

**The Heathen Way: The
Modern (Re)Construction of an Ancient Identity**



Dissertation Proposal (Draft)

Submitted By:

Jennifer Snook

March 17th, 2006

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

1) [Greenhouse, Linda. 2005. "Supreme Court Rules on Religion in Prison." New York Times. June 1, A14.....27](#)

INTRODUCTION

Explanation of topic

This project will study the followers of modern Heathenry; more specifically those members of the belief systems of Fyrn Sede, Ásatrú, and Odinism, whose devotees collectively refer to themselves as “Heathens,” all of whom endure as an often unnoticed fragment of the Pagan community. These three groups differ mainly in the origins of their specific religious system, Fyrn Sede focusing on the Anglo-Saxon, Ásatrú on the Scandinavian, and Odinism on the Scandinavian but more specifically, on the god Odin. Many Heathens, however, define themselves simply as “Heathen” and for various reasons, including the great similarities between the aforementioned groups, do not choose to specify a subgroup to which they belong. Given that many Heathens refer to themselves as such, so will I unless it is necessary to speak in specifics.

Contemporary Paganism, as a relatively new religious movement, is the resurgence of ancient non-Christian and typically polytheistic, pantheistic, or animistic belief systems. Heathens and other groups within the “Neo-Pagan” community can be distinguished from one another by the ultimate goals of both factions. “Neo-Paganism” as an umbrella term more often refers to witchcraft traditions, and can be defined as a movement which seeks to piece together the “Old Way” from a variety of historical texts and cultures from around the world. Loose interpretation and improvisation replaces any information that is missing from historical record. Reconstructionists, however, while part of the Neo-Pagan community, seek to piece together a religious tradition from *one specific* cultural background, using historical

texts and anthropological evidence (Adler 1979). The debate over missing pieces is fervent, while members seek the “true” academic answers time and again. Modern Heathenry, therefore, is a reconstructionist tradition; a contemporary revival of ancient beliefs, adapted to their contemporary context. The fidelity to history with which Heathens construct their “culture” begs analysis of those aspects of culture which are so unlike that of mainstream society, or contrarily, so fervently similar. Because many Heathens differentiate between Neo-Pagan and Reconstructionist, The word “Pagan” will be used to refer to both communities as a whole.

The fidelity to history with which Heathens construct their “culture” begs analysis of those aspects of culture which are so unlike that of mainstream society, or contrarily, so fervently similar. modern Heathenry traces its origin back to the historical cultural practices of pre-Christian northern Europe and, akin to most Pagan belief systems, is concerned with the cycles of the earth and the workings of animals, plants, humans and their relationship and interconnectivity with the cosmos (Jorgensen and Scott 1999). It is this focus on the visible, tangible elements of nature, which is nearly always present in the arguments of Pagans who find comfort in the visible “reality” of their spiritual system, as well as the romanticism and anachronism which both creates it and is simultaneously created by it. Ideologically, Paganism is decidedly individualistic, allowing for free interpretation and invention, and adamantly so. Like most new religious movements, Paganism struggles with “sources of authority” (Flowers 1981). Traditional authority does not exist within Paganism, as it has lost its historical roots. Charismatic authority cannot exist in many Pagan sects, and

more specifically, cannot exist in modern Heathenry where it is so thoroughly rejected (Flowers 1981). In support of this line of reasoning is Kaplan's (1996) notion that "modern Pagan groups are notorious for cannibalizing leaders through rumor, innuendo, just plain jealousy, or simple indifference, rendering any style of leadership virtually ineffective" (P. 202).

Purpose

One main question drives this study, namely, how participants experience multiple identities derived from their identifying with and participating in the Heathen community. Heathenry offers participants (for lack of better terms) "ethnic," "gender," and deviant religious identities, as well as a sense of community belonging. Firstly, as a contemporary religious movement, Heathenry has emerged and continues to emerge during a time in which communication technologies are paramount. I will explore what organizational forms Heathenry takes across time and space, paying particular attention to how this communication technology helps to create and maintain community boundaries and "membership" identity. This will add to the literature on NRMs which has yet to take the internet into account. Secondly, I wish to explore the connection between Heathenry as an "Ethnic" religious identity, looking at how it reproduces a unique Whiteness. I will examine the literature that explores historical reenactment as a possible affiliation between religion / anachronism and ethnicity as a contribution to whiteness theory. Thirdly, I will explore the core components of the Heathen "self" or "identity" and how it reproduces / challenges dominant religious norms and values. Lastly, I will engage with literature on women in

masculine-dominated settings, such as women in the workplace and other literature on gender identities to uncover how Heathen women enact and claim ownership over a particular masculinity / femininity in their struggle for empowerment and belonging.

OVERVIEW of LITERATURE

Modern Heathenry in Contemporary America

Much of the research completed on modern Heathenry has been for the purposes of highlighting the group's involvement in the racist and National Socialist movements, illuminating its characteristics as a Pagan sect, or merely describing the historical development of modern Heathenry from historical text to its revival in contemporary society. Some examples of this include Jeffrey Kaplan's (1996) insights into why the Heathens he interviewed believed that they had chosen Heathenry (in this case, Ásatrú) as their spiritual path. First, "the awakening of childhood memories" of storybooks illustrating Norse Mythology from the early 1950s, functioned as significant because of its portrayal of the gods of modern Heathenry. That, coupled with the religious freedom given to them by their parents, proved to be a powerful influence in encouraging further investigation into Ásatrú. A second scheme of entry into Ásatrú was the interest in the occult and magical division of the cultic milieu that the Heathens explored during adolescence. Others come to Ásatrú from previous involvement in other aspects of the Pagan community. Kaplan's work in 1996, however, was completed prior to the infancy of the internet. Since then, the Heathen

community has shifted from the real to the virtual, branching out and growing via communication technology, which Kaplan's work could not have taken into account.

In 2001, Anthropologist Jenny Blain published the results of her ethnographic study into the *seidhr* practitioners in the modern Heathen community, titled *The Nine Worlds of Seidh Magic*. In her work, she discusses the practice and reconstruction of the pre-Christian oracular shamanism. However, because her work is anthropological in nature, and more descriptive, she does not offer any critical analysis or theoretical contribution with her work.

A newer work, *Gods of The Blood*, written by Mattias Gardell in 2004, also comes out of the field of anthropology. It offers a disturbing but revealing account of racist Heathens, who use Heathenry as a platform to espouse nationalist ideology and separationism. While Gardell's (2004) work echoes Kaplan's rich outline of the history of formal Heathen organizations, it does not give voice to the majority of the Heathen community which is not racist. Instead, Gardell's work perpetuates a stereotype and connection to racism that has polarized and indeed been used by the media and government to persecute members of the Heathen community since its inception in the early 70s. My chapter on Heathenry's connection to Whiteness will respond to this.

Symbolic Interactionism: Identity

Goffman and Stryker, claim that the self is composed of collected role identities; that is, socially recognized roles to which we attribute meaning, sometimes referred to as "situated identities" (Burke 1981, Goffman 1959, Stryker 1968). Identities, then, are those socially constructed roles which are given meaning through interaction and agreed upon by

others. According to Burke and Reitzes (1981) identities can be characterized by three things. Firstly, identities are “social products,” with meanings ascribed to them which are socially recognized and maintained. These identities are (re)constructed and exchanged in interaction with others. For example, a person working in the position of “teacher” is fulfilling a socially recognized position. Students, in their roles, have been socialized into the meanings of these roles and both will respond toward the other on the basis of these meanings. Second, identities are organized hierarchically, according to their importance to the maintenance of the self, as well as to the degree that we are committed to the identity based on our links to others (Howard 2000; Stryker 1968). The characteristics of these role-identities are based upon the particular social context in which they are attributed their meaning. Third, identities are both symbolic and reflexive in character (Burke and Reitzes 1981). It is in specific situational contexts that we come to view ourselves through the eyes of others, attributing the meaning to the particular role which comes to have an agreed upon significance. It is our reaction to the responses of others, and their response to us in turn which carries on the meanings attributed to the given role we play.

Identities are then constructed through interaction with others, but also through the reflexive process that we come to engage in when we interpret given definitions. It is through this reflexivity that we come to acquire standpoints and frames of reference from which to interpret any given social context. It is because of this agreed-upon meaning that we come to understand that we are able to look upon situations from the perspective of Mead’s “Generalized-Other,” predicting how others may respond to our behaviors, and come to

behave according to that response. Additionally, Hewitt (1989) proposes that people are conscious of their identity only when it becomes problematic. I would argue, however, that Heathens are seldom ever unconscious of their Heathen identity. Heathenry is perpetually and discursively recreated, piece by piece from historical record, it is an exceptional daily effort on the behalf of Heathens to reconstruct, and renew its existence as a system. From this view, Heathenry appears as continually problematic chore. Hewitt (1989) argues accordingly that "persons with identity know who they are, what they are doing, and where they are going" (P. 152). According to these definitions, identity is a product of self-objectification and can only be had when one is cast in a particular role which is acknowledged by others. To say that there is a "Heathen" identity could be true only in the when and if this identity is understood by others. As obscure as this group is, therefore, the Heathen identity would be recognized only insofar as there are other Heathens that share the same meanings.

New Religious Movements & Communication Technology

The internet and other computer-mediated communication technologies are both products and producers of culture, intertwined in a reciprocal process of change and transformation. Technologies advance faster than academia can analyze their influences on culture and communication, producing a void in our knowledge across many disciplines. Avison and Myers (1995: 52) posit that "IS researchers need to consider the ways in which people within organizations create and recreate meaning through the use of information technology." While "anthropologists have looked at the invention and re-invention of 'Traditional culture' in many countries," scholars of New Religious Movements (NRMs)

attempt to uncover the invention and re-invention of religious movements. Few sociologists, however, have focused on the relationship between internet technology and NRMs, leaving the NRM literature decades behind in terms of what NRMs look like over time and space. To demonstrate the effect of communication technology on Heathenry as a NRM, I engage with literature from studies of NRMs as well as organizational culture. I will define “New Religious Movements” by using Pitchford et al’s (2001) contention that NRMs are such “that their religious culture is too novel to be classified as belonging within the conventional religious traditions of the society in which they are being observed” (P.381).

Dawson and Hennebry’s (1999) study into the impact of the internet in the recruitment of members into NRMs demonstrated the effect of cyberspace technology and the importance of including it in studies into the sociology of religion and NRMs. Heathenry is no exception. The internet negates space, (Cheney et al. 2004) allows for NRMs to be diffuse, and fragments organizations which become constantly in flux and dynamic. People no longer have to rely on one another for information, or on face-to-face discussions for interaction. Members are attracted to Heathenry through other avenues but almost always begin socialization into it via the internet.

Martin (2002) argues that cultural studies often assume that culture is both embodied and bound by physical location. The same can be said of NRM studies, which, until now, have analyzed NRMs based on members’ physical bodies and spaces. Like Martin’s (2002) argument about organizational boundaries, the boundaries of online space are moveable, permeable, fluctuating and dangerous.

For many sociologists contributing to the backbone of NRM literature, the technology of the internet was not yet available as a cultural artifact, and had not opened up the possibilities for types and methods of communication within organizations. Members are attracted to Heathenry through other avenues but, in the last decade, have almost always begun socialization into it via the internet, which has rapidly increased membership while repositioning the movement from real-world space to virtual spacelessness. It would seem that the bulk of the cultural mythology within the Heathen scene has been written by its members, in an ongoing discourse that takes place in cyber-space. Wellman et al. (1996: 225) argue that, when bound together by interests instead of social categories, the internet can be “empowering for members of lower-status and disenfranchised social categories” like members of deviant NRMs, offering an outlet and a common ground previously unavailable to them. Carley (2001: 209) argues the effect of “intelligent spaces” on organizations, and I argue likewise on NRMs, “will be to alter the size and complexity of the underlying networks – interaction, knowledge and information.” The “complexity” that Carley speaks of has created a struggle for Heathens who attempt to maintain coherence while engulfed in an overabundance of new meanings, messages and information.

Because virtual communities lack the face-to-face intimacy of other group structures, and because the Heathen community is fraught with disagreements over varied political *and* religious views, the internet is the forum of much of the antagonistic infighting which, while assisting in the boundary-maintenance of the community, often leads to bad blood between members. However, because the virtual boundaries of Heathenry are often indistinct, the

internet offers members a choice for either participation or non-participation, without obligations. Turmoil causes rifts, but it can also be ignored as members bounce from listserv to listserv without embodied consequences or direct, physical exile. If presentations of self fail online, members can try again, experimenting with cultural boundaries by testing taboos and definitions of authenticity (Martin 2002, Williams and Copes 2005). These options were not available to the NRM members studied by scholars pre-internet. Despite all the mayhem, Heathens manage to hold it all together. Out There in that fuzzy unreachable place, Heathens create something meaningful; bonds of friendship, allegiances, and that longed-for sense of community that must be accounted for in the literature.

Constructions of Gender

When we speak of “gender” we discuss it in dichotomous terms that we have constructed for it, namely “masculinity” and “femininity” which Harris (1974) remarks are “sexist polarizations for identity.” We are slow to define any gendered performances that are neither or both. Heathenry has been described as a “He-Man” religion among its mostly gynocentric Neo-Pagan cousins, in that its members encourage and reproduce perceived “Viking” masculinities, which may seem threatening or uninviting to women / femininity. Female members in the Heathen community, however, have constructed alongside the men, a masculinized (for lack of a better term) femininity, which empowers them to be “tomboys” while still engaged in and claiming ownership over gendered domestic endeavors.

Judith Haberstam (1998) argues that female masculinity “offers an alternative mode of masculinity” detached from mysogyny allowing women to appropriate “male

power” (Haberstam 2002). In effect, Heathen women are actively engaged in the attempt at avoiding “girly sissy-stuff” while maintaining ownership over “traditionally” held feminine domains. They fulfill their economic and social gender roles, while eschewing many of the performances that go along with so-called woman-ness. However, unlike the performance of drag-kings whose theatrics are subdued and “quietly macho” (Haberstam 1998), Heathen masculinity encourages forthright and unabashed in-your-face masculinities from both genders. Heathenry is undoubtedly not the vehicle by which women come to performances of masculinity, but instead, offers sanctuary for women who may already embody it too much for acceptance by other more mainstream communities. It offers women a sense of empowerment that they may step outside of femininity without sanctions, although the limits and the acceptability of their performances are still, to a certain extent, controlled by the boundaries imposed by Western culture. Much of the literature in the field of Psychology refers to masculinized women (or feminine men) as androgynous (Harris 1974, Heilbrun 1974, Norlander 2000). Literature in this area, however, defines androgyny and “new” performances of gender within the boundaries of stereotypical masculinity and femininity, maintaining the dichotomy between genders. Much of the research on androgyny seeks to determine whether or not it is advantageous, arguing that androgynous individuals may be more open to performing and/or learning all ranges of stereotypically gendered tasks (Norlander 2000, Woodhill and Samuels 2004). Woodhill and Samuels (2004) offer “seven possible gender identities” involving combinations of masculinity, femininity and androgyny on scales of positive or negative, as well as “undifferentiated” gender identity. Other

discussions of androgyny or “cross-gender” identification have used the term “tomboyism” to describe women who choose masculinity while rejecting femininity (Carr 2005). The former works focus on an androgyny that is defined by a *balance* of masculine and feminine, and do not proffer insight into how alternative gender identities are performed. The latter work seeks a relationship between tomboyism and sexuality. Some sociological research into studies of gender resistance in subcultural contexts have focused on women who consciously adopt performances in opposition to the gender norms of their setting (Haenfler, forthcoming, Remington 1983). Heathen women, however, are not (for the most part) actively engaged in the resistance of both masculinity and femininity. Instead, they are claiming ownership over a masculine performance, adopted from a number of images of Viking women as warriors, such as Wagner’s “Ring Cycle” and historical accounts of early Heathen women taking up arms.

Among the Vikings, after which Heathenry is most closely modeled, the very idea of “masculinity” was an ethic of the time (taken from the original meaning of “courageous” or “prideful”; the Viking word was *drengr*, but lacks a direct translation). It was considered the pinnacle of good character, and therefore highly prized and defended. Throughout the Icelandic Sagas both genders applauded acts that contemporary society might consider “masculine” acts of violence or pride. Without transporting a surplus of Oedipal baggage, we might say that Viking society was, and Modern Heathenry still is, a very “phallic” culture (Rubin 1997). Women who were wont to show pride or defend themselves verbally or

physically were greatly respected and honored throughout Viking culture as superlative citizens.

Questions have arisen on the nature of femininity and female gender roles of the period, which allowed for such formidable and seemingly “masculine” women. Weigman (2002) comments that “Halberstam celebrated woman’s normative undoing, making sex and gender mobile across bodies and identities...” (P.51). Ancient Heathen concepts of gender, according to Carol Clover (1993) also involved the mobility of masculinity across both (and other) genders. Clover contends that unlike the contemporary view of gender opposites: The “Men are from Mars, women are from Venus” ideology, the Vikings did not differ in their concept of “womanhood” but rather, lacked one altogether. The current construction of masculine and feminine had yet to be imagined. There was *one* category of gender, and it was male. Women were viewed as less perfect men, their internal genitalia being viewed as identical but inverted. Psychoanalytic theory might argue that they were perceived as “less equipt” and therefore somehow marginally inferior (Rubin 1997). Whether or not “Freud’s theory was about language and about the cultural meanings imposed upon anatomy” instead of about the body itself, (Rubin 1997), Clover (1993) seems to argue that the Vikings *did* believe in these biological distinctions, arguing that they carried over into terms of perceived duties and capabilities, inside vs. outside, and power vs. powerless.

Modern Heathen women cannot escape from contemporary definitions of gender differences. Instead, they have adopted the imagined behavior of their female ancestors, domestic tasks and masculine traits alike.

Constructions of Whiteness

American society is the proverbial “salad bowl;” an amalgamation of multiple ethnicities which carry with them ethnic identities, ancestral cultural practices, and occasional folk religions. In this collection of peoples with folk histories, White Americans claim ownership over what artists would call the “negative space” of U.S. culture. Whites, as the “default” or normative American ethnicity are treated as the axis of U.S. civilization, experiencing an ethnicity that is often unconscious, because “societal norms have been constructed around their racial, ethnic, and cultural frameworks, values and priorities and then referred to as ‘standard American culture’” (Chavez 1999). According to Fine (1997), it is possible to identify different cultures precisely because they are The Un-White; “excluded from the normative.”

Whiteness is constructed in relation to the “other” but is itself “boundless” and therefore “involves drawing boundaries, engaging in boundedness, configuring rings around the substantively empty category ‘white’” (Fine 1997: 214). Similarly, Helms (1993), who developed one of the first White racial identity models, argues that for Whites, racial identity is about their perceptions, feelings, and behaviors towards other ethnic groups rather than their perceptions about their own ethnicity. This supposes an absence of actual ethnic identity among Whites; presuming that Whiteness is merely the by-product of perceived difference. The creation of a White ethnic identity, then, is indeed “boundless” if defined by what it is *not* rather than what it *is*. It opens a world of possibilities for many White Americans who lack clear, tangible lineages to their past to define their own White ethnicity

and reconstruct, recreate, or invent a “shared culture, religion, geography, and language” Chavez (1999). Winant (1997) argues that the civil-rights movement of the 1960s redefined white identity, resulting in a multiplicity of potential Whitenesses and, consequentially, the elimination of any “normalized” form of Whiteness. He refers to the resulting dilemma as “white racial dualism” arguing that “white identities have been displaced and refigured” (1997: 41). If this is the case, and White ethnicities are subject to re-invention, what forms might they take?

M.M. Bakhtin’s (1981: 16) discussion of the “epic” or “absolute” past suggests that the epic as a genre is intertwined with cultural tradition and relies on it for survival. This past is separated from us, valorized, untouchable and bound by time and space. “Epic discourse is a discourse handed down by tradition.” It is only in the past that things are “good” and pure, and it is through tradition that we maintain our ties with this past. The epic, and the past that it mirrors, is sacred, and its distance “excludes any possibility of activity and change”(1981: 17). It is not the “truth” of such ideas about the past that Bakhtin is discussing, but rather how they are invented and employed in the reconstruction of the absolute past in contemporary discourse. Popular culture uses the genre of the epic to appeal to our sense of nostalgia, not for actual historical fact, but for something more magical than hum-drum postmodern existence.

Dyer (1997) highlights the Whiteness of the epic male hero of contemporary film expressed through Rambo, Tarzan and Conan. Reading the body as an artifact, “The White Man’s Muscles” uncovers the implications of a hyper-masculine Whiteness which seems to

suggest the superiority of white male capability. All racist meanings aside, the introduction of the epic hero into possible constructions of Whiteness extends beyond fiction. This epic Whiteness is also expressed through the recreation of “authentic” and “ancestral” historical bodies and cultural practice (in multiple forms), which could be viewed as a reaction against the lack of a clearly-defined, objectified White racial and ethnic identity. Heathenry, as a construction of White ethnicity, relies on a return to the epic past, the “original” Euro-White ethnicity of the idealized “ancestors.”

In this chapter I will engage the literature on White privilege and ethnic identity to illustrate how Heathens have constructed a unique ethnicity (and performance) over which they can claim direct ownership.

RESEARCH DESIGN & ANALYSIS

Membership Roles & Participant Observation

My research is opportunistic in nature (Adler 1987), as I have claimed membership in the Heathen setting for several years. To gain entrée, I have introduced myself as a “native” to various nearby groups using the method of participant observation, taking on what Adler (1987) refers to as a “complete membership role,” which will assist me in immersing myself into the scene as a “native.” Currently, my entrée into the scene includes familiarity with the community’s dynamics in terms of group relationships, location, and availability.

While there are many methods available for research, participant observation can undoubtedly be one of the most informative methods for documenting information on a given subculture. Schwartz and Schwartz argue that the role of “full membership” as Adler

would call it, allows the researcher to “maximize his participation with the observed” while the intent is to “experience the life of the observed so that he can better observe and understand it” (1955: 349). Rather than merely observing, by participating as a full member, I will be able to relate to my subjects “as status equals, dedicated to sharing in a common set of experiences, feelings, and goals” (Adler 1987: 67) and will therefore come closer to the true emotions of my subjects than if I choose any other method. In other words, my methods will not only allow me an “insider” perspective, but will also allow me access to data not obtainable through any means less engrossing. According to Adler (1987), this approach has been referred to as an “auto-ethnography” in which the researcher’s “master status” is the same as the subjects the researcher has chosen to study. This occurs mainly when the researcher’s membership in the group has preceded the decision to transform the group into a research subject.

Setting

Heathens assemble in semi-fixed or unstructured groups (which Ásatrúar refer to as “kindreds”) each of which are independent from one another and free from any central authority. Each group has at least one member responsible for the organization and management of group events. The lack of a central authority creates difficulty in the attempt to approximate the population of modern Heathenry as a whole. Kaplan’s (1996) research in the Heathen community provided him with the rough estimate that Heathens number 500 in “committed adherents... with peripheral members perhaps swelling to a maximum of 1,000.” While I would challenge this and claim that my observation into the local area seems to

indicate that there are far more Heathens than Kaplan estimated, the number is still slight. Communication technology has offered community belonging and connections to solitary Heathen practitioners dispersed throughout the country. Because community groups are geographically dispersed, I am limited to the direct access of Heathens in Colorado and the Southeast for fieldwork, and to phone contact with other Heathens across the country.

Like many New Age NRMs, much of Heathenry is wary of the formal organization reminiscent of traditional “organized” religions. It is rare for Heathen groups to boast their own Church buildings or public spaces. They therefore congregate in non-public spaces for regular events, holding ritual observances or *blots* (pronounced “bloats”) in the homes of the administrative leaders. A large portion of my research has therefore taken place in the homes of my participants, which have often been small and chaotic spaces.

In addition to these smaller intimate gatherings in private homes, there are larger regional meetings as well, primarily Ásatrú gatherings in public spaces. Many of these gatherings are special events while others are held on a regular basis, usually over the summer months. *Moots* are gatherings of regional folk, often those who hold membership or affiliation with some national Heathen organization, such as *Troth moot*, the annual meeting of The Troth. There are also *things* or regional assemblies held once or twice a year in various parts of the country such as the East Coast Thing. During the course of my research, I have attended at least 15 *blots* and two regional *moots*.

There are also *things* or regional assemblies held once or twice a year in various parts of the country such as the East Coast Thing. These assemblies are based upon ancient

Icelandic tradition in which the *thing* was the site where major policy-making decisions were made and trials were conducted. In the year 930, the regional things gathered at Thingvellir in the south of the island during the summer solstice to form the *Althing*, the first parliament of Iceland. The *things* and *althings* were so essential to the cultural and individual independence of Icelandic Heathens that in 1075, Adam of Bremen was inspired to remark, "They have no king, only the law." In the past, the U.S. *Althing* has been held in the northwest and hundreds of Heathens have attended, representing various kindreds from around the country. These meetings are public and access is therefore easily gained.

The combination of my participant observation into private household settings in addition to large-scale public gatherings will provide a useful dichotomy into the lives and practices of Heathens in both the public and private spheres.

Data Collection & Analysis:

My method of data collection consists of detailed field notes from participant observation, observation of online discussions, and interviews. My notes are both descriptive and methodological. Bernard (1988) notes that methodological notes are useful for jotting down when one has broken a cultural norm of the research setting, while descriptive notes comprise the bulk of the researcher's writing. In addition, I will be taking analytical notes about how Heathenry is organized and how the Heathens arrange themselves within the context of their subculture. During my time in the field, I have taken mental, voice, or written notes on useful or interesting themes, events, or conversations that I observed.

My interviews will be digitally recorded, semi-structured informal interviews with participants either face-to-face or, as distance restricts me, over the phone. I will ask participants to outline their religious and subcultural experiences as children, their pathway to Heathenry, and their experiences within the community with gender, definitions of Heathenry as a "folkway", as well as experiences with technology. I have collected (and continue to collect) stories that frame the community's mythology. I have used grounded theory methods (Strauss and Corbin 1997), building theory from my observations of "what is really going on here?" (Irvine 1999). At first, I organized my data into simple categories such as "gender", "ethnicity", "organization" and later, organized them to include more details such as "identity", "core values", "masculinity", "differentiation" and other themes that emerge through online and real-life discourse. These themes have led me to my primary research questions.

Criticism of my research may include the argument that as a "native" claiming group membership, I possess an inherent bias due to an affinity for Heathenry. Schwartz and Schwartz (1955) postulated that through group membership, a fieldworker involves "affective participation." By so doing, he/she

has control over neither his affective responses nor their effects on his observations [and] he must contend with his feelings as part of his data. Only by increasing his awareness of them, their bases, and their effects on him will he be able to counteract their distorting influences.

Not only will I be playing both roles of researcher and group member, but there will come a time when these two roles clash and I will be forced to decide where my duties to

both my discipline and my religious affiliation lie. Jarvie (1969) posited that “the fieldworker is a scientist seeking truth; that very quest involves eliminating prejudice and bias when studying other societies; and that seems to demand relativism” (P.506). I expect that my research will force me to struggle with the truth, honesty, and fairness as I make my best attempt at an honest illustration of what my observations construe.

PROBLEMS & ETHICS

Confidentiality

Because my study population is “abnormal” and may be subject to social sanctions if they reveal their religious identities (Scarboro 1994), it is imperative that I practice confidentiality in my research. Even traditional religious affiliation is a socially sensitive topic for many to discuss, devoid of the additional stigma that Pagans convey. Indeed, the *New York Times* has issued articles which refer to Ásatrú as a racist religion which promotes violence to maintain superiority over the “mud people” (Greenhouse 2005). Most Heathens are in a constant struggle to repair this kind of damage on the community’s reputation, leading some members to a preference of public silence about their affiliation with Heathenry. While to many practitioners, being Heathen may be a master status and their identities may be public knowledge, many Pagans in general tend to remain “closeted” during the first years of participation. It is well documented occurrence that Pagans have frequently lost their jobs or had difficulty with the law upon revealing their religious status, which Scarboro (1994) referred to as “coming out of the broom closet.”

Dissonance:

Lofland & Lofland (1984) postulate that “factions” within any research setting may cause friction between the researcher and participants. If a researcher aligns him or herself with one group toward which other groups or individuals hold animosity, the researcher is likely to be rejected from close contact with these individuals, or thrown out of the scene altogether. Within the Heathen community, the practices of obsessive differentiation and autonomy often lead to intra-group dissention. “Leading” members of one group may have long standing grudges against “leaders” of other groups, creating a tense situation in which a researcher must juggle respect and avoid the appearance of taking sides. As a solution to this problem, Lofland & Lofland (1984) suggest that the researcher align him or herself with a wider faction, one so large as to dispel any possible interpretation of bias. A researcher can also assume the role of one who is incompetent with the scene’s history and practices. While claiming membership in a group while simultaneously making the attempt at “socially acceptable incompetence” (Lofland & Lofland 1984) may seem difficult, within the Heathen community it may be possible. Heathenry takes on many new members who have come to the scene from years of independent study, free of previous contact with other Heathens. Such an individual, like myself, could claim membership but also unfamiliarity with group-practices and likewise, group history.

Another problem inherent in participant observation as a research method is the presence of the researcher in the setting. “Together the observer and the observed constitute a context which would be different if either participant were different or were eliminated” (Schwartz, Schwartz 1955). Much research indicates that the presence of the

researcher in the setting may lead to behaviors that would not have occurred otherwise (Bernard 1988.) I have found, however, that my membership in the setting has been the primary way that my participants identify me. My role as a researcher is rarely noted, as many Heathens have taken it upon themselves to play the “scholar” and document our community in (often failed) attempts to produce more community literature.

Some may ask; what if my research results in illustrating the participants of modern Heathenry in a negative light? As a group member, the Heathens that feel negatively portrayed may feel that I have somehow betrayed them and broken the tenant of fidelity. I risk being ostracized from the community. This too is a known concern. In his experience as a fieldworker, Bosk (1979) notes that “fieldworkers worry over fulfilling their obligations to their subjects, over balancing personal debts to individuals against universal debts to the discipline of sociology, an over discharging obligations to subjects that extend beyond the life of any particular piece of research” (P. 143). Furthermore, Bosk (1979) argues that there are three dangers that I must be aware of in my research role; First, that I may create such a rapport with my subjects that it may be difficult for me to achieve the “critical distance necessary for analysis” (Bosk 1979), second; that I may become burdened with the feeling of indebtedness to my subjects and lose sight of my true debt to the Heathens, and lastly; that I may overgeneralize their behavior, having become so enchanted in the scene that I attempt to speak for all of Heathendom. These are problems that I anticipate encountering and in so doing, I will be more prepared to resolve them once they arise in the field or in the analysis of my data.

Bibliography

- Adler, Margot. 1979. *Drawing Down The Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Adler, Patricia A. and Peter Adler. 1987. Membership Roles in Field Research. California: Sage Publications Inc.
- Alma, Hans and Hetty Zock. 2002. "I and Me. The Spiritual Dimension of Identity Formation." *International Journal of Education and Religion*. 3, 1: 1-15.
- Beckford, James A. 1977. "Explaining Religious Movements." *International Journal of Social Science*. XXIX, 2: 235-249.
- Berger, Helen A. 1999. A Community of Witches. South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press.
- Berger, Peter L. 1967. The Sacred Canopy. New York: Doubleday & Company Inc.
- Bernard, Russel H. 1988. Research Methods in Cultural Anthropology. Sage Publications: USA.
- Biernacki, Patrick and Dan Waldorf. 1981. "Snowball Sampling." *Sociological Methods & Research*. 10, 2: 141-163.
- Bloch, Jon P. 1998. "Individualism and Community in Alternative Spiritual Magic"." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 37, 2: 286-302.
- Bosk, Charles. 1979. "The Fieldworker and The Surgeon." In Bosk, Charles. 1979. *Forgive and Remember: Managing Medical Failure*. University of Chicago.
- Burke, Peter J. and Donald C. Reitzes. 1981. "The Link Between Identity and Role Performance." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 44(2): 83-92.
- Campbell, Colin. 1972. "The Cult, the Cultic Milieu, and Secularization." In Kaplan, Jeffrey. 2002. The Cultic Milieu. and Helene Lööw. Oxford: AltaMira Press.
- Carr, Lynn C. 2005. "Tomboyism or Lesbianism? Beyond Sex/Gender/Sexual Conflation." *Sex Roles*. 53 (1/2): 119-131.

- Chavez, Alicia Fedelina, Florence Guido-DeBrito. 1999. "Racial and Ethnic Identity and Development." Ch. 5 in *Updates on Adult Development Theory*. Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Clover, Carol. 1993. "Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe." *Speculum*, 68,2:363-397.
- Dobratz, Betty A. 2001. "The Role of Religion in the Collective Identity of the White Racialist Movement." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 40, 2: 287-303.
- Dyer, Richard. 1997. *White*. New York: Routledge.
- Emerson, Robert M. 2001. Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations. 2nd Ed. Illinois: Waveland Press.
- Fine, Michelle. 1997. "Witnessing Whiteness." *Off White*. Fine, Michelle et al. New York: Routledge.
- Flowers, Stephen E. 1981. "Revival of Germanic Religion in Contemporary Anglo-American Culture." *The Mankind Quarterly*. XXI, 3: 279-294.
- Gardell, Mattias. 2003. *Gods of the Blood: The Pagan Revival and White Separatism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press
- Gergen, Kenneth. 1992. *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gillet, Devyne and Lewis Stead. 1994. "The Pentagram and The Hammer." Presented at the workshop "Wicca and modern Heathenry" at the 1994 FreeSpirit festival. Retrieved October 15, 2002. <http://www.webcom.com/~lstead/wicatru.html>
- Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.
- Greenhouse, Linda. 2005. "Supreme Court Rules on Religion in Prison." *New York Times*. June 1, A14.
- Haberstam, Judith. 1998. *Female Masculinity*. London: Duke University Press
- Haberstam, Judith. 2002. "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly." in *Masculinity Studies & Feminist Theory: New Directions*. Ed. Judith Kegan Gardiner. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Hampshire, Annette P. and James A. Beckford. 1983. "Religious sects and the concept of deviance: The Mormons and the Moonies." *The British Journal of Sociology*. 34, 2: 208-229.
- Harper, Darla. 1999. "A Woman in a Man's World: The Importance of Women in the Viking Society." Retrieved 11/18/01.
<http://www.unix.oit.umass.edu/~clit387/Norse.html>
- Heilbrun, Carolyn. 1974. "Further notes toward a recognition of androgyny." *Women's Studies*. 2: 143-149.
- Hewitt, John P. 1989. *Dilemmas of the American Self*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Holstein, James A. and Jaber F Gubrium. 2000. *The Self we Live By: Narrative Identity in a Postmodern World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Howard, Judith A. 2000. "Social Psychology of Identities." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26: 367-393.
- Hughes, Gerald and Douglas Degher. 1993. "Coping with a deviant identity." *Deviant Behavior*. 14: 297-315.
- Jacobs, Janet Leibman. 2002. *Hidden Heritage: The Legacy of the Crypto-Jews*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Jarvie, I. C. 1969. "The Problem of Ethical Integrity in Participant Observation." *Current Anthropology*. 10, 2: 505-508.
- Jorgensen, Danny L, Scott E Russel. 1999. "American Neo-Paganism: The Participants' Social Identities" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 38,3: 325-339.[Online] Available at: <http://ehostweb17.epnet.com> . Accessed 11/08/01.
- Kaplan, Jeffrey. 1996. "The Reconstruction of The modern Heathenry and Odinist Traditions." In Lewis, James R. 1996. Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft. [Online] Available at: <http://emedia.netlibrary.com>. Accessed 12/10/02.
- Kaplan, Jeffrey. 1997. *Radical Religion in America: Millenarian Movements from the Far Right to the Children of Noah*. New York: Syracuse University Press.

- Lee, Richard Wayne. 1995. "Strained Bedfellows: Pagans, New Agers, and "Starchy Humanists" in Unitarian Universalism." *Sociology of Religion*. 56, 4: 379-397.
- Lofland, John and Lyn H. Lofland. 1984. *Analyzing Social Settings: A guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis*. California: Wadsworth.
- Lofland, John, and Rodney Stark. 1965. "Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective." *American Sociological Review*. 30, 6: 862-875.
- Lynch, Frederick R. 1979. "Occult Establishment" or "Deviant Religion?" The Rise and Fall of a Modern Church of Magic. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 18, 3: 281-298.
- Norlander, Torsten and Anna Erixon. 2000. "Psychological Androgyny and Creativity: Dynamics of Gender Role and Personality Trait." *Social Behavior and Personality* (28)5: 423-436.
- Pitchford, Susan et. al. 2001. "Doing Field Studies of New Religious Movements: An Agenda." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 40(3): 379-392.
- Remington, Patricia Weiser. 1983. "Women in the Police: Integration or Separation?" *Qualitative Sociology*. 3(2): 118-135.
- Rubin, Gayle. 1997. "The Traffic in Women (Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex)." *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*. Ed. Linda Nicholson. New York and London: Routledge, 27-62. [R]
- Schwalbe, Michael L. 1993. "Goffman Against Postmodernism: Emotion and The Reality of The Self." *Symbolic Interaction*. 16(4): 333-350.
- Schwartz, Morris S. and Charlotte Green Schwartz. 1955. "Problems in Participant Observation." *American Journal of Sociology*. 60, 4: 343-353.
- Stryker, Sheldon. 1968. "Identity Salience and Role Performance." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 30(4): 556-564.
- Tacitus. 1970. *The Agricola and The Germania*. London: Penguin Books.
- Turner, Ralph H. 1976. "The Real Self: From Institution to Impulse." *American Journal of Sociology* 81(5): 989-1016.

- Ward, Christie. 2000. "Women and Magic in the Sagas: Seiðr and Spá." The Viking Answer Lady. Retrieved 11/18/01 (<http://www.vikinganswerlady.org>)
- Wiegman, Robyn. 2002. "Unmaking: Men and Masculinity in Feminist Studies." in *Masculinity Studies & Feminist Theory: New Directions*. Ed. Judith Kegan Gardiner. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Welch, Lynda C. 2001. Goddess of The North. Maine: Weiser Books.
- Winant, Howard. 1997. "Behind Blue Eyes: Whiteness and Contemporary U.S. Racial Politics." *Off White*. Fine, Michelle et al. New York: Routledge.
- Yinger, Milton J. 1960. "Contraculture and Subculture." *American Sociological Review*. 25,5: 625-635.