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Surviving and Thriving in a Hostile Religious Culture

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

SURVIVING AND THRIVING IN A HOSTILE RELIGIOUS CULTURE:
CASE STUDY OF A GARDNERIAN WICCAN COMMUNITY

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

by

Michelle Irene Mitchell

2014

To: Interim Dean Michael R. Heithaus
College of Arts and Sciences

This thesis, written by Michelle Irene Mitchell, and entitled *Surviving and Thriving in a Hostile Religious Culture: Case Study of a Gardnerian Wiccan Community*, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

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Date of Defense: November 14, 2014

The thesis of Michelle Irene Mitchell is approved.

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

SURVIVING AND THRIVING IN A HOSTILE RELIGIOUS CULTURE:
CASE STUDY OF A GARDNERIAN WICCAN COMMUNITY

by

Michelle Irene Mitchell

Florida International University, 2014

Miami, Florida

Professor Whitney A. Bauman, Major Professor

The present study explored a minority oppositional religious culture, which continued practicing despite overt hostilities to their practices. The qualitative research project utilized interviews and observations of the Gardnerian Wiccans in Broward County, Florida. The narrative data were transcribed, coded, and categorized into three themes related to the following research questions: Why would individuals create a secretive religion? Given they had to practice in secret, what about this religion had people seeking out information and joining Covens? What would keep this group together despite opposition from dominant culture? As a microcosm for religious conflict in society, the study showed differences in the culture's religious paradigm structure as a major factor for religious conflict.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Religion has continually taken the forefront of the world stage as religious tensions play a major part of the unrest not only, in the Middle East but also around the world. According to the International Report of Religious Freedom, provided by the State Department to the U.S. Congress annually, the year 2013 witnessed the largest displacement of religious communities since the report's inception in 1998. "All around the world, individuals were subjected to discrimination, violence and abuse, perpetrated and sanctioned violence for simply exercising their faith, identifying with a certain religion, or choosing not to believe in a higher deity at all" (US Department of State). The purpose of the report was to inform the U.S. Congress which countries violate major religious freedoms, as well as to detail the U.S policies in those countries which promote religious freedom.

For instance, the 2013 report noted that in Pakistan, more than eighty Christians were killed in the Peshawar church bombing by Muslim militants. Yet, the incident motivated other Muslims to create human chains around Christian churches to prevent further bloodshed. In essence, while opposing religious faiths created a violent situation, the same religious attitudes facilitated a way to bridge the gap. The human Muslim chains were voluntary and thus, according to the State Department report, U.S. policies should be directed toward encouraging similar interreligious support (US Department of State).

Inside the U.S. borders, the government has not instituted a national report on religious freedom. Instead, in 1993 Congress passed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993, Pub. L. No. 103-141, 107 Stat. 1488. The act was created to ensure that the federal government could not curtail religious freedom. The Supreme Court, in 1997,

ruled that the act was unconstitutional because the federal government cannot regulate state governments. Yet, many states proceeded to pass similar laws to protect their citizens. However, the problem of religious freedom; that is who has the right to religious freedom and in what manner religious freedom can be displayed is still being played out in the Supreme Court today (Bomboy).

In Florida, the tensions between religions played out on a smaller scale as influxes of immigrants with different religious affiliations began moving to Florida in 1950s. For instance, as the Cuban immigrants moved into South Florida they brought with them the religion known as Santeria. Santeria sacrificial practices were offensive to the existing population thus, in 1987: the city of Hialeah banned the use of animals in ritual sacrifices (Kilpatrick). The Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye sued the city for violation of their religious freedom (Kilpatrick). The case against Hialeah reached the U.S. Supreme Court in 1993 where the ban was unanimously overturned on the basis of freedom of religion guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. While the ruling settled the legal issue, social sentiment against Santeria practices remained. While technically Santeria was not a Contemporary Pagan religion, the manner in which the city treated Santeria practitioners was of extreme importance to the Contemporary Pagan community which resided in South Florida.

A case which was more important to the Contemporary Pagan community than the case in Miami was north of Broward County in the City of Palm Bay. In 1993, a neighbor observing a Wiccan ritual in a private yard called the city to complain. The city responded to the complaint by citing the homeowner for zone violations. The homeowner brought the matter to the local court with the result that the judge referred the issue back

to the city council (Leagle). Eventually, the homeowner negotiated with Christian organizations that held Bible studies on personal property. Appealing to their interests, the homeowners attained the support of two of the organizations. Once the Christian organizations spoke publically to the city council, the zone restrictions were lifted in 1994 and the Wiccan coven was able to continue holding outdoor rituals (Raney). However, as with the Santeria case, the social problems did not stop when the city relented. In October, 1995 the Sun Sentinel published the headline “Witch Hunt: Accusations of Child Torture and Satan Worship Haunt Palm Bay Witches” indicating a continuation of public discrimination.

Unfortunately, Gardnerian Wiccans in Broward County, Florida, continued to maintain a secret existence despite the legalization of the freedom of religion. Even though their counterparts in other parts of the state won legal battles, Broward Wiccans endeavored to avoid similar persecution as their neighbors. Yet, regardless of the perceived need for secrecy, the number of Wiccan adherents grew from 1978 to present (Nashoba). Many Covens formed and disappeared, yet some covens expanded and endured for years (Cara). Adherents had to practice their beliefs in silence, hampering communication between compatible individuals and limited meeting places to sympathetic organizations like bookstores, psychic stores and personal homes. Communication in the 1980s was done by advertising in a Contemporary Pagan magazine or word of mouth (Cara). By the late 1990s, the Contemporary Pagan community began meeting online. Slowly over the last thirty years, the community has found ways to adapt to the dominant culture in Broward County while they continue practicing their faith in secret.

Statement of the Problem

Even in the secular age people look for a purpose in life which may be filled by a spiritual path selected by their family. However, legislated religious freedom in the U.S. has emboldened many religious seekers to find alternative spiritual pathways which deviate from the mainstream. Unfortunately, legislation does not alter public opinion. In the case of Broward County, Florida, the Judeo-Christian religious culture held the predominant idea of religiosity based on monotheistic principles. However, other religions reside in Broward County; religions such as Wicca or Santeria whose religiosity operates on a magical consciousness (elaborated on in chapter two). The conflict between these two paradigms needs to be understood as the foundation for why people seek out Gardnerian Wiccan spirituality despite the prejudicial attitudes they encounter.

Dismissing the friction in South Florida between religious organizations as simple prejudice does not describe the root problem. What is the root cause of the prejudice which caused Gardnerian Wiccans to hide their religious practices in a country which legally guarantees the right to religious freedom? My study attempted to explore the underlying tension between the predominantly Christian population of Broward County and the minority culture of Gardnerian Wiccans. The source of the derision between these two cultures may also provide a motivating factor in the individual spiritual quest which brings people to Gardnerian Wicca.

Humanity's search for a spiritual meaning can take a myriad of paths, reflected in the number of religions populating the earth. Most people have their spirituality handed down to them as a family belief system. Sometimes though, an individual searches for a different path. The process of a spiritual quest is highly individual, yet the individuals

connect in a particular religion may find they all have similar motivations. My study examined the factors which compelled searchers to choose Gardnerian Wicca as a life course despite the negative associations attached to the religion.

Since Gardnerian Wicca is linked to witchcraft, many are attracted to the novelty of a secret society which purports to have the power to perform miracles. However, once the novelty has faded, most adherents continue to follow the path. My study examined why Gardnerian Wiccans in Broward County continued to practice even though the dominant culture disapproved of their practices. Since Gardnerian Wicca can be practiced either in a group, called a Coven, or by an individual, called Solitaries; there must be aspects of the religion more obscure than simple desire for community that bond adherents to their religion.

Background and Need

In the late 1930's, Gerald Gardner, a self-educated anthropologist, moved back to England after living and studying abroad for most of his life. While abroad, Gardner studied isolated, indigenous cultures whose practices intrigued him. Gardner's self-education also allowed him to explore esoteric subjects, such as séances or occult practices, which would be frowned upon by a traditional British education. Gardner's unique background allowed him to be receptive to the New Forest Witchcraft Coven he encountered in 1939. The New Forest Coven consisted of women who practiced witchcraft rituals in secret. Gardner decided to reveal the existence of witches, as well as formalized the Coven's practices. Gardner's system built on the existing witchcraft practices while emulating the Goddess cults detailed in Margaret Murray's *The God of the*

Witches published in 1933, as well as incorporating magical practices from ceremonial magic.

The revelation of modern day witches sparked a controversy discussed in the newspapers (Heselton 445). The derogatory press reinforced the need for secrecy to protect members of the Coven. Yet, Wicca spread from England to the United States and then went worldwide. Now, Wicca has over a million estimated adherents globally (ReligionFacts). While researching cultures internationally is beyond the scope of the current project, a case study should give enough information to extrapolate how Gardnerian Wiccans are able to thrive in a culture which considers Wiccans deviant members of society. This information should shed light on how religious beliefs become such an intrinsic part of human life that adherents continue to practice, despite the difficulties of being a member of a persecuted religion.

The majority of the Wiccans in Broward County concluded that Contemporary Paganism originated when Lady Cara moved to South Florida in 1978. In 1978, America was essentially at peace with the outer world. President Carter was in the midst of brokering peace in the Middle East between Egypt's president Anwar Sadat and Israeli premier Menachem. Pope Paul VI died, and the new Pope, John Paul I, died unexpectedly after thirty-four days in office to be succeeded by John Paul II. With relative international peace, Americans spent more time searching for enemies at home.

Internally, fear of enemies, real or imagined, ran rampant through the country but specifically in Florida. These enemies came in all forms, such as homosexuals in Miami as well as true monsters like serial killer Ted Bundy. The most influential event on Pagan lives in 1978 was the horrific event in Jonestown, Guyana, when Jim Jones' followers

committed mass suicide, reviving the fear of alternative religious groups generally called cults.

The Jonestown event came at the end of a long era marked by fear of cults. The height of the cult frenzy came in 1970 after Charles Manson and his followers massacred three people in what many considered to be a ritualistic manner. Thus, “the sex-and-ritual murder pattern had now been set in the California media, and it would henceforth be difficult for any non-standard religion [such as Wicca] to detach itself from that connection” (Ellis 180). Since Gardnerian Wicca became public, the national press, first in Britain and then in America, picked up the theme of witchcraft and combined the practice with the idea of Satanic ritual cults that presumably performed violent, deviant acts, including violating animals as well as humans. Even though murderers, such as Charles Manson were convicted, none of the so-called ritual killings was proven to be connected to religious groups. The truth did not stop the media from writing stories about religious cults and their deviant acts, especially stories about such people as Mike Warnke, a self-professed witch presumably initiated by Raymond Buckland, a Wiccan Elder. Warnke then toured the country in the 1970's proclaiming that all witchcraft was Satanism. “For the next twenty years[,] Warnke was a central and much-cited figure in the American anti-Satanism movement. His stories put dramatic flesh on the rumors and inferences about devil worship being circulated in the media and through the Pentecostal conduits” (Ellis 192). In 1992, Warnke’s fame ceased when an investigation proved Warnke's stories as false.

The negative press was detrimental to Wiccan practitioners across the nation, even after the Satanism scare was proven to be false. When the number of Wiccans was

minimal, estimated 1,196,000 in 1990, people ignored the Witchcraft movement.

However, as Wicca continued to grow across the country, Wiccan adherents encountered situations in which people lost their jobs, lost their children, or lost their property to be vandalized because of their religious practices. Adherents of Gardnerian Wicca had to become circumspect in their practices, remaining secretive even with family members who disapproved of their new religion. Yet, even in a negative environment, Wicca continued to thrive, as is substantiated by the growing numbers of adherents and by the growing number of public rituals. In 2008 the online service *Religion Facts* estimated adherents were 2,804,000.

In April of 2007, when the United States Federal Government was forced by legislation to install a pentacle on an Arlington gravestone of a Pagan military service member, the government was also obligated to recognize Wicca as a legitimate religion (Pitzl-Waters 2010). While legislation granted Pagan practitioners legal rights, the ruling does not help define Wicca as a religion mainly because there is not an unambiguous definition of the phenomenon of religion. However, there are many theorists who venture definitions in order to study spirituality in culture. Nor does the legislation improve relations between religious cultures.

Conflict of Religious Paradigms

In order to improve relations between cultures, theorists have searched to explain why religious dominant cultures and religious minority cultures conflict. In the early 1900's, the research on obscure cultures bolstered the amount of evidence available for anthropologists and sociologists to analyze. Lucien Levy-Bruhl, in 1926, wrote a book,

How Natives Think, in which he conjectured that indigenous religions possessed a different perspective, an alternative paradigm, from the people who studied them (Levy-Bruhl 36). The difference in paradigm revolved around collective representations of the world which created a mystical thinking versus more causality based mental arrangements found in Western scientific thinking. Thus, Levy-Bruhl postulated the *Law of Participation* based on the idea that “in varying forms and degrees [native thought patterns] all involve a ‘participation’ between persons and objects which form part of a collective representation” (Levy-Bruhl 76). The notion of an innate conflict between oppositional paradigms, participatory versus causality, informed later theorists such as by Stanley J. Tambiah, Victor Turner and Ariel Glucklich. However, none of these theorists applied the theory to Contemporary Pagan populations, much less Gardnerian Wiccans.

Spiritual Quests and Conversion

Spiritual quests which led converts to mainstream religions find support from the community at large. However, people who joined New Religious Movements (NRM) in the last thirty years had to fight the notion that all cults brainwash their adherents. The cult scare of the 1970s saw a rise in parents taking children out of the new religious movements and de-programming them. Even as the height of the fear passed, the media continued to utilize incidents for books, television and movies; thus reviving the fear for the public on a regular basis (Arweck 1).

Proselytizing is disparaged by the Contemporary Pagan community, specifically Gardnerian Wiccans, thus groups do not advertise nor do they actively seek new people to join. However, Priests and Priestesses have a mandate to teach others. For instance,

classes will appear in New Age shops wanting to attract customers or flyers for meetings written in Theban, the witches' alphabet, will be posted in public areas (*Witching Culture* 63). The majority of the people I interviewed found their way to Gardnerian Wicca through an active quest which began with books and/or the Internet.

Lewis Rambo's research into conversions admits there are active questers searching for a new spiritual path however; the majority of his research comes from organizations which actively proselytize. Rambo's seven stages of conversion cover facets of a typical conversion to Contemporary Paganism (Rambo 168). Yet, several differences to Rambo's theory of societal and family influences have to be made when considering Contemporary Pagans. For instance, data would have to be gathered from similar counter-cultural groups which are both deemed socially unacceptable as well as do not actively seek converts.

Persistent Religious Retention

Religious communities have been slowly losing adherents because of a variety of factors. According to the Pew Research, twenty-eight percent of adults have abandoned the faith of their childhood calling the results "a very competitive religious marketplace" (PewForum). Pew Research also has detailed reports on people leaving Catholicism and Protestantism but does not discuss any NRM affiliation. According to the report called "Faith in Flux," people converted from one faith to another because the previous faith did not meet the needs of the adherents, as well as the converters had a change in fundamental beliefs.

On the other hand, studies such as Sarah Pike's and Sabina Magliocco's, suggest Contemporary Paganism has grown over the years. Calculating exact numbers of Contemporary Pagans cannot be done for two reasons: most surveys do not include a specific category for Paganism and most Contemporary Pagans would not divulge their religious affiliation (Patheos). However, the numbers of Gardnerian Wiccans in Broward County has grown over the last thirty years and new people request information often (Cara).

Searching for both a reason to why people converted to Gardnerian Wicca and why they continued to practice lead me from the mystical conscious, intrinsic in the conflict of the two religious paradigms, to the attempt to create a community based on humans but then expanded the adherents' concepts, through rituals (explored in chapter four), to a larger spiritual community which both Covens and Solitaries connect with on a regular basis. Since the ritual features in all three themes I found; conflict of religious paradigms (as magical consciousness), spiritual quests and conversions (as part of the attraction) and persistent religious retention (as the conduit to the universe), I consulted the work of cultural anthropologist Victor Turner, who studied the Ndembu villagers and formulated theories on rituals and rites of passage, to create a theoretical framework to analyze the function of ritual.

Utilizing Arnold van Gannep's theory of the ritual process, Turner expanded van Gannep's process into a theory of *communitas* (*The Ritual Process* ix). *Communitas* connected people from different backgrounds into a mutual unstructured liminal space, creating a community of equals. Sabina Magliocco utilized Turner's theories to illustrate how Contemporary Pagans employed the ritual process to formulate an oppositional

culture that then created a central identity that was intrinsic of continued adherence of participants (*Witching Culture* 185).

Thus, the work on indigenous religions which resulted in the alternate paradigms of participatory and causality has not been applied to Contemporary Pagans in order to comprehend the disparity between Broward County's dominant culture and the Contemporary Pagan population. Conversion theories have not looked at the situation of an individual from the dominant culture converting to the minority culture, specifically Gardnerian Wicca that does not seek converts nor has retention practices. The research on marginalized religions established the process of *communitas* and identity which needs to be applied to the area of religious retention.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my study was to examine the minority religious culture of Gardnerian Wicca, in the context of the conflict with a dominant religious culture, because the conflict influences not only the people who convert to Wicca but also the reasons for continuing to practice. The United States has come a long way in dealing with NRMs since the cult scare of the 1970s. However, community friction still occurs when religious ideals clash making the prospect of converting to a counter-culture religion both enticing to some and detrimental to others.

To comprehend the emic point of view, how a community sees itself, of Gardnerian Wiccans in Broward County required interviewing Wiccan Elders who have been involved with the community for over twenty years. From these interviews, I was invited to attend different Wiccan groups in order to continue asking questions. I also

gathered news articles from the last thirty years for a perspective on the difficulties Contemporary Pagans and/or New Religious Movements encountered with the dominant Judeo-Christian culture of South Florida. By learning how these adherents converted to Wicca, the prejudices they had to deal with, and how they felt about their continued practice the study was able to shed some light on the cultural issues listed above as well as answer the study's following research questions:

Given the detrimental consequences of converting to Gardnerian Wicca and considering no one is recruiting, where does the major attraction to Wicca reside? What are the reasons someone converts to a counter-culture religion? Are they social outcasts looking for a home or possibly a community of like-minded people? Once they convert to Gardnerian Wicca, what encourages continued participation despite cultural pressures to discontinue practice? What part does the ritual perform in bringing in converts and keeping participants?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The literature review will begin with background research into Contemporary Paganism and then will address the three prevailing themes found in the study. The first section will address research related to a possible source of religious conflict; the differing paradigms of the dominant and the minority cultures. The second section will focus on research studies about the process of religious conversion. Finally, the third section will discuss research related to function of ritual in persistent retention.

Background Research

As with other New Religious Movements of the last sixty years, academic research on Contemporary Pagans is exiguous; however, there are some theorists who have scrutinized the phenomena of Contemporary Paganism. In 1979, Margot Adler's survey of American Pagans, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America*, was published and then updated periodically until 2006. Adler talked to as many different Contemporary Pagan traditions as she could find in America in the 1970's, in order to find out what Pagans believed. She found the common thread of all Contemporary Pagans was the inherent sacredness of the natural world. "They are usually polytheists or animists or pantheists, or two or three of these things at once. They share the goal of living in harmony with nature and they tend to view humanity's 'advancement' and separation from nature as the prime source of alienation. They see ritual as a tool to end that alienation" (Adler 1).

On the same day as *Drawing Down the Moon*, Starhawk published the *Spiral Dance* which inspired many American feminists to participate in the Goddess religion. Many activists group sprung up around Starhawk's vision of Contemporary Paganism, the most notorious being the Reclaiming Witches in the San Francisco area.

In the late 1980s, T. M. Luhrmann followed Adler's lead by observing the Pagan population in England. Luhrmann set out to find out why educated, well-off individuals would be attracted to modern witchcraft. She developed the conclusion that participants believe in the efficacy of their rituals because of a combination of “shifts in perception,” “experiences they found moving,” and “intellectual strategies” which she entitled “interpretive drift” (Luhrmann 11-12). In other words, Contemporary Pagans changed their frame of reference from scientific reasoning to a participatory mode of rationalization described in detail below which served to make sense of magical rituals, as well as allowed the participants to believe in the efficacy of their magical acts.

In 1999, Ronald Hutton published *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*. Hutton, a historian from the University of Bristol, wanted to establish Contemporary Paganism in the history of religion. While Hutton achieved his goal, he also located Contemporary Pagans in modern society. Adler, Hutton and Starhawk's works were monumental, not only in assisting to legitimize and spread the religion around the world, but also in establishing Pagan studies as viable for researchers.

The first peer reviewed journal on Pagan studies, *Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies*, appeared in 1996 under the name *A New Journal of Neopagan Thought*. In 2001, Chas. S. Clifton became the editor and the journal became a fully peer-reviewed academic publication with the current subtitle. Since then, *The Pomegranate*

has covered a variety of topics from historic perspectives of indigenous religions to current day magic. At the University of Pennsylvania in 2006, the peer reviewed journal *Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft* pursued a similar agenda to bring pagan issues into the academic world.

Sarah Pike and Helen Berger studied extensively the participatory nature of Contemporary Pagans by attending Pagan festivals across America. In *Earthly Bodies, Magical Selves: Contemporary Pagans and the Search for Community*, Pike focused on the festivals as a way for Contemporary Pagans to create a self-identity. “Neopagans make an effort to create, for a week, reality as they think it should be, a world that heals body and soul and encourages interaction with nature” (Pike 23). Pike explored conflict through the multiple stages of the Contemporary Pagan festivals, the preparation, the execution, the rituals and the conclusion of the festival, because these are the areas in which she found people creating self-identities. While Berger also examined Contemporary Pagans' creation of self-identities in *A Community of Witches: Contemporary Neo-Paganism and Witchcraft in the United States*, she concentrated on adherents purposeful self-creation because “the Neo-Pagan community is based on a lifestyle choice” (Berger 8). Both Pike and Berger highlighted ritual in the process of creating a self-identity.

These academic researchers have forged the way in Pagan studies. However, the rich oppositional culture of Contemporary Pagans continued to mature as the religions expand allowing for more interpretive studies which can aid in understanding world-wide phenomena such as religious conflict.

Conflict of Religious Paradigms

Many theorists look at emerging religions through the lens of syncretism. While Contemporary Paganism also is an amalgamation of different religious ideas and cultural practices, most Contemporary Pagan traditions want to recreate religions from indigenous cultures before colonization by an Abrahamic religion. Examples are the Greco-Roman mystery religions of Ceres and Demeter or the Druidic religions of the Celtic people before the Anglo-Saxon invasion. While we have some information on these historic religions, the information is far from complete thus a syncretic analysis would be incomplete. However, the lack of information has not deterred adherents to the Contemporary Pagan traditions. Rather than examining Gardnerian Wicca through the syncretic lens, considering the work of anthropologists who have researched indigenous religions, particularly the indigenous religions which incorporate magical practices into their rituals, will bring into focus how Gardnerian Wiccans view the world.

Anthropology, in the search of historical origins, began studying what the “modern” world considered “primitive cultures.” Lucien Levy-Bruhl disagreed with the designation of primitive cultures and posited that the problem was in different views of the world rather than a lack of intelligence. Levy-Bruhl's *How Natives Think*, published in 1926, began with the *law of participation*, which examined indigenous pre-logical thinking “preoccupied above all with the mystic powers and properties of person and things, it conceives of their relations under the law of participation without troubling about contradictions which rational thought cannot possibly tolerate” (Levy-Bruhl 104).

Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, in 1990, expounded on Bruhl's *law of participation* in his book, *Magic, Science, Religion, and the Science of Rationality*. While Tambiah did

not address Contemporary Pagans, he did explore extensively the idea of “*participation* versus *causality*, [that] raises the issue of two coexistent mentalities or two coexistent modes of thought and action in mankind” (Tambiah 86). In religious thought, the split between the two reality arrangements originated with the nature of God. In a participatory organization, God is sacrificed to create nature, providing a direct connection and thus, humans participate with God on a daily basis. Deity infused into everything also allows people to form collective representations between disparate things such as a stone having healing abilities. Whereas in a causality framework the monotheistic God is responsible for creation thus is the ultimate cause of existence and thus, sets up direct relation of cause and effect representations such as a stone does not move so the stone is an inanimate object (Tambiah 6).

Susan Greenwood, in *The Nature of Magic: An Anthropology of Consciousness*, analyzed Levy-Bruhl, Turner and Tambiah's theories of collective representations as the concept of a “magical conscious,” a process which eliminates the distinction between the spiritual realm and the material realm (9; *The Anthology of Magic* 40). Greenwood “argue[d] that if nature religion is studied in terms of magical consciousness then holism, a central defining feature of indigenous knowledge, is not lost just expressed in a different cultural and physical context” (*The Nature of Magic* 4). Revisiting E.E. Evans-Pritchard's prodigious undertaking with the Azande, Greenwood in *Anthropology of Magic*, revealed how the “magical conscious” manifested in the Azande culture even if, Evans-Pritchard did not recognize the paradigm (98-106). In both treatises, Greenwood argued that a magical conscious is not just a part of a counter-culture but intrinsic to every human being. “Magical consciousness is based on analogical rather than logical

thought, and involves the association of ideas, symbols and meaningful coincidences” which can refer to religious experiences or normal day experiences such as losing oneself in a beautiful view (*The Nature of Magic* 89).

However, according to Ariel Glucklich in *The End of Magic*, the magical conscious is inhibited by social and cultural training. The Western emphasis of individuality precluded “the awareness of the interrelatedness of all things in the world by means of simple but refined sense perception” because the individual becomes a passive observer of the world who has its own commentary on the events rather than an active participant (Glucklich 12, 109). An active participant defined as, “the 'person' is an open and diffuse experience possessing no rigid boundaries that separate inside from outside and no single plot line” (Glucklich 106). Many cultures, such as in India, still have cultures in which people think of themselves as a community, rather than an individual, but Glucklich's explanation for interconnectedness encompassed more than other human beings. An openness of sensory perceptions allowed the individual to surpass itself, in order to connect and integrate with the wider world. Rather than evaluate the world one event at a time, a magical conscious allowed “the senses [to] involve humans -as well as animals- in a perceptual interaction with the world *with no privileged position for the observer*. ... The certainty we feel about being separate is a cultural artifact; it does not reflect the true physiological and functional relation between humans and their environment” (Glucklich 104). Glucklich pointed out that a magical conscious is not ritual. Ritual submerges individuals deeper into the sensory perception by use of symbolic actions leading to an embodied response which can be emotionally powerful or transformative (Glucklich 112-114).

Anthropologists from Levy-Bruhl until today examined magical cultures to find out not only how they function but also why they persist in the scientific age. Their answer lies in how magical cultures perceive the world and humanity's place in the world. Rather than a logical, causal perception to the world, magical cultures utilize a sensory perception which connects them to each other and the environment. Thus, humanity becomes only a part of the world, not the center of the world. Contemporary Pagans live, for the most part, in the Western world where logical, casual thinking is predominant. Therefore, Contemporary Pagans create a counter-culture which encourages a sensory perception of the world. In their counter-culture, rituals are designed to connect the individual with the whole of existence, as discussed below (*Witching Culture* 126).

Spiritual Quest and Conversions

Humanity's search for a spiritual path can take myriad paths, reflected in the number of religions around the world. Most people have their spirituality handed down to them as a family belief system. Sometimes though, an individual searches for a fundamentally different path. The process of a spiritual quest is highly individual, yet the individuals connected in a particular religion may find they all have similar motivations. My study examined the factors which compelled searchers to choose Gardnerian Wicca as a life course.

Normally, those who are questing for meaning in their life will convert to a religion which has a similar intellectual framework (Rambo 61). However, some questers make a complete lifestyle change when converting. The research shows these people are active agents of their own spiritual journey (Rambo 56).

John Lofland and Norman Skonovd, in 1981, proposed six conversion motifs: intellectual, mystical, experimental, affectional, revivalist and coercive. Both intellectual and experimental conversions, according to Lewis R. Rambo, are the most plausible today considering the religious freedom of the modern era because they require active searching for a new religious affiliation (Rambo 1993, 14-15). These motifs will be addressed during the discussion of my interviews in chapter four.

After writing *Understanding Religious Conversion* in 1993, Lewis R. Rambo has been the prominent researcher on conversion. Rambo posited that conversion is a process usually predicated on similar worldviews, in that the convert will change from one religion to another when both faith systems hold similar paradigms, if not the same faith systems (Rambo 1, 61). However, Rambo's definition of *tradition transition* highlights when conversion deviated from the normal pattern which is also the case for the majority of Contemporary Pagans. "*Tradition transition* refers to the movement of an individual or a group from one major religious tradition to another. Moving from one worldview, ritual system, symbolic universe, and life-style to another is a complex process that often takes place in a context of cross-cultural contact and conflict" (Rambo 14).

Crisis, whether emotional or intellectual, precipitated by conflict can create the context for individual *tradition transition* (Rambo 46). Rambo inventoried ten different catalysts for a crisis; including mystical experiences and pathology. The pathology category posits that the crisis was either a sense of deficiency or "a desire for fulfillment ... According to this orientation, some people are spiritual questers, always growing, learning, developing, maturing" (Rambo 52). The conversion process, while being intensely personal, was studied by sociologists and psychologists as a cultural

phenomenon especially after the cult scare of the 1970's. Lofland and Skonovd found common motifs between conversions then Rambo developed contexts for the conversion process.

Persistent Religious Retention

While Sabina Magliocco did not analyze conversions to Contemporary Paganism, she did conduct an in-depth study of the Contemporary Pagans on the east coast of the United States. Primarily her work focused on how Contemporary Pagans created a self-identity derived from a counter culture utilizing many techniques such as reaching into the past for myths and tales to formulate present rituals grounded in a self-created identity. "For Pagans, folklore becomes an important tool to discover the past and bring authenticity to contemporary spiritual practices" (*Witching Culture* 4). The primary focus of Magliocco's research developed into an analysis of Contemporary Pagan rituals.

In addition to rituals, *Witching Culture* delved into Pagan material culture and counter culture efforts in identity creation. Magliocco explained the idea of a counter culture by referring to Victor Turner's idea of anti-structure as Turner elucidated in his book, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (Turner 186). Turner constructed his theories on the work of Arnold van Gannep, a French ethnographer and folklorist who at the turn of the twentieth century wrote *Les rites de passage (The Rites of Passage)* in 1909. Van Gannep was interested in classifying human behavior, especially ritual behavior, into viable schemas. For *The Rites of Passage*, van Gannep examined "descriptions of the native Australians, the Tobas of India, the Masai of Africa, and numerous other tribes in America, Asia, and Africa" (van Gannep vi). Van Gannep saw a

pattern in the life-crises ceremonies across all the tribes thus; he postulated three distinct phases of transitional rituals: separation, transition, incorporation.

Summary

The background research placed Gardnerian Wicca into the history of religion especially as a NRM in the U.S. Besides Luhrmann, the majority of the research was conducted on Contemporary Pagans at festivals or individuals rather than coven specific. The lack of work on covens may reflect the secrecy policies of Wiccan covens as my study found in the research. However, research on the coven dynamics is necessary to answer the questions of why people would join and why they would stay.

The work done on the difference between magical conscious and logical conscious illuminated why converters felt displaced from the mainstream culture and/or the monotheistic religion of their family. Consideration of the paradigm conflict provided information to evaluate not only the hardships concerning conversion but also motivations to convert. Adding the counter paradigms to the information gathered on the conversion process allowed an analysis of how Gardnerian Wicca related to converters. While more research needed to be done on Gardnerian Wicca specifically, the conversion research elucidated converters' motivations which provide a backdrop for the reasons why people continue practicing. In other words, someone who feels displaced from mainstream religion because they possess a magical consciousness will begin an active journey searching for the right spiritual path. In the case of my study, the path conducted the converter to Gardnerian Wicca where the magical consciousness flourished inside the ritual.

III. CASE STUDY METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Religious conflict affects everyone, sometimes in a personal way and sometimes through outside forces. The study of Broward County's Gardnerian Wiccans provided an opportunity to examine how conflict between cultures can lead to a conversion process and ultimately to a growing population of a counter culture.

The qualitative research study described how a section of the Broward County Florida community came into conflict with the dominant religious culture. Interviews and observations were used to collect data on the conversion process of several individuals. The narrative data were transcribed, coded, and categorized into four themes related to the research questions.

The study of modern alternative religions, fairly new to the academic arena, provided some of the context for my study. However, my study relied on information from fieldwork, as well as from similar research conducted on varied indigenous religions. My fieldwork brought me into Wiccan Covens which convene in Broward County Florida, specifically Gardnerian Wiccan Covens which continued to maintain initiation records starting with Gerald Gardner. The main question that helped to reveal the successful nature of the Gardnerian Wiccan culture was; how did a secretive religious group form and thrive when the outside culture misconstrued and considered their religious beliefs offensive?

Settings and Participants

Due to the need for secrecy, Gardnerian Wiccans do not have a central meeting place.

The Unitarian Universalist Church of Ft. Lauderdale was where many people attempted to obtain information on the Contemporary Pagan path. However, specific information on the Gardnerian tradition can only be gained from Gardnerian Elders, who were hard to find since they do not use their own names in public settings. Thus, my research began in advertised groups, leading to individual interviews with influential Coven Priestesses and Priests. The following information emerged from interviews conducted in Broward County from 2013 to 2014, as well as participation in discussion groups and rituals during the same time period. In all, twenty-eight people, both men and women, contributed to my research project.

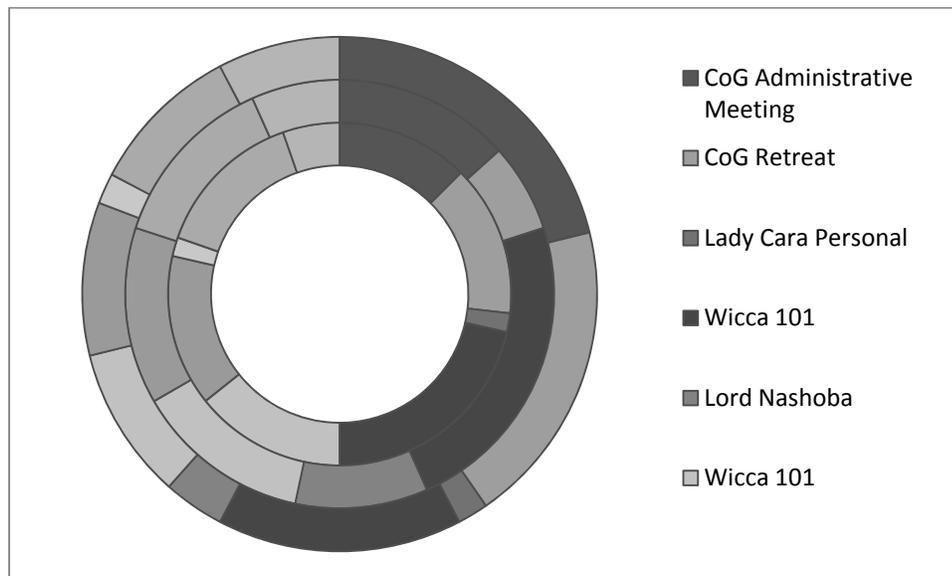


Fig. 1. Chart of Interviewees and Meetings Attended

My research began with Lord Nashoba, the High Priest of WolfMoonGrove Coven, recommended I interview Lady Bridget Sidhe-Lyric whom I reached through the Covenant of the Goddess website. Lady Bridget moved to Florida in the 1980s and was initiated shortly thereafter. Through the connective link of High Priestesses I was then referred to Lady Cara, who is the first known Wiccan High Priestess in Broward County and may be the most influential in establishing the Broward County Wiccan community.

The Pagan community has an online presence called Witchvox.com which lists participating individuals and groups. I easily found Lady Cara under the Florida listings. During the interview, Lady Cara invited me to her Wicca 101 forum held on Friday night. The majority of my information came from joining these fora and listening to the participants.

Lady Cara's Covens are considered conservative Gardnerian because they rigorously follow Gerald Gardner's instructions for their practice, such as strict secrecy and skyclad (nude) rituals. "Among Wiccan traditions, American Gardnerians are the most exclusive: they are lineage-based (that is, they trace descent from Gardner's Coven) and oath-bound (much of the liturgy and practice are considered secret, with penalties for those who reveal it to outsiders)" (*Witching Culture* 73). The lineage is matrilineal through the High Priestess of the Coven. In the United States, the lineage starts with Rosemary Buckland in the early 1960s. Lady Cara states she is sixth from Gardner and only initiated members can access the full lineage to establish legitimacy (Lady Cara). Through lineage papers, Gardnerians establish a sense of community, especially since High Priestesses are particular as to who attains a first level initiation because initiates are considered progeny because the High Priestess not only transmits ritual knowledge but

also, a portion of her power to each initiate thus, making every name on the lineage an innate part of the Gardnerian web of life.

Lady Cara was forthcoming in some areas, such as when she was initiated and when she moved to Florida. However, she refused to approach any “secret” information, even if the information could be found online. Forbidden information included names of people and/or covens, as well as anything mentioned in the Inner Court ritual.

I came across similar problems with my other interviews. Precursory information is readily accessible but personal information is off limits. When entering a room of Pagan adherents and/or seekers, they assume a respectful attitude toward others while at the same time reserving personal information for the sanctity of the Coven.

Covenant of the Goddess

In 2013, I contacted the Broward County Covenant of the Goddess (CoG) on Facebook. After emailing back and forth for a few months, I was allowed to attend an administrative meeting held in a personal residence. The local group is called the Everglade Moon Local Council (EMLC) and does not have a central meeting place because the host of the meeting rotates monthly. The meeting I attended was hosted by Lady Bridget Sidhe-Lyric, the High Priestess who agreed to be interviewed.

After the meeting, I sat with Lady Bridget and her husband for about a half hour. She told me how they had moved to Broward County in the 1984 and became initiated in 1990. Once she had her own Coven she held the rituals in the backyard but also rotated to other personal homes. A guided tour of the home allowed me closer access to the altars but did not deliver me any in-depth information. While the couple was warm and

welcoming, they were true to the Wiccan secrecy and did not reveal anything. In fact, they were more interested in me and the friends we had in common.

Subsequently, I was invited to attend the EMLC annual retreat. Unfortunately, I could only attend one day. However, I was fortunate to attend their feast and celebratory ritual. The festivities were held next to a tributary filled with crickets, frogs, birds and baby alligators. The ritual followed the Gardnerian Outer Court structure to preserve the secrecy. Patiently, I waited to address any in-depth questions with Lady Bridget during the personal interview. Several months later, Lady Bridget found time in her busy schedule to talk to me over Skype. The discourse covered the same material as before, how Lady Bridget moved to Florida and started her Coven, but also added a few new facts such as her ideas on ritual and her experiences with discrimination.

Wicca 101 Group

Later in 2013, I attended a Wiccan 101 group which met every Friday night at a local New Age store after hours. The leader of the group, Lady Cara, was a Gardnerian Wiccan High Priestess who was very influential in launching the Broward Wiccan community. While this group's attendance fluctuated, they did have a consistent twelve adherents. The majority of the attendants were seekers referred by friends or people at the Unitarian Universalist Church. The format of the class resembled more of an open forum on specific topics. The initial meeting was held on a warm August night and while the meeting would have been fine outside, they sectioned off part of the inside of a New Age store in Broward. The group was for all Wiccan traditions, yet everyone in attendance was Gardnerian. There was a mixture of Solitaries and Coven members, as well as children present.

For the initial meeting Lady Cara discussed the history of Wicca, starting with Gerald Gardner and continued through her personal history until the present day. The next meeting I attended was dedicated to ritual tools; the function of the tools and how to make them. During the last meeting I attended, I was able to ask any questions I wanted, however I was lightly admonished when I mentioned anything found in the Inner Court ritual even if the information was readily accessible on the Internet.

A personal interview with Lady Cara illuminated how the Wiccan community began in South Florida. When Lady Cara arrived in 1978 there was only one New Age store so she left a message on the board searching for like-minded people. She also advertised in *Circle Sanctuary Magazine*. Letters came to her through a P.O. Box looking for information and thus the Wiccan community in Broward was born. In the past thirty-five years Lady Cara has initiated sixty-eight Priestesses and Priests. When a Coven elevates members to the third level, the HPS expects the third level initiates to form their own Coven to continue teaching the Wiccan path. The process is called hiving. Lady Cara's initial Coven has hived off at least sixteen different Covens in the South Florida area including the Coven that initiated me.

Gardnerian Coven

In 1998, the WolfMoon Coven hived from one of Lady Cara's Covens, Mystic Moon Coven. WolfMoon would be considered a third generation Coven from Lady Cara. Lady Tara trained and initiated the High Priestess (Lady Pandora) and the High Priest (Lord Nashoba) and issued in their Coven in 2000 (WolfMoon website). The Coven resides in a personal residence where classes are taught and rituals performed. WolfMoon's primary mission is to provide complete and adequate education on the Gardnerian Wiccan path,

thus they are considered a teaching Coven. As a teaching Coven, their numbers fluctuate more than non-teaching Covens; however, more information can be gained from their Priests both from a practical stand point as well as an academic view because the High Priest, Lord Nashoba, has a PhD in Theology and is writing several books on the Wiccan religion.

Measurement Instruments and Procedures

Coded Newspaper Articles

While the participants provided enough information to construct the emic view of Gardnerian Wiccans, the study needed an instrument which would provide the etic view; how the outside culture (the dominant group) viewed Gardnerian Wiccans or New Religious Movements in general. During the literature review I collected newspaper articles from a newspaper database. My search parameters consisted of counting how many times Neo-Pagans, Pagans, Witches or Wiccans were referred to negatively and positively in major South Floridian newspapers from 1976 to present. I added court cases to the news articles because during the interview process I was referred to several court cases which dealt with the conflict between the dominant Judeo-Christian culture and the NRMs in South Florida. The information on the court cases was found through online sources which ended up containing newspaper articles not found in the initial search.

Personal Interviews

The data were collected through observations and interviews during which a consent form was signed by each participant granting me the right to use the information they provided to me. The observations were collected under natural, non-manipulative

settings. The personal interviews of High Priestesses and High Priests were done in informal settings, one on one, using the interview protocol (see Appendix A). I interviewed two High Priestesses and one High Priest for a total of six hours, as well as several follow-up emails for clarification. When signing their consent form, all three participants agreed to allow me to use their public names and I was told not to use their legal names.

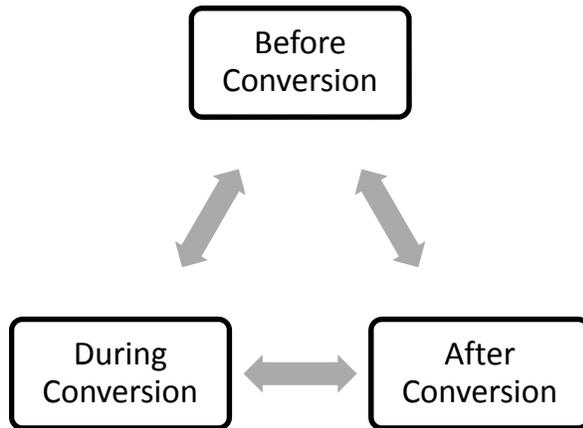
Group Observations

From the personal interviews I was invited to a variety of events where I could interview subsequent practitioners as well as questers. I was fortunate enough to attend a CoG administrative meeting as well as a CoG retreat ritual. Also, I was able to attend several of Lady Cara's Wicca 101 fora. In total, I conducted thirteen and a half hours of observation.

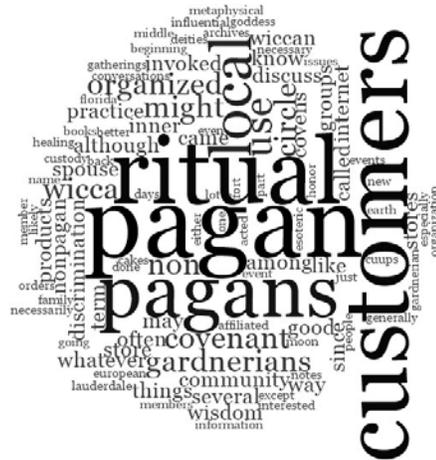
Data Analysis

My project utilized a grounded theory incorporating content analysis and analytic induction. According to Bertrand Russell, to answer the primary questions "... there are three steps to the grounded method: Coding the texts for themes; linking themes into theoretical models; and displaying and validating the models" (435). Thus, the answers are "grounded" in the data itself. Analysis of the data was then done by sorting the

material instruments, listed above, into the following categories:



The categories were then submitted to the In Vivo coding process (using the participants' words to code the material) which allowed for the data to be organized “into discrete parts, closely examining them, and comparing them for similarities and differences” (Saldana 100). After the first round of coding, I created concept maps to produce a meaningful structure to interpret the data.



Three major themes emerged from the data: a conflict of religious paradigms between the majority and minority cultures, a quest for personal fulfillment by converts,

and the reason converts continued to practice Gardnerian Wicca. While the newspaper articles confirmed the dominant culture misconstrued Contemporary Paganism with deviant behaviors, the information from the interviews stated a problem with the dominant culture. Interviewees who talked about problems with Christianity intertwined their comments with tales of their spiritual quests. Every interview or observation I attended included some aspect of the ritual. The Covenant of the Goddess planned their annual retreat, including a ritual, when I attended their meeting. Lady Cara went into aspects of the ritual in her Wicca 101 group. All the other High Priestesses and High Priests stated explicitly the ritual was the major reason for their continued practice either as creating a community or connecting them to the sacred realms. Thus, the three themes became the categories discussed in chapters one and two: conflict of religious paradigms, spiritual quests and conversion, and persistent religious retention.

Also present in the data were minor themes such as the acceptance of homosexuals, the use of New Age stores, utilizing occult practices, how to recognize correspondences (collective representations), the making of ritual tools and the consecration process. However interesting these themes were to me, I chose not to explore them because they were not prominent enough in the data.

IV. PATTERNS, THEORY AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

My results painted a picture of people searching for spiritual fulfillment. The first snapshot showed conflict between religious world views of people living in the same culture which caused many people to search for new spiritual avenues. From the outer conflict, the research depicted an inner conflict which caused a highly personal search for self-identity and self-empowerment. The final impression was of an exceptionally individualized religion that is part of a ritualistic counter culture accommodating either group devotion or individual reverence for an inherent sacredness of nature and humanity's place in the world. The element weaving all of the themes together was the Gardnerian Wiccan ritual.

Conflict of Religious Paradigms

In 1970 over half a million people resided in Broward County. By 2010 the population grew to over two million. While the population flourished, the ethnic formation of Broward County remained predominantly white Christians, aged 19 to 60. An analysis of religious affiliations revealed that in 1980 Catholicism was the dominant religion in the county, however only 35% of the population reported having any religious affiliation. By 1990, twice as many people reported being religious; of those reporting 18% were Catholic and 17% were Protestant (*Broward-by-the-Numbers*).

Nine people, out of the twenty-eight, shared their experiences with discrimination that resulted from their religious practices. Of the six meetings, only one meeting had

Christianity as a topic of discussion. In that meeting, several people expressed the opinion that Christianity was not only limiting for women but also denigrated people in general by creating an atmosphere of condemnation. The theological concept of sin was especially debilitating in that we were born in original sin and required salvation from God in order to be acceptable, whereas Wicca accepted all beings as good in and of themselves. Not only did mainstream religion condemn magical practices but scientific thinking also denied the efficacy of magic. The people who attended the Wicca 101 groups, who were mostly seekers, complained about feeling alienated or isolated until they found the group.

The people I interviewed, who had converted years ago, acknowledged a rift in the paradigm structures and would then point me in the direction of discriminatory acts committed in Broward County. While I do not have the room to go through the entire history of Broward County between 1978 and the present, two key indicators, the court cases outlined in chapter one, displayed the manner in which Florida dealt with alternative religions.

In the Wicca 101 group, Lady Cara stressed the need for tolerance for other people no matter what their gender, sexual orientation or belief system. Similarly, Lady Bridget told me in a follow-up email, “Other religions preach tolerance, but Wiccan actually practices it. When people who are Queer, or LGBT or whatever initials are hot right now, when they find Wicca they find a community who treats them as a valuable person, without judgment.”

The admonishment at the end of their ritual (to keep Wiccan secrets) carries over into daily life, thus most adherents do not discuss their religion with others. Many Wiccans actively hid their participation in Wiccan activities because of the prejudice other Wiccans have met in their extended families and their neighborhoods. The consequences of discovery could be tragic. For instance, one former metaphysical bookstore owner, in Broward County, told me:

There were conversations among pagan customers of custody discrimination in which a pagan would lose the custody rights to children to a nonpagan spouse, especially if the nonpagan spouse had remarried. This was often complicated by the tendency of pagans to live in alternative lifestyles which might accentuate the nonpagan spouse's concerns

The interviewed groups continued to keep the locations of their retreats and rituals secret from the public. The meeting places were revealed only after meeting a potential adherent in person several times to ensure the person was trustworthy.

Personal Quests and Conversions

The conversions of the people I interviewed correspond to Lofland and Skonovd's "intellectual conversion" motif. "In intellectual conversion, the person seeks knowledge about religious or spiritual issues via books, television, articles, lectures, and other media that do not involve significant social contact" (Rambo 14). Two of the interviewees converted because of their conflict with Catholicism and one interviewee converted because of a conflict with Judaism. Other interviewees, while not citing the specific impetus for the spiritual journey, talked of finding Wicca through books and the Internet. All of them said they experienced a feeling of "coming home" once they found Wicca.

During the Wicca 101 forum in which Christianity was one of the topics, the conversation ended with an emphasis on self-empowerment. Lady Cara told the group, “Since you are connected to everything you have a great deal of influence,” through the thoughts you have and the energy you emit into the universe. Thus, the theme of personalization which runs through the Wiccan ritual provided a sense of self-empowerment. Lady Cara’s instructions for ritual preparation stressed personalization in the tools, in the intent and in the experience beginning with the *Book of Shadows* which is a journey of the adherent’s magical experiences. I discuss the ritual in detail below and how the ritual assists in retention of adherents.

Religious Retention

According to Magliocco and my interviewees, adherents continued to practice Wiccan beliefs because of the self-identity created by the ritualistic system connecting them with the universe (*Witching Culture* 185). Other sociologists also recognized the role self-identity performed even in groups known for social activity. “Religious identification offers a distinctive “sacred” worldview and “eternal” group membership, unmatched by identification with other social groups. Thus, religiosity might be explained, at least partially, by the marked cognitive and emotional value that religious group membership provides” (Ysseldyk et al 60). If the retention of Contemporary Pagans is established by self-identity and self-empowerment, then retention can be found in an examination of the ritual process.

Description and Analysis of a Gardnerian Wiccan Ritual

According to many theorists, Contemporary Pagan rituals are the primary agent for cohesiveness in an otherwise individualistic and vacillating religious structure. Adherents meet fundamentally at Sabbats (Wiccan holidays) and Esbats (full moons) that are routinely observed with a ritual. Rituals blend the Wiccan community into a multi-faceted religious system. The central cohesion emerges from a shared liminal experience, a shared holistic paradigm and a shared value on participatory religion.

Vignette

At dusk, the frogs begin to sing louder as a cool breeze flows over the water. A bonfire, which had been stoked for hours, crackles into the coming night. Just south of the fire pit stands an altar with the Goddess statue on the right and the God on the left. The altar is a simple design but eloquent.

When she was ready, the High Priestess, hosting the retreat of the Covenant of the Goddess, calls to everyone. Her signal tells the participants to change into ritual clothes. Once everyone is ready they automatically line up to be purified by sage smoke before entering the circle. As the High Priestess moves the smoking sage around each participant, the mood changes from boisterous to constrained happiness.

The High Priestess grins widely as she greets each participant entering the circle. She waits patiently for each of us to take our place. Then she takes up a sword and chants around the circle to create a connection between our realm and the realms of the elementals and the Gods. We know once the circle is consecrated we cannot leave the

ritual space because crossing the circle will break the barrier. Once the barrier between the mundane and the ritual space has been established, the High Priest invites the elements to the ritual: air, fire, water and earth respectively. We know the connection to the sacred realms is complete when the sound of the frogs disappears and the temperature rises.

After the ritual space preparation, the High Priestess and the High Priest join together to invite the Gods to accompany us. We then release our suppressed joy in exuberant dance until we are breathless. Glowing with delight we fall to the ground and share refreshments until we feel the end of the ritual has come. The High Priestess and High Priest rise and repeat the opening process in the opposite order in order to disassemble the partition between here and there.

The ritual described above was held at the annual Everglade Moon Local Council retreat in St. Lucie, Florida. The Local Council is a division of the national organization Covenant of the Goddess, a group of Wiccan Coven representatives. The gathering consisted of High Priestesses and High Priests from different Wiccan Covens across South Florida, so the ritual framework utilized at the retreat was familiar to all. Not only did the ritual conform to Wiccan norms, but the format also, followed a typical ritual pattern: delineation of sacred and mundane, the liminal state which is the heart of the ritual, and the closing that brings the participants back to the mundane (*Witching Culture* 139). The three part design “provide[s] a container for ecstatic ritual practices, marking them as framed experiences during which participants feel free to suspend disbelief and become absorbed” (*Witching Culture* 141). The suspension of disbelief allows the

participant to experience a liminal state which is “neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (Turner 95). Each ritual is designed to take the participants out of the norms dictated by a dominant outer culture and connect them to a universal whole that combines the natural world with the supernatural world.

The connection between the natural and supernatural during rituals carries over into the mundane world as a shared holistic paradigm of life thus the oppositional elements found in the ritual also carry over into the mundane world. A reminder of the connection, as well as disconnection, returns in an act of reflexivity through the creativity utilized in ritual formulation (*Witching Culture* 203). The participants expect the ritual to remind them of the interconnectedness of existence because “they tend to view humanity’s ‘advancement’ and separation from nature as the prime source of alienation. They see *ritual* as a tool to end that alienation” (Adler 1). According to Religious Studies scholar Michael York,

paganism eschews any true hierarchy between the temporal and permanent, between the physical and spiritual, or between this-world and the otherworld. In paganism, all realms of being and possibly nonbeing partake in a dynamic partnership or colloquium of potential equals (York 162).

The Pagan holistic view originated in a cosmology, which was created and animated by a Divine life source, such as the Babylonian Mother Goddess Tiamat or the Viking giant Ymir (Tambiah 7). The idea of a Divine source animating all life forms creates the foundation for “nature based” religions.

The reciprocal structure of Wicca inherently creates an intertwining of macrocosm and microcosm into a participatory system that manifests in a symbiotic

union of a holistic paradigm and individualistic belief system. The idea of the holistic paradigm grew out of the study of so-called primitive cultures. Lévy-Bruhl, after studying the work of his predecessors, posited another explanation for the indigenous perspective. “Participation ... signified the association between persons and things in primitive thought to the point of *identity* and *consubstantiality*. What Western thought would think to be logically distinct aspects of reality, the primitive may fuse into one mystic unity” (Tambiah 86). Since then, other theorists have called this perspective a “magical world view” (*Witching Culture* 126; Adler 22; Albanese 511). Ritual is a way to immerse oneself in the magical world view because of the physical, mental and spiritual energy needed for Wiccan observances. “Ritual is hard work. Because it is participatory, it requires each participant's undivided attention” (*Witching Culture* 139).

Converts to Gardnerian Wiccan find the magical world view as a piece of their self-fulfillment, as well as oppositional to the religious cultures they are used to living (Wicca 101). Thus, the participatory paradigm performs a threefold function in the lives of Gardnerians; the ritual attracts converts then allows the converts to cope with the dominant Judeo-Christian culture by infusing oppositional functions into their lives and in the end the self-transcendent experience found in ritual and carried over into the mundane world retains adherents. In order to illuminate how the ritual provides the functions listed above, I have examined each part of a typical Gardnerian ritual below.

The following ritual is from participant-observer notes of a Wolf Moon Coven open court ritual held during the Sabbat of Imbolc which is held in February. Since the Wolf Moon Coven is a teaching Coven, they hold open rituals established by Gardnerian Wicca for each of the Sabbats. Public is allowed to participate in the open rituals, as well

as attend weekly classes without the intent of being initiated. However, I am the last initiated member of the Coven because the High Priest is no longer initiating people.

Sabbats and Esbats

Annually, Gardnerian Wiccans celebrate four Greater Sabbats and four Lower Sabbats. The Greater Sabbats follow the agrarian Gaelic festivals: Imbolc, Beltane, Lughnasadh and Samhain. While the Lower Sabbats are held on the equinoxes and the solstices: Ostara, Litha, Mabon and Yule. Samhain, or Halloween, is the beginning of the Wiccan year and by far the most notorious celebration of Contemporary Paganism.

Also synonymous with Wiccans is the full moon. The full moon ritual, held thirteen times a year, is called an Esbat. The most notable portion of the ritual is a section entitled “Drawing Down the Moon” because a Priestess brings the Goddess into herself (Adler 170). For some Priestesses, the Goddess talks through her, but others need to read a script. Adler elucidates her experience of the ritual as, “I have seen a young woman, with little education or verbal expertise, come forth with inspired words of poetry during a state of deep trance. I have heard messages of wisdom and intuition from the mouths of those who, in their ordinary lives, often seem superficial and without insight” (Adler 171). Other than an attempt at possession, the Esbat follows a similar framing format as the Sabbats.

To analyze the Gardnerian ritual we will follow Turner, who in 1967 developed a tripartite form of rituals which focused on transitional (rite of passage) rituals:

The first phase of separation comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or a set of

cultural conditions (a “state”); during the liminal period, the state of the ritual subject (the “passenger”) is ambiguous; he passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state; in the third stage the passage is consummated (Turner 94).

Turner's analysis pertains to rites of passage; however the trinary structure applies to other rituals as well. Even though Gardnerian rituals are designed to create a spontaneous *communitas*, the framing of the ritual is planned well in advance. The following analysis utilizes a Gardnerian Wiccan Coven's teaching ritual, called an Outer Court ritual (see Appendix B), because the learning ritual provides the structure, either implicit or explicit, which can be found in Sabbat, Esbats, celebratory rituals and rites of passage. The analysis will begin with the creation of the altar items and the altar construction before addressing the tripartite sections of the ritual.

Phase of Separation

The Gardnerian ritual brings the participants gradually from the structured state to the unstructured. The separation phase begins with a physical alteration for the individual. Each participant changes into ritual outfits which do not resemble the clothing worn in the outside societal structure. The robes and dresses are in an archaic style worn in England's middle ages. If the participant is working toward initiation then the ritual outfit will be in the Coven's color and made by hand. Once the HPS calls for the beginning of the ritual, the participants line up with second level initiates first, then first level initiates, then guests with the HP at the end of the line.

When the line is ready, two things happen at the same time: smudging and besom cleansing. Smudging is the process of cleansing an individual's spirit of negativity and is

also the spiritual separation from the mundane world. As each person reaches the front of the line, they hold their arms out and clear their mind. An appointed person takes burning sage and runs the smoke over the held out arms, then up and down the body. Once the front is done, the person turns around and the process is repeated on the backside. After all the participants are smudged, the line moves sedately down a rock path.

A proper analysis of the ritual, from both the emic and the academic perspective, pursues the energy flows. Smudging, a physical act representing the separation of the participants from the mundane world, allows the participants to prepare themselves for the ritual. The mental process of shedding stress and negative energy releases the participant from the constraints of the modern world. Walking down the path brings the participant “from an earlier fixed point in the social structure” to the area chosen for liminality which the HPS prepared during the besom cleansing (Turner 94).

The HPS, who is already in the circle, conducts the besom cleansing. A besom is a consecrated broom, in this case the besom belongs to the Coven. Starting in the east, she sweeps the broom clockwise around the circle three times, in order to sweep out any negative energy, while chanting. Her chant for this ritual is as follows:

*Besom, besom, Wiccan's broom
sweep out darkness sweep out doom
rid ye lady's hallowed ground of any negative thoughts around.
Sweep ye circle , sweep it well, sweep it deosil sweep out ill.
Make the round of the ground where we do our lady's will.
She finishes off with, Blessed Be. The besom is placed, bristles up,
in the east or south
(WolfMoonGrove 4).*

Once the participants are in the circle, they are instructed by the HPS to, “fac[e] into the circle or deosil and stretch out your arms at your side and face your right palm down and your left palm up and chant 3 times with a deep breath in between: I am one with the universal life energy. It is flowing through my body now, I can feel it, [while] visualiz[ing] channeling the energy to the altar” (WolfMoonGrove 5). The dynamism of the altar gives the HPS a focal point for the Coven's energetic power.

After the altar is charged with the Coven's energy, the HPS and the HP prepare the altar to be a central focal point for the energy accumulated in the beginning of the ritual. Symbolically the altar is “opened” when the HPS opens the *Book of Shadows*, rings the bell and lights the candles (see Appendix B). Opening the book signifies the acceptance of the HPS and the HP of their role in the ritual, as well as the readiness to welcome the Divine energy of the Goddess and the God. Ringing the bell is the process of alerting the Divinities while the candles illuminate where their energy is needed. When the altar is primed for the Divine energy to be joined to the Coven energy, the whole Coven turns to the north with their athames held in the right hand pointed toward the sky. Together, the participants recite the Coven Invocation then turn toward the altar with their athames pointing at the altar and invite the Gods to attend the ritual.

The participants have now completely separated from the mundane world. The mundane world is the structured society which people are “expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards binding on incumbents of social position in a system of such positions” (Turner 95). The separation from a structured society is necessary for individuals to accept an unstructured state. In other words, the person going through the rite of passage is changing their mental arrangements

in order to become or accept a new role in society. Turner's ritual structure still applies to the normal Gardnerian ritual, as well as their initiations, in that the participants detach from an individual structured state to form a spontaneous *communitas* in the liminal period.

Liminal Period

The most powerful symbols are reserved for the liminal period when the participants have connected with a self-transcendent power which combines them together. For Contemporary Pagans the pentagram, used to open and close the pathways to the Elemental realms, is a symbol of protection. However, the pentagram to a dominant Judeo-Christian culture signifies magical workings done with the power of the devil. Thus, the pentagram also represents an oppositional attitude.

After the altar is open and an energy vortex is created, the HPS and the HP begin to bring in the energy from other spiritual beings, called Elementals, to blend with the energy drawn from the participants and the energy given by the Goddess and the God. “The HPS takes her athame and walks deosil to each quarter, starting in the East, she holds up her athame towards the quarter and draws the corresponding invoking pentagram and chants” (*WolfMoonGrove* 7).

Each of the Elementals has correspondences and intellectual attributions which are invoked when the Elementals are called upon. Yellow/air delineates intellectual capability “allowing logical reasoning and thought, as well as the ability to communicate. Red/fire is the Element of energy, raw and uncontained, with potential for creation and destruction. ... by destroying the old self and creating a new one within the fire of the

forge. Blue/water represents our emotional state but also water is often used to mark the boundaries between the different realms, as they mark psychological crossing points. Green/earth, on the material level of reality, gives us our experiences of solid matter, form, and substance. ... It is therefore the element that governs manifestation (Farrar 187).”

Symbols to Open and Close the Elemental Quarters

Invoking pentagrams...

To draw an invoking pentagram visualize light of the appropriate color flowing from your tool. Start at the point opposite the element and follow the arrow, continue until you have completed the pentagram and arrived back at your starting point.



AIR



FIRE



WATER



EARTH

Banishing pentagrams...

To draw a banishing pentagram, start at the point of the element, visualize light of the appropriate color flowing back into your tool and follow the arrow.



AIR



FIRE



WATER



EARTH

Fig. 4. “Invoking and Banishing Pentagrams.” Source: WolfMoonGrove

The HPS starts in the east and walks clockwise around the circle, stopping at each cardinal direction to repeat the chant above. After the Elementals are invited, the HP then follows in the HPS footsteps and lights the candles previously placed at the cardinal directions, in order to gain the Elementals' attention. At this point, the HPS gathers the combined energy to create the circle with either a sword or her athame. Starting in the east, the HPS again walks clockwise around the circle while mentally drawing a sphere to encompass the whole of the ritual area, as well as connect the area to the realms of the Elementals, as well as the realm of the Divine.

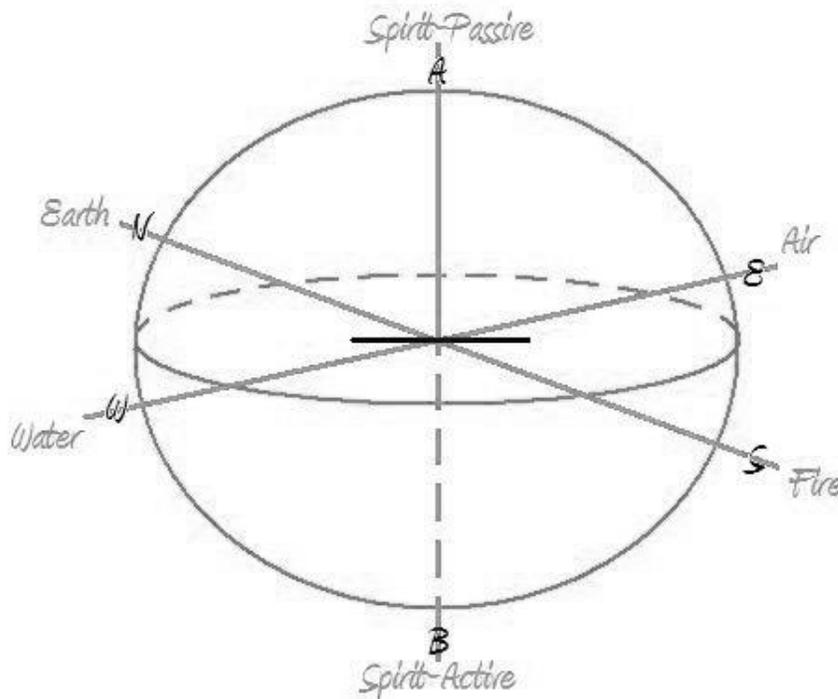


Fig. 5. "The Circle as a 3-dimensional Entity." Source: *Wiccan Community*.

The circle not only provides a barrier from the outside world, it also contains the cone of power the HPS produces with the energy. "Witches raise 'the cone of power,' or

consolidate the combined energies of the participants in a cone that rises from their bodies ... In Gardnerian Witchcraft, the transformation culminates in a symbolic Great Rite, the union of female and male principles in nature symbolized by the priestess plunging her athame in the cup held by the priest” (*Witching Culture*, 141). Depending on the purpose of the ritual, the participants engage in a myriad of activities such as singing, dancing or magical works.

The liminal period in the Gardnerian Wiccan ritual requires binding the participants together, in order to combine their energy into a group, beginning with the participants channeling their energy into the altar. Symbolically, the HPS and the HP manage the combined energy to “open” the altar, thus creating the central vortex of the circle, an energy vortex that will connect the circle to the other realms. The altar becomes the symbol of connection between the participants, as well as, between this world and the divine realms. When the connection is made, the participants invite the Goddess and God to the ritual. Officially the group enters the liminality state once the realms are connected and the Gods are present.

Once the liminality stage is set, the group becomes, in Turner's definition, a spontaneous *communitas* which “appears to be very frequently associated with mystical power and to be regarded as a charism or grace sent by the deities or ancestors” (Turner, 139-140). Turner's definition applies to “preindustrial and early industrial societies with multiplex social relations” (Turner, 139). Since Contemporary Paganism seeks to recreate preindustrial religions, spontaneous *communitas* created by the group's energy becomes the main goal for the ritual.

Unification

The separation from the liminal stage in the Gardnerian ritual is as gradual as the separation from the structured state participants experience before the ritual. During the magical portion of the liminal stage, which may or may not include a variety of ecstatic practices, the group expends the energy produced during the beginning of the ritual. Yet, some of the charged energy remains in the circle and in the group. The process for purging the energy is called grounding. Grounding begins to center the person and bring the individual back to the structured state.

When the magical portion of the ritual concludes, the HPS and HP consecrate the food and drink designated for the ritual offering of gratitude for the Divine assistance from the Gods. The quintessence of the consecration process is the Great Rite. The Great Rite is, in the Outer Court, a reenactment of the Goddess and God coalescing in a sexual act culminating when the HPS immerses her athame into the HP's chalice. Afterward, the group consumes the food and drink while engaging in conversation about the celebration. The food starts the grounding process and the conversation begins to unravel the group into individuals.

Once the group is ready, the HPS and the HP begin the extrication of the physical realm from the Elemental and Divine realms. The HP disengages the connections by replicating the opening process except everything is done widdershins, counterclockwise by utilizing the banishing pentagrams, shown above, when he thanks the Elementals for their presence. The HPS must then dismantle her circle either by taking the residual

energy into herself or dispersing the energy into the earth. Once the circle is down, the HPS closes the *Book of Shadows*, snuffs the candles and rings the bell in the opposite order of the opening. Then she calls on the participants to keep the Gardnerian Wiccan secrets, none of which are revealed in an Open Court ritual and thus none have been revealed here.

Typically, after the conclusion of the ritual, the participants hold a feast. The feast grounds the individuals and brings them further into the physical realm where structured society resides. While the ritual closing begins the consummation process, the feast engenders the participants to regain the state of structure lost in the liminal stage.

Examining the ritual through the lens of Turner's tripartite system helped to comprehend how the ritual created a self-identity for the participants. Contemporary Pagan retention resided in the ritual process which enabled the participant to become empowered, an active agent in their own spiritual development. The ritual also connected the participant to a self-transcendent quality found in the liminal period which everyday life lacks.

Summary Conclusions

Turner's analysis of rituals pertained to initiations or rites of passage as did van Gannep's analysis before Turner. However, the analysis relates to the Gardnerian Ritual because the liminal period, the point at which the group's energy ties the participants into a *communitas*, connects the people to the sacred realms. The connection carries through the ritual back to the mundane world, thus, changing the participants into part of the

sacredness of the universe every time they perform the ritual. The ritual then becomes the epitome of the conflict of paradigms.

Seekers tend to confuse their magical consciousness with the actual act of magic which is performed in the ritual, therefore; the ritual tends to attract potential converts even though they do not understand the full import of the ritual until after they have been through a full Sabbat or Esbat. After immersing themselves into the ritual, converts continue to practice in order to be a part of the sacred community.

Self-empowerment seemed to be more important to the people I talked to than the discriminating views of the dominant culture. The ability to choose how to connect with the divine seemed to be worth the necessary secrecy and/or risk. In some instances, the secrecy seemed to add to the mysterious nature of practicing Gardnerian Wicca which was the element which attracted some of my interviewees.

Once attracted I found, as Magliocco did before me, that the ritual was the reason adherents continued practicing. Both Lady Cara and Lady Bridget expressed a feeling of kinship with the members of their covens growing out of years of ritual practice. The ritual provided for most people a safe haven where an individual could walk out of mundane life to find a connection not only with divinity but with the universe as well. Once the ritual connected adherents with the universe, the connection became strong enough to continue bringing adherents back to the circle, year after year.

In many ways, my study findings mirrored those of preceding researchers. For instance, both Magliocco and Pike were able to identify the prejudice of the dominant culture as equating minority practices with Devil worship (Magliocco 187; Pike 104). Their conclusions, however, stated that the prejudicial behavior led to identity formation

of the counterculture. My findings found that adherents based their self-identity on a magical connection with the universe, whereas the prejudicial attitude only predicated the need for secrecy. Only further research could account for the discrepancy between the conclusions.

However, both ways of creating a self-identity reveal the true rationale for a new religious movement. Adherents of a New Religious Movement are redefining humanity's place in the world. The religious minority view themselves not as an agent of one deity but rather an intricate part of all of existence. The redefining process may be a product of an ever growing emphasis on individualization in a secular world but expresses as a new religion formatted on the idea of old religions. In that case, religious conflict is not only a difference in paradigm structures but also a reflection of the hardships of human change. Change, in this form religious conversion, becomes inevitable as the world becomes a more global society in need of drastic reformations in order to survive. If religious conversion to an alternative cosmology is the beginning of these drastic reforms then the impetus felt by converts will facilitate a continued affiliation with Contemporary Paganism.

The majority of New Religious Movements are counter-culture groups which reflect the necessary reforms needed in the dominant culture, at least in the view of the adherents. Examining the type of participants in my study can illuminate some of the problems found in the dominant culture. For instance, the majority of the men in my study were homosexuals who had found an accepting community in the Gardnerian Wiccan community in Broward County.

Similarly, the majority of the people I encountered were women. During the rigorous training for first level initiation, the emphasis is on establishing a firm sense of self which many women are unable to explore in other settings. In Gardnerian Wicca women are not only able to assume leadership roles, unlike many mainstream religions, but are expected to perform the lead role in covens.

Absent from my study were children and teenagers. While children did attend the Wicca 101 groups along with their parents, they did not participate in any of the discussions. However, there were no teenagers in the groups I observed. The reason for their absence was not readily apparent. Further research would need to be done in order to determine if the scarcity of teenagers was due to lack of interest or exclusionary practices of Gardnerian Wiccans in order to avoid unwanted conflicts with parents.

Limitations

When I started my research I knew I would need to be aware of my insider perspective, however I thought my insider status would allow me access an outsider cannot have in the Gardnerian Wiccan culture. As my research progressed, I was told that my High Priestess had been removed from the Gardnerian lineage and thus, technically I was not a Gardnerian Wiccan. While Lady Cara was gracious enough to allow me access to some of her Elders as well as her Wicca 101 group, due to my status I was not able to discuss any Gardnerian secrets. While I do not believe the lack of secret material affected my results, the additional material would have made the study more fertile.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the results of the study, there are several recommendations for future research.

In order to eliminate my first limitation, a researcher could either join a Gardnerian coven, which appears on the lineage, or study a more open NRM. To improve or verify the results in this study, researching similar religious counter-cultures could be observed.

Also, future studies could devise an instrument to evaluate the dominant religious culture of the proposed area in order to obtain a more accurate assessment of the level of discrimination. Also, the researcher could create a questionnaire specifically regarding the conversion process.

A step further from my case study could take a researcher into the arena of finding a way to not only open a dialogue between both sides but also develop a way to bridge the gap between them.

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Appendix A

Potential Interview Questions:

- 1) When did you become Wiccan?
- 2) Did you join a Coven? If so, which one?
- 3) Who ran the Coven at that time?
- 4) Was the Coven skyclad?
- 5) If so, how did you feel about the rituals?
- 6) If your rituals are no longer skyclad, why not?
- 7) Why is the Great Rite an intricate part of the Wiccan ritual?
- 8) Is there anyone you refer me to in order to get more information?

Emailed Questions

- 1) In what year were you initiated? And what year did you move to Florida?
- 2) How many people have you initiated in Florida?
- 3) Can you tell me the main importance of ritual?
- 4) What is the purpose of the Wiccan existence?
- 5) Have you experienced any incidents of discrimination and if so, how did you handle it?
- 6) Are the number of Wiccans, in South Florida, growing or declining? Why?
- 7) What do you think I need to know for my thesis?
- 8) Did you sign the consent form (attached)?