

An Analysis of the Perceived Challenges and Experiences of Some Student Practitioners of
Earth-Based Religions at Porpoise State University

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate School in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

By

Josiah Black

Advisor: Dr. Thalia Mulvihill

Ball State University

Muncie, IN 47306

May 2011

ABSTRACT

THESIS: An analysis of the Perceived Challenges and Experiences of Some Student Practitioners of Earth Based Religions at Porpoise State University

STUDENT: Josiah Black

DEGREE: Master of Arts in Student Affairs Administration in Higher Education

DATE: April, 2011

PAGES: 102

The university environment can be a challenging and highly experiential place for students. This study is an in-depth look at the challenges and experiences of students who practice Earth-Based religions on Porpoise State University's campus. The theoretical framework for this study draws principally from the work of Chickering (1969), Chickering and Reisser (1993), and Fowler (1981). These works serve as the principle scaffolding around which other literature on the subject can be interpreted and applied. Additionally, this study contains an review of literature relevant to Pagan beliefs and experiences.

This study was qualitative in nature and focused on phenomenological methodology. Data were gathered through interviews, semi-structured in format, with students who identified as practitioners of Earth Based Religions and maintained full-time student status with Porpoise State University. Students, and their university, were given pseudonyms for their protection. Data analysis utilized grounded coding introduced by Strauss and Corbin (1997) and produced themes which were common to the experience of each student.

The researcher concluded that Pagan students face a variety of challenges at Porpoise State. Conclusions were drawn about spiritual development in the sample, access to resources, campus atmosphere, and student interactions. The researcher also introduced several suggestions

for best practice including the development of a designated worship space for students, the establishment of a full time university staff member to coordinate spiritual development, and the inclusion of specific information about Earth Based religions into Porpoise State training materials for new employees.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....ii

TABLE OF CONTENTS.....iii

CHAPTER ONE.....1

 Introduction.....1

 Important Terms.....3

 Background of Researcher.....4

 Statement of Purpose.....6

 Research Questions.....6

 Significance of Study.....6

CHAPTER TWO.....7

 Theoretical Foundations.....9

 Relevant Literature.....10

 College Student Development.....10

 Student Spirituality.....12

 Spiritual Development Theory.....13

 The Value of Spiritual Development.....20

 Earth-Based Religions.....23

 Pagan Beliefs.....24

 Magic.....26

 Importance of Community.....28

 Stereotypes and Challenges.....32

CHAPTER THREE.....34

Statement of Purpose.....	34
Research Questions.....	35
Study Design.....	35
Research Method.....	35
Population.....	36
Sample.....	37
Data Collection.....	37
Summary.....	39
CHAPTER FOUR.....	40
Student Sample.....	40
Themes.....	42
Spirituality.....	42
Discovering Paganism.....	43
Community.....	45
Resources.....	47
Nature Space.....	48
Books and Internet Resources.....	53
Missing Pieces.....	55
University Experience.....	59
Religious Interactions.....	59
Positive Perceptions of University.....	61
Feelings of Frustration.....	63
CHAPTER FIVE.....	67

Recommendations and Conclusion.....	67
Challenges and Experiences.....	67
A Dangerous Perspective.....	68
The Need for Mentors.....	73
A Satisfying Relationship.....	76
A Positive Atmosphere.....	79
Recommendations and Other Considerations.....	80
A Free, Green Space.....	81
Administrative Support.....	83
More and Better Training.....	85
Limitations and Future Study.....	85
Closing Summary.....	88
REFERENCES.....	89
APPENDIX A- IRB INFO, INFORMED CONSENT.....	93
APPENDIX B- FIRST CONTACT E-MAIL, INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	100

Chapter One

Introduction

The significance of the college experience to the development of a student has been a frequently researched topic within the realm of higher education (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Indeed, a high number of studies and surveys have been conducted over a large breadth of topics pertaining to the student experience. We can say with some certainty, thanks to the diligent work of many theorists, that the college years are an important developmental period for an individual (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). While many studies have been conducted, one group of students' whose collective experience has been frequently overlooked by researchers is students who practice Earth-Based religions. It is the purpose of this study to examine and analyze the perceived experiences and challenges faced by some of these students at Porpoise State University.

Porpoise University is a large, state university located in the American Midwest. It boasts a total enrollment of approximately 22,000 students and an on-campus population of approximately 6,000 students. Porpoise State is primarily homogenous culturally with the majority of its student being Caucasian and residents of the state in which it is located. While Porpoise State has no specific religious affiliation, Christian organizations on campus have thrived. Thirty-seven organizations are registered as spiritual organizations through the Office of Student Life. Of these Thirty-seven

organizations, twenty-eight identify as some denomination of Christianity or as non-denominational Christians. There exists only one student organization on campus for students who practice Earth-Based Religions aptly named Pagan Group. Student participants in the interviews conducted as part of this study were all Porpoise State University (henceforth PSU) students, so PSU serves as the primary context in which the experiences of the students have occurred.

Students who practice Earth-Based Religions (EBR) find themselves in a unique position on many university campuses, PSU included. Although other minority faith groups are present in the form of Muslim students and Jewish students, neither of these groups face quite the same experience as EBR practitioners. First, these students are predominantly polytheistic which is in sharp contrast to the predominate faith on campus. They are forced to exist in a cultural context heavily shaped by monotheism and the Abrahamic tradition. While these students might very well acknowledge the existence of the Christian “God,” it is extremely unlikely that they would identify Him as superior to all other deities.

Additionally, they face challenges in articulating their beliefs as diverse spiritual interpretations are embraced by these students. Under the umbrella of Earth-Based religions many different belief systems find themselves a home. Names that might be familiar to some such as Pagan, Neo-Pagan, Wicca, and Eclectic Paganism are all represented in addition to many more named and unnamed groups. Although many of these students might worship the same or similar deities, there is not one unifying religious code or text which serves to unite all EBR practitioners. While this researcher would normally hesitate to study such a broad group of faith backgrounds, these students

have organized themselves into an organization on PSU's campus. This unity implies a certain shared experience or perception which unites otherwise disparate practices making this group of students viable for study.

Finally, these students face the challenge of decades of unkind stereotypes and media portrayals. As many of their rituals are distinctive from modern Christian practice, they are sometimes the target of prejudice and hate from those outside their sub-culture. Words like witch or warlock have long been vilified in Western culture or relegated to children's stories such as the Harry Potter books or Merlin in "The Once and Future King." Understanding the experience and challenges that these students have would be of great benefit to any university professional trying to better address the developmental needs of their student population. Through the qualitative interviews conducted as part of this study, a better understanding of how these students experience the university environment was obtained and analyzed for significant themes and insights.

Important Terms

As describing these groups can be difficult due to the often large disparity in specific beliefs amongst a given group, the researcher in this case makes use of a few terms which might be initially difficult to follow. The following terms are those which the researcher believes are important to an understanding of this study. When possible, the definitions have been taken from the organizational website of the group which provided the majority of the sample.

Earth-Based Religions- "Earth-Based religions are a group of religions that venerate the Earth and Nature, and often ancient Pagan deities. These religions include Wicca,

Druidry, Heathenry, Religio Romana, Animism, Shamanism, Eclectic Paganism, and many other traditions. All of these traditions share an urge to celebrate life and to honor our connection with all other beings on the planet” (Organizational Website, 2011, par. 1).

Paganism- “Paganism is a polytheistic Nature religion. It is re-creating ways of relating to the Earth and all its inhabitants which express human relationships with all that exists” (Harvey, 1997, 1).

Wicca: “Wicca is a belief system and way of life based upon the reconstruction of pre-Christian traditions originating in Ireland, Scotland, and Wales” (Herne, 2011, par. 3).

Pagan- “Pagans, as members of these religions are called, often emphasize the cyclical nature of reality, the immanence of deity in this world, and personal participation in the rites of the religion.” (Pagan Group, 2011, par. 2).

Background of the Researcher

I am presently pursuing my Master of Arts Degree in Student Affairs Administration in Higher Education. As an undergraduate student in the field of History, I had the opportunity to take a course about magic, witchcraft, and science. In this class, we studied the history of paganism, its interactions with other faiths, and its relationship to science and the modern world. This was my first experience with a small field of research known as Pagan Studies. I elected to write my undergraduate thesis, aptly titled “Burning Bridget Cleary,” on the persecution and murder of a woman named Bridget Cleary in Victorian Era Ireland. This particular study opened my eyes to the hardships

faced by those whose spiritual beliefs, or perceived spiritual beliefs, fall outside of the accepted norm of the time.

I have witnessed the struggles faced by students who do not conform to the predominate religion. I have had the opportunity to see first-hand that an unspoken majority faith exists on PSU's campus which unintentionally dominates the space and resources that could be utilized by other faiths. I have listened to the accounts of individuals who have been roomed or partnered with these students and have heard the prejudiced and misinformed opinions which follow suit. Relatively few practitioners of Earth-Based religions are found in positions of leadership on PSU's campus and the broader community is a comparable demographic and environment to the campus. From the outside, it does not appear to be an easy environment in which to practice.

As a Student Affairs practitioner, I consider it to be an important aspect of my work that I endeavor to create the best experience possible for my students regardless of their spiritual backgrounds. I feel that students who practice Earth-Based Religions are under-represented and misunderstood in modern society and in higher education. While I do not identify as a practitioner of an Earth-Based Religion, I believe that they deserve to have their voice heard in the same fashion other students of faith are able to speak and be heard. I believe that a better understanding of their experience and challenges is essential to ensuring their holistic development. I have had friends and co-workers who identified as members of this faith background and have heard their stories and struggles. It is my hope that through this study, and others like it, we can gain a better perspective and create a better environment for these unique and spiritual individuals.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study can best be summarized by two main divisions. First, it was the goal of this study to provide a better understanding of the experiences of students who practice Earth-Based Religions. Through semi-structured qualitative interviews, it was the hope of the researcher that the “voice” of these students could be brought to the forefront and analyzed in light of certain developmental theories. Additionally, the researcher hoped to provide, based on the analysis of the interviews, recommendations for best practice geared towards faculty and staff members who work to create a positive developmental environment for these students. These two goals provided the underpinning for the both the interviews and the analysis which followed. Ultimately, it was the hope of this researcher that, if nothing else, the story of these students was told in a fashion which represented them honestly and without prejudice.

Research Questions

This study was designed to address the following central research questions:

RQ 1: What are the perceived challenges and experiences of some practitioners of Earth-Based Religions on Porpoise State University’s campus?

RQ 2: What recommendations, if any, could be made to Porpoise State University regarding the ongoing needs of this student population?

Significance of Study

The significance of this research comes from the reality that very little like it has been conducted in the past. As a result, little has been said about the experience of Pagan students at university and less still has been written about how student affairs professionals may address their unique needs and challenges. There exist no specific

developmental models for how students of this spiritual background develop. While studies have been conducted about modern Pagans, Wiccans, and other Earth-Based Religions, no major studies conducted about these groups in the context of higher education became apparent during the literature review phase of the project. As a result, the assumption must be made that there is a gap in the knowledge base about both this faith community and about students who identify with this spiritual background. This study attempted to take one small step towards filling that gap.

Furthermore, the knowledge produced by this study may be beneficial to educators in the specific context of Porpoise State University. It may also be beneficial to anyone who is asked to work with students who practice Earth-Based Religions in an educational or developmental context. As these students often hold spiritual beliefs that are complex and difficult to understand by the average non-practitioner, this study offers a glimpse into their beliefs and experiences. In a sense, this study is significant because they are significant.

Organization

This study is divided into five chapters. Chapter One introduces the topic, study, research questions, and significance of this project. Chapter Two contains a review of literature relevant to college student development, Earth-Based Religions, and student spirituality. Chapter Three outlines the methodology of the study. Chapter 4 contains the analysis of the interviews organized by prevalent themes. Chapter 5 contains conclusions, arguments, and recommendations for best practice by the researcher. Additionally, appendices include the reference list, interview protocol, and informed consent document.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

The focus of this study is on the perceived experiences and challenges faced by some college students who are practitioners of earth based religions at a large, public university. This review of literature is divided into two major sections: theoretical foundations and the Pagan experience. The theoretical foundations portion of this chapter reviews literature relevant to college student development. The Pagan experience portion of the review focuses on literature which examines what it means to be Pagan in the modern-context. As substantial research data does not widely exist regarding either the development or general experience of students who practice Earth-Based Religions, this review aims to provide a cultural context for the reader and provide an appropriate space to analyze the experience of these students.

Theoretical Foundation

This study finds its theoretical foundation in the works of two distinct areas of study. First, it draws on the work of Chickering (1969), as well as Chickering and Reisser (1993), who attempted to articulate how college students develop identity through their experience in higher education. He developed a system of seven vectors which describe the way most students develop throughout their experiences at university. He revised this work in association with Linda Reisser(1993) and the revised version serves as the

primary theoretical model that can be used to better understand other literature written about the development of university students. In addition to literature written about student development in college, this study also utilized the work of James Fowler (1981) in the realm of spiritual development. Although Fowler does not focus specifically on the spiritual experiences of students, his observations about faith development provide an excellent framework for the understanding of other works on spiritual development as well as the importance of the student spirituality in the university setting.

Relevant Literature

College Student Development

One of the most referenced pieces of literature on the topic of college student development is Chickering's and Reisser's (1993) *Education and Identity*. A revision of Chickering's previous work, this volume introduces an important structural framework into the analysis of college student development: Chickering's seven vectors. These vectors attempt to map the development of an individual over the period of time traditionally defined as the college years. According to Chickering himself, this model is "useful precisely because of its broad conceptual nature" (p. 44). Essentially, Chickering believed that this developmental model could be utilized by researchers in a multitude of ways as a result of its generality.

The seven vectors were developed to be sequential in nature. As the authors view development as a journey into and through these different vectors, it is important to remember that these happen one after another. The first vector is Developing Competence. In this context, competence refers to the skills or abilities acquired by the student as they develop. According to Chickering, students can develop intellectual,

physical, and interpersonal competence, all of which are necessary to move into the next vector. Vector two is Managing Emotions. As students may not initially have positive and healthy outlets for their emotions, this vector concerns itself principally with the development of emotional control within the student. A student who is ready to move beyond this vector will have developed appropriate ways to healthily express their emotions, whether positive or negative.

Vector three is Moving through Autonomy to Interdependence. While autonomy is a trait with high value, it is not where the journey stops. Chickering asserted that in this developmental stage individuals will learn to function autonomously, but then also learn to utilize the skills they acquired for the good of a group. Vector Four is defined as Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships. Chickering believed that this vector represented a time when individuals developed a greater tolerance for difference in their relationships and an increased ability to relate intimately.

Vector 5, Establishing Identity, is perhaps the most complex and tumultuous of the vectors. This vector represents a complex process during which an individual attempts to reconcile a lifetime of experiences, input, history, and feelings into a cohesive sense of self. This vector is also frequently marked by a period of exploration wherein the person seeks after many new experiences or clarification. Individuals moving through this vector also wrestle with self-image problems and self-doubt. The end result is a person who owns their personal context and feels comfortable being who they are regardless of circumstances. Vector six, called Developing Purpose, is a vector during which individuals determine what their occupational goals, life plans, and family relationships might look like. Chickering also identified this period as one where students

would gain the ability to proceed with their plans despite obstacles. In a sense, the self established in vector five commits itself wholly to the accomplishment of certain goals or plans. As a result, a person who has moved through vectors five and six could comfortably say “This is who I am and this is where I am going.”

Vector seven represented the final step in Chickering’s model: Developing Integrity. While moving through this vector, individuals learn to think critically about their beliefs and values, make these values personal while still respecting others, and develop the ability to act on these values in a responsible fashion. During this time period, people develop an internal code or belief system which will continue to develop and expand throughout the rest of their lives.

In addition to Chickering’s work on the subject, Perry (1968) created a theory about the cognitive development of individuals called Perry’s Theory of Intellectual and Ethical Development. Perry asserted that students move through nine stages of cognitive developments. According to Evans (2009), Perry’s theory focuses on four key ways of thinking: dualism, multiplicity, relativism, and commitment in relativism. Initially, students start out as dualists. Dualists, as the name implies, see knowledge as being very dichotic in nature. To a dualist, every question has a right answer and a wrong answer. Students who fall into this realm often meet opposing viewpoints with frustration and hostility. Evans noted that “the transition to multiplicity begins when cognitive dissonance occurs” (p. 86). When students observe authority figures with differing opinions, they begin to question whether their dualistic view is really the most realistic. As students transition into multiplicity; they begin to acknowledge that many opinions carry weight, but do not necessarily support any of them.

The next stage, relativism, is reached when students recognize the need to support a specific opinion. This may come in the form of realizing that there are perspectives that carry less value, but there is still room and the expectation for disagreement. This represents the final cognitive development described in Perry's theory. However, he did introduce the notion that one more step could be taken by students ethically. In commitment to relativism, students would begin to construct their own ethics and values based on their experiences and challenges through the lens of relativism. So while students are not thinking about issues any differently, they are more actively applying this way of thinking to their lives, interactions, and challenges. A person who has moved fully into Perry's ninth stage will have a strong set of personal commitments born of the challenges they have faced, but will acknowledge that others are free to construct their own intrinsically valuable commitments (Evans, 2009). It is important to note that while Perry's (1968) initial work precedes that of Chickering's by one year, they should not be seen as two different views on the student development, but rather two closely related perspectives on different aspects of same developmental process. Indeed, identity development could not occur without cognitive development and both models exhibit an emphasis on the formation of personal ethics.

Student Spirituality

Spiritual development theory. Fowler's (1981) book "*Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*" is one of the preeminent theoretical texts on the development of faith. Fowler believed faith was important to all humans and believed that it follows a sequential model of development throughout the life cycle. Therefore, it must be understood that these stages must occur in order and

deviation is not necessarily accounted for in Fowler's model. An individual might become stuck at a given stage for an indeterminate amount of time, but bypassing a stage is not represented in this model.

Fowler's model is comprised of six, sequential stages which an individual experiences beginning at birth. Stage one is "Intuitive-Projective Faith," a stage experienced by very young children where their beliefs are influenced by visual examples displayed by adults. Stage two is "Mythic-Literal Faith," wherein children assimilate stories into their identity which help them identify with their own culture. Stage three is "Synthetic-Conventional" faith stage. This stage, usually beginning around the time of puberty, involves the individual expanding their experiences outside of their immediate family/culture. As a result, their faith must grow and change to suit the new environments and situations. Stage four is "Individual-Reflective Faith." This stage is represented by the interaction of a strengthened self-identity coming into conflict with the dominant culture or background of the individual. The result is a more individualized faith system which is the product of much self-exploration. Stage five is "Conjunctive Faith" and is typified by the reengagement with issues that were pushed aside to achieve a unified vision of self in the previous stage. Finally, stage six is "Universalizing Faith." This stage is achieved when an individual shows a spirit of true love and justice. Essentially, the individual moves past self-beneficial motivations and become altruistic in nature.

According to the loose chronology associated with these stages by Fowler (1981), college students would likely fall into either stage three or stage four. Stage three, "Synthetic-Conventional Faith," begins at puberty. During this stage of faith, personal

values and beliefs are often formed by forces external to the individual. Fowler asserted that:

For Stage 3, with its beginning in adolescence, authority is located externally to the self. It resides in the interpersonally available “they” or in the certified incumbents of leadership roles in institutions. This is not to deny that adolescents make choices or that they develop strong feelings and commitments regarding their values and behavioral norms. It is to say, however, that despite their genuine feelings of having made choices and commitments, a truer reading is that their values and self-images, mediated by the significant others in their lives, have largely chosen them. (p. 154)

Essentially, Fowler believed that during this stage the beliefs and values of the individual are largely constructed by an external agent. This agent might take the form of a peer group, organization, religious group, or other entity external to the individual’s immediate family. However, if the “they” experienced by the individual during this stage discourages questioning and challenging beliefs, and no major conflicts are experienced, then the individual may remain in this stage indefinitely until sufficient impetus is created to move forward.

Stage four, “Individual-Reflective Faith, is characterized by the individuals resistance to the “they” experienced in stage three. Fowler states that

The movement from Stage Three to Stage 4 Individual-Reflective faith is particularly critical for it is in this transition that the late adolescent or adult must begin to take seriously the burden of responsibility for his or her own commitments, lifestyle, beliefs and attitudes. (p. 182)

In a manner similar to Chickering's and Reisser's (1993) fifth vector, Individuals in this stage create a world view and identity which exist separately from the values espoused and imposed by the dominant others present during Stage Three. An individual in stage four would measure and analyze all experiences through the newly created and highly personal lens. Additionally, individuals in this state dissect and reject symbols, instead breaking them down into their simpler conceptual meanings. This is consistent with the individualization inherent in this stage as it rejects oppressive and ideologically restraining imagery.

According to Fowler, the strengths present in this stage are critical thinking and strong-self identity. On the other hand, weaknesses include the over-utilization of one, rigidly defined point of view and a propensity to analyze all experiences based on how they relate to self. An individual prepared to transition out of this stage, something that would not likely occur until well into adulthood, would exhibit a realization, or the tension preceding a realization, that existence is too complicated to be perceived through a single lens. Subsequently, an individual transition out of this stage would reengage with issues or challenges to their beliefs that were ignored in favor of a single identity and perspective created during stage four.

Fowler's work consistently engages themes and ideas of identity and cognition, but it is especially apparent in the third and fourth stages of spiritual development. This realization is of particular importance because these stages are said to occur during the chronological ages most typically associated with traditionally aged college and university students. Although Fowler did not deal directly with university students, there

are strong parallels, as evidenced above, between his observations and the assertions of Chickering and Reisser (1993), and Perry (1968).

Although Fowler's work is considered to be foundational to the understanding of spiritual and faith development, it is by no means the exclusive way to interpret the process. Parks wrote two books on the topics of faith development with a special focus on the experiences of young adults. These books, *The Critical Years: Young Adults and the Search for Meaning, Faith, and Commitment* (1986) and *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (2000), served to outline her perspectives and theories about the way young adults develop. This distinction is notable as Fowler (1981) paid little attention to the complexity of the experience of young adults.

Parks (1986, 2000) developed a complex model for understanding the way individuals experience and develop spiritually. She asserted that four stages exist within the developmental progression of an individual which include: adolescence, young adulthood, tested adulthood, and mature adulthood. Parks (2000) also introduced the notion that chronological age is a poor indicator of entrance into young adulthood, as this transition is often subjective and signaled by a variety of cultural phenomena such as obtaining a driver's license, marrying, or completing a degree.

Within these sub-divisions, Parks (1986, 2000) observed three forms of development: cognitive, dependence, and community. Further diving into each of these, she dissected cognitive development into five distinct forms of knowing. The first of these forms of knowing is *authority bound* and is represented by an individual's dependence on authority figures. Individuals experiencing this form of knowing see life

as very two dimensional and could be compared cognitively to Perry's dualistic thinkers. The second form, *unqualified relativism*, is characterized by the realization that reality has many forms. As individuals move through this stage, they go from seeing all opinion as equal to valuing a few over others. *Probing commitment*, the third form of knowing, is indicated by short term commitments that are based on serious self-exploration. The next form of knowing, *tested commitment*, can be seen when individuals have participated in the probing commitment form enough to have established some fairly solid commitments. Finally, *convictional commitment* is seen when individuals have a strong commitment to their own understanding and perspectives, but still see the value in what others have to offer and explore. These forms of knowing are strongly influenced by the work of Perry (1968), and seem to utilize his notions about cognitive development as they relate specifically to spiritual issues.

In the realm of dependence, Parks (2000) identified four forms of dependence that individuals may experience. These forms speak to where an individual draws their emotions and feelings about different situations in their lives.

Dependent/counterdependent is the first form and often seen in young adolescents. Individuals at this stage often derive their emotions from authority figures and other cues in the dominant culture. For example, an individual in this stage might feel frustrated with income tax reform because their parents are frustrated with income tax reform, even though the individual is too young to pay taxes. The second form of dependence is *fragile inner dependence*. Evans (2009) describes inner dependence as when an individual "balances the views of others with one's own views. (p. 204)" The presence of mentors is essential to both this form and to the individual's advancement to the next form of

dependence confident inner dependence. In this third form, the individual engages in inner dialogue which helps them to be confident in charting their own ethical and spiritual course. The final form of dependence is *interdependence*. In this form, individuals can comfortably experience the beliefs of others without feeling challenged. They begin to perceive the connectedness between human beings, the world, and the divine. Chickering's fourth vector is of special significance to this particular process, as we see that Park's forms of dependence reach their climax at this point as well. Spiritually can potentially be an important avenue to reaching a state of healthy interdependence. .

Parks also explored different forms of community that individuals rely on as they grow through the various stages of development. She believed that individuals experienced a consistent struggle between the need to establish agency and the need for contact with others. The first form of community is the *conventional community* and can be best described as a community in which the individual depends highly on the other members for self-guidance and definition. A *diffuse community*, the second form explored by Parks, is one outside of the individual's conventional community and is often represented by a friend group. This community is one the individual seeks out as a way of confirming their growth and new directions.

The third form of community, the *mentoring community*, is of pivotal importance to the young adults as it is a form of community which encourages them to explore their values. Later in life, individuals may experience a *self-selected group*, or a group in which the tested adult claims membership after having established their own identity. Finally, adults much later in life sometimes experience *openness to others* which,

according to Parks, is when an individual begins to truly value and seek out diverse opinions in their interactions.

The value of student spirituality. In addition to the above theories of development, additional studies have been conducted into the value of spirituality in the college setting. Astin (2004) argued for bringing spirituality more into the forefront of the Liberal Education experience. Astin believed that putting a more intense focus on the internal development of students would push higher education to transition into putting more emphasis on how things are learned rather than how they are taught. Astin also asserted that the most important contribution a more intense focus on spirituality would make is an increased sense of community among students. Astin closed his argument with the following:

This enrichment of our sense of community will not only go a long way toward overcoming the sense of fragmentation and alienation that so many of us now feel, but will also help our students to lead more meaningful lives as engaged citizens, loving partners and parents, and caring neighbors. (p. 41)

This perspective is strongly supported by research presented by Parks (2000) about the importance of community.

Kuh and Gonyea (2006) also explored the impact of spirituality to student success and engagement in their study of data provided by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) database. Kuh and Gonyea hoped to provide evidence of positive correlations between student spirituality and success in the realm of higher education. The authors found that according to survey data, “students who participate in spiritually enhancing activities also participate more in a broad cross section of collegiate activity”

(p. 44). An additional discovery noted that “institutional mission and campus culture matter more to spirituality and liberal learning outcomes than most other institutional characteristics” (p. 46). Essentially, the data showed that students who are supported by their institution feel more comfortable growing and engaging in their spirituality. This comfort would then be manifested by an increased involvement on campus.

Fisler et al. (2009) conducted a qualitative study about the phenomenon of spiritual conflict and struggle in the setting of higher education. Students related a variety of challenges and struggles that came about as a result of their university experience. Students in Fisler et al.’s. sample noted experiencing challenges to their beliefs from external sources such as roommates, faculty, and university structure. Additionally, Fisler et al. observed that spiritual struggle could be deeply personal and students often turned to books for assistance. In the words of the author: “Books, including non-religious autobiographies, served as tools for exploring different spiritual perspectives” (p. 264). The authors often observed that common responses to the spiritual exploration created by conflicting views included reaffirmation of beliefs, readjustment of beliefs, and blending of new perspectives and ideas. These responses show strong correlations to experiences predicted by both Fowler (1983) and Parks (2000).

Although not strictly related to university student spirituality, the episode “True Believers” of the documentary series *Carrier* (Dickson, 2008) confirmed a portion of the conclusions. *Carrier* centers on the deployment of the aircraft carrier U.S.S. Nimitz and its crew of sailors and marines. The documentary itself focuses on their lives and experiences throughout the deployment of the Nimitz.

In the episode “True Believers” (Dickson, 2008), the documentary crew focused on the religious and spiritual experiences of the sailors and marines on board. Although the Nimitz was a military vessel, several Navy clergymen were stationed on board to ensure the spiritual nourishment of all the soldiers present. The clergymen ran a variety of religious services to cater to the needs of the diverse spiritual beliefs that were present on the ship. When they were unable to meet the spiritual needs of a certain population, the clergymen would designate lay leaders to lead worship services. Despite obvious differences in beliefs and practices, the soldiers on board were shown to effectively share the same worship space with little to no conflict.

A final important contribution to the dialogue concerning the value of spirituality to higher education came from Chickering (2006). He was critical of the current world culture of falling back into views that he believed aligned with Perry’s (1968) dualists. Chickering asserted that both two year and four year institutions of higher education were in the best position to address this in the culture at large. Having just completed a significant work with Jon Dalton (2006) titled *Encouraging Spirituality and Authenticity in Higher Education*, Chickering felt that Dalton’s ten principles and practices for strengthening moral and spiritual growth in college were essential for administrators to consider and implement. The ten principles developed by Dalton spoke to issues of implementing core institutional values in a more intentional way, creating open environments where these values could be debated or challenged, establishing a commitment to holistic development, and honoring authenticity and spirituality.

Earth-Based Religions

To this point, this literature review has worked to create a foundation for understanding the development of university students in the realms of identity formation and spirituality. However, these students represent a unique sub-culture within the society (or societies) represented within the university. As a result, it becomes necessary to engage in an analysis of literature which hints at some potentially common aspects of the life experiences of Pagans. Margot Adler (1986) believed that the public had a very inaccurate picture of Pagan life and choices. This portion of the literature review is dedicated to describing, defining, and establishing different aspects and terms associated with Earth-Based religions. As the pool of relevant, scholarly literature is relatively shallow, with the pool concerning pagan university students being virtually non-existent, I have broadly applied several comprehensive works on the subject with the goal of demonstrating the general perceptions of scholars regarding the beliefs, practices, and experiences of practitioners of Pagans.

Pagan beliefs. In *Drawing Down the Moon* (1986), Adler took an in-depth look at several sub-divisions of Earth-Based Religions; most notably Wicca. She made several important observations about Paganism in general and outlined some of the unifying elements which unite many belief systems that might seem otherwise disparate. Adler observed that “Most Neo-Pagans sense an aliveness and ‘presence’ in nature” (p. 8). She also noted other important similarities including a propensity to identify as polytheists, animists, pantheists or combining aspects of two at a given time. She goes on to identify their primary goal as living in harmony with nature. Pagans were said to believe that humanity’s forward progress served to alienate them from nature. Practitioners sought to alleviate this separation through ritual and often looked to older polytheistic belief

systems as a source of inspiration. Many modern Pagans, according to Adler, gravitate toward belief systems once found in ancient Greece, Egypt, Samaria, and in Celtic lands.

Adler (1986) also observed that many modern Pagans tend to live in cities or highly populated areas, where the separation from nature can be more acutely felt. She also noted that Pagans “lead quite ordinary, and often successful, lives in the ‘real world,’ they are able to detach themselves from many of the trends of the day, maintaining a sense of humor, gentle anarchism, and a remarkable tolerance of diversity” (p. 99).

Hutton (2001), in *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*, offered an additional definition of a Pagan based on the research he conducted in the United Kingdom. Hutton stated that The Pagan Federation, a British organization of Pagans, had issued three fundamental statements of belief in order to define a Pagan. The first was described as “an acceptance of the inherent divinity of the natural world, and the rejection of any notion of the creation of the world by a power outside itself” (p. 391). This first statement opened the door for many interpretations about the nature of the Earth’s divinity. The second statement could best be summarized as a rejection of any law or code professed to be divinely created to moderate or control human behavior. Hutton observed that this represented a dismissal of concepts such as “sin and salvation” (p. 393). The final statement was the acknowledgement that divinity has no specific gender. This statement did not simply open the door for deities of either gender, but also for beings which transcend, combine, or reject genders. As a result of this widely accepted acknowledgement, many Pagans revered deities or concepts which were often seen as well outside the accepted norms of the Abrahamic religions.

In addition to these three statements introduced by The Pagan Federation, Hutton added five additional observations of modern Pagans. Hutton noted that modern Pagan Witchcraft “aimed to draw out and enhance the divinity within human beings” (p. 390). Hutton believed that this represented an acknowledgement and cooperation with superhuman forces in order to develop divinity within the practitioner. A second observation made by Hutton was that Neo-Paganism rejects notions that religion and magic should be separate. Many modern Pagans saw these concepts as being intrinsically connected, in stark contrast to other religious traditions that may have viewed concepts such as magic to be highly heretical.

Hutton went on to observe that modern Paganism is a mystery religion, meaning that it derives a good deal of its power from the perception that it is otherworldly or different in some fashion. Essentially, this meant that only initiated practitioners or participants could fully understand the complete workings of the faith system(s) especially as it related to death, rebirth, and the role of humans in the world. Hutton believed this was evidenced by a lack of public practice and a hesitation to use predefined worship spaces. A further observation was that Paganism’s “essence lies in the creative performance of ritual” (p. 397). Many Pagans were shown to experience their faith through ritual both individually and with a group. Finally, Hutton (1986) reinforced an observation made previously by Adler when he noted that Paganism is “eclectic and protean” p. 391). Hutton noted that many modern Pagans drew inspiration from many sources and exhibited an ability to fluidly shift their practice to accommodate new revelations or knowledge.

Magic. Bailey (2006) made several important points about the concept of magic in his article “The Meanings of Magic.” Bailey observed that magic is a “profoundly unstable category” (p. 2) and can often only be defined in context. Bailey also made reference to the fact that within many cultures there may be some debate about what does or does not qualify as magic. Many definitions of magic were found to be expressed as comparisons to religions. Bailey introduced one definition that said “magic seeks to coerce or command spiritual forces while religion aimed to supplicate their aid” (2006), p. 3). Additionally, Bailey noted that another perspective was that magic is more often a private practice, while religion refers to something more community based. Also introduced by Bailey was a view which viewed magic as having specific and tangible goals whereas religion was more broadly applied.

Pike offered another definition of magic in her 2001 work *Earthly Bodies, Magical Selves: Contemporary Pagans and the Search for Community*. Pike asserted that “In its various meanings, magic is essentially a method of consciously separating oneself from the world of the everyday and moving into a realm where possibilities are open for physical or psychological transformation” (p. 228). Pike’s assertion was that magic is a conscious ability which allows that individual to willfully open themselves to transformation in whatever form it might take. A second definition explored by Pike is that “The Science and Art of causing change to occur in conformity with Will” (2001, p. 228).

Adler (1986) offered additional insights into magic as it is defined by Pagans. She observed that despite popular perception, many practicing pagans do not view magic as being supernatural in nature. Adler related a personal anecdote wherein she was asked

while visiting a coven to help in the gathering of fish from a dried up stream. When she, and several others, decided that gathering the slippery, evasive fish was too difficult to manage, one member of the group offered the following definition of magic: “Magic is simply the art of getting results” (1986, p. 7). Then, through the use of techniques and focus derived from emulating fishing bears, Adler and her companions were able to successfully catch the fish. After this experience, Adler attempted to expand this definition by offering the following:

“Magic is a convenient word for a whole collection of techniques, all of which involve the mind. In this case we might conceive of these techniques as including the mobilization of confidence, will, and emotion brought about by the recognition of necessity; the use of imaginative faculties, particularly the ability to visualize, in order to being to understand how other beings function in nature so we can use this knowledge to achieve necessary ends.” (1986, p. 8)

Importance of community. Pike (2001) offered an important argument regarding the importance of community to Neo-Pagans and their location of self. Pike observed that many Pagans find a delicate balance between personal autonomy and their commitment to community. One important observation was that “Because of their desire to connect with ancient others and today’s marginalized cultures, Neo-pagans locate the self in a network of relationships” (p. 24). Pike’s entire book is dedicated to observing and analyzing events known as festivals in the Pagan tradition. These festivals are large gatherings of Pagans and often involve organized ritual, the sale of culturally relevant goods, and a variety of workshops designed to encourage and develop the skills of the practitioners. Pike noted that an important part of self-exploration was the exhibition of

new knowledge or self-exhibition. At several of the festival fires she attended, Pike noted that nude, or partial nude, dancing was an important method of self-expression. However, Pike suggested that “the self must be recognized by and performed for the community in order to be real” (p. xxi). Therefore, Pike’s belief was that self-development, both physical and spiritual, for the communal Pagan could not occur as effectively without interaction with the community. This line of thought shows strong associations with Chickering (1969) and Irving (1968). As a result of this, festivals and covens are created and sustained by this delicate interaction between self and community.

Adler (1986) provided additional commentary on the importance of community to Neo-Pagans through her examination of modern covens of Wiccans. Adler noted that covens come in a variety of forms and functions, but their essential definition was “a group of people who convene for religious or magical or psychic purposes” (1986, p. 108). Some covens were shown to be designed around male/female polarity and were therefore comprised of male/female couples. While Adler notes that traditional coven would have only been twelve to thirteen, modern covens can be even larger. These communities worked spiritually within the established boundaries of a circle, which served as a portable worship space, and it was often the initial work of the coven to define, bless, and purify the spot prior to other rituals. The communities helped to specify the practice of the individuals within them as most covens share common symbols and practices. Additionally, participants in these communities often took part in rituals that required cooperation and shared focus to complete goals. Adler noted that these groups often met to engage in some sort of work, often spiritual, that provided spiritual focus for the group. This was shown to take many forms including poetry, community Pagan

Group vice, tree planting, sexual worship (rarely), or engagement in issues such as feminism.

The symbolic importance of the circle, and subsequently community, was further emphasized by Carpenter (1996). Carpenter noted that the cardinal directions of the circle were intrinsically linked to certain elements which were held very important by Wiccan groups. North was connected to earth, which represented the physical body and home. East was linked with air, representative of thoughts and communication. South was equated with fire, the element of energy and will. Finally, west was linked with water to indicate emotions and feelings. Carpenter noted that the center of the circle is linked with spirit, the gender of the divine, and the notion of the wholeness of the deity (1996).

Stereotyping and challenges. Pike (2001) presented interesting anecdotal evidence of prejudice and stereotyping as experienced by festival goers at the Yellowwood Forest in southern Indiana. According to Pike, a local newspaper, *The Brown County Democrat*, ran a story regarding the alleged observations made by two police officers while patrolling the event. The officers repeatedly referred to the rituals performed as being Satanic and alleged that the group had planned to sacrifice a goat. Furthermore, a group from a local church drove by the camp site and threw anti-satanic literature from their car windows at the festival attendees.

Pike (2001) asserted that the apparent ties to Satanism often mis-associated with Pagans came from conservative Christians. These Christians, according to Pike, often misrepresented Pagans in three typical ways: scapegoating, fear of captivity, and fear of apocalypse. When scape-goating, Christians would often blame Pagans for a variety of social issues such as sexual immorality and violence. Pike described Fear of Captivity as

the belief that someone Pagan would gain sway over individuals and their family. Finally, fear of apocalypse was rooted in the belief that paganism will somehow bring about the Christian conception of the end times. Additionally, Neo-Pagan traditions such as drumming, nude dancing, and unfamiliar garb contributed to misconceptions as those who viewed them from the outside were never given a proper explanation of their significance. Pike also observed that when Neo-Pagans spoke out against Christianity, their opposition was spun and portrayed as proof that their agenda was counter to that of Christianity and the dominant culture.

Hutton (2001) also observed prejudice in his study of modern pagan witchcraft. He observed that two different models of hostility towards Pagans were present in English society. The first, according to Hutton, centered on the belief that while there were not actual supernatural forces at work, certain Satanic groups did exist who condoned and encouraged practices that could be seen as morally or physically dangerous. Although no groups have ever been proven to exist, opposition of this style was rooted in an apparently rational need to stop a harmful group from doing harm. The second model of hostility can best be described as follows: “the other model adopts all the physical structure of the first but accepts in addition the notion that the devil-worshippers concerned are in reality working in contract with effective supernatural powers” (p. 254). Hutton observed that while the belief in supernatural forces did not seem apparent in society, the actual fear of real supernatural forces was much more prevalent than he initially anticipated. During his research for the book, Hutton believed that a large majority of the middle-class, university educated people he spoke too about his topic often asked if the spells performed by pagans actually worked.

Summary

Chickering (1969), Chickering and Reisser (1993), and Perry (1968) provided information about how students develop their identity, cognition, and integrity.

According to Chickering and Reisser, integrity was fully established when an individual was behaving consistently both inside and out. Essentially, this integrity was demonstrated when outside action matched inside beliefs. Perry explored cognition and believed that cognition was fully developed when individuals reached a commitment to relativism. This could be seen when an individual used the cognitive approach of relativism to make choices, decisions, and affirmations essentially developing cognitive ethics and integrity.

Fowler (1981) offered the notion that individuals develop their spirituality through a series of stages based of increasingly complex identity and cognition. Individuals start out at a point where their beliefs and spirituality are pressed upon them by their family, society, and peer group. They then go through a process of challenging and resisting these influences which ultimately results in an individual with a firm set of beliefs that is comfortable hearing and discussing other viewpoints. Parks (1986, 2000) provided an additional theory for understanding spiritual development which focused on forms of knowing, dependence, and community especially as they related to young adults. The works of Astin (2004), Kuh and Gonyea (2006), Fisler et al (2009), Dalton (2006), and Chickering (2006) addressed the value of spirituality in higher education and, in some cases, provided recommendations for institutional practice and improvement.

The Pagan Perspectives portion of this literature review utilized the works of Hutton (2001), Pike (2001), Adler (1986), Bailey (2006), and Carpenter (1996) to

communicate the general experiences and perspectives of the broader Pagan community. This portion elaborated on topics such as the meaning of magic, the importance of community to pagans, and the prejudice they can sometimes face in larger society. It is the hope of the researcher that this literature review provided some insight into both the development of students and the beliefs of pagans, two topics which intersect in the lives and experiences of Pagan university students

Chapter Three

Methodology

Chapter Three contains an overview of the methodology utilized in analyzing the perceived experiences and challenges of students who practice Earth-Based Religions on Porpoise State University's campus. This chapter states the purpose of the study as well as the research questions. Additionally, it outlines the specific data collection methods and the rationale' for the structure of these methods.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study can best be summarized by two main divisions. First, it was the goal of this study to provide a better understanding of the experiences of students who practice Earth-Based Religions. Through semi-structured qualitative interviews, it was the hope of the researcher that the "voice" of these students could be brought to the forefront and analyzed in light of certain developmental theories. Additionally, the researcher hoped to provide, based on the analysis of the interviews, recommendations for best practice geared towards faculty and staff members who work to create a positive developmental environment for these students. These two goals provided the underpinning for the both the interviews and the analysis which followed. Ultimately, it was the hope of this researcher that, if nothing else, the story of these students was told in a fashion which represented them honestly and without prejudice.

Research Question

This study was designed to address the following central research questions formulated as follows

RQ 1: What are the perceived challenges and experiences of some practitioners of Earth-Based Religions on Porpoise State Universities' campus?

RQ 2: What changes, if any, could be made by Porpoise State University to better meet the developmental and spiritual needs of these students?

Study Design

Research Method

This study utilized a qualitative research method. As the purpose of this study was to interpret and analyze the specific experiences and challenges of a group of individuals, qualitative methodology seemed more appropriate. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005) qualitative research is a process which focuses on experiential data rather than that which could be traditionally measured. Additionally, Denzin and Lincoln observed that qualitative researchers investigate social experience and how it comes by its meaning. As this study concerns itself with how these students develop, socialize, and experience their time at university, the qualitative method of research provides the most logical model for how to record and analyze these factors. This study utilized a semi-structured interview protocol as defined by Denzin and Lincoln. Students answered questions designed to encourage sharing and deep exploration of their past experiences. Furthermore, the semi-structured format allowed the researcher to expand or pursue additional topics within the same line of questioning. This provided space for the subjects to explore beyond the confines of a rigid interview protocol.

The specific interview protocol utilized in this study was inspired by two works of qualitative research to which the researcher had previously been exposed. These works were *Hooking Up: Sex, Dating, and Relationships on Campus* by Kathleen Bogle (2008) and *No Bugles, No Drums: An Oral History of the Korean War* by Rudy Tomedi (1993). Tomedi focused on prompting an uninterrupted narrative from his study participants, and though he offered no analysis of his own, effectively communicated the experiences of his participants. Bogle utilized a semi-structured protocol to explore the phenomenon of casual sex at two contrasting universities. Her use of the semi-structured protocol allowed her to effectively explore a complex and deeply private experience common to the students in her sample. The protocol was then submitted to an experienced qualitative researcher for input before being put into practice.

Furthermore, this study was based upon the concept of phenomenology. Husserl (1970) argued that perception and the objects perceived do not exist independently of one another. This study is focused entirely on the experiences and perceptions, both specific and broad, of the subjects being interviewed. In that sense, all of the knowledge produced by this study is in some way shaped and given context by the perception of the students in question.

Population

The population of students in this study was all Porpoise State University students between the ages of 18 and 24 who self-identified as practitioners of an Earth-Based Religion. Earth-Based Religion, in the context of this student population, refers to any student who identifies as a Pagan. No attention was paid to sex, sexuality, gender, race, or

specific academic program. This group is estimated to be between 50 and 100 students, although only about half of those claim membership in Pagan Group.

Sample

Specific inclusion criteria for student participants in this study were full-time Porpoise State University students who identified as practitioners of Earth-Based Religions. A final sample of 8 students from various academic backgrounds was selected for inclusion in the study using a method known as purposive, snowball sampling. They were all between the ages of 18 and 24. Any students who were interested in participating that did not meet these requirements were not allowed to participate in the study. Students had to be willing to participate in a single, hour long interview. Student participants were associated with various academic programs and no attention was paid to specific course of study.

Data Collection

Prior to establishing contact with students, the researcher developed an interview protocol rooted in the qualitative method and designed to be semi-structured. The questions included in the protocol were purposefully designed by the researcher to encourage the subjects to share personal experiences and engage in dialogue about them. The interview protocol, as well as an application form and thesis narrative was submitted to Porpoise State University's Internal Review Board for approval in September 2010 after review by the researcher's thesis chairperson. IRB approval for the research was granted in September 2010 before any subjects were contacted. The IRB letter of approval and all documents submitted for review including the interview protocol may be found in Appendix A of this document.

Upon receiving IRB approval, the researcher attended a meeting of the Pagan Group to solicit volunteers for the study. As the group defined itself as one dedicated to educating the PSU community about their belief and values, it was hoped that several willing participants could be found within this group. Students provided the researcher with contact information to indicate their willingness to participate in the study. Upon receiving contact information, the researcher composed an e-mail (Appendix B) to provide additional information for the potential participants. Participants were then offered one hour slots within pre-designated blocks of time, although alternative times were arranged when necessary.

Upon arrival for their interview, subjects were asked to allow an audio recorder to be activated. The subjects were then provided with a voluntary consent document which was explained to them by the researcher. Before any official interview questions were asked, the subject signed the consent form to indicate their willingness to proceed. As a part of this consent form, students were informed that they could discontinue participation and the interview at any time. Additionally, they were advised that there were no anticipated risks associated with the study, but were provided with contact information for both the thesis chairperson and the IRB office. Students were also informed that the interviews were to be an hour in length.

Student interviews were recorded on an audio recording device. Prior to recording, students were asked to select a pseudonym to be utilized during the research. Upon the completion of the interview, all digital recordings were removed from the audio recorder and stored on the researcher's personal, password protected laptop. An additional copy of all audio files was stored on a flash drive kept in a locked drawer in

the researcher's office. Typed Transcriptions were prepared by the researcher and stored digitally in the same fashion as the audio files. Only the researcher and the thesis chairperson had access to the source recordings and these recordings were destroyed at the completion of the project. Complete Transcriptions of all interviews were prepared by the researcher and were kept for future research and use.

Summary

This was a qualitative, phenomenological study of the perceived experiences challenges of some students who practice Earth-Based religions at Porpoise State University. It utilized an interview protocol which was semi-structured in nature and designed to promote deep sharing and exploration on the part of the participant. All research was conducted at Porpoise State University in the fall of 2010 with the full consent of the participants. Data were analyzed for recurring themes and used to formulate conclusions about the experiences of these students as well as recommendations for best practice for university personnel

Chapter Four

Thematic Analysis

The purpose of this chapter is to explore certain topics that emerged through the qualitative interviews that took place with my sample of students. It is the hope of the researcher that the analysis of these themes will yield a more complete picture of the experience of student practitioners of Earth-Based religions. These themes were uncovered by utilizing a process known as grounded coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1996). Codes were developed by recognizing and labeling recurring themes or ideas within the data and were therefore grounded in the experience of the sample. The recurrence of themes and statements was useful in drawing out experiences key to these students. Statements or responses found to be coded in similar fashions were then connected under broader themes for the purpose of presenting student experience and perception as authentically as possible. While this selection of themes is far from comprehensive, the researcher believes it represents those which are most at the forefront in the lives and experiences of these students.

Student Sample

The students who agreed to participate in this study all share one common trait: they identify as practitioners of Earth-Based religions. While this serves as a useful umbrella, it is by no means all encompassing. These students have various beliefs

backgrounds, and experiences which add up to create a unique perspective and viewpoint. What follows is a brief introduction of each student participant and a small amount of information important to understanding their perspective and experiences.

Craig- Craig considers himself an eclectic Pagan. He was raised in a home without a specific religious affiliation, but acknowledged that his mother was raised in a very Christian home. Craig is involved in SER, but does not hold any sort of executive board position.

John- John was raised in a traditionally Catholic home and upon converting to a form of eclectic Paganism utilized print resources to supplement his knowledge and practice. John also follows online message boards and websites related to practicing Paganism. John also serves as the Member's Advocate for Pagan group. He is expected to work with and for members when they feel discriminated against or unheard.

Joshua- Joshua considers himself to be a Greek Reconstructionist as he focuses principally on worshiping deities once worshipped by the ancient Greeks. Joshua also shared that he explored many religions prior to settling on Paganism. Joshua lives off campus, but participates heavily in Pagan Group. He is also an avid tarot reader.

Nathan- Nathan is a former Indiana Academy student who discovered Paganism while doing a school report. According to Nathan, religion has never been an important topic for his family. Nathan relies heavily on print resources to inform his practice and spiritual growth.

Rebekkah- Rebekkah was raised as a Catholic, but many of her early spiritual experiences involved practicing her Christian religion in outdoor settings. Rebekkah

practices a fusion of Catholic traditions and Pagan beliefs. She was also one of only two members of the sample to speak to sexual orientation. She identifies as Lesbian.

Shawn- Shawn was not raised in any specific religion, but considered himself a Christian for much of his early teens. Shawn now identifies as an eclectic Pagan and currently serves as the President of Pagan Group.

Susan- Susan describes her faith journey as one that took her from being a devout Catholic, to a practicing Hindu, and finally into the realm of Paganism. Susan was also the only other member of the sample to volunteer information about her own sexuality. She identifies as Lesbian. Susan is also the only individual to identify shows such as *Charmed* being an influential factor in her belief development.

Segaya- Segaya is the only member of the sample to be raised in a Pagan home. His father became a follower of a faith known as Asatru when Segaya was very young. His father introduced it to him, so Segaya grew up in a Pagan household. Although he periodically attends Pagan Group, Segaya often disagrees with his peers in the sample and offers alternative explanations and perspectives on issues explored by the questions.

Themes

Spirituality

For the purposes of this findings section, the notion of spirituality refers to a combination of experiences that most closely relate to how these students experience their religion(s). As a result, it encompasses notions of religious origin as well as how they experience community. These aspects are central to understanding how these students experience the university environment and their peer relationships.

Discovering paganism. Discovering Paganism refers to the process by which these students began practicing their specific beliefs. Many students shared stories of developing their views and the struggles they faced when sharing these with family and friends. In this section, student responses to questions about the origins of their practice are presented.

With the exception of one student, Segaya, all of the students in the sample identified as having come from religious backgrounds outside of Paganism. In several cases, students spoke to converting from Roman Catholicism or incorporating Pagan tradition into their practice. Susan shared a little of her history as a Pagan:

Um, I'd say the most dramatic transition was probably after I got confirmed ironically enough. I mean I knew fairly surely that I wanted to be confirmed, but I was like ok so I've gone through this sacrament but I want to look into expanding what else I am. (Susan, Transcription)

Susan also went on to say that she practices a blend of Christianity and Celtic religious traditions. She believes this is the most relevant way of life for her. Rebekkah also related that she had been raised Catholic and discovered Paganism during her sophomore year in high school. She expressed happiness about her discovery:

And, um, so when I was in my sophomore year of high school I was hanging out in one of my friends houses and I found this book and the cover was really pretty. So I picked it up and it was Scott Cunningham's *A Guide to Solitary Wicca*. (Rebekkah, Transcription)

John also shared that he had been raised in a Catholic home and had experienced dissatisfaction with the values of his upbringing. He noted the feeling of wanting something more than the traditions of his family.

Shawn came from a family without a specific and strong religious tie. He noted that his parents always encouraged him to get involved, but did not really endorse a specific religion. He got involved with a Christian church, but found himself struggling with what he actually believed:

I was in my shower one morning and I was just like, I really don't really believe any of this. I've been doing it for so long that I've kind of tricked myself into believing it. And that made me feel like I was being really dishonest with all of the people around me. I was going to church and, in effect, saying I'm a Christian I believe this when I really didn't. (Shawn, Transcription)

Shawn later began to explore the concept of Deism, one which is closely tied to Christianity. However, he eventually adopted a form of Paganism in which he worships two principal deities: Hathor, an Egyptian goddess, and Ananzi, an African trickster god. Shawn believes his deities revealed themselves to him in ways unique to their individual characters. The story of how Shawn discovered Ananzi's interest in him is perhaps the most interesting:

Ananzi was very in my face. I'm very arachnophobic. Ananzi is an African god, he's a trickster god, and he's also the god of spiders. I used to have these, they were actually night terrors, but these dreams and they all involved a Black man in a white suit and some kind of spider. And so, you know, once I got done

screaming I can put two and two together. I was like ok Ananzi I know you're there. (Shawn, Transcription)

Segaya is the lone exception to the pattern of these students finding Paganism in middle school or high school. Segaya's father introduced Segaya and his sibling to the concept of Asatru; which became Segaya's dominant belief system. Within their family unit, Segaya's mother is the only individual who does not share this belief system. They follow a tradition called Asatru, which Segaya explained as a sort Germanic polytheism that shares deities with the Norse tradition. Segaya explained his father's perspective on religion further in our interview:

My Dad is a science teacher so he is all about scientific atheism, but he sort of, and I agree with him a lot, I think it's almost unhealthy to be not open to a spiritual existence of some kind. To help answer those big questions out there that science doesn't necessarily have answers to. I think there is something there that needs to be addressed and if you can't get answers from whatever then there is something missing in your life. (Segaya, Transcription)

Asatru was the answer Segaya's father was looking for, and he soon spread its practice to his son and daughter.

Community. The literature about Pagans indicates that, broadly, Pagans place a high value on community and the group experience in regards to worship and the way they experience spiritual growth. This community subtheme represents a collection of responses by these students indicating their perceptions of and experience with community at Porpoise State University

The importance of community to these students consistently arose as well as the value of their individual experiences with Pagan Group. Craig disclosed that:

Umm, well having Pagan Group itself is fantastic. It was actually a major criteria for me choosing a college. That they had a lively pagan community, something I could get involved with. That was definitely a major benefit. (Craig, Transcription)

Craig seemed encouraged by the fact that there were others on campus that he could relate to. These sentiments were echoed by John, who also mentioned that knowing Porpoise State had a Pagan Group was an important factor in his university decision.

Nathan spoke to value of Pagan Group and community as a place to share hobbies and gain more understanding and support:

Well Pagan Group is great for that. A lot of people have the same general temperament and the same interests and hobbies. Or at least they have overlapping hobbies so you can network about things other than spirituality. And a lot of people have more experience so you can ask them questions like what does this particular symbol mean or do you have any deities in your pantheon that are associated with this concept. (Nathan, Transcription)

Nathan was not alone in this perception, as similar statements were made by Joshua and Rebekkah. Rebekkah was specifically excited because she had never had any friends prior to joining Pagan Group who espoused beliefs similar to hers. Shawn also echoed that Pagan Group was a source for great support because he identified himself as an eclectic Pagan. He explained that he did not follow a particular cultural religion, so it was helpful to have the input of so many other individuals.

Susan spoke to the theme of community when she mentioned her transitional experience from a previous institution. She disclosed that

Whereas here Pagan Group has been around for a couple years now, I'm not entirely sure how long but people have been really working hard that it's not the kind of community that you walk in and you are told that this is how you must practice or you're doing it wrong or this is how you must practice or you're not inheriting the one true way of such and such. (Susan, Transcription)

Perhaps most telling of all, Segaya mentioned the he wished there was a group that shared his specific beliefs. As he claims membership in one of the few Pagan groups to have some organization, a sense of missing an aspect of his practice is apparent when he states: "I would love, I guess, a church in Asatru is called a kindred. I would just love I guess if a kindred to be here. That would be really cool" (Segaya, Transcription). Segaya also commented earlier in the interview on the lack of a mentor figure or religious leader. In Segaya's tradition, these figures are known as Gothi, but he noted that finding one in Muncie, IN was unlikely.

Resources

Resources come in a variety of forms for the modern Pagan. In this portion, notions of nature space, physical resources, and those resources that are missing will be explored by the student sample. These subthemes represent those topics which arose most frequently for the students participating and represent where they draw a great deal of inspiration from.

Nature space. In interviews with student practitioners an important and recurring theme in their discourse was the presence and abundance of green space here on campus.

This indicates the importance of safe outdoor spaces to practicing Pagans. The theme of utilizing natural space most often surfaced in response to the question “What are the challenges, if any, to finding a safe place to worship on campus?” By examining the responses of students, the researcher was able to infer two important facts about Pagans and their interaction with “Nature Space” on campus: the importance of natural space to Pagan worship and the challenge of finding comfortable spaces in which to engage in worship.

The natural space on Porpoise State University’s campus plays an important role in the way many of the interviewed student’s practice their religion. Craig, one of the Pagan students interviewed for this study had the following to say about the religious actions he took to relieve his stress in relation to school:

Um, depends on the day and the type of stress but, umm, typically I might just go outside, climb a trees, and sit there and meditate for a half hour or so. I might take a walk out by the river. Whatever I need to do to just calm down and forget whatever stressful has happened in that day. (Craig, Transcription)

While this may sound like a common way for many students to relieve stress, Craig, in response to a follow-up question, overtly identified this as a spiritual experience. Craig viewed the setting as being especially important to his worship. It is an important point to understand that these students do not require the same physical space to worship to which other, so-called organized religions might be attracted. John, a sophomore who identifies as Wiccan, described his ideal worship space as having the following characteristics:

I just try to ground myself and that’s pretty much the three things I want. Just obviously for one quiet, everyone wants a nice place to be by themselves and

think. A nice place for grounding, near a nature type quality that I can connect with. A tall tree I can connect with, a smooth patch of grass I can lie down on, a nice fountain I can go to. And just myself, for the third thing, because really um, Wicca doesn't have any big churches or anything and there is no official place to go to worship so wherever you go you can just sit down and pray to whatever god you pray to or just enjoy the breeze blowing by or the apple that you're eating.

(John, Transcription)

From John's responses, we can see that the worship experience of these students is tied specifically to their ability to connect with green spaces. John alludes to the transitive nature of worship space as it is approached by many Pagans. In contrast to students of other religious backgrounds, John, and his Pagan friends, retains the ability to create their own sacred space when the environment and other conditions allow for it. In another portion of the interview, John praised Porpoise State as being one of the "most green campuses in the country" (John, Transcription). In addition to these statements made by John and Craig, two additional subjects, Shawn and Nathan, also reference taking walks outside or utilizing nature spaces in their practices.

Rebekkah, a junior and Celtic Reconstructionist, expresses that her experiences with Paganism found their genesis in outdoor spaces. Raised Catholic, Rebekkah referenced visits to a wooded portion of her family's property when she related the following: "I started like taking some of my stuff, like this cool little cross tile that I made in Sunday school and my hymn book, and have little masses in the woods under a tree" (Rebekkah, Transcription). While the genesis of an individual's Pagan beliefs could be the subject of an entirely different research project, this expression is significant because

it reinforces the common importance of nature space in the Pagan community at all stages. Indeed, Rebekkah's earlier Pagan experiences were, in fact, Catholic experiences performed in a Pagan environment.

Segaya also remarked on the importance of outdoor space to his ritual experience when he shared that

Every month, for instance, I like to pour out an offering to the land just to remind me that I'm here in Cityville (pseudonym), I go to Porpoise State, and I need to respect the environment when looking at the campus whenever. Almost like a pensive sort of reminder how I, I'll just pour out an offering of tea or something and that's kind of the most ceremonial thing I kind of do. (Segaya, Transcription)

While it can be inferred from these statements that there is no shortage of green space on Porpoise State's campus, the second issue that arises for these students as it relates to nature space is the question of accessibility. In this instance, accessibility is used to refer to the relative comfort level Pagan student's feel about practicing in a given space. While some students are able to reap benefits from the green space on Porpoise State's campus, several of the subjects interviewed also referenced their discomfort with performing overt rituals in these spaces. Susan, a sophomore Pagan, characterizes these feelings as follows:

It's like if you were having church outside and people constantly stopping to gawk at you, there are enough of us that it doesn't really matter but it's still kind of distracting and a little rude. And if you're doing something that someone doesn't recognize as a church Pagan Group vice then it's more likely someone is going to come over and heckle you. So we will normally try someplace like a park

where you can be far enough away from the road where people aren't slowing down and staring out their car windows at you because we've had that happen.

(Susan, Transcription)

This is an important occurrence for educators to be aware of because it represents a specific instance where students feel that they cannot comfortably practice in the university setting. Joshua validated many of the concerns expressed by Susan by explaining the challenges he faced when attempting to worship Apollo, who is a god of the sun and must be worshipped during the day, by articulating that students would often question him about his specific activities. "they will say 'You're doing something un-Godly.' I just don't want to deal with that right now. Would I go into your church and say 'You're going down the wrong path.' No, that's wrong" (Susan, Transcription).

The challenges associated with worshipping in outdoor spaces are clearly represented in the voices of the student sample. The concerns and experiences voiced by Susan and Joshua represent well the challenges associated with access for these students. None of the students identified the problem as a specific denial of physical access, but instead we see that these students fear interference and ridicule. It is of note that none of the students, except Joshua, could provide a specific instance where an outsider interfered with their practice. Although the fear of this interference, or their discomfort with noisy environments, was expressed, none of the subjects could supply a time that this had occurred. Although several subjects alluded to past experiences of other members of the community, no specific stories emerged.

Regardless of whether Pagans face discrimination as a result of their overt involvement with culture or simply their choice of worship spaces, it can safely be

inferred that the student sample in this study strongly supports the importance of nature spaces to their worship and experience. Although a few participants did not emphasize the importance of nature as overtly as some, all of them mentioned utilizing nature in some spiritual sense. Furthermore, despite a lack of specific examples, there exists an underlying discomfort on the part of these students with practicing in public forums.

Books and internet resources. The culture of the United States, whether aligned with any particular religious system or not, has been disproportionately exposed to the beliefs and customs of religions that are extremely different than Paganism. The physical resources required by most practitioners of Abrahamic religions (Islam, Judaism, Christianity) are radically different from those preferred by many practicing Pagans. Perhaps most notably, these religions utilize a highly specific text, or set of texts, from which they draw the majority of their knowledge about their deity, moral codes, and rules for practice. These texts are widely available in the United States and relatively inexpensive to acquire in print. As such, these are, in most cases, the only volumes required to support the growth of student practitioners of these faiths.

Pagans exist in stark contrast to these individuals. Although some Pagan groups might favor a book or a particular set of books, there is no unifying text which ropes in all of modern Pagans. Many Pagan groups draw from a variety of sources, both spiritual and historical, to refine and develop their practice. When asked, “Do you feel like you have access to the resources you need to grow as a practitioner? If yes or no, what are those resources?”, the students exhibited this reality to a notable degree. John noted that: “The university library here has a decent sized section of books, um, related to Paganism topics. Research or just topics in general towards the ecosystems and environment in

general. There are a lot of resources on that” (Nathan, Transcription). John also went on to mention that he uses a variety of internet sources to help him learn about and refine his practice including Pagan specific blogs such as *The Wild Hunt*.

Nathan also noted the importance of books as a resource.

Um, for the most part yes. Books are always helpful because um, this is gonna sound so silly but, a lot of knowledge comes from spell books or books of mythology and things like that. There are a lot of books that you can find at the white rabbit or people at Pagan Group will have them. You can find them at the library. This library here, if you know where to look. (Nathan, Transcription)

Nathan specified later that he draws knowledge from books on a variety of topics including, but not limited to, Buddhist philosophy, modern religious practice, ancient mythologies, woodworking, and meditation. This eclectic use of material to expand spiritual knowledge is common practice among many Pagans. The reality that these resources are present is highly beneficial for an eclectic Pagan like Nathan, as a diversity of books means a diversity of realms in which he can grow and develop.

However, not all Pagans fall into as eclectic of a range as Nathan. Rebekkah identifies herself as a Celtic Reconstructionist. Essentially, she attempts to recreate the religious traditions practiced by her ancestors in a process she describes as “sort of a scholarly approach. It’s trying to be very focused and check fact and check against the history. You don’t always have to follow it exactly but you are trying to practice it like they did” (Rebekkah, Transcription). Although her needs differ significantly from Nathan’s, Rebekkah also acknowledges the usefulness and importance of the library’s collection:

The biggest resource would be the library. We have some good books. Although I don't think we have any good books on modern paganism and practice. We do have some fairly good books on older historical mythologies and things like that.

(Rebekkah, Transcription)

As a reconstructionist, Rebekkah benefits greatly from texts found in the library and readily available on campus.

Finally, Susan, who practices a fusion of Christianity and Celtic Reconstructionism, also speaks to the contrast between her experiences at Porpoise State to those at Large University (pseudonym):

There are a lot of resources that are sort of recommended reading, there are a lot of forums on the web for people who are honestly trying to find out about Celtic cultures instead of just taking it all from Charmed. So a lot of books on recommended reading lists are right here. I was really surprised because at LU. I found one book and there was only one copy of it in a really hole in the wall library that I really didn't know where it was on campus so I was really surprised by how good the resources are here. So it was pretty cool. I mean it's very specific to my path just because it's ancient Irish history and religious culture, so I got lucky at least. (Susan, Transcription)

The positive reality associated with this level of satisfaction is that the Pagan students represented here seem to find a good many of the print resources they need without expending time and resources looking for them. Although they lack books on the specifics of how to practice certain rituals, it is reasonable that a state funded university library would omit religious "how-to" books from their collection. So, Pagan students at

Porpoise State University feel very good about their access to print and internet resources. For a system of faiths whose adherents must take personal responsibility for their own development, Paganism finds its complimentary knowledge base well represented in the collection of Bracken Library.

Missing pieces. This subtheme refers to the lack of certain resources or abilities that may impede the ability of these students to practice their faiths. Student responses explore a variety of issues related to university policy and the challenges they encounter. The reality of living and learning on a campus is that there are always policies which are designed to create the most good for the most people. As a result, these policies often favor the majority and, while reasonable, are not always the most inclusive.

In stark contrast to the availability of books and texts for the expansion of knowledge, students at Porpoise State face real challenges when it comes to utilizing some of the other resources they need to practice or perform rituals. In the following excerpt, Shawn discusses some of the difficulties experienced by Pagans when it comes to utilizing certain resources on campus:

Well I know Porpoise State has a reason for all of their rules, and they don't just arbitrarily decide things, and they are there for a good reason. But like, a lot of Pagan rituals involve like incense. Typically you burn the incense. That's a little bit of a fire hazard, which is understandable, but it is a little bit of a block. So there are some traditional Wiccans, for their altar they need two knives which is a weapons/safety issue and it make sense, but it is a little bit of a stumbling block. Even some people believe the deities should be given an offering and one of the typical kinds of offerings would be alcohol. Porpoise State's a dry campus, some

people are underage, it makes sense by the rules there, but it is a little bit of a stumbling block. (Shawn, Transcription)

A recurring issue mentioned by several of the students who were interviewed as part of this study was the lack of access to fire. Fire, in addition to being one of the four major elements utilized by some branches of Paganism, also encompasses the burning of candles and incense. When asked about the possible uses for fire, Craig responded as follows:

Well, uh candles are very representative of fire which to me personally is just a strong element. And incense helps to set the mood, as they do with everybody, but then you can actually burn specific incense for certain things. That gets really into the field of herbology and things like that. So there are a lot of different reasons depending on who is using it. (Craig, Transcription)

Open flames are strictly monitored by most local governments, so access to this particular part of their practice is illusive, especially for those students who live on campus. Joshua did mention an adaptation which had been utilized by Pagans practicing on campus: “Uh, candles are really popular among the Pagan community, but there is no candles. You can do it outside in certain spots, but not indoors. So if you do use candles you can put it on a little heater thing and that works fine” (Joshua, Transcription).

Additional items which can create trouble for Pagans wishing to implement them are ceremonial knives. Shawn alluded to their use in the previous excerpt, but Joshua elaborates on the importance of ritual blades to Wicca:

Wicca is big on having the four elements and having the four elements represented in ritual. Earth, Fire, Water, Air. Well the common item used for air is

an athame. Dagger, ritual sword, which Porpoise State is kind of like ‘Ehhh, well let’s not have any of that or have a very small tiny thing’. Which a lot of friends I know would say that you can do ritual with a little blade, but this is my athame as opposed to this dinky little thing like a toothpick. They would prefer it. (Shawn, Transcription)

Contrary to complaints mentioned by other students, Segaya noted frustration with his peers’ perceptions of university policy.

The sort of consensus among the Pagan Group-ers is that University Housing hates all Pagans because we are not allowed to have candles in the dorm rooms and we aren’t allowed to have ceremonial knives. I’m always like, really? You know what I mean? It’s just laughable because I always say that if you are honestly going to tell me that your relationship with your deities or spirituality hinges on you being able to light a candle and you being able to have a ceremonial knife. Not even used for cutting anything, just used to hold, and laughable and its appalling to think that’s how sophomoric your understanding of your spirituality is and, um, so yeah I never have an issue and I don’t ever foresee me having an issue.” (Segaya, Transcription)

Segaya was the lone voice of acceptance in this case, as the rest of the sample seemed to indicate that even if they themselves did not utilize fire or ceremonial blades, it would be beneficial for their peers to have that access.

Joshua shared some of what he hoped for in response to being asked about the missing pieces:

If we had a different space where we could have like, maybe, I keep going back to the fantasy for area where Pagans practice. They could place a fire bowl and say “Hey, this fire bowl is being placed here. You may have a fire as long as you are not stupid about it.” That would be positive. That would be something that would be easy and cheap for Porpoise State. Here is a fire bowl. 70 bucks. That’s fine.
(Joshua, Transcription)

While change may not be on the horizon for many of these policies, it is important that the needs and desires of this unique student culture continue to be considered and met whenever possible.

University Experience

While this study concerns itself a great deal with issues of spirituality and religion, one of its principle focuses is to analyze the challenges and experiences of these students in the context of their university. As a result, this theme emerged when student comments about PSU and interactions with other students were coded and brought to the forefront.

Religious interactions. The way in which students interact with their peers plays an important role in their development. Moreover, these students are members of a religious grouping that has often been met with persecution and challenges throughout history. Their interactions with students of other religious backgrounds speak to their experiences at university. The statements which follow relay their perspectives and experiences in this area.

When asked about their interactions with students of other religious backgrounds, the individuals in the sample responded with generally positive responses. Shawn shared that his interactions with other students had been very good.

Umm, my interactions have interactions with students of other faiths has been overwhelmingly positive. Religion is a big part of people's lives, but I have never had anyone tell me that I need Jesus, you know, the stereotype, because that is the stereotype. (Shawn, Transcription)

Shawn was not the only person to bring up positive interactions as most of the sample echoed that there were relatively few negative interactions. Nathan characterized his interactions with other students as follows:

There really haven't been any. I haven't done anything very publically pagan, so I haven't had much of an issue. Um, uh, I am trying to think I can't really think of anything. There are not many people who care or actively realize. (Nathan, Transcription)

The notion of students being ignorant to their existence, and therefore less confrontational, was echoed by other students in the sample. Segaya believed that the only conflicts faced by students were generally jokes made from a position of ignorance rather than outright hostility. However, a couple students seemed to believe that they would face ridicule while performing public rituals. However, students did not produce a single specific example of discrimination or prejudice when asked about conflicts arising as a result of perceptions of their religions. Both Rebekkah and Joshua did reference an incident which had supposedly occurred years before in one of the residence hall communities. According to Joshua, a conflict had arisen between Pagan members of a

floor community and other members of the community. One of the Pagan students involved in the conflict was called a “Pagan Bitch” (Susan, Transcription). Rebekkah corroborated this story, adding that it was apparently a student staff member present on the floor that was also contributing to the issue. Despite what this anecdote might imply, John, who serves as member’s advocate for the group, shared that his services were rarely utilized but should remain an essential option for students in the organization.

Students also indicated a positive relationship between Pagan Group and the Muslim Student Association. John mentioned that Pagan Group made a point to attend the Muslim Student Association’s Ramadan feast. Nathan felt that this interaction was proof that Porpoise State students are willing to interact with one another despite perceived differences in religion. Shawn and Nathan also mentioned that religion had come up as a result of a classroom discussion and had felt like a comfortable topic at the time they had explored it.

Four of the students from the sample also noted that conflict was often limited to members of the community who did not agree on specific points about the practice of these religions. Students who practiced comparable traditions or those who worshipped the same deities would sometimes come into conflict over the specifics of practice. Students noted that this becomes particularly heated when it comes to the patron deities of the students in question, as those practices are often the most personal and emotionally charged.

Positive perceptions of the university. Although it is in the nature of academe to analyze and dig for meaning, sometimes the truth of something is brought forward more clearly by those individuals who live it. In this case, students were seen to reflect often on

their positive experience at Porpoise State University. Students not only enjoy their academic programs here, but also view Porpoise State as being superior to other institutions in the region when it comes to meeting the needs of Pagan students.

All of the students expressed satisfaction with their experience at Porpoise State University with the exception of a few isolated incidents that will be explored in an additional section. Students were asked how their college decisions might have been affected if they had known more about practicing on campus prior to making the decision. Students overwhelmingly responded that they would remain at Porpoise State University if given the choice to do so again. Joshua felt strongly that Porpoise State was an excellent place for himself and his peers:

Porpoise State actually is pretty good despite its, well I wouldn't say flaws, but its lack of knowledge. I would say that it's probably the best place for Pagans in Indiana. Besides Indianapolis, because it has more Pagan stores and more Pagans in general. But college wise, Porpoise State is pretty good. (Joshua, Transcription)

Joshua's positive perspectives were echoed by most of the students within the sample. Shawn echoed Joshua's sentiments when asked about whether he would have continued, he said "No! I love Porpoise State, actually. Like I said, there are a few stumbling blocks, but they are nothing like major major. I really just love it here" (Shawn, Transcription). Shawn suggested that the few areas which have need of growth are not necessary for his student friends.

Although Josh and Shawn had overwhelmingly positive things to say about the university, while this was common in the sample, it is not the only opinion represented. Craig, Susan, and Rebekkah all spoke to the idea that Porpoise State may not be the

perfect place for them. Although each of them mentions liking the campus, they all provide reasons why Porpoise State may not be up to their specific standards. In Susan's case, she would not transfer but did mention that one of the reasons she found herself at Porpoise State was that she could no longer afford the tuition being asked for by Large State (pseudonym). Similarly, Rebekkah shared her experience getting searching for universities: "I was looking at that a little bit when I was choosing universities, but I think the things that bother me are things that will be at every university" (Rebekkah, Transcription).

Only one individual in the sample overtly said they would willingly seek other experiences if given the opportunity: Segaya. Segaya believed that Large University (pseudonym) would have more opportunities for him as an individual: "I don't know that it would have, umm, hmmm, I think that knowing what I know now, I think I would have liked to go to Large University honestly. Just because it's bigger, it's more liberal, it's more hippies...so there are some Asatrus in Largeville (pseudonym)" (Segaya, Transcription). While some students such as Susan also see the potential plus to transferring to such a university, the overwhelming tone revealed by the members of the sample was positive in nature. Students gave no consistent indication that they were considering transferring schools or that they regretted their decision to attend Porpoise State.

Feelings of frustration. While the positive statements made these students are important, and certainly welcome, attention must be paid to their frustrations and shortcomings. These students live in an environment which they view as very positive,

but this can also make the more negative aspects stand out more clearly. What follows are the most consistent and significant complaints or concerns voiced by the student sample.

Although most students expressed support for Porpoise State, there were a few who mentioned incidents where they felt particularly frustrated and unimportant to the university. These incidents range from how a particular conflict was handled to the perceived structure of Pagan Group's charter. While it is entirely possible that more issues have occurred or are going on under the service, few students registered any significant complaints. During our interview, John suggested I take a closer look at people who had a rougher time than he had. He believed those who had been forced to come out as Pagan earlier than they wanted to often face more challenges.

Many student frustrations also came from the lack of resources explored earlier in this chapter. For students who practice certain rituals, the lack of candles and access to knives can bar them from worshipping in the ways in which they would prefer. Beyond this, an interesting theme emerged while questioning students about how they felt supported by the University. Susan discussed the fact that, according to their perceptions, Pagan Group cannot hold any specific religious services as a group. While Susan did not know specifically why this was the case, she noted feeling frustrated and somewhat discriminated against. Susan went on to say:

I mean here if anyone in Pagan Group meets someone else and says I like the way you do things and I'd like to do something together then they would have to do that specifically outside of Pagan Group. So we can talk to people and say hey we'd like to do something, but you can't do it within Pagan Group you are breaking charter. (Susan, Transcription)

This particular frustration arose again when interviewing Rebekkah. She disclosed that Pagan Group had made a choice to charter themselves as a discussion group rather than a religious group. This was done from a perspective of wanting to seek greater legitimacy. The organization chose to center its mission on educating peers rather than having a mission that is purely religious in nature. She seemed at peace with the decision to align them in such a way, but she also disclosed that Pagan Group would often find them arranging such things in an informal manner. While Susan believed that the organization's president might know more about why the school would not allow them to worship, Rebekkah actually provided the most insight into how this is done. Apparently, Pagan Group would announce an event that had been arranged independently, but when students arrived it would be run by someone who just happened to be President of Pagan Group.

The only other significant frustration registered by any of the students was raised by Rebekkah. She noted that a student had found herself in conflict with floor members as well as the R.A., who was apparently being disrespectful. According to Rebekkah, the group was not able to reach a satisfactory resolution for their member. She mentioned that while this problem was ongoing the group felt very angry about the issue. Rebekkah also related a final incident which is particularly troubling:

We had a member, um, two years ago who was really depressed and attempted suicide. And when they had people come to get her to take her to the hospital, she was going on about her spirit guardians and how they had come to her while she was going to commit suicide and had tried to talk her out of it. And they thought that she was crazy and she got put in the locked ward of the hospital and she had a

really hard time talking her way out of it. And I blame part of it on the mental practitioners and part of it on the university. (Rebekkah, Transcription).

These issues and complaints are relatively far between. Nearly every member of the sample noted that Porpoise State was a beneficial environment for their practice. These frustrations should not be overlooked, but it is necessary to acknowledge that they are not the predominant experience.

So students in the sample experienced a variety of origins when it comes to the beginnings of their faith. Although many were Catholic, not all of them were raised in religious homes at all. Students also spoke to the value and importance of community to their experience at Porpoise State University. In the realm of resources, students appreciate the large areas of green space available to them, but hold on to some fears of persecution in response to the idea of practicing in public. Students praised the availability of print resources in the library, but were disappointed by certain policies which restricted them from using fire or ceremonial knives. Finally, students spoke to feeling satisfied overall with their experiences at PSU, but did relate a few anecdotes about challenges they had faced while at university.

Chapter Five

Recommendations and Conclusion

Having reviewed literature relevant to the topic and explored the responses of students during their interviews, I will not begin the process of drawing conclusions from the synthesis of those two portions. Additionally, I will offer a few recommendations for best practice as Porpoise State continues to build its relationship with these students. I will also offer recommendations for further study and explore some of the limitations found in the current study.

Conclusions

Challenges and Experiences

The question of “What are the perceived challenges and experiences of student practitioners of Earth-Based religions on Porpoise State University’s campus?” is a complex one which revealed many answers throughout the course of this study. I would assert that student participants in this study spoke to a variety of experiences and challenges which include, but are not limited to: a unique spiritual development experience, a lack of mentors in the community, competing feelings of connection and disconnection with the university, and the belief that, while sometimes challenging, Porpoise State presented them with a positive environment for higher education. The subsections which follow elaborate on each of these issues and their significance to the experience of students on Porpoise State’s campus.

A dangerous perspective. James Fowler (1981) indicated that sometime between the beginnings of puberty and early adulthood a transition occurs in the way that an individual experiences spiritual development. Fowler's third stage Synthetic-Conventional Faith, which begins roughly at the same time as puberty, is characterized by an external locus of control which influences the individual's beliefs and development. Although the individual may feel they are choosing their own course, there is typically an external source of authority which is influencing those choices. The transition to stage four or Individual-Reflective Faith involves the rejection of this external authority and the adoption of a highly personal lens through which they view the world. It is the assertion of the researcher that the Pagan students interviewed in this study exhibit signs that this process occurred earlier than in the average student and would indicate that these students are at a more advanced state when viewed through the lens of Fowler's stages.

Fowler suggested that this transition will usually occur in late adolescence or early adulthood, often no later than the early twenties, but many of the Pagan students interviewed here exhibit a form of this transition much earlier. Students were asked to describe their personal histories as practitioners of Earth-Based religions. Consider the following response by John as he described his personal history as a practitioner:

There was a period in my life where I was unsatisfied with what my spiritual life had entailed up until that point. I had grown up in a Catholic home, I was raised Catholic, and there was just one point I just realized it wasn't very fulfilling. I wanted something more. At that point I started researching other types of religions, other faiths, and other forms of spirituality. I went through a whole lot

of them. Nothing really clicked until I actually found Wicca. Um, the thing I practice right now, and from, without sounding too cheesy, it was a little bit of love at first sight almost. I have heard that Paganism doesn't have converts it has people who realize that's what they've been all along. (John, Transcription)

John described a few signs that could indicate his transition to stage four. First, he describes a level of dissatisfaction and a lack of fulfillment with his experience as a Catholic. Additionally, he takes responsibility for his own spiritual search. Where individuals firmly locked in stage three would likely seek out the help of a spiritual elder who would guide them back the "norm", John exhibits an internal motivation to chart his own course. The examination of other faith systems and forms of spirituality is something that the external authority would resist.

Furthermore, John's description of Paganism as lacking converts is telling of his deep personal connection to his belief system. John does not acknowledge that he was converted in any way; instead he believes that Pagans were always Pagans, just undiscovered. He rejects the potential for outside influence, and although some was undoubtedly present in print form, the lack of a significant leadership body within Paganism supports the idea that John made an early transition into Stage Four. The most interesting thing about John's transition is that he described it as beginning in middle school and continuing through High School.

However, John's story, while compelling, is hardly enough to serve as the sole basis for a conclusion about the experience of these students. An additional account offered by Shawn offers insight into this early transition as he makes the decision to leave Christianity. Shawn's experience exhibits a similar progression to that of John's.

Although both were invested in other faith systems, they experienced a revelation wherein they broke away from the belief system they had conformed to previously. In Shawn's case, he gravitated first to Deism and eventually declared himself a Pagan. However, his transition from the dominant belief system in his life to one of his own choosing (Deism) occurred when he was 15 or 16, still notably younger than Fowler would suggest as the norm. We can also infer that these are legitimate personal decision and not simply manipulations by an external locus of power. The spiritual authority in the lives of these individuals would not steer them deliberately away; as authority seeks to enthrall and control.

Even certain dynamics within the organization these students belong too suggests an established movement into stage four. Several students mentioned disagreements within the Pagan Group as well as made a point to establish a diversity of views within the organization. For example, Craig provided an example of a disagreement that occurred within Pagan Group

Um, well a good example of one would be that last month there were two members one of which during a discussion was like defining uh I can't remember which deity specifically one of the Celtic gods I believe. He was defining him and his own point of him and he was the patron deity of another member who had a completely opposing view and it just didn't lend itself too well to humble conversation. (Craig, Transcription)

A group of students firmly situated in stage three of Fowler's model would not exhibit the behavior that this argument suggests. Students in stage three typically radiate towards groups of individuals that would share the same core beliefs. So two students who shared

the same deity would, logically, share the same beliefs about that particular deity. However, this argument suggests that presence of two highly individual lenses at play. Additionally, the fact that this argument did not end in someone leaving the group suggests an acceptance of difference that would not be present in a stage three group. There was also no external power which urged them to return to a correct view of the issue, instead this debate was welcome even if it did become somewhat heated.

Rebekkah's response to the question posed about conflict is also very telling of her position within Fowler's stages of faith:

Um, I haven't really had any conflicts with anybody outside the Pagan community. Inside the Pagan community it's mostly just little stuff like assuming because I have been Wiccan I will know all of this stuff. Or assuming I will lead this presentation about Celtic religions. I'm like no, just because, I'm not; thank you. It's just stuff like that. (Rebekkah, Transcription)

Not only does Rebekkah's account tell us more about the acceptance and presence of conflict within the group, it also suggests something about her own developmental position. As stage four is about defining one's own personal lens, her resistance to leading and educating her peers offers evidence that she was not focused on bringing others over to her perspective despite being acknowledged by her peers as an authority. This rejection of the opportunity to assume the mantle of authority suggests a need to further disassociate from external authority. Someone who has, developmentally speaking, just removed external authority from their own sphere of influence would not find the idea of becoming an authority appealing.

In light of the responses of this group of students it seems safe to infer that in the case of those surveyed many of them have undergone the transition from stage three to stage four earlier than the average individual. Although Fowler's timelines are by no means binding, it is significant that these students, who developed apart from one another for the majority of their lives, share similar progressions and evidence for relatively early transition. Furthermore, the dynamics of the group and the lack of a true spiritual authority suggest that they are an association of individuals who find themselves firmly in Fowler's fourth stage. The interaction of their individual belief systems continue to help them refine and personalize their own unique ways of experiencing spirituality.

Although the work of Fowler is an essential foundation for understanding the development of faith and spirituality in an individual, it is not without shortcomings. According to critique offered by Evans (2009), Fowler's work has been variously accused of being gender biased, ethnically biased, and biased in favor of Protestant Christianity. As the student participants in these studies adhere to a variety of specific practices, most quite separate from Protestantism, Fowler can really only provide part of the picture.

The great danger that comes from this is that Fowler is still seen by many as being the most important theorist in the realm of spiritual development. If these students are evaluated in the same fashion as their Christian classmates, then something will almost certainly be lost. The reality of how this theory would locate them cannot be denied, but the appropriateness of this instrument must be called into question. The values of this group are so radically different from the dominant culture that it becomes extremely challenging to not press the expectations and perceptions that we carry onto them. While

I am certainly not an expert, I was able to construct a developmental location for them based on Fowler's theory. Imagine the missed opportunities if this theory is only one used to understand their development.

The need for mentors. The work of Sharon D. Parks (1986, 2000) may offer a more clear view of where these students fall developmentally. One of the main points of analysis for Parks was commitment within the context of spiritual development. Craig spoke to a variety of religious viewpoints being represented by the group of students present at Pagan Group. When asked if it was acceptable practice for students to have a variety of viewpoints, Craig responded that it was a positive thing to have these present. Craig's perspective suggested that there was a general attitude that everyone had to find their own path and that there was not a wrong way to go about practicing. John affirmed this when he noted that "everyone I have ever met here on Porpoise State has been completely open with who they are and being very friendly about who other people are" (John, Transcription). Although the acceptance of multiple viewpoints is very common in modern Pagan circles, the notions of everyone being correct suggest that these students find themselves in a form Parks referred to as unqualified relativism.

This perspective is further supported by the comments Craig and Rebekkah made about conflicts occurring within the group. These conflicts were characterized by members within the group having disagreements over the specifics of practice and belief. Although there is a tolerance and support for this in the group, it can be inferred that these students are moving through this form of commitment. As they begin to move past a viewpoint Perry (1968) would have likely termed multiplicity, and into a perspective where validity is established by evidence rather than innate value, these individuals begin

to see their own beliefs with a more nuanced view that encourages the formation of more personalized beliefs and commitments.

These arguments also indicate that students are beginning to balance their own views and the views of others. These students have moved away from the top-down dependence evidenced by Park's first form. They have begun to engage their own beliefs in a way which allows them to interact with their peers and have established the beginnings of self-dependence. Many of the experiences shared by students which spoke to worship being a very solitary, nature based practice also support the notion that they are experiencing fragile inner dependence (Parks, 2000). One important example of this can be seen in the experiences of Rebekkah who reflected on practicing a fusion of Paganism and Christianity:

So, um, after our group went to the Unitarian universality church here for part of our unity tour to get to know other faiths I started going back there. The first time I went there for the coffee hour afterwards I talked to a 60 year old man in the choir about my pagan faith and my girlfriend all the same conversation and he didn't bat an eye. I was like, okay! This is the church I need to go to. So I mostly go to the Unitarian Universalist church. I still believe in God, I still go to mass with my family but mostly it's hard to balance that with my personal beliefs.

(Rebekkah, Transcription)

Rebekkah's attempts at balancing the two sides of her beliefs are very telling of her fragile inner dependence. Rather than pushing off confidently into her Pagan beliefs, she still clings to those ideas in which she was raised. Her delight at a positive interaction with an older member of the faith community is also extremely important as one of the

essential things to individuals moving into confident inner dependence is the presence of mentor relationships.

Presently, these students lack these strong mentor relationships. Although there are older members of the group, these students have been shown to run relatively parallel developmentally speaking. If true mentors are present in the community, they were not present in the sample which included several members of the organization's executive board. Furthermore, any sort of faculty or staff support was only vaguely alluded to by Susan. Clearly, these students lack the support of experienced elders or faculty members. A fact further supported by previous observations made about the importance and nature of this community. Segaya also spoke to this need when he mentioned that he wished a Gothi were present in the community to guide his spiritual development. Students seem to be missing these relationships, even if they vary in their beliefs and practices.

The importance of mentor relationships is further stressed by what was shown in the documentary *Carrier*. Although the Navy Chaplains on the U.S.S. Nimitz were not numerous enough to lead a service for every faith group represented, they coordinated the recruitment of lay leaders who could fill in that important gap. As many of the soldiers featured in the documentary fall into the same age range as our sample, it can be safely assumed that the spiritual development of these individuals would be comparable going into their respective experiences (university and military service). The Navy clearly recognizes the benefits these relationships can have on their sailors and despite being a governmental institution it still goes to great lengths to ensure individuals are provided with the opportunity to connect with a mentor.

A nuance in understanding must be applied here to temper my own conclusions. While the importance of mentor relationships cannot be understated, it is essential that we consider the unique and diverse beliefs of these students. It is possible that mentor relationships may already exist in some way that has not been shown or that some students are finding these relationships through online sources and the writing of important authors in the Pagan community. I understand what a mentor should be in the context of Parks and the society I live in, but that role might take a very different shape for these students.

A satisfying relationship. Students who identify as Pagan on Porpoise State University's campus are faced with a balance of resources and disconnection that make it difficult to speak to the level of satisfaction they feel with the university. Kuh and Gonyea (2006) showed that students involved in some sort of spirituality related activity would succeed more and become more involved in their institution of higher education. However, these students interact almost exclusively with their peers in Pagan Group. Every student in the sample, with the exception of Segaya, spoke to the importance of the group as part of their support network. This suggests a strong association with and appreciation for the group and its presence on campus. One interesting observation is that these students may feel more connection to this group than they do to the University.

While students did identify the presence of abundant print resources and green spaces, they did not given any indication that the culture of the campus is specifically supportive of their beliefs. Although students could not produce specific instances, they suggested that public practice of their religion could result in negative interactions with peers indicating their belief that they are viewed as others. Susan's willingness to believe

that Porpoise State was barring her organization from openly practicing also suggests that these students believe the university views them as others and speaks to their lack of connection. Many students seem to view Pagan Group as a better resource for them than PSU's services and departments. The sort of involvement Kuh and Gonyea(2006) suggested should be present is not, possibly because the students in the sample seem to view PSU as a distant entity that supports their organization from the shadows.

This disconnection between these students and the rest of the university is of not because we know from the works of Chickering and Reisser (1993) and Perry (1968) that a diversity of experiences go into the successful development of a personal identity. While they are presently satisfied with the state of their physical resources, they are perhaps missing those intangible pieces of their experiences that University could provide if it was sensitive to their unique needs. They are willing to educate their peers and others on what it is they practice and do, but without the proper venue it would become easy to feel that their lessons and experiences are not valued by their institution.

A way must be found to bridge the gap between these students and their peers if we hope to engage, develop, and support them further. Another strong example of this taking place can be found in *Carrier* as the Navy shows its commitment to the spiritual development of its sailors by providing a specific space in which worship can happen. This is a beneficial practice as it gives the sailors some ownership in the community found on the U.S.S. Nimitz and the feeling that the Navy is supportive of what they value. While many religious groups have space available to them on campus, should they so choose, Pagan rituals cannot all be performed indoors. This reality adds to the feelings

of alienation and disconnectedness some students alluded to (consciously or unconsciously) in their interviews.

One explanation for the apparent disconnect between the positive feelings students have about the university and their own apparent self-perceptions of being outsiders is that they enjoy their status as others. Living outside of the normal understanding of the university gives them the power to operate as they see fit with little intervention from the larger community. While there are certain resources that these students would be happy to receive and utilize, we must not forget that Hutton (2001) viewed Paganism as a set of mystery religions, meaning that an important part of their existence is to maintain some level of detachment and independence from a cultural landscape dominated by other faiths and value systems. This perception would also explain the strong association they have with Pagan Group, as the shared sense of otherness would allow for the formation of a tight knit community committed to preserving and protecting their way of life.

A positive atmosphere. It is important to note that students on Porpoise State's campus have not had to deal with many instances of active discrimination. Although some of the shortcomings discussed previously could be viewed as institutional ignorance or discrimination, students in the sample did not feel discriminated against in any broad way. Interview responses consistently spoke to the individual's belief that Porpoise State students did not know much about the religions that fall under the EBR umbrella, but were accepting of their practices. Although the story of the conflict experienced by some students in the residence halls certainly constitutes discrimination and hateful attitudes, it

is an isolated incident that does not seem to reflect the Pagan students' perceptions of their peers.

Students spoke to collaborations with other religious groups such as the Muslim Student Association. Additionally, individuals mentioned positive interactions with a variety of Christian groups. The only negative religious interactions mentioned seemed to be with missionaries who visited from off campus. Indeed, the Pagan students included in this study seemed to be genuinely focused on the education of their peers about the beliefs of Paganism without a push for conversion. They are also passionate about educating themselves; something that should be fostered by the university for the same reason spirituality should be encouraged when considering the holistic view of the student. Segaya mentioned attending Campus Crusade for Christ meetings for nearly a full semester in an effort to better understand the religious beliefs of that group.

The lack of discrimination and their willingness to learn is something that can be used for the benefit of the students. Chickering (2006) believed that spirituality was an important answer to the issues of isolation experienced by students. Students engaging in interactions with other faiths can begin to fill in those experiential pieces they need to begin constructing their own identities. The presence of this willingness to learn is an overwhelmingly positive sign and one that indicates that a stronger connection to the university could be on the horizon for these students.

Students in the sample also alluded to faculty members supporting their various religious beliefs by incorporating Pagan holidays into their classroom calendars in addition to mandated federal holidays. Although this was only referenced by Shawn, the absence of complaints by other students seems to imply that they have no major

complaints about the classroom environment. Assuming this is true, the classroom would also be a prime environment to begin introducing these students to the complimentary experiences they need to develop identity and spirituality.

Recommendations and Other Considerations

In response to the second research question of “What changes, if any, could be made by Porpoise State University to better meet the developmental and spiritual needs of these students?”, my recommendations are three-fold. I believe that these are three pivotal ways in which Porpoise State University may adapt its facilities, resources, and perspectives to better serve student practitioners of Earth-Based religions. All of these must be implemented with the understanding that they should exist as beneficial options for these students. We cannot, and should not, assume that because one Pagan student wishes to utilize a certain resource that all of them will. It must also be understood that they would never be willing to trade their independence for more, or better, resources. Why then, is it important to implement these changes? I would argue that presently Porpoise State University does not fully meet the developmental needs of these particular students. As Porpoise State strives to develop its students in a holistic fashion, it must not forget to include issues of spirituality and the growth that comes with them. Considering that James W. Fowler (1981) emphasized the importance of faith to all human beings, it would be prudent for Porpoise State to consider the developmental importance of supporting spirituality.

While other majority faith students have the benefit of a supportive society and local culture, these students have none. As Earth-Based religions do not share a specific set of beliefs, they do not employ trained clergy to assist them in their belief system

development. As a result, it falls to the individual Pagan to take responsibility for his or her own development. What this means is that these students frequently rely on instructional books, historical texts, and internet resources to meet their developmental needs. This also sets them apart from other minority faiths, many of which utilize professionally trained clergy or singular religious texts freely available to many. The resources our university is able provide may well be the only ones these students will ever get. This is an opportunity to champion an issue of diversity that other universities might overlook or ignore.

A free, green space. An important change to be made on campus would be the designation of an outdoor space for student religious observances. Margot Adler (1986) noted that most Pagans experience an aliveness or presence in nature. This indicates the importance of safe outdoor spaces to practicing Pagans. However, students are not privy to any such spaces here on campus. While Christian groups could easily reserve rooms to hold religious studies, there exist no green spaces which could kept expressly private for the rituals conducted by these students. Campus Forrest (pseudonym) represents the closest thing to an actual private nature area on Porpoise State' campus, but it cannot be reserved or restricted in any way which would be beneficial for the students in question. Students are therefore forced to move off campus or to perform their rituals in a public fashion which could invite prejudice or interference.

While this space would benefit Pagan students in a very real way, it is reasonable that there are two major arguments against such a designation of space. First, the earmarking of any space to benefit a specific religious group might seem discriminatory. This proposal would be to create a space that could be reserved and used by any student

religious group. The stipulations put on the space would simply be that it allow for fire, a key component in many Pagan rituals, and be away from the main hub of campus to allow for privacy. Second, many might argue that Porpoise State is an exceptionally green campus with many “go-to” spaces where outdoor worship could occur without specific reservations. While this is an exceptionally green campus, the reality is that these students practice a faith which is often misunderstood by many. As a result, practicing in areas which lack a specific designation could result in unwanted interference or persecution. This would also serve to address the potential developmental challenges facing student practitioners of Earth-Based religions in the realm of developing interdependence. Their present challenges with group worship are largely rooted in their comfort level with practicing in noticeable ways in public spaces. So this accommodation would provide the Pagan students with what they need as well as opening up another potential meeting space for other religious organizations.

The recommendation of the researcher is that a space be designated, either on the fringes of campus or the on one of the satellite properties, a fire pit be installed in accordance with local fire code, and also suggests the addition of trees, flowers, and bushes to an appropriate degree in the proximity of the designated location. A space could be selected that is not presently in use and be quickly and inexpensively converted into a student worship area. Porpoise State would not need to provide any specific equipment or Pagan Group vices that would benefit any one faith. The university would simply need to offer the initial cost for the fire pit, horticulture, and a small fraction of time from the current maintenance staff. While many might argue that the development and use of government owned space for religious purposes is not appropriate, the

experiences of the individuals, noting especially that a small contingent of Pagans is represented in the episode, in *Carrier* seems to argue that the government views the spiritual well-being, regardless of specific background, of its sailors as being a high priority.

Administrative support. The second recommendation I would make is the development of an administrative position responsible for coordinating spiritual resources on campus. This position could be a person of a specific faith background or someone interested in issues of student spirituality. Either way, this individual could serve as the primary contact person with the various religious groups on campus. Creating this position would give groups like Pagan Group the chance to have a real professional to interact with, rather than an absentee advisor alluded to in the interviews. This individual could also help to find lay leaders in the community to work with various groups. This would help fill the need for mentors and help the present generation of Pagan Students develop more completely.

This person could also coordinate interactions between various groups that would help reach a better understanding of one another. Content knowledge related to spirituality would be useful in closing gaps created by ignorance of one another's traditions. As further plans were made for the university, having someone present who could really speak to being religiously inclusive would also be a tremendous benefit to PSU's long terms goals. Everything from building design to dietary options could benefit from having someone such as this on staff at a state university. While it may be a state-sponsored atmosphere, *Carrier's* depiction of Navy clergy helps us to see that individuals

acting in unbiased ways can create positive situations for people from all faith backgrounds.

While this person should exist as a resource for all students, they should not be obligated to utilize the position in any way. As Paganism, in its various forms, is highly personal and extremely differentiated it would be unrealistic to assume that one person could spiritually counsel the entire campus population of Pagans is an impossible notion. However, to have someone there that students could choose to speak with or request services from would be a huge benefit; especially if they were specifically trained to understand and interact with students from minority faith backgrounds.

More and better training. The final recommendation for best practice offered by this researcher is the inclusion of Earth-Based Religions as a topic in any instance that diversity education occurs on campus. The goal of this change would be to introduce faculty and staff members to concepts associated with Earth-Based religions. As many people do not fully understand Earth-Based Religions (Adler, 1981), a shift would be extremely useful as it would equip university educators and staff members with basic knowledge about the group. Furthermore, once faculty and staff members are aware of the group it is far more likely that they will begin to make more and better observations about their experience and develop. While interference in their practice must never be condoned, it is the assertion of this researcher that greater exposure to the university at large can only help these students.

Limitations and Future Study

While this study attempted to take a comprehensive look at the experiences and challenges of students who practice Earth-Based religions, it was by no means all

encompassing. There exist a few key areas that I hope to see expanded in the future. Whether it is by me personally or others who take up an interest in this topic, there are several areas that this study only briefly dealt with and others that it did not touch at all that should be explored in the future.

One potential limitation in this study involves trustworthiness of the instrument. The protocol used to conduct these interviews was largely inspired by the researcher's previous reading of qualitative study. However, only one experienced qualitative researcher looked over the instrument before it was implemented. A beneficial step that could have been conducted would have been submitting it to additional researchers to better validate its usefulness. Additionally, a pilot study could have been conducted to ensure that the tool was effective when implemented.

This study did little to engage concepts such as sexuality, socioeconomic status, race, gender, and country of origin. The students interviewed all identified as Caucasian and were from a relatively narrow geographic region. As a result, voices are still missing from this sample as many Pagans also claim membership in LGBT populations. Furthermore, regional differences also correspond to differences in specific practices, a topic that was not explored in this study. Qualitative research also overlooks long term trending in favor of a closer look at a particular experience. National data about the success of Pagan students would be extremely useful to the field.

One such area is the realm of specific practices and beliefs within the group. Although students were asked to share a personal history of their religious backgrounds, few of the students elaborated on their specific practices. As this study was focused on their experiences, this line of questioning might have yielded more information about

how they form, refine, and execute specific rituals in the university context. This might have provided useful information about the genesis of ideas and the extent to which they are drawn from what sources. Additionally, student participants would have had an opportunity to explain and expand upon the significance of specific rituals and practices, especially those that might seem most off-putting to outsiders. This would have brought more information to the forefront about these students.

A second potential area to pursue would have been sexuality among these students. Both of the female participants in this study, Rebekkah and Susan, self-identified as Lesbians. Furthermore, Pagan culture has the reputation of being far more permissive in the realm of sexuality and sexual exploration. An understanding of how sexuality is viewed among these students would also provide additional developmental insights that were not explored in this initial study. This line of inquiry also carries the potential to benefit the students as several stereotypes about the supposed promiscuity of Pagans are present in many sources and were touched upon in several of the interviews. While not a pervasive theme in this study, the sexuality of these students would provide an interesting basis for a follow-up study. This particular take on the subject could also be expanded to include gender issues as well as sexuality.

Finally an analysis of the effects of their views and exposure to popular culture pertaining to Earth-Based religions would also be an interesting approach to the topic. Many of these students came of age during a time when television programs such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Charmed*, and *Angel* dominated prime time young adult television. It is possible that exposure to these positive, if somewhat inaccurate, images might have influenced their decision to pursue these belief systems. Especially in the case

of female students, since many of these shows featured empowered female leads who were physically aggressive and emotionally powerful.

The resurgence of stories rife with pagan imagery such as Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and (less overtly) C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* may have also contributed to the positive imagery associated with concepts such as magic, the divinity of nature, and animism. All of this would make an interesting study if adequate student participation could be mustered.

Closing Summary

Pagan students represent a vibrant and complex sub-culture which finds a home on Porpoise State University's campus. Undoubtedly, they face challenges here that at times are difficult to deal with and hard to understand for someone outside the culture. Regardless, they maintain a powerfully optimistic view of their circumstances, peers, and world in the face of misunderstandings that can be potentially crippling.

The researcher reached several conclusions about student's developmental course, need for mentors, connections to campus culture, and their perception of the campus atmosphere. These conclusions helped to inform several recommendations for best practices centered on addressing the challenges and shortcomings brought to light by the study.

It has been a privilege to spend time with these students and learn about their experiences and culture. It is the hope of this researcher that educators and administrators alike continue to pay attention to this group of students and work more actively to meet their needs. Through a combination of adjustments to facilities, resources, and practices a better future can be promised to these students. Surely their voices, when joined with the

others present in the spiritual community on campus, can offer something unique and culturally beneficial for all students with whom they come in contact.

References

- Adler, M. (1986). *Drawing down the moon: Witches, druids, goddess-worshippers, and other pagans in America today*. New York: Viking.
- Astin, A. (2004). Why spirituality deserves a central place in liberal education. *Liberal Education*, 37-41.
- Bailey, M. D. (2006). The meanings of magic. *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, 1, 1-23.
- Bogle, K. A. (2008). *Hooking up: Sex, dating, and relationships on campus*. New York: New York University Press.
- Carpenter, D. (1996). Emergent nature spirituality: An examination of the major spiritual contours of the contemporary pagan worldview. In J. Lewis, *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft* (pp. 32-85). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Chickering, A. W. (1969). *Education and identity*. New York: Jossey-Bass.
- Chickering, A. W. (2006). Strengthening spirituality and civic engagement in higher education. *Journal of College and Character*, 8(2), 1-5.
- Chickering, A. W. & Reisser, L. (1993). *Education and identity* (2nd ed.). New York: Jossey-Bass.
- Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Dickson, D (Producer). (2008). True Believers [*Carrier*]. Los Angeles: Icon Productions.

- Fowler, J. W. (1981). *Stages of faith: The psychology of human development and the quest for meaning*. New York: Harper One.
- Harvey, G. (1997). *Contemporary paganism: Listening people, speaking earth*. New York: New York University Press.
- Herne, H. (2011). *What is Wicca?* Retrieved from:
<http://wicca.com/celtic/wicca/wicca.htm>
- Huseerl, E. (1970). *The crisis of the European sciences and transcendental phenomenology* (D. Carr, Trans.). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Hutton, R. (2001). *The triumph of the moon: A history of modern pagan witchcraft*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Evans, N. J., Forney, D. S., Guideo, F. M., Patton, L. D., & Renn, K. A. (2010). *Student development in college: Theory, research, and practice* (2nd Ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Fisler, J., Agati, H. A., Chance, S. M., Donahue, A. E., Donahue, G. A., Eikhoff, E. J., ... Foubert, J. D. (2009). Keeping (or losing) the faith: reflections on spiritual struggles and their resolution by college seniors. *The College Student Affairs Journal*, 27, 257-274.
- Kuh, G. D. & Gonyea, R. M. (2006). Spirituality, liberal learning, and college student engagement. *Liberal Educator*, 40-47.
- Organizational Website (2011). *Earth based religions*. Retrieved from
<http://pg.iweb.psu.edu/pagangroup.htm>
- Parks, S. D. (1986). *The critical years: Young adults and the search for meaning, faith, and commitment*. New York: HarperCollins.

- Parks, S. D. (2000). *Big questions, worthy dreams: Mentoring young adults in their search for meaning, purpose, and faith*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Perry, W. G. Jr. (1968). *Forms of intellectual and ethical development in the college years: A scheme*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.
- Pike, S. M. (2001). *Earthly bodies, magical selves: Contemporary pagans and the search for community*. Berkely, CA: University of California Press.
- Porpoise State University. (2010). *Immersive Learning*. Retrieved from <http://cms.psu.edu/Academics/UndergraduateStudy/BeyondtheClassroom/ImmersiveLearning.aspx>
- Porpoise State University Office of Student Life. (2010). *Pride guide*. Retrieved from <https://apps.psu.edu/PrideGuide/>
- Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1997). *Grounded theory in practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Tomedi, R. (1993). *No bugle, no drums: An oral history of the Korean war*. New York: Wiley.

Appendix A

IRB Information, Interview Protocol, and Informed Consent

IRB Approval

Date: 09/24/2010 10:33 AM

To: "Thalia Mulvihill" <[REDACTED]>, "Josiah Black" <[REDACTED]>

From: "Chris Mangelli" <no-reply@irbnet.org>

Reply To: "Chris Mangelli" <[REDACTED]>

Subject: IRBNet Board Action

Please note that Porpoise State University IRB has taken the following action on IRBNet:

Project Title: [191687-1] An Analysis of the Perceived Challenges and Experiences of Some Student Practitioners of Earth-Based Religions at Porpoise State University
Principal Investigator: Josiah Black, B.S.

Submission Type: New Project

Date Submitted: September 22, 2010

Action: APPROVED

Effective Date: September 24, 2010

Review Type: Exempt Review

Should you have any questions you may contact Chris Mangelli at cmmangelli@PSU.edu.

Thank you,
The IRBNet Support Team

www.irbnet.org

Informed Consent Document

Study Title

An Analysis of the Perceived Challenges and Experiences of Some Student Practitioners of Earth-Based Religions at Porpoise State University

Study Purpose and Rationale

The purpose of this study is to analyze and communicate the perceived experiences of and challenges faced by a group of students who practice Earth-Based Religions at Porpoise State University. This research is important and necessary as this student group exists as a minority faith population on Porpoise State's campus. As their faith is sometimes negatively perceived by those outside the group, it is the goal of this study to bring to light the challenges they may face as a result of these attitudes. Additionally, analysis will take place regarding the level of support they receive from the University as it presently exists.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Student participants will be full-time students as defined by Porpoise State University. Subjects will be no younger than eighteen years of age and no older than 24 years of age. Subjects will be self-professed practitioners of Earth-Based Religions.

Participation Procedures and Duration

For this study, you will be asked to participate in a one on one private interview. You will be asked several questions designed to prompt a discussion about your religious practices and experience at Porpoise State University.

Audio or Video Tapes

For purposes of accuracy, with your permission, the interviews will be audio taped. You will be assigned a pseudonym for the purposes of taping to protect your identity. The audio files will be stored digitally and be deleted from the audio recording device after the interview. Transcriptions and audio files will be stored on a password protected computer until their destruction following the completion of the project.

Data Confidentiality or Anonymity

All data will be maintained as confidential and no identifying information such as names will appear in any publication or presentation of the data.

Storage of Data

The data will be entered into a software program and stored on the researcher's password-protected computer until the project is complete. Only members of the research team will have access to the data.

Risks or Discomforts

A potential risk associated with this study is that participants may be, despite the care taken by the researcher, revealed to be practitioners of Earth-Based religions.

Who to Contact Should You Experience Any Negative Effects from Participating in this Study

If you experience any negative effects from participation in this study please contact either IRB or Dr. Thalia Mulvihill.

Benefits

Subjects will provide the basis for a study intended to explore their experience as college students. The information collected, and the analysis to follow, may result in better representation of these students to the university community at large. Additionally, developmental challenges faced by these students could be revealed, subsequently creating an opportunity for the needs of these students to be more adequately met by the university.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw your permission at anytime for any reason without penalty or prejudice from the investigator. Please feel free to ask any questions of the investigator before signing this form and at any time during the study.

IRB Contact Information

For one's rights as a research subject, you may contact the following: Research Compliance, Sponsored Programs Office, Porpoise State University, Muncie, IN 47306, (765) 285-5070, irb@█.edu.

Study Title An Analysis of the Perceived Challenges and Experiences of Some Student Practitioners of Earth-Based Religions at Porpoise State University

Consent

I, _____, agree to participate in this research project entitled, “An Analysis of the Perceived Challenges and Experiences of Some Student Practitioners of Earth-Based Religions at Porpoise State University

have had the study explained to me and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have read the description of this project and give my consent to participate. I understand that I will receive a copy of this informed consent form to keep for future reference.

To the best of my knowledge, I meet the inclusion/exclusion criteria for participation (described on the previous page) in this study.

Participant’s Signature

Date

Researcher Contact Information

Principal Investigator:
Josiah W. Black, Graduate Student
Educational Studies
Porpoise State University

Faculty Supervisor:
Dr. Thalia Mulvihill
Educational Studies
Porpoise State University

Thesis Narrative (As submitted to IRB)

SECTION 1 – TITLE, PURPOSE OF THE STUDY, AND RATIONALE

1.1 Title.

An Analysis of the Perceived Challenges and Experiences of Some Student Practitioners of Earth-Based Religions at Porpoise State University

1.2 Purpose of the study.

The purpose of this study is to analyze and communicate the perceived experiences of and challenges faced by a group of students who practice Earth-Based Religions at Porpoise State University.

1.3 Rationale.

This research is important and necessary as this student group exists as a minority faith population in the United States (The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2008). As their faith is sometimes negatively perceived by those outside the group (Pike, 2001), it is the goal of this study to bring to light the challenges they may face as a result of these attitudes. Additionally, analysis will take place regarding the level of support they receive from the University as it presently exists.

SECTION 2 – DESCRIPTION OF SUBJECT POPULATION

2.1 Number of subjects. This study will include 8-12 university students.

2.2 Describe the subject population. Student participants will be full-time students as defined by Porpoise State University. Subjects will be no younger than eighteen years of age and no older than 24 years of age. Subjects will be self-professed practitioners of Earth-Based Religions.

2.3 Describe any specified inclusion/exclusion criteria.

Students must be self-professed practitioners of Earth-Based Religions.

SECTION 3 – SUBJECT RECRUITMENT

3.1 Describe the method of subject recruitment.

Subjects will be recruited by soliciting the assistance of the student group “The Society of Earth-Based Religions”. The researcher will contact the executive board of this organization and solicit permission to attend a meeting to explain the goals and methodology of the study. Students will then be asked to volunteer for participation by privately contacting the researcher.

SECTION 4 – METHODS AND PROCEDURES

- 4.1 Describe the methods and procedures to be used.** The study will consist of a face-to-face interview conducted in a private location to be agreed upon by the researcher and the subject. The interview will be semi-structured in nature and will utilize 10 broad research questions designed to meet the aforementioned goals of the project.

SECTION 5 – ANONYMITY/CONFIDENTIALITY OF DATA**5.1 Describe how data will be collected and stored.**

Data will be collected using an audio recording device at the time and date the interviews take place. The data will then be reproduced as a typed Transcription for the purpose of analysis and inclusion in the final research report. As a result of the nature of this study, data will not be anonymous. The confidentiality of the subject will be protected through the use of pseudonyms at the time of recording. Interviews will take place at private locations at private times to prevent unintentional association with the study from taking place. Furthermore, the researcher’s timeline and precise goals will only be known to the researcher, his thesis committee, and the subject for the purposes of confidentiality. The raw data will only be reviewed by the researcher and Dr. Mulvihill, the chair of the thesis committee.

Digital recordings will be downloaded to the researcher’s personal computer and the originals will be deleted from the recording device. The Transcriptions of the interviews will also be stored digitally on the same device. A backup copy of both

the audio recordings and the typed Transcription will be secured on a 1GB flash drive and kept in a location that only the researcher can access. Data will be kept by the researcher until the conclusion and successful completion of the research project, then electronic files will be deleted and paper documents will be shredded.

SECTION 6 – POTENTIAL RISKS AND BENEFITS

6.1 Describe the potential risks and discomforts. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study.

6.2 Describe how the risks will be minimized. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study.

6.3 Describe the potential benefits. Subjects will provide the basis for a study intended to explore their experience as college students. The information collected, and the analysis to follow, may result in better representation of these students to the university community at large. Additionally, developmental challenges faced by these students could be revealed, subsequently creating an opportunity for the needs of these students to be more adequately met by the university.

SECTION 7 – SUBJECT INCENTIVES/INDUCEMENTS TO PARTICIPATE

7.1 Describe any inducements/incentives to participate that will be offered to the subject. Subjects will receive no incentives for participation in this study.

SECTION 8 – OTHER FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 Describe any financial expense to the subject. N/A

8.2 Describe any provisions for compensation for research-related injury. N/A

SECTION 9 – INFORMED CONSENT

This is a separate document and will be attached to the research project protocol.

SECTION 10 – ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

10.1 Informed Consent Document

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Appendix B

First Contact E-mail

Initial E-mail

From: Black, Josiah William
Sent: Monday, October 18, 2010 2:15 PM
Subject: Earth-Based Religions Study Interviews

Greetings,

You are receiving this e-mail because you indicated interest in participating in my interviews with individuals who practice Earth-Based Religions. I am very excited to get to know all of you a little better and it is my hope that this study will be beneficial for both you and the campus at large.

I will be conducting interviews over the course of the next couple weeks. I have listed dates and times that are available below. From this selection, please indicate all hour long blocks during which you might be available. Please respond to this e-mail by the end of the week so that we may schedule our interview times! If you have more specific questions about the study or interview, please contact me via e-mail or phone at (765) 285-6011.

Thanks very much for your help on this project. It literally could not happen without you.

Interview Times:

Monday October 25th 1pm-5pm
Tuesday October 26th 2pm-4pm, 7pm-9pm
Wednesday October 27th 4pm-8pm
Thursday October 28th 3pm-8pm
Friday October 29th 1pm-7pm

Again, please indicate any 1 hour blocks encompassed in the time frames above during which you would be available. Based on your availability, I will be back in touch with an interview time. Thanks! If you are not available for any of these time frames, let me know and alternate arrangements will be made.

Thanks again!

Josiah W. Black

Interview Protocol

1. Would you describe for me your personal history as a practitioner of Earth-Based religions?
2. When you decided to begin practicing, did your family and friends support you?
3. In what ways do you feel your religion helps you to be successful at Porpoise State?
4. What, if any, are the challenges associated with finding a safe place to worship on campus?
5. What have your interactions with students of other faiths been like on campus?
6. Would you describe for me any conflicts with other students that have arisen because of their perceptions of your religion?
7. In what ways do you feel supported here as a practitioner of an Earth-Based religion?
8. Do you feel you have access to the resources you need to grow as a practitioner and, if yes, what are those resources?
9. What resources are you lacking that might benefit your growth spiritually speaking?
10. Please explain to me how your university choice might have been affected if you knew then what you know now about practicing your faith on this campus?