

THESIS

DIVINELY MASCULINE: NEOPAGANISM AND GENDER IDENTITY IN
CONTEMPORARY AMERICA

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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY JESSICA ENBERG ENTITLED DIVINELY MASCULINE: NEOPAGANISM AND GENDER IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICA BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTERS OF ARTS.

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

DIVINELY MASCULINE: NEOPAGANISM AND GENDER IDENTITY IN
CONTEMPORARY AMERICA

This research is focused on how men use religion to define their gender identity. Specifically, this paper looks at the religion Neopaganism. Out of the 1960s and 1970s Counter Cultural and New Religious Movements rose Neopaganism, an earth-based religion in which the Goddess(es) and the God(s) are venerated, nature's yearly cycle of seasons are celebrated, and magic is practiced. This paper will discuss how the Feminist and Men's Movement that arose from the 1960s and 1970s affected gender roles in the U.S. and prompted the study of U.S. Masculinities.

From these studies it was determined that men's gendered identities could no longer be understood in terms of a singular masculinity, but as several masculinities. These masculinities are placed into two categories: the hegemonic masculinity, or the ascendant and dominant masculinity in the U.S. culture, and subordinate masculinities, which are those that differ from the hegemonic masculinity in terms of ethnicity, sexuality, religion, class position and marital status. The focus of this paper is how men in Neopaganism use religion to define their subordinate masculinities.

The research group for this study consisted of five men and four women, with the main focus on the male informants. The ethnographic methodologies included observation, participation, and 36 in-depth, open-ended interviews. The main findings include the following: the male informants have what they consider to be strong feminine sides; while the male informants acknowledged there is a U.S. male stereotype they do not believe in a strict gender role for men and women; all the male informants were looking for balance of masculine and feminine in their lives; the balance they sought had more meaning for them when found through religion because it offered divine justification for how they perceived themselves as men; and the Neopagan environment in which they participate offers both a safe haven for them to express their true gender identity without fear, retribution, ridicule or judgment.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“P.A.G.A.N. – People Against Goodness And Normalcy”

Until recently, the above quote from the 1987 movie *Dragnet* has represented a common misperception of Neopaganism in the United States. Jokes regarding virgin and animal sacrifices, and even devil worship, are commonly applied to Neopagans. Once Neopaganism began to grow in popularity as a more commonplace religion in the United States, and once more studies and books clarified what it meant to be Neopagan, the derogatory comments became less frequent. It became more generally understood that this religion was focused on venerating the earth, celebrating feminine and masculine polarities of being, and promoting balance between the individual and nature.

At the most basic level, Neopaganism represents several spiritual practices that each view human experience and the earth as magic and sacred (Berger 2005; Adler 1979; York 2003). Neopaganism is a collection of religious beliefs that includes, but is not limited to, Wicca, Asatru, Druidism, Celtic traditions, and Eastern philosophy (Greenwood 2000, Adler 1979; Gillette and Stead 2002; Melton 1998; Harvey 1997). Though participants often worship together, Neopaganism is a very individualistic religion. There is no specific dogma and, as a result, how and what individuals worship is their choice.

Within the Neopagan literature and scholarship, there has been a focus on gendered identities, primarily on how women have used this religion to redefine their personal roles, their social responsibilities, and their identities. The focal point of this thesis, however, is not female, but male identity. Though women are the primary participants in Neopagan religions in the United States¹, men also participate in this religion whose dogma is female-centered. It is the intention of this thesis to discover why men join a female-centered religion and what role it plays in their lives and their definitions of themselves as men.

Recently, men's studies have grown as a branch of gender studies. The study of gender came to the forefront in the 1960s and 1970s, influenced by the Counter Cultural and New Religious Movements of the time. With the rise of Feminism, women's roles changed in the United States, which consequently impacted men's roles as well. That is, the Feminist Movement not only changed what it meant to be a woman in the United States, but also what it meant to be a man.

The fact that both men's and women's roles were changing prompted research into U.S. masculinities. With the study of U.S. masculinities, researchers are just now beginning to clarify what it means to be a man in the United States. Scholars are moving away from a few simplistic definitions of masculinity to understandings both more various and complex. These definitions begin with the distinction between what are referred to as "hegemonic" and "subordinate" masculinities. *Hegemonic* masculinity is understood to be the dominant culturally and historically conditioned form of masculinity found in a society, a stereotype that is open to change and challenge (Hearn and Morgan

¹ According to a study conducted by Helen Berger, 65 to 66% of participants in Neopaganism are women. This is due primarily to appeal of the Goddess and the feminine as divine (Berger 2005:28).

1990). *Subordinate* masculinities, on the other hand, vary according to ethnicity, sexuality, religion, social class, and marital status (Hearn and Morgan 1990).

Subordinate masculinities, and especially their relationship to religion in the U.S., are the focus of this study. As framed in this thesis, Neopaganism captures important dimensions of U.S. society, which can be read to clarify how men define themselves both spiritually and also as men.

As mentioned previously, earlier studies of Neopaganism have focused on women. Studies of men and Neopaganism are the exception rather than the norm. These studies (Berger 2005; Barner-Barry 2005; Pike 2004; Greenwood 2000; Adler 1979; Schwable 1996) suggest that men joined these female-oriented religions in order to find balance between their masculine and feminine sides. They further argue Neopagan men use this religion to protest against U.S. patriarchal society: Neopaganism offers men a positive male deity in the form of the Horned God that is the equal, not the superior, of the Goddess, allowing men to spiritually frame their understandings of more right and just gender relations in general.

This research affirms some of these findings. The informants represented in this anthropological study, for example, seek balance between their masculine and feminine sides though many of them do not necessarily see this balance as necessarily found in two separate genders. Instead, they look to balance masculine and feminine energies in their own lives.

By contrast, the informants in this study, while passionate about transforming gender in their own lives, are not interested in using their spirituality to condemn or even protest mainstream U.S. social norms. These men do not consider themselves to conform

to stereotypical patterns of gendered social interactions; they do not agree with, or even like the roles normally prescribed to men. Nevertheless, they are more interested in using Neopaganism to better themselves personally, finding the aforementioned balance in their daily thought and practice, rather than to protest politically. Instead of trying to actively change U.S. gender stereotypes, they remain focused on more personal, and more individualized, searches for divinity.

This individualized, personal search is what led the informants featured in this thesis to Neopaganism. Neopaganism offers the male participants in this study a way to define what it means to be a man, providing divine justification for their gender path. Based on these observations, and breaking with previous research, it is suggested in this thesis that Neopaganism offers men a personal and spiritual, rather than political, path. That is, Neopagan men are content to use the thought and practices of Neopaganism to reform their own gendered lives. They are not generally interested in struggling publicly with others in a kind of symbolic arena for control over the definitions, and associated resources, of what it means to be a man.

The Neopagan group featured in this thesis consisted of five men and four women. The subjects of this study came largely from a local chapter of the Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans (CUUPS), though two individual male practitioners considered themselves to be solitary Neopagans. The ethnographic tools used in this research were participant-observation, complemented by in-depth interviews (four per participant). I observed and participated in bi-monthly Neopagan group meetings over nine months and took part in two rituals, Samhain and an impromptu ritual after the

September 11, 2001 tragedy. The meetings and the rituals took place at the local Unitarian Church.

Due to the private and individual nature of Neopagan practice, and also the inconsistency of attendance at the bi-monthly meetings, the one-on-one interviews became the most important source of cultural information. The more individualized interactions with informants allowed them to freely answer questions about their religion and the role it played in defining their identity. The interviews were held in several locations throughout Fort Collins, CO. The meeting places were designated by the informants and were generally at places they felt most comfortable, such as local coffee shops and homes, or locations easily accessible from work or school, such as a local sandwich shop and the Anthropology graduate student office located on the campus of Colorado State University.

It is the intention of the thesis to not only describe how the study of masculinities arose in the United States and what role Neopaganism plays in that definition, but to also demonstrate through the male informants what role religion plays in their lives as men. This thesis cannot hope to define in general terms what it means to be male in Neopaganism. To a large extent, its conclusions are limited to how these five men define masculinity for themselves. Nevertheless, it is hoped this study, combined with others, will contribute to a more general framework of understanding for how Neopaganism contributes to men's gendered understandings of themselves.

CHAPTER TWO
NEOPAGANIM, WICCA AND ASATRU:
AN OVERVIEW OF INFORMANTS' RELIGIOUS PARADIGMS

One of the defining characteristics of Neopaganism is its eclecticism. Instead of being defined by one religious paradigm, Neopaganism is a collection of religious beliefs. These beliefs include Wicca, Asatru, Druidism, Celtic traditions, and Eastern philosophies (Greenwood 2000; Adler 1979; Gillette and Stead 2002; Melton 1998; Harvey 1997). Neopaganism has been understood as “an umbrella term for spiritual practices that share a view of the world as enchanted and the earth is sacred” (Berger 2005:29). And members of Neopaganism themselves define their religion as “an earth-based religion, in which the Goddess or Goddesses and the God force or Gods are venerated, nature’s yearly cycle of seasons are celebrated and magic is practiced” (Berger 2005:28).

Neopaganism made its appearance in the United States during the Counter Cultural Movements of the 1960s and 1970s. It seemed to appeal to environmentalists and women who were inspired by the Feminist movement and were looking for female-focused divinities (Berger 2005). It was the Counter Cultural Movement combined with American individualism, the latter of which will be discussed in Chapter Three, that helped to transform Neopaganism by “emphasizing its environmental aspects, feminist perspective, and focused on individual innovation and experience” (Berger 2005:37).

The eclectic make-up of Neopagan religion is a result of the highly individualized nature of its religious construction. Neopaganism differs from many Christian religions defined by orthodox religious dogmas. By contrast, there is little orthodoxy or central leadership across the various Neopagan sects found in the United Statesp. This allows for tremendous individual innovation in the religious realm, which results in highly personalized religious practices under the umbrella of “Neopaganism” (Berger 2005; Adler 1979; Barner-Barry 2005). It is common practice for individuals to combine religious ideals from Neopaganism, and indeed from a multitude of other spiritual realms, to develop their own unique belief system.

Nevertheless, there are several common factors found among Neopagan practitioners. For example, Neopagans believe the earth to be sacred. The sacredness of the earth “means that everything that is part of the earth both living and nonliving – is sacred. Sacredness characterizes all humans, all other animals, all plants and all earth components usually thought of as nonliving” (Barner-Barry 2005:33). Neopagans also frame their divinities as both feminine and masculine. The so-called “Goddess” represents the feminine, while the “God” is equated with the masculine. The Goddess is often venerated in her three aspects, maiden, mother and crone, the God in the form of the Great Horned One (Barner-Barry 2005; Berger 2005). Though the Goddess is central to this religion, Neopaganism is by no means a monotheistic religion. Neopagans often worship more than one Goddess and/or God. Most Neopagans “work with a number of sacred, spiritual beings, including a corresponding God or any one of a variety of more specific ancient pagan gods and goddesses derived from a host of traditions” (Barner-Barry 2005:32).

Ritual practice is also an important aspect of Neopaganism, both in individual and group ritual settings. It is through ritual that Neopagans celebrate the natural forces of the earth, the cycle of life and death, and the power and vitality of the Goddess(es) and God(s) (Berger 2005; Adler 1979; Berger, Leach and Shaffer 2003). The yearly cycle is generally broken into eight major celebrations that commemorate the seasons. Some Neopagans also observe the phases of the moon, which is a celebration of the Goddess in her three forms (Berger, Leach and Shaffer 2003). Likewise, looking across many Neopagan practices, ritual space is generally set up in the same way: after forming a circle, participants invoke the four cardinal directions in order to render their space sacred and thus to protect it from dangerous and disruptive outside influences (Berger 2005). Within this circle, work corresponding with the celebration of the *sabbat*, or any other ritual occasion for that matter, begins. The specific ritual could range from celebrating the Neopagan New Year to healing the ill (Berger 2005). This work is generally accomplished by raising energy in order to manipulate it to complete the work at hand (Berger 2005).

Those who participated in this study fall into the category of Neopaganism. While some have very specific terms to refer to their particular brand of Neopagan spirituality, others simply refer to themselves as “Neopagans”. Their religions are as individual and unique as they are themselves. This chapter will describe the Neopagan religions of the nine informants. Because these religions will be referenced frequently throughout this paper, it is important to establish a basic understanding of each informant’s religious paradigm.

WICCA

The most prevalent Neopagan religion practiced among the informants represented in this thesis is Wicca. Of the nine individuals, five informants, two men and three women, either considered themselves strictly Wiccan or included its tenets in their religious paradigm. Of all the Neopagan religions, Wicca is the most commonly practiced (Berger 2005; Adler 1979).

The beginning of modern Wicca, or “witchcraft” as it is sometimes referred, can be traced primarily to two individuals: Aleister Crowley and Gerald Gardner (Adler 1979; Harvey 1997; Melton 1998; Jones and Matthews 1990; Hutton 1999; Pike 2004; Berger 2005, York 2003). Aleister Crowley, a wealthy socialite during the 19th century, is credited with re-introducing witchcraft to Europe as the head of The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (HOGD), which was established in 1881 in Britain (Melton 1998). HOGD was a Neopagan organization that “incorporated Celtic scholarship and recreated magic, Hermetic, Middle Eastern and Rosicrucian (Masonic) theory, and though not in itself Pagan, it included Egyptian god forms in its rituals” (Jones and Matthews 1990:27). As the head of the HOGD, Crowley published a variety of materials that established a sort of magical encyclopedia that included magical practices and thought. It was Crowley’s work at HOGD that influenced modern witchcraft and Wiccan practices (Melton 1998).

Though Aleister Crowley is credited with introducing the basic foundation for modern witchcraft, it is Gerald Gardner, a British civil servant, who is considered the forefather of the Neopaganistic form of witchcraft in Britain and the United States today (Adler 1979; Melton 1998; Jones and Matthews 1990; Hutton 1999). Gardner claimed he

was initiated into a secret coven that continued pan-European pagan traditions practiced before the spread of Christianity (Berger 2005). In his 1954 book *Witchcraft Today*, Gardner claimed this coven passed down rites and rituals to him that were held secret for centuries (Hutton 1999; Adler 1979).

Though practitioners and scholars alike questioned Gardner's claim about his secret coven, his form of witchcraft spread rapidly through Britain in the 1950s before coming to the United States in the 1960s. Gardner's Neopagan paradigm was a combination of Asian and Western magic, "Masonic rituals, nudity, and Goddess worship" (Melton 1998:607). Though there are several different forms of Goddess spirituality and witchcraft, almost every one of them can be traced back to Gardner.

Though the practice among Wiccans in the United States can vary between individuals, as well as across covens and groups², there are several basic tenets that form its foundation. In its most basic form, Wicca is "an earth-based religion, in which the goddess or goddesses and the god force or gods are venerated, nature's yearly cycle of seasons is celebrated, and magic is practiced" (Berger 2005:28). The most defining characteristic of the Wiccan religion is its worship of the Goddess as the major deity.

In her most basic form, the Goddess is the Mother Goddess, the representative of the earth. She is generally venerated in her three forms: maiden, mother and crone (Adler 1979). Like the religion itself, Goddess worship is as eclectic as its worshippers. There is no specific Goddess to be worshipped by all Wiccans. Individuals and different Wiccan groups (covens) can worship a particular abstract idea of the Goddess, for

² It is important to note that the use of "group" in this context refers to loose gathering of Neopagans, such as those in CUUPS. Individuals for the sake of worship consciously form Wiccan covens. "Groups" simply refers to individual practitioners who may or may not know each other, and who come together to worship as a larger Wiccan group during specific times of the Neopagan holiday season.

example, the Goddess as representing the divinity of nature, while others venerate another Goddess, such as Aphrodite, the Goddess of love.

Along side the Goddess is the God, known primarily as the “Horned God”. He is considered to be the Goddess’ consort. He represents the masculine side of the divine and is associated with the Horned Lord of animals. He is the god of the hunt, of the forest and green growing plants. He is also the god of death and is associated with the sun (Adler 1979; Barner-Barry 2005). The Horned God is reborn every *Yule* (winter solstice). He matures and is married to the Goddess at *Beltane* (May 30) in order to bring, according to his followers, fertility to the world, after which he dies at *Samhain* (October 31) to ensure the fertility of the crops, and is reborn again at *Yule* (Barner-Barry 2005; Berger 2005). This death and rebirth cycle represents the death and rebirth of the earth throughout its yearly cycle. Though the majority of Wiccans are interested in maintaining balance between male and female energy through their worship of the God and Goddess, not all Wiccans worship the God. One form of Wicca, known as Dianic Wicca, only worships the Goddess (Barner-Barry 2005).

In addition to beliefs about the Goddess and the God being important to Wicca, there are also holidays that are commonly celebrated among all Wiccans. There are four major holidays and four lesser holidays, or *sabbats*, and monthly rituals known as *esbats* that commemorate the cycles of the moon (Holland 2000; Adler 1979; Berger 2005; Cheal and Leverick 1999). The four lesser holidays are those held on the solstices and the equinoxes (Adler 1979). These Quarter Festivals are the spring equinox (*Ostar* or *Eostre*), the summer solstice (*Midsummer* or *Litha*), autumn equinox (*Mabon*), and winter solstice (*Yule*) (Holland 2000; Cheal and Leverick 1999). Though these quarter festivals

are part of the Neopagan yearly calendar, not every individual, coven or Wiccan group celebrates all of these lesser holidays.

The holidays Wiccans are most likely to celebrate are the four major *sabbats*, which correspond with the changing of the seasons (Adler 1979; Berger 1999, 2005; Holland 2000; York 2003). The Neopagan New Year begins with *Samhain* (October 31st). At this time that the veil between the living and the dead is believed to be its weakest, and in the belief systems of Neopagans contact with the ancestors can thus take place (Adler 1979; Holland 2000; Berger 2005; York 2003). *Imbolc* or *Oimeic* is the next major holiday celebrated on February 2. This festival is known as the winter purification festival. The next major festival is *Beltane*, or May Day (May 31). This is celebrated as the birth of spring and is the great fertility festival. It is during this celebration the Goddess and the God are married, symbolizing the fertility of the season. The final major *sabbat* celebrated in the Neopagan calendar is *Lughnasadh* (August 1). This festival celebrates the reaping of the harvests and the death of the God, which symbolizes the coming of winter (Adler 1979; Berger 2005; Holland 2000; Cheal and Leverick 1999).

Though the *sabbats* make up the Neopagan holiday calendar, many individuals and covens also celebrate the *esbats*, or the cycles of the moon. These cycles, and specifically the phases of the new, quarter, and full moon, represent the different phases of the Goddess (Berger 2005; Adler 1979; Barner-Barry 2005). The new moon corresponds with the maiden, the quarter moon the mother, and the full moon the crone.

The important link between both the *sabbats* and the *esbats* are their use of specific elements of the Wiccan ritual. Though not every Wiccan celebrates every

holiday or moon cycle, the rituals used to celebrate these important elements of nature are generally set up in the same way³. Most Wiccan rituals, whether on the occasion of a major holiday or a moon cycle, begin by creating a magical space. Casting a circle around the participants creates this space. The group or coven gather in a circle and the high priestess grounds and purifies the circle. This protects the coven and its members from the outside world as well as focuses their attention on the ritual practice at hand (Cheal and Leverick 1999).

The individual running the ritual, whether it is a high priestess or a solitary practitioner, then purifies and grounds the participants of the ritual. Purifying the circle rids the ritual space of outside influences and allows the spirit world to enter the circle. This purification is accomplished by smudging, which is a burning of sage or a sprinkling of salt water around the circle (Cheal and Leverick 1999; Orion 1995). Grounding puts the participants in touch with the earth, rooting them to the ground and allowing nature's energy to flow through them (Cheal and Leverick 1999; Orion 1995). This is accomplished by meditation, or by physically touching the earth.

Once the circle is cast and purified, and thus the participants are grounded, the deity/deities are invoked. Invocation begins by lighting candles, using anthems, or swords and then invoking the four cardinal directions: North represents earth and the human body; South represents fire and the participants will; West represents water and emotions; and East represents wind, which is symbolic of light and intellect (Greenwood 2000; Adler 1979; Cheal and Leverick 1999; Orion 1995). These elements are called into

³ The description of the basic ritual though common among many covens and groups does not apply to every Wiccan who participates in ritual. As with Neopaganism in general, the eclectic nature of Wicca can lead to different ritual practices. The ritual description, however, does apply to the majority of Wiccan rituals and will be used as the basis for ritual practice in this discourse.

the magical space not only to protect those participating in the ritual but also to aid in their magical work.

The purpose of the ritual is to celebrate the cycles of the earth by raising energy for magical workings (Berger 2005; Cheal and Leverick 1999; Orion 1995; Adler 1979). Magic might be described as “the science and art of causing change by non-physical means not as yet accepted by science” (Berger 2005:34). Wiccans believe that “the material world is comprised of energy and that energy can be manipulated by the mind and by the Witch’s own etheric energy” (Berger 1999:34). Magical work begins by raising energy, which can be accomplished by dancing, chanting, clapping, meditation, or singing. By raising energy in the ritual setting, the participants can direct their energy to a specific task at hand, such as healing the sick, protecting the earth, bringing others good will, or any other intention the group might have as a whole or individually (Berger 2005; Orion 1995; Cheal and Leverick 1999).

In performing this magical work, Wiccans follow the Wiccan Rede in order to maintain “good” magic that helps people and the earth instead of harming them. The Wiccan Rede states, “Do as thou will as long as thou harm none.” Many Wiccans believe in a three-fold return in energy. In other words, if a Wiccan sends out negative or positive energy, it will return to them three fold. In essence this means those participants that do harm will inevitably be harmed themselves (Berger 2005; Adler 1979).

After the magical work is completed and the ritual is done, the four cardinal directions are dismissed and the circle is closed (Berger 2005). The closing of the circle can be as simple as blowing out the candles, or as involved as acknowledging each direction and un-casting the circles (Cheal and Leverick 1999). Following the ritual,

there is usually a social gathering in which food and drinks are consumed. This gives the participants closure and allows them time to return to their normal state of being after such an intense experience (Cheal and Leverick 1999; Berger 2005).

Though Wicca is the most prevalent religion among the informants, it is not the only one practiced among the informants. Two of the informants, one male and one female, were members of Asatru, a Norse polytheistic religion. Though there are differences between these religions, they share common Neopagan traits such as the veneration of the earth and the Goddess(es) and God(s).

ASATRU

Much like Wicca, the modern Asatru⁴ movement began in Europe and Scandinavia and then made its way to the United States in the 1960s and 1970s (Flowers 1981; Berger 2005; Adler 1979). In the United States the most prominent and successful Asatru organization was the Asatru Free Assembly (AFA) (Flowers 1981; Adler 1979). The group was originally known as the Viking Brotherhood and started in 1973. It eventually evolved into AFA, which was started by Stephen McNallen, a graduate student of political science. He continued to run this organization during a stint in the military and, once he was out, moved to northern California, where he intensified his efforts toward the establishment of Asatru in the United States (Flowers 1981).

McNallen also published a quarterly journal called *The Runestones*.

Asatru, which means “belief in Gods/faith in Asir”, is a polytheistic Norse religion that worships the Old Norse and Germanic Warrior Gods and fertility Goddesses

⁴ The original designation of Asatru when it came to the United States was Odinism. There were a few subsets of Odinism that revived Neo-Nazis’ paganism and propaganda. As a result, many groups and individuals who participated in this Neopagan path used Asatru to move away from the racist stereotype. (Adler 1979; Berger 2005)

(Adler 1979; Flowers 1981; Berger 2005; Berger, Leach and Shaffer, 2003). Unlike Wicca, Asatru's foundation is based on specific gods and a particular origin story, though many Asatru do not claim an unbroken tradition from the pre-Christian Asatru religion as some Wiccans claim (Flowers 1981). It can be thought of as a revival of the Old Norse religion. Participants look to books of sagas, poetry, and archeology to find the remnants of the old religion (Flowers 1981; Berger 2005).

The basic tenets of Asatru focus on the worship of a large God and Goddess pantheon. Unlike other Neopagan religions that see their deities as part of nature or one divine entity, Asatru is polytheistic (Berger 2005). There are two levels of gods: the Aesir and the Vanir (Berger 2005; Adler 1979; Flowers 1981; Dumézil 1973). The Aesir are known as Sky Gods and are generally more aggressive with law, magic and war (Adler 1979; Flowers 1981). The most notable Gods associated with the Aesir are Odin the high God, his wife Frigga, Thor, Tyr, Balder and many others (Dumézil 1973; Adler 1979; Flowers 1981). The Vanir are the Gods of the earth that represent agriculture, fertility and death (Adler 1979; Flowers 1981). The most well known of the Vanir Gods are Frey, Freya, Njord and Nertus (Dumézil 1973; Adler 1979).

Despite the two categories of Gods in the Asatru pantheon, most participants worship all of the Gods instead of picking specific ones to worship (Adler 1979). Because the Gods represent different aspects of the earth and human nature, all the Gods are venerated. It is the intention of participants in Asatru to learn from the stories and sagas of the deities as a guide on how to live an honorable life. Author Steven Flowers writes:

Divinities in Asatru/Odinism are not seen as independent, transcendental beings, but rather as exemplary models of consciousness, or archetypes, which serve as patterns for

human development. These entities are viewed as psychic realities within both the individual and with society. They are not made the objects of worship in the Judeo-Christian sense, but rather humanity and divinity are conceived of in a mutually dependant relationship, and as part of the same ultimate reality (1981:289).

In other words, the Gods are not separated from the human race as beings of such purity that it cannot be obtained by humans. Instead, they are the roles models for humans to model themselves after to become better people. The Gods work in tandem with humans instead of watching from afar, not participating in their lives. To the Asatru, the Gods are much like humans in the attributes and foibles (Berger 2005)

Like Wicca, Asatru Gods are honored in rituals. They can be honored in daily rituals and seasonal celebrations (Adler 1979; Flower 1981; Berger 2005). Like other Neopagan religions, Asatru celebrate the eight seasonal holidays including the solstices and equinoxes (Adler 1979; Flower 1981; Berger 2005). These holidays include *Vetrnaetri*, which is the Norse New Year that falls on October 14, *Yule* (winter solstice), *Ostara* (spring equinox) and *Midsummer* (summer solstice) (Flower 1981). They also participate in daily rituals and a set of particularly Norse holidays celebrated in between the solstices and equinoxes (Flowers 1981; Berger 2005). These include *The Charming of the Plow*, which celebrates Freya, *Merry Moon*, which honors Njord and Nerthus, *Freyfaxi* (Harvest) which commemorates the first harvest and Frey and his horse, and finally *Fogmoon*, which is a dedicated to Odin and Freya (Anderson 2004).

The ritual setting in Asatru is similar across particular ritual settings, although they tend to be very simple. Like Wicca, Asatru can consist of groups of participants know as Kindreds (Robinson 2004). The Kindreds gather on the holidays with a priest, called Gothi, and a priestess, referred to as Gythia, that conduct the ritual (Robinson 2004). The ritual is generally known as a blot, which means a ritual sacrifice, and is

generally associated with drinking of mead or ale (Flowers 1981). To have a suitable blot, the group needs a location, time away from modern conveniences, such as phones, television and computers, and a beverage to drink. In large Kindred rituals, a horn full of mead or ale is passed among the members to celebrate the particular season and the Gods (Gillette and Stead 2002). These rituals can vary depending on the Kindred or individual. It can be modified to remain simple, or can be made more elaborate.

Though there are religious variations among the informants, they share a common belief in the earth as sacred, the individual as being in charge of their own religious destiny, and ritual as the most sacred way to venerate both the participants and the Goddess(es) and God(s). These religions also share a common belief that men and women do not have to strictly adhere to specific roles for men and women. The divine is both feminine and masculine and, therefore, all humans are also believed to be divine. In the next several chapters, I will delve into how Neopaganism relates to gender and how the male informants in this study use this religion to determine their gender identity.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES: U.S. MASCULINITES, COUNTER-CULTURAL AND NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

This thesis is a discourse on U.S. masculinities and what role religion plays in how men define masculinity. Since the 1970s, gender studies have gained importance in several academic fields and contemporary scholarship. Many, for example have explored the relationship between gender and religion (King 1998). In the last several decades there have been several anthropological and sociological studies of U.S. masculinities and religion even though the main focus of gender studies has been on women (Guttman 1997; Doty 1993). It is the intention of this research to contribute to the academic scholarship of U.S. masculinities and religion by looking at Neopaganism and how this religion helps men to define masculinity.

The study of U.S. masculinities and their relationship to religion does not occur in a vacuum. One cannot discuss U.S. masculinities without looking at the Feminist Movement because they are interlinked. As the role of women in the U.S. began to change as a result of Feminism, the roles of men changed as well. The Feminist Movement forced men and women alike to question their gender roles and identities (Seilder 1990; Gutmann 1997).

The Feminist movement, which was a part of the U.S. Counter Cultural Movements in the 1960s and 1970s, in conjunction with New Religious Movements were catalysts for a cultural change that inevitably led to the reevaluation of gender. This shift included a move away from a male-centered religion, such as Judeo-Christianity, as the only religious source and introduced the idea that both the feminine and masculine were divine. One such religion was Neopaganism. This female-centered religion contributed to the questioning and redefinition of gender in the U.S. for both men and women.

This chapter will define and discuss how the Counter Cultural Movements and New Religious Movements of the 1960s and 1970s contributed to not only the study of masculinities in the U.S., but how they led to the redefinition of what it meant to be a man in this new cultural atmosphere. I will look specifically at how U.S. masculinities were and are affected by the female-centered religion of Neopaganism.

THE STUDY OF MASCULINITIES IN THE UNITED STATES

To begin the discussion on U.S. masculinities, it is important to define gender since it is the foundation of this research. Gender is described as the “historically, socially and culturally developed ‘construct’ or interpretation of what it means to be a woman or man in different religions and cultures” (King 1998:648). According to Kenneth Clatterbaugh, a professor of Philosophy and Gender Studies at the University of Washington, gender can be broken into four parts: gender roles, gender stereotype, gender ideal, and gender identity (Clatterbaugh 1997). These definitions contribute to the analysis of my male informants and how their understanding of gender contributes to the discourse on U.S. masculinities because the interaction of gender roles, stereotypes and ideals led to the development of their gender identity.

First, *gender roles* are defined as a set of behaviors, attitudes and conditions generally found in men and women of a particular group (Clatterbaugh 1997). Second is the *gender stereotype*, which is a general description of what the majority of people believe to be the typical masculine/feminine gender role (Clatterbaugh 1997). The third part of this definition is the *gender ideal*. The gender ideal is a general societal understanding of what gender roles for men or women *should* be (Clatterbaugh 1997).

Clatterbaugh states, “Obviously, what people think men should be may be quite different either from what men are or from what people think men are. Stereotypes and ideals, too, are historically situated; they reflect the ideas of specific groups about what men (of specific groups) are and should be” (1997:3). As a society changes so does the idea of what gender ideal should be.

The final part of Clatterbaugh’ definition of gender is *gender identity*. Gender identity is how one defines gender for oneself (Clatterbaugh 1997). The first three parts of this definition, gender role, stereotype and ideal all play a role in how one determines his/her gender identity. Individuals may define their gender identity based on the gender stereotype, they may develop their gender identity in opposition to the stereotype and/or ideal, or they may even develop a hybrid of the two. Currently in the United States defining one’s gender identity is a highly individualistic endeavor. According to Sociologist Meredith McGuire,

Gender identity has become open, fluid, even voluntary. Individuals have multiple options of what it means to be a man or a woman. Gender can, thus be chosen, shaped and transformed. Modern individuals are encouraged to consider, choose and control all the components of gender roles; their emotional expression, patterns of relating to co-workers and friends, postures and gestures, clothing and personal props, fitness, manner of speaking and so on. There is even the option of whether to physically ‘change sex.’ One’s identity, including one’s gender identity – thus becomes a continuing project to accomplish (1994:275).

The focus of this research is this fluid, individualized notion of gender identity and how the male informants use religion in defining this identity.

The study of gender became a prevalent area of research during and after the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. After World War II and during the 1960s major changes occurred in the U.S. due to decreased birth rates, urbanization, technological advances, increased consumer demands, mass education, increased female

employment, and the desire for individual rights for all sects of U.S. society (Jesser 1996; Hearn and Morgan 1990; Pike 2004; Aidala 1985; McGuire 1994; Puttick 1999). All of these changes led to social and cultural change in U.S., which inevitably led to the questioning of gender roles.

With women demanding more rights, becoming more active socially and politically, and moving out of the household realm and into the workforce, the roles for men and women began to change. This cultural shift had an impact on the concept of gender in general and masculinity specifically (Clatterbaugh 1997; McGuire 1994; Seidler 1997). Sociologist Angela Aidala states:

Gender identities and roles are among the most basic orienting constructs by which we guide self and communicate with others; the attributes, traits of temperament, expectations, right and obligations which we consider appropriate to ourselves in any situation, we consider appropriate to ourselves as women or men. Gender roles have a basis in (as well as contribute to) the structure of economic and political relations in a society. Thus relatively sudden changes in social and economic conditions inevitably give rise to gender role ‘crisis’ – finding oneself without adequate guides to ascribe meaning, articulate order values, designate goals, and carve paths of action as (male or female) human being (1985:288).

It was during the culture shift of the 1960s a gender “crisis” emerged. As male domination began to weaken in the social and political arenas in the U.S., men were faced with reevaluating the roles they played as the old rules of patriarchy shifted. For men, prior to 1960s, their gender role was well defined by society. They were expected to be the providers, competitive, successful, head of the household, strong both mentally and physically, competent and responsible. Once society began to change with the influence of Feminism different ideas of masculinity emerged (James 1996).

Before Feminism the idea of masculinity was never really questioned. Instead the definition of masculinity was taken for granted because it was well established. Feminism brought attention to the invisibility of masculinity in social science research

(King 1998). Research into masculinity was often conducted by men and reflected men's versions of the world, thus creating the invisibility of men and their gender roles, which may have served men's interests, keeping their activities apart from critical scrutiny by other men as well as by women (Hearn and Morgan 1990; Gutmann 1997). With the rise of Feminism and the changing of gender roles, it was impossible to ignore the concept of masculinity in the U.S. because the previously accepted definition of what it meant to be a man began to change throughout the late 20th century.

The exposure to Feminist ideals had differing impacts on men in the U.S. Some men felt abused, oppressed and tyrannized by the Feminist Movement while others felt oppressed by patriarchy and wanted to rectify the situation (Doty 1993; Hearn and Morgan 1990; Seilder 1990). Both reactions acted as an instigator for the men's movements in the 1960s and 1970s. The men's movement was not a single movement, but rather several movements gathered under a single description. These movements were social, political and religious and reflected both a protest against Feminist ideals and an acceptance that the patriarchal U.S. society was harmful to both men and women (Clatterbaugh 1997; Doty 1993).

There were several men's movements, such as the Evangelical Christian and moral conservative movements that saw Feminism and the change in women's roles as a threat to society and believed it led to a moral crisis and social unraveling of U.S. society (Clatterbaugh 1997). It was the goal of these movements to maintain prescribed gender roles where men were dominant in the public sphere, which included politics, business, the church, and maintained the role of men as providers and head of the household.

These movements supported the idea that women were better suited for the private sphere, taking care of the home and children (Clatterbaugh 1997; Doty 1993).

Other men's movements, such as men's right and the Mythopoetic movements endorsed Feminist ideals and believed patriarchy was damaging to both men and women. These movements rejected the stereotypical idea of a man as strong, aggressive, unemotional, rulers of the public sphere and superior to women. They rejected "the claim that traditional masculinities are either biologically grounded or necessary to social stability. For them, masculinities are created and maintained through male privilege and its corresponding oppression of women, although they allow that traditional masculinity is also harmful to men" (Clatterbaugh 1997:10). These movements embraced Feminist ideals in order to move away from stereotypical male gender roles that were seen as detrimental to men.

With all these men's movements, what became apparent is instead of there being a singular U.S. masculinity, there are many masculinities (Hearn and Morgan 1990; Clatterbaugh 1997). These masculinities can be broken down into two categories: "hegemonic" and "subordinate" masculinities. *Hegemonic* masculinity is the form of masculinity currently ascendant and dominant in U.S. culture (Messner 1998). The U.S. hegemonic masculinity is construed not only in relation to femininities, but also in relation to subordinated and marginalized masculinities (Messner 1998; McGuire 1994). *Subordinate* masculinities are those that differ from the hegemonic masculinity in terms of ethnicity, sexuality, religion, class position and marital status (Hearn and Morgan 1990). It is these subordinate masculinities and how they are influenced by religion that is the focus of this thesis.

As mentioned earlier, the study of masculinities did not occur in a vacuum. Several cultural changes occurred in the United States that instigated the research into U.S. masculinities. To understand how U.S. masculinity research became important in the U.S., it is vital to look at the social and cultural conditions that brought this concept to the forefront, specifically the Counter Cultural and New Religious Movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

COUNTER CULTURE AND NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

As mentioned, there was a shift in U.S. culture in the 1960s and 1970s. After WWII the economy was good, there was mass education for all, there was a decrease in the population, an increase in urbanization, a large youth population, racial unrest, political unrest due to the Vietnam war, changing roles for women, and an increase in media technology that exposed the U.S. to the world. For example, television and photojournalism brought the Vietnam War and Asian culture to the United States (Pike 2004; Puttick 2000; Wuthnow 1986; Braunstein and Doyle 2002).

All of these were the ingredients for the Counter Cultural Movements. A Counter Cultural Movement⁵ is designated primarily by its challenge to the fundamental principles of the dominant culture. The intention of such movements is to offer alternative values and belief systems with the aim of creating a better society (Gurevich 1995; Roberts 1978; Van Doorn 1989; Musgrove 1974; Melville 1972; Beckford 1986).

The late 20th century was ripe for Counter Cultural Movements in part because 20% of

⁵ The origin of the term counter-culture has been accredited to two separate authors. Gurevich (1995:68) states that Theodor Roszak was the first to coin this phrase. Roszak used this term to describe the new religious movements that were arising in 1960s in order to “unite various new spiritual ideas spearheaded against the ruling culture into a relatively integral phenomenon” (Gurevich 1995:68). Keith Roberts states (1978:111) that Talcott Parsons was the first to use the term counter-culture in *The Social System* (1951:522), but did not provide a definition.

the U.S. population was educated youth, also known as the Beat Generation. Many in this generation went against their parents' and society's ideals of industrialization and urbanization (Wuthnow 1986). They wanted to revert back to an egalitarian society and move away from technology because of its dangers to humanity after incidents such as Hiroshima, the Vietnam War and the Cuban Missile Crisis (Wuthnow 1986).

It was during this time U.S. society became less focused on family and community and more focused on the self (Dawson 1998; Robbins et al 1990; Hannigan 1991; Pike 2004). During the 1960s, "there was a cultural shift towards understanding the self as a commodity to be created and presented. Self-expression and 'personal autonomy' were central to the 1960s counterculture and represented a 'progressive democratization of personhood' and a search for individual rights. The 1960s moral authority for most Americans was increasingly located in the self rather than in family, church or nation" (Pike 2004:74). This self-expression and personal autonomy included redefining the gendered self.

In conjunction with the Counter Cultural Movement, New Religious Movements also appeared during the 1960s and 1970s that questioned the role of gender in the U.S. New Religious Movements (NRMs) are defined as "religious movements which draw their inspiration from elsewhere than the primary religion of the culture" (Greenwood 2000:8). The designation " 'new religions' properly conveys the recognition of the manner in which fresh religious expressions are competing with secularizing forces in directing the future of Western society" (Melton 1998:594).⁶

⁶NRMs of the 1960s and 1970s were not the first NRMs in U.S. history. During the Second Great Awakening in the 19th century saw the birth of new alternative churches and religions, such as Methodist, Baptist, Disciples of Christ, Church of Christ, and several Eastern religions. The decades of the mid-20th century, however, had a larger impact on U.S. society due to the increased media exposure (Melton 1998; Wuthnow 1986).

There were several factors that contributed to the rise of NRMs. Prior to the rise in NRMS, in the 1950s, “Christianity was established, both formally and informally as the United State’s civil religion. There was an increase in church building and attendance was on the rise” (Pike 2004:68). The 1960s, however, saw a shift away from organized religion. The source of this shift, as with the Counter Cultural Movements was the large educated youth population, the use of psychedelics, the exposure to new cultures, the move away from family, church and nation to a personal autonomy as the main source of moral authority, and the moon landing, which brought awareness of humanity’s insignificance in the universe (Pike 2004). Church attendance declined and interest in alternate religions where the focus became more about a personal spirituality rather than a collective spirituality increased (Dawson 1998; Bloch 1998).

These NRMs in conjunction with the Counter Cultural Movements, particularly Feminism, not only had an effect on U.S. society in general, but on gender relations specifically. These alternative religions encouraged men and women to question their gender identities. Because male-dominated religions were now in question, the roles for men and women became more fluid, and moral authority moved from the church to the individual, thus allowing men to question their prescribed gender role.

One such NRM that prompted men to seek out new ways to define masculinity was a men’s movement known as the Mythopoetic Movement. This movement was made up of alternative religions used to redefine and understand what it meant to be a man in post-Feminist U.S. society (Clatterbaugh 1997; Doty 1993). There were two major movements within the Mythopoetic Movement. The first was developed by the author and poet Robert Bly who wrote the book *Iron John: A Book About Men*

(Clatterbaugh 1997; Schwalbe 1996). This movement was a move back towards the gender role and stereotype where men were protectors and strong. He stated that men were influenced too much by feminine energy. He believed there was a lack of male bonding and initiation rites, which damaged the male psyche. Bly stated men needed male groups in order to initiate each other and find their inherent “maleness” (Clatterbaugh 1997).

This “maleness” followed Jung archetypes, which states both men and women were born with archetypes, but certain ones are dominant in men while others are dominant in women (Schwalbe 1996; Clatterbaugh 1997). For example, men, “by virtue of their masculine archetype, are inclined to impose order on the world, define territory, provide for others, give of themselves to others, and love women” (Schwalbe 1996:37). Bly argued that because feminism had such a strong influence on men, they were unable to find their true selves. Only through male initiation rites and the move away from the feminine could men be whole (Adler 1979). This movement was not at the cost of women. In fact, Bly believed women were hurt by patriarchy, but so were men. This movement focused on helping men understand what it meant to be a man in a feminist world.

The other Mythopoetic movement was initiated by author John Rowan. This religious movement was Neopaganism, primarily Wicca. It supported feminist ideas that the U.S. was an oppressive patriarchal society that hurt both men and women. This movement was a contrast to Bly’s movement. Bly’s movement believed there wasn’t enough male influence on men in a post-Feminist U.S. society, where Rowan believed there wasn’t enough female influence in men’s lives. He believed men needed to have a

balance of the Goddess and God. Rowan believed that if men were to heal themselves from the detrimental effects of patriarchy, they needed a balance of both male and female energy (Clatterbaugh 1997).

It is the latter of these two Mythopoetic movements that is the focus of this thesis and how men use this religion to define what it means to be a man. In order to understand how this NRM contributes to the definition of masculinities, it is important to not only re-visit what Neopaganism means, but to also look at previous studies regarding Neopaganism and gender identity.

NEOPAGANISM AND GENDER

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Neopaganism is defined as spiritual practices that see the world as enchanted and the earth as sacred (Berger 2005). In the history of gender studies and Neopaganism, the focus has primarily been on women. Though the research on men and Neopaganism is limited, there have been a few studies that have focused on why men join female-centered religions. These studies suggest that Neopagan men are seeking balance. They are looking for a balance between the masculine and feminine side of nature and within themselves. The Goddess and nature worship in Neopaganism is seen as representing their female “selves” or female energy (Adler 1979; Berger 2005). The Goddess provides the nurturing mother aspect the male-centric religions are missing.

The Horned God provides a positive image of manhood. The Horned God “represents powerful, positive male qualities that derive from deeper sources than the stereotypes and the violence and emotional crippling of men in our society” (Greenwood

2000:38). It is through Neopaganism that men find “more diverse models for masculinity and allow men to explore their human potential without being subject to rigid male ideals that lie with the emotionless warrior” (Pike 2004:136). By developing their feminine side in conjunction with positive male God images, men separate themselves from patriarchal forms of domination of nature and women, thus bringing balance to their lives.

Some men in these studies saw their participation in Neopaganism as a political and social statement against patriarchy in the U.S. They believed it was detrimental to both men and women and by participating in a female-centered religion they were not only making a statement about the damaging affects of patriarchy, but were also a catalyst to change it, freeing men from the tyranny of patriarchy. They believed only by accepting the divine as a balance of the feminine and masculine could the wounds of patriarchy be healed (Barner-Barry 2005)

My research with five male informants from the Neopagan community focused on what role religion played in how they define their gender identity as men. It is the intention of this study to look at the NRM Neopaganism and how men use this religion to define and express their subordinate masculinities. In the following chapters I will discuss how my research is both similar and different from previous studies on Neopaganism and the male gender identity. As in previous studies, the men in my research are interested in balance between the male and female energy they believe exists in all things. They do differ in the fact that they are not interested in overtly condemning or acting out against patriarchal society. They are more interested in developing their spiritual self than making any sort of political or social commentary about gender.

CHAPTER FOUR

ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODOLOGY AND SETTINGS

Like the diversity of its religions, individuals participating in Neopaganism come from unique backgrounds. These individuals are both male and female, they can be heterosexual or homosexual, and are from the upper, middle, and lower classes. Participants in Neopaganism also come from varying religious backgrounds. Many

individuals were once members of Christian or Jewish religions and for various reasons left these religions and eventually found their way to Neopaganism. There are also individuals who have no prior religious background, Neopagan or otherwise. Some of these individuals felt “drawn” to Neopaganism or were introduced to it through different sources, such as friends, books, or seminars (Adler 1979; Harvey 1997; Greenwood 2000).

The informants in this particular study mirror many of these attributes. In order to gather information about their unique historical and religious backgrounds, I used several ethnographic techniques. These included observation, participation, and interviews. In this chapter I will introduce and describe not only the informants, but also the ethnographic methodology used to collect the information for this study.

ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODOLOGY

The community I choose to study was from an organized group at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Fort Collins, CO. Of the nine informants, seven came from this group – Troubadour, Lioness, Taramathea, Suzuki, Tock, Wandis, and Oskar⁷. This group was called the Covenant of the Unitarian Universalist Pagans (CUUPS) and was comprised of men and women who considered themselves pagan or were interested in learning more about this particular religious path. CUUPS held meetings that were open to both the UU Church and to the community at large.

⁷ The names of all nine informants have been changed in order to protect their confidentiality and privacy.

CUUPS became a part of the Unitarian Universalist church on June 24, 1987 in Little Rock, Arkansas with the passage of the of the following Statement of Purpose:

The Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans is formed for the purpose of enabling networking among Pagan-identified UUs; providing outreach of Unitarian Universalist congregations and the general public; promoting Pagan/Judaic-Christian dialogue; encouraging the development of theo/allogical and liturgical materials based on earth and nature centered religious and spiritual perspectives; encouraging greater use of music, dance, visual arts, poetry, story, and creative ritual in Unitarian Universalist worship and celebration; providing support for Pagan-identified UU religious professionals and ministerial students' and fostering healing relationships with our mother the Earth and all her children. (York 1995:128)

To become officially recognized as a CUUPS chapter “the UU church must accept the Statement of Purpose, must maintain an affiliation with a Unitarian Universalist Church, must include three due-paying members, pay annual registration fees, must provide one contact person who is both a member of the CUUPS and the UU, and include the CUUPS headquarters on it’s mailing list” (York 1995:131). The Fort Collins UU Church accepted all the above requirements and was started by three individuals in 1997.

My research began by searching for a Neopagan group that would accept an outsider and be willing to partake in my research. I learned of CUUPS through a professor at Colorado State University. I began going to several CUUPS meetings to assess if this particular community would be a good fit for my research. After the second meeting it was clear several individuals were dedicated not only to the CUUPS group, but also the Neopagan religious paradigm. It was after the first ritual I attended, which took place a month after I started attending meetings that I decided to approach a few of the members to gauge their interest in being a part of this research into Neopaganism and gender. I first approached Lioness and Wandis, both of whom presided over the ritual. Not only were they willing, but they also recommended several people within the group

who would be interested as well. It was at the next bi-monthly meeting that I approached Troubadour, Tock, Taramathea, Suzuki and Oskar. At this point, four of the informants were women (Taramathea, Wandis, Lioness, and Suzuki) and three of them were men (Tock, Troubadour and Oskar).

Because it was the intention of this study to focus on men, it was important to find more male informants. Tock suggested a fellow volunteer from the Rocky Mountain Raptor Program who would be interested in participating. Another male informant found through a mutual friend in Spokane, Washington was also interested in taking part in this research. Though other informants knew men who participated in Neopagan religions outside of CUUPS, most of them did not want to participate in the study either because they felt uncomfortable speaking with an outsider or they were private about their beliefs and feared retribution and preferred not be interviewed.

INFORMANTS

While all four of the women and three of the men were members of CUUPS, the remaining two men were not associated with any organization or group. They considered themselves to be solitary practitioners. Though the majority of the informants identified themselves with a particular Neopagan religion, such as Wicca and Asatru, there were others whose beliefs were not as strictly defined. These individuals stated their beliefs were either so varied or had no specific description to define them, they merely considered themselves Neopagan.

As with their Neopagan paradigms, these individuals came from varying backgrounds that influenced their religious paths. Many of these individuals had been members of different Christian religions, while the others had no prior religious influence from either Christian, Jewish or Neopagan religions. Each informant, however, was introduced to their particular sect of Neopaganism by friends, significant others, books, magazines, or by attending a Neopagan ritual.

The individuals who allowed me to ask them tough and probing questions about their faith were as interesting as they were unique. Though many of them shared similar facets of their personal background, they each had their own journeys to the divine. Troubadour is in his 50s and works as a telephone customer operator. He was raised Roman Catholic and at the age of 17, he joined the seminary. He left by the age of 18 because of what he saw as unmitigated hypocrisy. For the next several years he continued to search for the divine through Christianity.

Nearly 40 years ago, Troubadour went on a religious retreat to the Sunshine Ranch, which was the headquarters for the Emissaries of the Divine Light. Though it was a Christian retreat, Troubadour was more interested in the pagan undertones. It was here he learned of the importance of being in balance with not only the divine, but also with nature. It was also during this time Troubadour picked up his first book that included a detailed description of Wicca and Neopaganism. He continued to be a solitary practitioner until he joined the Fort Collins CUUPS. He is currently a member of a coven outside of CUUPS.

Tock is in his 30s and is a Wiccan who works as a computer technician for a local telephone company and volunteers at the local Rocky Mountain Raptor Program. He has

been practicing Wicca for nearly ten years. Before practicing Wicca, Tock had very little mainstream Christian influence. His parents were raised Catholic and baptized Tock in the Catholic Church, but they never attended mass outside of the traditional Christmas and Easter masses.

Starting in 4th grade, Tock considered himself an Atheist and continued on that path for 15 years. It wasn't until his 20s he had a need to search for something spiritual. It was the combination of reading spiritual material and a co-worker who was Wiccan that lead him to take a further look at Wicca. After this introduction, Tock continued to research the religion and was interested in learning all he could. It was through another individual at the Rocky Mountain Raptor Program who helped him further down this religious path. This fellow volunteer encouraged Tock to go to his first CUUPS meeting. The meeting they attended was the first CUUPS meeting at the Unitarian Church. Even though Tock is a member of a coven outside of CUUPS it is the eclectic nature of CUUPS that keeps him coming to the meeting. He enjoys not only learning about other Neopagan religions, it also solidifies his belief in his own spiritual path.

Oskar is in his 20s and works as a computer technician in the quality assurance department at a local company. He is the only male informant who practices Asatru. Like Troubadour, Oskar was raised in the Roman Catholic Church. When he was approximately 10, his parents decided to no longer attend mass. After leaving the church, Oskar did not practice any faith. He did not think it was necessary nor did he really think participating in any religion was extremely important. It was an encounter with a significant other six years ago that he was first introduced to Asatru. This particular individual had been practicing Asatru for many years and though she was reluctant to

introduce Oskar to this religion, he took to it easily. Though he is no longer with the woman that introduced him to his faith, Oskar is strongly attached to Asatru. Because he is one of the only Asatru among the CUUPS members, most of his rituals mirror Wiccan rituals. Though he would sometimes prefer to practice with other Asatru, he is content in the knowledge there are other pagans with whom he can share his faith.

Andrew is in his 40s and is a professor at Colorado State University. Because his faith has been influenced from several different religions, he has a hard time defining his faith beyond the term Neopagan. Prior to becoming a pagan, he was raised in a Christian household. When he was a child, his parents took him to Christian services. When he was 10, his parents determined they were no longer interested in continuing with these services. When offered the option to go to church or not, Andrew chose the latter.

Until roughly 12 years ago, Andrew did not practice any religion. Andrew took a Philosophy of Religion class and it was here he was introduced to the term pantheist, which means that divine can be found in everything and is not separated by the imaginary line of heaven. Though this class and its concepts hit home for him, he did not pursue this notion for a little over two years. When he did decide to follow the pantheistic path, a friend of his, who had been practicing in Native American and Celtic shamanism, introduced him to pagan ideals and rituals. It was this first introduction that led Andrew to search for his own religious path.

When he first began to practice Neopaganism, Andrew was an active Wiccan. He felt the Wiccan path was a religious system he could relate to. The last couple of years, however, Andrew began following a different path. As a volunteer at the Rocky Mountain Raptor Program, Andrew found another “teacher” that led him down a

different pagan path. His current Neopagan leanings are simply to become a better human by being in tune with the energy of the earth. When asked why he felt this new path was the most important to him, he stated it was the truth.

Thaddeus is a network engineer for a large technology company. He is in his 50s and is a Vietnam vet who was a member of a mainstream Christian religion for most of his life. He was a member of the Catholic Church, Methodist Church and the Unity Church. After awhile the idea of following strict rules of behavior and watching the priests spend too much time on rules instead of empowering the patrons, he became disillusioned with organized religion. It was, however, some of the teachings of Christianity that started him down the path of Neopaganism. The church taught him God was in everything – trees, in everyone, in rocks, everywhere – and if that was the case, why did he need a church. It was when he decided he did not need a church to express his faith that he considered himself a Neopagan. Like Andrew, he does not have a specific form of Neopaganism he attaches himself too. He merely believes that all life is sacred, including the earth.

Suzuki is in her 40s and is a student at Colorado State University who also works part-time as a seamstress and pattern maker. As a child her parents took her to a Unity church, which she enjoyed because of the minister and the youth group. As she got older, she continued to go to Christian based religions, but in her mid 20s she said she just had a feeling that Christ-based religions were not for her. She had a hard time believing that every person was born into sin and there was one man, Jesus, born to this earth who would save all human souls.

It was at that point she stopped going to church. Instead, she realized that she was a science based religious person meaning she did not believe in the myths of the church, but did believe in the power and sacredness of the earth. She remembered having great experiences in nature as a child and this prompted her to take the path towards Neopaganism. She said it was spontaneous awe with nature and the introduction of Buddhism by her ex-husband that made her interested in Neopaganism. Suzuki took the tenets of Buddhism and added Goddess worship to create her own pantheon in order to venerate her femininity and the earth.

Wandis is an equine science student in her 20s. Growing up she never went to church, but Christian ideals were a part of her household growing up. Tenets such as do not take the Lord's name in vain and the story of Christmas were part of these Christian ideals. It was, however, when she was a teenager that she experienced a traumatic event turning her away from the Christian faith. When a Catholic friend of hers told his family he was gay, they kicked him out of the house and ostracized him, which led to his eventual suicide. It was this strict adherence to the church rules that took precedence over one's own family member that pushed her away from Christianity.

It was through a high school boyfriend she found the Asatru religion. Her boyfriend's friend was a member of Asatru. Through persistence Wandis and her boyfriend were able to convince his friend to explain the religion to them and introduce them to the leader of his group, known as a Thule. The Thule took them under his wing and after they proved they were serious about the religion, he brought them into the group. Though Wandis is no longer a part of the group, she continues to be a devout Asatru.

Lioness is in her 30s and is a housewife, student and part-time worker for her husband's business. She was raised in a Christian household and as a child her mother took her to an independent, Evangelical bible church. She also attended vacation bible schools each summer and was part of the youth group known as Awana. Lioness said she was immersed in Christianity while she was growing up. Over time, however, she became disillusioned with Christianity. She did not like being told this was the only way to believe and it was forced upon her. Lioness did not like the rigid rules everyone in the church had to follow. She saw even the adults did not get to make their own decisions about how to live their life because they were required to follow the church rules without question.

Once she was out of the house, she decided not to go to church. It was during this time she formulated her own morality and used her imagination to design her own spirituality. As a young girl she was always inspired by nature and even built an altar in her garden where she would go to meditate. It was through her husband that Lioness was introduced to Wicca. Her husband was in the Air Force and had been speaking with a co-worker who was Wiccan. One day while driving to the store, her husband mentioned that he was interested in becoming a witch, another term for Wiccan. She did not know that at the time and became upset because she thought her husband was about to join a cult. After convincing her he was not joining a cult and she should speak to his co-worker, she reluctantly agreed. Once he explained the tenets of Wicca to her, Lioness felt it made sense because a lot of it was information she already believed, such as the veneration of the earth. From that moment on, Lioness learned more about Wicca and has been a practicing Wiccan for seven years.

Taramathea is a student teacher in her 30s and was raised in a Christian household. Her mother was minister for United Church of Christ, her father was a Baptist minister, and her stepfather was a Presbyterian minister. As a child her parents raised her as a Baptist. She said as early as the age of eight she was not interested in organized religion. She said she did not understand how people could commit themselves to that and she never believed anyone could “save” her but herself. As a result, she became an Atheist in 8th grade.

It was at the age of 16 she first found Wicca. During a Philosophy of Religion class she took in high school, the teacher’s wife, who was Wiccan came in and introduced the class not only to Wiccan ideals, but also to other religions, such as Buddhism and Hinduism. For Taramathea, it was the Wiccan religion that stuck with her. While she did not pursue the Wiccan path right away, she held onto the beliefs. It was not until she started college that she pursued Wicca as a religious path. It was there she started to read more books and meet other Wiccans. Though she said her Wiccan beliefs are still emerging, she continues to practice Wicca today.

The nine informants that agreed to partake in this study were eager to share their worldviews on religion, both mainstream and Neopagan, and were interested in discussing how gender played a role within that worldview. To gather as much information as possible, I used several ethnographic methods. These included observation and participation in both bi-monthly meetings and in rituals, and four interviews per informant.

OBSERVATION AND PARTICIPATION

Bi-monthly CUUPS Meetings

I began my research by observing and participating with this community, both in their bi-monthly meetings and in ritual settings. I participated in the meetings for nine months, which were held at UU church in one of the auxiliary rooms. This was a medium sized room with the walls painted off white with three windows at the back of the room. The carpet was a brownish color that looked to be quite old and worn out. The room was filled with several couches and chairs donated by the UU or CUUPS participants and were arranged in a circle. In the middle of the circle of chairs and couches were two small brown tables. The room was partitioned off by a moveable wall, which was generally shut during the meetings. There were also several cabinets with craft items, such as crayons, colored paper and yarn for those who brought their children from time to time.

The meetings were always informal with the topics of discussion generally provided via email. When I began going to meetings, Tock was the unofficial leader of the group. He would send out emails about topics of discussion and the sign-up sheet for those that were to attend. Topics of discussion were emailed the week prior to the meeting. Everyone on the email list had the opportunity to suggest topic ideas, but generally only one or two people would propose ideas. The topics of discussion ranged from raising children in a pagan household, picking a Pagan name, discussing different Deities and the specific pantheons of participants, raising energy, making crafts, and planning sessions for upcoming rituals.

Once the topic of discussion was chosen and the meeting took place, anyone at the meeting had the opportunity to run the meeting, man or woman. Typically one of the

men would start the meeting. For the first five months of meeting I attended, Tock would try to solicit someone to lead the discussion, but usually would begin every meeting and lead the discussion about the topic at hand. Eventually Oskar took over and became the unofficial leader because Tock decided to spend most of his time with his own coven. The men of the group seemed more confident in starting the conversations at these meetings. While the women certainly participated, it was rare for them to lead the discussion.

Though the meetings were to be held bi-monthly, there were several instances when the meetings were cancelled due to low group participation via email sign up sheet. While attending CUUPS meetings, the number of participants at each meeting varied. On the low end of attendance there have been as few as six and as many as 16. Even though I met many of my informants through meetings at the beginning of my participation, their involvement was also inconsistent. There were many reasons for this such as personal conflict, disinterest in the topic of discussion, or plans with their own covens outside of CUUPS.

While I attended several meetings throughout my research, my participation in the meetings was very limited. Even though I participated in some of the discussions, such as folklore and its importance to individual practice, and making crafts, I spent the majority of my time listening and observing the members in these meetings. I was interested in seeing how they interacted with each other and to observe who did the majority of the participation, i.e. men vs. women, and if there was any specific gender issues related to my thesis that would present itself.

Rituals

I also had the opportunity to observe two rituals with the CUUPS groups. One was a Samhain ritual, which was held in the main UU Church sanctuary and the other during a regular meeting after September 11, 2001. Because the informants either had their own covens outside of CUUPS or preferred solitary ritual practice, the opportunity for me to observe my informant's rituals was limited. For those with covens, they were very protective of the members not included in this research and did not want me to observe or participate in their rituals. As for those who preferred solitary ritual practice, it was too personal for them to share and having another person there would defeat the intended personal relationship with their worship.

The first ritual I was able to observe and participate in was the Samhain ritual held on October 30, 2000. Samhain is the Neopagan New Year when the veil between the living and the dead is lifted for one night and contact with the ancestors can take place (Adler 1979; Holland 2000; Berger 2005; York 2003). The ritual was held in the UU gymnasium. This was a large, open room with walls of windows on two sides, the sanctuary on another side and an attached kitchen on the fourth side. There were three tables set up in front of the kitchen where participants put food for the potluck that took place after the meeting. On the West side of the room was another table with a black table cloth, a candle, several pieces of small, blank paper and writing utensils. This table, which will be discussed later, was used at the end of the ritual.

The ritual was a combination of both a Wiccan and an Asatru ritual. Two women – Wandis, who is a practicing Asatru, and Lioness, a practicing Wiccan, ran the ritual. Twenty-six men, women and children - eight males and eighteen females, attended the

ritual. I recognized only a handful of people from the CUUPS meetings. The majority of the participants were dressed in jeans and t-shirts. There were six individuals, five women and one man that were dressed in ritual attire. For the women, including Lioness and Wandis this included black, flowing dresses and necklaces with pentagram, of varying shapes and sizes. The male was dressed in a black flowing shirt and black pants. He too wore a pentagram necklace.

The ritual began when Wandis and Lioness announced to the group it was time to form a circle around the impromptu altar they built in the middle of the gymnasium. Each person who entered the circle was given a piece of paper with invocations they said throughout the ritual. On the altar was a cauldron, six candles, incense, a bell, a smudge stick, paper, matches, two chalices one full of mead and one full of water, and bread. Wandis then lit the smudge stick made of sage and juniper and smudged each person that entered the circle. She began at the feet of the participant and weaved her way to the top of the head. She then made a circle around the participant and went from the head to the feet. As she purified the participant she said, "I sweep from this sacred space all negative energies inconducive to love, peace, tranquility and perfect trust."

After everyone had been purified by the smudging, Wandis made her way back to the altar, picked up the bell, rang it and said, "With this sound I banish from this sacred space any spirit or being not filled with love and light." At this point Wandis and Lioness began to light the candles, thus invoking the four cardinal directions and making the space sacred. They lit incense for the East and air, a candle for South and fire, a candle for West and water, and sprinkled salt for North and earth.

After the candles were lit, everyone in the circle was asked to help invoke the four cardinal directions, or Call Quarters by following an invocation on the piece of paper given to them prior to entering the circle. Everyone in the circle read the following while Wandis and Lioness held up the corresponding candles, incense and salt:

Air in the dawning East. Winds that gently blow. Fill our minds with knowledge. Protect our sacred circle. You are welcome here. So mote it be!

Fire, noontide South, flames that light and warm. You who spark our will and transform our day! Protect our sacred circle. You are welcome here. So mote it be!

Water, western twilight, cleansing rains, keeper and changer of our dreams, mists and life's flow. Protect our sacred circle. You are welcome here. So mote it be!

Earth, Northern midnight, fields and forests green, mountain, silence, serenity, stone, soil, root and sea. The strength within our bones. Protect our sacred circle. You are welcome here. So mote it be!

Once the participants invoked the four directions, Wandis, who is a practicing Asatru also blessed and invited the Norse gods for each direction.

It was at this point the Goddess, in her three forms was invoked. Wandis and Lioness lit three candles while the participants chanted

Three candles we light, as maiden, as mother, as crone. The candle of the Hearth we've lit. Hearth flames belong to Her. We light the winter's fires in this place sacred to her. In time that is not time. In a place that is no place. On a night that is not night. Beyond the worlds. Between the worlds above, below, and beyond.

A candle for the God was lit as well with the invocation "We light a candle in honor of death aspect of God and for those who honor the Lord of the underworld, or the dark lord." Wandis also asked the nine Gods of the Norse pantheon to bless the circle by saying, "We welcome the Nine and ask the Gods of the world to enter the sacred circle."

Once the Goddess and Gods had been invited to bless the sacred space, Wandis took bread and the glass of mead and blessed everyone in the circle by dipping a piece of bread into the mead and told all it was a blessing from the Gods. She then read a

message from the Goddess regarding Samhain and what the holiday meant. Samhain is the time of year when winter is approaching and the dead and ancestors are celebrated. Wandis spoke of the importance of the ancestors and how they are with us in our time of pain, love, joy and sorrow. She spoke of how the Goddess wants us all to remember the ancestors for they led the way for each of us, they guide us now and they demand our respect. Through the Goddess and the ancestors, each person can find the love of self and the love of the Earth from which we are all born, all die and will some day return.

Wandis and Lioness then each took a cup, one with mead and one with water and a plate full of bread. They went to each participant and offered him or her a piece of bread and a choice of either drinking from the mead or the water. Once they drank the liquid of their choosing, Wandis or Lioness said “A gift from the Gods” to which the participant responded, “Blessed be.”

Wandis and Lioness returned to altar and lit a candle for the dead and wrote on the pieces of paper at the altar. Once they wrote on the pieces of paper, they placed them in the cauldron and burned them. Wandis told the participants that on these pieces of paper were names of those who have passed, and the hardships and triumphs of the past year. She then placed the cauldron on the floor, stepped over it and said by burning the paper and stepping over their remains, the past was now left behind and a new year and a fresh start can begin.

Once the past had been let go, she said it was time to begin the journey to the New Year. She had all the participants sit down, shut their eyes and listen as she began a meditation. The meditation revolved around how each participant was in charge of weaving his or her path to the future. Though the Goddess and Gods help you along the

way, she said it is the individual that has the power to lead their own way and create life as they see fit.

At this point, the meditation was over and she had everyone open his or her eyes. Though the ritual was nearly over, she told the participants the table at the West of the building had pieces of paper for each person to write the names of those who have passed, to write the hardships they would like to release, and to put down their hopes and dreams for the futures. These pieces of paper were to be burned later in the caldron to represent leaving the past behind and starting over in the coming year. She also encouraged people to place mementos of those who passed on the table as well in celebration and honor of their lives. Wandis then invited everyone to stand up. She and Lioness blew out the candles one at a time and thanked the Goddess and God(s) for being a part of the ritual, making the space sacred, and blessing each of the participants. The circle was officially opened and the participants either went to the table to place mementos and write on the pieces of paper, or sat down for the potluck provided by those who attended.

The second ritual I attended was during a special meeting held after the September 11, 2001 tragedy. Not only did I observe this ritual, but I also had the opportunity to participate. The ritual was held on Monday, September 17 at 7:00 PM. The night of this particular ritual was attended by the greatest number of people of all the regular meetings I attended throughout my research. There were sixteen people, four men and twelve women. Their ages ranged from early twenties to mid- to late fifties, with one exception – a six-month old girl.

The ritual was held at the UU Church in the auxiliary room where all of the CUUPS meetings took place. In the middle of this room were two brown tables. On the tables were candles, some that were provided by the CUUPS members who organized the ritual, two men and two women, and the rest were provided by those attending the ritual. In total, there were roughly two-dozen candles on the tables. The candles were of various colors, sizes and shapes. The majority of these candles were to be used later during the ceremony, while four of the candles of specific colors were used to invoke the four directions, North, South, East and West. Each of these candles were slender and of a particular color: North was green to represent the earth, South was red representing fire, East was white to symbolize air, and West was blue, which represented the water of life produced by the earth.

Though each participant was aware of the proceedings of the evening, no one wore any type of clothing that would be categorized as ritual clothing, such as robes or nice dresses and suits. The majority of the attendants wore jeans and t-shirts.

Once everyone had arrived, the first thing we did was introduce ourselves and we described our belief systems. Three men and one woman practiced Wicca, one woman and man practiced Asatru, one woman stated plainly she was pagan, and the rest stated they were still in the process of “looking for their path.” From what people were saying, looking for their path consisted of looking for a religious belief outside of mainstream Christianity. Many individuals who were still looking for their path mentioned how they were once affiliated with one form of Christianity, but it had been unfulfilling, too dogmatic, or just not what they were looking for.

After introductions, the ritual began at approximately 7:25 PM. The ritual started when the lights were turned out and everyone stood up to form a circle. The circle was formed around the two brown tables in the middle of the room. Once we were all standing, one of the women, Maya⁸, who organized the ritual asked for volunteers who would like to invoke the four directions in order to create a sacred space within the circle of people. Two men and two women stepped forward to light the candles. The women lit the North and West candles and the men lit the South and East candles.

Once the candles were lit, Maya passed around a seashell full of mashed up rose petals and sand. Each person took the seashell and spread some of this mixture around the area of the circle where they were standing. Maya stated this mixture would close off the circle, making it a sacred place and protect all those involved. The rose petals and sand make the circle sacred because of their association with the earth, the sacred life force. After everyone had sprinkled the mixture, Maya informed everyone the candles on the tables were there for each person to light a candle, either to their own particular God(s) and/or Goddess(es), or for a wish, hope or desire each hoped to come true in the wake of the disaster on September 11.

The lighting of the candles began when the woman who lit the North candle, Suzuki, lit a candle for the Goddess Kwan-Yein and asked her to be present at the ritual and to guide all those involved and affected by the disaster to love and light. Once she started the candle lighting ritual, each person lit at least one candle. While lighting the candles, each person said out loud for who or what they were lighting the candle. Several people lit a candle for the God(s), one woman lit a candle for the Goddess in her three forms, maiden, mother and crone, while another lit a candle for all those working on the

⁸ This individual's name has been changed to protect her anonymity.

relief effort and the man Jesus Christ. Many others, including myself, lit candles in the name of peace, tolerance, understanding, the celebration of life, love and justice. Wandis read a poem she had written to the Norse Gods to protect and look after those who had died in New York, Washington D.C. and Pennsylvania.

Once all the candles were lit, which took approximately 15 minutes, the man who lit the South candle asked us to all join hands. At this point the emotion in the room was intense, almost tangible. Several women were crying, others were staring at the candles. The man who had everyone join hands told us to close our eyes and imagine our feet were roots that were going into the ground. This process is known as grounding. It was meant to ground each person involved to avoid being overwhelmed by the emotional energy created during the ritual by linking his or her body to the stability of the earth. Once hands were joined, there was four minutes of silence, which allowed each person to breathe deeply, relax and become grounded in their own way.

After everyone was grounded, the ritual came to an end and it was time to close the circle and dissolve the sacred space. This began when the man who lit the East candle sang a song, one that I was unfamiliar with. Another man sang a song, *Tin Solider*, and the majority of the group sang along with him. Once they had finished singing, the candles that were lit to invoke the four directions were blown out, one by one. The people who lit the candles also blew them out while thanking the elements from each direction for joining our ritual and make the space sacred. Once the candles were out, the group sang a song that pertained to the closing of the circle. The song thanked all of the deities for their presence and asked for the protection of those involved in the ritual outside the ritual setting. After the song ended, everyone dispersed and chatted among

themselves about topics ranging from the tragedy of September 11 to the daily activities each person had participated in that day.

INTERVIEWS

Due to the private nature of the ritual setting for my informants, the majority of my research was based on in-depth, open ended interviews. Because the informants either had a coven outside of CUUPS or preferred solitary practice, interviews were the best way to glean the most information about not only their religious beliefs, but also how their religious paradigm related to the understanding of their gender identity, especially with the male informants who were the focus of this study.

I conducted four interviews with each informant, resulting in a total of 36 interviews. These interviews lasted from twenty minutes to two hours, depending on the questions and the informant answering them. All the interviews were in-depth, open-ended interviews. An in-depth, open-ended interview is where every detail of a topic is explored without restricting the interviewees' answers by time (Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte 1999). Though many of the questions were predetermined, the answers were open-ended. I allowed the informants to answer freely for as long as they needed and when necessary, I probed with further, spontaneous questions.

The first interview was a preliminary one asking the informants about their age, occupation, where they were originally from, family situation (i.e. married/single, children), past religious experience prior to Neopaganism, how they became a Neopagan, how long they had been practicing, what drew them to this religion, their specific beliefs, what they like and dislike about their religion, individual vs. group practice, what it

means to them to be a Neopagan, how long they had been a member of CUUPS (if applicable), what drew them to CUUPS, and what role CUUPS played in their identity as a Neopagan.

These questions served as a baseline to get to know them and to discover what direction to lead the next three sets of interviews. It also afforded me the opportunity to see what I type of questions I could ask and what I could not. For the most part, each participant was willing to answer any and all questions. In the first interview, all were eager to share with me their personal stories and their worldview of Neopaganism and Christianity alike.

The next three interviews focused primarily on gender. The second interview focused on their understanding of gender as a Neopagan versus those in mainstream U.S. society. These questions included their take on the differences between men and women in general society vs. those in Neopaganism, how they would compare themselves to the stereotype in the U.S., how their religion has added to their identity as a man/women, if Neopaganism was about defining gender roles and if so, what were those roles, and what, if any change has Neopaganism made in their view of the roles of men and women in general society.

The third interview focused on asking probing questions about the information given in the first two interviews. For example, I asked specific questions about their own Neopagan beliefs, such as the importance of certain deities they worshipped and what it meant to them, how these deities played into their role as men/women. The third interview as molded specifically for each informant in order to gain a deeper

understanding of how they saw themselves as men/women in Neopaganism and what part that played in developing their gender identity.

The fourth and final interview was about gender not only in the context of the informants but also in Neopaganism and U.S. society in general, and their relationships with Neopagans vs. non-Neopagans. These questions included their opinion on whether they saw themselves as being different from men and women in general society and what those differences were, how they would compare themselves to non-Neopagans, did they spend more time with Neopagans or non-Neopagans and how their relationships differ, what compromises they had to make around non-Neopagans and how that affected them, and if they felt it is difficult to be a Neopagan in today's society. These questions allowed me insight into how they viewed themselves within U.S. society, specifically as a Neopagan man/woman. It also showed whether they felt they had to compromise who they were in order to "fit in" or avoid conflict with non-Neopagans.

The interviews were held in several locations through out Fort Collins and two locations in Spokane, Washington. In Fort Collins, I conducted interviews at two local coffee shops, two informant's homes, two restaurants, one informant's work place, two via email, the Anthropology graduate office, and the student union building at Colorado State University.

The majority of the interviews took place at a local coffee shop in Fort Collins. This particular coffee shop was well known to my informants because they would meet there after the CUUPS meetings. The suggestion to meet here for interviews came from the informants themselves. It was a long and narrow building with paintings on the walls by local artists. The tables, chairs and couches were an eclectic mix of new and old

furniture. Many of the pieces looked as if they were donated because they were well worn. There was a mix of Christmas lights along with overhead lights that created a relaxed atmosphere. All four interviews with Taramathea, were conducted here, three with Tock and Lioness, two with Andrew, Oskar, Troubadour, and one with Wandis.

The other coffee shop was a small shop in downtown Fort Collins. Only one interview was conducted there because the informant, Oskar, wanted a convenient place to meet after work. This coffee shop was Di Vinci themed and had recreations of his works painted directly on the wall or in framed pictures hanging on the wall. It was a small, square room with matching silver tables and chairs. The register was at the back of the room along with a display case of food and beverages.

Two other public places where interviews took place were a chain sandwich shop and a chain restaurant. One interview was conducted at a Quiznos in Fort Collins. Just like the interview at the Di Vinci coffee shop, the informant, Tock, was looking for a convenient place to meet after work to grab something to eat and suggested this restaurant. The restaurant was empty with the exception of the employees working. It was a rectangular building with the food counter at the back and the tables and chairs filling the space in front of the counter. It was filled with black iron chairs and tabletops, had red walls with generic scenic paintings, and a tan, marbled linoleum floor.

The other restaurant interview took place in Spokane, Washington at a local Perkins. The informant, Thaddeus, suggested this as a neutral location that would provide us something to eat because the interview was held early in the morning before he went to work. This was an older Perkins with brown carpet, off-white wallpapered walls, vinyl booth seats, and cream-colored lamen tabletops. The tables were laid out in

a U-shaped pattern around a coffee bar and the kitchen. There were very few patrons when the interview took place.

Though several interviews took place in the public sphere, there were several interviews that took place either in the informant's home, in the anthropology graduate office at Colorado State, or via email. Two of the informants graciously let me into their homes for interviews. Troubadour invited me twice to his home to conduct interviews. He not only allowed me to ask questions, but he also invited me over for dinner to meet his wife. It was a small, blue house with two levels. The front door opened into the living room with stairs leading up to the second floor to the left of the door. The entrance into the kitchen was located next to the stairs and this is where the interviews took place. It was a small space with brown cabinets, yellow linoleum floor, with white kitchen appliances. The kitchen table was located at the back of the kitchen and this is where we sat down for interviews.

The other informant who allowed me into her home was Suzuki. All four interviews with this informant were conducted in her home. She lived near campus in a small blue house. The front door opened into a living room, dining room area shaped like an L. The interview was held in her living room, which had two couches, a recliner and a coffee table. The living room had a small television and a gaming system. In the dining room were several bookshelves filled with books. There were so many books they were stacked on the floor through the dining room and the living room. For the interview, I sat on the couch while Suzuki sat in the recliner. For three of the interviews we were by ourselves. The first interview, however, her teenage daughter came home during the interview and I was able to briefly meet her before she went to her bedroom.

Four interviews were held in the anthropology graduate office after hours on the campus of Colorado State. Though an alternative space was suggested by me, the three informants were close to the office because they were students at CSU and since I was there working, they suggested meeting in the office to conduct the interviews. This space was a small cinder block room with the door at one end with several desks with computers, and cubicle walls that separated the desks. There was also a couch and a table. The interviews were conducted at the table with the informant on one side and me on the other. The door was always locked during the interviews and was held after office hours for both the other graduate students and the professors.

The other area on the Colorado State campus where I held an interview was the cafeteria of the student union building. This common area was large area where students gathered to eat their food and study. There were two levels in the main eating area. The upper level had a gray and red tile floor with several gray tables and black chairs placed throughout the area. The lower level was a carpeted meeting area containing sofas and chairs, one television, overhead theater lighting, and two offices located on either side. On one side of the area was a glass brick wall and the food court was located on the other side. This place was chosen because the informant, Wandis had just finished class, was on campus and was looking for something to eat. She suggested this area, which was close to my office at the anthropology graduate student office.

Finally, two interviews with Andrew were done via email. Due to his busy schedule as a professor and as a volunteer at the Rocky Mountain Raptor Program, he requested that I send him the questions via email. This was the most convenient way for him to answer my questions.

For this research, the one-on-one interviews offered the most insight into my informants' views on religion on gender. After building trust and getting to know me, they felt comfortable opening up to me to share their point of view. The informants were both thoughtful and open in their answers. The next chapter will focus on the ethnographic analysis of the bi-monthly meetings, the rituals and the interviews.

CHAPTER FIVE

ETHNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

My participation in the CUUPS meetings, rituals and the interviews were investigatory tools used to understand how the male informants use Neopaganism to help

define what masculinity means to them. They were useful not only to observe how the men interact with both Neopagan men and women, but also how they speak of themselves in the context of their gender identity. The main ethnographic tool used in this research to understand the relationship between gender identity and Neopaganism were the interviews. The one-on-one interaction with the informants led to a deeper conversation about what it meant to be a man in Neopaganism. It is the intention of this section to take an analytical look at the meetings, rituals and interviews as investigator tools to understand what the male informants said about how Neopaganism is used to define their gender identity.

BI-MONTHLY MEETINGS

While observing the CUUPS meetings, it became apparent that although the goal was to maintain balance of participation and leadership among the members for both men and women, the men tended to lead meetings. Tock was not only in charge of the email distribution list, setting up the meetings and picking out the topics of discussion, but he would generally begin the meetings and start the discussions. He would encourage others in the group to start the discussion, but most often ended up leading them. This was also true once Oskar became the unofficial leader.

Women primarily attended the meetings with the exception one or two male members. It was interesting to see in this public setting the men were the primary instigators. Generally the women who attended would participate but seemed to hold back and be reserved about their opinions. If two men were in the meeting, they tended to dominant the conversation.

Before participating in CUUPS meeting, my research on Neopaganism led me to believe this was a female dominated religion where women were the main, if not the sole leaders. It also led me to believe men took a secondary role to women and followed their lead. This preconceived notion began to dissipate the more meetings I attended. Though the women were vital and active members, they would often acquiesce the leadership role to the men in these public settings. The men were quick to lead and were unwilling to idly sit by in silence waiting for someone else to start the meeting. They were efficient and got directly to the topic of discussion.

In this setting, the gender roles of men and women were similar to the stereotypical ideas of leadership in terms of gender in U.S. society. This idea of men being strong in the public sphere and being unafraid to both share their opinion and defend it was very obvious. The women, although willing to share their views, were less willing to be confrontational and were more passive in their participation.

Though men ran the majority of the meetings, there were a few exceptions. During the two meetings where crafts were made, no men were present, with the exception of an 11-year-old boy. It was only a handful of women and the discussions were often about the Goddess(es) and their families. They tended to be more conversational and more relaxed about speaking in public when men were not present. It was interesting to see when the men were gone the women were able to relax a bit more and were more willing to open up about themselves. It seemed even though these Neopagan women were comfortable with their male counterparts, it was easier for them to relate to each other and open up about themselves when the men were gone.

It became clear in the meetings that even though there were no officially prescribed gender roles for men and women in this Neopagan group and that balance was the ultimate goal, stereotypical elements of U.S. society were present. In my assessment, it is difficult for both male and female Neopagans to completely escape the gender roles that have been culturally instilled in them, despite their best intentions. While the informants spoke of gender equality in all settings, reflected in their interviews and how they say they behave, this did not match their actions as observed by me. In the open, unscripted environment of the bi-monthly meetings, the stereotypical gender roles presented themselves. The men took over the meetings and interjected their opinions, while the women acquiesced and gave leadership roles to men, holding their own opinions in check. Even though the informants spoke of and believed they lived their lives as gender neutral as possible, this was not evident in the bi-monthly meetings. It was equally clear, however, they were not consciously aware of this lack of fit between their words (and also their thought and ideals) and action.

RITUALS

Both the rituals and the meetings offered insight into how gender roles differed between the mundane setting and the sacred setting. Though the men tended to lead the public sphere of CUUPS, in the sacred ritual setting leadership roles of men were reversed. Though they were active participants, both of the rituals I attended were either lead solely by women or were instigated by women. Unlike the meetings, the women

easily lead the group through the ritual, starting with the calling of everyone into the circle.

Instead of being passive in their interaction with the participants, Wandis and Lioness easily engaged all participants, men, women and children. It was clear their confidence in being the ritual leaders and their knowledge of the ritual made them a source of authority. The participants easily followed their direction and were eager to follow them through the ritual.

This female leadership was apparent in the September 11 ritual as well. Maya, the woman who led the ritual easily called together all the participants and told them how the ritual would proceed. It was obvious her authority was based on her knowledge of the ritual procedure. However, her authority was not over emphasized because she wanted everyone to get involved and asked for volunteers to help with the creation of the circle. This was clear when the invoking of the four directions took place. Two men and two women volunteered to light the candles. At this point it was apparent that balance of the masculine and feminine was an important aspect of the group, despite the fact a woman initiated the ritual. Men and women alike shared their feelings and emotions about the tragedy. This ritual was the most gender-balanced event I participated in during my research.

In the scripted ritual environment, gender equality was more easily attained. Both men and women participated more or less equally and vocally in the rituals, with both genders relatively unashamed to share their emotions. This was most evident in the September 11 ritual when men felt free to sing songs and cry at the tragic loss of life. There was no judgment from their fellow pagans. Of note, in this environment, it was

also easier for women to take the leadership role and for men to follow, showing that sometimes Neopagans, male and female, were able to enact their ideals regarding gender.

INTERVIEWS

To begin the discourse of gender identity within the interview setting and what role Neopaganism plays in how they define it for themselves, it was important to understand how the male informants saw the male gender role stereotype in the U.S. This gave me a base to work from not only to understand what they believe was the stereotype, but how they saw themselves as both playing and differing from this role. The answer was consistent among each informant. All stated that men in the U.S. were supposed to providers, were strong both physically and mentally, were competitive, testosterone driven, and emotionless. When speaking about the stereotype of men's roles Troubadour stated, "Men don't cry, men only show one emotion – anger, or anger squared called rage. Men can do this, men can't do that. Oh, men don't cook, that's a woman's job. Men don't belong in the kitchen."

Similarly, Andrew noted that even though Feminism and the men's movement made some change to stereotypes in the U.S., they still follow, in his words, the 1950s sitcoms. He stated, "Women are supposed to be domestic, caretakers, nurturers. Men are supposed to be emotionless, not passionate less, but emotionless. They are to be the providers, things like that." Tock also stated, "Men are the financial ones of the family. They're expected to be the earners, they're expected to bring in household income, and even if they get divorced they're expected to bring income to the kids and the wife in a lot of cases."

Both Oskar and Thaddeus had a slightly different take on what the stereotypical male role is in the U.S. They believed there are a few stereotypes, but ultimately the stereotypical male gender role is hard to define because to Oskar and Thaddeus it has become less prevalent as our culture moves away from the 1950s stereotypes. Thaddeus stated,

Yeah back when I was being raised which was the 50's, um men ah men were basically ah like Spock on, um, Star Trek in the sense they were strong, nothing ever got to them and an answer for everything, in times of trouble and turmoil the weaker people like kids and woman would go to them to be protected or saved or whatever and basically of a, of a, of a, um, of a solver of a, of, a of, a fortress of a castle, of a, you know, all this guy is essential he brings home the bacon, the money, I mean he makes the money you know he's like, he's basically, um, in his mind the key to the whole thing. Woman are, was the kinder, ah, gentler, more emotional softer side of all of that, all the things that a man can't afford to be. Because in those days if a man was that way he'd be tromped on by other men, but, but it worked.

In the 50s and 60s if you'd say, 'Imagine a doctor. What do you see?' I didn't see a woman. Today – man, women – it's absolutely normal. You wouldn't even think the slightest bit about it. The only difference I can see between men and women as far as typical things would have to do with physical strength issues...Man today is hard to define because we are starting a new tradition: a tradition of gender not being a prerequisite to any particular endeavor. I just can't think of anything that you would have to be a female or male. I don't see a gender limitation.

Similarly Oskar stated, "My culture and previous knowledge and what not, has told me that yes, men are supposed to be strong and motivated and so on and so forth. That makes us all looked at and prized, you know stupid football players and that kind of stuff. Now it's like, now that matters like half if not 10% of what a man is. A man should be someone who is, and I hold myself to the same standards of someone who is intelligent, who seeks out knowledge who has goals and is driven to meet them, which is not to demean someone else that I thought used to be highly prized as a man, you know again we can use the football player as an example."

After determining their understanding of a stereotypical male, I asked if any of them consider themselves to be a stereotypical male. The response varied among the informants. Three of the informants, Thaddeus, Troubadour and Andrew had served in the military and two of them felt at that point in their lives they were very similar to the stereotypical male. Troubadour joined the military and was sent to Vietnam. He stated, “As far as being testosterone driven, let’s see in the army I was a Ranger. I jumped out of airplanes and helicopters and yes, I can even remember a couple of the North Vietnamese soldiers that I killed. I can even, if I work on it, I can virtually smell the one’s bad breath again. But yea, I’ve done that too. As far as being a warrior, the ultra macho, I’ve already done that. I’ve been to the extremes and to the middle.”

Andrew was also in the military and felt during his tour, it was easy to become the ‘emotionless warrior’. He stated:

When I was in the Navy, it was a really good place to go to assimilate and if there’s one thing you do in a uniformed service, is to become uniform. So, um yea, it was really easy to assimilate into that. You can be careless. You don’t have to think about things. And you know there was a time when I was in the service where that was great. I loved to not having to really care about my emotions. I enjoyed not having to care about my spirituality. I didn’t care about the welfare of women. It wasn’t, I didn’t have to and it was a luxury not to. This is really a tough thing for humans to get a hold of that the easiest path is often the path we should avoid or the easiest path is the one we should investigate much more before we start walking it. And so, because of its ease, because of it allowed me to fit in and because I was like every other guy there, yea it was real simple, but there was always a space where, there was always a line I won’t cross, there was always a space where I’d pull back and I’d say, well you know, bullshit.

Even the informants who were not in the military felt they have qualities of the stereotypical male. As Troubadour states, “Just because we are pagan doesn’t mean we are not human and doesn’t mean that we eliminate every influence modern American

society has. We probably are more aware of them because we talk more about them...but whatever's in the general society you'll find in paganism too." For example, Tock mentioned that he is the breadwinner and he enjoys "typical" male activities, such as watching sports and hanging out with the guys. Troubadour, Thaddeus, and Andrew also considered themselves the breadwinners.

Oskar, on the other hand, specifically mentioned he has the typical competitive male nature. In terms of other men he says, "You kind of see them as competition in pretty much everything in life. I mean the obvious in the work place whatsoever. Any other guy at work whose potentially competition for your next job or maybe, unfortunately your current job and that's always, there's always the urge to be a little bit better to show a better face and that's always a good thing. Do better, show a better face. That's always something to strive for. So there's a job, there's women, obviously. We all see each other as competition for the same beautiful women and that always causes tension, whether you want it to or not."

These male informants, however, would not categorize themselves as the stereotypical U.S. male, even though they share some of the characteristics. In fact, even though they know there is a stereotypical gender role for men in the U.S., they do not believe there is a specific gender role for men or women. Instead, they believe gender is a fluid concept not designated by specific roles or traits. Men can express feminine traits in tandem with masculine traits because they believe it is important to live life with balance. There does not need to be a category for them to fall into, such as masculine or feminine to be a contributing member of society. These men are not purposefully working against the stereotype or trying to make a social or political statement against the

stereotype. Instead, they believe they are more than just a stereotype and they are living their lives as their “true” selves.

Before they found Neopaganism, the male informants stated they all had what would be considered a strong feminine side, even if it was suppressed at different stages of their lives, i.e. when some of them were in the military. All of them credit a source in their life, such as a mother who nurtured the feminine qualities, or had fathers who had strong feminine characteristics.

When asked about the feminine influence in Asatru and how that affects him, Oskar, stated, “I think it’s great. Personally, I’m a rather feminine man. I have no problem admitting to that.” When I asked him to explain what that meant he said,

I don’t give a damn about sports. I’ve never been much into activity. The easy ones – all my friends in high school and now are female. I really don’t go into the brutish, stereotypical man. I really actually detest that. I don’t want to be one of those. So I find myself as more of a feminine man. So these types of ideals and practices appeal to me a lot. I really enjoy learning about these things; applying this to ever minute of my day-to-day life, at least trying to and then over analyzing it when I’m done. I didn’t say that was a feminine trait. I just said that’s what I do.

I also asked him if he felt any pressure growing up to act like the stereotypical man he said he detested. He answered,

Um, I’d say no mostly because my father isn’t like that at all. He’s gotten even better at it since then. He is the stereotypical feminine man. So that was great to grow up around and then, of course, my mother had a big part in the early years and actually she’s having a big part in the later years right now too. So I didn’t feel a lot of parental or sibling pressure in that kind of direction. I think I was just given, when I was growing up, a very good sense of who I am and I am actually very proud of what I’m doing, where I’m at, and my goals, the things I want to do. So, why strive for something that someone else tells me I need to be. So I think I got lucky in that sense because it all sounded like a bad joke to me when I was growing up what these people are thinking about. What? What’s the whole point? I never understood it.

Tock also mentioned his family as an influence on his feminine side. He stated, “I’ve been told that I’m in touch with my female side more than some guys. I’m not

saying it's good or bad. I think it's just true." When asked what these feminine traits consisted of, he said "I'm the primary cook at my house. I clean house. I don't think there are men's jobs and women's jobs. I think that I have a lot of nurturing side too that I'm pretty open minded about a lot of things in that sense." He credits his family in his development of balance between male and female roles. He stated,

You know, I was raised in a very neutral family. My mom and my dad both raised us. It worked out quite well in terms of there was not girl's duties and boys duties. No, the men had to make dinner and clean dishes and the women had to clean bathrooms and take the garbage out. They didn't care. They pretty much made us do whatever. And so my mom thought one had to sew and how to cook and all that good stuff.

So I think in some sense I've always been kind of very equally minded. I think though that I've never really thought of it in any sense of female aspects as being powerful, that women are powerful. Not saying that I was discriminating against women saying that they're not powerful but I never really thought of it in those terms, but for that matter I never really thought of men being powerful although it's obviously around us that we think we are for whatever reason.

It was the influence of this gender-neutral environment that contributed to Tock's belief in the balance between the masculine and feminine. One was not more powerful or more appropriate for him than the other.

Andrew, despite his time as the stereotypical male while in the military, also felt he had a strong feminine side he contributed to his mother. He stated,

Yea, I am much more connected to my emotions. I'm much more willing to explore. Learning to manage your emotions is a very intense learning experience. Uh, you know, I think it's broadened my perspective. I got very lucky with my mother. My mother, everybody says, well most every says it's about their mother, but she was pretty much the incarnation of love, if you can call it that. And one of the things, just as a happy byproduct of the amount of healthy love she lavished on me as a child, I feel like I'm a total nurturer.

I think it's because of my mom. I've always had what would be considered feminine traits...oh this is hilarious. When I was 10 my dad was stationed in Germany, and I have an older brother about six years. One day my dad came up to me and said, "You, your brother and I, we're goin' to Italy for a week", and I said, 'Oh that'll be cool! When are we all leaving?' 'We're not all leaving, it's just you me and your brother.' I said, 'Oh what about mom and [my sister]?' I have an older sister. He looked at me and said, 'Sometimes the men folk gotta

get away from the women folk.’ And I swear to god it was not his exasperation with the feminine but his concern that I was gay. I have always incorporated feminine stuff in my life. I’ve never been fond of the competitive monster, which is a masculine trait. Um, I always preferred to make socially constructive meaning by sharing. That’s a feminine trait. I feel for people, I am very compassionate. That’s feminine.

Though Andrew suppressed this feminine side in the military, it was still a part of him, which he later rediscovered while on his path to Neopaganism.

The last two male informants, Troubadour and Thaddeus while they mentioned they have always had a strong feminine side, due to the environment they were raised, which was in the 1950s, they suppressed these feminine traits in order to avoid ridicule. During the 1950s, there was a defined role for men and women. Men were the providers and emotionless, while women were caretakers and nurturing. When asked about his feminine side, Troubadour said though he had feminine characteristics, such as being nurturing, he had to suppress it while growing up. He stated, “In high school being the least bit sensitive and automatically you’re queer, especially if you were yellow on fights, or some dumb thing like that.” He did, however, say that while in the military he was able to express the feminine trait of nurturing, which not only came naturally to him, but was also a job requirement. He said he was a medic during Vietnam and, “when you’re moving injured people you have to be gentle. You don’t want to inflict more pain. A man’s body had been ultimately injured. And, of course, I did kill enemy soldiers while protecting my patients. I had no qualms at all, but yes, as a field medic, as a hospital medic I had a chance to do that. We all did it and some of the medics were far more gentle than the nurses were. I was instinctively, we were easier, but in the army as a field medic, as a psychiatric tech, everything, I could be nurturing and caring. That was my job.”

Prior to finding Neopaganism, Thaddeus was also influenced by the 1950s gender roles for men and women. Because he experienced the extremes in his household, an emotional mother and a logical father, he expressed both feminine and masculine traits in what seemed a haphazard manner. He stated,

Born and raised in the 50's, um, there was this idea that boys to do boy things and girls do girl things and boys certainly didn't cry or show emotion or do any of this stuff, and girls did and girls played with dolls, and boys played with you know boy toys and girl toys. And there were girl rules and boy rules. And there were feminist issues and masculine issues. And I think at one point we tried to move away to kind of in a denial thing where we were saying that, um, I don't know, but the basic roles that were outlined in the 50's would work because everybody knew what to expect. Well, I was raised in a family that my father was absolutely pure logic and my mother was absolutely pure emotion.

My problem up until, ah, probably into my 40's was that I just, ah, adapted both of those so it was either on or off, so whatever problem came my way I either operated purely emotionally to it, or purely logically to it, which confused a lot of people. Before it had to be either my dad's way or my mom's way. That's where I would look at whatever challenge came my way. Is this something to sit there and cry about? And make no logical improvement? Or is this something that there is no need to feel any emotion about?

As a result, Thaddeus expressed both feminine and masculine traits, depending on the situation. Even though there was a prescribed way for him to behave as a man in the 1950s, his home life had a bigger impact on his gender identity, which allowed him to express both. The feminine traits each male informant possessed were never seen as detrimental to their masculinity, even if they had to suppress them in order to save themselves from ridicule. Instead, they saw it as a natural and important part of being human. As a result, they were interested in finding an avenue to not only express these traits, but also to find a balance between the masculine and feminine.

It was this search for balance that brought them to Neopaganism. For two of the informants, Troubadour and Thaddeus, they sought out a religious avenue to express this balance. Because religion had always been a part of their lives in the form of

Christianity, they developed a deep connection with spirituality. For both Thaddeus and Troubadour, Christianity became too rigid, dogmatic and did not suit their changing ideas of what it meant to be a man.

As mentioned in chapter four, Troubadour was Roman Catholic and even entered the seminary to become a priest. In his mid-30s he decided to leave the church to pursue a different religious path. When asked why he stated, “More very, very specific rules and yea, more very, very specific rules from the church as far as behavior and what was expected, what was demanded.” I further asked how he felt about these expectations and he replied, “They’re pretty cruddy. They’re unrealistic. They’re expecting everyone to fit into a very, very confining space and not allowing for a full variation, a full spectrum of differences. It’s sort of like the, a very misshaped bell-shaped curve where the norm is terribly narrow thing were the norm should be the very wide thing and the aberration is just a very, a little bit on the end.” It was a seminar at the Sunshine Ranch in conjunction with the reading of *Drawing Down the Moon* that started Troubadour on his Neopagan path.

Thaddeus also found the dogma and rules of organized religion unsatisfying and felt it did not speak to the way he felt about himself or the world around him. He stated,

Organized religion didn’t talk about what we were doing in Vietnam, or what we were doing to each other, or what was specifically happening to me. In fact, organized religion basically taught that, near as I can remember, is that man is sinful by nature and the shit that happens to you, you deserve it. I eventually started thinking that, you know, if God is how organized religion is telling me; in other words, God is in the trees, God is in me, God is in you, God is in the rocks, God is everywhere. What do I need a church for? [My church] is anybody who is open to the idea of sharing the concept that we are free spirits with free will and we can use it in whatever way we want and are you searching out something that works for you? And I wasn’t getting that message from organized religion. From organized religion I was getting ‘you have these rules.’

It was this search for a spiritual path without rules that lead him to Neopaganism.

Tock, Andrew, and Oskar on the other hand were not practicing any form of religion before finding Neopaganism. It was the search for balance between masculine and feminine traits and the need for the sacred in their lives that brought them to religion. They felt balance was a crucial part of their lives while simultaneously feeling a lack of something sacred. When asked why he started searching for something religious, Andrew stated,

Um, well, the lack in my life of anything spiritual or sacred. Um, you know, I probably couldn't put it in those terms then, but now I look back and I think I felt some sense of imbalance in my life and it was the ignorance of the sacred and there was no way I was going to ever enter into a monotheistic religion. Um, I was actually, I took a philosophy of religion class and learned the term pantheist, which means god is in everything, okay. And I thought 'Oh, this makes sense,' but I didn't pursue it for about 2 years. And then when I started feeling I needed something more in my life, I started exploring and I had a couple of friends who had been studying, well one of my friends, was studying Celtic Shamanism for 30 years and he is also a Native America pipe carrier.

It was through the initial influence of friends and then the teachings of his spiritual teacher he met through the Rocky Mountain Raptor Program that led him to Neopaganism.

Tock also was not on any specific spiritual path and even considered himself an Atheist for 15 years until in his mid-20s he began searching for something spiritual in his life. He stated that perhaps it was his father's diagnoses of colon cancer that started the search, but he ultimately was interested in adding the sacred to his life. He stated, "This deep needing for spirituality never really caught me until later on in life. So somewhere in my mid-20s I started thinking of doing some searching. I kind of started reading some other books, some other texts and I came across Wicca through a co-worker and I said okay, what's that about and explained to me and I said okay, that's interesting and I said, I read about it and I just said ding, ding, ding, and a little light went on. So my

real philosophy about a lot of things hasn't changed, but I added a spiritual aspect to it." It was through this friend and then later through another teacher at the Rocky Mountain Raptor Program Tock began on his path to Neopaganism.

Oskar's path to Neopaganism was a bit different than the others. Though he grew up in a Roman Catholic Church, once his parents stopped taking him to church at the age of eight, he never sought a new religious path. When asked what religion he practiced after his parents stopped taking him to church, he said, "Nothing. It was just, you know, we stopped going on Sundays and for a while us kids were really happy to have our Sundays back to ourselves and then that was the end of it really. I had never touched a faith until four years ago and I never really thought about it. It never came up."

He started searching six years ago because his girlfriend at the time, Wandis, was Asatru and began to explain to him the workings of the religion. Over time the religion became an important part of his life because it offered him a sacred understanding of the world around him. When asked what drew him to Asatru he stated, "It did a good job at the beginning of explaining a lot of things about, explaining things specifically about the world and the way it can be explain that it works. But more it gave a little more of the guidance I found out that I needed." Though the relationship did not last, Asatru was a strong enough influence in his life he remained an active member of the faith.

After searching for the divine in their daily lives, Neopaganism offered all of them what they were looking for. In one way or another they said this religion, whether it was Asatru, Wicca or a general form of Neopaganism, felt like the truth. It fit perfectly into what they believed the divine to be and who they felt they were as men. It was the later part of this equation that led me to ask, why would men join a female-centric

religion? The answer among the informants was the same – it offered both a balance between the masculine and feminine, and ultimately allowed them to be free to be who they are. If, for example, they wanted to be emotional, they could. There were no rules speaking against being emotional. If they wanted to be logical, they could be that as well.

There are no rules saying you have to act a certain way as a man. Instead, the religion is about being human. A common theme among the informants is Neopaganism was attractive to them as a man because this religion was not about defining gender roles. The concept of gender was a fluid concept. It could be molded and changed depending on the individual person. Other Neopagan men and women did not judge them because they too felt a person had the right to live their life as they saw fit as long as they are not hurting themselves or others.

To determine how Neopaganism adds to the gender identity of the male informants, I asked them what it was about Neopaganism that drew them to the religion, especially as a man. Troubadour stated,

Freedom. It means I don't have to have anybody tell me what to wear, when to wear, how to wear, what to eat, when to eat, where to eat, how to eat as in the rules that come out of the Koran, or the rules that come out of many Christian groups. I don't have to have somebody directing me from the time I open my baby blues until I start snoring at night. I can be, I can take care of myself. I can stand up and say "Hey, this is what I want to do and I will do it." I don't have to have all the control and the direction.

There is a whole big wide range of who I am, different expressions, different emotions, different behaviors – all of which are perfectly valid and I can be any one of those at any given time, whatever's needed and I don't have to limit myself...The freedom to do it and not the inhibition to say no this is not the Christian way to behave.

I then asked how Neopaganism added to his identity as a man and he replied,

It's let me be more of who I am. I let the poet and the musician come out. The bard is coming out as well as the warrior. Hey, I'm a warrior poet, but I am able

to release a lot of stuff that I never was able to because it doesn't matter. I'm giving myself permission to do it now. Where as before I'd have to go and see the priest and ask him permission. I don't need the jerk anyway.

I further asked if he felt Neopaganism was about defining gender roles for men and women. He felt it was not about defining roles. Instead, he said,

It's about being a human being. The freedom to be what one wants to be is there and gender sometimes helps out and in fact gender gets in the way. Fortunately we have the surgery to take care of that now, but as far as the reason of Paganism as defining gender roles, no. It's to let one's self be free so one can define one's own role.

Pagans allow for each man to figure it out for himself. There's not a WWJD in what would Jupiter do? No, we are free. We can decide for ourselves, we don't have a little manual, or in a nun's case a womenual. We don't have that, we don't need it and we are free to make our own decisions. We are also free to take our own lumps.

I think the biggest thing in paganism is just quietly allowing people to do whatever they want to do.

Troubadour is able to express himself as a man any way he sees fit with Neopaganism.

There are no guidelines he must follow. He can express himself through music and poetry and not feel chastised for showing his emotions.

Andrew also believes Neopaganism offers him not only balance between the female and male energies, but also allows him to see the path of truth. When asked why he followed the Neopagan path he said he was on the path of being human. When asked to explain what that meant he replied, "To fully be able to see the truth. To fully be able to accept the truth. It's okay if you don't quite understand the truth as long as you sit with it long enough to understand where it's going. So let the truth guide your life. All on an emotional, physical, mental and spiritual level. That to me is a human being. So when I started looking at earth-based religions I was looking for the truth. I was looking for something that was real and more so than any other place I found, I found real."

On his journey to become a human being, Andrew believes finding the balance between the male and female energy is important. Ultimately, he believes there is one energy that is both male and female. He stated,

To me, there is no such thing as male energy; there is no such thing as female energy. There's just energy and we are free to pick up and weave with what energy we so choose...I think it's, it really can be seen in part as a response to our very, well, our culture in this world at this time isn't as restrictive as others, but for many people our culture is very restrictive. Men have to be this way; women have to be this way. No, women are not running around in veils, okay. So it is a more dismissive culture talking about the world, but it still has very strong gender roles prescriptions and, um I want to get away from that completely. I'm not interested in how I should be because of the gender I was born into and so when you start moving beyond gender ideas you realize that there is just energy out there.

When asked further to describe how incorporating both male and female energy into one form of energy through his Neopagan path added to his identity as a man he stated,

Using these terms, incorporating the feminine has enriched my life. Remember last time I said I was trying to become a human being? You can't be a human being without incorporating that energy. You simply can't because you are denying too much of yourself. So, yea I'm in a much better place today because of that.

I think Paganism opens the door to breaking from these dangerous stereotypes more so than anything else in our culture. Brave men rush through this door; others have too much baggage to move so quickly; but the door is open. It's reaffirmed my life-long belief that it's necessary to integrate everything "male" and "female" to become complete.

My path allows me to become who I am without gender roles and stereotypes attached, beyond those in my own mind which I am working to shake loose from. Perhaps that's the connection, the freedom - the insistence - to shake off definitions of male and female that don't come from truth and love.

While Andrew has moved beyond the terms female and male energy, through his religion he uses this combined energy to express his gender identity as being fully integrated with both feminine and masculine traits. To him, this is what is natural, this is truth.

In the same vein, Oskar does not believe in the division of masculine and feminine roles in mainstream society and he found that Asatru blended perfectly with his belief. He stated,

I guess the first thing is just been the thing that I have been saying all the time that there is no need to have a gender role whatsoever. Anyone can achieve anything and there is no need to be held back. And you certainly shouldn't be held back by your religion. You hit enough roadblocks in the world today to not impose new ones on yourself.

They are integrated into the religion mostly because we prize different values in different people. Just like our gods represent different values from one another. It's more important to express what those values are not necessarily label them as this is what a man should do and this is what a woman should do, but say these are all separate virtues of some kind or another. Just like we have a male and a female deity, several of them actually that represent the spring, that represent fertility, that represent honor, poetry, battle all those things is not necessarily given a male or female label by saying well, we have a female deity that is fertility, we have a male deity that is honor meaning those are female or male aspects. They're not. Most of our gods have a male and female counter part. In one story they're a man and in another they're a woman and it's hard to figure out sometimes. But more along the lines it's trying to say that we're all human and these are the certain parts that we can use to make up a human.

I don't think that I had to find Asatru to understand these things. That's just the way I understood these things. So, I'm just saying that Asatru brought it to me and it was a perfect way for me. So, it just made a lot of things make a lot more sense.

When asked what attracted him to Asatru, he replied,

The ability to be open and to act however you feel you want to act and justify it. It's been said that that's okay, that's wonderful. Men are attracted to that because they're a few of us, myself included who goes, 'I don't want to act a certain way. There's no specific one way I want to be. I don't want to have to fit into any else's mold or idea of how I should be so why should I?' And this gives a good reason to go, 'Well, I shouldn't. This outright says here look I shouldn't.' There's nothing telling me that I should be anything.

Because Oskar does not believe in the delineation of specific roles for men and women in general, Asatru provided a divine justification for his belief. He feels he can be free to be a man that is not interested in being the stereotypical male, but can instead express himself how he wishes, even in an emotional sense.

Thaddeus' understanding of gender roles for men and women are similar to Oskar's, though Thaddeus believes there are differences between men and women. When asked what he saw as the differences between the gender role of men and women he stated,

In the role of humanity, if that's the right phrase, I believe God did, God, Creator, whatever, I use the term 'God' relatively loosely, I believe our Creator did in the interest of making us almost need each other a bit more. I think women are, by nature, more nurturing. Not because of a learning bias, I just believe they are. I believe that my experiences, and that's all I can speak from, I believe there is a 'mothering' mode in women, I'm not talking better or worse, that is different than men and visa versa. I think women don't seem to have, at least the women I know, they don't seem to have what I would call the warrior, or macho, or testosterone driven attributes that I see in an awful lot of guys. Those things I'm talking about I don't believe are learned necessarily.

I don't think it is an accident that God, the Creator, actually created men and women. I think they were designed not to compete with one another but to compliment one another, a point that is often missed by the extremes of the thought patterns of either gender. For example, maybe certain feminist movements versus certain macho movements whatever they may be. That's not what I am talking about. To me those groups are more into segregating and polarizing their gender rather than understanding how they complement one another.

Nor do I feel as a man that I have to think how a woman would do something. Nor do I need to think this is a traditional female role so I better go ask a woman how to do it and then I'll do it that way. I do think that if whatever you are you do some particular task really well that's what you should learn is how do you do *that* task. Just because you are a certain gender I'm not so sure that naturally gives you the talent to really do anything. Which is different from me telling you that I would rather play with a doll than a truck, I really think that's something different. I really think that's a personal choice issue.

Though Thaddeus believes there are differences between men and women, these differences are not specifically assigned to a gender. Though he believes, for example, a woman can be naturally more nurturing, this does not mean it's a gender specific role. Instead it is a gender task either a man or a woman can take on. A man or a woman can take on any of these tasks if they make them feel more fulfilled as a human.

When asked specifically what role he felt men and women play in Neopaganism and how this affects his view of men and women in general he stated,

I'll go back to that word compliment. There could be strengths and weaknesses but I don't see those as defined gender traits. I'm just saying that if I was a woman and I met a guy that was having problems expressing his emotions to the point of causing a physical illness or something, stress, ulcers, and I was comfortable in my ability to handle that, I would feel comfortable mentoring, teaching and coaching that person. But is that gender transfer? I don't think so, I think it's 'gift' transfer. We could sit here and define a whole bunch of gifts that humans have but don't ask me to categorize this gift as being really more this way or that way. I couldn't do it.

I no longer define men and women in a competition role. I go back to seeing them in a complimentary role. Whether it's by stuff I've learned or it's a biological and cultural fact, whatever, I'm much more comfortable talking to you about these subjects and comfort extending down to knowing you don't have some hidden agenda.

I no longer lock people into roles. You should get the job based on your ability to do the job. As a Pagan I can see your spirit and I can see so much more than the bits that are hanging off you, to put it crudely. Those bits are irrelevant. There going to fall off, degenerate, go back to the earth, they're not what's you. I don't think I had that viewpoint before I looked more at the container than what was inside the container. I think our society is one of evaluating people more for what they have rather than what they are capable of doing. That saddens me and yet I can't really do much about it, except for my own life.

When I probed further and asked specifically about how Neopaganism added to his identity as a Neopagan man he stated,

Actually, the difference is that is just doesn't seem that important to be 'a man'. If you start stacking up, in your life, what's important, like I said I think the most important thing is love, in its purest sense. Love is a builder and, my goodness that takes up so much of my time to study it and understand it.

Rather than first thinking what a guy is or a gal is and then thinking I'm spending too much time being a guy maybe I should balance it by trying some feminine traits. I study the traits I would suspect and then let other people judge if they are feminine or masculine. I really don't care.

If you are willing to step up which I think is what Pagans do, they step up to a much bigger picture. The other things just aren't as important. We're not in denial that such things exist, as sexism, but for me I don't have time to worry about it. I accept to not let it get in my way. I think we have to recognize it so we don't stumble over it or can't figure out what's blocking us. But to actually spend any amount of time trying to display or enhance or improve gender

specific things about this particular incarnation strikes me as a monumental waste of time because there are so many important things you need to do.

Instead of spending his time on his spiritual path figuring out how to be a better man, he believes it is important to spend his effort being a better human. This includes a balance between the masculine and feminine. Only by balancing these gender tasks can he be the best human in this life.

For Tock, it was also the balance of the feminine and masculine that drew him to Neopaganism. He was also attracted to the concept of individual responsibility. From his point of view, individual responsibility extend both to taking care of the earth and being responsible for determining his own rules on how to live his life. When talking about what appealed to him about Wicca, he stated,

Balance. The idea of a god and goddess to me is very powerful. You look around and everything trees, plants, all animals, I mean there is this male and female energy in everything. Okay you've got the asexual bacteria you know, but there's just this dichotomy in everything. And the idea of having a dichotomous spirituality is just like very powerful to me. It's like wow, that's a really good idea. Why do you have to have a male god or a female god? It just makes sense to me. Yea, it just clicked it just follows with nature and I think that was the biggest attraction. That idea that you are responsible for your own actions. Individual responsibility is also very powerful for me because I've always believed that anyway.

Just seeing the balance is an important part to me, the duality of it and like I said just so much around us just seems to fit that model, that mold. Why not the divine? Why shouldn't the divine just be one element, masculine? I would accept it better than masculine. At least it's androgynous so you don't really know if it's male or female. To me that's more acceptable than just calling it a he.

So those two things – individual responsibility and the balance between the polarity of the divine. And then the pantheistic attitude is probably the third one. I'm a pantheist; divine is everywhere and that is powerful too and that's and we're all divine, we all have the divine spirit. I never picked that up before. I don't know it's like a light bulb went on, yea that makes sense.

When asked if he believes this balance between the male and female dichotomies encourages Neopagan men and women to celebrated their female and male sides he replied,

Do you think pagans encourage males to see their female side and females to see their male side? I think they do. I think they do. I think it's kind of like okay. It's kind of a Jungian thing that the idea that there's male and female parts in both of us. I think there is a lot of celebration in that males can express their female side without feeling ashamed or embarrassed and think women can do that too. I think it's more accepted in pagans. I think you find a lot of pagan males with probably a strong female side to them. I think that's probably true.

So to me I think that all the expression of the feminine and feminine qualities and even having a female deity are significant draws. I think that shows much more equality. There's, you know you can't have equality unless you express, show that there's power in the female as well as male. Until you kind of deal with that I think that's a problem for me.

I also asked Tock if he believed Neopaganism was about defining gender roles, to which he replied,

No, not necessarily. I think that's, I think it may do that, but don't think it actually does do that. I mean I think those are kind of a separate deal. I think it does give stronger role models to both sides. It maybe gives you strong focus and saying hey, this is kind of female traits and male traits, but it doesn't necessarily say you have to follow that. You must do it this way. So I don't think it does.

I don't think it's divided that way. I don't really think it's divided that way. I think that you play the role you need to play. If you want to be a man, be a man; if you want to be a woman, be a woman. Men can be women and men can be men. I mean I don't think there's a dictate about it, which roles you specifically have to play. I think it's important to play the roles you need to play for whatever you're doing. I don't think the religion dictates that in anyway.

I think if nothing else it's made me realize that it's okay. It's okay to do that. It's okay. It's not wrong. I don't have to be this masculine, tough guy and have to have no compassion, make everyone else do the same thing, 'you take care of yourself. Don't worry about anybody else,' kind of thing.

I don't think it's truly defining of a man or a woman, to a certain extent. If anything it might be detraction from the archetype male, but I don't think it necessarily defines. It just is in that sense. I don't think it necessarily defines me as a man or a woman, or whatever.

Mostly I've always been feminist in the sense that I believe that men and women are equal and I think Wicca is just a strengthening of that belief. I guess seeing

that in the divine and worshipping that in the divine is kind of the ultimate expression of my belief of that.

There is no way in paganism for that to be communicated in an explicit manner what your roles are and what my roles are. They don't come down and tell us that. It's for us to discover on our own if we choose to, but it does give us these strong, powerful images. So I think that's what I'm saying.

As with the other Neopagan male informants, Tock believes while there are female and male traits associated with each gender, these traits are not specifically prescribed to a man or a woman. In other words, if a man wants to be emotional, that is acceptable; if a woman wants to be tough, that too is acceptable. It is this balance and ability to choose for yourself how to define your gender identity that drew Tock to Wicca.

Tock also believes he is able to freely express his masculine and feminine sides because Neopagan women accept Neopagan men as they are. He stated,

I think part of it, I think pagan women are more accepting of a man who shows he doesn't have to be strong all the time. He can be himself, he can have emotions and I think that kind of feeds on itself. If the woman is accepting of those traits then the man can feel like he can be vulnerable. He doesn't have to be the tough person all the time. I think there is something to be said about that. I think men are under a lot more pressure in society than they need to have.

It is the acceptance of women that further solidifies Tock's pursuit of a balance and expression of these feminine and masculine traits.

This concept prompted me to ask my female informants their views on Neopagan men and why they believe men are drawn to a female-centered religion. When I asked Wandis, who is a follower of Asatru if this religion allows men to freely express their feminine traits, she stated,

Yes. They very much allow for men to be expressive in ways that our culture doesn't allow for. Men are just as responsible for the children and the household as women are and they are just as responsible for caring for their women in ways other than physically providing for them. So, it very much empowers men to, 'It's okay to be a man that's alright.' and strengthens areas that would be suppressed in our common culture.

Yea I think that Asatru is such a tight community among the men, man to man is much stronger than most other religions and on a much more even playing field. So, yea in Asatru you do see men show much more of their vulnerabilities, especially towards each other and towards their women and it's okay when you're weak to rely on everybody because everybody has those periods, those moments. So yea I think Asatru does promote men to show those characteristics.

To Wandis, Neopaganism offers men not only a safe environment with other Neopagan men, but the religion itself is designed to encourage a balance between masculine and feminine.

When I asked Wandis if she felt women in Asatru were more accepting of feminine traits displayed by Asatru men and, therefore, allowed the men to feel more comfortable to display these traits she stated,

I think women in Asatru almost expect more of men. I think women outside of Asatru nurture them so they support them. So, when men say they can't handle it and they can't take it and the women in our culture shrink back from that because they can't handle their provider not being there because they can't take care of themselves because our culture never pushes women to take care of themselves. In Asatru women are already quite stable and quite capable to take care of themselves so when their men are weak in anyway they can take over and they can help them. So, I think that men are often much more emotional in Asatru.

According to Wandis, in the Asatru environment, men feel more comfortable showing their emotions and with support of both the Asatru women and other non-Neopagan women in Neopagan men's lives, these men have the freedom to integrate female traits into their lives without feeling ashamed.

These questions were also posed to the female informants who considered themselves to be Wiccans – Lioness, Suzuki and Taramathea. When I interviewed Lioness about Wicca and gender, she stated Wicca was not about defining gender roles, but was instead about redefining gender roles. When I probed further and specifically asked her what this redefinition meant for Neopagan men, she replied,

Um, for part in relief for men to accept about themselves, that um, their bodies are also beautiful you know um, not necessarily in a feminine way but beautiful

um, and other things like it's fine for a man to nurture. Man can nurture very well, and it's not wrong, um it's okay for men to love and be emotional and cry at sad parts of movies, you know it's human. Almost maybe that's part of what the gender role thing will be is just to make it more universally human roles that whatever your own strengths and desires are you will tend to show regardless of what they used to be.

I think they're still under a lot of pressure but I think that they feel more able to express themselves in other ways because they realize there's other people out there like them, they realize that there isn't just one way to be, and I think that you know as time progresses it's getting better and better for them in that respect.

I think, and I would say Pagan men are probably a step ahead of the rest because from the Pagan's perspective, like myself it seems that Pagan's are more open minded about non—not following the traditional roles, it's not rigid they're more flexible, they're usually open minded.

Like the male informants, Lioness believes Neopaganism allows men to be more open-minded and willing to allow themselves to express the duality of humanity, both male and female traits.

Susuzki also had a similar understanding of Neopagan men. She believed men are drawn to Neopaganism not necessarily because they have a strong feminine side per say, but because they are open to different paths and are willing to explore different ideas of what it means to be a man. When asked why she thought men joined Neopaganism, she replied,

They may be feeling that dichotomy the search for, that maybe the church...I mean Troubadour is a classic case. I mean, he was studying the priesthood for crying out loud. He studied for years. I mean he definitely the, but you know he's a thinking person and maybe at some point he realized 'Hey, you know this just isn't the path. There's just too much emphasis on this male energy.'

I think it's not necessarily a certain characteristic or belief in itself, but just the fact that being open to a different belief system helps them be open to more in general. I think men, in our society especially, tend to be more like, 'This is what you do as man and you better not stray or you're gonna be a faggot or a weakling, or whatever'. It is a pretty narrow definition, I think, of what's acceptable for men. I think women in our society have a lot broader space to go and still be accepted. It used to be if you didn't wear dresses, heels and white gloves you just weren't a 'lady'. Now it's pretty loose. But specifically about [men], just probably that they are more open to being who they are, experiencing who they are just for themselves, being more accepting of others.

When asked what if women in Neopaganism affect men's willingness to express more feminine traits she stated,

I have a relationship with this guy who is pagan and so if I wasn't who I was, I wouldn't be having a relationship with him, if you know what I mean. It's hard to imagine, given that who I am whether it's me, who I am, or it's me because I'm pagan or because this that or the other thing then, yea I do allow certain aspects to come out. In general, I would think that it would work somewhat like that if the women are, to me it comes down not to whether you are pagan or not, but what that means, what that means that you're pagan. What I think it means when you are pagan is that you are more accepting; that you are not as 'blinders on through life', that you are more willing to accept people as they are. When people get accepted as they are then they are freer to express. There's the trust in the community that okay, I can become 'weird' and everybody will be cool with it.

Susuki believes it is more the Neopagan person, not necessarily their gender that allows both men and women to be who they are in this religion. It is the Neopagan community in general that is accepting, making it easier for men to express their feminine sides and work towards a balance of both the masculine and feminine.

Of the female informants, Taramathea had a different perspective of men in Neopaganism. In general, Taramathea did not believe all Neopagan men are interested in finding the balance between the masculine and feminine. Instead, she believes Neopagan men still have all the trappings of the stereotypical male. When asked if she believed Neopagan men are different from non-Neopagan men, she said,

There probably is, um some difference but I don't know that, I mean even when we're in groups, like as a group in, you know CUUPS, we sit around and we're talking, it's usually the men who lead the conversation or who start the conversations or who volunteer first to talk or whatever. I mean even in groups that are supposedly on an equal level I find that men dominate the conversation in the landscape of what the discussions are. So I find myself keeping much more quiet when a, you know when there is something I know I could say but I choose not to because I don't necessarily want to affect the, at least the path of the conversation. I don't want to, you know to change it or whatever—whatever and so I don't know how many other women fit in the group and think, well there's something I could contribute to this conversation but, ah I'm going to tone it down or taper it or change it or whatever, you know but I find myself not saying a lot of things, that I could say but I don't know that men necessarily have

that inhibition or need to—to hold back so I think, yes to a certain extent that there is going to be a different dynamic.

Um, I think it's all cultural and I don't think you could take the culture away just because you changed the, you know the landscape, it, you know it just doesn't go away. And men are men and women are women and we have defined our types of roles and our culture so we can't just throw those off and say well I'm a Pagan now, you know I wish that were the case because if it were I would look and act and think very differently than I do, but yeah I don't see that. I don't see that happening.

When I probed further and asked if Neopaganism does anything to knock down the gender barriers in general U.S. society, Taramathea stated she thought Neopaganism actually had the opposite effect. In other words, instead of the stereotypical idea that women are objectified in U.S. society, she believed Neopaganism tended to objectify men. She stated,

It seems to do the opposite of what our culture does in terms of objectifying men verses women, um in the male driven society that we live in, we have this whole notion of men being superior and women are objectified and I think you take a flip of that with Paganism where women are elevated and men are objectified and I'm not saying that it's in all cases but that's what I'm seeing, um and not only objectified but —um to the point of almost being masochist. I think there are, I should say sadist excuse me. Um, I think they are portrayed as almost evil, and murderers and rapist and I'm at first, when I first started to explore my faith, I was a little shocked to find that there were men that participating in it.

I was like, wow why would any man follow Tarot and want to participate in a religion that accuses them? However, as I have trained more and I have become more open and learned and dealt with men more I think that my awareness of roles in our religion have changed, you know that I've become more aware that there is a lot more power into acceptance that we embrace we try to, we try to embrace them, however I think that there is an acute denial of that dynamic being at work and I think it is at work.

I think there is this kind of um, I don't know I want to say name bashing element that goes on you know in that kind of you know subversive way and I don't think it's intentional but I find when I connect with other members of our group outside of CUUPS that there is momentum included in that circle. You know [Neopagan women] talk about things there that we would not talk about in the inner circle and we share things and we discuss our spirituality in a way that we never would in front of the men in the group and so I do think there's a subversiveness to it and I don't think it's intentional. I think it's part of human classes. I think women need that. I think women have been so, um subjectified for so long, we need to move past that and the only way you can do that is to

reconnect and because of the way that we were torn from each other the only way I think its safe for us to reconnect is, is underground, you know in a private way.

While Taramathea felt strongly that the stereotypical roles do not disappear just because a person is Neopagan, she did state Neopagan men are unfulfilled in certain areas of their lives and that is why they are seeking another path. She stated,

I think that men need something that they're not getting in their own circles, you know they're not getting where they are. I hope it's not guilt but I think there's maybe there's some of that. I think some of them are just dominated by women, I mean I look at certain characters I think oh yeah, there's definitely women behind that man, but some of them I think just are sweet, you know they are gentle souls and maybe they have a feminine soul, you know. I don't know, either they were women in their past lives and they need to continue that, that identity so I think that would be possible. Well, you know I can't speculate humanity and I guess, I can hope.

But I think most people that I have met have been on a very definite path where as I think the average person is afraid and very unaware of themselves or the run around and I think that the Pagan person is a seeker. They're, they're looking for something, they don't necessarily know what it is, some of them do, but they know when they find Paganism that they find something that is going help them get there, so yeah I, and I think that the other thing is that we all accept each others gifts much more readily because I think we don't see your own gift when you're in a culture that denies them and when you are part of something that you're exploring that and pursuing that then you, your gifts are encouraged.

While Taramathea does not believe Neopagan men are necessarily trying to find balance in their lives, she does acknowledge that perhaps these men are seeking something they cannot find either in general U.S. society or through other mainstream religions, such as Christianity. She believes these men may have a feminine side they are trying to understand and bring forward as part of their everyday lives.

Though Taramathea does not believe Neopagan men are necessarily seeking balance in their lives, the majority of the informants see Neopaganism as a gender-neutral religion where men and women can seek a balance of the masculine and feminine that is equal rather than the traditional US male-dominated society. They feel this balance is not encouraged in general U.S. society or in religions, such as Christianity. Neopaganism

offers men an avenue to seek this balance and offers a safe environment where both other Neopagan men and women are accepting of their gender identity.

According to the male informants, they all have strong feminine sides they are trying to balance with their masculine sides. It is this balance that drew them to Neopaganism. This religious paradigm offered them a divine justification to not only seek this balance, but also gave credence to their natural predilection for the expression of feminine traits. While they are aware of the stereotypical male traits they possess, they do not consider themselves to fall into the hegemonic stereotype of the U.S. male. Instead, they are constantly trying to balance them with their feminine side in order to be, in their words, more fully human.

CHAPTER SIX

INTERPRETATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this research, several common ideals existed among the male informants. First, as Neopagan men, they do not believe they fall into the stereotypical description of a man in the U.S. While they acknowledge they have stereotypical characteristics, ultimately they see themselves as having both male and female traits that make them more androgynous than stereotypical men characterized by overt machismo

and lack of emotion. They believe in order to be fully human, a person needs to recognize everyone has this duality inside them and to experience it gives them a well-rounded human experience. While their actions did not always follow their words or intentions, as was witnessed in the bi-monthly meetings, gender balance was their ultimate goal.

Second, the most important goal in their lives is to find balance. This includes the balance of the divine with both masculine and feminine deities and the balance of the masculine and feminine within themselves. The God(s) offer them a positive male image of masculinity, as the Goddess(es) offers a positive image of femininity. The deities are not in competition with one another, nor is one more powerful than the other, but instead they compliment each other. This balance mirrors the male informants' perception of their own gender identity. They are not overtly masculine, but neither are they overtly feminine. Instead they have found a balance between both sides of their personality.

Third, the balance they sought had more meaning for them when found through religion. Each of these men were searching for the divine in their lives. For Troubadour and Thaddeus religion had been a part of their lives since childhood. They developed a deep connection with spirituality that defined their lives, even though the Judeo-Christian paradigm no longer suited them. This connection did not disappear when they left the church. Instead, they continued their search until they found a religion fitting their new religious paradigm. For Oskar, Andrew and Tock, the lack of spiritual experience drove them to seek out the divine. Through either personal tragedy or pure curiosity, each of these men started searching for a religious path because the absence of the divine was no longer satisfying. It was through religious experience they were able to find a place

within the world that not only justified their existence, but also coincided with their beliefs about nature and gender. For each of these men, the religious experience solidified who they were as men and gave them a divine justification for their existence.

Finally, the Neopagan environment in which they participate offers a safe haven for them to express their true gender identity without fear of retribution, ridicule or judgment. While in a religious setting, whether rituals or meetings, Neopagan men are afforded the opportunity to explore different avenues of their gender identity, which is supported by their fellow pagans. They see other Neopagans living as their true selves and are encouraged to do the same.

It was the combination of these four ideals that led the male informants to Neopaganism. Before they became Neopagan, they all felt they had a strong feminine side. Some of them lived their lives embracing their feminine side, while others were aware of it, but due to social pressures, such as the military or preconditioned gender roles through religion and society, they hid their feminine side to avoid ridicule. Regardless, once they decided these traits were a positive part of who they were, they began to embrace them and wanted to find an avenue to bring it into balance with their masculine side.

Neopaganism not only offered them this balance, but also gave divine justification for how they perceived themselves as men. The duality in nature and the duality in the deities demonstrated to them this combination of both the feminine and masculine was not only acceptable, but was also divine. This allowed them to fully embrace and integrate their feminine side in their gender identity because it was equally important as their masculine side. Neopaganism also offered them an environment where not only

women accepted them as they were, but other pagan men both accepted them and behaved in similar ways. Other Neopagan men did not judge them if they felt like singing a song, or enjoyed a special and nurturing connection with both humans and animals. Instead, this balance of the masculine and feminine and the lack of division between the two was the norm in the Neopaganism setting.

These ideals are common among other studies conducted on Neopagan men. Balance is the most important element of Neopaganism drawing men to the religion throughout the U.S. (Berger 2005; Adler 1979; Pike 2004). These studies find that Neopagan men felt the stereotypical ideal of the male gender as strong, competitive, aggressive, primary economic providers and heads of the household, to name a few is detrimental to men in the U.S. It does not allow for variance and, therefore, is harmful to men who do not share these characteristics. These stereotypes are not only encouraged in Judeo-Christian religions, but are also seen as a divine justification for both discrimination against women and men who do not fall into this stereotypical gender role.

According to these studies, it was the combination of detrimental aspects of the patriarchal U.S. society in conjunction with a male-centered religion that drove these men to Neopaganism. They were rejecting the stereotypes and their negative affect on society while simultaneously finding a sacred justification for the balance of masculine and feminine. Neopagan religions offered these men a positive image of masculinity. Author Sarah Pike states, "Neopagan men have followed feminist strategies in borrowing images of deities from ancient cultures that they believe had healthier views of masculinity" (2004:135). She further states, "Ancient cultures offer more diverse models of

masculinity and allow men to explore their human potential without being subject to rigid male ideals like the emotionless warrior” (2004:136).

While the informants of my study do believe patriarchal society has been detrimental to both men and women, they did not join Neopaganism as an overt political or social statement against U.S. society or the stereotypical male gender role. They are not generally interested in struggling publicly with others in a kind of symbolic arena for control over the definitions, and associated resources, of what it means to be a man. They are more interested in using Neopaganism to better themselves and to find balance in their lives, both within themselves and with nature. Instead of putting their attention on actively changing the U.S. male stereotype, they are focused on their personal search for the divine as a man living in the U.S. Neither were they drawn to Neopaganism for the variation of the Gods and their examples of different masculinities. Instead, the strong pull for balance between their masculine and feminine qualities was the main draw to Neopaganism. While the Gods offered positive images of masculinity, the informants already had a strong idea of their gender identity as men and instead of looking for a male image to help change their masculinity, they were looking for something to solidify it.

It became apparent through this research that even though they shared common characteristics with Neopagan men from previous studies, these male informants were not interested in redefining what it means to be a man in order to change the concept of masculinity in general. Instead, it is a highly individualized attempt at understanding what it means to be a man. The development of their gender identity is about building their own masculinity through their interpretation of the male gender role, which began before they found Neopaganism. Their experiences growing up, their prior religious

experiences, their interactions and, for some, their participation in the hegemonic masculinity all prompted their redefinition of what it means to be a man.

Neopaganism did not prompt this redefinition, but it not only gave them the tools to solidify and tease out different parts of their masculinities, such as nurturing and being emotional, but it also gave them a divine justification and value for their subordinate masculinity. If the earth is sacred, and the earth consists of male and female dualities, then why can't the feminine and masculine within a person be just as sacred? Through Neopaganism they were able to find their place within the concept of masculinity without feeling like less of a man.

The value of this research is it brings further insight to the idea that men throughout the U.S. are constantly redefining what it means to be a man. There is more than one way to define masculinity and gender identity, and this definition becomes highly individualized. It further shows that religion can offer a divine justification for this redefinition. These masculinities belong to the sacred and are beyond the judgment of mankind. This allows for men to feel unashamed and proud of their gender identity, even if it doesn't conform to the hegemonic masculinity. The stereotype becomes null and void when religion turns their gender identity into something sacred.

This study also draws attention to the importance of studying men within the realm of gender studies. In the long history of gender studies, men have been seen as the instigators and propagators of a patriarchal society that holds back women and minorities for the purpose of social and political control. Currently studies show this is no longer the standard by which all men should be categorized. Through their life experience, intrinsic knowledge of themselves, and a more open cultural environment, the definition

of masculinity has become a fluid concept. A study such as this one brings attention to the fact that men are constantly searching for ways to define their gender identity in a cultural atmosphere that allows for personal choice instead of a prescribed role.

The definition of U.S. masculinities is as unique as the Neopagan men who define them. The Neopagan men in this study are dynamic and confident in who they are as men. Their religions only further serve to solidify the strength of their conviction of what being a man truly means. This study and the men who participated offer an insightful look into how dynamic defining masculinities in the context of religion in the U.S can be.

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