian
 - 27 Ordo Templi Orientalis (OTO)
 - 28 Hebrew archangelic
- E. Mythology or Region identified (excluding eclectics and solitaires)
 - 29 Celtic

- 30 Norse (including Asatru)
- 31 Welsh (including Welsh Celtic)
- 32 Irish (including Old Irish, Witta)
- 33 Saxon
- 34 Assyro-Babylonian
- 35 Chaldean

F. Pagan Organizations

- 36 Oddysian (Wiccan Church of Canada)
- 37 Modified or eclectic Oddysian
- 38 Rowan Tree Church
- 39 Aquarian Tabernacle Church (ATC)

G. Eclectics (excluding solitaires)

- 40 Eclectic
- 41 West Coast Eclectic
- 42 Celtic eclectic
- 43 Goddess eclectic
- 44 Magical eclectic

H. Other named traditions

- 45 Kairosian
- 46 Georgian
- 47 Communitas
- 48 Faerie
- 49 Modified or eclectic Faerie
- 50 Protean
- 51 Thirteenth House
- 52 Star Sapphirean
- 53 Blue Star
- 54 Gardinia
- 55 Minervan
- 56 Atlantean

I. Family Traditions

57 Famtrad

J. Aboriginal-based

58 Shamanism

59 Native traditions

K. Other

60 Wicca or witchcraft (no modifiers)

61 Pagan

62 Druid

63 Unitarian Earth-based

64 Eco-pagan

65 Voudon

66 Other

67 do not like labels

99 no response

Religious Affiliation you would give on the Census (question 27)

01 witchcraft, Wicca(n), witch or named tradition

02 neopagan or pagan

03 neopagan/Wiccan or pagan/Wiccan

04 Jewish

05 United Church

06 Quaker

07 Catholic

08 Unitarian Universalist

09 Aboriginal

10 Theist

11 Agnostic

- 12 Other
- 13 None
- 14 Recognized religion with modifier 'pagan' or 'wiccan'
- 15 Don't know what I'd say
- 16 Decline to state / leave blank / none of their business
- 17 Other response
- 99 did not respond

Appendix C: Interview Guide

Before we begin, is there anything you'd like to ask me? About the research, or myself, or anything else?

I'd like to start by asking you a couple of questions for reference. I know that you answered them on the survey, but those responses and these ones are being kept separately, so I'd just like to ask them again.

How old are you now? And how long have you been involved in the Craft?

In the survey responses that I received back, there were about 3 women for every man. In your experience, is that about right?

Do you think that the Craft has a special appeal for women?
Given that, why do you think men become involved?

Is the Craft different from other religions? How so?

What do you feel you've gotten out of being Craft?
Could you have gotten that from another religion, or from something outside of religion altogether?

How do you think your life would have been different if you'd never encountered the Craft?

In the survey, I asked about the things that appeal to you about the Craft. Are there things you don't like about it?
What are those?

If you could change one public perception about the Craft, what would it be?

Why did you decide to participate in this research?

Now that we've finished with my questions, is there anything you'd like to ask me, or anything further you'd like to discuss?

Appendix D: Ritual Opening

The ritual segments given below were written for the indoor Lammas (August 1) celebration of a small (9 person), gender-inclusive eclectic witchcraft coven. It was written to be led by a priestess alone, rather than by a priest/priestess pair. The text, and the descriptions that accompany it, are used with the permission of the author. It is not a participant-observation account of the ritual itself, but the author's reconstruction of how the ritual would have been done.

(Before the formal beginning of the circle, the altar would be set up by the priestess and/or one of the other coveners, either on a low table, or by the simple expedient of laying out the embroidered black altar cloth (about 2' by 3') on the floor. The altar is at the edge of the circle, and faces northeast. Each corner of the cloth is marked with a sigil of the element to be placed there: air (censer) in the upper right; fire (red candle) in the lower right; water (water bowl) in the lower left; and earth (salt dish) in the upper left. In the center of the cloth is a chalice of wine. Behind it, is a candle called the 'source' candle, from which all the others will be lit. To the left of the chalice is the Goddess candle, to the right, the God candle. The priestess' athame is placed in front of the chalice, where there is also a small vial of oil and a small bowl for libations. Beside the altar are the Book of Shadows and a candle for illumination, should the priestess need to refer to the script.)

(When the priestess was ready to begin the ritual, she would turn off the lights, ensure the phone ringer was off, and light the candles and the incense. This would indicate to the other coveners that it was time to form a quiet line and adopt a meditative mindset. A tonal chant might then be started. As each covener passed by the priestess, s/he would be annointed with oil on the forehead, given a kiss on the cheek, and told 'Blessed Be'. S/he would then take her/his place in the circle. When all had entered, and the atmosphere seemed calm, the priestess would pick up her athame in her right hand, and, beginning at the altar and proceeding clockwise either behind the coveners, or pointing the athame over their heads (depending on the space) would walk the circle three times and say...)

We cast this Circle to be our temple
A boundary, refuge and hallowed place
between the worlds, and beyond time.
We bless and consecrate this temple
to the glory of the Old Gods.

Once for beginnings,
Twice for their fruition,
Thrice for the endings
which shall begin anew.

(At this point, she has returned to stand again in front of the altar. She draws an equal-armed cross with her athame, in the air over the altar, beginning with the down stroke, and says...)

May the Powers give us strength
And may Knowledge keep us safe.
May the Gods of Light and Darkness
guard over us, and keep us from harm.
In the holy name of all that Is,
This Circle is cast.
So Mote It Be.

(other coveners may or may not choose to repeat 'so mote it be'. The priestess replaces her athame on the altar, and the person standing in the east takes a step forward, walks clockwise around the inside of the circle, either picks up or is handed the censer, and returns with it to the eastern quarter. S/he raises the censer above her/his head, then brings it back down to chest level, and walks slowly around the circle, either in front of or behind the coveners, depending on the precedent the priestess has set, elevating the censer at each quarter in turn. As s/he walks, s/he says...)

With the laughing breath of Air
Do I cleanse this sacred space,
That knowledge might be fresh,
And our own minds be clear.

(s/he finishes in the east, then walks around the circle clockwise again to return the censer to the priestess. While s/he returns to the eastern quarter, the individual in the south comes clockwise around to circle to get the fire candle, and repeats the process, this time beginning and ending in the southern quarter. The people in the western [water] and northern [earth] quarters will do the same, except in addition to walking with their elements, they will sprinkle water and salt respectively as they go.)

With the warm light of Fire
Do I cleanse this sacred space,
That power might flow freely,
And our own wills be strong.

With the soothing love of Water
Do I cleanse this sacred space,
That love might flow among us,
And our own hearts be whole.

With the firm body of the Earth
Do I cleanse this sacred space,
That we might have nourishment,
And keep the Rede, our Law.

(when the last person has returned to her/his place, the priestess picks up her athame again and moves clockwise to the eastern quarter. She draws a five-pointed star with her athame, with the top point at the level of her head, and the bottom points at the level of her hips, repeating her first stroke as her last stroke. While she does this, she says...)

From the East
 come the light of the dawn sun,
 the shoots of grain appearing
 in the new-ploughed field
 and the call to awake and arise.
 Spirits of the Air,
 of knowledge and inspiration,
 Be you welcomed in peace.
 Blessed Be.

(her 'Blessed Be' is timed to correspond with her final stroke. She bows her head slightly, and the coveners repeat, 'Blessed Be'. She repeats the process in each of the other quarters, with the word changes given below.)

From the South
 come the midday sun,
 the stalks of grain ripening
 in the fertile fields,
 and the call to work
 in the service of life.
 Spirits of Fire,
 of light and growth,
 Be you welcomed in peace.
 Blessed Be.

From the West
 come the setting sun,
 the sheaves of grain harvested
 in the stubbly field,
 and the knowledge that rest
 is soon at hand.
 Spirits of Water,
 of wisdom and love,
 Be you welcomed in peace.
 Blessed Be.

From the North
 rises the chill white moon
 as the night descends
 o'er the empty fields,
 and the time for dreaming
 is at hand.
 Spirits of the Earth,
 of silence and the task complete,
 Be you welcomed in peace.
 Blessed Be.

(the priestess returns to the altar and sets down her athame. Other coveners could have done the quarter calls, had they wished, but the general practice of the group was that, particularly if new calls had been written, the person who wrote them, did them. This reduced the reliance on the script. The priestess then kneels in front of the altar, placing her hands on the floor, and says...)

Queen of the moonlit heavens,
 Gold-crowned Queen of the Earth,
 Mother whose womb
 has brought forth such bounty,
 and whose love is the life of all things:
 We, Your children
 have prepared a place for You,
 in this, our Circle.
 Come, bringing hope and love
 to our celebration of the harvest
 and the changing of the year.
 And be You welcomed in peace, my Lady.
 Blessed Be.

(coveners repeat 'blessed be'. Priestess remains kneeling, but raises her arms to the level of her head in a suppliant's position and says...)

Lord of Life and Lord of Light,
Lord of the fields and the wild places,
You who are the force
of growth and change,
We call You.
Lord of Shadow and the turning wheel,
Lord of Justice and the winter's ground,
We know You are here.
We, Your children
have prepared a place for You
in this, our Circle.
Come, bringing wisdom and understanding
to our celebration of the harvest
and the changing of the year.
And be You welcomed in peace, my Lords.
Blessed Be.

Appendix E: Statements of Belief and Articles of Faith

Covenant of Gaia: Articles of Faith

This document forms the body of belief common to all our members. Preamble

In these Articles, the following definitions are valid:

"Pagan" refers to any earth-centered or nature-based religion or any follower thereof.

"Wicca" is the revival of the worship of the Earth Mother, Triple Goddess and the old Gods in a modern context.

"Wiccan" is any practitioner of the Wiccan religion whether initiated or not.

The Covenant has formed to answer a need in the community, to provide fellowship for the Pagans and Wiccans in Alberta. We accept that some Pagans and Wiccans may choose to refer to themselves as Witches.

The Covenant is structured as a group of congregations and solitary members who come together and agree on many points, and agree to disagree on others. The final control of the Covenant rests in the members, who elect the Board of Directors and must approve major policy decisions (see By-Laws). Each group in the Covenant retains its autonomy as to organisation, exact forms of the rites, and who is given precedence in worship.

We each have special reverence for a particular Goddess or God (or multiples thereof). All beliefs are equally valid. The Covenant shall be a mutual support group for its members, with the opportunity for Friendship, mutual learning and teaching, providing religious and pastoral services to all who request them.

Articles

1. We endeavor to live by one Law, and that is: If it harms none, do what you will. We also respect the corollary of the Law, that whatever you do will return threefold upon you.
2. We believe that each person has a right to choose, and so our rites are non-violent and non-coercive. We shall strive to follow these principles in our everyday lives as well.
3. We aver that the Earth is sacred and we may choose to express our relationship with the Earth as one of deep connection, of stewardship, or of reverence for the Earth as our Mother Goddess. We seek to live in harmony with nature.
4. We celebrate the traditional holy days of the year, both the solar and lunar cycles. We also hold community rituals of passage to spiritually mark life changes such as birth, death, joining and separation before our deities.
5. We respect the traditional mysteries of our faith and acknowledge the need of some of our Sisters and Brothers to keep their religious affiliation confidential. The Relationship between a worshipper and her deities shall be sacred and inviolable, provided only that in the love of one's own deities, one does not profane or curse the names of the deities of others.
6. Divinity is as likely to manifest in female form as male. Many of us believe in a Goddess / God duality. There is a sacred pattern to the Universe, aspects of which we may perceive as the Goddesses and Gods. They are immanent and may be evoked within us. They may also be transcendent.

7. We offer fellowship to all who profess Pagan faiths and we acknowledge the spiritual validity of Pagans who may not choose to join us. We respect all other spiritual paths, insofar as they fulfill the Law and harm none. We do not proselytize, for we do not aver that ours is the one, true, right and only path for all. As Pagans, we understand that since divinity can be within us we have no need for a Superior Earthly Spiritual Leader. Beyond the Law, we do not have a legacy of infallible sacred texts. We share the firm conviction that people were meant to lead lives filled with joy, love, pleasure and humour.
8. There shall be no charge for religious instruction or initiation, but reasonable fees may be charged by our clergy for the conduct of the Rites of Passage.
9. We have a liturgy in general form for initiations, ordinations, elderings, marriages and funerals, but these rites may be adapted as the officiating clergy and participants desire.
10. Neither this nor any of the above Articles may be amended or removed from this document.

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Congregationalist Witchcraft Association: Statement of Shared Beliefs and Ethics

2.1 The members of this Association believe:

- a/ that the divine is multi-faceted and that it is appropriate to Name and worship a variety of Goddesses and Gods in a variety of different ways,
- b/ that the divine is primarily immanent,
- c/ that there are a variety of guardian spirits and levels of divinity,

d/ that we generally shape our liturgy and theology around the worship of the Goddess or the Goddess and the Old Gods,

e/ that the divine is ever-present and ever-active in the world,

f/ that we can through petition, action, and ritual, cause change in the world in accord with our Wills.

2.2 Every woman and every man is an embodiment of divinity.

2.3 All acts of love and pleasure are acts of praise of the Goddess. This specifically includes all non-coercive sexual orientations.

2.4 An ye harm none, do what ye will.

ETHICS

3.1 All members of this Association must bind themselves by agreement with the following: Though there are many Goddesses and Gods and many Paths to their worship, our paths do not involve;

a/ animal sacrifice,

b/ any coercive activities,

c/ charging fees for teaching the Craft or Initiation within it. (Members of groups may reasonably be expected to share in the expenses of events sponsored by the group or agreed to as part of its obligations as members of this Association, and voluntary donations may be solicited from students).

d/ malfeasance,

e/ breaking Priestly confidentiality,

f/ oath-breaking.

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