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HUMAN-NATURE RELATIONSHIP AND FAERY FAITH  
IN THE AMERICAN PAGAN SUBCULTURE

A Thesis Presented

by

Sarah Goodrich

to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Science  
Specializing in Natural Resources

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## **ABSTRACT**

Within American religious culture, there is a small but significant and growing movement that overlaps and interacts with the environmental movement. It's known by many names, including Contemporary Paganism, Neo-Paganism, Earth Religion, and Nature Religion. A few years of observation at Starwood Festival, the largest annual Pagan gathering in North America, revealed that many individuals who identify as Pagan (or Wiccan, Druid, animist, or another of the identities that fall under the Pagan umbrella) include in their spiritual practice engagement with faeries or other nature spirits. My research employed qualitative methods including participant observation and interviews to examine the extent to which engagement with faeries and other nature spirits among Pagan festival attendees affects their relationships with nature and their behaviors in the natural world. The Pagan understanding of the Earth and all of its inhabitants and elements as animate or inspirited—as exemplified in the phenomenon of faery faith—conflates the wellbeing of the Earth and wild nature with the psychological wellbeing of each individual human, making this worldview highly compatible with the emerging field of ecopsychology. Drawing on theories of enchantment, consciousness, multiple realities, imagination, and play, my interpretations of the stories of my informants contribute additional perspective to the contemporary practice of Paganism as a small but growing countercultural movement within the dominant Western culture, particularly as it informs the human-(in)-nature relationship.

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## INTRODUCTION

While attending the annual pan-Pagan gathering Starwood Festival, I have observed that many festival attendees engage in some way with faeries or other nature spirits. Through ethnographic field research, I have elucidated how these activities and proclivities affect people's relationships with nature and their behaviors in the natural world. The belief in faeries is a psychological phenomenon that bestows consciousness to elements of nonhuman nature, making this phenomenon congruent with transpersonal psychology. The emerging field of ecopsychology, which conflates the wellbeing of the natural world with the psychological wellbeing of individual humans, provides a particularly apt framework for understanding the effect of faery faith on the human-nature relationship.

Contemporary Paganism, also referred to as Neo-Paganism, Earth religion, and nature religion, is a growing religious movement that places nature prominently in the spiritual experience. Paganism encompasses a broad array of more specific traditions, including Wicca, Druidry, Goddess religion, Ásatru, and Animism, among others. Because Paganism in North America represents an alternative to the dominant Abrahamic religions, there is some fear among members of the general population who don't understand Paganism, as well as fear among Pagans that they will be persecuted or outcast in their daily lives if their religious affiliation is known (Bowman, 2000). This climate of fear leads to secretiveness, making it very difficult to know how many Pagans are currently practicing in the United States and the world. Secretive practice of

Paganism is so common that there is a phrase for those individuals who choose not to share their Pagan identities with people in their daily lives: they are “in the broom closet.” The Harvard Pluralism Project estimates that there are 200,000-1 million practicing Pagans in the United States (The Pluralism Project, 2009), and the prominent Pagan website The Witches’ Voice estimates 1-3 million world-wide (2002).

The largest Pagan gatherings take place at outdoor festivals, and in 2009 I conducted my field research at the largest pan-Pagan gathering in the United States, Starwood Festival, attended by 2,500-3,000 people (Association for Consciousness Exploration, 2009). 2009 was my fourth year attending Starwood Festival, and I had observed over the previous three years that many festival attendees engage with faeries or other nature spirits in some way. My research goal was to find out whether this observed engagement with faeries has any effect on the relationship between practitioners and nature or the behavior of practitioners vis-à-vis the natural world.

In the context of this investigation, “faeries” can best be described as liminal human-like creatures of nature. They are liminal in that they are not entirely of this world, but neither are they entirely of a world apart. They are not human, but they do take human-like forms and often display human-like behaviors such as language, dancing, and singing. Faeries by definition have a close affiliation with nature, sometimes symbolically embodying natural forces or elements (Letcher, 2001, p. 155). I follow Lewis and Kahn’s (2010) spelling convention and intentionally “differentiate between ‘fairy,’ as in fairy tale or fairy-themed commodity products, and ‘faery,’ a paranormal, supernatural phenomenon associated with spirits and magical experiences of creatural

life” (p. 103). I choose “faery” over “faerie” to avoid any confusion with the Dianic tradition of “Faerie Faith.” The “faery faith” that I’m examining here simply constitutes belief in faeries, which occurs in many Pagan traditions. Some authors use spellings interchangeably, and quoted spellings are preserved. The label faery includes many liminal human-like creatures of nature known by other names, such as elves, pixies, gnomes, trolls, nymphs, brownies, sprites, etc. For some Pagans, faeries and “otherworlds” are as natural as trees and forests, so belief in faeries represents a close connection with real nature, not an imaginative escape from reality (Harvey, 2006b, p. 48).

The relationships between reality, fantasy, and imagination are central to this inquiry. My working premise is that people use imagination to construct what we understand to be reality, so the line between the two becomes blurred, and identifying whether something is real or imaginary becomes rather unimportant in terms of the role that it plays in defining one’s worldview. In this study, faeries are understood as an important and influential phenomenon, and the question of whether they are real and/or imaginary is considered unanswerable.

My view is that the current proliferation of Paganism, particularly its magical and imaginal aspects, is a vector for re-enchantment in the enchantment narrative that serves to tell a history of the West. The basic plotline of this narrative is that ancient cultures incorporated an enchanted worldview in that people had an appreciation of the unknowable, a sense of awe and wonder in the face of nature, and a belief that nature is inspirited. Some combination of scientific rationalism, industrialization, capitalism, and



monotheistic world religions has resulted in a disenchantment of the West. Some scholars, particularly in Pagan circles, are pointing to Contemporary Paganism as one aspect of a current re-enchantment of Western consciousness.

It is clear to me that Paganism provides a special and venerated place for nature, but does this translate into more environmentally friendly behavior? How does environmentalism fit with Paganism? It's difficult to talk about environmentalism among Pagans because the Pagan worldview is fundamentally different than the dominant paradigm: it places human beings within nature as opposed to separate from it. From this standpoint, all Pagans at least philosophically care for the Earth because there is no separation between the self and the rest of nature, but this is not necessarily called environmentalism.

When I was first exploring this topic, I thought my research question would be "How does engaging with faeries define an environmental ethic among pan-Pagan festival attendees?" but I found through researching Paganism that this framework doesn't really fit. An inquiry framed in terms of relationship with and in the natural world has proven to be more appropriate and fruitful. As Graham Harvey (2006a) states, "what Pagans most value might be realising that to be fully human is to adjust or radically change what now seem like normal relationships and behaviors towards a living world and lives in that world" (p. 88).

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### PAGANISM AS NATURE RELIGION

As defined by Graham Harvey (2006a), “Paganism labels a diverse but cohesive array of religious activities and affiliations that can also be named ‘nature-centred spiritualities’ or ‘nature religions’... Pagans are people who identify themselves as members of a spectrum of nature-celebrating spiritualities” (pp. 84-85). Chas Clifton (2004) is careful to clarify that while Pagans celebrate nature and see nature as fundamentally sacred, Pagans are not nature worshippers (p. 336). If this definition of Paganism seems rather broad, it is. *Pagan* is an umbrella term that includes people who identify as “Ásatrú, Druid, Goddess-Feminist, Shaman or Wiccan,” to name the most common specific Pagan spiritual identities in the West, as well as people who prefer the general terms ‘Pagan’ or its cognate ‘Heathen’ (Harvey, 2006a, p. 85).

I will not go into the distinctions among various traditions that fall under the Pagan umbrella; rather I will consider the (few) elements shared by all brands of Paganism. As Susan Greenwood (2005) says, “unfortunately, for those seeking precise definitions, nature religion does not embrace one world-view, and it is important to note from the outset that there is little homogeneity of practice apart from the overarching need to reconnect with nature” (p. x). Marion Bowman (2000) writes that “while there is considerable variety within paganism, certain things have the status of ‘common knowledge’ or received wisdom: pagans respect nature; revere the earth as sacred; are tolerant; are ‘different.’”

Most importantly, the practice of all Paganisms necessarily involves a close relationship with so-called nature. So what exactly is nature? It is a complex cultural concept that can scarcely be summed up in language, but Adrian Ivakhiv (2001) has provided the most complete and poignant description that I've seen of the constantly shifting signifier *nature*. In broader Western consciousness, he says that nature is "a categorical stand-in for the nonhuman and non-artifactual world which surrounds and interpenetrates with human social communities" (p. 36). This broad description seems fairly accurate for most people in the dominant Western culture, and it would ring true for many Pagans as well, except that defining nature as nonhuman does not jive with a common Pagan conception of nature that incorporates humans along with other animals. The layered collage of significance represented by *nature* is much more complex than this, though. Ivakhiv goes on to list several cultural connotations of *nature*:

nature as a divinely ordained system of norms and rules, rights and obligations; a book to be read, interpreted, and studied; a motherly female, nurturing and providing for the needs of her children; a bodylike organism, whose features mirror those of the human body; a clocklike object or machine, to be studied dispassionately, taken apart, and manipulated for human benefit; a ruthless and harsh kingdom, "red in tooth and claw," from which humans should distance ourselves through the social contract of civilization; a flourishing web of life; a storehouse of resources; an Edenic Garden that should be set aside in protected areas, to be visited periodically for the replenishment of one's soul; a museum or theme park for curiosity seekers, or an open-air gymnasium for trials of masculinity; a cybernetic system or data bank of circulating information; a spirit or divinity, or a locus for the residence of many spirits; and an avenging angel,

capriciously and unpredictably meting out its inhuman justice to a humanity that has transgressed its natural order (pp. 36-37)

Even this extensive and descriptive list of images represented by the word *nature* does not come close to exhausting the cultural significance of the term.

The meaning of nature is not much simpler among Pagans broadly. As Graham Harvey (2006a) says, “what Pagans actually mean by ‘nature’ varies as much as what their neighbours might mean” (p. 85). Expressed more fully by Marion Bowman (2000), “depending on what brand of paganism people subscribe to, what past they seek to recapture, or what future they hope to create, ideas concerning both nature and appropriate or natural behaviour must vary.” Despite the understanding that there are likely no absolutes that apply to all Pagans, I will venture to summarize the most prevalent ways in which Pagan conceptions of nature tend to differ from those in the general population: the espoused (though not always practiced) belief that humans are a part of nature, rather than separate from it; the conviction that nature is sacred; and the understanding among many Pagans that nature has consciousness. These elements are expressed in various combinations, as illustrated by the well-known Wiccan elder Starhawk’s insight that “to Witches, as to other people who live close to nature, all things—plants, animals, stones, and stars—are alive, are on some level conscious beings. All things are divine, are manifestations of the Goddess” (Harvey, 2006a, p. 86). This Pagan viewpoint combines the belief in the consciousness as well as the sacredness of nature.

Starhawk's mention of "the Goddess" in the preceding passage refers to an anthropomorphism and deification of the Earth as a whole. This "consciousness of Earth as a living (not merely lived in) planet" (Harvey, 2006a, p. 87) is alternately referred to as the Goddess, Gaia, or Mother Earth, among other names. Whether or not the Earth is anthropomorphized in the various practices of Paganism, Adrian Ivakhiv (2001) explains that "proponents of contemporary earth spirituality understand the divine or sacred to be *immanent* within the natural world, not transcendent and separate from it, and speak of the Earth itself as being an embodiment, if not *the* embodiment, of divinity" (p. 8).

Pagans tend to view nature as fundamentally balanced, with contrasting elements reminiscent of the yin yang concept.

Paganism emphasizes both the beauty of nature and the fact that it is 'red in tooth and claw'. Inspired by the polarities of the natural world, Pagan thinking incorporates spring and autumn, life and death, light and darkness—the dark being understood, not as evil, but, like the winter and the night, simply a necessary feature of the natural world (Partridge, 2004, p. 79).

While the dualisms manifest in nature are emphasized, a defining feature of Paganism is that it "transcends the Western dualisms of mind and body, matter and spirit, people and nature, visible and invisible, ideas and experience" (Shaw, 2004, p. 134).

All Paganisms are either polytheist or pantheist, or some combination of the two (Taylor, 2002, p. 32). Polytheism is the belief in many gods, as opposed to the unitary divinity, or "One True God," in monotheism. Various forms of Paganism regard a great variety of gods and goddesses (Carpenter, 1996, pp. 55-56), often particular to a tradition

rooted in a certain place, such as the Norse tradition of Ásatru. Some brands of Paganism, including Ásatru, worship a pantheon of Gods and Goddesses (York, 2003, p. 61), who are often embodiments or archetypal representations of natural elements, such as air/wind, water, earth, fire, etc. (Carpenter, 1996, pp. 55-56). Graham Harvey (2006a) identifies an “entanglement of animism and polytheism” (p. 86) that emerges when animist spirits that exist in elements of nature are perceived as divinity.

Animism and pantheism also overlap, as evidenced by Dennis Carpenter’s (1996) assertion that “Pagans may be described as animistic in their recognition of all Nature as alive and imbued with spiritual energy” (p. 69). Pantheism is the belief that the divine permeates everything in the world, including every person, every being, every grain of sand, etc. so that everything is sacred (York, 2003, p. 67). While some Pagans are clearly polytheistic, others focus almost exclusively on “the Goddess” (as embodiment of the Earth) or a Goddess-God duality, often representing the Earth and the Sun, respectively (Carpenter, 1996, pp. 56-57). Goddess spiritualities are more pantheist as opposed to polytheist in that the Goddess is imminent in the Earth, that is the Goddess and the Earth are one and the same (p. 51).

Polytheism and pantheism are not mutually exclusive; many Pagan belief systems incorporate both, and animism runs through some manifestations of each. As summarized by Margot Adler (1986), “Polytheism is grounded in the view that reality (divine or otherwise) is multiple and diverse. And if one is a pantheist-polytheist, as are many Neopagans, one might say that all nature is divinity and manifests itself in myriad forms” (p. 25).

Contemporary Paganism has its primary roots in “the ancestral (pre-Christian) religious traditions of Europe,” which were “re-created in the early to mid-twentieth century and [are] in continuous evolution and construction since then” (Harvey, 2006a, p. 85). Some Pagans focus on the ancient roots of their spiritual paths, often glorifying the notion of a “golden age, usually somewhere in Europe, in which people lived in harmony with nature” (Harvey, 2004, p. 335). Wicca is commonly referred to as “the Old Religion,” and Celtic traditions are especially venerated among some practitioners (Clifton 2004, 336). This focus on an ancient Pagan legacy stems from a hunger for tradition and connection with ancestors, which have largely been lost in the postmodern world in which people move around the globe and spiritual connection has been co-opted by recent dogmatic religions and the spiritual substitute of consumerism (Harris, 1996, p. 153). This is nowhere more evident than in the United States, where most everyone has ancestral roots elsewhere and capitalism is king if not God.

There are spiritual traditions native to the United States, and some American Pagans borrow from Native American spirituality in forging their spiritual paths, but this is often viewed as a form of cultural appropriation or even imperialism. It is considerably more socially accepted for people of European origin to draw from European traditions in their spiritual practice (Clifton, 2004, p. 337). There is a spectrum in the practice of various Paganisms, from near complete reliance on reconstruction of ancient traditions to almost exclusive invention of new religious traditions, and most Pagans fall somewhere between these two extremes. “Such an awareness of the need to invent as well as borrow

and pass on religious tradition is prevalent in the pagan community” (Taylor, 2002, p. 47).

Rather than grounding one’s spiritual practice in traditions of another time and place that may or may not have been, Clifton (2004) argues for a contemporary Paganism that is grounded in the biodynamics of place, embracing the true meaning of “nature religion” (p. 336). Greenwood (2005) explains that “contemporary practitioners of nature spiritualities have to create meaningful relationships with place; they are not like hunter-gatherers... Most have no established tradition and so they have to create it” (p. 212). Clifton (2004) urges practitioners of nature or Earth religion to “learn where you are on the earth and learn the songs of that place, the song of water and the song of wind” (p. 340) and to draw spiritual beliefs, fulfillment, and traditions from the Earth itself. Similarly, Barry Patterson (2004) urges a connection with the *Genius Loci* (spirit of place) wherever one finds oneself (p. 355).

Nature religions are commonly framed as “spiritualities of connection” (Taylor, 2005, p. 2666): connection of people with nature and with particular places, and connection among all the living beings on Earth. Greenwood (2005) describes “connection with the natural world” as “the basis of nature spiritualities,” quoting a well-known Pagan who said that “for modern people the world has been intentionally deprived of significance, and so you have to reconnect” (p. 1). “In Western cultures,” she explains, “nature, the earth, or ‘the environment’ as it is now frequently called, has been progressively devalued by some dualistic conceptions of the universe that separate humans from nature.” In response, “practitioners of nature spiritualities overcome this



cultural alienation and relate with nature as a living and inspirited cosmos” (p. vii). Andy Letcher (2001) also alludes to a loss of human-nature connection as an instigator for the practice of contemporary Paganism, including belief in faeries: “An increasing number of people feel an ache for the natural world with which, through living in urban environments, they have lost contact. Belief in a golden age, or even in fairies, is, on some level, an expression of this sense of loss” (p. 156). As summarized by Carpenter (1996), “the theme of interconnectedness represents a basic component of the Pagan worldview and involves the recognition of the fundamental interrelatedness of all beings” (p. 69).

The spirit-nature connection that is central to Paganism leads most Pagans to practice their spirituality outdoors in relatively natural settings. The most formal Pagan gatherings occur at outdoor camping festivals, where attendees often travel great distances to be in a place and time where Paganism is accepted and celebrated, where they can be open about their beliefs, and they are not the minority (Pike, 2001, p. 27). Most devout followers of Abrahamic religions attend formal religious services in the towns and cities where they live approximately once per week. This is distinctly not the norm for Pagans, owing to the sense of repression and fear felt by many followers of magical or Earth religions (Bowman, 2000) as well as the lack of dogma and formal structure in the disparate belief systems included under the Pagan umbrella.

Pagan festivals generally take place in rural, out-of-the-way locations, during the warmer seasons, often in conjunction with a Pagan seasonal celebration such as Beltane (at the spring equinox) or Samhain (at the autumnal equinox) (Pike, 2001, p. 11).

Festivals are generally 3-7 days in duration. Formal festival activities include workshops on topics relevant to Paganism, rituals, sometimes feasts, and very often a ritualized fire circle characterized by drumming, dancing, trance work, and socializing (pp. 4-5).

Festival life is at once extraordinary and ordinary. In *Earthly Bodies, Magical Selves*, Sarah Pike (2001) highlights the magical space afforded to festivals by their attendees. Festivals are enjoyed in large part because they are separate from the everyday world, or “mundania” as it is often called by festival goers. By contrasting mundania with the relative significance and sacredness of the festival, a liminal experience is created. The festival becomes a space-time where anything goes and anything is possible (p. 20). A festival organizer describes festival life this way: “It’s a trip to the land of faery, where for a couple of days you can exist without worrying about the ‘real’ world” (p. 21).

“Real” and “reality” become shape-shifting signifiers in conversations with festival goers. While “the real world” is often referred to as “mundania,” thoughtful discourse on the relationships between festival life, mundania, and reality often produce the conclusion that the festival experience is in many ways much more real than is the experience of ordinary everyday life. Festival organizer Jeff Rosenbaum believes that festivals afford people the opportunity to “recapture that sense of being in reality rather than being asleep and dreaming in this world of illusion” (Pike, 2001, p. 21). Pike explains how festival life becomes particularly “real” for attendees in comparison with their daily lives:

Neopagans’ expectations that festivals will be especially “real” point to their intense dissatisfaction with the everyday world and the depth of their desire for

something more. The power of festival space is in the possibility for natural and supernatural experiences otherwise unavailable. The stronger their rejection of mundania, the more vivid the festival world becomes for them. They highlight at festivals what is lacking for them in mundania—religious tolerance, for instance—in order to focus their desires and energies on making the festival special. In order to create a “super-real” festival world, Neopagans imbue the festival space with meanings absent from the workplace and urban landscape (p. 22).

One component of the festival experience that makes it seem more real to some attendees is a sense of heightened awareness and sharpened senses, owing in part to the newness of their experiences there (p. 22).

While Pike mostly frames the Pagan festival experience as an extraordinary one, Graham Harvey’s description frames it as much more ordinary—even “mundane.” In his book *Contemporary Paganism: Listening People, Speaking Earth*, Harvey (1997) focuses on the experience of festival as a returning to the basic natural cycles of daily and seasonal life, with a Pagan understanding that the mundane is sacred:

[Pagans are] confronted not with the demands and claims of a ‘spiritual’ afterlife or deity, but with the significance of everyday life on Earth. Birth, growth, sexuality, fecundity, creativity, death, decay, vitality, beginnings, endings, joy, sadness, and other mundane, everyday, ordinary affairs are found to be meaningful and sacred. It would be misleading to see these ‘themes’ or a ‘quest for meaning’ as the prime focus of the festivals. They are certainly significant, but Pagans celebrate the festivals with the much simpler understanding that they are honouring the seasons and the land... They encourage and inculcate an awareness of being ‘at home’ here and now in the mundane and therefore sacred Earth (p. 126).

Harvey's description of festival life in no way contradicts Pike's descriptions; they are clearly describing the same thing. It's just a matter of how the experience is framed and how concepts of the mundane, the sacred, the real, and the extraordinary are applied to festival versus everyday life.

In this passage, Harvey also speaks to the sense that these festivals are "home" for the Pagans who return to them year after year. Particularly for people who feel alienated in the dominant culture, their everyday "homes" may not feel very home-like. As one regular festival attendee puts it, "there is a family out there, ready to embrace me whenever I feel lonely or out of touch. All I need is to find a Pagan gathering and I'll be home" (Pike, 2001, p. 32).

Sarah Pike (2001) found that most Pagans with whom she interacted at festivals and in online communities expressed some sort of environmental ethic, but they chose not to be politically active in expressing their environmentalism (p. 48). Rather, respondents in her study reported making lifestyle choices based on their Pagan and/or environmental beliefs. For example, one Pagan wrote in a listserv discussion, "the sacred connection which I feel with the earth is manifest in organic/biodynamic gardening, support for alternative technologies, solar passive housing, etc." (pp. 45-48).

While some Pagans become active environmentalists owing to their religious beliefs, it more commonly happens the other way around: environmental activists adopt a Pagan belief system because it jibes with their convictions (Partridge, 2005, p. 73). "Because [Paganism] is inherently ecocentric, it is, for many environmentalists, the

obvious spiritual choice” (p. 76). Regina Smith Oboler (2004) defines Paganism as fundamentally environmentalist by taking Clifford Geertz’s definition of religion as “a system of symbols which act to produce powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations” and identifying the following symbols in contemporary Paganism: Nature, the Earth, and the Environment. She asserts that these signifiers create “a system of pro-environmentalist moods and motivations” (p. 86).

In her 2004 study, Smith Oboler attempted to characterize and quantify the environmentalist ethic and action among Pagans, and her findings supported her thesis that Pagans are by nature environmentalists. For example, 98.5% of her respondents (all of whom identify as Pagan) believe the natural world is sacred, and 95% of respondents make healing the Earth part of their spiritual practice (p. 88). When she compared Gallup poll responses from Pagans vs. the general population, she found that Pagans are more environmentally aware and active than the general population (pp. 95-96). However, she also found that most of her respondents identified as environmentalists before they adopted Paganism, leading Smith Oboler to conclude that “it is not so much that religion is the cultural system that dictates the terms of social action, as that religious action and more mundane social action are parts of a larger cultural system that encompasses both, in which each reflects the other as a mirror image” (p. 105).

The original proliferation of contemporary Paganism in the United States concurred with the more mainstream environmental movement. There has been an undeniable greening of human consciousness in the United States, particularly since the first Earth Day in 1970, the unofficial beginning of the modern environmental movement

(Partridge, 2005, pp. 42-43), although environmentalist sentiment had been percolating in public consciousness for several years prior, as evidenced in part by the popularity of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, published in 1962 (Greenwood, 2005, p. 33). The public face of the environmental movement has been almost entirely secular, which makes sense given the contemporary dominance of scientific rationalism. However, environmentalism does have its theological and spiritual components, both in terms of the greening of major world religions and in terms of emerging nature spiritualities (p. 43) that have acted as co-creators with the environmental movement.

The term "nature religion," which describes a diversity of belief systems, entered the vernacular around the same time as the first Earth Day (Taylor, 2005, p. 2661). Before the inception of the environmental movement, "magical religion" was the primary label for the same grouping of belief systems that came to be known as "nature religion" and "earth religion" (Clifton, 2006, p. 3). This had the simultaneous effects of highlighting the (more socially accepted) ecological components of these religions and obscuring the (much less accepted) enchanted aspects (Pike, 2001, p. 23). Perhaps because of an actual or intuitive understanding of this semantic shift, in some Judeo-Christian circles, "nature religions" have been framed as "primitive, regressive, and dangerous" while proponents see them as "perceptive, authentic, and ecologically beneficial" (Taylor, 2005, p. 2662). As Taylor and Van Horn (2006) point out, "for some, environmentalism is viewed with suspicion, particularly when it is seen as tied to deep reverence for or even worship of the Earth. Some conservative Christians, for

example, consider environmentalism to be a Trojan horse that threatens Western civilization with a revitalized Paganism” (p. 165).

Within Paganism, “there is a great emphasis on one’s responsibility towards other creatures (human and non-human) and the environment” (Partridge, 2004, p. 79). In some cases, this leads practicing Pagans to become politically active in the environmental movement. As Taylor and Van Horn (2006) write,

those who are self-consciously pagan in their religious identity are the ones most likely to be at the forefront of ecological resistance movements in America. This is because when the earth is itself considered sacred, and not only indirectly so because it was created by a divine being, then the earth itself becomes the locus of religious and ethical devotion (p. 177).

Dragon Environmental Network, an explicitly Pagan environmentalist organization that was founded by Wiccan followers of the well-known eco-activist Witch Starhawk, makes a good example of the Pagan tendency toward environmental activism. One of Dragon Environmental Network’s principle practices is “eco-magic,” in which the practitioners use magic and ritual to focus their energies on halting environmental destruction and supporting the work of people protecting and preserving the land (Partridge, 2005, p. 73).

Environmentalism itself takes on religious significance for its most dedicated and active participants. Taylor and Van Horn (2006) argue that “religious perceptions and practices have decisively shaped American environmentalism and have done so to such an extent that much environmentalism can be considered a form of nature religion” (p. 165). In the experience of contemporary philosopher and environmental ethicist J. Baird

Callicott, “when one pokes passionate greens deeply enough, underneath you find a sense of the sacred” (quoted in Taylor, 1997, p. 105). Most early environmentalists, more often labeled conservationists, had recognizably Pagan belief systems (Taylor, 1995, p. 104). For example, John Muir (1838-1914) referred to “all the spirit creatures of these rocks and of this whole spiritual atmosphere” in his notes (quoted in Taylor, 1995, p. 103). Catherine Albanese (1990), describing the religiosity of Muir’s conservation work, wrote that “to go to the mountains and the sequoia forests, for Muir, was to engage in religious worship of utter seriousness and dedication; to come down from the mountains and preach the gospel of preservation was to live out his life according to the ethic that his religion compelled” (p. 101).

Despite the apparently spiritual role that nature played in their lives and work, Muir and his contemporaries did not always overtly proclaim their Pagan beliefs because Christianity was so dominant in the society, and they understood that alienating Christians would defeat their environmental goals (Taylor, 1995, p. 104). This trend of deemphasizing if not hiding one’s nature-based spiritual convictions continued throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is still apparent today. Like Muir, Rachel Carson practiced a nature-based spirituality. “Of course, when writing *Silent Spring*, Carson was concerned about her scientific credibility, and so her spirituality and ethics were only subtly expressed” (Taylor and Van Horn, 2006, p. 173).

Contemporary Pagan scholar Bron Taylor (1997) envisions a possible “universal religious environmental ethics” or “planetary civic religion” described as follows:



a pluralistic earth religion, based on a minimum common denominator that affirms the entire earth and its processes as sacred, one that is informed and shaped by the best available science, one that respects cultural diversity as part of the sacred whole and allows many expressions and viewpoints about how to proceed (pp. 105-106)

Taylor presents this vision in a spirit of possibility, saying hopefully that it “might not be either pernicious, or merely a utopian fantasy” (p. 106). Similarly, Taylor and Van Horn (2006) predict “that nonsupernaturalistic nature religion will likely become an important feature in the religious life of America and beyond, and such religion will increasingly become a wellspring for environmental action based on kinship ethics and a reverence for life” (p. 180).

Kinship ethics and reverence for life are the foundation of deep ecology, a philosophical, political, and spiritual worldview that has found currency among some Pagans and some environmentalists. Founded in 1973 by eco-philosopher Arne Naess, deep ecology amounts to a radical rejection of anthropocentrism. The central tenet is “biospherical egalitarianism” (Partridge, 2005, p. 56), or the concept that all life forms on Earth have inherent worth, apart from how they may benefit humans, and ultimately that all creatures on Earth (including humans) are fundamentally equal in cosmic importance. Susan Greenwood (2005) provides an apt illustration of the philosophical shift represented by deep ecology: “the world is no longer our oyster, we share it with oysters” (p. 34). Both the animism and the philosophically revolutionary bent inherent to deep ecology are evident in Bron Taylor’s (2000b) summary: “In short, deep ecology posits

that a transformation of human consciousness must take place if humans are to reestablish harmony with nonhuman nature” (p. 277).

In 1985, deep ecologists John Seed and Joanna Macy (2009) developed their “Council of All Beings” workshop, described in this way on the workshop website:

... Rediscovering our “deep ecology”—our interconnectedness with all beings—we find empowerment as agents of healing change... We retrace our steps through our evolutionary journey and allow other life forms to speak through us. We shed our solely human identification and feel deep empathy for the myriad species and landscapes of the Earth.

Although you wouldn’t know it from the Council of All Beings website, founder John Seed was a member of the radical eco-activist group Earth First! when he developed the workshop, and Earth First! still uses the workshop today. The Council of All Beings has since spread around the world and is practiced by a great diversity of groups with various political inclinations, from activists to religious groups to environmental educators (Partridge, 2005, pp. 69-70).

The terms *environmentalism*, *environmentalist*, and *the environment* can be problematic for deep ecologists as well as animist Pagans because they connote a human-environment or human-nature duality. As Graham Harvey (2006a) explains, “humans, badgers, eagles and microbes do live within particular environments, but the world is not ‘our environment’ in the sense that it is a resource chiefly for human benefit” (p. 179). The concept of environmentalism assumes a stewardship ethic toward the nonhuman natural world. It’s not that Pagans aren’t concerned with the health and wellbeing of

nature; it's that, speaking as members of the natural world, some Pagans frame what is commonly referred to as environmental stewardship or environmentalism in different terms so that they "prefer not to speak of 'environmentalism' but of ecology or ecological ethics, or of living respectfully among 'all our relations'" (p. 179). It is difficult to conceive of environmentalism within this dramatically different human-nature relationship. In David Abram's (1996) words,

It may be that the new "environmental ethic" toward which so many environmental philosophers aspire—an ethic that would lead us to respect and heed not only the lives of our fellow humans but also the life and well-being of the rest of nature—will come into existence not primarily through the logical elucidation of new philosophical principles and legislative strictures, but through a renewed attentiveness to this perceptual dimension that underlies all our logics, through a rejuvenation of our carnal, sensorial empathy with the living land that sustains us (p. 69).

"Sensorial empathy with the living land" is only possible when the land is understood not only to be living but also to have consciousness, for empathy is the experience of another's feelings, indicating an emotional and therefore conscious aspect to the existence of the land. The new environmental ethic may not be defined by environmental responsibility but rather by a shift in the relationship of human beings with the rest of the natural world.

Ironically, the Pagan belief system taken to the extreme sometimes results in an attitude of indifference toward environmental concerns. Given that the human race is but a blip on the cosmic scale of life on Earth, "most pagan environmentalists believe that

edenic natural paradise will eventually be restored, with or without humans” (Taylor, 1995, pp. 139-140). Through a slightly different lens, but still focused on a cosmic timescale, others see the end of the world as relatively immanent, believing that the next big asteroid will likely strike the Earth soon, causing mass extinction, and that ultimately the sun will explode in a supernova, ending all life on Earth (Taylor, 1997, p. 103). Add to this the Pagan rejection of a behavior-regulating promised afterlife along with the animist belief that humans are but one species of many on the Earth, having no special powers, privileges, or responsibilities; some individuals conclude that what we do here and now has little bearing on the long-term health and wellbeing of the planet, leading to purely hedonist lifestyle proclivities (p. 103). This is a minority viewpoint that most Pagans see as a misreading and a desecration of Paganism’s intent. While most Pagans incorporate an understanding of life on cosmic timescales, this does not impede their understanding of the Earth and nature as sacred, and it does not result in environmental irresponsibility.

A more cohesive and overt Pagan stance on environmental concerns has been emerging, as evidenced in part by “A Pagan Community Statement on the Environment” that was published online at [www.ecopagan.com](http://www.ecopagan.com) on Earth Day (April 22) 2015. This document was drafted by a group of 40-50 Pagans from a wide range of Pagan spiritual identities, and it has been signed by over 6,000 individuals and organizations as of the publication of this thesis in June 2015. The document focuses on the sacredness of the Earth and the human-in-nature relationship that is central for all Pagans. It is action-oriented in its call to “build a culture of true sustainability” and revolutionary in its

assertion that “any economic or political system which encourages the exploitation of Earth and people must be dismantled or substantially reformed.” The statement calls for change on the personal day-to-day level, the societal and cultural level, and the spiritual level (Halstead et al., 2015).

For some Pagans, the only true solution to our environmental problems is a fundamental shift away from the destructive Western separation of the sacred from the mundane, and toward a resacralization of nature. Adrian Harris (1996) posits that “the ecological crisis is more than a question of environmental destruction and human misery, for it is at root a spiritual crisis” (p. 155). “Piecemeal repairs to the environment will only postpone the crisis, for even if scientific techno-fixes can save us from global warming, ozone depletion and habitat destruction, the human crisis remains” (p. 155). He calls for radical change in the way we define and interact with the so-called environment, which will involve “imaginative leaps” that go beyond all our preconceived notions, even beyond language (p. 155).

#### **FAERIES AS NATURE SPIRITS**

It will likely come as no surprise that little has been explicitly written about faeries in the academic literature, but faeries are mentioned in Pagan scholarship. Susan Greenwood (2005) states that “for practitioners of nature religion the land is alive with spirits of place, spirits of ancestors, deities and otherworldly beings such as fairies and dwarves” (p. 61). Doreen Valiente defines the Pagan conception of faeries as a

conglomerate of “actual spirits of nature whose presence can sometimes be perceived, but who usually share this world invisibly with humans, souls of the pagan dead, and folk memories of aboriginal races, now mostly vanished” (quoted in Partridge, 2004, p. 80). According to Graham Harvey (2006a), some animist Pagans interact with faeries and other nature spirits, who are considered conscious beings of nature just like humans, animals, plants, rocks, etc. (p. 91). Faeries of all these stripes and origins fit within the broad animist tradition in that they are living spirits of nature.

Animism is a strong and defining current running through the practice of Paganism that emphasizes relationship with “other-than-human persons,” a phrase coined by anthropologist Irving Hollowell (Partridge, 2004, p. 83). As defined by Graham Harvey (2006a) in his book *Animism*, “Animists are people who recognise that the world is full of persons, only some of whom are human, and that life is always lived in relationship with others” (p. xi). In the animist worldview, “nature” refers to “the greater realm of life that ambivalently includes, but never privileges, humanity” (p. 88). The Latin root of animism is *anima*, meaning breath, life, or soul, so at root, animism expresses the idea that the world is wholly inspirited (Greenwood, 2005, p. ix).

If animism is taken in its broadest definition, most people who identify as Pagan subscribe to animist belief systems. In some cases, this takes the form of knowing, naming, and communicating with individual animals or plants (Harvey, 2006a, p. 91). Animism is sometimes practiced simply by taking time to live in nature, as “guests among the trees” (p. 91) in an effort to minimize or abolish the artificial divide between humans and other beings. In addition to believing that animals and plants have some

measure of consciousness, some animists also believe that rocks, soil, mountains, streams, lakes, forests, etc. have their own consciousness. Indeed many Pagans believe that the Earth herself is a conscious being, often referred to by the name Gaia (Partridge, 2005, pp. 61-63).

One area where faeries have found their way into the recent literature has been in studies on the Pagan eco-protest communities in Britain. Andy Letcher (2001) spent time in the field with some Eco-Pagans who were protesting a large-scale road-building project in Great Britain in the 1990s (p. 147). Letcher (2006) asserts that in his experience the protesters' belief in faeries is literal, not metaphorical (p. 176). There are reports of elves, pixies, gnomes, etc. (all referred to by the umbrella term faeries) having been seen and more often heard or sensed. These encounters with faeries are taken as proof that nature is on the side of the protesters (p. 182). In some cases, protesters take on the persona of a faery; in others, they simply align themselves with faeries for support, protection, and moral ground. "Protesters came to regard themselves as, or aided by, fairies or nature spirits in a just cause that pitted nature against artifice, the little people against the much larger, but corrupt, forces of law and order" (Letcher, 2001, pp. 147-148).

Protest sites and camps are given enchanting names such as Cosmic Pixie Tree Village, Skyward Camp, Fairmile (where the protesters call themselves "Fairies") and Fort Trollheim (where the protesters call themselves "Trolls"). The protesters themselves also adopt pixie-like pseudonyms such as Poc, Busker, and Tegwyn (Letcher, 2001, pp. 149-150). Likewise trees at the protest sites are commonly named, an indication of their

status as autonomous beings even though they aren't human. In fact some trees introduce themselves to the protesters, as was the case when a tree introduced herself to two different protesters as Hern. When another tree, Melea, was cut down by the road crew, the protestors held a funeral and ritual burning of her body (Letcher, 2006, p. 182).

Acts of eco-protest or eco-sabotage are referred to as "pixieing" (Letcher, 2006, p. 177). The renaming of places, people, and activities serves to transform ordinary reality into an enchanted time and place. "For Eco-Pagans this enchanted world of which they are a part is not delusory, escapist or infantile, but a neglected, forgotten, and truer reality" (p. 181).

The radical environmental action organization Earth First! has a significant Pagan contingent, although individuals often prefer to keep their ideological connections to Paganism implicit for political reasons. In an interview with Bron Taylor (2002), Pagan Earth First!er Buck Young spoke of his introduction to the "faerie-world" as a key step on his path toward radical environmentalism (pp. 46-47). Taylor quotes part of a manuscript written by Young, in which he places faeries at the nexus of the Earth First! environmental revolution:

Gnomes and elves, fauns and faeries, goblins and ogres, trolls and bogies... [must infiltrate our world to] effect change from the inside... [These nature-spirits are] running around in human bodies... working in co-ops... talking to themselves in the streets... spiking trees and blowing up tractors... starting revolutions... [and] making up religions (p. 47).



The Earth Liberation Front (ELF) is a radical anarchistic environmentalist group that spun off from Earth First! in Great Britain in 1992 and was then exported to the United States. Its adherents are called “elves” in keeping with the acronym by which the organization is commonly known (Taylor, 2002, pp. 35-36). The elf archetype has become significant in the identity formation of this activist group and its participants.

The ELF moniker caught on rapidly partly because it provided a rubric for putting a positive spin on the most radical of actions (elves are viewed positively in western literature as playfully mischievous, not malicious), and partly because the idea of elves in the woods cohered with the pagan spiritualities of many of these activists... These elves function as fairies do for other radical environmental activists—they are appropriated as symbolic earth warriors—conjuring images that resonate with the pagan spirituality animating many activists (p. 36).

Indeed contemporary Pagan beliefs are figuring into the modern-day eco-protest culture, particularly in the road-blocking eco-protests in England, where Andy Letcher describes “an enchanted world in which practitioners [of Eco-Paganism] are engaged in a mythological struggle against a corrupt modernity, and they are reinforced through phenomenological encounters with the non-human world” (p. 184).

Perhaps the most famous modern-day enclave enjoyed by faeries and other nature spirits is the Findhorn community in Scotland. Founded in 1962 as a family garden (The Findhorn Community 1975, 2), it has grown and thrived into a world-famous New Age intentional community (The Findhorn Foundation, 2009). While the New Age spirituality practiced at Findhorn is distinct from any brand of Paganism, members of both spiritual identities interact with nature spirits.

Dorothy Maclean, one of the garden's founding members, received her first communication from a nature spirit in the garden's first year. She was contacted by the deva of the garden pea. Devas are "that part of the angelic hierarchy that holds the archetypal pattern for each plant species and directs energy toward bringing a plant into form on the physical plane" (The Findhorn Community, 1975, p. 7). To clarify, the pea deva is not the spirit of any one individual plant; rather it is the overarching spirit of the entire garden pea species. "While the devas may be considered the 'architects' of plant forms, the nature spirits or elementals, such as gnomes and fairies, may be seen as the 'craftsmen,' using the blueprint and energy channeled to them by the devas to build up the plant form" (pp. 58-59).

Robert Ogilvie Crombie, known as Roc, moved to Findhorn in 1966 (The Findhorn Foundation, 2009). It was Roc who was gifted with the ability to communicate with the nature spirits such as faeries and elves, also known as elementals as they are made up of the natural elements of earth, air, fire, and water (The Findhorn Community, 1975, p. 102). Roc wrote out actual dialogues that he had with a small faun-like nature spirit named Kurmos whose work entailed helping the trees to grow (pp. 105-106) as well as conversations he had with the god Pan (pp. 108-111). According to Roc, nature spirits in their primary state take the form of a "light body," described as a nebulous misty glowing whirl or vortex (p. 114), but they may assume a human-like or archetypal "thought form" such as an elf, gnome, faery, etc. when necessary (p. 118).

In the broader Western culture, children engage with faeries more often and more openly than do adults. They indulge in fairytales, dress up like faeries, build faery houses,

and are generally permitted to believe in faeries and interact with them in ways that are not acceptable for adults in our culture. Richard Louv (2008) notes that science has replaced myth and religion as the primary way that the dominant culture knows nature (p. 23), which has produced an emotional distancing. However, he also highlights the animist and anthropomorphic understandings of the world that are just beneath the surface of the dominant culture that is apparently based on scientific rationalism with a sprinkling of Abrahamic religion. As Louv says, “Science may frown on anthropomorphism, but children do not” (p. 298).

Children are excused for their anthropomorphic understanding of the world because it’s seen as innocent child’s play and they’re too young to know better. John Berger notes that children’s lives are full of toys depicting animals, even more than toys depicting people. He says that these animal toys “address our loneliness as a species, our powerful yearning, this spiritual hunger, which at its very core is a faith in the invisible... Even as wildness fades from our children’s lives they signal their hunger—or, perhaps more accurately, we sense their hunger. We come full circle, and nurture their souls with totems, with the anthropomorphic symbols of the parallel lives all around us” (Louv, 2008, p. 298).

Many people in the Pagan community describe adult extraordinary experiences in terms of revisiting childhood wonder. For example, Tanya Luhrmann (1989), in describing the ritual activities of witches she was studying, said that “these witches were recreating a childhood world, enchanting adulthood” (p. 18). Sabina Magliocco (2004), describing her own experience as a participant, reported that “Because I decided to

remain open and vulnerable during rituals, I gained access to imaginative experiences I had banished from my consciousness since reaching adulthood” (p. 12).

Louv (2008) draws attention to the deep distrust of animism among Christian conservatives and the fear that environmentalists are necessarily animists and therefore idolaters. “Some religious institutions and belief systems resist and distrust the suggestion that nature and spirit are related. Suspicious of environmentalism as an ersatz religion, they perceive a creeping, cultural animism. This belief, which runs deep in American culture, is perhaps one of the least acknowledged but most important barriers between children and nature” (p. 298). There is an unwillingness among many Americans to consider the legitimacy of animist beliefs and the relationship between nature and spirit. This attitude results in the marginalization of children’s spiritual and animist experiences in nature as mere child’s play. Such experiences in adulthood are rejected outright as lunacy and heresy, so childhood is the only time when the experiences are afforded any possibility, and even in childhood they are not considered “real” or legitimate.

Louv (2008) notes that little has been written about children’s spiritual experiences in nature, and he speculates this may be out of nervousness because such mystical experiences are beyond adult or institutional control (p. 298). He describes “the tangled vines of biblical interpretation, semantics, and politics” as “real barriers to communicating the simple awe we felt as children as we lay on our backs seeing mountains and faces in clouds” (p. 291). He seems to long for a culturally acceptable context for the spiritual, mystical, transcendent experiences that children have in nature—perhaps more than adults (pp. 293-294). “Nature introduces children to the idea—to the

*knowing*—that they are not alone in this world, and that realities and dimensions exist alongside their own” (p. 296). Joseph Laycock (2012) points out that “childhood is also where most Westerners are exposed to stories of faeries, fantastic creatures, and magic,” which most adults learn to reject as unreal, but it should not be surprising that some never do (p. 75). Faeries fill a deep and abiding human need for connection with nature in a way that works for the imaginative and anthropocentric psyches of children as well as some adults who either never lost this childhood wonder or managed to rediscover it.

## **APPROACHES TO STUDYING PAGAN EXPERIENCE OF FAERIES**

### **Imagination, Play, and Multiple Realities**

The concept of imagination has been given little serious attention, perhaps because it is not easily pinned down. As Edward Casey (1976) attests, “imagining is easy enough to enact or experience, but it is extremely difficult to capture in midair for purposes of scrutiny and examination” (p. 4). Philosopher Richard Kearney (1998) invokes Shakespeare in expressing the simultaneous familiarity and elusiveness of the imagination when he describes it as something “more distant than stars and nearer than the eye” (p. 5). Eric Unger (1953), in his essay “The Imagination of Reason,” delineates three realms of human knowledge: the known, the temporarily unknown (which may be probed through scientific inquiry), and the eternally unknown (which constitutes the mysteries left to philosophy). Imagination sits squarely in the realm of the eternally unknown—or eternally philosophized. Yet Unger describes philosophical inquiry into the

unknown as “imaginative reason or reasonable imagination” (Unger quoted in Brann, 1993, p. 783). This leaves us to conclude that exploration of the imagination is necessarily imaginative, and it is intuitively true that studying the imagination requires an imaginative approach. It’s no wonder then that few have met the challenge of trying to understand the imagination, as any substantial exploration of this realm becomes a tail-swallowing endeavor. Indeed, Eva Brann (1993), in the preface to her extensive exploration, *The World of the Imagination*, refers to imagination as “the *missing mystery* of philosophy” (p. 3).

Philosophers in all epochs have had something to say about imagination, but it has mainly been in tangent to other explorations, and imagination has often been considered only as an adjunct to other mental faculties. To quote Casey (1976), “at very few, if any, discernable points in more than two thousand years of philosophical endeavor have convincing and lasting distinctions been made between imagination and the group of sibling acts that would include memory, perceptual illusion, fantasy, delusion, and hallucination.” He goes on to say that “imagination is seen in some instances as an aspect of perception, in others as a part of thought” (p. 15).

Imagination plays a central role in the defining myths of Western culture. Both in the case of Adam and Eve eating from the forbidden tree of knowledge and in the case of Prometheus stealing fire from the gods and giving it to humans, an act of rebellion against the gods and their natural order bestows humans with creative, imaginative, god-like powers that set them apart from the rest of the animal kingdom (Kearney, 1988, p.

80). Humans are defined as a special creature, neither animal nor god, because of their capacity to imagine.

The dawn of modernism and Emmanuel Kant's (1724-1804) "Copernican Revolution," in placing humans at the center of the universe and bestowing them with creative powers, introduces the notion of imagination as a productive human activity. Imagination is no longer a mimesis of divine creation, nor an intermediary faculty between sensing and thinking; rather it is "the primary and indispensable precondition of all knowledge" (Kearney, 1988, p. 156). This shift from a mimetic to a productive paradigm (p. 155) means that humans have the ability to create their own realities. Kant posits that without imagination and intellect, the so-called objective world would make no sense to us. We ourselves impose the meaning, order, and regularity of appearance that make up "nature" (p. 171). Kant's ideas were preceded by Rene Descartes' (1596-1650) "I think, therefore I am" and David Hume's (1711-1776) revelation that there is no empirical rational reality divorced from imagination (pp. 161-164). Hume, however, insists that "if reality is no more than a bundle of fictions, we must nonetheless cling to these fictions *as if* they were real" (p. 165).

The currency of the imagination continued into the twentieth century with the introduction of phenomenology, a philosophy that focuses on the *experience* of imagining (Casey, 1976, p. 2) and makes room for—even relies on—the imagination. Father of phenomenology Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) imbues the imagination with human agency in his reframing of the image as "an act of consciousness" as opposed to the classical notion of "a thing in consciousness." Phenomenology rejects both inductive and

deductive reasoning as modes of understanding lived experience. In fact rationalism is fundamentally rejected in favor of a more holistic method of gathering information and making meaning that relies on multiple intellectual and sensory modes (Kearney, 1998, p. 14). Both perception (of reality and/or presence) and imagination (of unreality and/or absence) are employed in making sense of the world (pp. 16-17). Husserl claims that the true essence (eidos) of things may be apprehended “when they are grasped not only in their actuality but also in their possibility”—and possibility may only be reached by way of the imagination (p. 19).

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) takes phenomenology one step further in his radical rereading of Kant’s transcendental (or productive) imagination. Given the Kantian imagination’s original power of production, Heidegger concludes that imagination must precede any experience of the object, meaning that we would have no conception of reality without the power of imagination (Kearney, 1998, pp. 46-48). Moreover, he draws from Kant that both sensation and intelligence (feeling and thinking) are derived from the same imagination (p. 52).

Edward Casey’s (1976) concept of pure possibility that emerges only in the act of imagining has its roots in Husserl’s phenomenological possibility.

By “pure possibility” is meant a kind of possibility that is posited and contemplated for its own sake and not for the sake of anything external to, or more ultimate than, itself. It is the sort of possibility that is considered on the basis of its inherent interest, not on the basis of its actual or potential value in the realization of projects that transcend the act of imagining itself (p. 116).



Casey draws a distinction between this “pure possibility” of imagining for the sake of the imaginary and “hypothetical possibility,” which is present in hypothesizing, pretending (both in child’s play and adult parody), and anticipating (p. 115). “All that I can claim for certain,” says Casey, “is that what I imagine exhibits a purely possible space and time. Likewise, the objects or events “in” such space and time are things which *might be*—might just conceivably be—but which in fact *are not*” (p. 37).

Casey looks closely at the relationship between imagining and perceiving, and he’s ultimately eager to separate the two. “The relationship between perception and imagination has been interpreted in a bewildering variety of ways in Western philosophy,” he notes. “Within one and the same tradition of thought, the two acts have been regarded alternatively as modes of each other, contraries of each other, conjugate acts, different expressions of still another act—and, much more rarely, as equal but independent acts” (p. 127). More specifically, he finds that philosophers “have held that imagining and perceiving overlap or coincide in certain crucial ways, including extension of one act into the other, repetition of one by the other, resemblance between the two acts, combination of elements through an act of fusion, and in still other ways” (p. 130). Despite the relationships that philosophers before him have drawn between imagining and perceiving, and despite his admission that the two acts are sometimes continuous, Casey clearly states that “even in their closest conjunctions, imagining remains distinguishable from perceiving: continuity does not imply coincidence” (p. 145).

Kieron O’Connor and Frederick Aardema (2005) subscribe to the phenomenological view that perception and imagination work in tandem and that

imagination is the gateway to the possible. They put forward a “possibilistic model of consciousness” in which “consciousness only ever presents the world in different degrees of possibility, never as certainty” (p. 237). Everything real and unreal exists at some point on the possibility continuum (p. 242), with imagination being used to conceive of possibilities (p. 243), so that “what we take as our reality is arrived at as the most possible world in the context of other possible worlds,” without any absolute certainty as to what actually constitutes reality (p. 247).

While phenomenology was a step toward integrating the real and the imaginary and granting agency to human consciousness, the existentialist response to phenomenology amplified the divide between reality and imagination, weakening the creative powers of the imagination in the real world and focusing on a lack of meaning in lived human experience (Kearney, 1988, p. 196). Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) provides the most comprehensive treatment of the imagination from an existentialist viewpoint. Sartre subscribes to Husserl’s notion that perception and imagination differ only in their intent and perspective (Kearney, 1998, p. 58). However, while Husserl is able to hold imagination and perception as two simultaneous and complementary methods for understanding the world, Sartre sees perception (of the present) and imagination (of the absent) as mutually exclusive and incompatible (O’Connor & Aardema, 2005, p. 234). For Sartre, “to posit the imaginary is ipso facto to negate the real” (Kearney, 1998, p. 62). Therefore, Sartre concludes that imaginative people are in fact mentally ill, as their imaginative conception of the world is by definition divorced from reality (p. 73). This is an echoing of Sigmund Freud’s (1856-1939) grouping of the imagination with fantasizing

and hallucination as indicators of psychopathology (O'Connor & Aardema, 2005, p. 234). However, Sartre also agrees with Husserl that imagination grants us freedom in that it is an escape from reality and a gateway to the possible. Sartre ultimately finds imagination's greatest utility to be its ability to define reality in relation to the unreal (Kearney, 1998, pp. 76-77).

In contrast to Sartre's conception of the imagination as the negation of reality, and a person's indulgence into imagination as a pathology, Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962) celebrates the imagination as the ultimate "happiness of expression" (Kearney, 1998, p. 99). For Bachelard, imagination originates in an animate nature: "Images are born directly from the murmuring voice—to which one listens in speaking nature. Yes, as so many poets have said, nature speaks for those who listen to it" (Bachelard, quoted in Kearney, 1998, p. 108). Bachelard's imaginary does not represent unreality so much as surreality or alternate reality. Imagination provides the opportunity to see reality in various ways and to transform reality into the products of imagination. Bachelard introduces the concepts of *rêve*, equivalent to Sartre's pure negation of reality, and *rêverie*, a constant re-creation of reality (p. 100). *Rêve* and *rêverie* are both viable modes of the imagination, but it is *rêverie* that engenders the power of possibility *a la* Husserl.

For Eva Brann (1993), the imagination is an essential and defining component of our humanity. She sees imagination as the glue that binds the human soul to the outside world: "it both holds the soul together within and connects it to the objects without" (p. 3). She also sees imagination as the "pivot between sense and intellect" (p. 6), demonstrating her phenomenological proclivities. Brann supports a complete

superimposition of imagination and reality, so that imagination is not “seeing this *as* that, but rather seeing this *and* that: There is a dirt-filled ant-jar imprisoning a heap of acrid-smelling, crawly insects *and* there is a secret underground city of competent and purposeful little comrades” (p. 779). Most poignantly, Brann believes that “our most specifically human mission [is] to remake the world imaginatively” (p. 774), and she feels strongly that the power of imagination is best employed in the real world (p. 149). In fact, she argues that perceiving the world without imagination provides an incomplete understanding: “Instead of claiming that vision and imagination must displace each other,” Brann asserts, “one should say that casting a cold, image-free eye is a curtailed kind of seeing” (p. 776).

Brann (1993) is concerned about the future of the imagination in light of the current trend toward rationalism and positivism in the West. She describes the imagination as “humanly vital yet endangered” (p. 26).

It is strange that every contemporary book on the visual imagination must devote itself primarily to the problem of its existence. In the course of its exposition all definitions will be proved defective, all generalizations false, and the question itself undecidable—undecidable, that is, in the terms of rigorously positive reason. For such rationality acknowledges no right to inquire into any psychic life whose operations cannot be tested and modeled. Now the imagination’s vital signs wane under such severe treatment (pp. 781-782).

Sociologist Alfred Schutz (1962) points out that imagination is not necessarily relegated to the realm of the individual when he writes that “imagining can be lonely or

social.... An instance of the first is day-dreaming, of the second the mutually oriented intersubjective make-believe play of children or some phenomena studied by mass psychology” (p. 240). Play is a very useful and fulfilling human activity that is completely accepted, even encouraged, during childhood, when it is considered vital for proper social and intellectual development (Henricks, 2006, p. 5). Play among adults in our culture is viewed very differently, however. Johan Huizinga (1872-1945) (1955), a Dutch cultural historian, asserts that this has not always been the case in all places and times. He describes the medieval and renaissance periods in Europe as being full of play. The cultural shift away from play, according to Huizinga, occurred with the onset of the industrial age, characterized by “utilitarianism, prosaic efficiency, and the bourgeois ideal of social welfare,” resulting in a pervading “portentous seriousness” in cultural interactions (pp. 191-192). Huizinga sees value in the capacity of play to move people beyond the serious: “In play, we may move below the level of the serious, as the child does; but we can also move above it—in the realm of the beautiful and the sacred” (p. 17).

Huizinga (1955) frames play in the Middle Ages as being part of a broader cultural “play-festival-rite complex” in which organized public events meant to serve important functions in the community simultaneously displayed characteristics of playfulness, celebration, and ritual (p. 31). Sociologist Thomas Henricks (2006) clarifies how ritual and imaginative play were conflated: “ritual in earlier times was no simple enactment of abstract form. Rather it was an imaginative creation of order through the

energy and inspiration of the participants. People ‘played out’ symbolic events so that these might effect changes in cosmic order” (p. 17).

Imaginative play very often involves a temporary shift in identity for the participants, sometimes facilitated by assuming different speech or behavior patterns or donning costumes. “By dressing up in this way players become other beings, people who have left behind their routine identities” (Henricks, 2006, p. 14). Formalized role playing games like Dungeons and Dragons, Shadowrun, and Changeling involve the conscious invocation of imagination to temporarily pretend that players are fae creatures. In Changeling, “characters require the raw energy of human imagination, a metaphysical force known as ‘glamour,’ to survive. The antithesis of this force, ‘banality,’ is deadly to the fae” (Laycock, 2012, pp. 76-77).

In an example of radical identity shift facilitated by play, Lynne Hume (2006) found that people who identify as vampires most often begin their exploration with a spark of the imagination lit by fantasy literature. Some move on to more playful activities including role-playing, dressing up, and acting out. If participants take this play seriously, a new lifestyle and belief system can be born (p. 3). There are individuals other than vampires who identify as part animal, angel, faery, or other mythological creature, an identity group known by the term “Otherkin” (Laycock, 2012, pp. 65-66). Some Otherkin believe they are only human in physical body and entirely other-than-human mentally and spiritually (p. 72). The utility of this particular form of identity play is described by an Otherkin who identifies as part wolf: “Sure we can explain it away as imagination, but repressing anything completely inevitably leads to ill health, whether the repression is

physical or psychological. We need to play, and Otherkin allows us to express that within safe boundaries” (p. 73).

When play is culturally sanctioned and conflated with ritual, and particularly when it is framed as performance, it can also serve to form more permanent identities (Henricks, 2006, p. 215). Henricks points to sociologist Max Weber’s (1864-1920) assertion that Western rationalism has encouraged a questioning worldview and critical thinking skills, which has resulted in the necessity for people to consciously form their own identities (p. 92). Identity formation, according to Henricks, is accomplished through a combination of the transformative act of play and the conformitive act of *communitas* (or being in community) (pp. 92-93). This theory of identity formation coupled with today’s relative dearth of play in adult life would presumably leave us with a rash of partially-formed identities and identity crises. Intuitively, this does not seem far from the truth.

In Letcher’s (2001) experience with the Pagan eco-protest community, the protesters living at Fairmile who called themselves “Fairies” and those living at Fort Trollheim who called themselves “Trolls” were actually playing the parts of their ascribed archetypes. “The Fairies were mostly vegetarian, non-violent, played mandolins and sang songs about their aesthetic eco-paganism; the Trolls ate meat, drank more alcohol, and banned any music they deemed too ‘Fairy-ish’” (p. 152).

Huizinga illuminates the transformative power of play not only for individual identity formation but also for transformation on a much larger scale. Henricks (2006) summarizes Huizinga's ideas on play as transformation:

To play is to take on the world, to take it apart, and frequently to build it anew. So understood, play for Huizinga is a protest against determinism, a claim that humans need not merely endure existential conditions but can reform these according to their own desires and insights. For such reasons, play—especially in its protected formal settings—is thought to be the engine of history (p. 185).

Henricks also identifies the ontological power of play when he writes that “play is the laboratory of the possible. To play fully and imaginatively is to step sideways into another reality, between the cracks of ordinary life” (p. 1).

Contemporary Pagans tend to understand the concepts of *truth* and *reality* as subjective and multiple because each individual person perceives, interprets, and imagines events according to their own experience, personality, and perhaps even genetic make-up. As explained by one of Tanya Luhrmann's (1989) informants, “I am aware that my reality and my conclusions are the result of my unique genetic structure, my life experience and my subjective feelings; and you are a different person, whose same experience of what may or may not be out there will be translated in your nervous system into something different.... This recognition that everyone has different experiences is a fundamental keystone to Paganism” (p. 342). Reality is also multiple in that it is momentary, meaning that an individual can shift from one reality to another in any moment (including the dream reality, the everyday reality, the ritual reality, the play reality, etc.) (Young & Goulet, 1994, p. 318).



The idea that reality is not a singular experience but rather that there are multiple realities within which we operate was introduced by William James in his 1890 essay, “The Perception of Reality.” He lists multiple “sub-universes” or “worlds” that we experience: “there is the world of collective error, there are the worlds of abstract reality, of relative or practical reality, of ideal relations, and there is the supernatural world” (p. 291). He explains that “each world whilst it is attended to is real after its own fashion; only the reality lapses with the attention” (p. 293).

James doesn’t see all sub-universes as being equally real, however. He marks the world of everyday life as the “ultimate or paramount reality” because it’s the world of our senses and also the world in which we work. As explained by Alfred Schutz (1962), “all these worlds—the worlds of dreams, of imageries and phantasms, especially the world of art, the world of religious experience, the world of scientific contemplation, the play world of the child, and the world of the insane—are finite provinces of meaning.... each of [which] may receive a specific accent of reality (although not the reality accent of the world of working)” (p. 232). Schutz frames this idea in a slightly different way when he writes that “the world of working in daily life is the archetype of our experience of reality. All the other provinces of meaning may be considered as its modifications” (p. 233). Erving Goffman (1997) characterizes James’s separation of the world of the senses into a category of more real reality as a “cop out,” saying that “after taking this radical stand... he allowed that the world of the senses has a special status, being the one we judge to be the realest reality, the one that retains our liveliest belief, the one before which the other worlds must give way” (p. 150).

Defining reality or the quality of “realness,” whether or not reality is conceived of as multiple, is not a simple undertaking. According to William James (1890), “whatever excites and stimulates our interest is real; whenever an object so appeals to us that we turn to it, accept it, fill our mind with it, or practically take account of it, so far it is real for us, and we believe it” (p. 295). James postulates that some realities are more real than others because “as a whole, sensations are more lively and are judged more real than conceptions; things met with every hour more real than things seen once; attributes perceived when awake, more real than attributes perceived in a dream” (p. 300). He essentially says that things that are sensed are taken as more real than things that are imagined, which are “usually real with a less real reality than that of the things of sense. They are taken less seriously; and the very utmost that can be said for anyone's belief in them is that it is as strong as his ‘belief in his own senses’” (p. 294).

In a seeming departure, James also says that “a rare experience, too, is likely to be judged more real than a permanent one, if it be more interesting and exciting.” James at once claims that the quality of realness is determined by that which can be sensed and also by that which is exciting. He explains that these ideas are actually not contradictory in that “our emotions probably owe their pungent quality to the bodily sensations which they involve. Our tendency to believe in emotionally exciting objects (objects of fear, desire, etc.) is thus explained without resorting to any fundamentally new principle of choice. Speaking generally, the more a conceived object *excites* us, the more reality it has” (p. 307).

James introduces the notion that education can affect what is considered real when he writes “the greatest proof that a man is *sui compos* is his ability to suspend belief in presence of an emotionally exciting idea. To give this power is the highest result of education. In untutored minds the power does not exist. Every exciting thought in the natural man carries credence with it” (p. 308). Insofar as education is equated with cultural indoctrination, this is a reasonable explanation for the differences in what constitutes reality among different groups of people spread over time, space, and ideology.

Folklorist Peter Rojcewicz (1991) questions what can reasonably be seen and known inside a particular “cultural map” of reality (p. 495). For example, the cultural map of modernity leaves no room for the possible existence of elves and sprites, so subscribers to the dominant culture don’t even consider looking for them. These and other nature spirits become fictionalized characters relegated to child’s play and fantasy novels. As explained by Eva Brann (1993), “The forced imagination loses the courage of its convictions and is overcome by the melancholy of its unreality. When its sustaining energy is strained, the trust in its visions collapses and a kind of inner calamity, an imaginative devastation ensues; the insubstantiality of the pageant seems manifest, the fabric of every vision appears baseless, and all the spirits melt into thin air” (p. 792). The gravity of the constraints imposed by our current cultural map are expressed by Rojcewicz (1991) in the following passage:

The picture of reality that has dominated in the West for the last three centuries is of a predictable, mechanistic, and purposeless world devoid of human or spiritual qualities... We can only be certain that the universe is

highly susceptible to our particular interpretations, for better or worse. We represent the world to ourselves as impersonal, mechanistic, and purposeless, and we respond to this representation, as if it were a cosmic law. The truth of the matter, perhaps, is that the impersonal, mechanistic, and purposeless qualities are in ourselves (p. 499).

The implication of the way that Rojcewicz frames our cultural reality is that because the source of the perceived reality is within each of us as actors in the culture, it is within our power to change our own reality.

Anthropologists Charles Laughlin and Jason Throop (2001) would agree with Rojcewicz that members of a culture are capable of defining their own reality—drawing their own cultural map. “In the process of coming to know the world,” they say, “the importance of intuition and imagination are at least as important as reason in forming an accurate cognized picture of reality” (p. 720). Laughlin and Throop present a circular flow diagram that illustrates how a culture’s cosmology informs its mythopoeia (composed of the myth-ritual complex, art, drama, and other symbolism), which informs experience, which when interpreted creates cosmology (p. 712). This circular flow is self-sustaining and tends to reinforce the status quo—unless members of the culture consciously choose to revise their interpretations of life experiences or engage in new and different experiences. “A society’s mythopoeia is ultimately the product of the creative imagination of its people. By creative imagination we do not mean mundane fantasy (imagined unreality), but rather the *imaginatio* in Henry Corbin’s (1969, 179) sense—the exercise of the creative intuitive faculties associated with imagery by which the

essentially invisible aspects of reality may be envisioned” (Laughlin & Throop, 2001, p. 713).

Laughlin and Throop assert that “modern Euroamerican culture is marked by a vast chasm between its conception of reality as described by science on one hand and unreal fantasy on the other” (p. 714), which is not at all the case for cultures that understand the world to be enchanted. When considering the conceptions of reality in other cultures from a Western viewpoint, “What is *real*, the scientists say, must *pass our tests*. ‘Pass our tests’ means that it must be possible to discover something equivalent in *our culture*” (Duerr, 1985, p. 127), meaning that the realities experienced by alternative cultures are dismissed outright.

The enchanted realities that are a part of the contemporary Pagan experience are sometimes described by practitioners as more significant and seemingly more real than the so-called real world. This has been documented among practitioners who engage in trance. Even if encounters in trance state are not “real” in the same way that “reality” is, they may be more significant than “real” encounters or experiences, making them more important in real life (Tramacchi, 2006, p. 100). While working with eco-protesters in England, Andy Letcher (2006) found that “For Eco-Pagans this enchanted world of which they are a part is not delusory, escapist or infantile, but a neglected, forgotten, and truer reality” (p. 181). The same holds true for practitioners of shamanism, who believe that the worlds of dreams, myths, and imagination are as real as the “hard” world (Taylor, 2002, p. 41). Some shamans who journey to otherworlds consider the worlds they visit to be more real and more significant than the everyday world (Tramacchi, 2006, p. 100).

Philosopher Edward Casey (1976) asserts that “Imagination has no genuinely ontological power, that is, no power to make real what is nonreal or the reverse—where by “real” is meant having a determinate and intersubjectively ascertainable status within an enduring spatio-temporal framework” (p. 82). He claims that imagination is non-corrigable, that it is not subject to truth or falsehood (pp. 94-95), so it cannot be verified or falsified “for verifiability requires the possibility of intersubjective confirmation, and in imagining any such confirmation is excluded in the nature of the case” (p. 96). For Casey, what is taken to be reality must be corroborated by multiple individuals (intersubjectivity), and imagining is an individual endeavor that is never intersubjective, therefore reality and imagination are not related. As explained by Casey, “to imagine is to sup-pose something—an object, event, or state of affairs—as purely possible. Such entertaining of pure possibilities cannot be understood as an activity of negating what is empirically real, or even as being indifferent or neutral toward it” (p. 112). For Casey, “part of the ‘purity’ of imaginative possibilities lies precisely in their independence of the mutually exclusive alternatives of reality and unreality” (p. 113).

Casey’s definition of reality is not shared by other phenomenologists, who take Husserl’s possibility as indicative of a more malleable reality that can be experienced differently by different individuals in different moments. Coming from a more traditionally phenomenological viewpoint, Kieron O’Connor and Frederick Aardema (2005) outline a “possibilistic model of consciousness” wherein one’s conception of reality is made up of simultaneous inputs of perception and imagination (p. 237), the result being that “what we take as our reality is arrived at as the most possible world in

the context of other possible worlds” (p. 247). Eva Brann (1993) expresses a similar understanding that “perceptual and imaginal visions of the world—the same world—do occur simultaneously, and that it is precisely by reason of this double vision that the imagination is very much engaged with the world” (p. 149).

The phenomenological imagination described by these scholars is not simply a producer of fantasy or unreality; it is in fact one of the productive elements in our experience of reality. As explained by a magician (a type of contemporary Pagan practitioner), “The uninitiated interpret imagination as something ‘imaginary’ in the popular sense of the term, i.e. something unreal. But the imagination is a reality. When a man imagines, he actually creates a form on the Astral or some higher plane; and this form is as real and objective to intelligent beings on that plane, as our earthly surroundings are to us” (Luhrmann, 1989, p. 275).

In his discussion of Jung’s “active imagination,” Edward Casey (1976) seems to agree in some respect with the idea that imagination engenders some sort of reality. He says that “the content of what we actively imagine is indeed felt to be psychically real insofar as it may affect and change the psyche of the imaginer himself” (p. 216). Casey actually seems to appreciate that the “purely possible” in imagining may have more import for an individual than does the empirically real, but he nevertheless does not want to confuse the two. He ventures to say that “it might even seem as if the thetic character of the real has been substituted for the purely possible insofar as active imagining puts us in touch with archetypal material. What could be more ultimate, and thus more real, than such material?” He goes on to say that “an archetypally attuned imagination deals with

what is purely possible—with what cannot be constricted to the empirically real” (p. 215).

### **Consciousness Studies, Transpersonal Psychology, and Ecopsychology**

Exploration of consciousness plays an important role in the ways that contemporary Pagans understand and operate in the world. The subtitle to Susan Greenwood’s (2005) book *The Nature of Magic* is “An Anthropology of Consciousness,” and Starwood Festival itself is organized by the Association for Consciousness Exploration. Consciousness comes into play from multiple angles, the first being the idea that human consciousness may be explored, expanded, and changed for the better. According to Sabina Magliocco (2004), “the experience of altered or alternate consciousness that reveals a previously hidden, spiritual reality is the core of the Neo-Pagan movement” (p. 152). From a more political standpoint, Bron Taylor (2000) summarizes the conviction among deep ecologists that “a transformation of human consciousness must take place if humans are to reestablish harmony with nonhuman nature” (p. 277). Susan Greenwood (2005) introduces the concept of “magical consciousness,” which is embodied and intuitive, in contrast to the reflective and intellectual qualities of individual consciousness in the dominant Western paradigm. “Above all,” says Greenwood, “magical consciousness concerns the awareness of the interrelatedness of all things in the world” (p. 7).

The concept of embodied cognition that is explained in *The Embodied Mind*, by Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch (1991) bridges the gap between



phenomenology and cognitive science in the exploration of human consciousness. Varela, Thompson, and Rosch “hold with [philosopher] Merleau-Ponty that Western scientific culture requires that we see our bodies both as physical structures and as lived, experiential structures—in short, as both “outer” and “inner,” biological and phenomenological” (p. xv). In terms of cognition, they see the “biological” body as “the context or milieu of cognitive mechanisms,” which works in concert with the “phenomenological” body that is experiential in nature (p. xvi). Prior to the articulation of this framework, cognitive science, rooted in the scientific method, and philosophy of human experience, by definition an experiential inquiry, rarely overlapped. There was (and to a large extent still is) a rift between these two disciplines that both explore human consciousness, but from different perspectives and using different tools. Varela, Thompson, and Rosch pay homage to both modes of inquiry and attempt to draw them both under the same umbrella of embodied cognition. As articulated by the authors,

To deny the truth of our own experience in the scientific study of ourselves is not only unsatisfactory; it is to render the scientific study of ourselves without a subject matter. But to suppose that science cannot contribute to an understanding of our experience may be to abandon, within the modern context, the task of self-understanding. Experience and scientific understanding are like two legs without which we cannot walk (pp. 13-14).

Embodied cognition, as defined by Varela et al., is a particularly useful framework for exploring the phenomenon of faeries because it lends legitimacy to the experiential as an indispensable component of our understanding of human consciousness. Faeries exist in folklore, literature, art, and in experiences that humans have, so a framework like

embodied cognition that makes room for experiences as legitimate evidence for understanding consciousness, reality, and imagination makes sense for this inquiry.

Another main thrust of the Pagan understanding of consciousness is that it is not exclusive to human beings. Taken in its broadest definition, most contemporary Pagans are animist; that is they understand the world, and particularly the natural world, to be inspirited (Greenwood, 2005, p. ix). The animistic worldview states that all beings have consciousness (p. 10). For some animists, this extends to beings from nature's "otherworlds" or planes beyond normal human consciousness (Harvey, 2006b, p. 48), including faeries and other nature spirits, who are considered conscious beings of nature along with humans, animals, plants, rocks, etc. (Harvey, 2006a, p. 91).

The study of consciousness, including individual human consciousness as well as the shared consciousness of the world in a Jungian sense, is made explicit in the field of transpersonal psychology. "A self-identity that transcends the individual as a separate entity underlies transpersonal psychology" (Davis & Canty, 2013, p. 603). Similar to embodied cognition in its bridging of scientific and intuitive inquiry, "the transpersonal approach seeks a new vision, one in which both human science and human spirituality can be honored" (Hartelius, Rothe, & Roy, 2013, p. 3). Douglas MacDonald (2013) states that "I approach transpersonal psychology as a subdiscipline of psychology, which I define as the scientific study of consciousness, particularly non-ordinary states, modes, processes, and structures of consciousness" (p. 326).

Transpersonal psychology employs the phenomenological focus on human experience as a primary subject of study. As such it provides a framework for

incorporating extraordinary or transcendent human experiences such as interactions with faeries into scientific inquiry. As reasoned by MacDonald,

if the transcendent were viewed in purely experiential terms, something that is suggested by most, if not all, extant schools of mysticism, then it could be positioned that the transcendent and transpersonal are just extensions of the continuum of all human experience, and can comfortably be treated in terms that are not dystonic with naturalism. Within this context, it might be said that the assumption of naturalism may be better reconceived as that of experientialism—anything that is available to human experience is a legitimate focus of scientific study (p. 321).

MacDonald thus frames extraordinary human experiences as just one more aspect of the natural human experience, and therefore worthy of our attention and our efforts to learn what we can from these experiences through whatever means available to us, including scientific inquiry.

In examining the intersection of transpersonal psychology with the emerging field of ecopsychology, John V. Davis and Jeanine M. Canty (2013) find that both fields share an alternative concept of the human-nature relationship. They explain that “for the most part, ecopsychology presents two images for the relationship between humans and nature: (a) nature as home and its inhabitants as family (e.g., siblings or Mother Earth) and (b) nature as self, in which self-identifications are broadened and deepened to include the non-human world” (p. 600). Davis and Canty articulate the differences between these ecopsychological conceptions of the human-nature relationship and the ones that predominate in Western thought: “These views stand in contrast to views that nature is

dangerous and needs to be controlled and dominated or that nature is (merely) a useful resource to be exploited, protected, conserved, or stewarded” (p. 600).

Ecopsychology provides an apt framework for examining the role that belief in faeries plays in the human-nature relationship in that it conflates the environmental or ecological wellbeing of the Earth with the psychological wellbeing of individual human beings. From this framework, the environmental problems facing the planet and the psychological problems experienced by individual humans are two sides of the same coin. As expressed by Theodore Roszak (1992) in the preface to his book *The Voice of the Earth*:

This is an essay in ecopsychology. Its goal is to bridge our culture’s long-standing, historical gulf between the psychological and the ecological, to see the needs of the planet and the person as a continuum. In search of a greater sanity, it begins where many might say sanity leaves off: at the threshold of the nonhuman world. In a sense that weaves science and psychiatry, poetry and politics together, the ecological priorities of the planet are coming to be expressed through our most private spiritual travail. The Earth’s cry for rescue from the punishing weight of the industrial system we have created is our own cry for a scale and quality of life that will free each of us to become the complete person we were born to be (p. 14).

In his book *Radical Ecopsychology*, Andy Fisher (2002) postulates that “if we accept the ecological view that we are members of the biotic community, rather than its mere exploiters, then we may learn to recognize the natural world as a social and psychological field, just as we do the human community” (p. 5). Fisher lays out four

basic tasks central to the practice of ecopsychology, and the second, or philosophical, task is “to place psyche (soul, anima, mind) back into the (natural) world” (p. 9), which Paganism strives to do.

Davis and Canty (2013) identify “the broadening of self-identity to include other beings, the natural world, and the cosmos” as “a core theme” of ecopsychology. “It is here that ecopsychology and transpersonal psychology share common ground most visibly” (p. 598). In the ecopsychological framework, “humans and nature are both parts of a transpersonal whole. Deepening this identity promotes self-transcendence, self-realization, and optimal human maturity and at the same time, environmentally sustainable attitudes and behaviors” (p. 598).

Both transpersonal psychology and modern ecopsychology have drawn heavily on formative work in the field of depth psychology. Initiated by Carl Jung, depth psychology relies on the collective unconscious of all human beings to offer wisdom to the individual psyche by way of archetypes that have metaphorical significance for the individual. Alan G. Vaughan (2013) asserts that “it is clear that Jung thought of his approach to psychology, such as the collective unconscious and archetypes, in a way compatible with modern transpersonal psychology” (p. 141). Vaughan draws a very close alliance between transpersonal and depth psychologies when he says, “Undeniably, Jung was one of the major precursors, if not the actual founder, of a transpersonal psychology” (p. 150). Ideas that are recognized today as ecopsychological were expressed by Jung half a century ago. For example, Jung (1964) wrote that “man feels himself isolated in the cosmos, because he is no longer involved in nature and has lost his emotional

“unconscious identity” with natural phenomena.... No voices now speak to man from stones, plants, and animals, nor does he speak to them believing they can hear. His contact with nature has gone, and with it has gone the profound emotional energy that this symbolic connection supplied” (p. 85). The animism inherent in both depth psychology and ecopsychology is evident here.

James Hillman’s foreword to the edited volume *Ecopsychology* (Roszak, Gomes, & Kanner, 1995), entitled “A Psyche the Size of the Earth,” asserts that human psyches incorporate the world in which we live, that the soul extends outward, merging the individual with the environment and the “other.” He takes both Jung’s collective unconscious and Freud’s id as representations of “the world,” concluding that Jungian and Freudian psychologies both point toward harmonizing with the world as necessary for psychological wellbeing. Hillman believes that for many people, the most profound traumas in our psyches are in fact traumas to the natural world (or the “world soul”) that are felt deep in our human souls (Roszak, Gomes, & Kanner, 1995, pp. xvii-xxiii).

Stephen Aizenstat has taken a similarly ecopsychological approach to Depth Psychology, replacing the human collective unconscious with his notion of a “world unconscious” that includes human as well as nonhuman nature (Roszak, Gomes, & Kanner, 1995, p. 92).

Aizenstat advocates an ecocentric perspective, in which we as humans learn to listen to the voices of all Earth’s inhabitants, without separating ourselves from the world (Roszak, Gomes, & Kanner, 1995, p. 99).

Richard Louv’s (2008) main thesis in *Last Child in the Woods* is that children today are growing up without a connection to nature and that this lack of connection has

detrimental impacts both on children and on the natural world. Although Louv does not self-identify as an ecopsychologist, his ideas are ecopsychological. Louv has coined the term “nature-deficit disorder,” a pseudo-psychological diagnosis, to describe “the human costs of alienation from nature, among them: diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties, and higher rates of physical and emotional illnesses” (p. 36).

Mitchell Thomashow (1995) provides an ecopsychological perspective on the practice of environmentalism in his book *Ecological Identity: Becoming a Reflective Environmentalist*. He regards environmental practice as a healing profession because it involves healing the world. For example, conservation biologists heal damaged ecosystems when they work to restore their balance, and effective environmental educators heal both their students and the ecosystems those students impact (p. 143). Thomashow strongly advocates taking care of the environmentalist as integral to successful environmentalism, as the health of environmentalists and the health of the environment are intertwined. In Thomashow’s words, “If ecological identity enables people to identify with the earth, then to love the earth is to love oneself. This is how to take care of the environmentalist...” (p. 168). This ecopsychological notion that the wellbeing of the self and the Earth are closely aligned is strikingly similar to the contemporary Pagan worldview.

### **Enchantment, Disenchantment, and Re-enchantment**

There is a narrative of disenchantment and re-enchantment that circulates through much of the literature about the 20<sup>th</sup> century emergence of alternative spiritualities,

including contemporary Paganism. In *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, Christopher Partridge (2004) asserts that “alternative spiritualities provide eclectic, individualized religion for disenchanted Westerners who want to hang on to the remnants of belief” (p. 36). Susan Greenwood (2005) writes that “re-enchanting the world for practitioners of nature religion means learning to see nature as alive and also as having a spiritual dimension” (p. vii). This story of cultural disenchantment and eventual re-enchantment frames belief in faeries and the general inspiritedness of nature as elements of this ebb and flow of enchantment over human history.

When sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920) was writing in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, he witnessed what he termed a “cultural crisis” resulting from the rationalization and disenchantment of the world (Gane, 2002, p. 4). According to Weber, the first steps toward the disenchantment crisis of the 20<sup>th</sup> century occurred within religious practice. There was a transition away from naturalism, characterized by a conflation of natural and magical phenomena that were granted spiritual significance, and toward religious symbolism, in which the forms and functions of gods were increasingly defined and systematized for an entire population by people in positions of power. These authority figures often focused the public attention on one god over others, initiating the move away from the traditional spiritual practice of polytheistic animism and toward monotheistic universal religion (Gane, 2002, p. 17). Over time, the god worshiped by the populace became more symbolic and transcendent, or separate from the natural every day world (p. 18). Promises of salvation likewise became increasingly otherworldly (p. 22).



As Weber sees it, disenchanted monotheistic universal religion in the West culminated with Calvinist Protestantism, which had clear connections with the rise of both capitalism and rationalism. The protestant work ethic and concept of a “calling” to do a certain type of work fed into capitalism, and the banishment of anything magical or supernatural from the practice of the religion was both a result and a cause of the scientific rationalism taking hold of the culture. Ironically, Protestantism was ultimately abandoned by both capitalism, which had no need for spiritual legitimation once its own logic of production took over, and scientific rationalism, which eventually rejected and devalued all religious values as irrational (Gane, 2002, pp. 19-21).

Weber agrees with nihilist Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) that the enlightenment and the rise of scientific rationalism were movements toward “the devaluation of ultimate values” in the West, and he vehemently disagrees with sociologist Émile Durkheim’s (1858-1917) assertion that scientific progress and human progress are one and the same (Gane, 2002, p. 2). He sees science as incapable of establishing values or resolving value-conflicts (p. 8), and he asserts that the result of expunging a society of its values is a dehumanized, impersonal world in which individuals are not ends in themselves but means to an end. This is evident in the alienating systems of capitalism and bureaucracy that predominate in today’s society (p. 23). Nicholas Gane (2002) spells out the nihilistic culmination of Weber’s thesis:

...religious beliefs and ultimate ideals gradually recede from (public) life as they are disenchanted by the claims of ‘rational’ science and are replaced increasingly by the idealized pursuit of secular, material ends. This leads to a world in which

questions of meaning and value disappear from the public arena, and in which the scope for creative action and for the pursuit of ultimate values becomes increasingly restricted (p. 26).

This description of how ultimate disenchantment plays out in a society bears a striking resemblance to the current condition of the dominant Western culture.

What follows the ultimate disenchantment of a culture? Weber posits that with religion having been divorced from the rest of cultural life, people begin to practice various religions and establish their own value systems that are not shared culture-wide (Gane, 2002, p. 29). This is potentially what is going on with the current proliferation of alternative polytheistic and pantheistic spiritualities as well as new brands of fundamentalist monotheisms. At first blush, this looks like a hopeful possibility for re-enchantment, but Weber's narrative ends with the establishment of competing value-spheres that ultimately fall back on rationalism to prove their efficacy (Gane, 2002, p. 151).

Despite Weber's dire predictions for enchantment in the West, when the theme of re-enchantment surfaces in the literature about alternative spiritualities, it is generally in a more positive and empowered tone. In *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, Christopher Partridge (2004) describes a cycle similar to the one Weber introduced, framing it in terms of secularization. He says that churches become more and more secular to the point that they are no longer meeting the spiritual needs of their followers, who then form sects or cults, some of which grow with time into large religions, which then again begin to secularize. Partridge asserts, however, that the current resurgence isn't in individual sects

or cults; rather it is a return of magical culture, or occulture (p. 40), so today's proliferation of alternative spiritualities is accompanied by a re-enchantment that is not subject to the cycle of secularization. Partridge (2004) quotes Michael Green, an advisor to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, who observes:

the numbers attending church are in massive decline, and in many churches no children and young people are to be seen... there is an undeniable spiritual quest in the air. New Age, the new Paganism and the cults have an enormous fascination for [those] who have found that materialism does not satisfy. But it has to be said that their quest for authentic spiritual experience rarely takes them to a church (p. 44).

An increasing number of spiritual questers are identifying as “spiritual but not religious,” an important distinction that indicates people are gravitating toward the freedom, open-mindedness, and experiential nature of a spiritual quest as opposed to the restriction, closed-mindedness, and dogmatic nature of organized religion (pp. 46-48). According to Adrian Ivakhiv (2006), the signifier *religion* has historically been defined by its distinctions from other signifiers, such as *magic*, *superstition*, *science*, and *secularism* (pp. 169-170). In this way, claiming that one is religious is putting oneself in a box that excludes many other descriptors that may also apply to the individual's spiritual outlook.

In concert with Weber and Huizinga, who both cite industrialization and scientific rationalism as the precursors to disenchantment in the socio-cultural realm, Partridge (2005) points to “the massive humankind-nature dislocation brought on by the Industrial Revolution” and the “driving force of rationalization” as sources of the disenchantment and desacralization of nature:

...no longer were the forests filled with the little folk of myth and magic, and the animistic spirits of folklore. Whereas the *supernatural* used to be, to all intents and purposes, *natural*, it gradually became *extranatural*, in that ‘modernity’ pushed it beyond the natural, empirical, *real* world, into the sphere of the fantastical, the fictional, and the theological. Nature was rationally quantifiable, empirical matter. It was not guided by the divine hand and infused with sacred meaning, but rather operated according to its own laws and could be truly understood only by scientific excavation (p. 44).

The proliferation of technology that accompanied industrialization has had an especially direct disenchanting effect on nature. In his book *Nature, Technology and the Sacred*, Bronislaw Szerszynski (2005) asserts that “it is in technology that nature’s disenchantment is most clearly performed” and that “as technology’s powers advance, those of nature withdraw” (p. 5). As the power of technology escalates, nature increasingly becomes a powerless disenchanted place where it once was a magical, living community of beings.

While Weber, Partridge, and Szerszynski may or may not agree with this assertion, some Pagan scholars insist that it is possible for scientific rationalism to play a role in the re-enchantment of nature. Bron Taylor (2005) argues that in its uncovering of increasing knowledge about the world in which we live, science can and should inspire awe and reverence for nature (pp. 2665-2666). “Despite the pronounced nature mysticism and occasional distrust of rationality and science found among radical green groups and participants in Earth-based spirituality, nature spirituality can be compatible with science, which can even inspire proper spiritual perception” (Taylor, 2001b, p. 234). Indeed, as a belief system rooted in the cycles and inhabitants of the natural world, Paganism is

arguably more compatible with natural science than are any of the major world religions. Chas Clifton's (2004) advice is this: "Yes, Western science is flawed, but it is our way of knowing, so take what it offers: its taxonomy, its lists, its naming. Start there then build a richer spirituality from that point" (p. 340).

People need not subscribe to Paganism per se to cultivate a sense of wonder, awe, and reverence in the face of nature. A group of respected scientists, including Carl Sagan, Stephen Jay Gould, Stephen Schneider, and Hans Bethe, issued a statement to this effect in the early 1990s:

As Scientists, many of us have had profound personal experiences of awe and reverence before the universe. We understand that what is regarded as sacred is more likely to be treated with care and respect. Our planetary home should be so regarded. Efforts to safeguard and cherish the environment should be infused with a vision of the sacred (quoted in Taylor, 2004, p. 998).

Carl Sagan (1994) also wrote, "a religion old or new, that stressed the magnificence of the universe as revealed by modern science, might be able to draw forth reserves of reverence and awe hardly tapped by the conventional faiths. Sooner or later, such a religion will emerge." These sentiments fall under the rubric of "civic earth religion" or "spiritual humanism," depending on the emphasis preferred by the practitioner. There is a growing movement in this direction, another indication of a contemporary re-enchantment of the Earth.

Many contemporary scholars have agreed with Weber on the role that monotheistic universal religion played in the disenchantment of the West. Partridge

(2005) focuses on the consequences this has for the ecological health of the planet:

“Christianity, by situating the divine outside nature, not only left nature vulnerable, but also positively encouraged exploitation” (p. 45). Taylor and Van Horn (2006) express a similar sentiment:

Christianity in general, and Puritanism in particular, provided a cosmology and theology that reinforced the general impetus among European settlers to consider land not as something sacred and worthy of reverence, but as a resource to be exploited for both material and spiritual ends. For such Christians, both the material and spiritual ends had something to do with glorifying and satisfying a deity who resided beyond the Earth and thus should not be too closely identified with it (p. 167).

These viewpoints expressed by Partridge, Taylor, and Van Horn are reiterations of “the Lynn White thesis,” as it’s known, or the argument first put forth by historian Lynn White, Jr., in 1967 that Christianity was largely to blame for the ecological crisis of the 20<sup>th</sup> century because its human-nature dualism led to extreme anthropocentrism, human alienation from nature, and ultimately exploitation of the Earth as a resource. The strand of White’s argument that is not as well known is his assertion that Christianity’s fierce rejection of the animist Pagan belief system was detrimental to the environment. “By destroying Pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects... The spirits in natural objects, which formerly had protected nature from man, evaporated” (Lynn White quoted in Partridge, 2005, p. 51).

Paganism is viewed as a vehicle for re-enchanting Western culture and healing the Earth community because it represents a true subversion of the destructive Christian paradigm. Partridge already sees this process underway:

Following the Christian disenchantment of nature, we are now witnessing its Paganized re-enchantment. Indeed, critical of the Christian understanding of God, the Church's historical attitude to the environment, and monotheistic patriarchy, the principal tenets of the White thesis are often uncritically accepted as *soft* orthodoxy within Paganism (Partridge, 2005, p. 78).

Arguing for a "Paganization of the west," Dragon Environmental Network founder Adrian Harris says that "the theology and practice of Paganism not only holds a solution to our environmental crisis, but can bring about a revolution in the way our culture makes sense of reality. Paganism puts us back in touch with the body, reconnecting our wordy analytical culture with the physical self, bringing us back to Earth" (Adrian Harris quoted in Partridge, 2005, p. 77). Although Harris uses more colloquial language than Weber or Partridge, he is referring to the same crisis of modern disenchantment brought on by rationalism (a.k.a. "wordy analytical culture"), and he sees Paganism as a viable path toward re-enchantment (a.k.a. "bringing us back to Earth").

Sabina Magliocco (2004) provides an eloquent summation of the re-enchanting capacity of contemporary Paganism:

Neo-Pagans consider nature sacred, and divinity immanent in every natural thing and living being. While they do not reject technology and science, they perceive modernity as a force that has alienated humans from a way of life that followed the rhythms of seasonal cycles and regularly brought them into contact with the divine in nature. Pagans believe that as

humans became more detached from nature, they ceased to see it as sacred. It is this sense of the numinous, the magical, the sacred in nature and in the human form that their religions attempt to recapture (p. 4).

From an animist viewpoint, the founding ideals upon which our current assumptions are built are faulty. As Graham Harvey (2006b) says, “If Descartes was wrong in asserting that animals are unable to think in ways he considered distinctively human, maybe the whole disenchanted construction of modernity has dangerously erroneous foundations” (pp. 48-49), in which case re-enchantment amounts to a radical reconsideration of the foundational myths of modernity. “Re-enchanting the world for practitioners of nature religion means learning to see nature as alive and also as having a spiritual dimension... Reciprocity between inspirited beings has to be developed to establish communication” (Greenwood, 2005, pp. vii-viii). For Harvey (2006b), “re-enchantment is not about mistaking imagination for reality but about achieving a more adequate view of a dynamic world shared with a wider community of living persons... in contrast to disenchantment in which humanity has claimed a unique and lonely position” (p. 49).

Sabina Magliocco (2004) explains that cultural historian Morris Berman blames cultural disenchantment for many of our contemporary world problems, including environmental degradation. “As an antidote, he suggests a reenchantment of the world, a politics of consciousness which would reconnect the individual to the community and to the larger world” (p. 204).



One strand of the re-enchantment narrative has to do with romanticizing pre-modern and primal cultures as enchanted elements from our past with which we must reconnect in order to re-establish enchantment in the present. “The ‘ancient wisdom’ of these cultures is understood to be the uncorrupted wisdom of a humanity unrepressed by the external dogma, rationalism and authority of later institutionalized religion and culture” (Partridge, 2004, p. 77). Some modern-day Pagans reconnect with their ancient ancestors through the use of runes (a system of symbols, often painted on small stones, that was developed by ancient Pagans living in northern Europe) for spiritual guidance, divination, and communicating with non-human beings (p. 83). Some Pagans, most notably in certain Wiccan traditions, claim a direct ancestral connection with ancient Pagans, saying that oral tradition has passed their sacred craft through many generations. For example, practitioner Claire Nahmad comments, “my material is drawn from the ancient wisewoman’s tradition, a tradition which reaches back many centuries to a time when the influence of the stars and the planets on all animate and inanimate things of the Earth was acknowledged and accepted...” (Nahmad quoted in Partridge, 2005, p. 79).

David Abram (1996) ties in the proliferation of written language with the spread of Western religion in his understanding of the disenchantment of nature:

Under the aegis of the Church, the belief in a non-sensuous heaven, and in the fundamentally incorporeal nature of the human soul—itself “imprisoned,” as Plato had suggested, in the bodily world—accompanied the alphabet as it spread, first throughout Europe and later throughout the Americas. *And wherever the alphabet advanced, it proceeded by dispelling the air of ghosts and invisible influences—by stripping the air of its anima, its psychic depth.* In the oral,

animistic world of pre-Christian and peasant Europe, all things—animals, forests, rivers, and caves—had the power of expressive speech... *Only as the written text began to speak would the voices of the forest, and of the river, begin to fade* (pp. 253-254).

A parallel disenchantment narrative has developed around faery lore, with literacy again postulated as the source of the disenchantment. In oral cultures, faery lore was circulated amongst people and passed from generation to generation as living stories that had to be told, performed, and lived. “Language, in oral cultures, is experienced as a property of the sensuous lifeworld not just that of human beings” (Greenwood, 2005, p. 148). The writing down of fairytales has rendered them static, lifeless, and exclusively human (pp. 143-144) and robbed them of their life-giving oral tradition, relegating them to the realm of fiction (p. 167).

According to Howard and Mageo (1996), “spirits—pagan and pre-Christian, irredeemable and recalcitrant—represent... emblems of cultural identity” and over time “all cultures reimagine their identities and histories; where spirits survive, they are an important medium for this reimagining process” (p. 4). This would indicate that the re-enchantment of the West, particularly as concerns nature, is likely served by renewed belief in faeries and other nature spirits. Howard and Mageo have found that among disparate cultures, “spirits are, in contrast [to Gods], often experienced by people without much power or status, who are locally perceived as being weak; or they may be experienced by stronger people in marginal places or states (in the forest or bush, in the twilight or dark, entering or waking from sleep), and notably more often by women” (p. 15). These findings all fit with the experience of faery in contemporary Paganism, and

coupled with the assertion that spirits play an important role in reimagining cultures, this points to a power shifting element in the re-enchantment process.

## METHODOLOGY

My research goal has been to learn from Pagan festival attendees who engage with faeries and other nature spirits about how these activities and proclivities affect their relationships with nature and their behaviors in the natural world. I took an ethnographic approach, and as an ethnographer I was “participating... in people’s daily lives... watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions—in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 1). Ethnography is interpretivist rather than positivist in its approach (Glesne, 1999, p. 5), meaning that the research is grounded in the assumption that people construct the social world through their actions and interpretations (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 11). This leads to an understanding that in any setting, there are “multiple voices representing multiple interests or ‘realities’” (Sluka & Robben, 2006, p. 19). Whereas ethnographers during the colonial period may have taken an authoritative tone in conducting and reporting their research (p. 17), ethnography today can be characterized by learning with and from research *participants* rather than studying research *subjects*. This method is more ethically sound, and it produces more authentic information (p. 26).

I conducted my research at Starwood Festival, July 21-26, 2009, in Sherman, New York, a small agricultural town in the westernmost part of New York State. The year that I conducted my field research, Starwood Festival was the largest pan-Pagan gathering in the United States, with annual attendance of approximately 2,500-3,000 people. 2009 was

the 29<sup>th</sup> Starwood Festival. At a large festival like Starwood, there is something going on at almost every hour of the day and night. Several workshops are offered simultaneously throughout each day so that participants must choose among them (Association for Consciousness Exploration, 2009). The fire circle serves as the social hub of community activity, and the fire burns all night and into the next morning. The quietest times of day are morning and evening, but the truth is that there is no time at Starwood that is completely quiet.

The two research methods I employed at Starwood were interviews and participant observation. I interviewed twelve festival participants during the week-long festival. Informants were purposefully selected based on the richness of their personal experience and engagement with faeries. I sought out people who were offering, or had offered, workshops at the festival on something relating to faeries. I also sought out unofficial leaders in the community (as there are no official ones) who have experience with faery. Finally, I identified some informants by word of mouth, keeping in mind my goal to find the most information-rich cases (Glesne, 1999, pp. 28-29).

Four of my informants played leadership roles in the festival. There aren't any formal leaders at Starwood, but three of my informants were considered elders in the community and were respected as leaders in that capacity, and a fourth was both a leader in the Druidic faith and a staff member of the festival. In addition to these four "leaders," three other informants occupied high profile positions at the festival as artists and musicians. The remaining five informants played more pedestrian roles at Starwood; they were participants. The experience of Starwood is created by the participants, especially as

compared to a music festival, for example, where the experience is largely created by the musicians on stage. Because Starwood is a community-oriented gathering, simple participation is significant.

Many Starwood attendees return year after year, making it a cohesive community although it only comes together for one week each year. The average attendance tenure of my informants was 12 years. Four of them had been attending for over 20 years, three between 10 and 20 years, and five had attended fewer than 10 years. One informant was at Starwood for her first year.

When I approached potential interviewees, I identified myself as a graduate student from the University of Vermont and briefly summarized the research I was conducting. I provided them with a copy of the IRB Informed Consent form (see appendices). In some cases, I made an appointment for the interview sometime during the festival; in other case, I conducted the interview on the spot.

Each interview was  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 1 hour in duration. I was prepared with some questions to ask of the participants (see appendices), but the interviews were semi-structured to allow the participants to help guide the direction and content of the interviews (Bennett, 2002a, p. 155). I included a variety of questions from all of the categories identified by Patton (1990): experience/behavior, opinion/values, feeling, knowledge, sensory, background/demographics (quoted in Glesne, 1999, p. 71). I strove for a tone of genuine curiosity in conducting the interviews, as my goal was to learn as much as possible from each of the participants (pp. 83-84). I set up a special tent in a relatively quiet, private,

and dry place to conduct the interviews so that the atmosphere was comfortable and conducive to productive conversation (p. 75). However, I ended up conducting the interviews in several sites around the festival grounds. It turned out to be more practical to interview the informants on their turf than to bring them to my special tent. I recorded the interviews with a digital voice recorder, a device with which I familiarized myself before any interviews began. I made sure that the recorder had fresh batteries each time I used it (Bennett, 2002a, p. 157), and I backed up the content of each interview immediately after it was concluded onto my laptop computer as well as onto a memory stick so that the data was stored in three places to mitigate any technical problems (Denscombe, 2007, p. 289).

In addition to conducting interviews, I engaged in participant observation throughout the festival. This means that I was a member of the Starwood community and participated in the festival, but I was also constantly aware of my role as a researcher and my goal to carefully observe the behavior of festival attendees (Bennett, 2002b, p. 139). Participant observation is a key research method in ethnography; in fact, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) have asserted that ethnography necessarily involves participant observation (p. 21) and Salomonsen (2004) describes the role of the participant observer in ethnography as crucial. Participant observation, she says, allows a researcher “to study an ethnographic field horizontally, in solidarity with an indigenous point of view, not vertically and from externally applied norms” (p. 43).

While participating in the community is necessary for conducting research, it is also important that the researcher be able to interpret the data collected during fieldwork

for an academic audience culturally situated outside the community being studied. For this reason, I strove to strike a balance between emic and etic approaches, drawing from my experience as a member of the Starwood Festival community as well as my experience as an anthropological scholar. There is some “fear within the discipline of scholars ‘going native,’ that is adopting the values, practices, and beliefs of those studied to such an extent that one loses the ability to be reflexive about them” (Salomonsen, 2004, p. 43). Salomonsen points out that most ethnographers enter the field as “natives” of the “Western, scientific culture” (p. 48), so the concept of “going native” is “entangled with unacknowledged normativity and a positivist, hierarchical view of the relation between observer and observed” (p. 43). It is generally accepted today that it’s impossible to research a social setting without being somewhat involved in it, and all people, including researchers, have a point of view and a measure of bias. Particularly in the wake of postmodernism and its critiques of scientific positivism, ethnography has, for the most part, accepted that objectivity is a myth, or a “dishonest illusion,” as Salomonsen puts it (p. 48).

Ethnographers are necessarily part of the social worlds they study, making reflexivity, or study of one’s own cultural actions, a central feature of ethnographic research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 16). Melissa Harrington (2004) goes so far as to argue for further reflexivity in the study of Paganism: “Rather than trying to eradicate the personality of the researcher, and to pretend that they do not have bias or personal interests, by adopting a pseudoscientific approach in a nonscientific field, we could instead aim for further reflexivity” (p. 78). With this in mind, I conducted and



reported my research self-consciously, taking note of my own viewpoints and considering my particular biases but making no attempt to distance myself emotionally or cognitively from the community I was studying.

In my particular case, I had been attending Starwood Festival for three years prior to conducting research during my fourth year in attendance. I participated in the festival in ways that called to me personally, which mainly involved ecstatic dancing at the all-night fire circle. I was curious about faery faith and eager to learn more, as I did not hold this particular belief. I did wear wings on occasion during parades and such, but I didn't profess belief in faeries. By the time I was conducting anthropological research at Starwood, I was accepted by festival goers as a member of their community. However, I still had a firm handle on the assumptions at work within the dominant Western culture, where I've existed for most of my life, and I remained able to report my findings for an academic audience.

Because the personal experiences and background of the researcher will inevitably have an effect on the research, it is important that these things be disclosed in the reporting. Denscombe (2007) asserts that researcher identity should be seen as a crucial resource, not a limitation; in some cases, a researcher's identity and particular background and experiences actually enables the research (p. 301). In my case, I was uniquely positioned to conduct this research because I had attended Starwood Festival for the previous three years, so I was a somewhat established member of that festival community, and I had a reasonable understanding of the social mores of a Pagan festival (Harrington, 2004, p. 79). However, I had not claimed identity as a Pagan, and I was less

enmeshed in the community than some individuals who, for example, have grown up attending Starwood and other Pagan gatherings since birth. Particularly in a population that is marginalized the way that Pagans are, it is important that participants and informants trust me as a researcher. Recognizing me as a festival attendee and knowing that I am “one of them,” at least to some extent, went a long way toward making participants feel safe enough to share their stories (p. 79).

When Starwood was over, and I returned from the field, I transcribed all of the digitally recorded interviews and saved each interview by a code name, so that informant names were not attached to the data. In analyzing the interview data, I coded words, phrases, sentences, and/or passages that represented important and recurring themes in the data, and then organized those codes into categories. My goal was to use coding as a mechanism for interrogating and expanding the data as well as for organizing and reducing it to manageable chunks (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 30). I looked for “patterns, themes, and regularities as well as contrasts, paradoxes, and irregularities” in order to “move toward generalizing and theorizing from the data” (p. 47). I worked to build relationships among codes and categories (p. 48) in order to discover new meaning in the data (p. 30). I was careful to maintain the narrative, or story telling, aspect as one important iteration of the data (p. 52) in order to counterbalance the fragmenting nature of coding and categorizing (p. 80). Particularly in this study that walks the tightrope between reality and imagination, the stories that informants tell may possibly serve the function of modern cultural myths, so it is important not to lose those.

I was sure to become deeply familiar with all of my data, both interview data and field notes, as well as relationships among those data (Denscombe, 2007, p. 291) so that my analysis was as rich as possible. When analyzing the coded and categorized data, I avoided inductive reasoning, or making generalizations based on my specific data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 156). However, I did “develop theoretical ideas about social processes and cultural forms that have relevance beyond [the] data themselves” (p. 163), being careful to indicate that my ideas are reasonable extrapolations from the data I collected, and not necessarily true in all cases. As Denscombe (2007) points out, the “data does not speak for itself; researchers derive meaning from the data through interpretation” (p. 287).

Once I made initial interpretations of the data, I imaginatively considered other possible alternative interpretations in order to be sure that the interpretations I settled on make the most sense (Denscombe, 2007, p. 293). I was also careful not to exclude data that do not support my theories, but to engage those data and present them as outliers (p. 302). Throughout the data analysis process, I was cognizant of leaving a clear “audit trail” that others could follow to understand my thought process and the logic of my interpretations (p. 295), and I did my best to explain the data analysis process that led me to the results presented (pp. 302-303).

I conducted my research within an enactive framework in order to remain open to all possibilities in the direction of the inquiry. The term *enactive* was first coined by Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1991) “to emphasize the growing conviction that cognition is not the representation of a pre-given world by a pre-given mind but is rather

the enactment of a world and a mind on the basis of a history of the variety of actions that a being in the world performs” (p. 9). In the enactive view, cognition is essentially *embodied action* and “has no ultimate foundation or ground beyond its history of embodiment” (p. xx). “Such an approach implies that knowing evolves not only within “minds,” but emerges collectively through engagement of shared action” (Haskell et al., 2002, p. 2).

Doing social research within the enactive framework fundamentally changes the relationship between the researcher and the researched because knowledge, culture, reality, etc. are constantly being created through embodied action of the community’s participants, and the researcher necessarily becomes complicit in these defining activities (pp. 2-3). As illustrated in very colorful language by Johnna Haskell (2002), a researcher who employs an enactive approach, “I experience the world arising as an intertwining of relations. I re-search the world through embodying actions and through the storying of experience. As researchers, we need to remain open to the experiences and environment (world) like a kayaker dancing with a river” (p. 4). This describes well the approach that I took in interviewing people at Starwood Festival. I basically remained open to any account of faery they offered, collecting their stories without judgment as to their validity or reality and documenting the significance of the stories for my informants.

According to Haskell, enactive inquiry is “a way of being ‘present’ or open to the non-concrete” (p. 5), “a process whereby intention and action blur into the flow of doing. Doing, experiencing, being are inseparable from the inquiry of embodied actions” (p. 6). This approach is particularly useful in researching an extraordinary phenomenon such as

faeries because it focuses on the experiences of the research participants, makes room for their stories, and allows the researcher to be open to whatever version of reality is being presented by an individual at any given moment. Sound, effective, and ethical anthropological research relies on this sort of openness and willingness to take informants seriously (Swartz, 1994, p. 210), even when they are describing experiences that are extraordinary by the measure of the anthropologist's home culture (Young & Goulet, 1994, pp. 298-299). "Perhaps enactive inquiry brings forth the invisible through embodying actions within the relational space of experience," says Haskell (2002), "My purpose is to awaken the alien, the unknown, the flesh of experiencing" (p. 8).

John Ippolito is another researcher who uses enactive inquiry, in his case to study second language learning (Haskell et al., 2002, p. 16). For Ippolito, taking an enactive approach means viewing language as a developing relation between speaker and listener rather than a system of codes referring to a fixed reality and existing apart from the people using the language. Language does not exist without speakers, and speakers also do not exist without language. Language learners and speakers are actual embodiments of the language, and meaning co-emerges through the relation of speaker and listener in their embodied action of speaking the language (pp. 18-19).

Ippolito explains that "the speaking across languages which is part of my research focus always involves the unknown, always involves uncertainty, always threatens the self from beyond the comprehensible" (p. 19). I see a parallel between Ippolito's experience with second language learners who do not have a firm command of the language they are speaking and my experience talking with informants about faeries and

other nature spirits. Although I was always speaking in my native tongue of English with informants who also spoke English, we were talking about a subject that is not well defined in the culture, a subject that is full of shifting and groundless signifiers. One of the first tasks I undertook in each interview was to try as best I could to understand what the word “faery” meant to my current informant—and the word does not mean the same thing to all people. Consider other important terms in my inquiry, such as spirit and nature. Needless to say, my research involved a great deal of uncertainty, incomprehensibility, and unknowns.

According to Ippolito, “language is linked to nothing less than the creation of a shared world between the self and the other” (p. 20). I have the sense that in engaging in conversations about faeries, nature, inspiritedness, enchantment, etc., my informants and I were helping to create the very world of which we were speaking. Talking about these liminal, numinous entities; naming them; telling stories about them, all give them life.

## **RESULTS**

### **PAGANISM AS NATURE RELIGION**

“Nature” and “the natural world” were cited as important to all the people I interviewed, and either “nature” or “the Earth” are central to the belief system of each individual. One person said “I think I feel most connected with myself and with the divine when I’m really connected with nature, when I really have my feet on the ground and when I can see the stars...” Another said “Nature is important because when you get out of the concrete jungle, you’re looking at a source for inspiration, and it’s harsh too, and the greatest challenge.” When I asked the senior Druid whom I interviewed what it means to be a Druid, the first thing he said was that it’s “Earth-based.”

Most of my informants didn’t report a personal alienation from nature, but they were concerned about a general societal alienation from nature and the destruction of wild places. One said “I think that there is a sense that the man-madness of cities has cut people off though from the nature, yeah, the trees and the you know people can live their whole lives without really you know like getting into the flow of the seasons and the sun and moon and the trees and the growing.” Another said “nature for me is kind of pervasive, and I don’t feel that there’s that much of a separation or that perhaps the conventional wisdom of the last several thousand years of separating mankind from nature is valid.” One person, speaking of faeries, said, “When we lived in the natural world, we had a lot more connection with them and would work with them consciously if we could but I think in recent times there’s been quite a divergence,” indicating that this person believes that humans once lived in the natural world but that we no longer do.

The spiritual belief systems of the people I interviewed and the spiritual paths that led them to their current beliefs are each distinct but many of them do share traits. Eight of the twelve informants were raised Christian, and none of them were raised Pagan, so all the informants share a spiritual quest sort of experience that has led them to their current beliefs, which in themselves are not an endpoint but in most cases a snapshot taken mid-quest. One informant who was in his twenties told me he had “seeker’s ADD,” having explored nihilism, Wicca, yoga, meditation, New Age, gnosticism, and most recently shamanism. Spiritual identities vary from this seeker currently exploring shamanism to a Wiccan dedicant to a senior Druid in ADF (abbreviation for Ár nDraíocht Féin: A Druid Fellowship).

Most of the informants preferred not to be labeled with a particular religion or belief system. I would describe two of them as New Age based on the language they used to describe faeries, other nature spirits, and the spiritual landscape, but they did not choose to self identify as New Age. Some of the concepts they invoked that come from the New Age tradition include faery portals, astral projection, and the distinction between devas (“the strategy of nature that bring natural forces into being,” according to the informant) and faeries (“the tacticians”). Two informants, who were married to each other, said that they “basically follow a Native American path” and that they “don’t have a religion; it’s a spiritual path we’re on.” Another informant has created her own spiritual path for herself and others which she describes as “ecospiritual.” Another informant says that “I feel like my entire life is a quest for spirituality;” she’s comfortable with the label “nature religion.”



Environmentalism and the identity of environmentalist were uncomfortable or distasteful to most of the people I interviewed. When asked whether she considers herself to be an environmentalist, one informant said “I don’t personally use that word, and I don’t because it’s so political. What I believe is that I have a responsibility to the Earth, I have a responsibility to be responsible for my actions as it affects the Earth.” Another informant expressed a similar sentiment when she said “The problem is that it’s a political term” and then said she prefers to live mindfully and lightly on the Earth. The senior Druid framed the question of environmentalism by saying “the Earth is our mother, and we come from her. And if we’re gonna make her look ugly, what are we gonna look like?” He said that “with ADF...we try to be environmentally friendly with what we’re doing. Most of us recycle, most of us try to reuse.”

One informant was very conscious of the cultural meaning of the term environmentalist and why it’s problematic for her but still a somewhat apt descriptor. Similar to other informants, her discomfort with the term was with its political connotation. She said, “I consider myself kinda like a nonpolitical environmentalist...I believe in living really closely with the Earth and being as self-reliant as possible and have the lowest impact...So I guess I consider myself kind of like an old school environmentalist, before it had the word and you know the political connotation with it.”

An informant who was more comfortable using the term environment and its cognates was the one who started her own spiritual practice for herself and others. “It’s a spiritual environmental connection that I’m working on,” she said, and she reported that her spirituality and her environmentalism are “very much intertwined... the two are one.”

She said that “the environment is part of you, and if you are really serious about your spiritual path you must recognize the relationship to the environment. We are the environment.” She was instrumental in the “greening Brushwood” group, which sought to improve environmental stewardship at Brushwood Folklore Center, where the Starwood festival was held each year. She agreed with other informants that devotion to the Earth or “the environment” needn’t take the form of political activism. “Now you may not go out and chain yourself to a tree,” she explained. “That kind of action is not suitable for many of us, but merely the fact of taking your dinner scraps and putting them in a compost. Composting is a religious act. Recycling is a spiritual exercise. That is my way of thinking, and in principle many if not most Neopagans, people who profess Neopagan path, would agree with me.”

#### **FAERIES AS NATURE SPIRITS**

All of the individuals I interviewed incorporate faeries into their belief systems in some way; this was a prerequisite for their participation in this research study. Three of the informants understand faeries metaphorically. The other nine believe that faeries literally exist.

The conception of faeries is closely tied with nature for all of my informants. One described faery as “an elemental spirit, it’s a spirit of the Earth.” One of them said that “I think that they are so intimately related to the trees, the grass, the animals and things that it may be hard for us to see them as separate.” Two informants clearly stated that faeries

get their power from the Earth, one elaborating that “they’re absolutely Earth bound Earth spirits.” Another informant said that “they’re totally in touch with nature and that’s also what’s scary about them,” elaborating that engaging with faeries is “like that fantasy of reconnecting with nature but it’s dangerous, it can kill us, it can harm us, it can consume us.” An informant who was well versed in faery mythology asserted that “we see throughout the record that faeries are attached to nature and to the natural world” and that “throughout the faery record, faeries can be summoned by destroying some part of nature.”

Some informants seemed to regard faeries as a sort of indicator species for wild nature. That is, a place that is really teeming with fae is a healthy natural ecosystem whereas a dispirited place has experienced some sort of disturbance. There was a general concern among some informants that faeries are more and more scarce—because humans are carelessly developing and polluting so many places without any regard for the spiritual beings of those places. Two informants spoke of “electromagnetic pollution” caused by cell phones among other things. One explained “Our cell phones emit radiation, cell phone towers everywhere. When that kind of technology comes in, it’s very very difficult for them [faeries] to maintain their structures because it’s constantly sending energy through to disrupt it.” Another informant expressed concern that pollution is “requiring them [faeries] to move further away from us. It would be destructive if they continued to interface, and they need to with the land because quite a number of them have certain purposes for protecting different species, different ecosystems. I think at some point it’s gotta stop because it’s taking us dangerously out of balance. They are

guardians, protectors, and healers, and workers in their own right, just not necessarily of humanity, and we need other species to live, so if we wipe out their guardians and wipe out their species, what are we gonna do?”

Faeries seem to play a special role in the human-nature relationship because they are particularly attuned to humans and interacting with them, so faeries can act as a bridge between humans and non-human elements of nature, indicating to humans where in nature we are welcome and where we aren't as well as how we may use the land, water, etc. and how we should behave there. Some informants reported keeping special faery gardens, or in one case a wild corner of her property: “in my yard, which I call it an old tradition, there is one corner left wild, not touched, and my feeling is that what we call the faeries or the devas or the plant spirits will feel more comfortable there and it is there I go to talk to them, or occasionally to ask help.”

Three informants regard faeries, at least in part, as more abstract anthropomorphisms of nature elements. Conceiving of nature elements as human-like numinous creatures called faeries allows us to interact with them as if they are other people. One informant defined faery as “all of the energies of the Earth, which could be the rivers, the ocean, the metal in the Earth, the dirt in the Earth, all of that.” Another said “They're the feeling that you get out of the corners of your eyes, you know the life force, you know that all nature is sentient. And it's not, faeries are more personification for me of the awakenss of nature and our planet.”

Faeries are evident at Starwood Festival. Workshops that have been offered at Starwood in recent years include Fairy Races of the British Isles, Experiential Elemental

Faerie, *Living Between the Worlds—Working with Faerie in an Urban Setting*, *Fairy Lore in British Folk Music*, and *The Erotic World of Fairie: Sexuality In British Fairy Lore*. Recurring events include *The Annual Fabulous High Faerie Tea Party & Potluck*, *The Faerie Woods Art Project*, and *The Pixie Parade*. Places at the festival site include *The Faerie Woods*, *The Fairy Garden*, and *Pixie Pathway* (Association for Consciousness Exploration, 2009). In addition, dressing up in faery garb is common among festival attendees. Festival participants commonly wear wings, and some wear tails and/or horns or antlers.

The concept of childhood and a differentiation between childhood and adulthood frequently come up in descriptions of interaction with faery. Many of my informants reported seeing, hearing, and feeling the presence of faeries as children significantly more often than they did as adults, or in some cases, their experiences of faery occurred only in childhood. Informants believe this to be the case for a variety of reasons, including that children are more open to the faery world, faeries are less trustful of adults, and adults have taken on too much baggage from the dominant culture to be open to the experience.

One informant said “As I got older, they went away. I didn’t see them as much.” When I asked him why he thought this was the case, he said “My personal belief is they [children] don’t have the common man sensibility of ‘I’m seeing things, you really didn’t see and hear that, we don’t see those things, we don’t hear those things.’” For him, it’s a matter of cultural indoctrination about what is real and possible, a process that occurs during childhood, taking hold by the time we become adults.

Another informant reported that faeries appear especially to children because children's imaginations are more active. He reported that "I saw gnomes, for real... I was a child, I was 11 years old seeing gnomes in Spain. I really thought I was chasing this little dude running away, and he hid under this bush, and I don't know where my brain was. You know, I don't know what was happening, but I really thought I saw a gnome. And that's when I became more accepting of faeries and the folklore like that."

An informant told a story that illustrated her beliefs about the changing relationship with faeries as people move from childhood into adulthood:

When my older granddaughter was... about four or five we were walking in the woods, and I was saying to her about faeries, about spirit beings and this kind of thing, and I said 'now you really see them with your inside eyes, not much with your outside eyes, because grownups don't see faeries,' and I said 'you really can't see them,' and she said 'no Grandmother that's not right,' and she looked around, and she said 'it's ok guys, you can come out, it's just my grandmother and she's almost a kid.' It's one of the greatest compliments I ever had.... Now, at 23, I speak to her periodically, and I said 'do you still see the faeries?' And she said 'no, no I don't, and it's alright, I guess I've outgrown that.' And it makes me so sad because what she means is I've bought into the conception that they do not exist and therefore if you have no acceptance of something existing, you cannot experience it.

This informant expressed a belief that our experiences are largely determined by what we expect to experience, by what is considered possible and/or likely within a given culture. In her words, "If we don't have a concept, we don't have an acceptance of the reality of

something. We either don't see it or we don't accept what we see, which is another thing I believe that humans see a great deal more but their mind shifts it to be something else."

The same informant reported that "I think I probably did [see faeries] as a child" but she hasn't ever seen them as an adult. "I'm dreadfully earthbound," she said, "and my hope is always that that will open itself to my physical eyes, but my spiritual eyes and my heart totally accepts their being here. I don't have to see them to know they're there, but it would be nice."

One informant's experience was markedly different in that he reported that "My relationship with faeries probably started when I was in my teens... As a teen, I got very excited by mythology." This informant's relationship with faeries is almost exclusively through myths and legends, "the faery record," as he calls it, although he did report that "I have seen faces in the forest, and I know what it is, and I look the other way."

Some informants talked about the importance of what we imagine, create, or experience, regardless of whether or not it's real. An informant who makes art about faeries reported that

they've had a huge effect on me in my imagination and my creativity, in making my artwork and I do performance art so I feel like I enjoy performance art because I feel like I can really make the art real, it's in me as I'm doing it, I am the art or the other people who are participating are the artwork, so I've done pieces where we were portraying nymphs you know but you really are embodying that energy so even though I don't know if nymphs or faeries are real per se, we made it real, the energy was real, that existed when we did that, you know what I mean? It exists when I make artwork about it, portraying that thing. ... I think

whether they're real creatures or not, they're totally real in our psychology and in our everyday lives.

Another informant who is also an artist described the difference between metaphor and reality as “an Occam’s razor sort of thing.”

An informant who creates faery-themed visual art sees art as well as fantasy literature not only as modes for creating a faery reality but also as safe spaces for non-believers to become acquainted with the world of faery. In describing an event he’s been to called the “Fairy World’s Festival,” he said “since it’s fantasy they can introduce Paganish concepts to the muggle world...” He added that “I’ve noticed that with literature too, especially young adult literature, there’s a lot of delving into magickal concepts in a nonthreatening way.”

Another informant pointed out that “you go to a culture where the fae are still there—Irish, the Irish still believe that the fae are there, the elves are there, you know some of the mounds, that’s where the fae live, you don’t go there. There’s actual things that happen at some of the areas in Europe where they believe in the fae and people go out there even with video cameras and weird things happen, and there’s no way to understand what’s going on so it’s pushed directly to ‘it’s the fae, the fae made that happen.’”

One informant invoked Einstein, a respected wise man from the rational scientific tradition of our culture to support the value of the imagination. “Einstein, I will have to paraphrase because I don’t remember, once said something to the effect of: imagination is



the strongest tool that we have for progress, because when we cease imagining other possibilities, we are stuck with what we've got."

One informant described the experience with faeries that first made him believe they were real and that started him on the spiritual path that eventually led to Druidry:

I was 9 or 10, living at my grandparents house with my brother and my sister, and I was laying in my bed one night. Sometime in the middle of the night, I woke up hearing a song being sung and I woke up and I saw oh little creatures maybe this tall—can you see that?—about a foot to 18 inches tall, give or take, they were different sizes varying, different shapes, some had pointed ears or rounded ears but they had kind of the same looks about them, and they were dancing around my bed, in a circle, and the headboard of my bed was up against the wall and they were still going around my bed, and I just sat there watching them, trying to figure out what they were saying. They were singing, chanting a song, not knowing any of the chant or the words or anything, and my brother woke up who was across the hall from me, opened up his door, looked across to my room and saw these things dancing around my bed and screamed his fool head off, just got scared to death and would never come into my room ever again after that at my grandparents house.

This informant's story about faeries dancing around his bed included corroboration by his brother, who also saw the faeries, lending credence to the experience. Similar corroboration was included in the following story:

...we saw this blue light glowing at the side of the road, and I was wondering what it was and walked up to the side of the road and said "What's that?" And both of us saw two little creatures probably about two-and-a-half feet high or so and one of them I could tell you was a wizard, only because the guy that was in front of him, standing in front of the stump of the tree, poked a stick towards us

that had a sharpened end and screamed out to us in this weird voice, “Leave the Wizard Alone!!” Kinda weird, kinda strange, but it was a, it was an experience that I was like wow, and it would happen for a few minutes and then finally the wizard said something and he turned to the wizard and they disappeared. You know the blue light went out and they were gone. And the lady and I had the same experience, the next day we talked about it, and she was like that’s exactly what happened, that’s exactly what I saw, that’s what I heard, and she said I’m never talking about this again, that was too scary.

Another informant told of a visit to a large group of people by a fae creature called a “guardian”:

...suddenly out of nowhere come this gigantic force. It was huge, benign but huge, and...there was people camped and as this force passed them they woke up...and it turned and went across a bridge and over and up a hill and there was people in the sweat lodge and something stuck its head right through the canvas and into the sweat lodge and they bailed. They just whoooo and they come running to me. They said “What in the world?” And I said “What are you talking about?” They said something stuck its head and it was visible. And it was huge, and it had large elongated ears, and a big face and large teeth like a troll almost but it was not, it was benevolent, and the energy went back up the hill and went away.

Those research participants who had personal experiences with faeries were generally eager to share them. They seemed both grateful and proud to have been graced with a numinous or paranormal experience. Some informants who didn’t have personal experiences to share seemed genuinely disappointed and even forlorn that they weren’t fortunate enough to experience faeries directly. There was a sense that an interaction with

faeries is a gift as well as proof that the person having the experience is both connected to the earth and open to the universe, hence the sense of pride in experiencing faery.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Imagination, Play, and Multiple Realities**

Treatments of the imagination are scarce within academic discourse. This is primarily because the primacy of positivist science in the current Western tradition marginalizes any subject that cannot be studied by way of a testable hypothesis. However, despite the impossibility of subjecting it to scientific study, imagination persists as an undeniable phenomenon, unexplainable though it may be, and it is unequivocally celebrated by some groups, admittedly on the fringes of Western culture.

Imagination was generally celebrated by my informants, especially in the context of how the act of imagining can either create reality or can act as a precursor to the manifestation of reality. One informant said “anything you can imagine, you can create or you can cause to happen.” Another informant said that faeries have “had a huge effect on me in my imagination...” and then spoke about how “whether they’re real creatures or not, they’re totally real in our psychology and in our everyday lives.”

According to Edward Casey (1976), “‘real’ is meant having a determinate and intersubjectively ascertainable status within an enduring spatio-temporal framework” (p. 82). Some of the experiences with faeries described by my informants were intersubjectively ascertainable, that is they were experienced by more than one person. Although I never asked whether others shared the experience, this information was offered, probably to lend credence to the experience, to make me believe that it was real. The experiences still may not be considered real by Casey’s definition because the spatio-

temporal framework of the encounter in most cases would not be described as enduring; most experiences were fleeting. This is true for the story about the faeries dancing around the bed, the wizards by the side of the road, and the “guardian” in the sweat lodge. In all three of these stories, the extraordinary experience of witnessing fae creatures is made more believable or more real because more than one person shared the same experience. This constitutes Casey’s intersubjective ascertainability. However, in all instances, the spirits appeared briefly and were then gone, so the spatio-temporal framework of the experience was not enduring. For this reason, these experiences don’t fit into Casey’s definition of reality despite the intersubjective ascertainability that does make them seem *more* real than they otherwise would.

One informant reasoned that children probably experience faeries more often than do adults because their imaginations are more active. Richard Louv (2008) writes that children have spiritual, mystical, transcendent experiences in nature, perhaps more than adults in our culture (pp. 293-294). This leads me to think that children probably use play for spiritual exploration as well as lighthearted silliness. Perhaps the ability of play to elevate human experience to the sacred is there for all people of all ages but has been repressed in the dominant Western paradigm. The only play that is acceptable in our culture is “child’s play,” which is insignificant, light, silly, and of course only for children.

Johan Huizinga’s (1955) “play-festival-rite complex,” which he introduced as a phenomenon of the Middle Ages that no longer exists, seemed alive and well at Starwood Festival. The entire week was a celebration full of imaginative play including role

playing, dressing in costume, reenacting myths and legends, and taking on the identities of other-than-human archetypes like animals, faeries, and gods. Huizinga's observation that "in play, we may move below the level of the serious, as the child does; but we can also move above it—in the realm of the beautiful and the sacred" (p. 17) is evident at Starwood Festival, where play serves both purposes. Adults do play as children in this festival community, being silly and imaginative. They also role-play during rituals, bringing the play experience beyond the mundane and into a sacred realm.

The people whom I interviewed generally understood reality to be multiple, malleable, and/or participatory. This supports Tanya Luhrmann's (1989) finding that reality is understood to be subjective and malleable for Pagans (p. 342), with each person experiencing the world and creating their own personal reality that may be related to the multiple realities experienced by others but is not exactly the same for any two people. One of my informants referred to "the consensual reality in which we're living" and spoke of "our own power to co-create reality." She said that "anything you can imagine, you can create or you can cause to happen." The same informant also mentioned in passing that many different accounts of events can be true "because we experience life differently," referring to the concept that reality is a lived experience and therefore different for each individual as opposed to there being one true and fixed reality. Another informant said that "people invent what they would like reality to be." Another informant put it this way: "When you believe something is true it is, and when enough people believe it, it becomes a reality."

As explained by Peter Rojcewicz (1991), what we understand to be reality is largely influenced by our particular “cultural map,” which predetermines what is possible and probable within a given culture (p. 495). When several of my informants spoke about the existence of faeries, the ideas they expressed were very similar to Rojcewicz’s “cultural map” concept. One informant expressed this articulately when she said, “If we don’t have a concept, we don’t have an acceptance of the reality of something. We either don’t see it or we don’t accept what we see.” The same informant went on to say that “I believe that humans see a great deal more but their mind shifts it to be something else.” This is interesting because many people in the dominant Western culture would say that perhaps they thought they saw something unusual in the woods, but it was “just my mind playing tricks on me.” This informant turns this idea on its head, suggesting that perhaps there are unusual things that we don’t “see,” essentially because our minds are playing tricks on us, because our cultural map does not incorporate the possibility of unusual things in the woods.

The cultural map concept is essentially the reason cited by several informants for why faeries are so much more often seen and experienced by children in our culture. One informant told me about her granddaughter, who saw faeries as a child but reported to her grandmother when she was 23 that she no longer saw them. She said “I guess I’ve outgrown that.” The informant interpreted her granddaughter’s experience this way: “what she means is I’ve bought into the conception that they do not exist and therefore if you have no acceptance of something existing, you cannot experience it.” In other words, faeries are not a part of our cultural map, so children who are not yet entirely

indoctrinated in the culture are able to see them but adults cannot see faeries because their psyches are so enmeshed with the cultural map. Another informant expressed a similar idea when explaining why he thinks that children see faeries: “My personal belief is they don’t have the common man sensibility of ‘I’m seeing things, you really didn’t see and hear that, we don’t see those things, we don’t hear those things.’” This informant’s “common man sensibility” is another way to express the concept of a cultural map, as used by Peter Rojcewicz.

The cultural map concept is further supported by the observation that faeries are believed to exist within some cultures but not within others. The existence of faeries is accepted within the subculture of Neopaganism in the United States. Faeries are also included in some cultural maps elsewhere in the world. An informant mentioned Ireland: “you go to a culture where the fae are still there—Irish, the Irish still believe that the fae are there, the elves are there, you know some of the mounds, that’s where the fae live...” He went on to say that when unusual things happen in that culture, people believe “it’s the fae, the fae made that happen.”

### **Consciousness Studies, Transpersonal Psychology, and Ecopsychology**

The concept of human consciousness is ubiquitous at Starwood Festival. People at this gathering think and talk about consciousness a fair amount. In fact, Starwood Festival is organized by the Association for Consciousness Exploration. Most people in this community, including those whom I interviewed, consider human consciousness to be malleable and expandable. The Buddhist belief that individuals can gain awareness or



consciousness is shared by many members of the Pagan community in which I conducted my research on faeries.

There is an understanding that some individuals are more open than others to the faery world and other realms—and an understanding that just because one does not personally experience faery does not mean it's not there. Along with the belief that consciousness can be expanded, many people also experience the loss of certain levels of consciousness as they move from childhood into adulthood. Richard Louv (2008), in his book *Last Child in the Woods*, pointed out that children have very spiritual, mystical experiences, perhaps more than adults (pp. 293-294). This notion is supported by the experiences of my informants, who generally reported more interactions with faeries as children than as adults, in some cases having interacted with faeries as children but not at all as adults.

Many people at Starwood also believe that consciousness is not relegated solely to human beings. There is a strong current of animism running through the belief systems of many festival participants. Individual animals and plants are often considered to be conscious beings, and in some cases nature more generally and/or the Earth as a whole is thought to have consciousness. One of my informants said that “all nature is sentient” and that “faeries are more personification for me of the awakenss of nature and our planet.” The various ways in which my informants understand consciousness to exist apart from and/or beyond individual human beings are all expressions of a worldview consistent with transpersonal psychology. All the people with whom I spoke consider faeries to be

conscious beings, and faeries are always associated with nature, so faeries represent one way in which nature is understood to have consciousness.

On one level, faeries are anthropomorphisms of wild nature. When faeries take human-like forms, they provide a means for humans to interact with nature in a more direct, tangible way. Believing in creatures that are human-like in some way but are not actually human and that are representative of non-human nature makes it possible to relate to aspects of nature or the idea of nature as a whole in a way that is similar to relationships with other human beings. Faeries generally are happy and feel welcome in wild natural settings, and they feel sad, scared, and unwelcome in disturbed landscapes. In this way, belief in faeries coupled with the human capacity for empathy, results in an understanding that wild natural places are important and worthy of protection while disturbed or developed places are undesirable and generally to be limited. When faeries are understood as anthropomorphisms of wild nature, they can serve as a psychological impetus for more ecologically sensitive worldviews and behaviors.

The present inquiry into the impact that belief in faeries has on the human-nature relationship is a matter of psychology. The question is not whether faeries exist or what form they take but rather whether individual human beings and/or groups of human beings believe that faeries exist and the meanings that those people attribute to faeries in their own thought processes and worldviews. The people whom I interviewed all have psychological understandings of the world that incorporate belief in faeries as part of the mythos that gives meaning to their lives and their surroundings. In all accounts, faeries are spiritual beings that are closely aligned with nature, so faeries bridge the divide

between the psychological and the ecological. This is why ecopsychology is such an apt lens for examining faery faith as a component of the human-nature relationship for believers.

The core tenets of ecopsychology were expressed repeatedly during interviews with my informants. One said “I think I feel most connected with myself and with the divine when I’m really connected with nature, when I really have my feet on the ground and when I can see the stars.” The informant who has consciously created her own spiritual practice for herself and others expressed her ecopsychological proclivities when she said that “It’s a spiritual environmental connection that I’m working on,” and then went on to explain that her spirituality and her environmentalism are “very much intertwined... the two are one.” She made plain her ecopsychological understanding of the human-nature relationship when she said “the environment is part of you, and if you are really serious about your spiritual path you must recognize the relationship to the environment. We are the environment.” She asserted that “composting is a religious act; recycling is a spiritual exercise.” The senior Druid said that “the Earth is our mother, and we come from her. And if we’re gonna make her look ugly, what are we gonna look like?” The understanding of the Earth as a mother figure, of the entire planet as a personified divine being, conflates the wellbeing of the planet with the wellbeing of humans, making this belief system compatible with an ecopsychological framework.

### **Enchantment, Disenchantment, and Re-Enchantment**

Belief in faeries is one way for nature to be understood as enchanted. Natural

places become full of magical spirits who occupy space in our Earthly world as well as in other realms. Some informants indicated that just as natural places are inspirited with faeries, very developed or unnatural places are generally dispirited and faeries are scarce or nonexistent. Informants were concerned that human beings are not leaving enough terrain in a natural state for the faeries and that we are losing touch with these spirits and the benefits they provide to the ecosystems and species with which they have affinities. The belief is that there is a symbiotic relationship between faeries and natural communities, ecosystems, and/or species with which they have affinities. When natural communities are disturbed or destroyed, the faeries disappear. Likewise without faeries, natural communities suffer, so a positive feedback can develop, leading larger and larger swaths of the Earth to disenchanting and unnatural states. This is a true concern for some informants.

Some informants subscribe to the notion that there was a time that has past when nature was enchanted. “Separating mankind from nature” and “the man-madeness of cities” were cited as modern-day problems that have negatively impacted the human-nature relationship and the impact that humans have had on the natural world. One informant referred to a time “when we lived in the natural world” and indicated that we were more connected with faeries at that time. This indicates that this informant believes that we no longer live in the natural world.

The “play-festival-rite complex,” as described by Johann Huizinga (1955), was a cultural phenomenon of the Middle Ages (p. 17). This period of time was characterized by significantly more enchantment than the present, at least within the dominant Western

culture. However, the “play-festival-rite complex” framework seems a very close fit with the behavior observed today in the Pagan festival community, suggesting that modern-day Pagan festivals are serving as agents of re-enchantment.

Information gleaned from my informants about their belief systems and spiritual paths corroborates Christopher Partridge’s (2004) observation that there is a general movement away from organized religion and toward an ongoing spiritual quest (pp. 46-48). None of the research participants were raised Pagan, and they are all exploring Paganism at least in a broad sense at this point in their lives. Most of them prefer to avoid labels for their religions or belief systems, and some spoke overtly of being on a “spiritual path” or “quest.”

Faith in faeries can be understood as a re-enchanting element in the modern quest for spirituality. People who believe in faeries experience the natural world as inspirited and enchanted. Most modern-day monotheistic world religions are marked by an abstract conception of one true God who is removed from Earthly experience, thereby disenchanting life here on Earth. Participation in these organized religions is on the decline. However, much of the movement away from religion seems to be headed toward rational science and a conception of the natural world that is understood in more mechanical terms. The belief systems observed in the North American Pagan community that incorporate faeries are heading almost in the opposite direction, toward magic and spirit, a movement that is decidedly much less prominent than is the cultural investment in science as the way of knowing the Earth and our place in it.

Despite the prominence of science in modern understandings of the natural world, Richard Louv (2008) asserts that people are more motivated by spiritual beliefs than they are by utilitarian or science-based arguments when it comes to changing behavior in favor of the environment (p. 304). Louv also observes that “many scientists argue that the practice and teaching of science must rediscover or acknowledge the mystery of nature, and therefore its spiritual aspect” (p. 303). Louv’s prediction is that “the coming decades will be a pivotal time in Western thought and faith. For students, a greater emphasis on spiritual context could stimulate a renewed sense of awe for the mysteries of nature and science” (p. 304).

A reconnection of people with nature would likely incorporate a “renewed sense of awe for the mysteries of nature and science”—in other words, a re-enchantment of nature in the popular consciousness. There is some effort toward connecting science and spirituality to find resonance and a belief system that incorporates both, but this seems an even weaker stream than the one moving generally away from rationalist science and toward a magical or enchanted understanding of life on Earth.

## CONCLUSIONS

The research I conducted at the 2009 Starwood Festival is essentially an exploration of faery faith, a belief system that anthropomorphizes and recognizes sentience in wild nature. Insofar as ecopsychology conflates the wellbeing of individual human beings with the wellbeing of the Earth, and faeries are manifestations and/or representatives of nature, faery faith is ecopsychological. Faeries provide a more tangible, less abstract, way for believers to understand and co-create a healthy and mutually beneficial human-(in)-nature relationship.

The Pagan belief system engenders a fundamentally different relationship between humans and nature than do the more dominant belief systems in the West, including those of the Abrahamic religions as well as those based on scientific rationalism. Paganism places human beings within the natural world as one species among many, all of whom have inherent worth and significance apart from what they may or may not provide to human beings. This contrasts with a more special placement of human beings as separate from the rest of nature, with greater worth, responsibility, and privilege than other species.

Even in the context of widely-accepted Darwinian evolutionism, while people understand that *Homo sapiens* is one species of many on the planet Earth, the dominant socio-cultural construct still provides a special placement for our species, sometimes in a category separate from “nature.” Some people in our culture who claim to believe in evolution (i.e. as opposed to creationism) actually see *Homo sapiens* as a culmination of the evolutionary process, though this clearly stems from a misunderstanding of evolution.

Another common belief is that human beings are vastly different from any other creatures on the planet because of a perception that we have powers of reason and creation that all other creatures lack. These beliefs held by many members of our culture are significant in determining our collective understanding of how humans fit with the rest of nature.

Most Pagans view nature not only as important and worthy but also as alive, inspirited, and even conscious. Belief in faeries is one manifestation of this understanding of nature as having spirit and sentience. Holding the belief that humans are a part of the living, conscious, “sensuous life-world,” to use David Abram’s (1996, p. 154) language, means that consideration of the impact of one’s choices on the wellbeing of other creatures and wild nature as a whole is ingrained in one’s worldview and daily habits. Nature is an outward extension of the self, so caring for nature is caring for the self.

The people whom I interviewed, all of whom believe in faeries, expressed concern about a general alienation between human beings and nature in the dominant culture, but none of them reported feeling alienated from nature themselves. They all claimed to feel closely aligned with and connected to nature. Their perception was of a relatively healthy relationship between themselves and nature in contrast to a perceived dysfunctional relationship between people and nature in the dominant culture. It’s not possible to say that these people feel closer to nature because they believe in faeries, nor vice versa, but it is significant that the two phenomena co-occur.

I was surprised in conducting this research to find that most of my informants did not identify as environmentalist and had trouble with that identity. This discomfort with environmentalism is clearly not shared by all Pagans, as evidenced by “A Pagan



Community Statement on the Environment,” published online at [www.ecopagan.com](http://www.ecopagan.com) on Earth Day (April 22) 2015. The statement is an overt effort by some prominent members of the Pagan community to create a unified Pagan front in addressing environmental concerns.

It is notable that the statement excludes reference to gods, goddesses, faeries, or spirits. In defining Paganism, it does say that “Paganism includes polytheistic and pantheistic nature-worshipping religions, and often includes deities of all genders, ancestor veneration, and celebrations in tune with our Earth,” but the rest of the statement only mentions spirit in very abstract terms, alluding to pantheism in just one instance. Most of the language is focused on science and on the human-nature relationship (Halstead et al., 2015). If I were to read the statement without knowing the title or the source, I would say that it takes a spiritual humanist perspective.

I believe that the scientific bent of the statement and inclusion of only abstract references to spirit make it more palatable to a wider audience. It is clear that Paganism and environmentalism are close allies in building a more sustainable future for the planet. It’s as if the two groups speak different languages, and “A Pagan Community Statement on the Environment” is a valiant attempt to appeal to both Pagans and environmentalists at once, to identify common ground and common cause. The human-nature relationship seems to be a comfortable framework for Pagans as well as environmentalists, and of course it speaks to those who identify as Pagan environmentalist.

My research demonstrates that engagement with faeries is clearly a component of the relationships that believers have with nature. Furthermore, the belief that nature is

enchanted and alive with conscious beings called faeries makes for a human-nature relationship that is experienced as more intimate than the human-nature relationship that exists in the dominant culture. Personification of Earth elementals and aspects of wild nature within faery faith similarly creates a possibility for intimacy between humans and nature that does not exist within the dominant Western paradigm.

Faery faith provides an element of enchantment within Paganism and points to the role that Paganism is playing in re-enchanting the natural world for the growing membership of this broadly-defined spiritual path or faith system. My observation that the play-festival-rite complex, a cultural phenomenon of the Middle Ages described by Johan Huizinga (1955, p. 31), is alive and well at Starwood Festival further supports the idea that Paganism is a force for re-enchantment in our modern world. For Pagans, nature is enchanted and inspirited, and as members of the human species on planet Earth, our lives are also enchanted and inspirited.

The genuine belief in faeries among members of the American Pagan subculture supports the validity of Peter Rojcewicz's (1991) "cultural map" concept (p. 495). Within the cultural map of the dominant Western culture, the existence of faeries is generally not considered possible, though the idea that nature may be inspirited is afforded some degree of possibility for many people. Within the cultural map of the Pagan subculture, the premise that nature could be devoid of spirit is not considered possible, and there is room on the map for the existence of faeries. Reality for members of the American Pagan subculture includes an inspirited world that for many is populated by faeries.

My research does not indicate how widespread faery faith is among Pagans in North America, nor even at Starwood Festival, where the research was conducted. Participant observation gave me the sense that this belief is widely held in the festival community, but data were not collected to determine how many people at the festival believe in faeries. Interviewees were chosen in part because they engaged in some way with faeries, so the fact that all the people whom I interviewed believe in some manifestation of faeries is not an indicator of the prevalence of this belief. Because the research population was limited to Starwood Festival, there is no indication of the geographical prevalence of faery faith nor the relative prevalence within specific traditions that fall under the Pagan umbrella. My research also didn't explore other common Pagan beliefs, such as faith in more distinct divinities like gods and goddesses, and it only explored more pantheist beliefs tangentially. Faith in nature-based gods and goddesses and pantheist beliefs also certainly affect the relationships that practitioners have with the natural world. Further research into the prevalence of faery faith and the effects of beliefs other than faery faith on the human-nature relationship would be illuminating.

A few years of observation at Starwood Festival revealed that many individuals who identify as Pagan (or Wiccan, Druid, animist, or another of the identities that fall under the Pagan umbrella) include in their spiritual practice engagement with faeries or other nature spirits. The individuals whom I interviewed all believe that spiritual entities known as faeries, among other names, are members of our enchanted world, and most of them report personal interactions with faeries. My research illuminates how engagement

with faeries both reflects and informs the Pagan worldview and conception of nature. For Pagans, the Earth and all of its inhabitants and elements are inspirited, and faeries are a part of that enchanted reality for many practitioners. Drawing on theories of enchantment, consciousness, multiple realities, imagination, and play, my interpretations of the stories of my informants contribute additional perspective to the contemporary practice of Paganism as a small but growing countercultural movement within the dominant Western culture, particularly as it informs the human-(in)-nature relationship.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

These are questions that might possibly be asked of informants, but they will not all be asked of every informant. Each interview will be formed by the conversation that develops and the particular experiences and interests of the informant.

#### **Starwood**

How many years have you been attending Starwood Festival?

Have you attended any other similar gatherings?

What attracts you to Starwood?

How did you get to Starwood this year? How long did it take you?

#### **Spiritual Path**

What was your parents' belief system when you were growing up?

On a scale of 1-10, what was your personal faith in the belief system you were raised with?

How would you describe your belief system today?

Can you tell me a bit about your spiritual path? How did you arrive at your current beliefs?

How would you define "spirit"?

## **Faeries**

Do you believe any non-human beings have spirit?... Who or what has spirit?

How would you describe “faeries”?

What has your experience been with faeries or other nature spirits?

Can you tell me a story about a particular interaction with a nature spirit or faery?

## **Nature**

When I say the word “nature,” what comes to mind?

What experiences have you had with nature?

Tell me about a particularly powerful experience you had in nature.

Have you ever had a spiritual experience associated with a certain place? Tell me about  
the place.

Do you think your experiences in nature have affected your belief system?

## **Environmentalism**

Do you consider yourself to be an environmentalist?

Is there a connection between your environmentalism and your spiritual beliefs?

Were you an environmentalist first or a [Pagan/Wiccan/Druid/etc.]?

How do you express your environmentalism in your life?

Are you an environmental activist? Tell me about some of the actions you’ve taken part  
in.

## **Lifestyle**

Would you describe your current living environment as rural, suburban, or urban?

Did you also grow up in a [rural/suburban/urban] setting?

What car do you drive? About how many miles do you drive per week?

How often do you eat meat?

Do you seek out organic food? About how much of your food is organic?

How much more are you willing to pay for an organic food item as compared to a  
conventional equivalent?

Do you seek out local food? About how much of your food is local?

How much more are you willing to pay for a local food item?

Do you personally know any of the farmers who raise your food?

Do you consider packaging when making purchases?

How does concern for the Earth affect your daily life?



## INFORMED CONSENT

**Title of Research Project:** How Does Engagement With Faeries Affect the Human-Nature Relationship Among Pagan Festival Attendees?

**Principal Investigator:** Sarah Goodrich

**Faculty Sponsor:** Adrian Ivakhiv

You are being invited to take part in this research study because you are a Starwood Festival attendee who engages with faeries or other nature spirits in some way. I am conducting this research as a Master of Science candidate at the University of Vermont. The degree I am seeking is in Natural Resources with a concentration in Environmental Thought and Culture. We encourage you to ask questions and take the opportunity to discuss the study with anybody you think can help you decide whether to participate.

### Why is This Research Study Being Conducted?

I am interested in exploring the spiritual connection that people have with nature in the context of a dominant culture that has largely lost that connection. Engagement with faeries or other nature spirits may be one way that people connect with nature.

### How Many People Will Take Part In The Study?

12-18 interviews will be conducted.

### What Is Involved In The Study?

I will interview you for 30-60 minutes about your beliefs, thoughts, and feelings regarding spirituality, nature, faeries and other nature spirits, and lifestyle. The interview will be recorded so that I can use the transcribed text in writing my thesis, but the audio recording of the interview will not be published.

### What Are The Risks and Discomforts Of The Study?

There are virtually no risks or discomforts involved in this study.

### What Are The Benefits of Participating In The Study?

The only benefit involved in this study is the chance to engage in a fascinating conversation and to be part of an interesting research project.

### What Other Options Are There?

Your options are endless. Your destiny is yours.

### Are There Any Costs?

There are no costs associated with participating in this study.

### What Is the Compensation?

There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Can You Withdraw or Be Withdrawn From This Study?

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you may discontinue your participation at any time.

What About Confidentiality?

Your identity will be kept separate from the interview material and pseudonyms will be used in the published manuscript to insure your confidentiality.

Contact Information

Should you have any further questions about the research, you may contact Sarah Goodrich, the investigator conducting this study, at the address and telephone number below. Should you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research project, you may contact Nancy Stalnaker, the Director of the Research Protections Office at the University of Vermont at 802-656-5040.

Statement of Consent

You have been given and have read, or have had read to you, a summary of this research study. You agree to participate in this study and you understand that you will receive a signed copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Subject

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Subject Printed

This form is valid only if the Committees on Human Research's current stamp of approval is shown below.
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\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Principal Investigator or Designee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Principal Investigator or Designee Printed

**Name of Principal Investigator:** Sarah Goodrich

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