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WILLFUL DISOBEDIENCE: THE INTERSECTION OF SOCIAL DISSENT AND SPIRITUALITY IN THE AMERICAN NEO-PAGAN MOVEMENT

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**THE INTERSECTION OF SOCIAL DISSENT AND SPIRITUALITY IN THE
AMERICAN NEO-PAGAN MOVEMENT**

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Despite a history of oppression, the American Neo-Pagan movement is rapidly growing in popularity. Building on the social constructionist basis of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, this work investigates Neo-Pagan perspectives and social responses to the stigmatization of their Neo-Pagan identity. Utilizing phenomenological methods, this study aims to answer three main research questions: (1) Are there common experiences that have led individuals to participate in the Neo-Pagan community? (2) Are there benefits gained by those who participate in the Neo-Pagan community? If so, (3) are there mechanisms utilized by participating members to cope with the stigmatization of their Neo-Pagan identity? A total of forty-five semi-structured interviews were conducted with members of this community at Neo-Pagan festivals in Indiana and Ohio during the summers of 2011 and 2012. The findings suggest that there are common social experiences and benefits that can lead to participation in the Neo-Pagan movement and that there are coping mechanisms intentionally utilized by members of this community to minimize the effects of associated stigma. Broad scale social impacts are considered.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to every individual who has ever been made to feel
undeserving of personal liberty and dignity because of intolerance.
This work is dedicated, especially, to those who continue to work towards
ending such oppression.

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"Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law…" – Aleister Crowley (2011)

"An ye harm none, do what ye will." – The Wiccan Rede (2010)[1]

"He who has the biggest stick has the better chance of imposing his definitions of reality."
– Berger and Luckmann (1963)

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[1] This text from the Wiccan Rede is first credited to Doreen Valentine in 1964 (Coughlin, 2010).

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The America Neo-Pagan community is not often considered a religion; it is more accurately viewed as a multi-faceted spiritual perspective. Many individuals who label themselves as a Neo-Pagan also identify as adherents to various philosophies and spiritualities. Included are modern reincarnations of historic religions (such as Germanic Asatru and Irish Druidism), new nature based religions (such as Wicca), contemporary philosophical paradigms (like Thelema), as well as a host of individual perspectives and small, yet unidentified, spiritual sects. A majority of these spiritualities include intentional practices of magick and/or Witchcraft.[2] Many Neo-Pagans use multiple labels to specify their spiritual identification (such as "Jew Witch" or "Pagan Quaker"). There are also some who participate in Neo-Pagan events who do not specifically identify themselves as Neo-Pagan. Such individuals often label themselves simply as spiritualist or eclectics. Some individuals interact within Neo-Pagan communities for the lifestyle and social norms with no associated spiritual practices. There is no formal religious symbol that encompasses the whole of Neo-Paganism. However, often, the encircled five pointed star, called the pentagram, is used as an emblem.

The spiritualities and philosophies included under the Neo-Paganism umbrella are unique. However, within this diversity are principals that unite Neo-Pagan philosophies into a cohesive spiritual category. This includes sacred reverence of the earth, a respect for individual will and autonomy, a belief in personal creative power, and a desire for living harmoniously with all beings (Kirkpatrick et al., 1986). Within Neo-Paganism, there is not a central dogma adhered

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[2] The capitalization of "Witch" and "Witchcraft" and the spelling of "magick" are stated preferences of participating members within the Neo-Pagan community. Such designations are preferred as they set apart the spiritual practices of magick and Witchcraft from pop culture depictions of magicians and witches in dominant American culture.

to. Instead, a worldview is promoted. This perspective is epitomized in multiple, sect specific, versions of the principle, "Do what you will, harm none." These expressions articulate the foundation of an otherwise eccentric and often chaotic paradigm: believe and live as you accept as right but be considerate and mindful of the impact upon others.

Folklore tells us that during the height of the Roman Empire, the term Pagan first came into use by Christians as a way of derogatorily referring to country dwellers who refused to convert from traditional folk religions to Christianity (Metzer, 1999). Such disparaging sentimentality has continued for hundreds of years into modernity and has developed into outright discrimination. Cases of Pagans being denied employment in the United States are documented as recently as the late 1980s (DeYoung, 1988). In 1999, George W. Bush publically stated during an interview on *Good Morning America* that the Pagan religion Wicca (and associated Witchcraft) is "not a religion" (ABC News). It wasn't until 2007, after a heated debate between a military widow and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, that the Wiccan pentacle was allowed to be imprinted upon military headstones (Allison, 2007). From the Burning Times in Europe and the Salem Witch Trials in the United States to modern courtrooms and media in North America, Pagans resisting conversion to mainstream cultural religious practices have long fought against social opposition.

Despite a legacy of historic and now modern persecution, Neo-Paganism (contemporary Paganism) is experiencing expansive population growth in North America (Adler, 1979). Reid (2005) reported that, in Canada, "contemporary Paganism has increased its census-recorded affiliation tenfold during a period when traditional organized liberal religions, especially liberal Christian denominations, are experiencing membership declines" (2005: 128). Reid's findings coincide with research conducted in the United States that began in the 1970s (Adler, 1979;

Bonewitz, 1976). This phenomenon is intriguing to researchers. As Neo-Paganism was first identified as a spiritual collective in the 1970s (Adler, 1979), there has been little time since then for new generations of Neo-Pagans to be born and thus explain the population increase.

The purpose of this study is to investigate ways in which members of the American Neo-Pagan community perceive, interact and cope with the negative social responses often associated with a Neo-Pagan identity. This is done to in an effort to explore perceptions of self, identity and sense of purpose from within the American Neo-Pagan community. As such, this study aims to explore three main questions: 1) Are there common experiences that have led individuals to participate in the American Neo-Pagan movement? 2) Are there benefits gained by participating in the American Neo-Pagan movement? If so, 3) are there mechanisms utilized by participating members to cope with the stigmatization of their Neo-Pagan identity?

One of the first scholars to investigate the resurrection of Paganism in the United States was Margo Adler. Adler argued that Neo-Paganism is best conceptualized as a socio-religious movement born of the norms, morals and values championed by the 1960s American counter-culture movement (1979). She wrote of how many of the spiritualities included under the umbrella of Neo-Paganism are based upon ideologies popularized by the 1960s American counterculture movement including feminism, egalitarianism and environmentalism, among others. Adler thus identifies Neo-Paganism as a socio-religious movement and spiritual repository for individuals who identify with the morals and ethics promoted by the counter-culture movement of the 1960s (1979).

Adler's assertion of the intersectionality between Neo-Paganism and the counterculture is necessary but also problematic. Evidence of a relationship between adherents to these two worldviews certainly exists. Notably, both groups are founded upon similar ideological bases.

These bases include feminism, environmentalism and support for a collectivist approach to social

structure, among others. Both the counterculture movement and the Neo-Pagan movement have

faced hostility for the espousing of these ideologies from outsiders (see *Forrest Gump* [1994]

and *The Wicker Man* [1973] for popular media examples generalizing "hippies" and "witches" as

deviant social others). However, the counterculture and Neo-Paganism are also significantly

different from one another. The counterculture, as defined by Dowd and Dowd, is one that

"actively rejects or deliberately and consciously oppose(s) central aspects of dominant culture"

(2003, p. 22). While both Neo-Paganism and the counterculture espouse a worldview founded

upon values alternative to those of dominant culture, the counterculture is characterized by

political action deliberately intended to bring about social change. Generally, Neo-Paganism is

not defined by or known for engaging in such overt political action. It cannot, therefore,

currently be considered part of the counterculture. [3]

While Neo-Paganism is not part of the American counterculture, Neo-Pagan worldview,

ideologies and accepted bases of truth and meaning separate members of this spiritual

community from dominant culture in critical ways. Tiryakian defined culture as "a collective

paradigm which provides the basic interpretations and justification of ongoing social existence"

(1972). Accepting this definition, dominant American culture can be defined as the most broadly

accepted collective paradigm in the United States. Dowd and Dowd (2003) argued that the

paradigm of dominant American culture "is held together by forces emanating from 5 different,

but related, sources (p. 31)." These forces are:

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[3] While Neo-Paganism is not, inherently, an activist group, there are some within Neo-Paganism
who are engaged in and encourage others to engage in political action. Such political activism is
a central tenant of some Neo-Pagan spiritualities (see Starhawk, 1990 for detailed information).

1) The economy ("multination capitalism in which we are all implicated and from which we derive our livelihood)";

2) Education;

3) Technology ("the mastery of which is increasingly necessary for participation in social life");

4) Consumption ("we are all shoppers");

5) Memory (a shared knowledge of national wars, heroes, events and celebrities [p. 31]).

American Neo-Pagans are part of dominant culture to the extent that almost all Neo-Pagans live in communities where dominant American culture is the predominately accepted paradigm. Neo-Pagans shop, use technology, etc. However, Neo-Pagans are also distinct from dominant culture insomuch as these binding cultural forces are contested through their spiritual beliefs and associated social practices. Often, Neo-Pagans seek to educate their children independently in accordance with their beliefs and values. They create opportunities to keep financial resources within the Neo-Pagan community and many espouse and live the ideas of self sustainability, reducing their dependency on capitalistic consumption.

An alternative worldview, founded upon spiritual ideology, situates Neo-Pagans as both a part of and apart from dominant American culture. Tiryakian used the term "esoteric culture" to describe "spiritual reactions against the… ethos of modern society" (1972, p. 496). These spiritual reactions have often been met with hostility by those ascribing to the dominant worldview. Historical examples of the esoteric cultures of the Renaissance, Reformation and Surrealism movement that served as harbingers of social change through the creation of "revolutionary consciousness" are offered by Tiryakian (p. 505). He further described esoteric culture as "an important vehicle in the restructuring of collective representations of social

reality" (1972, p. 510). It would be presumptuous to assert that Neo-Paganism is harbinger of

social change to come. However, Tiryakian's framing of esoteric culture allows us a perspective

from which to view the foundational differences between dominant American culture, the

American counterculture and American Neo-Paganism.

There is evidence that public opinion is becoming more tolerant of Neo-Pagan

worldview. Qualitative interviews conducted with North American Neo-Pagans have led

researchers to the conclusion that the number of participants is not necessarily increasing

because Neo-Pagan participation in general is increasing. Rather, it is postulated that more

people are willing to identify publically as Neo-Pagan due to a perception of "decreased

stigma/increased public tolerance for modern Paganism… and an increase in the number of 'less

threatening' pop culture representations" (Reid, 2005). Recent films such as *Practical Magic*

(Dunne; 1998) and *ParaNorman* (Butler & Fell, 2012) defy earlier media depictions of "witches"

as manipulative individuals who maliciously control objects of desire. In these modern

portrayals, Witches are now often portrayed as strong, confident, and perhaps misunderstood,

individuals empowered to be in control of their own lives.

As the representation of Neo-Pagans and Witches within dominant American culture is

changing, it is possible that we will continue to see more positive media representations of such

individuals. The legislation passed that allows the pentagram to be imprinted upon military

headstones (Banerjee, 2007) may very well serve as a demonstration that our society is becoming

less hostile to Neo-Paganism in general. If so, this may speak of a larger shift in public sentiment

towards ideologies that resulted in Neo-Pagans being initially labeled as deviant (i.e., feminism,

environmentalism and egalitarianism). By investigating the American Neo-Pagan phenomenon,

scholars are given the opportunity to examine the social forces leading to an increasing number

of individuals identifying with a religious group that has been oppressed. This lends to the studies of religion, deviance and social control while deepening our understandings of the interconnection between spirituality and social change. The next chapter describes existent scholarly investigations of the American Neo-Pagan community to specifically examine the intersection between deviance and social control.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter two provides an overview of the existent academic literature exploring the Neo-Pagan community. This research is divided into two major thematic groups: the structure and development of the Neo-Pagan movement in the United States and the beliefs, values, behaviors and customs present within this community. Uniting the bulk of this work are investigations of intentional efforts to drive social change. It is demonstrated that further scholarly explorations specifically addressing how deviance relates to social reality construction is necessary.

A significant number of writings and media artifacts have been produced by members of the Neo-Pagan community (see Linden, 2005; Starhawk, 1999; Sulak , Zell, Glory & Weschcke, 2014). Participants within this movement have written about their history, beliefs, customs and identities as well as the values found within and the structure of their community. These writings are empathic and sincere, though also diverse and often contradictory. While it is recognized that Neo-Pagan authorship serves as important examples of legitimate firsthand cultural information, non-scholarly writings by Neo-Pagans are not considered within this section. The writings that are included come, primarily, from either ethnographic accounts or other empirical studies of the Neo-Pagan community.

There is an array of existing scholarly literature that has explored the Neo-Pagan movement as both a domestic and a worldwide phenomenon. This is demonstrated by scholars who have provided evidence of Neo-Paganism in a vast majority of modernized countries. Included are small countries such as Malta (Rountree, 2004) and Lithuania (Delis, 2006). However, the most prolific academic accounts of Neo-Paganism focus upon this socio-religious

community as it exists in the United Kingdom and in the United States of America. Much of this work details the developmental history of Neo-Paganism in the U.S.A. and Britain (such as Adler, 1979). Other works specifically focus on detailing the development and structure of particular spiritual paths under the Neo-Pagan umbrella. This includes Shamanism (Wallace, 2003), Germanic Asatru (Asprem, 2008) and Wicca (Adler, 1979; Harwood, 2007). While some empirical North American studies have explored the Neo-Pagan community as a whole (Adler, 1979; Maglioco, 2001), much of this research is topic-specific. Two major conversational themes arise from this topic-specific research: 1) the structure and development of the Neo-Pagan movement in the United States and 2) the beliefs, values, behaviors and customs present within this community.

The structure and development of the American Neo-Pagan community, here provided as the first main theme, can be organized into three prominent categories of theoretical discussion:

- the seeming universal human need to explain unfortunate and destructive life occurrences that leads to persecution of "others" (Metzer, 1999; Parkin, 1991);

- the interconnectivity of Neo-Paganism, the American counter-culture movement and associated progressive ideologies (Adler, 1979; Bloch, 1995); and

- the linkages among Neo-Pagan cultural storytelling, folklore and mythology (Carspecken, 2012; Maglioco, 2004).

More broadly, much of the research investigating the structure and development of the Neo-Pagan community also explores the challenges inherent to the construction of intentional social alternatives (Carspecken 2012), the structure of Neo-Pagan festivals and gatherings (Adler 1979; Pike 2001) and the demographic makeup of this community (Berger, Leach & Shaffer 2003)

The second main theme found within the academic conversations surrounding American Neo-Paganism relates to community specific beliefs, values, behaviors and customs. This research can also be grouped into major subheadings. These are:

- explorations of how Neo-Pagans create sacred space (Runetree, 2006; Hume, 2008);

- accounts of specific Neo-Pagan rituals (Ezzy, 2011; Maglioco, 2001);

- trends in Neo-Pagan identity construction (Bloch, 1998, Pike, 2001);

- evidence of conflicting ethics that can be identified within the community, such as valuing both individualism and community (Pike, 2001; Carspecken, 2012).

Much of the research in this category also explores the ways in which movement participants specifically identify their spiritual practice (Bloch, 1998), the overlap between spirituality and American Neo-Pagan emphasis on community (Pike, 2001; Adler, 1979; Coco, 2008) as well as the intersectional links between Neo-Pagan spirituality and feminism (Warwick, 1995; Gordon, 1995), environmentalism (Oboler, 2004; Madden, 2005) and acceptance of alternatives to heteronormative social order (Adler, 1979; Kraemer, 2012a; Brammer, 2009).

Considered as a whole, researchers agree that the experimental nature of Neo-Paganism aligns with intentional efforts to drive social change (Pike, 2001; Madden, 2005; Adler, 1979; Maglioco, 2009; Carspecken, 2012). Carspecken (2012) correlated this type of experimental creation with literary utopianism. She wrote of finding a "pull toward new possibilities and forms of decision making" in the Neo-Pagan community that mirror utopian dreams to "defy mainstream expectations about the way things can or should work in North America" (p. 2-3). She posits that this creates "chances to expand beyond current limits and expectations around how they interact with one another and the natural world, who (we) are and who (we) have the

right to be" (p. 22). This is done, in large part, through the creation of rituals, spiritual play, self exploration and social experimentation. Many of these explorations focus on one's relationship to one's self. In this way, researchers have framed the American Neo-Pagan community as a population exploring innovative possibilities for future social arrangements and social structures outside the current boundaries of dominant American culture.

Multiple scholars have also asserted that this defiant exploration beyond current social limits is precisely what constitutes the Neo-Pagan community as a socio-religious movement. Bloch (1998) articulated this sentiment when he described how Neo-Paganism "can be viewed as a contemporary social movement, in that it utilizes ideology to create new symbolic communication codes to attack mainstream social controls and promote its minority perspective" (p. 5). Similarly, Maglioco (2009) asserted that Neo-Pagans have reclaimed the term "Pagan" as an emblem for their opposition to specific aspects of dominant American culture, such as consumerism and patriarchy. In this way, intentional identification as Neo-Pagan stands to display an alternative set of values and morals. This revival of the term "Pagan" echoes tactics from the gay rights movement's reclamation of words such as "queer" and "dyke."

One way Neo-Pagans protect themselves from potential negative reactions from members of dominant American culture has been through the establishment of alternative, safe gathering spaces around the country. At campgrounds and on privately owned land across the America, Neo-Pagans gather to create and experiment with new social realities. Their gatherings are called festivals by themselves and scholars alike (Adler, 1979). Adler (1979) has described how Neo-Pagan festivals offer evidence to those within the Neo-Pagan community that an alternative culture is possible. She writes that, if only for a few days, Neo-Pagans come together at festival sites to create an environment to experience the multiple social futures they wish to see in the

world. Pike (2001) speculated that the deviant, creationary nature of these acts occurring at festival sites are precisely why Neo-Pagan festivals have often been poorly received by neighboring communities.

There is much academic material that describes specific beliefs and customs that are often perceived by members of dominant American culture as deviant and have led to Neo-Pagan stigmatization (see Reid, 2005). The main offenses most likely to be criticized, as cited by Pike (2001), are Neo-Pagan ethical stances as well as religious beliefs with specific emphasis placed on Neo-Pagan sexual morality and the associated sacralization of sexuality. Pike (2001) suggested that conservative Christians see these types of sexual behaviors and understand such beliefs to be evidence of Satanism, thus posing a threat to the health and safety of children and society at large. Pike further notes that,

> "Conservative Christians face off against Neo-Pagans, New Agers and other non-Christians in a battle for religious control of America's moral universe" (2001: 96).

It is likely that sexuality is simply the aspect of Neo-Paganism most vulnerable to attack and that dominant American culture is uncomfortable with much of Neo-Pagan worldview.

Sarah Pike (2001) is one of the only scholars to investigate the impact that the label "deviant" has upon the Neo-Pagan community and Neo-Pagan identity creation. Her ethnographic work describes the ways in which Neo-Pagans establish new social identities through creating and maintaining boundaries: between their festivals and festival neighbors, sacred and profane spaces, themselves and Christianity, as well as their "selves" and "others." Citing numerous examples of overt bigotry toward Neo-Pagans by Christians, Pike writes that despite the supposed radical tolerance touted by the Neo-Pagan community, some Neo-Pagan individuals and groups respond hostilely toward Christian others (2001). She argues that one unintended consequence of this intergroup hostility between Christians and Neo-Pagans is the

production of Neo-Pagan cooperative action against a common adversary. She hypothesizes that these cooperative actions help create a sense of shared experience and a common Neo-Pagan culture. As such, she argues that the perception of Neo-Paganism by members of dominant American culture as a morally bankrupt religion has "resulted in the need for this decentralized movement to organize and protect itself against threats to its religious freedom" (2001, p. 104). From Pike's perspective it can be seen that labeling the Neo-Pagan community as deviant has actually served to empower and unify the Neo-Pagan community by strengthening their communal bonds. This has helped Neo-Pagans create a common culture and basis for their identity.

Beyond the work of Sarah Pike (2001), academic exploration of the interconnection between deviance and the American Neo-Pagan movement exists only on the fringes of other topics. Scholarly investigation of the specific ways in which the experience of deviance effects the construction of social structures is necessary. The next chapter will frame Neo-Pagan deviance in a constructionist basis to explore how the stigmatization of Neo-Paganism is used by dominant American culture as a social reality control tactic and the effect of these tactics of social reality construction.

CHAPTER III

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM AND DEVIANCE

Chapter three begins with a description of Berger and Luckmann's theory of social reality construction (1966). The constructionist base for understanding legitimated knowledge is supplemented with conflict theory's critique of labeling theory to demonstrate the effect of power and control in social reality construction.

The Socially Constructed Nature of Reality

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann broke ground in the social sciences with their book *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966). This work spawned constructionism, a theoretical perspective that interprets social reality as a phenomenon that is constructed through human interactions. Constructionists do not ask whether phenomena truly exist. Instead, they seek to understand the process by which social phenomena and ideas about social phenomena are created and developed through human interaction. This is not a point of view typically adopted by many lay members of society. For as constructionists see it, social reality is a phenomenon recognized by a majority of humans as having an existence independent from their own creation (Berger and Luckmann,1966). Ideas, norms of behavior, symbols, definitions of situations, mores, values and codes of ethics are all examples of nonmaterial cultural products that come to be reified and accepted as true, natural and right. Yet constructionists point out that these cultural products are just that, cultural products, those that are socially constructed and culturally dependent.

Constructionists begin with the assertion that social reality appears to individuals in patterns of sensory stimulation. They then investigate the intriguing process by which these

stimulus patterns come to be taken for granted by participants in a social reality as naturally occurring, rather than as socially produced.[4] Berger and Luckmann hypothesize that knowledge of social truth is first taught to us by our parents and intimate significant others such as teachers, siblings and clergy (1966).[5] They term this process primary socialization and further hypothesize that it is significant others during primary socialization who first teach us what types of behaviors and experiences to expect as normal. As children, institutions appear to us as natural because children only know the one reality. Berger and Luckmann describe this phenomena when they state, "the child does not internalize the world of his significant others as one of many possible worlds. He internalizes it as the world, the only existent and only conceivable world" (1966: 134). Thus a single reality becomes reified to children.

Berger and Luckann (1966) theorized that as younger generations are taught how to perceive and interact with stimulatory information, social reality is created for the child. Interestingly, they further note that as older generations teach these processes of perception and interaction to their children, the true and right nature of these processes is reinforced back upon the older generation. Social reality is now taken as objective by both young and old. Thus removed from the original creative context, social reality is perceived as coming from nature and not as a human creation. Once patterns of interactions governing the processing of stimulatory information are institutionalized, social reality comes to be viewed as natural, innate, morally correct and necessary.

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[4] Berger and Luckmann posit that there are four key tools that legitimate stimulus patterns as real and naturally occurring: language, theology (trusted stories that explain why things are they way they are), theory (products of expert sense making knowledge) and symbolic universes of meaning (unified systems of understanding that include individual sense making). Together, these four means of legitimation are referred to as the processes of legitimation (1966).

[5] Truth is defined as the certainty of the accuracy of a perceived reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1966)

Berger and Luckmann (1966) theorized that once social reality is perceived as having an origin outside of human creation, we have lost the power to shape and refine it. We begin to see reality, including society, as something existing independently from ourselves, a force we cannot control, one we must adhere to obediently or risk living outside of it. Yet, it must be remembered that social expectations are diverse and culturally dependent. Patriarchy and white supremacy can come to be as expected as an egalitarian or a nomadic lifestyle. Expectations are simply that- expected, that which can be patterned and trusted. These trusted patterns can be almost anything if humans believe them to be legitimate.

Berger and Luckmann also argue that if we live in a society where it has become an institutionalized expectation that, for example, women are subservient, the poor are lazy, or consumption is the only path to happiness, then participating members of that society will believe that these things are true and have an origin outside of human creation (1966). It becomes a challenge, if not an impossibility, to see or create anything else. For it is very easy "to assume institutions do indeed function and interact as they are 'supposed' to," (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p. 64). However, this is a dangerous assumption to make. Berger and Luckmann demonstrate this danger when they write:

> "Since this knowledge is socially objectified as knowledge, this is, as a body
> of generally valid truths about reality, any radical deviance from the institutional
> order appears as a departure from reality. Such deviancy may be designated as
> moral depravity, mental disease, or just plain ignorance." (1966, p. 66)

As the institutional order is perceived as natural and correct, any deviation from this order is perceived as a direct threat to that social order. This leads to those who deviate from the institutional order being perceived as a threat.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) posited that patterned expectations create social reality, They further argue that this constructed social reality, in turn, creates man when they attest that,

"While it may be possible to say that man has a nature, it is more significant to say that man constructs his own nature, or more simply that man produces himself" (1966, p. 53). This theoretical basis is used for one of Berger and Luckmann's concluding arguments. They write that, while patterns of expected behavior provide a "background in which human activity may be produced with a minimum of decision-making most of the time" (1966, p. 53), social knowledge, when perceived as external, natural, invariable and true, has the power to constrain individual identity creation to a very high degree (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The greatest risk in this social reality construction process is that we not only concede constructive power over our identity, but also that we also force identities upon social others.

Though constructionist theory offers us a unique and powerful lens from which to view to the nature of social reality, this perspective also comes with limitations. Berger and Luckmann themselves ask:

> "How can I be sure of my sociological analysis of American middle-class norms in view of the fact that the categories I use for this analysis are conditioned by historically relative forms of thought, that I myself and everything I think is determined by my genes and my own ingrown hostility to my fellowmen, and that, to cap it all, I am myself a member of the American middle class?" (1966, p. 102)

How is it possible that any analysis of social phenomena can be conducted if the researchers themselves hold, to varying degrees, perspective and opinion of any social object under investigation? Is it possible to maintain any sense of objectivity? While these are questions that remain to be explored within the social sciences, constructionist theory allows scholars the opportunity to examine critically the ways in which social realities come to be accepted as true. The next section asks these questions of the specific phenomenon of socially constructed deviance.

The Social Construction of Deviance

Robert Merton wrote about the social causes of deviance in the late 1930s, though his ideas did not grow in popularity for decades to come. In his article, *The Social Structure of Anomie* (1938), Merton describes society as a type of game in which, if it could be assumed that everyone followed the rules, there would be winners and many losers. Winning, as he defined it, came with rewards such as achieving great social status and/or notability, along with a comfortable material existence, among other things. The losers were denied such rewards. Merton used this understanding of the game of society as the basis for his claims of the causes of social anomie. Merton writes that social actors who believe themselves unlikely to achieve winning game play, if following the rules ,would either lose interest in the game or find new ways of structuring the rules so that they could win. Merton termed these responses "modes of adaptation (1938)." Merton was one of the first to argue that society, rather than individual constitution, creates a-typical social behavior.

The Chicago School is known for their early investigations of deviance, made famous for conceptualizing subcultures as groups of deviants collectively responding to problems encountered in society (Thrasher, 1927). This perspective is perhaps best demonstrated by Albert Cohen. Cohen (1955) posited that the culture of gang delinquency in urban, working class areas developed as a collective response to a perceived lack of social and economic opportunities. Early scholars studying deviance, especially Merton and Cohen, framed the formation of subcultures in terms of collective responses to a specific problem/solution relationship between society and the individual. These theorists posited that social structures within a society create problems to which individuals may feel forced to respond by breaking the accepted rules of social engagement. When this problem/solution relationship is similarly experienced by many

individuals, these tensions can lead to the formation of a group collectively responding to a problem.

Despite Merton and Cohen's work detailing the social influences that pressure an individual to engage in deviant behavior, until the 1960s, deviance was largely viewed as a result of individual constitution. Upbringing, social context and mental illness were the most often given justifications in the understanding of deviant behavior. With Howard Becker's work *Outsiders* (1963), this perspective began to change. Becker writes, "Deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an 'offender'" of social rules (1963, p. 9). In this passage, Becker describes deviance not as something one is inherently, but rather is a social status that one acquires.

Like Becker, Eving Goffman wrote about deviance in the 1960s. In his hallmark work, *Stigma* (1963), Goffman describenes *stigma* as an accumulation of negative social consequences that result from identification with a group that has been labeled inferior. "Stigma" accounts for the disapproving social responses that are responding to some form of perceived "shameful differentness" (Goffman, 1963, p. 140). Goffman writes that deviants who express shameful differentness are denied inclusion into the "us" of non-deviant society. One of the most serious social sanctions deviants experience from non-deviant social others is the discrediting of individual and/or group behaviors, experiences and contributions to society as legitimate (Goffman, 1963). While Goffman's work specifically focuses upon the labeling and stigmatization of "deviant" groups such as "perverts", the physically handicapped, mentally impaired and "ugly," Goffman's theorizing can easily be transposed to include other deviant group, such as homosexuals and the poor.

Goffman argues that, over time, so-called "deviants" come to expect negative sanctions for their differences and come to adapt various means of coping (1963). He identifies six main identity management tools, employed with the aim of hiding "shameful differentness" from public recognition:

- attempts at passing as non-deviant;

- concealment of identifying characteristics;

- chosen social alienation;

- the reordering of social life such that encounters between the stigmatized and non-deviant social others are minimized;

- the management of multiple identities (such as using different names and associated biographies for differing social contexts);

- the establishment of communities of sympathetic others.

In *Stigma,* Goffman pays particular attention to the sixth identity management tool, communities of sympathetic others. He describes different types of communities created by the stigmatized to lessen the individual impact of stigma. These include self-help clubs, national associations (like Alcoholics Anonymous) as well as full-fledged residential communities, such as those for the blind and/or deaf (Goffman 1963). Goffman theorizes that these communities often form because "persons who have a particular stigma tend to have similar learning experiences regarding their plight, and similar changes in conception of self" (1963, p. 32). To be stigmatized is to experience socialization into a unique and challenging role in society, one that often needs support if the individual is to be healthy and productive. Through these communities of support, the stigmatized are able to offer themselves the social resources they are

denied in public society for their "shameful differentness": acceptance and identity legitimacy (Goffman, 1963).

It was also during the 1960s that labeling theory rose to prominence. This theoretical perspective specifically views deviance in the terms of a label that is applied to a particular type of social other who has broken some sort of social expectation. Best (2004) theorizes that the "deviant" label comes with serious consequences and negative social sanctions, including judgments of moral depravity, insanity or criminality and the revocation of social resources like status, notability and legitimacy . Often, "deviants" are subjected to resocalization efforts such as therapy or imprisonment (see Spitzer & Zucker, 2005).

Labeling theory, as a perspective, asks not what causes individuals to commit deviant acts, but what causes some acts to draw negative sanctions from others, including the label "deviant." While in many ways this reframing of deviance helps society to view those who have been assigned this label more compassionately, labeling theory has been charged with only investigating easy targets, such as "nuts sluts and perverts" (Liazos, 1972, p. 103). Both conflict and feminist theorists have argued that labeling theory refuses to examine those deviants who cause harm to others, such as those who engage in domestic abuse (Best, 2004). Conflict theory, specifically, has been critical of labeling theory, arguing that the theory fails to fully examine power dynamics that structure taken for granted social arrangements in which labeling occurred (Davis, 1972). In response, conflict theory has offered another, though complimentary, perspective of deviance. This frame posits that the label "deviant" is applied specifically to remove power from those to whom the label is applied such that they may no longer compete for control over social relations and definitions of situations (Collins 2004).

In spite of its critiques, labeling theory may be regaining popularity. One promising trend that lends to labeling theory's extendibility is found in contemporary research exploring bullying among children. Classical empirical research on bullying concluded that such behaviors are largely a result of antisocial tendencies that could be corrected with resocalization efforts (Jacobson, 2010). However, more recent empirical analysis of these behaviors concludes that bullying is specifically employed by children to control a disproportionate amount of power in social reality creation, especially in terms of identity legitimation (Thornberg, 2011).

Jacobson (2010) argued that bullying is fundamentally a move toward establishing a superior social identity, an activity of self construction through attempted omnipotence. Claims to superiority are executed by circulating ideas of a victim's innate inferiority due to identification with some category of perceived inferiority (Thornberg, 2011). By circulating the perception that a social actor or group of actors is different, deviant, less valuable and somehow not "us," the power to control the construction of social reality is subsumed by the "superior" from the "inferior."As Jacobson states, "bullying becomes a viable means of identity construction by gaining status in the eyes of our peers through the public domination of a weaker classmate" (2010, p. 57-59). Forced subordination, as such a tactic, serves to validate the "superior" peers' superior identity.

This recent surge in scholarship that focuses on bullying as a social reality control tactic demonstrates how young people learn to apply labels of inferiority to groups or specific individuals as a tool to claim control over a disproportionate and advantageous share of power in the social reality construction process. While such research specifically focuses on bullying among populations of children, it is reasonable to conclude that power, seized by means of superiority claims, is used by adolescents and adults, as well. Terms like dyke, skank, nigger,

slut and bitch all serve as examples of words used in popular lexicon to remove power from the identities of those to whom these terms refer.

Modern labeling and conflict theories both suggest that stigmatized labels are applied in an attempt to gain a disproportionate amount of creationary power in social reality construction (Collins, 2004; Thornberg 2011). Berger and Luckmann's discussion of the legitimation of knowledge lends depth to this conceptualization. Constructionist scholars hypothesize that legitimated knowledge is the basis for all social structure. What is accepted as true becomes so as we see our understandings of that truth reflected back to us in the social interactions and structures we have created. Seen in this light, the power of labels is profound.

While it is possible to frame my research with early deviance scholarship alone, especially subcultural theory, these theories are not sufficient because they do not fully examine the power dynamics that have led to Neo-Paganism's forceful exclusion from social reality construction processes. Viewed from the perspective of integrated social constructionism and conflict theory critiques of labeling theory, the rejection of the Neo-Pagan worldview by members of dominant American culture is seen to be a social reality control tactic- a means by which members of dominant culture commandeer the power to define what is accepted as true and right in social reality and exclude those who do not fit into their framework. By denying legitimation and power to Neo-Pagans in social reality construction processes, the social reality created by members of dominant culture remains less contested. Chapter 4 will discuss the phenomenological methods employed to investigate this phenomenon.

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

The primary goal of this work is to use the concept of socially constructed deviance as an analytical tool to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the experience of living as an American Neo-Pagan. Specifically, this work explores the ways in which deviance, and associated stigma, effect Neo-Pagan social constructions. After describing the research setting, this chapter discusses the semi- structured in depth interviews and phenomenological participant observation that were used to examine these areas of interest. Descriptions of the measurement tool and sampling procedures are also provided.

Data Collection Procedures

The purpose of this work is to present a description of Neo-Pagan interpretations of social experiences (especially deviance) and analyze the impact of these interpretations of social constructions. Historically, it has been asserted that sociological methods situating the social researcher as an omnipotent observer are the only true social scientific methods (Ritzer 2011). Yet many contemporary social researchers argue that if social science aims to understand the interpretive meaning making processes in which social realities are produced, researchers must become part of the meaning making process with participants (Mannell, Kleibner & Staempfi, 2006).

Geertz (1984) articulated that the goal of a social researcher is to understand concepts and ideas in the "experience-near" terms of the social actors and translate them into the "experience-distant" language used by scholar and scientist. He writes,

"To grasp concepts that, for another people, are experience-near, and to do so well enough to place then in illuminating connection with experience-distant concepts theorists have fashioned to capture the general features of social life, is clearly a task at least as delicate, if a bit less magical, as putting oneself in someone else's skin" (Geertz, 1984, 58).

With reverence to the legacy of oppression the marginalized Neo-Pagan community has experienced, it is appropriate for this study to utilize a method grounded in the "personal knowledge and subjectivity," of research participants, one that emphasizes "the importance of personal perspective and interpretation" (Lester, 1999, 1). There are many post-empirical methods that stress connecting on a subjective, experiential level with social actors. This includes the ethnophenomenology of Kukla (1988), the interpretive anthropology of Geertz (1974) and the autoethnography of Ellis (2003). Any of these post-empirical methods could be an appropriate mode of inquiry for the purpose of this research. However, because of the emphasis this study places on understanding how power affects social constructions, phenomenology is an appropriate method of inquiry into Neo-Pagan social realities.

Phenomenology is a descriptive research methodology in which the researcher becomes part of the interpretive process in an effort to describe the development and purpose of social constructions (Lester, 1999). Becoming part of this interpretive process necessitated my full-time participant in American Neo-Pagan social realities. In the summers of 2011 and 2012, I spent a total of 90 days living with Neo-Pagans while attending Neo-Pagan festivals in Ohio and Indiana. During this time, I attended skills sharing workshops, participated in rituals and engaged in sacred drumming and dancing at nightly fire circles. I contributed to the performance of routine camp maintenance tasks such as doing dishes, washing laundry and cooking meals with festival attendees. I also prioritized time to reflect and analyze how I made sense of these experiences. When not directly engaged in Neo-Pagan behaviors, participant observation or

documenting these activities, I conducted semi-structured in depth interviews with participants. Some interviews were also conducted at private residences between the two summer festival seasons. By combining semi-structured interviews with phenomenological engagement as a participant observer in Neo-Pagan social realities, I gained a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which Neo-Pagan social realities are constructed and the broader social forces that influence this construction.

The Setting

Chapter 2 described the growing number of Neo-Pagan festivals taking place across the United States since the 1980s. Previous scholars have described these festivals as a primary location for full enactment of Neo-Pagan social realities as they are safe from hostility (Pike, 2001; Carspecken, 2012.) Five Neo-Pagan festivals in the American mid-west were selected for data collection. Data collection activities (i.e. participant observation documentation and semi-structured in depth interviews) took place in two waves at five festivals during the summers of 2011 and 2012. I attended the same five festivals both summers. Close contact with Neo-Pagan participants at these festivals allowed me to examine the social practices and behaviors situated within the daily lives of Neo-Pagans at festivals. As a result, I offer a comprehensive understanding of Neo-Pagan social reality construction.

This research began as part of a longitudinal study of American Neo-Paganism led by Dr. Laubach of Marshall University. To gain access to Neo-Pagan perspectives for the purpose of Dr. Laubach's study, a student research team was gathered at Marshall University in the summer of 2011. Our team was led by Dr. Laubach, who served as our primary investigator. The seven student researchers were David Sears, an ex-military undergraduate nursing major interested in

Neo-Pagan practices of alternative medicine; Daniel Hudson, an undergraduate student studying Sociology interested in exploring the interconnections of community, ideology and spirituality; Lisa Mathis, a post-graduate Mathematics student with general research interests; Linda Greer, an undergraduate sociology student studying religious art and symbolism; Maegdlyn Morris, an undergraduate counseling major focused on investigating experiences of alternative sexual and relationship practices; Larisa Rogers, a post-graduate student exploring the function of of Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous meetings in festival environments; and myself, a graduate student of sociology studying the overlap of intentional communities and spirituality.

Our team attended five festivals in Ohio and Indiana during the summer of 2011. This included ELF Fest, a 5 Memorial Day weekend celebration, hosted by the Lothlorien Nature Sanctuary in Needmore, Indiana; Babalon Rising, a 4 day Thelemic sacred sexuality festival, hosted by Our Haven Nature Sanctuary in French Lick, Indiana; as well as Summer Solstice, a 7 day celebration of the height of summer; Wormhole, an 8 day open camping session, and the 7 day Starwood Festival, a yearly symposium focused on consciousness exploration, all hosted at the intentional community of Wisteria, in Pomeroy, Ohio. Between 100 and 600 people attended each of these events. All festivals were unique in focus, size, organization and land structure. However, these events all featured primitive camping, workshops sharing Neo-Pagan knowledge and skills, rituals honoring specific deities or general spiritual diversity and nightly sacred fire circles enacting sacred, archaic drumming, dancing and socializing.

During the summer of 2012, I returned and attended each of these same five festivals as an independent researcher. There were minimal noticeable changes in the structure, leadership and/or attendance at these events during the year that elapsed between research dates. However, I changed dramatically as a researcher during this the time. In 2011, I was a new participant in the

Neo-Pagan community. I had a theoretical knowledge base that I called upon to help me understand the community I was studying but my necessary practical knowledge grew only as I actively engaged with festival activities. When I returned in 2012, I had spent a year synthesizing what I had learned the previous summer and was much more aware of what I was specifically looking to investigate. In 2012, my interview script was refined and I more clearly spoke the verbal and cultural language of Neo-Paganism. Both years' material proved valuable.

Applied Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a research method designed to permit researcher access to participants' subjective interpretations of reality by exploring the processes by which individual and group meanings are created and enacted (Husserl, 2011). Phenomenological methodology is structured to aid researchers in sharing in the interpretative process of meaning making with their subjects. To become part of the interpretive meaning making processes, researchers develop and adopt a personal understanding of the worldview present in the community under study (Mannell, Kleibner & Staempfi, 2006). As such, I "became" as Neo-Pagan as possible for the duration of this study. To this end, I constructed a Neo-Pagan identity over the course of this project. Instead of merely going through the actions as a participant or watching experiences unfold as an outside observer, I intentionally adopted a personal understanding of the worldview present in the Neo-Pagan community.

During the course of this research, I remained open to experiencing alternative forms of spiritual ecstasy firsthand, to establishing a personal connection with the divine through various Neo-Pagan rituals and to experimenting with new forms of social arrangements in my personal life that I was introduced to by members of this community. This allowed me to connect with

research participants on a deeply personal level through the use of common language and a sharing of similar experience during interviews (Kukla, 1988). Minimal data detailing my experiences participating in Neo-Pagan social realties is included in this document. It is critically important that the voices of the Neo-Pagans this work represents remain the primary focus. However, it is necessary to note my activities as a part of the research process, as my experiences as a Neo-Pagan directly informed my formation of the interview instrument and influenced the ways in which I present the data.

Changes occurred within myself between the two stages of data collection activities. In 2011, my primary concern was testing my interview instrument. I was more attuned, stronger mentally in my involvement and more descriptive in conducting participant observation during data collection in 2012. As I became more comfortable with the interview script, I was able to devote more time and attention to participating in and documenting my surroundings. I participated and documented my surroundings during the first summer of data collection, but my findings were more general. I was not yet attuned to or taking notes on specific philosophical differences in spiritual sects, the politics of festival organization or the intricacies of navigating dual identities as participants in both Neo-Pagan and dominant American cultural social realities.

There are many challenges inherent to employing phenomenological methods. One such example is of the researcher's inability to become a full member of a community under study (Geertz, 1974). Adler and Adler (1987) stated that this inability is the defining line between typical setting members and participant researchers- researchers cannot solely focus upon their involvement in participating in setting activities, as most participating members can. Researchers must also engage in necessary habits such as recording conversations and events in a nearly schizophrenic multi-focus (Adler and Adler; 1987). An additional limitation to the

phenomenological approach includes the use of community-specific language. Using community-specific language in interview scripts and participant observation documentation supports the experiential nature of subjects' understandings, yet limits the ability of the research to be compared to other populations in the future. This could create challenges to presenting a unified body of work on alternative spirituality. For example, the term "mundania" is one common to the Neo-Pagan lexicon, and refers to non Neo-Pagan members of dominant American culture. This is a term that likely could not be applied to studies of other communities, though it is one offered by many Neo-Pagan respondents and unifies multiple narratives within the present study. Also, when researchers come to know the data in participant specific terms, translating findings back to the language of academics becomes complicated. With the added burden of cultural transmediation, researchers much become ever more rigorous in their dedication to authenticity of representation (see Ellis, 2005: Adams, 2011).

My observations of American Neo-Pagan communities in the American mid-west have been recorded in approximately three hundred pages of field notes. Engaging in this level of participant observation instead of relying on theoretical assumptions about this community has allowed me to recount the everyday lived experiences of participants. Combining phenomenological participant observation with in depth semi-structured interviews, I have been able to attain a level of understanding of the Neo-Pagan community to be shared with others that could not have been achieved simply by being in the field.

Semi-Structured In Depth Interviews

During the summers of 2011 and 2012, semi-structured in depth interviews were conducted with Neo-Pagans at Neo-Pagan festivals in the American mid-west. As a non Neo-

Pagan member of dominant American culture and therefore an outsider to this community, I was

acutely aware that I would be challenged to accurately record the perspectives of Neo-Pagans

held in relation to their experiences of a unique social reality without reframing it in a way that

reflected my own cultural understanding. Thus, the use of in depth, semi-structured interviews

was intentionally chosen in an effort to minimize the unequal power dynamic that often exists

between researchers and participants in knowledge producing interview conversations (Briggs,

2007). I offered interview participants a general guideline for their responses to questions about

the main areas of research interest, while also creating space for participants to focus on

information they found to be valuable in relation to their experiences.

In my selection of interviewees, I employed a purposive sampling technique. Because I

was interested in capturing the incredible diversity of lived Neo-Pagans experiences, Neo-Pagans

from a variety of backgrounds were interviewed. I intentionally selected Neo-Pagans with

various experience levels and roles within the community as well as different chosen spiritual

identity labels. I wanted to speak with first time festival attendees, individuals who had been

institutional in the founding of the festivals, parents, volunteers, workshop presenters, officiators

of spiritual ceremonies and craft vendors. I also purposively sampled a range of ages. No one I

approached declined to be interviewed. The majority of Neo-Pagans participating in Neo-Pagan

festivals tend to be white and middle class. It is usual for there to be slightly more females than

males. As a result, I selected a sample of Neo-Pagans that was balanced in terms of the gender

makeup of the community, and one that reflected a variety of educational backgrounds and

occupational experiences. I also selected an equalized sample of first time festival attendees,

long time participants and festival organizers. I was not able to select an inclusive sample in

terms of race/ethnicity as there is a lack of racial diversity in the Neo-Pagan community of the American mid-west.

The interview script was pre-tested during the summer of 2011, provided rich data, and thus proved to be a solid instrument. However, many of the questions in this initial script were very general and, in some cases, utilized language that was more specific to dominant American culture rather than that of the Neo-Pagan community. This script also did not ask for specific demographic data such as race/ethnicity, gender or current employment status. Therefore, changes were made to the instrument before its use during the summer of 2012. Questions of demographic data were added, some questions were refined to be more specific in focus and the language was revised to be more explicitly informed by Neo-Pagan worldview.

Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured fashion, meaning that each respondent had the opportunity to answer every question. However, often unanticipated topics would surface during the course of the conversation. Interviewees would be encouraged to further elaborate on these unanticipated topics through follow-up questions that were not originally included in the interview questionnaire. In general, interview questions covered topics such as daily life while attending Neo-Pagan festivals, Neo-Pagan experiences and expectations within the community, spiritual identification, interactions with members of dominant American culture and individual practices of Witchcraft and magick. In 2012, a pre-interview questionnaire was added and administered orally to participants to gather demographic data (see Appendix B).

Interview sites, while at festival, included, but were not limited to, personal campsites, researcher campsites, workshop areas, ritual spaces after the rite had concluded, or communal eating spaces. Most interviews were conducted in attendees' personal campsites during the early afternoon. Follow up interviews conducted between the summers of 2011 and 2012 took place in

private residences of the interviewees. Each interview was recorded on audiotape and lasted anywhere from thirty to one hundred minutes, yielding over 200 pages of interview transcripts. Additional notes were taken after the interviews to enhance the analysis of recorded accounts.

Sample Characteristics

It would be impossible to tell a single unified story of living as a Neo-Pagan, as interpretative texts are multi-vocal and are made of the stories told by many types of people (Ellis 2005). As such, accounts that emerge from these interviews are not expected or intended to be exhaustive of all the possible perspectives of those who participate in the Neo-Pagan movement of the American mid-west. Neo-Paganism is a diverse, flowing and evolving socio-religious community. Neo-Pagan identities include, but are not limited to, practitioners of Wicca, Thelema, Germanic Asatru and Irish Druidism. Many Neo-Pagans identify simply as eclectic or as goddess and/or earth worshippers. Thus, for the purpose of this study, a Neo-Pagan is defined as any individual who identifies with one or many of the religious subheadings included in modern Paganism. As such, anyone who chooses to self-identify as Neo-Pagan is included for consideration in the data. While there are many children active in this community, only adults were interviewed.

During and between the summers of 2011 and 2012, I conducted semi-structured in depth interviews with forty-five Neo-Pagans I met at Neo-Pagan festivals in Ohio and Indiana. Thirty-seven of these interviews were conducted while on site at festivals, the other eight were conducted in private residences with individuals I met at festival in the time between summers. Beyond observable characteristics such as gender presentation and relative age, demographic data was not gathered during the summer of 2011. Demographic data was gathered during the

summer of 2012 but this information is not included as the results would not be representative of the sample as a whole. Therefore, no finite sample characteristics can be offered. However, general statements about the sample can be stated.

Respondents used a variety of terms to describe their spiritual identity: "Jew Witch," "an eclectic, Wiccan, Shaman, making it up as I go along," "Thelemic philosopher," "mostly Asatru," and "tree hugging dirt worshipper" are some examples. The vast majority of participants in Neo-Pagan festivals are white and multiple interviewees describe the Neo-Pagan community as "goddess-heavy[6]," meaning that the community tends to focus on women's spirituality and have a dominantly female population.

Religious or economic inclusion criteria to Neo-Pagan festivals is fairly open- entrance to the private property where festivals are hosted is granted to those who pay the entrance fee ($100 to $175 dollars for each event), facilitate a minimum number of performance, workshops or ritual hours, or who work barter for free or reduced price entry. However, despite this economic diversity, there are limitations. There is a level of economic investment that is necessitated by the equipment needed for camping rustically many days at a time. While participants come from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, those who do not have supplies such as tents and sleeping bags may not be able to participate.

Most interview respondents described their home communities as either urban or suburban. A minority of respondents live in rural areas. At all festivals but Starwood and Wormhole, most individuals come from communities in Ohio, Indiana, West Virginia, or Pennsylvania. Both Starwood and Wormhole draw attendants from both coasts of the United States. Nine of the forty-five respondents state that they do have social ties to other Neo-Pagans in their hometowns. Having described the sample, I now turn to the methods used in my study to

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[6] Thank you to fellow researcher Linda Greer for providing me with this term.

investigate the life narratives of research participants to uncover potential benefits enjoyed and stigma coping mechanisms employed by members of the American Neo-Pagan community.

Data Analysis Procedures

My analysis of the American Neo-Pagan community is generated from primary data that I collected (e.g., field notes and transcriptions of audiotaped interview materials). The proposed research questions, review of existing literature and theoretical perspective anchors the data analysis. A question-by-question analysis of the interview questionnaire was intentionally unexplored as this would fail to capture the richness of the lived social experiences of interview subjects. Instead, field notes and interview transcriptions were evaluated using thematic analysis to identify patterns of behavior and described perspectives across the data sample (Guest, 2012). Data were then coded by hand, first using synthesizing concepts, then, later, definitive concepts.

In Depth Semi-Structured Interviews and Phenomenological Participant Observation

I analyzed Interview transcripts and field notes using two interpretive frameworks: (1) thematic analysis to capture emergent themes that surfaced and (2) a theory-generated scheme of identity management tools for coping with stigma, posited by Goffman. Before discussing why individuals choose to participate within the American Neo-Pagan community and how Neo-Pagans employ identity management techniques to cope with identity related stigma, I first had to illustrate the benefits gained from participation in the community and the identity maintenance techniques Neo-Pagans employ.

The following research questions guided the initial phase of analysis: (1) Are there common experiences that have led individuals to participate within the Neo-Pagan community?

(2) Are there benefits gained by participants within the Neo-Pagan movement? If so, (3) are there mechanisms utilized by participating members to cope with the stigmatization of their Neo-Pagan identity? I read through the field notes and interview transcripts looking for evidence of narrative themes that emerged from the data in relation to each of these questions. As evidence was found, it was placed in a separate word document for later coding. Any participant response that did not fit into one of these three main categories was grouped into a "miscellaneous" file.

I now had new documents supporting evidence of narrative themes in relation to common life experiences leading to participation in the American Neo-Pagan community, benefits gained from participation and stigma coping mechanisms. I then read through and coded each paragraph in numeric fashion to distinguish particular themes that were identified and supported them with quotes from personal interviews. After, I returned to the full interview transcripts and reviewed them, coding each paragraph to ensure I had not missed any evidence. The coding scheme used for the interview data was also used when revisiting field notes to ensure uniformity across both types of data in the sample. While coding, I was diligent in identifying descriptions of life occurrences leading to participation within the Neo-Pagan community, discussion of personal spiritual identity, social practices perceived as deviant by members of dominant American culture and identity management techniques. Together, these two data sources indicate that there is a common life narrative describing experiences that have led many Neo-Pagans to participate within the community, that participants stay within the community because there are perceived benefits and that there are identity management tools systemically employed by members of the Neo-Pagan community to mitigate the consequences of associated social stigma.

In sum, the methodology presented in the foregoing paragraphs enables me to present a rich, complex and authentic description of the Neo-Pagan community of the American mid-west.

Phenomenological participant observation allowed me, in many ways, to become Neo-Pagan for the duration of this study and thus gain access to subjective interpretations of Neo-Pagan reality. At the same time, in depth semi-structured interviews highlight and express the actual voices of those living as Neo-Pagan in the American mid-west. The use of only one of these methods of inquiry would not have allowed me to gain such a deep understanding of the situated behaviors and everyday practices involved in creating and participating with Neo-Pagan social reality. The next chapter provides an overview of the results from each research questions.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS

This chapter answers the three questions that guided this research. Respondents provide a narrative of experiencing increased acceptance for personal expression and a related autonomous empowerment from their participation in the American Neo-Pagan festival community. These experiences lead to the perception of an actualized personal liberty and a validated chosen identity. Neo-Pagan participation in intentionally constructed social networks that continue this liberation outside of the community to the extent possible is then discussed.

Influence on Participation

This section explores the common experiences that have led individuals to choose to actively participate within and identify as a member of the American Neo-Pagan community. Three major themes emerge from the data in relation to this topic: 1) experiences of alienation within dominant American culture for social preferences and/or spiritual beliefs followed by acceptance for these preferences and beliefs by members of the Neo-Pagan community; 2) the desire to benefit from flexible social norms present in the Neo-Pagan communities; and 3) the ability to enact a more desired social reality.

Alienation and Acceptance

Many Neo-Pagans indicate that they experience feelings of alienation when engaging with members of the dominant American culture. Respondents report family, friends and other peers rejecting the validity of experiences the respondents consider spiritual in nature. These spiritual experiences include, primarily, personal connections with deities and/or divinity other than Judeo-Christian Gods, as well as the belief in spirits and/or other divine inspiration not

recognized by dominant American religious traditions. Often this caused doubt in the individual about the nature of the spiritual nature of their experience. Many respondents also cite alienation from members of dominant American culture on the basis of social preferences, such as practices of polyamory[7], feminism, anti-heterosexism and egalitarianism. Sometimes participants' preferences are associated with religious practices surrounding alternative belief systems. Other times they are not.

Multiple interview respondents recall early childhood experiences with spirits or other entities that many termed as manifestations of the divine. These respondents describe similar narratives when sharing accounts of these experiences with parents or older significant others as children. Interview respondents state that, as children, their accounts of such experiences were often met with hostility and renouncement by these significant others. One woman, now in her late thirties, describes early childhood experiences of what she perceives as communication with plant life and the earth, beings she describes as divine. She states these experiences began around age seven or eight and that she also experienced, what she now terms, premonitions. This woman states that, as a child telling her mother about the experiences she was having, she was made to feel ashamed and as if she had done something wrong. Her mother demanded she "keep her mouth shut" about such things. When these premonitions continued into adolescence, her mother began referring to her as a "devil child." The woman states she experienced similar rejection from her peers and other family members and thus, from a young age, adopted solitude and silence regarding her spiritual experiences as a social survival technique.

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[7] Polyamory is defined as the state or practice of having more than one romantic relationship at a time (Mariam Webster, 2014). Interview respondents distinguish polyamory from open relationships, cheating and/or swinging by highlighting the necessity of obtaining consent from all participating within the relationship.

Many interview respondents report similar experiences of rejection and hostility as children in relation to their spiritual experiences. The experience the woman describes above, in which she was termed "devil child" by her mother, exists at an extreme. Most respondents recalled more subtle challenges in finding acceptance for their spiritual beliefs within familial networks as children. One woman in her early twenties describes being introduced to magick and Witchcraft in the fifth or sixth grade. The respondent states that, as an adolescent, "I tried reading about that stuff and then my parents caught me and were like, 'no, actually that's really bad, don't do this anymore.' I really like magick and the idea of magick but I kind of grew up keeping it to myself I guess." Many respondents give accounts of a young interest in alternative spiritual practices that were met with discouragement by their parents and significant others. For some Neo-Pagans, this meant that childhood interests in spiritual magick and/or Witchcraft were put on hold and not developed until later in life. For those who did pursue an early interest, many of these people adopted the solitude and silence that was perceived to be the only way for them to continue developing their interests.

Experiences of alienation based upon childhood interest in alternative spiritual experiences were found to be common among members of the Neo-Pagan community. As adults, many Neo-Pagans have also experienced hostility regarding their spiritual identification from their families and significant others. For some Neo-Pagans, hostility from their families in relation to their spirituality is a continuation from childhood. Yet, for others who discovered or first expressed their interest in Neo-Paganism later in life, this is a new phenomenon that requires ongoing negotiation. One male respondent speaks of such challenges with his family as a young man in his early twenties. In reference to his spirituality, he states, "I struggle interacting with my family members simply because I can't fully express myself in the ways I have learned how

with them... When I try to discuss things openly, it's misunderstood." Many respondents, like

this young man, report avoidance as a tactic in managing this uncomfortable dynamic with their

family. For such individuals, information provided to their families about Neo-Pagan festivals,

events or spiritual practices is often intentionally kept vague and nonspecific, if openly discussed

at all.

Families appear to be the social arena in which many Neo-Pagans first encounter

alienation in relation to their spirituality. Yet numerous respondents also detail the struggles they

have expressing their Neo-Pagan identity as adults in other social venues, such as the workplace.

Many respondents report a fear of being "outed" as Neo-Pagan while at work. On this topic, one

man in his late thirties describes his experience in a white collar managerial position in the

Appalachian energy production industry. He states:

> I struggle at work sometimes, not saying things that will give me away. I have to...
> They would shit can me if they find out that my beliefs are anything other than
> standard Christian or eh, I don't care, which are the two common beliefs… If they
> were to find out I was some tree hugging dirt worshipper, there would be a
> distance between me and some of the people I need to interact with on a daily
> basis and it would inhibit my ability to do my job well.

Beyond specific challenges within family and workplace arenas, numerous respondents

also describe feeling a general sense of alienation and being "other" as a Neo-Pagan in dominant

American cultural communities. Often this sense of feeling "other" overlaps with a Neo-Pagan

view on social morals and ethics. In reference to social norms of dominant American culture, one

woman in her early forties who has participated in this movement for the past three decades

states, "I've developed a pretty specific sense of how the world should be and it really doesn't

line up with the way that most of the public thinks that the world should be." Like this speaker,

many respondents discuss the growth of a moral and ethical code aligning with their personal

ideals that has developed alongside their spirituality as a member of the Neo-Pagan community.

For many respondents, this has created additional challenges when interacting with members of dominant American culture. One long time festival participant, an older woman in her late fifties states:

> It's very hard for me to live in a community filled with Baptist Republicans because when we first came to town it was "Oh, what church do you go to? Have you found a church yet?" Everything is about church and voting for Republicans and being conservative. They don't want anything that violates their little social norm. You're supposed to fit into this little cookie cutter…

Together, these two female speakers illuminate the struggle that Neo-Pagans face as participants in both Neo-Pagan and dominant American culture. Within the Neo-Pagan community, individuals are encouraged not only to develop an individualized code of ethics, but also are given the freedom to enact these ethics while interacting with members of their Neo-Pagan community. This freedom does not extend to their participation in social interactions with members of dominant American culture. However, many Neo-Pagans find they must continue to engage with members of dominant culture for work or educational purposes. When I asked one interview participant whether or not she encounters challenges interacting with members of dominant American culture, she responded emotionally. As a single mother in her mid-thirties from suburban Ohio, she states:

> I live in an area that has a white bread appearance. And I am different. I don't care about grades. I don't care about status. I don't care about any of that. A lot of people in my community do. I care more about the important things…Integrity. Family. Honesty. And living an authentic life, not being what other people expect you to be, but being true to yourself. And they're so worried about appearances. I don't care about any of that. The people in that community do. I stay because I want my daughter to have the best education possible. But we struggle, we definitely struggle.

The use of "that" instead of "my" when referencing the Ohio community in which she lives linguistically demonstrates the distance she feels from her community. She is within the community, but also apart from it.

As it will be demonstrated, participation in the festival community allows the Neo-Pagans I spoke with a reprieve from the perceived confines of engaging with members of dominant culture, even if only temporarily. One woman in her early thirties describes this feeling. She states, "Out in the real world, I feel I must constantly be protecting myself from the attacks of society's you should be this way, you should buy this, etc etc. Here I feel I can be open with all these people, I feel like they're not going to judge me." One male respondent in his late teens affirms this sentiment as well. When asked about why he attends Neo-Pagan festivals, he comments that he comes because festivals are "a safe haven" for people to come to and enjoy themselves "without worry about some of the extra pressures that normal society would put on their activities." He states that when he goes back to his regular life outside of festival that he must "change completely" so as to relieve himself of the alienation he would otherwise experience for his beliefs and values. For these speakers, it is the freedom from social disapproval that connects them with the Neo-Pagan community.

The desire for freedom to express one's identity and to express it openly is regularly reiterated by interview respondents. A woman in her early twenties states that what drew her to identity with the Neo-Pagan community, once initially introduced, was being "so impressed by how everyone put themselves out there." One young man describes the allure of this freedom when he states, simply, that the Neo-Pagan community has created a space where he can "drop the defense" he maintains in regard to safeguarding his identity and beliefs from the potential hostile responses from members of dominant American culture. Many interview respondents report feeling that they can drop their acts of pretending to be what they perceive dominant American culture wants them to be when socializing with their Neo-Pagan friends. This feeling of release is especially strong while attending festivals. Those interviewed describe how, in

festival environments, they can openly voice their rejection of the consumerism and conformity espoused in dominant American culture. This is something that is done with extreme caution outside of Neo-Pagan interactions.

The Allure of "The Party"

Not all American Neo-Pagans identify with the experience of alienation from dominant American culture described above. For that matter, not all Neo-Pagan festival attendees identify as Neo-Pagan. For such individuals, festivals are a quite different experience. There are many who have come to Neo-Pagan festivals as cautiously curious onlookers. It is worth asking, then, what in the Neo-Pagan community appeals to these individuals, such that they continue their participation within the community.

Most respondents have a story of their introduction to the Neo-Pagan community. For those who did not come to the Neo-Pagan community necessarily seeking spiritual asylum, many cited "the party" they found within the community as a key influence in their continued participation. "The party" references the drinking, sexuality and drug use that often accompanies spiritual and social experiences within the Neo-Pagan festival community. In many ways, the party at Neo-Pagan festivals echoes the purposes of any other such party. Yet, multiple respondents stated that elements of "the party" are a common way for newcomers to make the transition to a new set of community norms that they may come to accept as desirable.

Some festivals, on the surface, have a strong party element. Around the fire circle and within private camp spaces, the consumption of alcohol is a commonly shared social activity. It is not uncommon for large containers of alcohol to be communally passed around the fire circle at night. At Lothlorien, plastic jugs of orange juice mixed with vodka are passed around to remaining fire circle participants at dawn. At Wisteria, "slap the bag" is a common jovial game

around the fire in which someone will pass around a bag of wine to be consumed freely if one is able to "slap the bag" with enough enthusiasm to please the carrier.

The imbibing around fire circles and in private camp spaces is done within the context of community policing. As a whole, the group works together to ensure none underage drink alcohol and that no one is so drunk that they become a danger to themselves or others. I saw many examples of this while participating in nightly fire circles. Similarly, at every Neo-Pagan festival attended, I witnessed the community working together to ensure no act of sexual harassment was tolerated. Such communal policing is especially important in these environments as sexuality and nudity are more openly accepted than in party settings within dominant American culture. It often is the responsibility of community elders and those who are familiar with Neo-Pagan norms to guide newcomers through learning the alternatives rules of social engagement. Sometimes this policing must also be done of longtime Neo-Pagan participants. As one Lothlorien elder stated to me, "yes, she is dancing naked. No, this is not an invitation for sex."

While the party element is demonstrably strong at festival, many of the respondents I spoke with do not typically engage in party activities. In describing their daily routines, many older respondents stated enjoying rising and going to bed early to take part in daytime activities such as workshops, rituals and performances. For some, spirituality and partying are not correlated with one another. Yet one young male respondent stated there is a productive relationship between these two elements of Neo-Pagan festivals. He describes the party in this way:

> For a lot of people, the fire circle isn't necessarily the sacred experience it is for
> many other people. But it is a way to break through their mainstream societal
> thinking because what is happening here is so completely different than
> anything they've ever done before, something they've probably been told is wrong

and to just get out there and do it (without or without the use of intoxicants), I think, is
helping to break down the boundaries that we've set up in our own mind that we don't
even quite realize are there.

This respondent discusses the party aspects of festival as necessary for some to break down their

previously constructed conceptions of deviance and immorality. Some respondents mused that

perhaps this is because once under the influence of alcohol or drugs, behavior and consciousness

becomes less inhibited. An older male in his fifties states that, "One way I think people are

learning to do that is through partying because, it's easy. It's an easier way to let those defenses

go."

Intoxication, in many ways, provides the same functions at Neo-Pagan festivals as it does

at bar or house party venues within dominant American culture. However, multiple respondents

comment that the party culture within the Neo-Pagan community differs from that the dominant

American culture. One respondent describes how:

This environment is a lot different regarding how drugs are done and experienced
and expressed in a lot of ways, or it has the potential to be a lot different... People
have a chance to have pretty spiritual experiences rather than in the outside where
you sit around and smoke weed and play video games.

Many respondents (especially younger respondents) describe how in some instances, it is within

the fire circle, sometimes with the use of drugs and alcohol, that they first experienced a

consciousness shift to view the world differently than they had before.

Respondents are clear that the fire circle is not a static experience. The fire circle is

archaic and spiritual in nature, an intentional mix of ecstatic dancing, drumming and natural

elements. The experience of participating within the drumming and dancing around a fire in the

woods is outside of the normal experiences one encounters participating within dominant

American culture. Respondents describe how participation in this somewhat intense experience

is so far outside what dominant culture views as normal that participation alone often triggers the reevaluation of one's identity and world perspective.

One Lothlorien elder describes his observation of the many young people who have first come to Lothlorien to check out accounts from peers of naked women dancing around fires, the looser sexual norms and the great parties. He states "many of these people come for the weekend and never come back. But others get a glimpse of something more going on at these festivals and come back to investigate." One long time festival participant and elder also at Lothlorien described how, "There have been many people who have come here for the drugs, sex, rock and roll that left with a little different focus about what is going on here." As such, "the party" serves as a sort of social lubricant, allowing participants a way to make the transition from dominant American culture to alternative culture. For many interview respondents, these experiences have become the basis of a new and evolving spirituality that legitimates their desire for a social reality in which their environmental, feminist, collectivist ideals are enacted.

Enacting Desired Social Reality

In addition to the themes elaborated above, every Neo-Pagan respondent in this study expressed some level of discontent with the social reality enacted in dominant American culture. The most commonly cited sources of discontent include existing social organization founded upon patriarchy and class, systematic inequality, the prioritizing of profit over the health of people and the environment, spiritual intolerance, marriage inequality and the social oppression of minority groups such as non-heterosexual and gender queer individuals. Most respondents cited a combination of these factors as the source of their discontent. Regardless of whether spiritual acceptance, social acceptance, "the party," or other reasons brought the individual to the

Neo-Pagan community, respondents universally describe a desire to see Neo-Pagan values enacted in their everyday lives within public social arenas. The Neo-Pagan festival community serves as a response to this dissatisfaction by providing a safe space to create, express and enact the social realities desired by Neo-Pagan.

An organizer of the Babalon Rising festival stated that, in the most basic form, Neo-Pagan festivals serve as a "safe space for play- play with the self, play with expression and play with one another." This play manifests through elaborate costuming and interactions around nightly fires, the creative construction of ritual and worship, the practicing of various physical art forms (such as metal work, chant and ceramics), skills building workshops (like massage, meditation and drumming) and interpersonal relationship development. One respondent in her early twenties describes the allure of participating in the festival community. She states:

> Festivals are a way for people to live the lives they dream of for themselves. Life is not at all like we would like it to be. But at festival, we can create, participate and be it in a way that makes it so, even if only for a short time.

A young woman similarly described this sentiment when she describes how she felt within her body while attending her first Neo-Pagan festival. She states:

> I feel so completely comfortable here. I am not worried about my body issues such as whether I've eaten too much or if people will find my leg hair offensive or my face being imperfect in complexion. I've never been here before. But this feels like the most real place I've ever been, it feels like the most natural thing in the world, how it's supposed to be. This is how I wish I was living all the time.

The fire circle is one of the primary sites for Neo-Pagan social desires to be enacted (see Pike 2001 for a more detailed analysis). A young female new to the festival community describes the fire circle as "a stage where you can go and act out these different parts and play with different parts of yourself." She explains this by giving the example of how one night she may

dress in costume, and other nights dance until the sun rises wearing nothing but a skirt, enjoying

the mud on her feet. This allows her to experience various parts of her identity that she does not

have the opportunity to explore when participating in dominant American culture. Similarly, one

longtime Lothlorien festival participant and now elder describes the reality creation that occurs

as Neo-Pagan festivals. He states, "This is a place for people to come and really live out all kind

of fantasies. People really need that, I think."

While the fire circle is a main site for expression and play, the creation of fantasy worlds

extends out into the festival community as a whole. For example, a majority of Neo-Pagans

claim to value a respect for the earth. Many express a desire to live more in harmony with nature.

Thus, living in tents for a time while attending festival can become a spiritual experience in

which this value is enacted. Another way festivals offer the opportunity to enact Neo-Pagan

social fantasy is through the creation of seasonal camping communities. Groups will camp

together and create spaces to socialize and share tasks such as cooking and dishes. A microcosm

of a more desirable social reality is enacted for the duration of an event. One middle aged woman

who has attended festival for about twenty years explains the purpose of this enactment when she

states, "There are many people who are involved (in Neo-Pagan festivals) for the norms- the

partying norms, the sexual norms. They're here for the lifestyle." Every participant stated some

form of belief that within the festival community they fear being judged or subjected to negative

social consequences for their desires less than in social situations within dominant American

culture. Most interview respondents state that the enactment of more desirable social realities

that occurs within the Neo-Pagan festival community keeps them coming back more than any

other factor.

<center>**Perceived Benefits**</center>

Neo-Paganism is situated within a historical legacy of oppression. With the potential for severe negative social consequences if identified as a Neo-Pagan, it is somewhat surprising that individuals participate within the community at all. Guided by my second research question, this section explores the benefits individuals may receive from their participation within this community that warrants risking the effect of social stigma. Two main benefits are identified - validation of personal identity and a less restricted individual liberty.

Validation of Chosen Identity

Many individuals who participate within the Neo-Pagan community have experienced social disapproval, rejection and/or hostility as a result of their expression of alternative spirituality and socio-cultural preferences during their lifetimes. As such, participating in the Neo-Pagan community can feel like a sense of homecoming. Some respondents describe the awe they experienced during their first festival, barely believing such a community existed after years of alienation. This experience is a common catharsis for members of the community. This is demonstrated in the phrasing by which some Neo-Pagans greet one another upon first arriving at festival: "welcome home." This statement declares to one another that this is a safe, welcoming space where individuals will not be persecuted for their spiritual beliefs or socio-cultural practices.

This experience of newfound homecoming can be healing, as the Neo-Pagan community provides a space where spirituality and identities that had been repressed can be safely explored. One woman in her late thirties cites having a safe space for spiritual exploration as the precise reason she is now deeply involved in the Neo-Pagan community. She states that what brought her to festival was a desire to "reclaim my spirituality that was neglected while I was married

because my partner wasn't comfortable with it." Outside of the Neo-Pagan community, she had

not found a space that would allow her to do so satisfactorily.

The spirituality that is encouraged to be developed and explored within the Neo-Pagan

community is, for many, empowering. One middle aged woman states that for the majority of her

existence, she felt powerless to make changes in her life. Since finding the Neo-Pagan

community a decade ago, she has spent many years feeling safe to explore her faith more

authentically. She states that she now feels much stronger and that her developed faith has:

> brought me through a lot of crap in my life- divorce, death, birth. It has helped
> me realize that I am a much stronger woman because now I have the valkyrie[8] to
> look up to. I've got many woman goddesses who have done the most remarkable
> things. It makes me a strong, stronger than I think, stronger than I remember.

Often, experiences of spiritual validation found within the Neo-Pagan community is

coupled with feelings of perceived validation in regards to other aspects of identity. One woman

in her early twenties who recently began attending Neo-Pagan festivals cites the support of her

personal identification as a psychic by members of the Neo-Pagan community as one of the key

reasons for her continued participation. Psychic/ empathic abilities are not necessarily linked to

any particular spiritual path. However, these abilities, like beliefs in nature spirits, angels and

ancestors are cited by respondents to have largely been met with hostility by members of

dominant American culture.

A young woman who has attended festivals many years in a row described how, within

the Neo-Pagan community, she is "with a group of people who understand the issues I am going

through, and who legitimate the psychic experiences that I'm having." She further states that, "'it

makes me feel powerful because I don't have to deny or question that these things are

happening." This empowerment has occurred because she now has other people who validate the

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[8] A host of female deities from the Norse Asatru tradition

authenticity of the psychic experiences she is having. Thus validated socially, she allows herself to feel more pride in her perceived abilities and to have more faith in her experiences. While not specifically stated, it seems that these experience help heal trauma from past social disapproval.

One further aspect to consider in relation to the validation of Neo-Pagan spiritual identities are the norms that surround spiritual labeling within the Neo-Pagan community. Many respondents describe their spirituality as something that is fluid and evolving, an aspect of identity that cannot be easily labeled. An example of this can be found in one Lothlorien elder's response to questions about his spiritual identity. He states, "I'm pretty much an eclectic, Wiccan, Shaman, making it up as I go along." This mentality towards spiritual identification is not universal within the Neo-Pagan community- some participants strongly identify with only one of the religions under the Neo-Pagan umbrella. Yet many others blend multiple religions including those outside what is typically considered Neo-Pagan. Such examples include self-identified "Jew Witches," "Unitarian Universalist Pagans" and "Pagan Quakers." Respondents state that support for such blending of spiritual identification was something not by members of dominant American culture. Thus, the freedom to identify with multiple spiritual identities attracts many individuals to the Neo-Pagan community.

Safe space for religious exploration and identification is treasured by respondents who state they have not found such space elsewhere in dominant American culture. A majority of respondents state they feel or have felt a lot of pressure to conform to others' ideas of religion. For these respondents, this conformity does not resonate as authentic. A young man who was recently introduced to the Neo-Pagan community said that one of the biggest influences that pulled him towards   participating in the Neo-Pagan community was his perception that "this group does not purport to have the right way. It offers ways that have worked in the past, ways

that might work in the future but, ultimately, whichever way works out for you is the way you are encouraged to go." This sentiment is not executed flawlessly (there are many debates within over the right way to perform rituals, correct historical accounts, etc) yet safe spiritual exploration was cited by the majority respondents as a primary reason for participation.

A Freer Personal Liberty

The second theme that emerged from responses to questions about the benefits gained by participating in the Neo-Pagan movement is an increased sense of personal liberty. There are many people who participate within Neo-Pagan community events and social networks who do not necessarily identify with any spiritual or religious leaning, not even Neo-Paganism. Many individuals included in this sample, including those who came for spiritual asylum report that the attraction leading them to participate within the Neo-Pagan community is the freedom of social norms. There are specific areas of their identities which the Neo-Pagan community is open to. The most commonly referred to aspects include sexual orientation, gender expression and alternative practices of intimate relationship structures.

The attitude of the Neo-Pagan community is perceived by respondents to be more accepting in contrast to that of dominant American culture. This acceptance refers to several aspects of personal expression. Most often cited identity markers were sexual preference, gender expression and intimate relationship structures. This open acceptance is exemplified in a mantra that is commonly expressed within this community as the guiding moral code- "Do what you will, harm none."[9] Regardless of semantics and personal interpretations of this mantra, this

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[9] There are variations of this expression found amongst various Neo-Pagan spiritual sects. Both Wicca and Thelema have their specific versions of this expression: "An ye harm none, do what ye will," within Wicca and "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law" within Thelema. Semantics aside, this expressions is a shared value among all Neo-Pagans I spoke with.

sentiment unites the attitudes of participant interactions within the Neo-Pagan community. One young man describes what this means to him in terms of his sexual orientation. He states:

> I'm bisexual. I like women and men. Here, that is completely and absolutely fine. You can come and be exactly yourself. Now, if you're an asshole every now and then, that's ok, you can come here and be that too, just don't hurt anybody. You can come here, be yourself, do your own thing. I mean, the saying here is 'hurt none, do what you will.' And it's a wonderful thing.

This respondent states that freedom to express his bisexuality is not something he feels a high degree of acceptance for within dominant American culture. He describes looking forward to time spent within the Neo-Pagan community, specifically at festivals, where he can be more open with this part of himself.

Such freedoms surrounding expression is a highly prized social norm within the Neo-Pagan community. One woman in her forties states that such norms are the reason she and many of her friends participate within this community. She provides an example of this when describing her polyamorous relationship practices[10]. She states that she is able to be open with her identification as a polyamorous woman within the Neo-Pagan community in ways that she "can't really do in the mundane world because it's misunderstood. People think you are swingers or there's not the spiritual connection or something like that." She states that she loves "coming to (festivals) like this where you are completely without social barriers or mores… Well, not completely but to some extent more… people are respecting each other on a very personal basis." She reports that her involvement with a community premised upon guiding principle such as respect and openness to differences allows her to feel more comfortable with herself and has improved her overall outlook on life, as well as her sense of wellbeing.

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[10] Polyamory is defined as the state or practice of having more than one open romantic relationship at a time (Mariam Webster, 2014). Participants distinguish this practice from swinging, cheating and open relationships by highlighting the consent of all participating individuals within the relationship.

One young woman describes how the guiding principles of openness toward and respect of personal identities practiced within this community constituted a type of "radical acceptance." She states that this community exemplifies ideas of "unconditional love"- that "your acceptance is not based on physical attractiveness or conformity," which appeals to her strongly. A younger man echoes this sentiment when he states that within the Neo-Pagan community:

> you can have your own will. That's something that's not as talked about in a
> lot of other groups. I think people are very often, in groups outside of this
> one, mostly in the work place, stripped of their own free will…. Here is a place
> that can be dropped. People support that yes, you do have your own free will,
> do what you want, and I'll do what I can to help you if that's what I need to do.
> In other places, like the work place… you simply do what you are told.

Many respondents equate this ability to more freely enact their sense of self will with feelings of living a more authentic life, one that they feel a higher degree of autonomy in creating. Once introduced to the degree to which personal liberty is accepted in this community, many individuals are inclined to continue their participation within it. This occurs with both people who identify with any of the spiritual subheadings under the Neo-Pagan umbrella and those who do not necessarily identify as such.

Stigma Coping Mechanisms

Despite a long history of oppressive social tactics aimed at disbanding Paganism and now Neo-Paganism, the Neo-Pagan movement is growing. Given this history, this section explores the ways in which participants within the Neo-Pagan community I studied cope with and work to minimize the effects of negative social sanctions encountered when interacting with members of dominant American culture. Here, the presentation of the data is guided by the third research question and sensitized by Goffman's six identity management tools (1963). All six of

Goffman's stigma coping tactics are described by participants. However, one main management tactic emerges most salient in the data: the building of intentional communities of sympathetic others.

Others United

Encounters with alienation and stigma resulting from interactions with members of dominant American culture are often described by participants as a powerful unifying force within the community. As one older female respondent stated, "we are a colony of misfits, an island oasis for lost toys." A young woman expounded on this theme: "a lot of people in this group have faced a lot of prejudice …I think it plays a huge part in this community and keeps it very strong." Dominant American culture has become a common "other" from which Neo-Pagans feel they must protect themselves. As such, this common adversary serves to fortify the allegiant bonds of those who participate within the Neo-Pagan community (see Pike, 2011 for a more detailed discussion).

Many individuals within the Neo-Pagan community have been denied social support (such as validation and authentication of identity) by members of dominant American culture. Whether these individuals are denied such support due to identification with spiritual, sexual, gender or interpersonal relationship expressions, the Neo-Pagan community serves as an alternative social arena in which the social supports they have been denied can be replicated. As one Lothlorien elder describes:

> Being a transgendered person, mundania is a bit more difficult to navigate
> than it is here and that mundania also includes my natural family. Here I have
> a family and family protections that I don't have other places.

Denied social resources, such as familial support, by members of dominant American culture, Neo-Pagans who have been "othered" find peers who are willing to support their identity genuinely within the Neo-Pagan community.

While a few respondents did describe semi- or total openness with their spiritual identity in the workplace and other social arenas within dominant American culture, most state they engage in acts to at least minimize the visibility of their identification with alternative spirituality. It is common for Neo-Pagans to employ efforts to intentionally hide aspects of their Neo-Pagan identity, especially in social venues where the consequences of public hostility could be profound, such as the workplace or in legal proceedings. Hiding aspects of one's self as an identity management tactic termed "closeting" (Goffman 1963). Many respondents acknowledging closeting, as numerous participants refer to times they remained in or came out of, what they term, as the "broom closet."[11]

The Management of Dual Identities

Respondents describe many ways of managing the necessary coming and going between Neo-Pagan and dominant American culture social realities. One often cited way to bridge this gap is to manage dual Facebook accounts- one for the persona they present to their families, work colleagues and other contacts within dominant American culture, and another for their spiritual community. Sometimes their spiritual identities extend to other areas of their lives such as Neo-Pagan authorship and teaching. It was not uncommon for me to receive two answers

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[11] This term serves within the Neo-Pagan community as a humorous reference of solidarity with the queer community for the similarly hostile social reactions homo- and bisexuals have experienced from members of dominant American culture for their personal expressions.

when asking for someone's name- their "real" name and their "spiritual" name. In some cases, one person can manage two rather complete identities.

This separation presents challenges, however. One woman in her mid-forties describes a time when her public facebook account was tagged in many photos from a festival. She states she did not want these photos available to be seen publically for fear of a disapproving reaction. She describes working quickly to have the photos removed. This example illustrates the lengths respondents report going to in effort to minimize the likelihood that members of the dominant American culture will find out about their identification as a Neo-Pagan.

Similar to the challenges experienced in managing dual identities, shifting between festival norms and the norms of dominant American culture can be difficult. A man in his late thirties who has attended festivals at Wisteria for the past seven years describes this challenge. He states, "It's very stressful to make the shift between here and… I still think of out there as normal life, and this is refuge, this is safety, this is shelter."A young woman in her twenties echoes this sentiment when she states that the main challenge in going back and forth between Neo-Pagan and dominant American societies is that, when interacting with members of dominant American culture, she has "a limited number of people I feel like disclosing my business to." This often leads to feelings of isolation and loneliness, as are commonly reported by members of the Neo-Pagan community. Despite the challenges of managing dual personas, the Neo-Pagans I spoke with stated that their connection with the Neo-Pagan community is worth the effort.

Intentional Social Support Structures and Networks

One of the main ways Neo-Pagans cope with the isolation of being a Neo-Pagan in dominant American culture is through the building and maintaining of intentional social support

networks. At festival, it is common for couples, families or individuals to attend alone. However, it is equally common, if not more so, for larger groups to attend festivals together. Often, these groups will camp together and, for the duration of the event, create a unique social reality. One young woman remarked of these groups that "within the festival community, there are many tribal like networks coming together and fulfilling the same function as extended familial networks." While at festival and during the time between, these individuals often form the foundation of the social support participants receive for their Neo-Pagan identity.

I witnessed interactions between many social support networks at every festival every year during my two summers of attending festivals. There were groups based on shared spiritual philosophies, geographic home region, age (specifically young adult groups of groups of elders) and common interests and/or relationships formed while at festival. Each such group has its own flair and sense of group identity. Sometimes, these social networks create shared camping space to contribute communally to chores, share parenting responsibilities and cook meals together while at festival. Such groups are often marked with tapestries, symbols, customs and sometimes ritualized social interactions that are important to the construction of the group identity. However, it is not necessary for groups to camp together to be identified as a social support network.

One example of a social support network based on shared interest is the Fire Tribe. There was a group present at every festival I attended that was responsible for building, lighting and maintaining the ritualized nightly fires that form the main social venue for all festival attendees. These individuals do not necessarily camp together, though they do mark their collective identity by wearing red suspenders. This symbol designates an individual's accepted right to participate in fire tending which can only be received by another, more experienced, fire tender.

Some camping groups have emerged from years of camping together. Many such groups do not have names, they are simply groups of friends who have made a tradition of attending a specific festival together each year. While evidence of such groups were found every year at every festival, such groups were most numerous at Lothlorien. At Lothlorien, some camps were simple and informal, others more elaborate and organized. Some were relatively small (6-8 people), and others larger (15-20 people). I observed networks of parents who camped together to share parenting responsibilities, groups worshipping a particular deity (such as Pan) and groups of performers and musicians.

While attending festivals, I identified three large (20+ participants) geographically centralized groups of Neo-Pagans that exist as communities in their hometowns. These individuals came from cities in three states: Bloomington, Indiana; Cincinnati, Ohio and Huntington, West Virginia. During Babalon Rising, Summer Solstice and Starwood, some members from the Cincinnati and Huntington groups camped together with others from their respective groups. Others did not. I did not observe any individuals from the Bloomington network camp together at Lothlorien. I also gained some evidence that geographically centralized networks of Neo-Pagans exist in other cities including Columbus, Ohio and Athens, Ohio, though I did not have direct contract with any such individuals. Three interview respondents stated that they have had moved across state lines to become more geographically integrated within a Neo-Pagan social network. The reason for these moves is primarily cited as a desire for the social support they find in the Neo-Pagan community that they do not typically experience in interactions with members of dominant American culture in their home communities.

For Neo-Pagans who are not a part of a geographically centralized group, outside of festival connections with other Neo-Pagans are most often meager. There are individuals who are unable to participate within a Neo-Pagan community in their home region because they do not exist or they cannot be identified. Some such Neo-Pagans state a sense of solitude and loneliness resulting from the lack of a Neo-Pagan community in their home region. One such woman describes feeling a "sincere lack of familiarity" without a Neo-Pagan community to actively participate within her home town.

Facebook has become a valuable tool in maintaining social connection with other Neo-Pagans in between festivals. Using the social media tool, individuals are able to share information, photos, and holiday greetings with a larger group of people that they may otherwise be challenged to maintain contact with. An older woman with health related mobility issues describes Facebook as a "get by," a way of getting through winter months and times outside of festival when her connection to the Neo-Pagan community is low. Facebook and other social media websites also offer tools for organizing Neo-Pagan social networks. Neo-Pagan events outside of festival can be planned and organized, as well as publicized. As a digital arena, Facebook functions as a personalized and protected social space for Neo-Paganism to be discussed more openly compared to other public or physical social forums.

While a few respondents described their participation in formal covens or other ritualized spiritual groups in their home communities, this was not the norm for festival attendees. The majority of interview respondents state they participate only informally in Neo-Pagan social networks, if at all. For most individuals, Facebook and loosely organized confederations of friends form the basis of their socialization within the Neo-Pagan community outside of festival. For many others, festival is the only time that they connect in person with other Neo-Pagans. It is

not uncommon for Neo-Pagan individuals that have considered themselves friends for many years to only see one another a couple of times per year while at festival. In these cases, online social networking often proves the necessary means of maintaining connections with other Neo-Pagans outside of festival.

Using my research questions as a guide, this chapter discussed the significant results from each questions. Given the supporting evidence presented in the foregoing discussion, it can be concluded that American Neo-Pagans have intentionally established social support networks to create a space in which a more desired social reality can be constructed. The next chapter will discuss how the findings relate to Goffman's conceptualization of stigma.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter discusses the implications of a common Neo-Pagan life narrative and how these shared experiences have led to a common perception by Neo-Pagans of Neo-Paganism and dominant American culture. The greater autonomy and liberty experienced in Neo-Pagan social realities has led many Neo-Pagans to hope for the inclusion of these ideals in broader society, though the lack of overt political activism profoundly differentiates the Neo-Pagan community from other collectivist movements in the past.

The overall focus of my research was to investigate the ways in which members of the American Neo-Pagan community perceive, interact and cope with the negative social responses often attached to a Neo-Pagan identity. Recent academic material has described specific Neo-Pagan beliefs and customs that are often perceived by members of the dominant American culture as deviant and have led to Neo-Pagan stigmatization (Carspecken, 2011; Pike, 2001). However, there is minimal research that concentrates on how American Neo-Pagans respond on a personal or communal level to the deviant label applied to them. My study was designed to fill this gap by investigating the creation of Neo-Pagan social realities constructed at Neo-Pagan festivals across the American mid-West.

Social Fiction: A Unified Individuality

Among the most significant findings to surface from this investigation is the identification of a common life narrative shared by members of the American Neo-Pagan community. Multiple Neo-Pagan voices tell a story of experiencing forced social alienation by

members of dominant American culture followed by receiving authentic social acceptance from members of the American Neo-Pagan movement. This alienation resulted from experiencing disapproving social responses to expressions of social or spiritual beliefs (or a combination of both) that deviate from those commonly held by members of dominant American culture. Queer sexual and gender expressions, belief in an earth-centered supernatural divine as well as personal creative power, egalitarian interpersonal interactions and non-monogamous interpersonal relationship structures are a few examples of personal expressions sited by members of the American Neo-Pagan community that are met with hostility from members of the dominant American culture. The Neo-Pagan narrative is then followed by acceptance for these rejected beliefs by members of the American Neo-Pagan community.

While this narrative of alienation and later acceptance is unified, the experience of living as a Neo-Pagan is unique and complex, even among members of the same spiritual sects. Individuality is highly prized in the American Neo-Pagan movement and, as such, members encourage one another to develop a personalized understanding of life purpose, meaning and approach. Individual Neo-Pagan moral and ethical codes are distinctive, yet they share a unifying bond- a belief in one's right to "Do what you will, harm none." Personal expressions of social and spiritual beliefs within this community exist in forms that are not found elsewhere in dominant American culture.

Most of the Neo-Pagans interviewed live full time in communities that are part of dominant American culture for work or educational purposes. A majority of these individuals state they are unsatisfied with their experiences interacting within this culture. This dissatisfaction has led many now Neo-Pagan individuals to seek camaraderie with like-minded others. Some state experiencing a sense of homecoming upon finding the Neo Pagan community.

For these individuals, the Neo-Pagan community relieves some of their dissatisfaction by offering acceptance for individuals as they are and providing continued support for authentic personal growth and development.

Neo-Pagans find that their worldview cannot be enacted in public social arenas without fear of negative social sanctions. As a result, festival sites have been established to create safe space for the social construction of Neo-Pagan reality. Neo-Pagan festival spaces are contextually situated within a historical legacy of oppression. Therefore, festival sites are mostly remote and serve to protect individuals from potential hostility from outside in dominant American culture.

Related to an attitude of open acceptance toward social and spiritual differences promoted by the Neo-Pagan community is a flexibility in relation to definitions of self and identity. In accordance with this community's open acceptance, individuals within this community are encouraged to experiment with their sense of self and identity. Contradictions and expansions of identity are gladly received. Within this community it is possible to be a queer polyamorous Goddess worshipping celibate or any number of spiritual configurations such as a "Jew-Witch" or "Pagan Quaker."

Not only are flexible and expanded notions of self and identity accepted, but respondents also state the existence of an open attitude toward identity evolution within the Neo-Pagan community. This allows for social and spiritual fluidity that extends current notions of social and spiritual possibilities into the realm of social fiction. Under the tenants of such tolerance, identities can be fabricated, merged and eradicated. This creation and experimentation serves to legitimate the Neo-Pagan hope that new social realities within dominant American culture are

possible and that these new social possibilities could include reflections of values such as feminism, egalitarianism and anti-heterosexism.

Neo-Pagan visioning of new social realities that embrace liberty and personal exploration sounds much like utopian idealism of past collectivist social movements. In some ways, the Neo-Pagan community is not exempt from such romanticism[12]. Yet, festival organizers state that this community is different from those movements. Where past social movements demanded immediate social change to a new envisioning of social reality or created alternative societies in which their vision could be enacted, Neo-Pagans interviewed in this study state that their community is seeking to affect individuals on a personal level without demanding total societal change. A Lothlorien organizer describes how the Neo-Pagan community hopes to change society with a,

> Slow going, ripple effect. We have the collective common space, the composting toilets and all these things you think about when you think about the 1960s and 70s hippie communes. But it's different. This is a place where people are openly invited to come and learn and get what they need to take back to their communities. It's not about creating an alternative society; it's about changing the society we currently live in.

Neo-Pagans have responded to dominant American culture's refusal to share creationary power in social reality construction by creating safe spaces to offer one another the social resources denied to them. In developing intentional social support networks, Neo-Pagans are thus prepared to offer one another legitimacy, liberty and shared social construction power to one another, with the hope that others will join them. The same Lothlorien speaker above articulates this hope when stating,

> This is a place to bring up awareness… It's about going home with attitudes you can use to affect your communities.

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[12] See Carspecken, L. (2012) for a more in-depth discussion of Neo-Paganism's connection with literary utopianism.

Limitations

There are limitations to this research. Namely, the interviews conducted for this study were conducted at Neo-Pagan festivals in the mid-west United States. As such, individuals included in this data set already had some level of connectedness to the Neo-Pagan community as well as a level of personal investment such that they set aside time and resources to attend. Neo-Pagans who are not interested in attending Neo-Pagan festivals for whatever reason are therefore not included in this data set. Thus, this research does not include the voices of Neo-Pagans with a negative or apathetic view towards Neo-Pagan festivals. This greatly limits the diversity of Neo-Pagan participation that is included within this data set and constrains the degree to which generalizations about the Neo-Pagan community can be made as a whole.

In addition, Neo-Pagan social reality construction was not examined outside of the festival community. While I attended many Neo-Pagan parties as a result of forging friendships with research participants, these social arenas were not part of the scope of approved human subjects research. Thus, participatory data collected from these environments is not included. Questions about these events were not part of the interview script, as their importance was unknown to me until the research process was largely completed.

The individuals that participate in mid-west American Neo-Pagan festivals are a largely homogeneous group. Lamentably, no comprehensive race, class or gender demographics were gathered in the course of this work. However, it can be stated that all interview respondents are white, more than half are female and the vast majority of interview respondents are assumedly upper working to upper middle class. Individuals attending Neo-Pagan festivals have the resources necessary to travel to festivals and camp in the woods for many days with likeminded individuals. This takes a degree of financial investment in terms of a camping supply investment

as well as time away from work and familial obligations. From this fact alone it can be assumed that there are many who experience the same feelings of alienation and isolation for social and spiritual beliefs that do not have the opportunity to search for and make connections with likeminded people. As such, this research in no way can make general statements about all individuals within dominant American culture who feel "othered" because of their social or spiritual beliefs.

Another significant limitation of this research is found in the general mistrust that Neo-Pagans have for outsiders. Utilizing phenomenological participant observation methods did allow a pseudo-insider researcher identity to be created and this granted access to many insider-only spaces and conversations within the Neo-Pagan community. Many Neo-Pagans describe how festivals are the only space in which they feel they can safely drop identity defenses and freely express themselves. However, it is impossible to discern how freely respondents expressed themselves during interviews. It is quite likely that respondents did engage in some level of identity management during the research process.[13] This creates a threshold for the level of authentic scholarly findings that can be concluded from the data set. Similarly, discussions that detailed individual magickal and/or Witchcraft practices were specifically avoided by nearly all research participants. There can be no discussion of how individual or collective magick and/or Witchcraft practices particularly influence Neo-Pagan identities and social structures.

Finally, limitations relating to my personal identification as a researcher are worth considering. Festival sites are dynamic and multi-faceted. Some, like the ELF and Starwood Festivals, have many hundreds of participants and dozens of unique social realities being enacted simultaneously. I was a young woman in my early twenties during the time of this research. I gravitated towards areas within festival sites where I believed other participating members would

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[13] Thank you to Rachel Sparkman for this insight on interviewing the stigmatized about their identities.

be open to allowing me to learn about them and their culture. My inability to be multiple places at once greatly limited my experience of the festival community as a whole and impacted my ability to include all social realities within this research.

Implications

While limitations are important to recognize, this research does extend previous scholarly work in a number of important areas. In addition to the information provided for the sociological study of religion, those studying social change and deviance will also benefit from this work.

Previous academic investigations of the Neo-Pagan community have focused, primarily, on identifying the existence of the Neo-Pagan community in countries around the world, the development of these communities and the particular practices of spiritual sects included in the Neo-Pagan religious subheading. Some recent scholarship has examined the specific aspects of Neo-Paganism that have led to the perception of their deviance by members of dominant American society. However, there has been minimal work exploring the effect of power in relationship to the perceived lack of legitimacy of the worldview espoused by this community. Through applied phenomenology, this study presents an account of why Neo-Pagans choose to identify with this community despite the risks of social exclusion from dominant American culture.

Goffman's work, Stigma (1963), directly informed the analysis of this data by providing a framework for exploring the response tactics utilized by members of the Neo-Pagan community to minimize the social consequences of the stigma attached to their identity. In Stigma, Goffman presents six tools individuals utilize to mitigate and, hopefully, avoid, the negative social consequences of stigma (1963). The present data shows evidence of Neo-Pagans

using all six tools to manage interactions with dominant American culture. However, Goffman's framework fails to thoroughly analyze the phenomena of the Neo-Pagan community in three ways.

First, there is a stark difference between the individuals Goffman studied and the American Neo-Pagan community. Goffman speaks specifically of the physically handicapped, the ill and the ugly. These are individuals who had no choice in their assumed membership with a stigmatized community. Excluding the small number of individuals who have been born to Neo-Pagan parents in recent years, Neo-Pagans must actively seek out membership in the Neo-Pagan community. Goffman's framework does not account for those who willingly choose to participate within stigmatized communities.

Secondly, Goffman describes communities of sympathetic others that stigmatized individuals create for themselves in effort to alleviate some of the individual burden of stigma. Of the examples Goffman offers, these communities are typically residential or geographically centralized, such as schools for the deaf or blind. This is typically not the case with the American Neo-Pagan community. While there are some examples of geographically centralized social support networks, two additional factors link members of this community together. The first is a shared life narrative. Members of this community share the story of facing hostility for their spiritual beliefs and social values from members of the dominant American culture and, later, finding support for their beliefs and values in the Neo-Pagan community. The second is the need Neo-Pagans have for one another to replicate the social support denied to them by non-deviant others. This social support allows Neo-Pagans empower themselves individually and the community as a whole to survive adversity from members of the dominant American culture.

Often this is done across great geographic distances. Goffman does not account for communities of sympathetic others that are not geographically centralized.

A final limitation of Goffman's work is his limited focus on the institutional social processes that construct deviance and associated stigma. His work primarily investigates face-to-face interpersonal interactions between social others in public space. Institutionalized stigma, such as discrimination in the workplace and the military, is not explored. As such, the American Neo-Pagan community represents a unique opportunity to investigate the processes by which the stigma of a community comes to be accepted as a social truth and how communities of the stigmatized can work to create intentional social change on an institutional level. Contemporary deviance scholarship could be strengthened by incorporating the constructionist basis provided by Berger and Luckmann (1966) as well as conflict theory's critique of labeling theory. Such a unified perspective would allow the use of stigmatizing labels (such as dyke, nigger, queer and the derogatory use of witch) to be seen as the social reality control tactics they are. Such a perspective would allow researchers to more fully examine how power influences social reality construction and critically analyze the experiences of marginalized non-normative others who have been denied inclusion in the construction process.

Directions for Future Research

My study contributes to the emerging body of scholarship on the American Neo-Pagan community by identifying the ways in which power influences social reality construction. Specifically, it investigates the effects of deviance on social structures. Previous research focusing on the intersection of deviance and Neo-Paganism has identified what about the Neo-Pagan community has led this group to be stigmatized by members of dominant American

culture. This investigation acknowledges Neo-Pagans' responses to dominant Americans culture's control of social reality production as a central bond that unites the otherwise individualist Neo-Pagan community into a unified whole.

Future research on the Neo-Pagan community needs to explore the extent to which Neo-Pagan social realities are enacted outside of festival environments. Research investigating how individuals are socialized into this culture once introduced and how Neo-Pagan identities emerge and evolve over a lifespan is also warranted. The use of social media should also could be investigated to examine how individualizes utilize online social networking as a tool in the building of communities of support for the stigmatized. Such work could be broadened to investigate how social media is used by stigmatized communities to manage dual identities as a coping mechanism.

Research on the Neo-Pagan community, specifically, can be continued in a number of ways. For those interested in studying social change, special attention to the intergenerational passing of Neo-Pagan culture from adults to children is necessary. In addition, it may interest researchers to explore how increasing public acceptance of fluid gender and sexual identities, as well as polyamory, may influence dominant American culture as a whole. Noting that a majority of Neo-Pagans are white and middle class, the reasons behind this homogeneity within the Neo-Pagan community also needs explored.

Scholarly investigation into leadership structures found within Neo-Pagan social support networks is justified. This research lightly touches on the interplay between Neo-Pagan values of individuality and community. It would be interesting to seek scholarly understanding of how a group that so highly values individualism preserves a sense of community and unity without

lapsing into a system of authority[14]. Investigating the ways in which Neo-Pagans self-police the

evolving boundaries of an alternative set of social norms could be particularly illuminating.

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Appendix A
IRB Approval Letters

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Office of Research Integrity
Institutional Review Board
401 11th St., Suite 1300
Huntington, WV 25701

FWA 00002704

IRB1 #00002205
IRB2 #00003206

June 7, 2010

Marty Laubach, PhD
Sociology/Anthropology Department

RE: IRBNet ID# 174661-1
At: Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral)

Dear Dr. Laubach:

Protocol Title:	[174661-1] Trends in American Neopaganism
Expiration Date:	June 7, 2011
Site Location:	MU
Type of Change:	New Project APPROVED
Review Type:	Expedited Review

In accordance with 45CFR46.110(a)(7), the above study and informed consent were granted Expedited approval today by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Vice Chair for the period of 12 months. The approval will expire June 7, 2011. A continuing review request for this study must be submitted no later than 30 days prior to the expiration date.

If you have any questions, please contact the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Coordinator Bruce Day, CIP at (304) 696-4303 or day50@marshall.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

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401 11th St., Suite 1300   IRB1 #00002205
Huntington, WV 25701   IRB2 #00003206

May 13, 2011

Marty Laubach, PhD
Sociology/Anthropology Department

RE: IRBNet ID# 174661-2
At: Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral)

Dear Dr. Laubach:

Protocol Title:	[174661-2] Trends in American Neopaganism
Expiration Date:	June 7, 2012
Site Location:	MU
Type of Change:	Continuing Review/Progress APPROVED Report
Review Type:	Expedited Review

The above study and informed consent were approved for an additional 12 months by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Chair. The approval will expire June 7, 2012. Since the approval is within 30 days of expiration the anniversary date of 6/7 was maintained. Continuing review materials should be submitted no later than 30 days prior to the expiration date.

If you have any questions, please contact the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/ Behavioral) Coordinator Bruce Day, CIP at (304) 696-4303 or day50@marshall.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

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Huntington, WV 25701   IRB2 #00003206

May 28, 2012

Marty Laubach, PhD
Sociology/Anthropology Department

RE: IRBNet ID# 174661-7
At: Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral)

Dear Dr. Laubach:

Protocol Title:	[174661-7] Trends in American Neopaganism
Expiration Date:	June 7, 2013
Site Location:	MU
Submission Type:	Continuing Review/Progress APPROVED Report
Review Type:	Expedited Review

The above study and informed consent were approved for an additional 12 months by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Chair. The approval will expire June 7, 2013. Since this approval is within 30 days of the expiration date, the fixed anniversary date of 06/07 was maintained. Continuing review materials should be submitted no later than 30 days prior to the expiration date.

If you have any questions, please contact the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Coordinator Michelle Woomer, B.A., M.S at (304) 696-4308 or woomer3@marshall.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

Willful Disobedience 83

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Institutional Review Board
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Huntington, WV 25701   IRB2 #00003206

August 29, 2012

Kristi Fondren, PhD
Sociology and Anthropology

RE: IRBNet ID# 337791-1
At: Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral)

Dear Dr. Fondren:

Protocol Title:	[337791-1] Social Dissent and Spirituality: Creating New Cultural Narrative through Intentional Social Support Networks

Expiration Date:	August 29, 2013	
Site Location:	MU	
Submission Type:	New Project	APPROVED
Review Type:	Expedited Review	

In accordance with 45CFR46.110(a)(7), the above study and informed consent were granted Expedited approval today by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Chair for the period of 12 months. The approval will expire August 29, 2013. A continuing review request for this study must be submitted no later than 30 days prior to the expiration date.

This study is for student Heather Sprouse.

If you have any questions, please contact the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral/Educational) Coordinator Michelle Woomer, B.A., M.S at (304) 696-4308 or woomer3@marshall.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

APPENDIX B
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW TEMPLATE

Study of Neo-Pagans at Festival

Pre-Interview Demographic Questions

1. Hometown: _____ 2. Age: _____

3. Race: _____ 4. Gender: _____

5. Highest degree received: _____

6. College Major (if applicable): _____

7. Current or most recent occupation: _____

8. Parent or primary care giver's total years of education: _____

9. Parent's current or most recent occupation: _____

10. Attended previous N.P festivals? _____

11. Previous N.P. experience in general? _____

If yes, was this in a group? Solitary? When? For how long? How old were you at the time?

_____

12. When did you begin actively considering yourself N.P.?
_____

General Questions
1. To begin, tell me what it is about N.P. Festivals that brought you here. Why did you decide to come?
A/ What have others told you about their experiences in first attending N.P. Festivals? Were they similar to or different from yours? In what way(s)?
B/ What do you like most about the festival experience? What do you like least about the festival experience?
C/ Is there anything in general you would change about N.P. festivals? Tell me about this.
PROBE (if needed): cost of attendance, time spent away from festival, physical challenges of camping, physical disability or childcare challenges

2. Please tell me about your spiritual identity. Do you identify with a particular spiritual group?
A/ How did you decide this? Was it a decision? Who helped to influence this decision? Why? What does this spiritual identity say about you?

Now, let's talk about what life is like at N.P. festivals.
3. Tell me what life is like at festival. In other words, describe your average day to me.

A/ What did you expect or imagine this experience would be like? Were these expectations met? If not, why?
PROBE (if needed): socializing with others, physical challenges of camping, distance traveled to attend, relationships between organizers, staff and festival goers
B/ Are there certain characteristics shared by Neo-Pagans? If so, please tell me about this.
PROBE (if needed): physically, mentally, emotionally, career-wise, and financially

4. Often, Neo-Pagans come into contact with the normative community. Please tell me about your experiences as a Neo-Pagan interacting non Neo-Pagans.
A/ Describe your experiences in normative society. What is/are your role/s?
B/Do you have struggles interacting as a N.P. in normative society? What is challenging? What is easy?
C/How do these experiences make you feel? What have other Neo-Pagans told you about this?

5. Some Neo-Pagans actively practice "magic/k" or "Witchcraft." What is your understanding of these practices? Please be specific.
A/ Have you personally practiced "magic/k" or "Witchcraft?" If so, please tell me about this.
B/ Do you know of any other Neo-Pagans practice magic/k? What have others told you about their practice? Please describe.

6. Now, let's talk about some of your most memorable experiences while within the N.P. community.
A/Thinking back over the time you have spent in the Neo-Pagan community, what would you say has
been your most memorable experience involving your experience? Why this experience?
B/What has been your most memorable experience at festival? Why this experience?

7. Thinking back over the time you have spent in the Neo-Pagan community, what would you say has
been the highest point for you? What did you learn from this experience?
A/ What has been your most challenging experience? What did you take away from this experience?
B/ What have you learned about yourself since you began your exploration of spirituality?

8. Is there anything I did not ask that you feel is important in terms of understanding the Neo-Pagan experience or your personal experience of Neo-Paganism?
Of the festival experience in general or your personal festival experience?
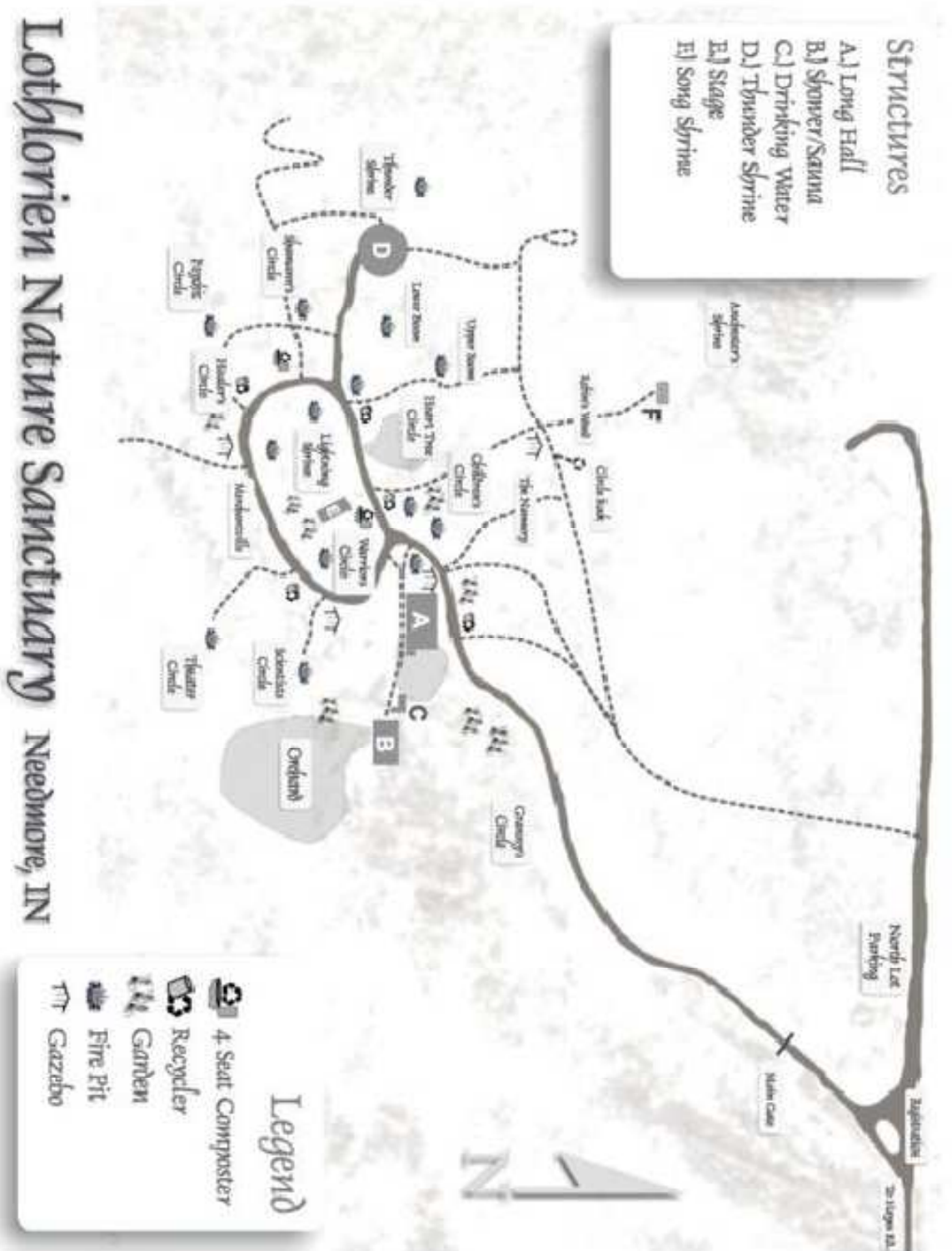
APPENDIX C

MAPS OF FESTIVAL SITES

Our Haven Nature Sanctuary

Frenchlick, Indiana

Wisteria Event Campground, Community and Nature Preserve

Pomerory, Ohio

Lothlorien Nature Sanctuary

Needmore, IN

Structures

A.) Long Hall
B.) Shower/Sauna
C.) Drinking Water
D.) Thunder Shrine
E.) Stage
E.) Song Shrine

Legend

4-Seat Composter
Recycler
Garden
Fire Pit
Gazebo

North Lot Parking

Main Gate

To Maple Rd.

Lothlorien Nature Sanctuary

Needmore, Indiana