# The Experience of Wiccan Counsellors: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of the West of England, Bristol for the degree of Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology**

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**August 2020**

**Word Count: 35,337**

**With grateful thanks to:**

**my parents;**
**my initiators and teachers in both Wicca and psychotherapy;**
**my participants;**
**and my supervisors.**

## Abstract

This research examines the experience of Wiccan counsellors through interpretive phenomenological analysis (Smith et al 2009). Five Wiccans, whose professional accreditation would enable them to deliver some form of 'talking therapy' within the UK National Health Service, were interviewed in a semi structured format intended to capture participants' experience as therapists and Wiccans. Emergent themes were: **Developmental Spiritual Quest**, which contained two subordinate themes; **Transformative Mystical Experience** and, in the case of the three female participants **Spiritual Emancipation as Women**. Secondly, **Perception of Self as Outsider** in that most participants saw themselves as eccentric to the mainstream. **Weighting Experience over Rationalism** addressed how most of the participants described reality. Fourthly, **Balancing Spiritual Identity with Professional Role** in that all participants worked to balance authenticity with understandings of 'professionalism' as articulated within clinical healthcare discourse. **Spiritual Life Supports Work as Therapist** reflected the sense that participant's spiritual lives supported their clinical work. Employing Zinnbauer and Pargament's (2000) framework describing religion and psychotherapy it was found that no participant adopted an exclusivist approach, rather they adopted either pluralistic or constructivist perspectives. A shared concern for self-development unified counselling and Wicca as different aspects of the same project, and participants were drawn to psychological models that included spirituality as a means of holding their dual roles, particularly Jungian analytical psychology. This was notable as many writers adopting an analytic perspective have construed 'oceanic' mystical experiences, in which the self is perceived to merge with a larger whole, as regressive (Neumann, 1954; Faber, 1993; Tacy, 2001). Experiences of this type, however, were of particular significance for the participants, who described them in terms of accepting their own mortality, and supporting the self-development that they saw as supporting their work with clients.

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# Chapter 1
# INTRODUCTION

This research considers the question ‘How do people make sense of the experience of being a Wiccan counsellor?’ through employing the method of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith et al 2009). IPA was regarded as especially apposite given its emphasis on examining the meaning that people ascribe to their experience. Prior to the advent of psychoanalysis, formally seeking to relieve mental distress through talking would likely have been conducted in a religious context, such as through confession within Catholicism. When Freud began the practice of psychotherapy, he adopted a materialist stance, dismissing religion as a cultural neurosis (Freud, 1913; Freud et al 1963) and Novis-Deutsch (2015) cites a letter between Freud and his analytic student the pastor Oskar Pfister.

> *“That you are such a convinced analyst and, at the same time, a clerical gentleman, ranks among the contradictions that make life so interesting.”*
>
> (Freud and Pfister, 1963, p. 142).

The majority of influential subsequent schools of therapy such as behavioural (Skinner, 1971) humanistic (Rogers, 1967; Maslow, 1968), cognitive behavioural (Beck, 1975), and systemic (Capra and Luisi, 2014,) have similarly rested upon secular foundations. However, the presence of the religious and the spiritual have never left the field; for example, in transpersonal approaches to psychotherapy (Assagioli, 1975; Rowan, 1993) and Christian counselling (Thorne, 1998). This research aims to explore how therapists, who are also part of the Pagan religion of Wicca, make sense of holding these dual roles of counsellor and spiritual adherent.

Whilst the interplay between client and therapist's’ spiritual beliefs can form an important part of the therapeutic relationship, for example through perceived similarity or dissimilarity, or therapist disclosure (Keeling et al, 2010), the amount of research directly examining the experience of psychotherapists or counsellors who also hold a Pagan religious identity has been small.

In the UK an unpublished master's dissertation (Seymour, 1998) has examined whether there existed a perceived need for a Pagan version of counselling among both Pagan therapists and clients through the use of a mixed methods qualitative design employing both questionnaire responses and interviews. Friedman (2012) has more recently examined the experience of Wiccans fulfilling the role of therapist in America with a focus on the ethical implications of assuming dual roles. Crowley (2018) examined responses to a questionnaire assessing Pagan experiences of counselling and psychotherapy in the United Kingdom, as well as an earlier questionnaire on Pagan identity, concluding that negative attitudes and lack of knowledge potentially impacted therapeutic relationships which included Pagans, whether as clients or therapists. All three of these papers have been written from an insider perspective, i.e. all writers identified themselves as Wiccan.

The majority of research studies examining the religion of Wicca, or Paganism generally, have hitherto been conducted from within the fields of sociology and anthropology with ethnographic approaches representing the most commonly used research method, for example Luhrmann (1989), Pearson (2001) and Harrington (2002). Harrington (2004) has argued that the perspectives and methodologies of Psychology could potentially benefit the emerging field of Pagan Studies and research of this type has increasingly seen publication, for example Williams et al (2012) and Farias et al (2013).

In seeking to examine the research which has been conducted around how religious therapists make sense of their experience it must be acknowledged that the term ‘religion’ denotes a very wide range of belief and practice. This is of particular relevance given that some aspects of religion, such as the Buddhist practise of mindfulness meditation, are now embraced by the therapeutic establishment (Didonna, 2009) while others, such as promoting a view that homosexuality is ‘wrong’, are regarded as antithetical to ethical practice (British Psychological Society, 2009). Whether a meaningful distinction can be drawn between psychotherapy and counselling has been debated (Jacobs, 1996; Thorne, 1999); one way to discriminate between them may be that psychotherapy places more emphasis on the use of a model of personality to effect change while the word counselling is most commonly associated with the person-centred approach of Carl Rogers (1957).

**Wicca**

Wicca is a form of Paganism, which became prominent during the 1950s as an initiatory religion in the United Kingdom, has been deeply influential on Paganism as a whole, and includes a number of offshoots. Probably the largest group of people who might describe themselves as Wiccan today are ‘solitary’, having been influenced by books such as Wicca for the Solitary Practitioner (Cunningham, 1988) and Buckland’s Complete Book of Witchcraft (Buckland, 1986); through choice or necessity they work alone choosing a ritual of self-dedication over initiation. Members of the earlier initiatory groups often, and sometimes fiercely, maintain that Wicca is only a term legitimately claimed within their membership (Doyle White, 2016). Another form has been Feminist Wicca, a more politically involved expression of spiritually which emerged in the United States during the 1970s, and the subsequent founding of Dianic Wicca (Budapest, 1989) which focuses on the worship of a Goddess rather than God and Goddess together.

Generally speaking, however, Wicca centres on the veneration of two primary divine forms. Firstly, a triple Goddess associated with the waxing, full and waning phases of the moon in the forms of Maiden, Mother and Crone. Secondly a masculine solar deity, the Horned God, who is born on midwinter’s day and grows to adulthood before being cut down with the harvest so that his blood may regenerate the earth; thereby fulfilling the aspects of child, lover and eventually sacrifice to the Goddess as the cycle of the year progresses. Wiccans tend to believe that the Goddess and God have many names and may therefore work with different pantheons and images of the divine; with Celtic, Norse, Egyptian and Hellenic deities often being chosen.

While many practitioners follow a solitary or eclectic path some seek initiation into British Traditional Wicca (BTW) or another line of initiatory witchcraft. This firstly entails finding a coven, then meeting the existing members, all of whom must agree the prospective member is a ‘good fit’ and they can work with them. After this the seeker may start a probationary training period of at least a symbolic ‘year and a day’ before being initiated into the coven as a member. This process is experienced differently for everyone as even groups in the same tradition can vary in their expectations and mode of work but certainly by the time a person is initiated they have engaged in a protracted period of study and effort.

It should also be noted that, since the idea of Wicca has entered into the mainstream, for example featuring in TV shows such as Buffy the Vampire Slayer, and Charmed, it has spawned a market for books in which the idea of a spiritual path features less prominently and which may have little in common with the practise of Wicca as understood within older traditions. Crowley (2002) cites Hardie (2001) and Horne (2001) as examples, writing:

> *"For these writers, witchcraft is a part of 'girl power' - a must for young female teens and twenty-somethings that nestles comfortably on the bookshelf alongside diet books and fashion makeovers as a manifestation of popular culture."*
>
> (Crowley, 2002 p 9.)

The participants in this research have been recruited from what has become known as British Traditional Wicca and the interviewees described themselves as Alexandrian, Gardnerian, or both; which is to say that they traced their line of initiation to Alex Sanders or Gerald Gardner, both of whom were prominent figures in the development of Wicca in the United Kingdom (Pearson, 2007). Wicca has often been described as a religion of shared ritual rather than shared belief and individual witches may vary widely in their metaphysical perspectives. Hutton (1999) observes that, based on the twenty one BTW groups in which he conducted field research, theological beliefs including monotheism, polytheism, animism and pantheism through to atheism (in which the Gods are considered to represent psychological archetypes rather than spiritual entities) may be found coexisting harmoniously within the same coven.

Wicca is sometimes referred to as The Craft, a term both suggesting the word witchcraft as well as the influence of Free Masonry; another craft organisation with three degrees of initiation (Hutton, 1999). Following initiation into BTW the witch is considered a priest or priestess of the Gods. Having taken the second degree of initiation, however, they take the title of High Priest/Priestess and are able to initiate others. Despite this Wiccans more commonly use the terms 'High Priest (HP) and High Priestess (HPs) to refer specifically to the leaders of a coven. Many Wiccans

are not open, or ‘out’, regarding their religious affiliation and the act of publicly owning one’s identity as a witch is often referred to as ‘Coming out of the broom closet’.

British Traditional Wicca incorporates elements of fertility religion, initiatory mystery tradition and witchcraft, in which the changing seasons and phases of the moon are marked though ritual celebration. There is an emphasis placed on the personal development of the adherent both marked though, and catalysed by, their progression through three degrees of initiation. Wiccans meet in small informal groups (covens) which typically, although not invariably, work naked (skyclad). Ritual practice varies but typically includes the ritual of ‘Drawing Down the Moon’ in which a priestess is invoked as the goddess and addresses the coven on Her behalf, either reciting or speaking spontaneously. Another central ritual is that of ‘The Great Rite’ in which a priest and priestess enact the union between the God and Goddess; most often this is performed symbolically ‘in token’ through the pacing of a ritual knife into a chalice of wine; however it is also possible for the other members of the coven to withdraw so that the union may be enacted ‘in true’, which is to say sexually between priest and priestess (Wagner, 2008). The inclusion of an erotic element within Wicca gave rise to much sensationalism and misrepresentation in the popular press of the United Kingdom in the 1960s (Valiente, 1989). Pearson (2005), Wagner (2008), and Aburrow (2014) offer more balanced considerations of the role of sexuality in Wicca, with Aburrow additionally seeking to explore contemporary craft dialogues around inclusivity.

**Magic and Magick**

Wicca can include such activities as spells and divination; in this respect it is hardly unique as a religion. In the context of modern western society, however, the practise of magic is sufficiently atypical to demand some consideration. An archaic spelling, ‘magick’ was proposed by the occultist Aleister Crowley in 1924 (Hutton, 1999; Crowley, 1991) as a means of distinguishing the occult from stage conjuring. While this spelling is not universally adopted within Wicca it is generally known and most witches would be familiar with it. Here, I have adhered to the more common spelling ‘magic’ unless referring to works in which the author adopts the additional ‘k’ themselves.

Pearson (2007) writes that Wiccans often consider magic in terms of Aleister Crowley's definition of 'The science and art of causing change to occur in conformity with Will' (Crowley, 1991 p.XII), or that ascribed to Dion Fortune 'The art and science of causing changes in consciousness according to the will' before identifying three strands of magic as existing within BTW Wiccan practice: 'goal focused 'everyday' witchcraft, aspects of 'high' ceremonial magic, and that of 'spiritual alchemy' which takes inner transformation as its goal. This internal transformation describes what is known as The Great Work, a term common in the western esoteric tradition, and found in such writings such as those of Elphis Levi (1896). It denotes a path of self-development which inherently includes a spiritual attainment; while this has been described as the philosopher's stone in some writings, and has also been conflated with enlightenment in various later works. Pearson (2011) has described The Great Work as "…the very transmutation of the Self, central to Wicca as an initiatory system." p369. High magic refers to the forms of magical practices found within occult orders such as The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, which draw on complex systems of correspondences and elaborate ceremonial rituals. In contrast 'everyday' witchcraft is used to denote simpler charms with practical applications and a generally more rustic tone.

Writing from the perspective of psychology, Subbotsky (2011) draws on past work by writers as Frazer (1890) and Tambiah (1990), to describe magic as an act which breaks physical causality in one of four ways, either: changing the physical world through consciousness; causing an inanimate object to act with apparent life; causing a violation of the laws of physics; or through creating a 'sympathetic' nonphysical link between objects and events. Moe et al (2013), however, argue that magic, in the context of Paganism and Wicca, is often misunderstood, citing Wise (2004) who argues that it can be considered in terms of focusing attention, aligning with nature, and employing symbolism to enhance an awareness of the sacred. That magic has frequently conceptualised by Wiccans to describe acts resulting in changes in a person's internal state suggests that Subbotskey's perspective, which is not atypical of psychological research, does not meet all the ways this term has been employed within Wicca and Moe et al (2013) argue for a distinction between magical thinking (West & Willner, 2011) and a Wiccan belief in magic.

Wiccan groups tend to cast spells for such purposes as healing, self-development and material success, with questions of ethics being considered with reference to the phrase known as the Wiccan rede: ‘An it harm none do what thou wilt’. Another guiding principle is the ‘law of three’; the belief that the effects of magic will be returned with added force, i.e. three-fold, to the person(s) casting. As a result, intending to harm another through magic (hexing), while not entirely unheard of, is generally considered ill-advised and assumed to result in significant consequences for the caster. While there are various systems of magic with which might be drawn on by contemporary Wiccans, for example the Qabalah (d'Este and Rankine, 2009) and evocation (Barrabbas, 2017), a typical process of spell casting as practised within a Wiccan coven can be outlined. The group meets within a ritually cast circle, the function of which being to protect those inside from outer influence as well as preventing energy from dissipating. Energy is raised though some means, for example chanting[1], before being directed, either through visualisation or via a symbolic act such as the tying of a knot, the cutting of a cord, or the burning of an inscription. Once a spell has been cast there is a general prohibition upon talking about it, at least until it has either worked or failed; this is due to the sense that discussion will dissipate the energy that has been directed by the group.

**Resulting Remarks**

If Wiccans and therapists are to be compared the most immediate similarity is that both groups are remarkably heterogeneous and there is debate as to how these terms should be employed. One person who identifies themselves as Wiccan could be a member of a group while another may practise their religion alone. They may have a teacher or learn exclusively from books, and their theological beliefs may be quite disparate. There also exists a debate about whether the term is more properly used in relation to initiatory traditions (Pearson, 2000) or whether it is more appropriate to adopt a wider usage (Doyle White, 2016). Similarly, ‘psychotherapists and counsellors' refers to a particularly diverse population; for example, the variation in training, practice, and underlying philosophical assumptions between a systemic family therapist, an Increasing Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) low

[1] Fararr and Fararr (1996) list eight methods of raising energy as being traditional: concentration/meditation; chants; projection of the astral body; drugs; dancing; restriction of blood flow; the scourge (ritual flagellation); and The Great Rite (sex).

intensity CBT practitioner, and a Jungian analyst are likely to be significant. Debates around the relationship and status of counselling in relation to psychotherapy are also contested (Jacobs, 1996; Thorne, 1999). This review shall not seek to establish a distinction between either counselling or psychotherapy but, rather, will consider differences between clinicians with reference to their theoretical orientation and training. Although participants were recruited from British Traditional Wicca, Wicca as a religion will be accepted in the wider ‘umbrella’ term advocated by Doyle White (2016) and will distinguish between different traditions within this (Dianic, Reclaiming, British Traditional, etc.) as necessary.

# Chapter 2
# LITERATURE REVIEW

This review firstly, considers some academic perspectives on the study of Wicca as a religion. Secondly, it presents research that has examined the experience of therapists who hold a religious identity. Thirdly, the literature that has investigated the interface between Paganism and psychotherapy is addressed.

**The Academic Study of Wicca**

Attempts to consider Wicca by academic researchers have been hampered by questions of definition arising from the variation between people who might describe themselves as Wiccan, and disagreements between them as to what Wicca is and where it comes from. Faber (1993) expresses this succinctly in describing the craft as possessing:

> *"... a maddeningly complex, disputatious history capable of discouraging the most sanguine investigator."*
>
> (Faber, 1993 p63.)

The situation for the potential researcher is further complicated in that comparatively small numbers of people identify as Wiccan and that potential participants may not be forthcoming about their beliefs.

'Wicca' has acquired a rather broad usage and arguments exist for focusing its meaning. Pearson (2000) has written from the standpoint that Wicca denotes those initiatory traditions derived from Gerald Gardner or Alex Sanders, which is to say BTW, and that it represents a contemporary manifestation of the western esoteric tradition. This, she argues, may be distinguished from two other 'ideal types' of modern Witchcraft: Hedgewitchcraft, which Pearson (2001) p52 describes as "the survival of ancient rural wisdom", and Feminist Witchcraft. However, Doyle White (2016) argues that this distinction "…perpetuates prejudice of inherent to some British Traditional Wiccans who seek to claim "Wicca" solely for themselves and

deny its use by other traditions of Pagan Witchcraft. It is thus unsuitable for academic purposes." p161. Doyle White, rather, advocates that the term 'Wicca' be employed in a broader context, and to distinguish between traditions within this overall category; for example, British Traditional Wicca (BTW), Dianic Wicca; Feminist Reclaiming Wicca, Hedge Witchcraft, Eclectic Solitary Wicca etcetera.

**Beliefs and practices**

The beliefs and practices of Wiccans, and Pagans more generally, vary considerably. Moe (2013), however, argues that a core belief is that of the imminence of divinity, the sense of spirit being infused with, rather than distinct from, the material world and that this may be contrasted with religious traditions in which the 'worldly' is perceived as separate from the divine. Reece (2014) examined quantitative data, derived from online questionnaires completed by 3318 Pagans in the United States, and reported that a high level of importance was placed on personal practice by both solitary Pagans as well as those who were members of groups. While there was much variation, there existed a core of group of religious activities, each of which was practised by at least 80 percent of respondents. These were: rituals, the making of offerings, the worship of one or more deities, healing, the casting of spells (for oneself or a more general good) and herbalism, divination, and prayer. Reece noted that while curse breaking, guiding the souls of the dead (psychopomp), and exorcism were minority practices they were of particular importance to those who did engage in them. Reece also found that most respondents identified with more than one religious identity.

In the Pagan Health Survey Project, Kirner (2014) analysed questionnaire data from 1598 Pagan respondents in the United States and argued that Pagan beliefs regarding the nature of the universe were reflected in their approaches to health and healing. She reported that Pagans tended to adopt a holistic approach, focusing on an individual's journey towards expressing health though coming into balance with a larger interrelated system of which they are a part, and presented this model under the headings of well-being, holism, energy, and balance. Kirner argued that this perspective is mirrored by Pagan ritual practices emphasising the cycles of nature (encouraging the acceptance of life cycles) and the ritual enactment of unifying opposing dyads (suggesting a return to natural balance within the individual). While

Kirner contrasted Pagan approaches with the classical biomedical model she also reported that respondents were by no means rejecting of mainstream medicine; they were, however, likely to employ alternatives when financial constraints limited their access to healthcare.

Crowley (2020) highlights the widespread nature of healing in Paganism and the importance placed on it by the majority of Pagans, whether in individual or group contexts, and links this to past findings, e.g. Orion (1995), that Pagans are particularly attracted to healing professions. Crowley describes healing as integral to the identity of Witch, citing the central role of healing as both within the Reclaiming Tradition (Starhawk, 1999; Roberts, 2011) and in initiatory forms of Wicca (Salomonsen, 2002; Nash, 2010). Crowley also draws a comparison between the Pagan approach to healing proposed by Kirner (2014) and the World Health Organisation (2006, p.1) definition of health "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" which similarly emphasises a holistic approach; arguing that there is an increasing convergence between Pagan approaches to healing, which place emphasis on autonomy, responsibility and a collaborative working relationship, with contemporary trends within healthcare.

**Wicca and the New Age Movement**

Wicca and Paganism have sometimes been considered as aspects of the New Age (Heelas, 1996; Hanegraff, 1998; Tacey, 2001). Wiccans, however, are typically clear that they do not fall into this category (Hutton, 1999), to the extent that 'new age' is often used in a pejorative sense within Wicca itself (Doyle White, 2016); although there are inevitably exceptions to this general rule, e.g. Coco (2007), as well as nearly 14% of Reece's (2014) Pagan respondents who identified with a New Age identity.

Hutton (1999) argues Wicca cannot logically be considered as an outgrowth of the New Age since, having arisen no later than the 1950s, it precedes the latter by some two decades. Simes (1995), cited by Hutton (1999), argues that Paganism places an emphasis on natural cycles and polarity in contrast with perspectives of ascending planes of consciousness, and karmic judgement in the New Age. Pearson (2000)

argues that BTW diverges from the New Age in its relationship to both authority and commitment and critiques Hanegraff's (1998) allocation of Paganism along with Wicca, to the category of New Age Religion. Hanegraff distinguishes between cult and sect, relying on prior work by Cambell (1972). Cambell presents cults as: individualistic; loosely structured; undemanding; tolerant; inclusive; transient; having fluctuating beliefs; rudimentary organisation. Sects, on the other hand, are: collectivist; structured; demanding; intolerant; exclusivist; stable; organised; and persist over time. Hanegraff proposes that examples of the New Age may be seen as tending towards the cult category. However, Pearson (2000) argues that Wicca, at least in its initiatory forms, is a closer fit to the attributes of sect and, while some later interpretations developed in the United States, may have less to distinguish them from the New Age, the older forms may be regarded as distinct. Indeed, Hanegraff (1998) writes that, had Wicca remained confined to its earlier form, he may well have not included it in his work.

Jenson and Thomson (2008) analysed the population concentration of self-identified Pagans by different American states against a range of state characteristics and respondent characteristics. These included, for example, estimating the strength of gun culture by state, extrapolated from magazine subscriptions and the number of gun shows.  Jenson and Thomson concluded that Paganism might be differentiated from the New Age on the basis that Pagans were more likely to be present in those States with higher subscription rates to magazines focused on environmental issues (thereby inferring that Paganism to be more focused on environmental concerns than New Agers) and that Pagans were more likely to be from a white European ethnic background.

While it may be that Pagans are less multi-cultural as a population than that of the New Age generally it could be questioned whether this is a valid way to distinguish between them; an analogy could be of seeking to differentiate Catholics and Baptists on a similar basis. While these groups might have different demographic characteristics they are actually distinguished from each other on matters of doctrine and practice, similarly both are known to be Christian by the same means. However, there are some groups within the broader category of Paganism, for example 'folkish' interpretations of heathenry, which do exclude people of non-European ancestry

(Gardell, 2003); this has become a point of contention within Paganism itself, especially as such interpretations have become a focus of attention within some far-right groups. Additionally, it has been found that those forms of Paganism practised in the United Kingdom and the United States are in fact less focused on ethnic identity than those found in eastern and central Europe (Strmiska, 2005). That there exists a far-right element within Paganism, if only as a fringe minority, seems very much at odds with the perspectives of the New Age.

**Wicca as Western Esotericism**

While Wicca, with its inclusion of the dark or destructive aspects of the divine and focus primarily on a pre-Christian past rather than a spiritualized future may be regarded as, largely, distinct from the New Age (although there is, doubtless, a degree of overlap between the two). It has been argued that Wicca fits more comfortably within the category of Western Esotericism (Pearson, 2000). Although definitions of Western Esotericism are debated (Bogdan, 2010) the term includes a disparate grouping of traditions which purport to convey some form of inner meaning to the practitioner; examples of which might include neoplatonism, ritual magic, astrology, alchemy, tarot, the kabbala, and Theosophy.

In attempting to offer a conception of Esotericism, Faivre (1994) argues that it may be considered in terms of a way of thinking comprising four necessary aspects, which must be present, and two relative aspects which often accompany them. The necessary aspects are firstly, the significance of correspondences; which is to say that there are connections between parts of the universe, the understanding of which may afford insight; for example, between planets, metals, numbers and letters. Secondly, that nature itself is possessed of a quality of life. Thirdly, the inclusion of imagination/meditation and, fourthly, the belief in the potential for a direct experience of transmutation, which is to say an internal change of state on the part of the aspirant. The relative aspects are that these forms of thought often include notions of a transmission, from teacher to student, and, finally, ‘praxis of concordance’ attempting to combine two or more traditions of knowledge in order to attain insight. Bogden (2010) highlights the practise of initiation within Wicca as being consistent with Fairvre’s requirement for a belief in direct transmission and Pearson (2000)

argues that all six of Faivre's aspects are to be found in BTW Wicca and it should, therefore, be considered a contemporary manifestation of western esotericism.

Von Struckland (2005) offers a critique of this definition, arguing that Faivre has not equally addressed ancient and modern periods of history, nor always adheres to his definition himself; for example, by including Mesmerism which includes the idea of living nature but not the other necessary aspects. Instead of a definition Struckland proposes a more pluralistic approach, arguing for a framework which considers claims of higher knowledge and methods to access to it, and which tend to present the world as a single unity. Wicca seems to fit this discourse well. Hanegraaff (2012) has subsequently argued that the collective idea of Western Esotericism has emerged as the 'other' from which dominant social and intellectual perspectives could define themselves as dissimilar. From this perspective Western Esotericism is presented as representing knowledge that has been rejected and an argument could be made to include Wicca within this.

**Numbers and Distribution and Demographics**

The international distribution of Wiccans has been concentrated in the Anglophone countries although there are certainly smaller numbers in the rest of Europe and South America. Doyle White (2016) has argued that there has not yet been a satisfactory answer to how many Wiccans there are; partly as a result of: questions of religious identity not always being invited on official census data; the reticence of Wiccans to acknowledge their religion when they are asked; and also due to tendencies of some Wiccans to overestimate their own numbers.

The United Kingdom census of 2011 recorded 85,144 respondents whose description could be considered to fall within the category of Paganism (Crowley, 2014) and Crowley has argued that the data is likely to have been further distorted by factors such as census forms being completed on behalf of households, for example by parents and landlords; respondent's identities being complex, for example following multiple spiritual paths; or a desire for privacy. Crowley (2014) estimated that, due to the deficiencies of the survey instrument the real number of Pagans in the United Kingdom was in the region of 180,000-240,000. In light of Crowley's research Doyle White estimated that, assuming a quarter of those who

described themselves as Pagan in the 2011 UK census were Wiccan, and that between a quarter to one half of United Kingdom witches concealed their identity, the data would suggest a figure of between 40,000 and 60,000 Wiccans in the UK.

Moe et al (2013) cite the US Census Bureau (2011) as recording 682,000 Pagans and estimating half of US citizens who identify as Pagan in the United States to also be Wiccan. This would suggest a number of nearly 350,000; although the real figure may well be higher for similar reasons as were highlighted by Crowley (2014). If Doyle-White's estimate that between a quarter and half of respondents choose not to disclose is adopted it leads to an estimate of there being between 525,000 and 700,000 Wiccans in the United States in 2011. Numbers in other countries appear to be smaller and Doyle-White (2016) cites census data as recording figures 10,025 Wiccans and 21,085 Pagans Canada with recorded figures from Australia and New Zealand being smaller still.

In fieldwork conducted with 103 British initiatory Wiccans in the North West of England Pearson (2000) found 19 of her respondents to be qualified healthcare or allied professionals, five of whom were therapists or counsellors. Pearson, however, acknowledged that this tendency was not replicated in her survey's national data and speculated this might be due to regional variation. Doyle-White (2016) contrasts Pearson's finding regarding healthcare with Hutton (1999) who did not find this tendency and cites similarly contradictory results of American studies in this area (Orion, 1995; Berger et al, 2003) arguing that correlations between profession and Wicca have yet to be convincingly established.

Doyle White (2016) concluded that Wiccan populations had generally been found to contain more women than men, to be derived primarily of members of the upper working, or lower middle classes, to be overwhelmingly Caucasian, and educated to a higher degree than the general population. As a group they have generally been found not to possess the economic status which might be expected on the basis of their education; while this may be due to the larger proportion of females, who have been found to earn less than their male counterparts, it could also be that this group places less emphasis on pursuing conventional markers of success than the wider population.

**Discrimination**

The Satanic Panic of the 1980s and 90s (Nathan and Snedeker 2001) had a particular impact on Wiccans and other Pagans, who were often confused with Satanists in the popular imagination. For example, the 1996 murder prosecution of Damien Echols (released in 2011 after spending 17 years on death row) was partially based on the belief that the murders of three children could have been part of a satanic ritual sacrifice following his identification as a Wiccan (Hoadley, 2016). Doyle White (2016) writes that the topic of children in relation to Wicca has often become particularly heated and that numerous Wiccans have had their children removed by social services due to their beliefs. In the United Kingdom, Dr Ralph Morse was temporarily suspended from his teaching position following his appointment as Youth Manager for the Pagan Federation in 1999 (Mendick, 2000). Perhaps unsurprisingly, therefore, in a survey of Religious discrimination in England and Wales, Weller et al (2001) reported that some Pagan respondents described a need to be secretive about their religion in relation to employment.

More recently in the United Kingdom the Equality Act (Legislation.gov.uk, 2010) offered a legal framework to prevent discrimination in the workplace. However, Crowley (2014) reported that concerns around discrimination remained present in responses to a questionnaire regarding the completion of the 2011 British census. Some respondents included concerns about children, and the potential impact for those who worked with children, as reasons why they chose not to declare their Pagan affiliation; Crowley (2018) highlighted how this group had felt particularly vulnerable and pointed to a tendency for modern Pagans to continue to be presented in a negative light in the media citing the Daily Mail headline ‘Pagans are on the march- but are they harmless eccentrics or a dangerous cult?’ (Brennan, 2010).

Weller et al (2015) suggested that the degree of Pagan self-censorship found in the Weller et al (2001) study had been was markedly diminished and Crowley (2017) writes that Paganism in the United Kingdom has become increasingly integrated into the mainstream. It cannot, however, be concluded that discrimination towards Pagans has been largely eliminated; Crowley (2018), for example, went on to describe one Wiccan working in the National Health Service recounting how her

medical director commented about ‘dirty Pagans’ on learning of her religious affiliation.

A contemporary study in the United States (Tejeda, 2015), employing a mixed methods design, investigated the experience of workplace discrimination and concluded that Pagans reported more workplace discrimination than members of most other religions. From interview data, Tejeda reported that Pagans in professions requiring a licence to practise, including one psychologist, experienced particular concern around self-disclosure, or of being ‘found out’. One participant described how their religion being discovered would call their ‘personal seriousness’ as a professional into question, another felt that their employer would begin searching for reasons to get rid of them. These findings were consistent with results reported by Kirner (2014) who found that some Pagan healthcare workers in the United States were only willing to be included in her research following an assurance that she would not ‘out’ them to colleges due to concerns regarding discrimination.

Recent examples in the United States reported in the media have been those of Carl DeLuca (Schulz, 2017) and Pauline Hoffmann (Kuruvilla, 2019). DeLuca filed a law suit against his employers claiming that he had been subject to various discriminatory acts and the spread of false rumours about him and his religion for two years prior to his job being terminated without notice, despite his having received positive work evaluations within his department. Pauline Hoffman, an academic of Bonaventure University, was required to sign a document saying she would uphold the Catholic values of her school, it having become generally known that she was Wiccan; asking if she would be asked to sign such a document were she Jewish she was told she would not. Feeling that she had been unfairly passed over for promotion by her university, offered reduced length of tenure, and pressured to resign from her post as Dean, she filed a law suit.

One challenge in assessing the extent to which discrimination occurs is that claims are often contested by the parties involved. For example, The Guardian (2007) reported how a Wiccan teaching assistant attributed her dismissal to discrimination, while her school maintained that she had actually been let go due to low attendance. Since being Pagan does not require a person to be obviously identifiable, and many

are open regarding their beliefs only with a limited number of people whom they trust, Crowley (2018) frames the identity of Pagan in the context of a Concealable Stigmatized Identity (CSI) (Quinn and Chaudoir, 2009). Concealment is argued to potentially increase both anxiety and preoccupation with consequences of exposure, and Crowley cites Quinn and Earnshaw (2013) as arguing that those with CSIs are actually liable to overestimate the potential to experience discrimination. Ethan Doyle White (2016), while acknowledging that Wiccans are indeed likely to experience more problems than Christians[2], argues that some of the rhetoric expressed in the Pagan community as a whole suggests some may overestimate the extent to which they are discriminated against. Since attempts to assess the extent of discrimination towards Pagans often rest on self-report data it is possible that, in some instances, the picture may have been skewed.

The rather convoluted question of addressing discrimination, defining what Wicca might be, and the mainstream media, was illustrated by the recent publication of an article in a UK newspaper, The Independent: 'I spent a week becoming a witch and the results were worrying' Radford (2020). Radford's article describes taking a 'new year me challenge' in order to become a witch over the course of a week with the aid of 'The Modern Witch's Guide to Happiness' (Bailey, 2019). There then follows a description of how, having 'suspended her belief in the scientific underpinnings of the universe', Radford builds an altar, buys crystals, connects with nature, tries to cast a spell, and experiments with tarot cards. The piece is written in a way clearly intended to poke fun at the whole business before concluding that witchcraft is built on a foundation of "bats***" and arguing that "Standing in the light of a full moon to recite our resolutions may be harmless, but as a society we shun science at our peril."

The article received a predictably unappreciative response from the Pagan community (Bustamonte, 2020) and numerous critical comments, some questioning, for example, whether Radford would feel it acceptable to attempt the same seven-day challenge in a similarly mocking tone with religions such as Islam or Judaism. That it would be quite unthinkable for a British newspaper to publish any such thing seems to underscore that Paganism is, as Crowley (2018) argues, treated differently

[2] A comment offered in the context of those countries where Wiccans are more widely located. Being a Wiccan in some parts of the world could pose increased challenges or even serious danger.

than other religions in the media. Given that Radford's article was published in the newspaper's literary review section, however, it might be thought to lampoon Bailey's (2019) book specifically; The Modern Witch's Guide to Happiness could have been the type of book that some Pagan writers might, themselves, satirise as superficial. Radford, however, makes it clear that her comments are directed beyond Bailey's writing, describing witchcraft as "…no less irrational than any other religion."

**Further Debates**

The situation of researcher as insider or outsider in relation to Paganism has represented a particular topic of debate. Luhrmann (1989) was initiated into a number of magical groups, including Wicca, as part of her doctoral research, in which she described never having actually entered into the subjective identity to which she was initiated, and that the people she studied were effectively engaged in a regressive fantasy. In order to explain how educated, suburbanites in the United Kingdom came to embrace a magical world view Luhrmann proposed the theory of 'interpretational drift', in which people were understood to have gradually altered their experiences, ways of interpreting the reality, and rationalisations in order to embrace a magical world view.

As an anthropologist Lurnham's research methodology rested upon the basis that it was necessary to remain apart from the subjective identity of those she was studying so as to maintain a necessary objectivity; to avoid 'going native' in the parlance of ethnography. Doyle White (2016), however, argues that many subsequent studies of Wicca (Hume, 1997; Greenwood, 2000; Pike, 2001; Salomonsen, 2002; Rountree, 2004, Magliocco, 2004; Bado-Fralick, 2005) could be contrasted with Luhrmann's in that they tended to adopt a more critical stance toward the insider/outsider distinction and placed emphasis on the importance of their subjective experience as participant.

Pearson (2001) argues that for a researcher the insider perspective offers a number of advantages. Writing from the perspective of a witch who became a religious studies scholar she frames her identity as researcher as 'going native in reverse', arguing that the position of insider allows researchers experiences which can aid research if they are able to manage their reflexivity with sufficient care. Davidsen

(2012) criticised Pagan Studies as a discipline, however, on the basis of it having become dominated by insider voices which threatened its academic objectivity.

Earlier academic writing outside the discipline of anthropology often adopted a critical stance. Truzzi (1972), for example, described Wicca as representing a strand of an occult revival in popular culture, while Purkiss (1996) was overtly critical of the 'narcissistic' character of Wiccan practice. Potter (2001) sought to address what he saw as undue bias in these works; he criticises Truzzi for acknowledging a distinction between Wicca and Satanism before partially conflating the two, as well as taking issue with Truzzi's dismissal of the sincerity of younger people who adopt the label of 'witch' as being largely motivated by a desire for superficial power and social status.

> *"However, unlike him [Truzzi], I recognise that this initial attraction in no way invalidates the sincerity of either the Neo-Pagan movement, nor its younger enthusiasts."*
>
> (Potter, 2001 p68.)

Arguably, they are both right. Truzzi's critique of 'young witches today' is echoed thirty years later in the previously quoted passage by Crowley (2002). At the same time, Potter's contention that young people's pursuit of the craft may be undertaken with great sincerity has been illustrated in research (Berger and Ezzy, 2007), although their initial interest is certainly likely to be captured by popular culture. Doyle White (2016), however, criticised Potter's assertion of there being a widespread bias toward Wicca within academia itself on the basis that Potter relies on only two examples, arguing that if this were actually the case, more papers ought to have been available.

Another critical interpretation of Wicca is offered by Faber (1993) who considers Wicca primarily from the perspective of Freudian psychoanalytic theory and adopts the argument that a focus on the worship of a Goddess represents a regressive instinct reflecting a failure to successfully negotiate fear of separation from the mother, and that the belief in magic represents a narcissistic wish for gratification. This is consistent with Freud's approach to religion generally (Freud, 1913) and Faber (2001) employs the same argument with respect to other religions. However,

in adopting an entirely negative position, Faber is only able to address religion as a neurotic response to unresolved psychic material despite stating an intention to address the ‘hijacking’ of Jungian theory in order to justify magical thinking.

Given the extent to which Jungian psychology has been employed within Wicca (Crowley, 2002) it is, perhaps, surprising that Wicca has received little attention from within analytic psychology itself. Tacey (2001) argues that the resurgence of ‘New Age’ Goddess worship is indicative of the ouroboros mystic described by Neumann (1954). Neumann offers the view that the ouroboros, the snake eating its own tail, symbolises the original unity of pre-consciousness and that the ouroboros mystic seeks to return to this state rather than embarking upon the hero’s journey to re-forge the psyche into a new unity through the process of individuation (von Franz, 1964). However, the symbology employed within British Traditional Wicca places an emphasis on the worship of a complementary God and Goddess along with the symbolic or actual enactment of the *hieros gamos* which does not readily fit ouroboros mysticism in Neumann’s terms. Crowley (1996) has made an exposition of Wicca informed by Jungian psychology, and which Tacey (2001) cites in passing. Crowley’s (1996) work, however, was targeted towards a general audience and did not make a significant impact within the analytical establishment. Dion (2006) has considered Wicca in relation to analytic psychology with reference to the role of the shadow archetype arguing that Wiccan ritual reflects an integration process. Dion emphasises that analytical psychology and Wicca are distinct entities but goes on to argue that, as Wicca is “consciously psychological” in that its adherents tend to conceptualise their Gods as both internal and external realities, psychological interpretations are very much within the spirit of Wiccan practice.

**Religious Therapists**

Tan (1996) drew a distinction between the implicit and explicit integration of religious perspective in psychotherapy. In the first case, the therapist holds some religious perspective but integrates it with their clinical practice implicitly. While they hold values consistent with their religious life, they do not bring their religious perspective explicitly into the room with their client. For example, while they might pray in relation to their work, they would not do so with their client, or inform a client that they did so. In contrast, in explicit integration the therapist is overt, rather than covert, about the

religious dimension of their work. In this case, for example in Christian Counselling, the client and therapist are aware of the religious framework; they are likely to consider the client's situation within a context of religion, they may pray together, or employ religious texts.

Gubi (2004) investigated the views of British counsellors and compared responses to a questionnaire about prayer between responders from the specifically Christian Churches Ministerial Counselling Service, and the mainstream British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP). Gubi found that 59% of the BACP and 91% of the CCMC counsellors used prayer in some way, including preparing for a session, or on behalf of a client who was not present. In common with Shafranske and Malony (1990) Gubi (2004) found that numbers of clinicians who had or did overtly use prayer as part of their sessions with clients was much lower (12% and 42% for the BACP and CCMC respectively). Gubi described the widespread use indicated by the results as remarkable given that the use of prayer had been given so little attention within the research literature.

In analysing the qualitative results Gubi found that, for some counsellors, prayer appeared to be central to both their practice and their identity as clinicians. The covert use of prayer was used as a way of attaining an optimal internal state in order to best provide a therapeutic space to the client and 18 respondents described the act of counselling itself as analogous to prayer. Covert prayer seemed to enjoy cautious acceptance within the respondents although openly praying either with or for the client was much more polarising, with some counsellors being enthusiastic while others were deeply critical. Gubi offered the critical perspective that while the most enthusiastic comments advocating overt prayer seemed not to be giving enough consideration of whether that might be right for that client the most hostile similarly seemed to be dismissing the hypothetical client's reality in favour of the therapist's perspective.

Similarly, Shafranske and Newton (1990) used questionnaires with American clinical psychologists and reported that, while the majority expressed some belief in a transcendent being or reality, and that 24% described having prayed for a client, only 7% said that they had prayed with a client. This result was reflected by West (2014)

who used IPA to explore how three Irish evangelical Christian therapists experienced their dual religious and clinical identities. He reported that, while all three participants considered how to draw a distinction between their own religious perspectives and their work as therapists, their spiritual lives formed a central part of their internal process. How and if this explicitly manifested between them and their clients varied with the participants comments on bringing prayer into the room illustrating this well. One would not work with prayer; the second placed value on praying for her clients and praying silently herself while in session but withheld this from the client. The third was open to explicitly sharing prayer with a client, but only if they requested it.

Brown, Elkonin and Naiker (2013) examined the attitudes of 15 South African psychologists, 14 of whom described themselves as Christians, towards the use of religion and spirituality in psychotherapy through conducting three focus groups. All participants were open to discussing their client's spiritual experience but, in common with other findings, not all would consider overtly engaging in religious activities as part of therapy. The participants had a strong feeling that it was their own religious/spiritual life that enabled them to meet their clients spiritually. However, they found it easier to connect with people who had similar beliefs to themselves, with one participant describing having found it hard to meet the needs of a Satanist client.

Gubi (2007) used interpretive phenomenological analysis to examine how 17 counsellors who used overt prayer in their clinical work experienced supervision. He argued that though the overt use of prayer could be useful as an intervention it required effective supervision, especially given that it could be regarded as unorthodox practice. Participants, however, tended to avoid discussing their use of prayer during supervision as they were concerned about not being understood or judged negatively. Gubi argued that supervision needed to be open enough to allow supervisees to explore the use of prayer without the fear of an automatic negative response.

Baker and Wang (2004) interviewed 14 Christian clinical psychologists and employed grounded theory to describe three dimensions as existing within the participants' accounts. Firstly, that they experienced an added dimension to their

clinical practice in which they felt as if they were participating in a larger purpose which facilitated their clinical work. Secondly, regarding being open about their religious identity the participants experienced a tension between the openness of faith found in Christianity and the more withholding stance adopted within clinical psychology. Finally, a theme emerged of the interface between faith and work environment which might be described as either challenging or harmonious.

The literature suggests that a recurring issue for the religiously committed therapist has been whether they should ever disclose their religious identity to a client and, if so, under what circumstances. The decision-making processes of therapists around divulging their religion to clients has generally been influenced by similarity; they were more willing to disclose their identity when working with somebody who they perceived as having similar views to themselves. They felt that, through having something in common, they could offer a shared world-view; that they would be facilitating the client to speak about their spiritual life more fully than if they remained non-committal. It may also be that clinicians are more willing to work with positive than negative transference. Where such a disclosure is made is important, for example in an overtly secular organisation such as the NHS self-disclosure of religious perspective is likely to be viewed as more dangerous than in a counselling organisation which is allied to the therapist's religion.

The American Psychological Association (1992) issued ethical guidance stating that therapists should provide an honest answer if questioned about their religion (APA, 1992). Tillman (1998) addressed this critically arguing that, from a psychodynamic perspective, an unthinking disclosure may impede therapy as the patient’s fantasies about the therapist can have clinical significance for their work and because it may influence ongoing dynamics of transference/counter transference. This view is consistent with one of Seymour’s (1998) Pagan therapists describing their own experience as a client in Jungian therapy whom she quotes:

> *“It is most helpful that I cannot know [their therapist’s religious identity]. By remaining uncertain and ambiguous my therapist is a shape-shifter, someone who can tolerate confusion and help me to deal with my own.”*
>
> Seymour (1998) p 46-47

Some theoretical contexts offer more space for such a disclosure. Writing from the perspective of family therapy Watts-Jones (2010) considers the technique of Location of Self in which the therapist is open about their key social identities and uses the differences and similarities between themselves and members of the family they work with to initiate a discussion. It also aims to empower the client(s) as this knowledge may enable them to choose a different therapist. Yalom (2009a) eschews the withholding posture of classical analysis and advocates an approach to psychodynamic therapy that employs the considered use of honesty and transparency in the service of the client.

The making of a decision of whether to disclose religious identity was a common theme across studies and brought up conflicts for some clinicians as they sought to balance their clinical role and internal congruence. Martinez and Baker (2000) found that Christian psychodynamic counsellors tended not to disclose their own value system, favouring reflecting the question back onto the client. One of their eight participants diverged, however, and felt that it was another piece of information along with theoretical orientation, training and qualifications that she would provide. One of the clinical psychologists interviewed by Baker and Wang (2004) lamented a client having seen a fish sticker (indicating they were a Christian) on their car as this now needed to be 'worked through'. In contrast, another participant in the same study felt that it was simply an honest response to acknowledge their own faith in response to a client's declaration of belief; the majority however were prepared to disclose cautiously if asked a direct question.

Novis-Deutsch (2015) outlined the tensions between psychoanalysis and religion with reference to Judaism and, while observing that there were some points of convergence, argued that there were distinct points of conflict. He conducted interviews with 15 Israeli psychoanalysts and psychodynamic psychologists who identified themselves as either Ultra-Orthodox or Religious Zionists. Using grounded theory, he described styles of identity the participants used, either based around integration or non-integration. Novis-Deutsch described the sample as adopting a mode of recognising the conflicts which they were caught in and choosing to enter fully into the experience despite the uncomfortable dissonance this occasioned. He

labelled this ‘principled pluralism’ and argued that the outcome was that the participants developed a more culturally pluralistic perspective than was usual in their culture; since they had done this work in themselves they were more easily able to accept pluralism in the external world.

In an interview, the Muslim psychologist Malik Badri described having experienced a strong dissonance between his religious perspective and the then dominant psychoanalytic model of therapy, which led to his embracing behavioural approaches to therapy and later CBT (Khan, 2015). Badri argued that the assumption of the universality of a western secular psychology which can be exported to the Muslim world reflects a colonial mind-set and that such a psychology must be Islamized in order to meet the needs of Muslim clients (Badri, 1979).

Abdel-fadil (2015) examined the experience of Muslim counsellors providing an online counselling service which was delivered with a person centred ethos but which was set within an Islamic context. With respect to ethics, the counsellors expressed that there were limits to what they could condone based on their worldview. One illustrated this in the situation of a client describing being in an illicit sexual relationship; he would advise that they either stopped or got married and work with the client to decide what they wanted. His view was that to collude with the client in maintaining the relationship would be dishonest given the context of the work they were doing. Abdel-fadil’s exploration of counsellors was noteworthy in that the clinicians were not reported as expressing significant conflicts around holding their religious and therapeutic roles together. This may be assumed to be primarily as they were offering a religiously informed service to people who were seeking this. Abdel-fadil described the understanding of Islam in the service she studied as placing emphasis on the loving and forgiving nature of God while ascribing personal agency and responsibility to the individual which she described as representing a ‘perfect match’ in its aim to fuse religious ethics with counselling psychology.

Some western counsellors may feel that situating the practise of therapy in a religious context places it outside the realm of ‘counselling’. However, secular counsellors also place limits on what they are willing to contain on the basis of a frame of ethics. For example, while they may maintain unconditional positive regard

for a client, counsellors may still break confidentiality in instances such as child abuse, or to prevent a client's suicide. The privileging of a secular humanistic world-view as the only, or more valid, frame to contain psychotherapeutic work arguably represents an example of the colonial assumptions decried by Badri (1979).

Although concepts such as karma or reincarnation may not be universally accepted within the context of secular psychotherapy meditation practices drawn from Buddhist teachings, especially those of mindfulness, have been employed for use with a range of populations within healthcare (Didonna, 2009). Overt and covert questions of the type proposed by Tan (1996) are, therefore, unlikely to be experienced in the same way for the Buddhist therapist. For example, a Christian might feel that prayer and the acceptance of Christ is the true answer to their client's difficulties while feeling unable to state this in their working context. A Buddhist on the other hand is likely to have more latitude to advocate such practices as mindfulness as a means of alleviating mental distress since mindfulness has influenced the development of a number of widely practised forms of psychotherapy which have included: Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (Kabat-Zinn, 1990); Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (Crane, 2017), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (Batten, 2001); Dialectic Behavioural Therapy (Linehan, 1993a; Linehan, 1993b); and Core Process Psychotherapy (Sills, 2009).

A challenge for the Buddhist psychotherapist may be that the emphasis of secular healthcare, and of approaches to therapy which seek to employ mindfulness separated from its Buddhist context, can seem dissonant with the search for true liberation (Rosenbaum, 2009). From a theoretical perspective too, such tenets as the ultimate non-existence of self (*Anatta*) may not sit easily alongside models of psychotherapy which focus on the development of 'ego strength'. Similarly, as mindfulness stems from a philosophical perspective in which desire is regarded as a cause of suffering, its wide acceptance within cognitive behavioural approaches focusing on desirable outcome measures might be seen as more indicative of being 'evidence based' rather than reflecting a philosophical synergy. Despite this, it seems that, for many clinicians in a Western context, the identities of Buddhist and therapist are less likely to occasion the levels of dissonance around integration of religious

identity and clinical practice sometimes experienced by therapists identifying as Christian or Muslim.

**Wicca and Therapy**

Psychotherapy was promoted, and practised, by two particularly influential figures in the development of Western Esotericism during the 20th century, and whose work was subsequently influential for many Wiccans. Israel Regardie, who wrote extensively regarding the Golden Dawn System of magic (Regardie, 1989); and Dion Fortune, one-time president of the Christian Mystical Lodge of the Theosophical Society, and founder of the magical order *The Fraternity of the Inner Light*. Israel Regardie was publicly arguing an integration of the occult with the perspectives of psychology during nineteen thirties (Regardie, 1932), and his thought was later to be developed in his work The Middle Pillar (Regardie, 1998), in which he outlined the practise of ceremonial magic, as informed by an understanding of psychology; also arguing that the study of magic should only be embarked upon following a period of psychotherapy. Dion Fortune, a lay analyst (the term then used for those trained in psychoanalysis but who did not possess a medical doctorate), similarly wrote concerning psychology (Fortune, 1922) and sought to employ psychological approaches in relation to the occult. (Graf, 2007).

Despite this early influence, attempts to explicitly link the practise of therapy with Pagan perspectives were not discussed, at least openly, until the later part of the twentieth century. Fox (1995) developed a version of the twelve-step program tailored towards Pagans and, in the following year, Harrow et al (1996) wrote concerning the use of counselling skills for Pagans, for example those fulfilling pastoral roles such as prison or hospital chaplain.

Harrow (1996) argued that the values of secular counselling were entirely compatible with those of Wiccan religious values and that both magic and divination could be effectively employed by a counsellor who was working within the Pagan community; which is to say offering a religiously informed counselling. In the case of divination Harrow suggested that it might be used to help access the intuitive sense of the client, although with the caveat that any attempt to make statements about a fixed future were to be avoided. Focusing on magic as a means of facilitating change she

asserted that the employment of rituals to influence the client's unconscious could be also used as an effective intervention. Chapin-Bishop (1999), however, sought to draw a clear distinction between the role of the Wiccan priest or priestess and that of psychotherapist. Arguing that, even if she were working with another Pagan, it would not be appropriate to bring her identity as diviner or ritualist into a session since, on top of the already potent role of therapist, it could place her in too powerful a position relative to her client.

In 1998 the Wiccan priestess Estelle Seymour wrote a master's thesis 'Towards a Pagan / Magical Counselling' in which she sought to evaluate the extent to which there was a perceived need for a Pagan version of counselling within the British Pagan community. This research was motivated in part by having had her own experience of spirituality interpreted as neurosis whilst a client herself, and of being aware of Pagans who chose not to seek therapy in case their experiences were seen as evidence of pathology. Conversely, as a therapist, she had also experienced clients who were hesitant to revealing experiences of psychic phenomena to her.

Seymour compiled the views of Pagans who had experienced therapy, or wished to do so, as well as those of therapists with a Pagan identity, all of whom had responded to invitations in a Pagan magazine and a mailing list. Seymour's therapist respondents represented an even mix of five psychodynamic and five humanistic therapists, and only one who adopted a CBT approach. Whilst practitioners usually acknowledged that their Pagan/magickal world-view informed their work they were generally against the idea of an overtly Pagan approach to therapy and only two believed that there could be a need for this. On the other hand, a significant number of clients and potential clients were clear about their desire to work with a therapist whom they felt shared something of their world view; Seymour characterised these two voices under the headings of 'Pagan/magickal counselling as an oxymoron' and 'There are times I would have given my eye teeth for a Pagan counsellor'.

In many ways, the descriptions given by Seymour's therapist responders seemed to run parallel to those of Christian participants described previously. The majority felt that their religious identity was best left outside of therapy, although they were divided in whether they would reflect a direct question about their religion back onto

the client or disclose. Some, however, were prepared to be more open in certain circumstances or use a shared world-view to frame an intervention; for example, Seymour quotes one respondent as saying:

> *"... one supervisee became very stuck and felt very dragged down last September. I commented that it was the day of the equinox, the day when Demeter went back down to the Underworld. This was a reference which I knew would be well-known to her, and she accepted it and found it a useful one. I would not have made it with someone I did not know (or someone I did know who had not made it clear they shared this frame of reference.)"*
>
> (Seymour, 1998 p37)

All respondents were clear that it would be useful for a therapist to have an understanding of a Pagan world-view however, although some were cautious about the practical issues of including this in training courses.

Walter (1998) sought to identify points of both convergence and contention between Paganism and Counselling. Walters firstly argues that counselling and Paganism similarly promote ideas of personal autonomy and responsibility, a respect for other people, the employment of ritual as an aid to personal transformation, a belief in the potency of thoughts and feelings, as well as adopting a positive approach to the idea of guidance. Additionally, he highlighted points of divergence, arguing that Psychology has often advanced perspectives dismissing an enchanted world view as the preserve of the gullible, primitive, or neurotic. Paganism in turn, he argues, has responded to a perceived scientism in psychology and Walters alludes to a tendency on the part of some occult writers to frame psychotherapy as failing to achieve the depth of magical approaches, or to represent only a first step on a more profound path.

Although Walters adopts the position that counselling and psychotherapy are not easily distinguished his approach to counselling is notably humanistic and does not, for example, address existential or Freudian perspectives in this regard; asserting that further similarities between counselling and Paganism include the assumption of

an organising principle to the universe which gives meaning to life, and that of a person's innate goodness.

Finally, Walters employed questionnaire responses and follow up interviews to examine how 12 non-Pagan British counsellors thought they might feel and respond to statements such as: 'My ex-husband is trying to get custody of the children because I am a witch' and 'I've cast a spell on someone.' At the time methodological frameworks, such as thematic analysis, to enhance rigour within qualitative research, were less widely known than today and Walters's results were interpreted intuitively without recourse to an overarching theoretical framework.

Although counsellor responses were mixed Walters reported that they were generally characterised by apprehension and doubt, with a minority being either keen to work with clients who made such statements or, conversely, particularly disturbed or alarmed at such a prospect. The participants were, however, generally interested in learning more about such world views. As well as seeking to address misconceptions around Paganism stemming from the satanic panic, Walters recommended that a Pagan world-view should be included in perspectives on spirituality in counselling courses along with information about other religious, or minority groups. Additionally, he argued for 'de-mythologizing' experiences of psychic phenomena; in that therapists, while not necessarily accepting them as objectively true, should be able to work with experiences of this type without pathologizing or dismissing them.

Friedman (2001) drew parallels between Wiccans and counsellors, in that both are guides and healers whose position invites an imbalance of power. She argued that the ethical values common to professional counsellors, therefore, have particular relevance to Wiccans and offered a code of ethical practice for the Wiccan priesthood informed by groups such as the American Psychological Association (1992) and the American Counseling Association (1995). Friedman built on this to argue that a sexual relationship between initiator and initiate was ethically problematic due to the imbalance of power between teacher and student and recommended that such relationships should be avoided by Wiccans. Adopting ethical values similar to those of counselling in this context, therefore, meant that the

ritual of the Great Rite (which can involve sex), represented a point of dissonance as it is typically performed as part of the third-degree initiation ritual.

Chartered counselling psychologist and psychotherapist, John Rowan has written about the use of transpersonal therapy (Rowan, 1993) and described how his involvement with Wicca came to influence his clinical work (Rowan, 2002), especially with regard to his relating to clients on the subtle level of Wilber's (2000) framework of transpersonal psychotherapy. Here the awareness of other is held within a perception of fundamental connection but the sense of individual identity is retained. Rowan (2002) writes:

> *"It seems to me that it was there [in a coven] that I really got the hang of Subtle consciousness, with its great acknowledgement and respect for symbols and images, its heart awareness, and its contact with the world-soul. When I got into a session with a client I am able to go into this state of consciousness and work from there."*
>
> Rowan (2002) pp 104.

In this example Rowan is describing the sort of experience, which Baker and Wang (2004) argued, represents an added facilitative dimension in their research with Christian clinical psychologists, in which the participants felt that their experience of religion brought something of value to their practise of therapy.

Writing from the perspective of psychotherapist, while acknowledging her own background as a Wiccan in the Reclaiming Tradition, Cole (2003) proposed a five-stage model for the use of ritual within therapy. Noting that the inclusion of ritual acts in the context of psychotherapy had a longstanding history she presented them as "a structured set of actions developed collaboratively by the therapist and client to effect a transition from one psychological state to another." Cole (2003) p47. Drawing on Krieger's (1979) stages of therapeutic touch Cole suggested a process of: centring, assessment, gathering energy, directing energy, and gratitude.
Cole emphasised the role of the client's faith in something external to themselves in bringing about change.

While the use of therapeutic ritual may take a variety of forms (Perlstein, 2001) Cole's model was notable for the ways in which the five stages aligned with the way in which magic is worked in Wicca and to the extent that it integrated this with psychotherapy theory. In her case study Cole (2003) describes working a ritual with a client who had engaged her as a therapist because she knew that Cole had a similar spiritual perspective to herself. Having constructed a formulation that the client's challenge in making a career decision stemmed from an undeveloped sense of self and lack of differentiation from her mother, they constructed a ritual in which Cole and her client cast a circle, evoked the help of the God and Brigid, the client's chosen Goddess, burned papers on which the client had written limiting beliefs, and planted seeds in order to represent corresponding affirmations.

Cole reported a positive outcome following the ritual intervention and went on to consider possible challenges with, and contraindications to, this form of client work. In considering the issue of confusing role boundaries, she argued that this could be addressed though the clearly defined purpose and context of ritual, as used in the model she proposed, along with adhering to a collaborative and client led approach. Contraindications to the use of ritual in therapy were identified as the client either not being committed or their own spiritual beliefs being incompatible, as well as the presence of thought disorder. Cole argued that difficulties which were long standing and had a seemingly irrational element were particularly apposite for a ritual approach, and that this was likely to be more effective when a client held a faith in something beyond themselves.

Seymour (2005) examined Pagan approaches to healing in relation to therapy and cites Orion (1995) in asserting that psychological conditions may be especially responsive to magical approaches for Pagans themselves. Seymour argues that healing, as conceived within Paganism, shares key features with two commonly held within psychotherapy; an assumption that integration and empowerment are paths to healing, and that negotiating crisis may result in growth. She goes on to highlight that both counselling and Pagan healing take place in a ritual space in which the healer seeks to work holistically with imbalances and obstructions, whether physical, psychological, or spiritual, and that these are recognised as being interrelated.

Seymour suggests that spells might be usefully conceptualised as a form of CBT in seeking to understand their relationship to therapy.

Seymour (2005) draws a parallel between the issues which might arise for Pagan therapists working with Pagan clients with past literature examining the process of therapy for clients who are of the same ethnic background, or sexual orientation as their therapists; where the potential advantages, such as the therapist possessing relevant knowledge, enhanced empathy, and providing a positive role model, are balanced against the potential for lack of objectivity and collusion. She argues that past literature on coming out as gay, specifically the Coleman Model (Davies and Neal, 1996), is of relevance when considering how to support the client who is coming out as Pagan.

Seymour recommends that counselling training should include information on Pagan perspectives and that therapists need to be able to make the distinction between spiritual awakening and psychosis. Spiritual awakening refers to those transpersonal experiences characterised by states such as ecstasy or serenity, heightened experience of perception, and experiences of connection, and Taylor & Egeto-Szabo (2017) argue that, while these states may be catalysed by spiritual practices and contact with the natural world they may also triggered by experience of loss, depression or stress. Although generally positive when such experiences become overwhelming or frightening in their intensity they may be referred to as Spiritual Emergency (Welker, 2019; Sedláková and Řiháček, 2019; Kaselionyte and Gumley, 2019) and include a psychotic dimension (Clarke, 2001). Seymour (2005) argues that it is necessary for therapists to understand the interface between spirituality and psychosis so as to be able to make appropriate referrals if necessary.

Friedman (2012) addressed the possible ethical problems for Wiccan therapists in an US context with regard to the potential for being placed in dual role situations and illustrated her review with material gained through engaging in a series of informal contacts with Wiccan therapists. Friedman argues that if the therapist were working with a client who was or became Pagan and was also aware of the therapist's religious identity this would place the therapist in a dual position in which transference issues are intensified as the therapist now has to work with being “the

all-powerful priestess and the all-compassionate therapist" in the words of one of her respondents, a comment echoing the concerns raised by Chapin-Bishop (1999). Another consideration is that the Pagan world is small and, as another priestess observed, there is always the chance of meeting a client in a ritual context which would be problematic given the intimacy which such events encourage.[3]

One psychologist who responded to Friedman presented the view that therapeutic work might be successfully managed with clients who formed a part of the wider Pagan community as long as boundaries were carefully negotiated. Friedman concluded that she personally intended to avoid working within the community herself and even went so far as to suggest that practitioners might consider concluding a therapeutic relationship as an option if a client became Pagan themselves. However, she also observed that, because people might seek out therapists whom they knew held similar beliefs to themselves, that avoiding these situations might not always be possible and cited the work of Zur (1999; 2000) who has explored the extent to which dual roles can be managed in, or even facilitate, therapy.

Friedman's work is important in the context of seeking to understand how Wiccan therapists might engage in a process of making sense of their experience of holding both identities. She both describes a particularly strong sense of convergence in that they are both healers and guides to the personal journey and, therefore, argues that ethical guidelines may be shared. However, she also experiences points of dissonance between the two worlds; both in potential for dual role relationships, which can be resolved, and those of sexual dynamics within the context of initiation, which cannot.

From the perspective of clients Kirner (2014) examined data from questionnaires completed by 1598 self-identified Pagans in the United States and found that a significant number described their religion as being pathologized when accessing mental health services; findings which were consistent with those found by Seymour

[3] There are more 'open' rituals which take place within Pagan communities and this does not imply the very personal contact which might be experienced within a coven.

(1998) in the UK more than a decade previously. One respondent in Kirner's (2014) research wrote:

> *"I have never been so blessed as the day I found a licensed therapist who was also a witch. For a long time I wasn't able to get the help I needed because I knew my religion would be on trial, not the guilt I needed help handling."* Kirner (2014) p94.

Following a literature review, Moe et al (2013) recommends that, when working with clients who identify themselves as Pagan or Wiccan, counsellors should remain affirming and seek to understand the client's individual perspective on spirituality through open ended questions; this should include establishing whether the client is solitary or part of a tradition, since this has implications for assessing their potential social support network. Moe argues that therapists should take care to avoid pathologizing the client's spiritual life, specifically asserting that a belief in magic should be distinguished from magical thinking, and that pronounced caution on the part of the client in disclosing a Pagan identity should not be regarded as indicative of paranoid ideation. Furthermore, counsellors should avoid conflating Wicca or Paganism with either Satanism or 'black magic'. Finally, Moe et al highlight the importance of the therapist identifying any assumptions and bias they may hold themselves and working to bracket these.

Harris et al (2016) considered how counsellors might best seek to provide Pagan clients with culturally sensitive therapy by employing a literature review in conjunction with interviews conducted with ten college students in the Mid-West of the United States, employing the methodology of Consensual Qualitative Research (Hill, 2011). Harris et al concluded that therapists should understand that Pagan clients might experience stigmatization in relation to their spirituality, and that this could also be a source of relationship difficulties within their families. They also suggested that therapists should reinforce the individualism, autonomy and personal responsibility characterising Paganism, and support, or even potentially incorporate, non-traditional means of healing, such as ritual, magic, or energy healing as a means of offering culturally sensitive therapy.

While Harris et al (2016) asked self-identified Pagan college students what they felt might be of help in counselling they did not require that the participants had actually experienced being a client, therefore some answers would necessarily have been speculative. Those participants who had been clients, however, reported both positive past experiences, such as feeling that they were not being judged regarding their spirituality, and negative ones of being pathologized; one participant actually asked the researchers for help in convincing other clinicians that her Pagan world view did not mean that she was ‘crazy’.

Harris et al’s recommendations included that the use of humour on the part of the therapist might be particularly apposite with Pagan clients, on the basis that their participants frequently reported using humour to manage stigmatization. This seemed tenuous given the very small sample size the finding was derived from; additionally, the potential for humour to be used as means of deflecting or keeping the therapist at a distance within the therapeutic relationship itself was not acknowledged.

Harris et al were, however, sensible of the context of their results acknowledging that, for example, the small sample size (10), limited age range (19-31), and high representation of GLBT participants (6/10) meant that, while their sample could not be regarded as representative of Pagans more generally it could be seen as particularly relevant to understanding the experience of younger GLBT Pagans. This was relevant in relation to their finding that their participants experienced difficulty in identity formation and ‘coming out of the broom closet’, which was charactized as traumatic and painful; and the researchers argued that, especially for the GLBT participants, this process paralleled experiences of GLBT sexual identity development.

Crowley (2018) examined how Pagan identities, as well as issues of self-disclosure and authenticity, could impact therapeutic relationships for both of clients and therapists. As clients, Pagans were sometimes concerned their experiences might be misunderstood or pathologized; Crowley argues that such concerns are not necessarily unwarranted, citing Buxant et al (2007) in asserting that non-mainstream spirituality is actually more likely to be treated as being more indicative of mental

illness than conventional types. One of Crowley's respondents echoed this, saying she felt that talking about her world view had irritated a psychiatrist who subsequently increased her medication, another had simply felt it necessary to remain silent in case her religion was used to pathologize her. Participants who described themselves as Pagan during therapy reported being met with a lack of knowledge, negative interpretations, or incomprehension; none of which had been helpful to the therapeutic relationship. Crowley argues that, since Paganism may be considered a concealable stigmatized identity, the decision to disclose for a client may represent a significant yet delicate moment in the process of therapy, partially due to anticipated stigma, and that the reception to this disclosure, on the part of the therapist, is important.

Crowley (2018) writes that, as therapists, Pagans must, decide how 'out' they are prepared to be on the assumption that clients and colleges may well be unsympathetic to their religious identity. For her participants the decision to disclose, as a therapist, was influenced by clients; for example, a therapist might be less willing to acknowledge their religion if working with a person whose own religion historically held a negative view of Paganism, or if they were engaging with a client who experienced psychosis. However, while disclosing little or nothing about one's own life may sit well within some schools of psychotherapy, a difficulty arises as clients may research therapists online, and perspective Pagan clients may seek out therapists whom they perceive as sharing their world view. Most of Crowley's respondents sought to avoid working with clients whom they might also encounter in Pagan contexts due to concerns regarding boundaries and role conflicts. However, this was not without exception and one reported a positive experience of therapy with their own High Priestess.

That many Pagans have a belief in the paranormal represents a challenge for healthcare professionals, who may misinterpret experiences which would otherwise be part of the service users' normal experience as symptomatic of mental illness. However, distinguishing between experiences considered normal for Pagans, such as visions, from symptoms of mental illness, such as delusions, can be difficult. Crowley argues that there is a potential role for healthcare professionals with a Pagan identity in this area, illustrating this with an example of a therapist participant's

experience of assisting a psychiatrist college understand a service user's belief in being a witch was not delusional, although they were also experiencing psychotic symptoms.

**Rationale**

It may be concluded that there are psychologists, and other clinicians, who identify as Pagan, or Wiccan, and some, perhaps especially in parts of the United States, feel justifiably anxious about the impact of this becoming generally known might have on their career. At the same time some Pagan service users have either found their spirituality to be treated as a symptom or are concerned about this as a possibility; as a result they may feel unable to discuss this part of their lives, feel especially cautious acknowledging their religion in therapy, or seek out a clinician who hold both Pagan and therapist identities. These findings are of particular relevance to Counselling Psychology, which places an emphasis on pluralism and the promotion of non-discrimination both in relation to its clients and its members (Douglas et al, 2016). However, it also raises the question of the extent to which an identity such as 'Wiccan', or 'Pagan' sits easily alongside that of 'Counsellor', and the extent to which holding these dual identities might be experienced as either dissonant or resonant by clinicians.

Wicca is deeply enmeshed with the practise of healing (Orion, 1995: Crowley, 2020) and, like psychotherapy, is supported by an inner journey and study believed to confer the ability to perceive a reality of which most people are unconscious. While many clinicians have incorporated ritual acts into their psychotherapeutic practice (Perlstein, 2001) some, working in or from a Pagan perspective, have felt that this has particular resonance or relevance for them (Harrow, 1996; Cole, 2003) although others have raised concerns regarding role boundaries (Chapin-Bishop, 1999; Friedman, 2012).

Drawing on a range of occult literature from the twentieth century Seymour (1998) argued that there is a clear parallel between the practise of magick and the practise of therapy and that, while this has been well understood from the perspective of practitioners themselves, it has remained largely unrecognised within psychotherapy as a discipline. More recently, however, Goodwyn (2016) has examined the efficacy

of a wide range of rituals in healing from the perspectives of anthropology, and biological, psychodynamic, and cognitive psychology; arguing that ritual may be understood, and shown to be effective in healing, from each perspective. He examines the place of ritual as it exists in contemporary healthcare and argues that psychotherapy and western medicine, while having many rituals, do not adequately allow for the integration a spiritual dimension. Goodwyn (2016) concludes that, while mental healthcare professionals are not currently expert ritualists, their becoming so would offers the potential to improve patient outcomes.

Drawing on the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss (1963), Hadjiosif (2013) has argued that the consideration of shamanism is of importance to Counselling Psychology on the basis that both may be taken as representing differing aspects of a more universal healer or guide figure and shamanism offers an alternative framework though which to consider the practise of therapy. Crowley (2020) has, similarly, highlighted the ways it that health and healing are conceived within Paganism and argues that the identity of healer is integral to that of witch.

# Chapter 3
# Method

## Outline

Five British Traditional Wiccans, who were also qualified therapists whose training would have qualified them to work within the National Health Service of the United Kingdom, were recruited using a non purposive snowballing strategy. Data and was derived from semi structured interviews designed to highlight the intersections between their religious and professional identities before being subjected to analysis using the questioning hermeneutic approach employed within interpretive phenomenological analysis. Participants were then invited to comment on the interpretation of their individual interviews. Following this the five individual interpretations were analysed in a second interpretive phase order to establish themes which extended across cases.

## Situating the Researcher

As a researcher I am a white, middle class male from the South West of England in my mid-forties, having qualified as a Mental Health Nurse shortly before embarking on my doctorate in Counselling Psychology. My practise of psychotherapy is integrative but tends to be largely informed by a relational psychodynamic perspective. For me the research topic is not an abstract question but a personal one as I have been a Wiccan in the Alexandrian tradition since 2011 and identified as a Pagan for more than a decade prior to that. Therefore, as I move toward registration as a psychologist, I am aware of a more personal secondary question beyond ‘How do people make sense of the experience of being a Wiccan therapist?’ which is ‘How will I make sense of my experience of being a Wiccan therapist?’

Examining Wicca from the perspective of insider/academic has become increasingly accepted as a valid research position (Pearson, 2001; Doyle White, 2016). This is partially a result of post modernist critiques of a supposed objectivity to which qualitative research might aspire, and the corresponding perspective that data is co-created between observer and observed rather than representing a pre-existent truth to be uncovered (Braun and Clarke, 2013). While Davidsen (2012) has criticised the filed of Pagan Studies on the basis of having become dominated by insider voices

displaying partiality, the position of insider as researcher remains valid if rigour is maintained though the demonstration of transparency and reflexivity.

**Prior Methodological Approaches**

Research specifically examining Wicca and psychotherapy has tended to employ mixed method designs in which interview data has been supplemented with quantitative data from questionnaires, Seymour (1998), Walters (1998), Friedman (2012) and Kirner (2014), Harris et al (2016), Crowley (2018). However, the majority of these studies have not adopted a specific methodological framework in approaching qualitative data and this may have aided some in demonstrating additional methodological rigour. Exceptions have been the most recent; Harris et al (2016) and Crowley (2018), who employed Consensual Qualitative Research and interpretive phenomenological analysis respectively.

**Deciding on a Qualitative Approach**

Since the middle of the last century the dominant research methodology within psychology has been to assess quantitative data based on either positivist or post positivist assumptions (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This reflects the adoption of what Critchley (2001) describes as the Anglo/American analytic philosophical tradition, with its emphasis on the study of epistemology, mathematics and logic, in comparison with ‘continental’ movements such as the phenomenology and existentialism of philosophers such as Merleau-Ponty (1945), Sartre (Gardner, 2009) and postmodernism (Derrida,1976). Researchers have, therefore, typically aspired to objectivity in preference to subjectivity and qualitative research has been relegated to the lower rungs of the ‘evidence hierarchy’. The difficulty with privileging quantitative research methods is that whilst this approach is especially suited for answering specific questions based on predefined variables it is less applicable to capturing the lived experience of participants. Braun and Clarke (2013) have argued that qualitative research may either be undertaken as part of its own paradigm or, less satisfactorily, be treated as an ‘add on’ in support of quantitative approaches to generating data.

In seeking to understand how Wiccan therapists made sense of their experience of holding these dual identities a qualitative research methodology was selected as

generating meaningful quantitative data posed a number of challenges. Had the wider definition of 'Wicca' (effectively anybody who identifies as Wiccan) been adopted then the study would have examined a vaguely defined, and potentially very diverse, group. Attaining a representative sample would have been particularly difficult and attempting to make general statements about a diverse population would also have required a large number of participants. If a more focused definition of 'Wicca' was employed, as advocated by Pearson (2000), attaining a representative sample in numbers sufficient to make meaningful statements about the population could have remained tenuous given the 'hidden' nature of the group. Additional challenges in making meaningful statements about a wider population would have been that past research has shown that Wiccans, especially those in professional settings such as healthcare, are tacit in acknowledging their identity, and the wide range of perspectives of what 'psychotherapy' can include.

Chamberlain (2012) has argued against adopting an 'off the shelf' method of qualitative research on the basis that, as each piece of research is unique, pre-defined qualitative methods which have varying aims and underlying assumptions should not be followed slavishly without regard to context. He also laments the lack of thought and engagement with underlying epistemology or theoretical underpinnings with which such methods are sometimes employed. Chamberlain, rather, favours the careful use of criticality and reflexivity throughout the investigative process in the hope that this will organically produce the unique methodological approach tailored to the research. In the present case, however, the adoption of a recognized method remained attractive as I was embarking upon my first qualitative study and the use of a carefully chosen template was judged to be helpful.

**Focusing on Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)**

Interpretive phenomenological analysis (Smith et al, 1999; Smith, 2004; Smith, 2011) is a qualitative research method which rests upon the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology (Hurssel, 1982; Heidegger. 1962; Sartre, 1956) and the interpretive discipline of hermeneutics (Gadamer, 1960). The method uses a small number of very detailed accounts and focuses on how participants come to understand and 'make sense' of their experiences. This is achieved by the researcher initially entering a phenomenological mode in which they work alongside the participant in

an effort to capture the experience described. In the case of interview data this stance is adopted while conducting the interview and during transcription during which the researcher seeks to immerse themselves in a participant's experience. Subsequently the researcher seeks to capture the essence of meaning which is conveyed beyond that which has been directly stated though the adoption of a questioning hermeneutic position. The participants are considered individually in great depth and only subsequently does the researcher seek to either identify themes which exist across the sample or consider ways in which participants diverged from each other. Additionally, some of Chamberlain's previously stated objections may be less relevant to IPA, as Smith (2004) has been clear that the methods outlined must be regarded as a guide and that methodological suggestions are to be adapted as required. Despite this Chamberlain (2012) makes an important point in that a methodology should not be employed without proper consideration of its theoretical underpinnings and that unthinkingly following a prescribed series of steps to generate data must be avoided.

The interpretive phase of IPA employs a questioning hermeneutic which may be distinguished from sympathetic or critical approaches (Smith, 2004; Smith et al, 2012). A sympathetic reading takes a participant's account at face value indeed interpretation beyond what is directly stated is not required; Seymour (1989), for example, adopts this approach. In contrast a critical interpretive position is characterised though interpreting meaning through the use of a theoretical framework which exists outside of the data. A relevant example would be that of Faber's (1993) study of contemporary Witchcraft as these are made within the context of psychoanalytic theory. Interpretations of meaning employing a questioning hermeneutic seek to go beyond what is said directly but only through using material contained within the data. Increasingly subtle levels of interpretation derived from a very close reading of the text and consideration of the language employed by individuals are advocated by Smith (2004; 2007). Smith (2011) has argued that a factor in distinguishing between poor and good quality IPA has been that the analysis extends beyond the descriptive.

The decision to employ IPA was taken after considering several qualitative methods as alternatives including Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and Grounded

Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). IPA was decided on for three reasons. Firstly because it offers a framework to include reflexivity; given that I am an 'insider' IPA is apposite as it offers a framework for the incorporation of my reflexive response both methodologically and philosophically. Secondly IPA focuses on a small number of participants, such as might be expected in the present study, due to its ideographic focus. Finally IPA offers a different hermeneutic perspective than has tended to be employed in previous research in this area, which have mainly a sympathetic hermeneutic position; therefore adopting the questioning Hermeneutic applied in IPA is more likely to add something new the field.

**Recruitment strategy and Participant information**

In order to focus the research this study specifically focused on the experience of people who were part of the initiatory lines of 'British Traditional' Wicca and whose professional qualification as a therapist would enable them to deliver some form of 'talking therapy' within the UK National Health Service. Given that Wiccans are low in number and research has show that they are especially wary of disclosing their religion if working in a clinical setting, a non purposive snowball sampling strategy was adopted in identifying potential participants. Two participants were already known to me through Wicca and they were able to identify a number of other sources to whom I wrote asking if they would be interested in participating. Participants who agreed to be interviewed were invited to select their own pseudonym rather than have one designated by myself or be assigned a number. Rowen and Flea were well known to me, while I had met Salem on a few occasions previously. Both Star and Rainbow were unknown to me prior to the research interviews taking place.

**Table 1. Participants**

| *Pseudonym* | *Gender* | *Age* | *Type of Therapy* | *Experience as Therapist* | *Years as Wiccan* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Rowan** | Female | 50s | Integrative | 20+ years | 10 |
| **Flea** | Male | 60s | Integrative | 30+ years Supervision Experience | 7 |
| **Star** | Female | 60s | Person Centred | 25+ years Supervision Experience | 20 |
| **Rainbow** | Female | 30s | Person Centred | 2 years | 5 |
| **Salem** | Male | 60s | Person Centred | 3 years | 20+ |

## Procedure

Each participant was interviewed using a semi structured interview using a format intended to capture their experience as both therapists and Wiccans and highlight intersections between the two. Participants were provided with both the participant information sheet (Appendix B) and the interview schedule (Appendix A) and Confidentiality and Consent paperwork (Appendix C) ahead of time. This was partially in the interest of full disclosure but also so that they would have an opportunity to consider their answers prior to the interview. They were requested not to discuss their answers with other people immediately, however, as it there could be a chance that they would influence each other. The structure of the interviews was divided into three parts: Experience as a Wiccan; Experience as a Therapist; and Therapy and Wicca. At the beginning of the interview participants were invited to chose a pseudonym rather than having one assigned to them as this was hoped to prove helpful in capturing something more personal than employing a number or letter.

The interviews were conducted in a semi structured format following the series of questions but making little attempt to steer the participants back to the question

which had been asked if they went in another direction. I took care to try and avoid using ‘leading’ language. On the few occasions I felt I may have made a mistake in this regard I acknowledged it directly; an example of this occurred when I asked Rowen if she would describe her psychotherapy practice as ‘integrative’.

> *Stuart: “Okay.” *pause* “A better interviewer would have asked 'how would you describe yourself?' and waited for you to come up with the word, rather than feeding you a word.”*
> *Rowen: “Ah, but I had already said it.”*
> *Stuart: “Oh, yeah.. I suppose.”*
> *Rowen: “You are paraphrasing it back to me. *laughs* Would I describe myself as that [integrative]? Yes I would, because I already have.”*

All the participants were interested in my own experiences and perspectives. I approached this by saying that I would be happy to discuss my thoughts candidly but also requesting that postpone this until the interview had taken place.

> *They both laugh a little. Pause. Stuart and Star look at each other. Stuart perceives Star as being expectant for him to give an opinion.*
> *Stuart: “Yep, and once again, I'm biting my tongue. I want to, I really feel myself wanting to get into a discussion and share myself. Of course I have to...”*
> *Star: “After this, I am really interested, I'd like to hear your experience.”*

At the end of the interview expectations around anonymity and confidentiality were confirmed and the interviewee signed the consent form. They were made aware that they were able to withdraw from the research at any time prior to publication.

**Analysis:**

The analysis of the interview was conducted by my initially immersing myself in the data; the process of transcription itself being a significant way in which this was achieved. The transcripts themselves were of a significant length and averaged around 13,500 words and, although the process of transcription from audio added to

the time taken to complete the study, this assisted me to enter deeply into the participants' accounts.

Following this an in-depth analysis was conducted using the questioning hermeneutic perspective specific to IPA in which interpretation is employed but without relying on a critical framework beyond what was offered by the participants during the interview itself. An example of this resulting analysis from the interview with is presented in Appendix D. Once the textual analysis was completed mind maps were employed to help organise the emerging themes within the individual interviews. An example of one such map is provided in Appendix E This resulted in Individual interpretations ranging from roughly 3,250 to 4,500 words written for each participant. These are summarised in Table 2.

**Table 2. Individual Interviews**

| Participant | Summary | Themes |
|---|---|---|
| **Flea** | Flea's saw his identities of counsellor and witch as deeply enmeshed and regarded his spiritual life as adding to his clinical practice; in his attempt to be a consistent individual who moved between contexts rather than adopting different personas in different roles it was implied that achieving greater synthesis was desirable thing as so long as boundaries remained clear. Synthesis as a process also emerged as a precursor to experiencing spirituality and magic, often through the resolution of dyadic pairs. Flea experienced both spirit and magic as energies which could be felt and possessed a numinous quality. Spirituality was described in terms of stillness 'a place I go to' and possessed properties of protection and nurturing. Magic was directional. It could be influenced but which also had its own movement to be aligned with and was associated with the coincidence of events in a meaningful way. | Considered but flexible Management of Boundaries<br>Synthesis of Witch and Therapist identities<br>Authenticity as both Witch and Counsellor |
| **Rowen** | Rowen described a number of ways in which she experienced things while with a client which she linked to her practice as a Wiccan, often as 'enhanced empathy'. When she discussed spirituality, it was in terms of its enmeshment with other facets of life. The importance of promoting equal relationships emerged as a theme and was contained within | Enmeshment of spirit with other aspects of life<br>Wicca Enhancing Empathy<br>The importance of |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | the phrase: ‘Power with rather than power over’ This striving toward equal partnerships extended to Rowen’s clients, her colleagues and also her Gods. | promoting equal relationships<br>The interview as an Exploration of ideas. |
| **Rainbow** | Rainbow was a woman in her thirties whose clients were typically adults engaged in a twelve step program. Rainbow saw her engagement with Wicca as being both personally healing and helpful for her development as a therapist, however, she also sought to maintain a strong boundary between her work as a clinician and spiritual journey as a Wiccan. In our interview striving for individuality and freedom was contrasted with collective forces which tended to have an oppressive tone, such as the patriarchy and stereotypes. | Power Dynamics – Empowerment vs Power<br>Individualism vs being overwhelmed by a dangerous collective.<br>Focusing on Experience rather than Rationality |
| **Star** | Although Star seemed to enjoy exploring how Wicca and Counselling might interact she always returned to her position that they were fundamentally separate. At the same time she described what she called her 'central dilemma'; the feeling that she might be more effective as a healer, and more authentic in the work, if she allowed some of her Pagan worldview in certain circumstances. At the same time she had to “play it straight” both to accord with her classically Rogerian definition of what counselling was and because of the context in which she worked. | Lifelong Developmental Quest<br>Central Dilemma<br>Feminism<br>Christianity as:<br>a) Difficult Personal History (negative)<br>b) Obedience to authority (negative)<br>c) Influence on current spirituality (positive) |
| **Salem** | Salem was a gay man in his early sixties. He framed himself as gifted but also as an outsider, although in some communities, such as Wicca and Counselling, he described his feeling of having come home. While Salem’s spiritual beliefs were intrinsic to his understanding of what took place in therapy on a deeper level he was adamant that he would never acknowledge this with a client. However, he also felt his gifts to perceive a spiritual reality was helpful for him as a therapist. | Being a Gifted Outsider<br>Having come home<br>The developmental journey of both the individual and the cosmos itself. |

**Seeking Feedback following the first phase of interpretation.**

Seeking feedback from participants was important to preserve their voices if they disagreed with something I wrote; In such a case I would have included this

information and the nature of our divergence. All agreed to continue on the basis of what I had written but only only Flea responded in depth, writing:

> *"Hi Stuart,*
> *Thanks for sending me what we have discussed for your research. I felt it was not only an actuate portrayal of what we discussed but also you got the inferences and the feeling behind our conversation very well. There was a lot of loving kindness in our discussion as well as humour and you captured these in your write up. It also helps me see my own movement in the time that has followed so I could see where I was at that time. Thank you for your efforts in keeping true to our interaction.*
>
> *Happy Solstice, Flea."*

**Constructing superordinate and subordinate themes across participants.**
Following feedback, and since none of the participants withdrew at this stage, I engaged in a process of constructing ordinate and superordinate themes across the five interviews, beginning with revisiting the individual interviews before returning to the full text as a whole. This was achieved both through using the process of close textual examination common to IPA and through developing the interconnections graphically through mind mapping software as was done when carrying out the first round of interpretations. The graphical nature of the mind maps was a particularly useful addition to the textual reading as it allowed for easy visual manipulation of the data rather as if arranging a jigsaw.

At this stage the large quantity of the material which focused on lifelong self development in some form started to become apparent as did it's centrality to how the participants made sense of their experience as both witches and psychotherapists. A significant strand of this data, which focused on the process of development having being catalysed or informed by spiritual experience, was identified as forming a subordinate theme partially on the basis of its being dependent on there being a process that it could inform but also on the strength of its quantity, consistency across all participants and relevance to the research topic. The narrative of emancipation and growth as a woman formed a particularly strong and consistent aspect of a lifelong path of development for the three female participants,

but was absent from the accounts of the two men; given it's central importance to these participants it was also ascribed it's own theme. During this phase the levels of interpretation (Smith, 2011) were deeper and I moved further from a descriptive toward an interpretive analysis. This may have taken place due to my having become more familiar with the process, but also because considering the sheer volume of text forced me to become less fixed on discrete parts and more sensitive to what was implied across the data as a whole.

**Process Issues**

One challenge in achieving a purely questioning mode during the interpretive phase was that the researcher and participants were familiar with numerous concepts to which the participants alluded on many occasions; these included such topics as humanism, psychotherapy, the occult, and Wicca itself. For example, all the participants alluded to the influence of C.G. Jung with the clear expectation that the interviewer would be generally familiar with the material to which they were referring; therefore, some of the interpretations made use of the data being offered in such a context. For example, interpreting a statement that analytic psychology was important in a participant's personal process might be interpreted to suggest they likely valued individualism due to the emphasis placed on separation from the collective during individuation. That a participant mentioned Jung would not, however, have provided the researcher carte blanche to attempt critical interpretations informed by analytical ideas.

No matter the hermeneutic perspective adopted, in adopting the paradigm of qualitative research data is considered to be co-created through an interaction between researcher and participant rather than a pre-existing 'truth' uncovered by the researcher in the manner of an archaeologist uncovering an artefact. (Braun and Clarke, 2013). An example of this emerged during an interaction in the interview with Star:

> *Star "He assumed that the single woman in the coven was provided for his pleasure. I was really... You know she had to fight him off. *starting to sound cross* He just assumed it was his given right. And I think in, traditional, you know old school Alexandrian, Gardnerian there is that attitude." *Slight silence*

*and looks at Stuart who realises he is probably looking scandalised* "Yes."*
*Stuart: "I am, obviously, having trouble maintaining my phenomenological attitude here.... You know..."*
*Star: "That's how outrageous it is."*
*Stuart: "Yes, Okay. Sort of silent outrage."*
*Star: "Well, we take that as read don't we?" Take silent outrage. And, hopefully, nobody would do anything like that and, hopefully, it is a generational thing. You know... Old men can be sexist, and that's a gross generalisation I know, but, in my experience... Well, certainly men of my generation and above* can be quite sexist and younger men can be quite all right."

When the text is considered two things are apparent. Firstly, that, when I realised something non-verbal, stemming from my own response, was taking place between us, I acknowledged it directly; making a 'here and now reflection' rather than trying to gloss over what was happening and get 'back on track'. In so doing I was dancing in a manner consistent with my training in psychotherapy, even though this was an interview not a session. My seeking to relate to Star and the other participants in this manner probably contributed to the tone of the interviews, which felt close, real and collaborative; perhaps, as therapists, these dance steps were ones we all knew and felt comfortable with. Secondly, in the final paragraph, Star works to distance this "gross generalisation" from me, a younger man, who "can be quite all right." While it is true that social attitudes have changed over the course of time, it also begs the question: how might the data have been shaped were I a woman, perhaps a woman who had also experienced similar things, who had nodded instead of looking shocked.

McConnell-Henry et al (2009) observe that, increasing research in rural settings or very specialised fields has resulted in an increasing number research studies employing interview data with participants who have a pre existing relationship with the researcher; for example student/teacher, professional or social peers, or nurse and client. They argue that this can allow for the necessary rapport for collection of deeply personal and authentic information to be established more quickly, potentially resulting in the creation of deeper, richer data. McConnell-Henry et al (2009),

however, caution that a researcher faces a challenge in dealing with the issue that pre existing knowledge may exist between interviewer and participant and, while the participant has consented to participate in the interview they have not agreed that any prior contact with the researcher in another context may be used. This was relevant in my interviews with both Flea and Rowen with whom I had discussed psychotherapy and Wicca in the past, and when they made references to things they knew I would be familiar with, I invited them to expand in an open ended way.

> *Flea: "And we've not talked about it since, but I'm interested in how that might have co-inside-ed with anything that he's working with."*
> *Stuart: "This, I mean..." [Aware that Flea and I have some shared experience but knowing that I will need to draw specifically on the contents of the interview during my interpretation] "Do you have an idea of what we did in the group?"*
> *Flea: "What we did in the group? We were in the, you remember, we were in the dark, talking about the dark, the dark side of...[Flea goes on to describe the ritual],"*

**Ethics**

Pearson (2001) has discussed the implications of researching Wicca as an insider from the perspective of anthropology and considers how the insider as researcher can act ethically towards the community they are studying while still producing useful data. She points out that past research has the potential to impact future studies and that, when conducting her own doctorate, she had to overcome distrust on the part of some Wiccans in the UK who felt that they had been treated in bad faith by Luhrmann (1989).

Pearson (2001) was sharply critical of Luhrmann's (1989) description of feeling relieved when people eventually seemed to forget her identity as a researcher, arguing that this represented an unethical research practise, as well as for entering into initiation in bad faith. In this research care was taken to inform participants about how the data we created might be used, both in written form prior to their interview and again verbally when we met, and what they could expect in terms of their transcripts being anonymised but direct quotes being used. Particular care was

taken to redact any identifying information such as place names or other identifying information. On a few occasions details were changed in ways which did not influence the results of the research but which served to obscure the identities of the participants.

The project was designed in accordance with the Code of Ethics and Conduct laid forth by the British Psychological Society (2009) and a submission for ethical approval for the research was made to the University of the West of England Graduate School and was approved prior to data being collected. Prior to conducting interviews full information was provided to participants about the content and purpose of the research and written confirmation of consent to participate obtained. Information provided to participants also outlined the limits of confidentiality and made it explicit that were the interview to include a disclosure that either the interviewee or a third party were at risk of harm it would be necessary for the researcher to consider issues around safeguarding which could potentially include breaking confidentiality. These documents are reproduced in Appendix B and C. Each interview was opened, and concluded, with a statement that what is said within the context of the interview will be included in the research unless the participant should at any time withdraw their consent. When the initial analysis of interviews completed copies of this and transcripts were sent to the participants with a request for feedback and reminder that they were still able to withdraw from the study if they chose to do so.

# Chapter 4
# Results

### The Interviews

The tone of the interviews generally was relaxed and trusting and, despite the focused nature of the inclusion criteria, the five participants emerged as very different voices within the collected data. The participants were willing to be candid and seemed to reveal much of themselves, were interested in the topic and seemed to be engaged in an exploratory, self-reflective process. This was evident in some of the language used, for example when participants started to say something and then changed their minds. Although three participants already knew the researcher two interviews were initial meetings and it is likely that sharing the identities of both therapist and Wiccan with the interviewer contributed to the easy way in which these conversations unfolded. That the participants and researcher shared the vocabulary of both psychotherapy and western esotericism further enabled interaction as they were able to link concepts without having to continuously explain things from first principles.

## Super-Ordinate and Subordinate Themes

### 1. Developmental Spiritual Quest

The participants seemed to find complementary ground between the identities of Wiccan and counsellor in that both placed an emphasis on engagement in a process of personal development; however, their journey went beyond a commitment to reflective practice and had a distinctly spiritual character. The interviewees saw themselves as being on a path or spiritual quest which they traced back to childhood and which had incorporated both Wicca and counselling; for the three female participants this was further embedded/located within a narrative of finding their spiritual agency as women. They also placed importance on a direct relationship with the spiritual in their lives with all but Rainbow spontaneously offering vivid accounts of mystical experiences which had been transformative or significant for them.

Salem saw human beings as inherently engaged in a process of development but, although he ascribed to humanism, he did not use the phrase self-actualisation, but rather:

> *1.A. Salem*: *"My own working on myself is the Great Work that we are all participating in."*

Similarly to self-actualisation The Great Work denotes a path of self-development but inherently includes a spiritual attainment which is considered to be beyond experiencing peak states and the influence of this perspective was intrinsic in how Salem understood his life.

One particularly meaningful statement which seemed to reflect a merger between Star's occult and humanistic perspectives in the form of following the path was:

> *1.B. Star: "For me it, doing your true will, is about following your organismic self. Being authentic, whatever, being yourself.*

In this statement Star incorporates terms from both the domains of counselling and occultism. Following the caveat that this is true 'for her', suggesting that there are other valid perspectives, Star refers to the True Will. This term was employed by the occultist Aleister Crowley, to whom she referred directly on several occasions, and which forms a central part of his mystical system of Thelema - in which a person's True Will denotes their fundamental nature, or purpose. As such it has parallels with the Buddhist and Hindu concepts of fulfilling of dharma (Easwaran, 1986, 1987), or with that of living in accord with the Tao in Taoism.

The nature of a person's true will is learned through attaining spiritual understanding of their path in life, poetically referred to as 'attaining knowledge and conversation of the holy guardian angel' (Crowley, 1991); here the symbolism reflects the Abrahamic idea of following God's will. From this perspective the will of 'God' and the True Will of the individual are perceived as synonymous once the adept understands their relationship to the universe. In quote 1.B Star goes on to relate True Will to the idea of the organismic self (Rogers, 1967), which denotes an organism's drive to realise

its authentic nature, before underscoring the connection to Roger's work through invoking the core condition of authenticity. Star's final words 'being yourself' are significant in the context of the three theoretical frameworks to which she has already referred: in humanism it implies self-actualisation; in Thelema, where the individual nature of a person is embodied in the phrase 'Every man and woman is a star' (Crowley, 1904); and in analytical psychology where the archetype of the Self is of especial significance (Urban, 2005).

Salem, Rowan and Star also incorporate rediscovering what they once knew into their narrative of the path; these descriptions have the tone of regaining something lost, or not fully understood, but pre-existent. Star expresses this generally in relation to her practise of high magic.

> *1.C. Star: "High magic in terms of the fall, we fell from divinity and now we have to try to get back up there and it is through developing ourselves to connect with divinity."*

Rowan uses more personally situated language:

> *1.D. Rowan "It [Wicca] was actually finding a name for what I had always done rather than the other way around, rather than seeking it out. For me the process has been about rediscovering what I knew as a child.".*

Salem offers a similar description in relation to both counselling and Wicca:

> *1.E. Salem: "I feel I've always been a therapist but now I know what I'm doing. I've always been a witch but now I really know what I'm doing because I've had the training and the structure."*

All three of these quotes convey the sense that there is something inherent and fundamental in the nature of the seeker to which they may reconnect through the quest itself.

### 1.2 Transformative Mystical Experience

For Flea the narrative of quest begins both with his seeking solace from an unhappy situation and being confronted by the reality of death during childhood. After spending years exploring Sufi, Buddhist and Pagan mysticism he experiences a transpersonal state of connection with the universe which resolves his fears.

> *1.2.A Flea: "Death attracted me to Wicca I think. I was terrified of it; it really disturbed me. I remember sitting in the garden doing this meditation on my corpse rotting in the ground and the worms beginning to eat and so on. And I felt the sunrise; there was a real stillness and a lovely feeling came over me. I suddenly realised 'of course, that's what happens'. I came from the earth, I'll go back to the earth. I felt complete calm; knowing that, somehow, it felt safe."*

Rowan, similarly, describes a state of transcendence, which assuages her sense of existential threat; following performing the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram[4] for a month on a daily basis resulted in a vivid experience of identity with the larger universe during which awareness her individual self was suspended:

> *1.2.B. Rowan: "I experienced a moment - and it was a moment- of non-existence, nobody, no... Just being part of everything and feeling that interconnection..."*

Rowan went on to expand on this, saying that, while reincarnation 'of some form' formed a part of her world world-view, she did not necessarily expect her individual sense of 'I' to continue after death.

> *1.2.C. Stuart: "So would you say that you would come back [reincarnated] or it would not necessarily be that sense of 'I' in the same way?*
> *Rowan: "Oh, no. No, not the sense of 'I'; I'm quite looking forward to losing that."*

[4] The LRP is a ritual which formed a central part of the Golden Dawn system of magic (Regarde, 1989) and which subsequently became widespread within western occultism. It involves a combination of visualisation, intonation of divine names and ritual. It is often performed with the intention of readying both the practitioner and their working space for further work.

Salem also had a particularly strong narrative of being on a path, but it begins with his sense that he was born into his spiritualist family for a reason. His 'coming home' into counselling and Wicca both form facets of a journey which he sees as culminating in still being able to offer guidance to others after death.

> *1.2.D. Salem: "And I realised that becoming part of the Craft was the path to becoming more than human eventually. Maybe not in this incarnation [...] Not that I'm looking to become a bodhisattva, but that idea of a spirit guide. You have not got a corporeal body but you could still make a difference.'"*

The way these participants made sense of their altered states of consciousness may be seen as working to resolve their sense of existential threat, however a contrast emerges which seems consistent with their ontological perspectives. Both Rowan and Flea experience their separate existence as being relatively unimportant or illusionary when set against their vision of creation. In contrast Salem's experience of spirits and altered states gives him a sense of the continuation of his individuality - although his experience of a transpersonal reality, in the form of the Web of Wyrd (Bates, 1984) described in his interview, is similarly important to him.

**1.3 Spiritual Emancipation as Women**

While all participants included establishing their individual identity in relationship to the collective, for the three women, this was also associated with finding their own power in the face of patriarchy. Rainbow's journey is particularly linked with her identity as a woman, and her feeling of being marginalised in her country's church, while living in a patriarchal society.

> *1.3.A. Rainbow: "And, I guess I sought spirituality as a meeting of those needs; however, being a woman, they were not met. Um, so, the priests won't take you as seriously as if you were a man and... Especially once you have hit adolescence, nobody really wants to touch you with a barge pole because of all the sexuality you represent for the priests which is just yeah..."*

As she grows up the spiritual elements of her quest are developed as she discovers Wicca and this leads both to discovering her own spiritual agency and being able to

relate to men in a positive way.  Similarly, Star's narrative of escaping her family's rigid interpretation of religion and discovering Paganism is intertwined with her sense of having been constrained as a woman and having to fight to find her freedom; being a counsellor, her personal therapy, Wicca, feminism and magic were all included in a strong narrative of individual development.

> *1.3.B. Star: "There was always a quest actually. I always did feel it was a quest and, coming across the feminist spirituality stuff was definitely... And knowing that there were cultures where women were revered and respected as opposed to second class citizens.".*

In the three women's descriptions as a whole there was a strong theme of having to overcome oppression in order to pursue their path and they seemed more aware of potential risks, both of being compliant, which included not being able to think for one's self and rape, and marching to their own drum which might have entailed losing their children or job as a result of their involvement with Paganism. Rowan and Star both expressed their frustration at feeling they were not only expected to relate to spirit through a male intermediary but also that they were discouraged from questioning what they were being presented with.

> *1.3.C. Rowan: "Completely different to how I experience monotheistic religion where you weren't *pause* Where I wasn't, I'll own it, I was not encouraged to question, I was not encouraged to... and you had the intercession of a priest; you couldn't approach the deity directly."*

> *1.3.D. Star: "Weren't allowed to question anything. *sighs* And it never did it for me; that a man was supposed to save me. So, I think the feminist idea, feminist spirituality, I think is what attracted me but I did not know that was what I wanted."*

For the two older women, Star and Rainbow, who lived through the satanic panic of the late eighties and early nineties, the sense of having to overcome opposition or face danger in order to pursue their path was not confined to early experience but continued into their adult lives during this time – although they did not experience it

as a current concern. For Rainbow there had been the experience of having to hide any evidence of Paganism when visited by her evangelical mother, and her fears around her mother attending the same church as a government employee involved in investigating alleged ritual satanic abuse. For Star it had been concern that she might lose her job, after being outed as a witch, when a student's pastor complained to her college.

Historically, certainly in the formative decades in the United Kingdom, Wicca has evidenced its own patriarchal dynamics and the early schism between Gardner and Valiente is illustrative of this (Valiente, 1989). Star described a negative experience around power and gender from some decades earlier:

> *1.3.E. Star: "Because he had been in Wicca for like a really long time, he assumed that the single woman in the coven was provided for his pleasure. I was really... You know she had to fight him off [metaphorically]. *starting to sound cross* He just assumed it was his given right."*

Star's description here raises additional issues around perceived seniority and entitlement, not to mention ethics. Although Star did not describe this experience as representative of Wicca generally, and went on to speculate that such things might be less common today as society was generally less sexist, Friedman (2001) has written in depth regarding the experience unethical behaviour of this type in contemporary North American Wiccan communities. Rainbow's description of men in Wicca was positive however, saying "They [other Wiccans] tend to not be as gender stereotypical as, sort of, people outside Wicca can be." before going on to reflect on her own experience of gender dynamics within a coven:

> *1.3.F. Rainbow: "In my experience the High Priestess basically wields most of the power *pause* But it is not quite like that, because it is a partnership that, in my coven, it is about. And, I think, the power of the priest is very much present and I think his um... You know, confusingly his power is in surrendering the sort of stereotypical male dominating power to the High Priestess and I think that gives the more authority, almost, in the coven to me."*

The women in this study seemed to find something closer to the equality in power they were searching for in Wicca, and which they experienced as supporting their spiritual journey, and this was especially captured by Rainbow's description of healing through positive experiences of masculinity in Wicca. At the same, however, they certainly did not describe a situation in which power dynamics were switched in their favour[5]; and such a conclusion would be consistent with the male participants not raising issues around gender during their own descriptions.

**2. Perception of Self as Outsider**

Participants tended to adopt an 'outsider' perspective. Rainbow told me she loved everything about the word 'witch', specifically its connotations of empowerment for women and being outside. While I initially thought she meant being out of doors she explained that it was the idea of:

> *2.A. Rainbow: "Being outside the sort of mainstream and, um, the... The symbolic cottage outside the village and all it represents."*

The cottage is not described as isolated or remote but 'outside the village' suggesting that, while separate it is not cut off from community life. Beyond the romanticism of a rural idyll this is a particularly evocative image and seems to say something about being able to relate to the collective on one's own terms and also that, since the village is something one wishes to be outside, it includes a dangerous or overwhelming aspect.

The preference for individuality was often associated with exceptionalism, and this was especially developed in Salem's interview he situated himself outside of the mainstream and seemed to prefer doing so. 'Normality' tended to suggest the connotation of being unexceptional instead of implying desirable qualities such as safety or stability and this came over in his description of the majority of people visiting Salem town.

[5] N.B. There are other forms of Wicca, such as Diannic, in which the situation would be different to that described in the context of British Traditional Wicca.

*2.B. Salem: "Touristy wise it was great, but the tourists just don't get it. It is like things hidden in plain sight and they are invisible to those who choose not to see in this incarnation."*

Similarly, whilst being different was referenced frequently, it tended to be used in relation to being gifted or special. Some of his resonance with the identity of outsider was conveyed when I asked Salem about what attracted him to Wicca.

*2.C. Salem: "Initially, this is going to sound really corny, being gay all my life I had a pretty tough time at school. Learned to fight hard fast and dirty from a very early age. *chuckling* But, that rebellious… Getting to Salem and seeing all these shops with New Age stuff, especially the Craft stuff."*

Salem described how accepting and supportive his family had been in all areas of his life and did not return to his experience of growing up gay again during our interview. In that passage, however, he seemed to convey finding a resonance between those people who were hurt by the larger social group and his own experience. His feelings of empathy became more explicit when he later described himself as unexpectedly crying at the graves of the witches who had been hung. Similarly, Salem situated himself as being 'outside' during his childhood through his family's spiritualism and Salem linked this to his later experience of visiting Salem town and experiencing such a strong resonance.

*2.D. Salem: "I was not fully aware of what was going on. I knew that this was part of the gift that I had to keep a bit quiet about at school, because my parents had said 'we do this but the average person, you know, it would seem a little bit weird.'"*

For the participants as a whole conventionality tended to be described with a negative tone suggesting oppression, mediocrity, or an awareness of the dangers of failing to conform rather than being associated with positive attributes such as security or safety; in general, they saw themselves as occupying an eccentric position in relation to wider society.

Exceptions were that: firstly, they seemed to place a particular value on their inclusion in Wicca (an eccentric group in itself) often using the phrase ‘coming home’ to describe this sense of belonging and the using family relationship metaphors in describing their experience of relationship with other members of this group; secondly, they identified strongly as ‘counsellors’. Star and Rainbow, particularly, tended to become increasingly self-reflective and tentative when our conversations strayed away from Rogerian orthodoxy. For Star this was contained under her ‘central dilemma’ heading, for Rainbow it could be noted in the joke about potentially losing her ‘person centred credentials’ as a result of her interest in Jung.

For Rainbow, however, even a label such as ‘Wiccan’ could feel problematic as she felt that it invited people to pigeon hole her as something, thereby threatening her individual nature:

> *2.E. Rainbow: “I still struggle with the word 'Wiccan' because that sort of implies some sort of belonging to a movement or something like this, which I don't like. I like to identify as 'That's me. Rainbow' and I practise, or walk the path, of Wicca.”*

When I asked Rainbow to elaborate on what belonging to ‘a movement’ would mean for her she described it as feeling too organised, or being part of something generalising which had an agenda which once again seemed to suggest the potential of being overwhelmed by a dangerous collective.

Flea’s description of his developing sense of spirituality during his childhood strongly captures the experience of standing apart in a vivid recollection of feeling unlike ‘all the other kids’:

> *2.F. Flea: I had all sorts of violence going on; and I used to hide around the back of the school when everybody was in the playgrounds and I clearly remember taking solace in the sunrise. ‘Cos you get to school before, you know, all of the other kids were bullying in the playground, and I would watch the sunrise and I used to believe that that was protecting me and so on.*

Star's account, too, includes the sense of being set apart when she was "*claimed*" by her patron Goddess:

> *2.G. Star: "...and I heard Sekmet, the name Sekmet, being called. I didn't know anything about Sekmet. Like I said I've always avoided Egyptian stuff because it just felt too trendy. Everybody is into it; right I'm not going to be."*

While the sense of being claimed by a Goddess is, inherently, to experience being set apart from those who are not so chosen, this passage clearly describes a preference to adopt the position of outsider through her words *"Everybody is into it; right I'm not going to be."* That the 'everybody' here is, itself, a reference to a very small section of society who concern themselves with Paganism or occultism in the first place underscores an inclination to stand apart.

Rowan was somewhat exceptional in this regard as she tended to describe collectives in generally positive tones, and she did not frame herself as being on the fringes in the way which was more characteristic of the other participants; indeed, she described her attraction towards feeling part of a group as being influential on her as motivations as both witch and counsellor:

> *2.H. Rowan: "What attracts me to Wicca is I'm a team animal, I like being part of a group. Um, and actually that reflects on my practice as a counsellor too. I like to be part of a team. Um, and Wicca offered that opportunity of both the personal individual experience, of magic, but also the collective... Communal; that's a better word."*

However, while Rowan's description of groups was more positive than the other participants, she was similar in that she desired to engage on her own terms, saying:

> *2.I. Rowan: "Sometimes I want to be social and sometimes I want to be quiet and on my own. I don't like ever feeling that I'm being... That enforced jollity, you know? No. It's got to feel authentic for me whether that is with people with a huge group of people if it feels authentic great. If there is any feeling of*

*inauthenticity, then I retreat. You know... I'm sort of sociable but I can also be quite misanthropic too *laughs*.*

The divergence from the other participants in this regard was captured well by the tone of her description of how society related to client groups she had worked with:

*2.J. Rowan: "So they were very, very disenfranchised; didn't feel that they had a voice. If they did have a voice, um, it was often ignored. And, actually, you know [...] people felt disenfranchised, ignored, side-lined. Run roughshod over.*

Here Rowan describes how wider society can be overwhelming and damaging to individuals but then focuses the problem in terms of not being included rather than focusing on the dangerous nature of the collective itself.

**3. Weighting Experience over Rationalism.**

There was a post-modernist tendency to ascribe value to subjective experience which fulfilled the function of reconciling unconventional perceptions or beliefs against a culture valuing rationalism, and which might even be hostile to an enchanted world-view. As a result experiences did not need to be rooted in 'objective' reality in order to be justified as valid, although it was important for the participants that this remained as a possibility. Star describes holding the perspective of 'not knowing' which was echoed on several occasions by both Rowen and Rainbow.

*3.A. Star: "Well, I think the first thing is the debate, and for me the jury is still out, are all these [Gods, Spirits] manifestations our internal projections, or are there real disincarnate entities around? I don't know. I really don't know. […] I tend slightly on the: 'It's all projection.'"*

Flea alluded to the potential for a negative perception of his beliefs by people in the mainstream with an element of humour.

*3.B. Flea: *Pause* You will have me locked up as a mad therapist. *chuckles* Stuart: What makes you say that?*

*Flea: *laughing again* "Because it, I was just... What made me say that was that I was thinking of you putting me down in print for a Master's of a Scientific Degree or whatever. That, if you like, is going to analyse and define things. And it makes me laugh. It makes me laugh when I think 'We have to define these things.' I don't have to define them in my head."*

Flea's joke about being 'locked up as a mad therapist' seems to suggest he feels some people might consider his world view crazy, or even dangerous, before going on to reflect on the futility of seeking to capture the experience of spirituality to quantifiable data.

While Flea's meta-awareness of his thought process was suggested more by reflective comments and jokes, such as in 3.B. above, Rowen, Star, and Rainbow made explicit statements asserting their own criticality and reflective stance in interpreting spiritual experience. These seemed to suggest, as well as the commitment to criticality, that they were similarly aware of the potential for tension between their beliefs and perspectives which might have cast them as deluded, for example Faber (1993), or Bailey (2019). Star also expressed disapprobation of people whom she perceived as failing to achieve this.

*3.C. Star: "Well, I mean... It is all this sort of thing about synchronicity and things that happen. If you choose to look then you can make it significant. I can say 'oh yes, I was called' and I think there are too many priestesses up themselves, you know, direct lineage from Atlantis, type airy fairy astral junky sort of stuff really. I really, I feel uncomfortable with stuff like that. I feel uncomfortable with all these grandiose claims that people have really. […] I think it may well be significant but I don't want to claim that I'm some sort of superior being as a result of it or specially selected."*

Here Star references the active role a person plays in constructing experience and meaning with the phrases 'if you choose' and 'you can make it significant', before going on to distance herself from those 'airy fairy' people whom she perceives as lacking in criticality. Star implies here that she perceives remaining grounded 'i.e. as opposed to "airy fairy" and critical of one's own experience, rather than credulously

accepting anything and everything, as serving a protective function against ego inflation; without which a person is liable to become “grandiose”, “up themselves”, and liable to believe anything.

Similarly, when I asked Rainbow about her thoughts around magic, gods and anything to do with the supernatural she began by focusing on how she started from a sceptical position, assuming none of ‘it’ was real before returning to her experience as being of primary importance.

> *3.E. Rainbow: “So, staying with that sort of sceptic, slash, cynic theme; I do start from the place 'let's assume it is not real' and sort of find my way […] I still am not certain whether I have experienced people's auras or I make that up. However, it does not stop me from working with it.”*

Although describing herself as beginning from the position of sceptic and cynic Rainbow leaves open the possibility that there may be something ‘more’; a magical reality underpinning her experiences, and this view was echoed by the other participants. Therefore, as Rainbow ‘is not certain’, Star ‘tends toward’ subjective explanations. Rowen’s framing of magic as being the result of a change in consciousness similarly allowed for either psychological or enchanted world-view interpretations.

> *3.F. Rowen: “Ah, mmm my view [on magic]… It works, for me. It, um. I do think that... for me I think that it is a change of consciousness; and if I can change my own consciousness then I can change the material world that I live in.”*

Rowen begins by using the caveat ‘for me’ twice in succession; in doing so she seems to suggest that magic works for her not necessarily because she has special powers over the external world but perhaps that this is her experience and she has the ability to alter her experience of reality. This is implied again by her description of changes in consciousness altering ‘the material world that I live in’, rather than simply ‘the material world’. Here she seems to be implying a constructionist perspective in which different people are seen as inhabiting differing realities based on their perception.

Star returned to the stance of ‘not knowing’ in describing being with the body of a friend who had died, however the context emphasised the importance and significance which the experience held for her.

> *3.G. “And a friend of mine who died. I remember going around to his room afterwards and sitting in there […] I had to open the window. And I don't know if I just make these little things up for myself because it makes me feel better or if there is something more significant going on. I don't know. I can't claim to say 'Oh, I did this and I'm a really powerful priestess'. I can't, you know... I don't know.”*

Flea allowed both for subjective or objective dimensions to spiritual or magical experience but instead of adopting a position of ‘not knowing’ as did Star, Rowen, and Rainbow, he employed a discourse centred on dyadic pairs of opposites. For Flea his approach to metaphysical ontology had this sense of an ‘in between’ or ‘liminal’ nature and his experience of Gods or Magic neither existed only in himself or the external world, rather they emerged from the interaction between the two. As he put it:

> *3.H. Stuart: “So real magic in the sense that it would cause an external effect as well as effecting yourself?”*
>
> *Flea: “Yes, I think it does. It is external and internal, it is where the two join; I believe. When I'm really in tune with what is going on in my life, with people around me and so on, things can happen, like I can be humming a tune, sitting in the car and then it comes on the radio.”*
>
> *[....]*
>
> *Stuart: “Well it sounds as if, if I understood correctly, the internal and the external are not separate and they could not happen unless they are together.”*
>
> *Flea: “They are separated, it is the joining which is where you get the magic.”*

Flea's description of his experience with the god Pan strongly captured acknowledging subjectivity, while valuing experience as profoundly important, while at the same time leaving space for a spiritual reality.

> *3.I. Flea: "Pan is a symbolism of, um, for me, is a symbolism of the spiritual aspect in which we are often frightened of. [...] Now I don't believe that there is an actual man out there, hoofed and bearded, and with the horns but it is a great explanation of that sort of energy, you know. So I could see him, I actually saw him when I was doing a meditation, I saw him in a ritual which we were doing. I saw him in the garden, it was superb. When I saw him I really connected."*

Flea's subsequent comment about this experience: "I suppose it is in the separating it and defining it that makes it not what it is." was echoed by Rowen and Star who both made statements to the effect that too much intellectual analysis of experience was unnecessary.

> *3.J. Rowen: "I don't know where they [auras] come from, whether this is an internal projection of intuitive feelings about something, whether I'm just intuiting it and this is like a manifestation of that intuition. Don't really feel the urge to explore too deeply because I'm quite happy to trust my instincts on it now."*

> *3.K. Star: I was imploring her [a Goddess] every night to help me, to help me to heal. I'm asking her for help; but I'm asking my higher self or some floating about person. In a way maybe it does not matter.*

However Flea implies that while the vision of Pan is 'what it is' subsequent analysis might even diminish its mystical quality, making it 'not what it is'. For Rainbow, also, too much analysis had the potential of detracting from experience and she described this while alluding to not being too concerned with weather or not certain Gods she related to possess a historical basis, or were more modern inventions.

> *3.L. Rainbow: "So, there are rabbit holes that you can fall down when... go quite deep down, when you dig up the historical evidence for things. And, um... That*

*can take you away from experiencing things for yourself. So, in my practise of Wicca, experience trumps logical knowledge."*

In contrast to the other participants Salem's discourse was generally free from qualifiers such as 'in my opinion' or 'as I experience it' and at no point did he suggest that his experience of a spiritual world might be a self-created reality rather than objectively real. For him spirit entities, Gods, angels, and the spirits of the dead had an independent existence, and magic was a force which certainly went beyond a person's capacity to alter their experience of the world through a symbolic act.

## 4. Balancing Spiritual Identity with Professional Role

While all the participants were committed to professional practice they varied in how they addressed separating vs synthesising their identities as Wiccan, and Counsellor. This took place both internally (whether they would entertain thoughts of their Gods during a session, if they would ever pray in relation to their counselling, the extent to which they framed their work as a counsellor as a spiritual calling) and externally (e.g. the extent to which they would self-disclose, or how anonymous they made their counselling room). Drawing a correspondence between theoretical models of development in both the psychological and occult literature also allowed a move towards additional internal synthesis.

The participants generally found the idea of entering into some internal dialogue with their gods about client work manageable, to a degree, since it was not inherently directive. Rowan acknowledged conversing with her Gods about clients, but was uncomfortable with my using word 'prayer' to ask about this, although she subsequently went on to say that this was what it actually was. Her description of this process was concerned with asking for advice, or guidance, however rather than petitioning for intervention or protection on behalf of another.

*4.A. Rowan: So, yeah. I do. I, and, you know... Even if it is an internal dialogue that I am having in my head; I'm really struggling with this and they seem to be in such a dark place and I don't know if I'm really able to help or... What do you reckon? You know? And that sort of conversation; and stuff comes through*

Salem, in contrast, said he prayed each time he set off for work but, for him, the boundary was that would not dialogue with a specific deity regarding counselling, only a more general sense of cosmic divinity.

> *4.B. Salem: "I don't specify, oh this God, that God. Or this spirit, that spirit. It is just to the Cosmos. If I'm doing specific work as a witch, I wouldn't do it for clients, but if I'm working magic, or spells, or something I will then focus on a particular entity, a God, a Goddess, a spirit, spirit of place."*

Therefore, for Salem, moving from the general to the particular felt too personal and would have threatened his sense of professionalism as a counsellor. Rowan, in contrast, would talk with her Gods freely; however, when she once experienced seeing Hecate standing behind a client during a session, she bracketed the perception, as she might her other personal thoughts or feelings, and carried on as normal. For Flea the idea of prayer seemed to have little meaning unless it was in the sense of meditative contemplation. Star only found herself conversing with her Gods regarding clients occasionally, and about those for whom she was concerned.

> *4.C. Star: "Yeah, I have done... Not generally as a rule. Ones that I'm troubled with, and trouble me. I'm more inclined to say 'Oh, look please just take this one on. I can't deal with it. I don't know what to do; guide me.'"*

Although Rainbow described counselling as a spiritual act, she sought to maintain a strong boundary between her work as a clinician and spiritual journey as a Wiccan.

> *4.D. "Stuart: Do you feel that the Gods or spirits are ever present in relation to your work?*
>
> *Rainbow: "When I read this question... I remember having a reaction to it. Because I am a bit of a... Wicca is separate. Counselling is separate. Um, so I don't call on my Gods to help me work. I don't teach about Gods to my clients. So no they are not present in the counselling relationship. However on the deeper level, the work of counselling; it is a political act but I think it is also a*

*spiritual act. It is a step on that spiritual path of sort of accepting somebody for who they are and being present with them and being okay with not knowing and being okay with what is happening. And I think that is something that I do in Wicca and that is something I do in counselling. But I would say no, none of the like spirits or anything like that are not explicitly present in counselling for me."*

*Stuart: "Explicitly?"*

*Rainbow: "Well, really or implicitly for me. They are not named. They are not acknowledged in my mind."*

Here Rainbow describes how the divine, as she experienced it in Wicca specifically, must be excluded from her thoughts during a session so as not to threaten the boundary between her clinical and religious identities. In contrast she described Buber's I Thou relationship (Buber, 1970), as more fundamental enabling it to be present in both contexts without threatening the separation of either.

A tension seemed to be experienced by most of them, whether they primarily sought to integrate or separate. Star wrestled with what she called her 'central dilemma'; the feeling that she might be more effective as a healer, and more authentic in her work, if she allowed some of her Pagan world-view in certain circumstances; at the same time she had to "play it straight" both to accord with her classically Rogerian definition of what counselling was and because of the context in which she had worked.

*4.E. Star: "Um, I think, because I've done counselling at college, I've paid less attention to the Gods. I think, if I was doing it in a different context, where I had set myself up as a Pagan counsellor or something - which is an oxymoron. As a something else, maybe not as a counsellor, I would be doing a lot more stuff to make sure I was tuned in in that way. So, I'm not saying that they are not, I'm just saying in the context within which I was counselling somehow I shut that bit of myself out to an extent. And I did feel limited. By the end of it I thought. What... I don't know who I could be and how much more effective I could be as a*

*counsellor. Because I'm teaching it, and because I'm doing it in the college, I have to be really straight with this. And really, sort of, limited."*

This was important even in relation to managing her internal world rather than doing something nobody other than herself could be aware of; for example such as using visualisation to clear the energy of a room between clients which she had started doing at one point but stopped, or asking Sekhmet to look after her during a session.

Although Rainbow found the idea of allowing any experience of Gods or Spirits during a session unacceptable, she did not find the idea of doing a purification exercise before seeing a client, nor of washing her hands to symbolically let go of the impact of a session problematic. She was also willing to draw comparisons between magical work and some experiences in therapy. She used the example of how she had worked with a client who felt they were being followed by an apparition of their abused younger self. During the session Rainbow had engaged with the child presence symbolically in a way which the client had described as very helpful. As Rainbow reflected:

*4.F. Rainbow: "I guess in some way that was a magical spell work *slight laugh* you know? That was working with magic in therapy session but, at the same time, you can see that from non-magical point of view as working with what is in the room, literally. Yes.... So, yeah... It's multiple dimensions in the same scenario."*

Although Star seemed to have enjoyed exploring how Wicca and Counselling might interact, she always returned to her position that they were fundamentally separate.

*4.G. "Stuart: Is there anything about your experience of being both a Wiccan and, you know, a therapist or a counsellor at the same time which you feel we have not touched on? Making sense of that."*

*Star: "No. More just the division really. And not feeling I can integrate, but I would not want to integrate Wiccan into... *pauses* If I was running a coven and*

*I had trainees, no problem. I think it is the context that makes a difference and counselling is counselling in its rarified oasis."*

Star's language, here, is indicative of the depth of her feelings about the practise of counselling. The 'high' or poetic nature of the phrase 'rarified oasis' conveys something about how Star experiences the profound depth of person centred work; it is an oasis, a place of life sustaining water amidst an arid environment, and the oasis, itself, is rarefied; which is to say pure, and refined. By extension Star's firm boundaries are necessary to preserve its purity. However, while Counselling must be insulated from Wicca, she does not believe Wicca must remain isolated from counselling; indeed, were Star to have trainees, she would actively seek to bring the life-giving water from the oasis to her coven.

Salem also evokes something of this using the analogy of 'cherry picking' in which he describes both 'not being able to', and of 'having to'; possibly the flavour of superficiality which 'cherry picking' implies further suggests the threat to authenticity.

*4.H. Stuart: "The ultimate question is how do you make sense of being a therapist and being a Wiccan together?"*
*Salem: "I think the only way I can answer that is I am a Wiccan, at the end of the day. I am also a therapist. And for me to be congruent in the room you can't cherry pick, it is the whole deal. However, in professional presentation and conduct I have to cherry pick, because it is not about me and it is not always a good idea for the client to know too much about me."*

While all the participants expressed a commitment to practising in a professional manner they situated themselves on a continuum between bracketing their identity as Wiccan from their own awareness while acting as a therapist on one hand, and maintaining a consistent perception of their internal reality as a witch, while moving between different contexts, on the other.

Only Flea would have made no real attempt to avoid discussing his Pagan identity but was resolved to answer any questions a client might put to him about his own experience as transparently as possible. His adoption of synthesis in the search for

authenticity was by far the most pronounced of the five and he correspondingly exhibited very little of the ‘central dilemma’ tension. Theoretical orientation and training may have influenced how the participants addressed balancing as the two integrative counsellors seemed to move towards synthesis while of the person-centred counsellors, Rainbow and Star, were more inclined to separation. The length of time a person had been practising counselling or Wicca did not seem to influence how they addressed synthesis/separation but the extent to which they perceived their working environment as being safe and accepting of this aspect of themselves did.

The idea of casting a spell intended to impact a client was almost invariably considered to be out of the question. The main reason for this was that the participants felt that it would step outside their professional role. However, additional objections were that they regarded it as unethical to cast a spell on another person without their knowledge and consent, and interviewees almost never acknowledged their Pagan or Wiccan identity with clients.  For the person-centred practitioners, there was also the concern that it would be directive. In only one instance (Flea) did a participant say they had ever cast a spell on behalf of a client, and this was at the client’s request and considered a quite exceptional event. Most interviewees were more open to casting spells on themselves in support of their therapeutic work however. For example, Salem and Rowan both described using a ritual to help bracket countertransference they had found problematic. It was also common for the participants to refer to clearing the energy of the room in some way before working, or performing a ritual act, such as washing their hands, to leave their work behind when the day was concluded.

Star also said that, while she had never done so, she might be open to using divination such as tarot cards in order to help her understand a client more clearly, although she would be something to do alone. Both the exploratory nature of our interview and the tension which seemed to be held by this central dilemma was reflected a number of times when Star began to question whether she might do some of the things I asked but then reined herself in, typically by making a statement along the lines of ‘but then that would not be counselling would it?’

Salem's description of being guided to Rogerian therapy was one of many instances in which he framed the universe as possessing an intelligence which supported development; it was also illustrative of how he tended to imply an objective metaphysical reality:

> *4.I. Salem*: *"The thing that resonated with me with Rogers was that everything just wants to fulfil its purpose and be a fully functioning whatever; whether it is amoeba or a human being. [...] And I believe wholeheartedly that I am now part of that process, but it is a higher power that brings whoever into my healing room to do whatever needs to be done."*

Here, through extending the humanistic idea of an actualising principle to include a spiritual dimension, consistent with his experience of Wicca, he allows a move towards synthesis in the domain of theoretical model. A similar process may be observed in quote 1.B. in which Star equates a person doing their True Will with following the organismic self.

## 5. Spiritual Life Supports Work as Therapist

The participants all saw their spiritual lives as adding to their professional work rather than detracting from it. Firstly, they generally felt that their experiences in Wicca had helped them to perceive their client more sensitively or intuitively, which Rowan described as 'enhanced empathy'. More fundamentally, however, there was a sense that who they as people had been developed through their ongoing spiritual journey and that this supported their work.

Rainbow also saw her engagement with Wicca as being both personally healing, and helpful for her development as a therapist regarding her relationship with men and she described her adolescent feelings of disempowerment in being reduced to sexual object rather than complete individual coupled with the visceral fear that power might be exerted over her though rape.

> *5.A. Rainbow: "I think doing Wicca helped me be less afraid of men. I think I used to be afraid of being objectified by a man; and that comes directly from my*

*early life experiences. The moment you hit puberty people only see you as a sexual object, or so I felt. […] But, underneath that was the fear of being raped basically, and I think that has run though my relationships with men until Wicca where, I think, sexuality is welcomed and is present in our rituals, however, it is safe. And I have no fear of being raped anymore. And that means that I can work with male counsellors and male clients much better; so that has had a really big impact on me as a therapist."*

She seemed to contrast her earlier description of church as a young person *"...once you have hit adolescence, nobody really wants to touch you with a barge pole because of all the sexuality you represent for the priests."* with her experience of sexuality being welcomed in Wiccan ritual but being safe which she experienced as healing.

Salem described Wicca and Counselling as separate but parallel and was able to draw several comparisons. However, his language suggested that they supported something transcendent. At one point he conveyed this by initially using the metaphor of bicycle wheels to capture the separate but complementary nature of the two:

*5.B. Salem: "So, where the Craft took me one direction this was like the second wheel to a bicycle, to help me go parallel to... Like the Kabbalah, the middle path. You know you have got the Craft on one side, you've got the therapy training on the other and, technically, never the twain should meet. I find that they are meeting in me and I'm comfortable with that because I'm managing it, and it is making an effect, a positive effect. Not only on myself but on my clients."*

There are many traditions in Kabbalah and its detailed study represents a very large body of work which goes somewhat beyond the scope of this thesis. In condensed terms, however, the Kabbalah is a diagrammatic depiction of the nature of spirit, both as it exists in the universe and within an individual, called 'The Tree of Life' in which ten locations (sephiroth) are connected by twenty-two paths. Sephiroth on the right

side are located on the pillar of mercy (Joachim), those on the left are located on severity (Boaz), while the middle pillar represents balance (Regardie, 1998).

Here Salem describes his feeling that he is integrating two things inside himself, and that this process benefits himself and others. That there is a spiritual developmental dimension to this process is implied in clearly; the integration of apparently contradictory dyads though the transcendent function is a key aspect of individuation in Jungian theory (Jung, CW 6 825-828; Jung, CW8 131-193), which Salem has already stated he is influenced by and the use of a Kabbalistic metaphor is notable in that, within the western esoteric tradition, it is closely associated with the Great Work (Fortune, 1935).

Rowan used the phrase ‘enhanced empathy’ to describe the feeling that her sensitivity to clients had been improved and was able to describe a number of ways in which she experienced things while with a client which she linked to her practice as a Wiccan. These experiences, such as seeing auras, feeling a sense of what was happening in the chakras (energy centres of the body) of her and her client and having flashes of imagery which seemed to contain an allegorical meaning, were something which she noted but kept to herself, saying:

> *5.C. “So it is not something that I'm overt about. It, it's like another tool. Like enhanced empathy is how I would describe it.”*

Rowan’s description of one of Roger’s (1957) core conditions being *enhanced* by experiences which she linked to her Wiccan identity was significant in how she perceived the impact of Wicca on her clinical work. Rowan described these experiences as having been useful when a client was struggling either to find words to express themselves, or to make a difficult disclosure. She was, however, quite cautious in interpreting what her experiences actually represented, saying:

> *5.D. Rowan: “I don't know where they come from, whether this is an internal projection of intuitive feelings about something, whether I'm just intuiting it and this is like a manifestation of that intuition. Don't really feel the urge to explore too deeply because I'm quite happy to trust my instincts on it now.”*

Rowan described divination as a means of connecting to her intuitive or unconscious knowledge and made use of various forms in seeking self-insight. These included scrying (seeking pictures or symbols in random patterns such as those created by ink in water, flames et al) and tarot cards. She saw this as having been relevant to her counselling on several occasions, giving the example of seeking to understand what it was that was blocking her from feeling as warm as she would expect in a therapeutic relationship.

Similarly, Salem described his clinical practice as being enhanced by his gifts such as perceiving auras which he experienced as enabling him to be both more perceptive and empathic. He also described having used ritual to move through negative countertransference, symbolically breaking a bottle into which he had directed feelings that he felt threatened his unconditional positive regard towards a client.

When it came to spells, again, Rowan was happy to use this aspect of her religious identity to work on herself as a therapist and she related how she had once used a spell to help herself to move past some countertransference which she felt was impeding client work. However, she drew a definite line around using a spell with a particular client in mind.

Salem, especially, described a world of subtle perceptions which he felt added to his practice. As described in the Weighting Experience over Rationalism theme they did not always ascribe objective reality to these systems and sometimes described them as a language through which to articulate their intuitive sense of what was taking place in the room. With the exception of Rainbow, who was the most rigorous in bracketing her internal spiritual reality, and Flea who simply described using his intuitive sense, participants tended to use the language of esotericism to describe this; for example, ‘picking up’ images, perceiving ‘energy’ or seeing auras.

Beyond giving the participants a language to describe, and perhaps a framework to develop, an intuitive sense of their clients they also described their spiritual life as catalysing changes in themselves which helped to connect therapeutically in a

deeper, more significant way. Flea described his journey in Wicca as having encouraged him to ‘go in to go out’ which he believed had deepened his skills as a therapist. Rainbow attributed the healing she had found in Wicca as supporting her in being able to establish positive therapeutic relationships with male clients, as well as giving her experiences of altered states of consciousness which had been helpful in understanding experiences in therapy. A passage from Star particularly captured the sense that something fundamental about her own self had been developed, which now supported her work in counselling.

> *5.E. Star: “I would like to think that my having a spiritual path, rather than defined as Wiccan, offers some resonance for people to be able to explore that within themselves. And, to me, if you are not connected spiritually it is like you are not plugged into the mains. You are running off your own batteries. And I know in counselling I've felt sometimes, it feels like people’s pilot lights are out and I just have to help them ignite in some way. By listening to them, offering the core conditions rather than doing anything more weird and wonderful. So there is something about nurturing somebody's inner flame. Feels really important. And I don't know that it's about being Wiccan; I'd attribute that to having a connection with a spiritual path.”*

That Star suggests here that she has established a connection to something beyond her individual experience which fires her and that people exploring their own spirituality will be more readily able to relate to her because of this; she describes this as being as a result of what she feels she has become rather than something she does.

Flea was explicit in conveying that his participation in Wicca had been instrumental in helping him to develop as a therapist, and he placed a particular emphasis on his Second degree initiation as having been important in this process.

> *5.F. Flea: “Now I've realised how relevant that [taking initiation into the Second Degree] was, really. It has taken me to work on a different level in my being and in my expectations. How do I be part of the world that surrounds me in a way that is useful to me and to others? I think what has happened to my work, the*

*Pagan, is that it has taken me to another depth."*

Flea initially begins with the description of levels; however, it is then emphasised that he is not ascending but, rather, descending; into deeper, more meaningful relationship both to his clients, and the world around him. Flea sees this process as both helpful in his work as a clinician, and largely stemming from entering deeply into himself as a result of participating in a Wiccan ritual.

# Chapter 5
# Discussion

## Summary of Findings

The superordinate themes that emerged from the analysis were, firstly, of personal development in the form of **Developmental Spiritual Quest**, which contained two subordinate themes; **Transformative Mystical Experience** and, in the case of the three female participants, **Spiritual Emancipation as Women.** Secondly, **Perception of Self as Outsider** in that most participants saw themselves as eccentric to the mainstream. The third theme, **Weighting Experience over Rationalism** addressed how most of the participants described their views on magic, the Gods, or anything supernatural; they placed emphasis on phenomenological experience rather than promoting a metaphysical reality and, while they did not discount that there could be something beyond their subjective perceptions, they tended to feel that whether or not this was the case was comparatively unimportant. Fourthly, **Balancing Spiritual Identity with Professional Role**, in that all participants actively tried to balance their perception of reality as Wiccans with remaining professional as clinicians. In this regard the participants seemed to situate themselves on a continuum between *separation*, with the function of preserving professionalism, on one hand and with *integration*, which had the function of preserving authenticity, on the other. Finally, the theme of **Spiritual Life Supports Work as Therapist** reflected the participants' feeling that their spirituality generally supported their clinical work.

## Structural Outline

This discussion firstly, examines the narrative of development presented within the contexts of Wicca and Psychotherapy which were contained within the Developmental Spiritual Quest theme; this was of note since it enabled the integration of both identities as aspects of a single self-development project. Since all the participants alluded to analytical psychology, the work of CG Jung has been given consideration as regards the 'oceanic' type of mystical experience, in which the sense of individuality becomes merged with a c ollective whole (Neumann, 1954) since this was commonly described by the participants. Whether such experiences

could be interpreted as regressive rather than developmental, as per the critical hermeneutic position adopted by Faber (1993) is considered.

Secondly the theme of ‘perception of self as outsider’ is presented as consistent with the process of separating from the collective described by Jung as a part of individuation. The assumptions of individualism in relationship to self-development, common in Western culture, are critically examined and contrasted with perspectives of personal growth as interdependence, rather than individuality, found in some other cultures. Thirdly, since all the participants were from backgrounds in which the ‘default’ religious context would have been Christianity and they all referred to it in relation to their experience as Wiccans and psychotherapists, the extent to which their experiences reflected and diverged from those reported by Christian colleagues in the research literature is outlined.

Fourthly, the place of Faith as a virtue within monotheistic religions is contrasted with its absence from the accounts of the participants, who did not describe subjective explanations for their experience as threatening to their spiritual identity. The impact of an emphasis on experience rather than faith is considered in the context of how psychotherapists might relate to religion using the model proposed by Zinnbauer and Pargament (2000). Fifthly, the implications of the women’s experience of a patriarchal system, which included but also extended beyond their experience of Christianity, is considered; as are the implications of an awareness of this forming a part of the narratives of the two men. Sixthly, ways in which participants might be seen as integrating, rather than compartmentalising, their professional and religious identities are outlined and a perceived danger of disclosure is identified as an impediment to this. Other potential examples are also considered in the form of ethics, the assumption of dual roles, and the use of tarot cards. Seventhly, the context and limitations of this research itself are considered, including my own reflexivity. Finally, the potential for future research and implications for practice are suggested.

**Self-development Narrative in Wicca**

There is a strong narrative of personal development running through the practise of Wicca. The process of becoming a ‘seeker’, finding a coven which will provide

training and then progressing through the three degrees of initiation all imply a process of inner growth. Strands of ceremonial magic, which significantly contributed to Wicca, were similarly concerned with the inner quest in the form of The Great Work - to which both Salem and Star refer. Rowan, too, shows this influence though her description of having to perform the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram daily for a month as part of working towards her second degree initiation in a Wiccan coven and this represents an example of the 'spiritual alchemy' form of magic listed by Pearson (2007). Although Valiente (1989) describes herself as having edited out much of the 'Crowleyanity' from Gardner's Book of Shadows a particularly well-known extract 'The Charge of the Goddess'[6], by Valiente, strongly conveys the idea of searching for the divine within:

> *"And thou who thinkest to seek Me, know that thy seeking and yearning shall avail thee not unless thou knowest the mystery; If that which thou seekest thou findest not within thee, thou wilt never find it without."* Fararr and Fararr (1996; p.43)

Pearson (2000) framed British Traditional Wicca as part of the western esoteric tradition, drawing on previous work by Fairvre (1994) and the descriptions of spiritual quest and inner transformation contained within the interviews seemed consistent with this conclusion.

Although Gardner titled his first book concerning Wicca 'High Magic's Aid' and had a charter from Crowley to run the O.T.O[7] in Europe (Hutton, 1999). Vivianne Crowley (2002) has argued that the idea of providing a means to personal or spiritual development was not strongly prevalent in Gardner's original presentation of Wicca; rather its early narrative was of seeking to regain a lost harmony with nature through reviving the 'old ways'. Certainly, the idea of Wicca offering a path of inner transformation became widespread over the following decades however (Crowley, 1996; Farrar & Farrar, 2002), and Crowley (2002) describes Wiccans of the 'second generation' of writers often employing material from analytical psychology with its

[6] An extremely comprehensive examination of this text and its sources has been made available online http://www.ceisiwrserith.com/wicca/charge.htm

[7] Ordo Templi Orientis - an occult lodge of which Crowley was leader and which he aimed to promote his religion of Thelema.

central concept of individuation; Rainbow's interview, particularly, was explicit of this influence:

The process of development in analytical psychology is described in terms of individuation, and all the participants referred to Jung when asked about theorists who had been influential on them; this was notable as, although Flea and Rowan had a more integrative background and practice, the other three participants were trained from a Rogerian person centred perspective. Salem, particularly, was illustrative of how Jung's ideas enabled a connection between the domains of psychotherapy and Wicca without the danger of threatening professionalism.

In the case of the Rogerian counsellors, ideas from analytic psychology were considered in reference to self-development or personal quest rather than being brought into work with clients and only the two participants who adopted a more explicitly integrative approach were likely to encourage clients to work with dreams or symbols, or offer interpretations informed by Jungian theory.

Jung presented individuation as a process of psychological development which takes place through a number of mechanisms. Firstly, as a means of differentiation (Jung, CW 6 757). Jung argues that the development of the younger person comprises internalising the norms with which they are presented by society and strengthening their ego in order to function; subsequently a process takes place through which a person comes to differentiate who they are as an individual from the wider society in which they have developed. Secondly, Jung describes individuation as a process of integration of unconscious material into awareness, and Jung (CW 6 825-828) uses the example of synthesis of sensuality and spirituality into a mediatory product to argue that the psyche possesses a means of synthesising apparently contradictory material which he terms the Transcendent Function. Thirdly, Jung (CW 6 757-762) describes Individuation as the development of consciousness out of an original state of identification with the mother.

A central aspect of individuation, therefore, is separating from the wider cultural/psychological matrix, however the worship of the 'Great Goddess' has been examined from within analytical psychology as potentially seeking to return to a

perinatal undifferentiated state of unity (Tacey, 2001). Jung (CW 7 260-261) describes the danger of identification with the collective psyche and Neuman (1954) presents this as symbolised by the image of the ouroboros, a circular depiction of a snake eating its own tail. The idea of ouroboros mysticism as presented by Neuman did not seem to fully capture the participants in this study however; as, while they valued the experience of the divine feminine, none of them dismissed the vitality of the god image and they seemed to emphasise their separation from the collective through the outsider theme. This could be seen as consistent with Crowley's (1996) depiction of Wicca promoting a balance between male and female archetypal symbols in life, in contrast to a regressive desire for the primordial mother through an unconscious thanatos impulse. Crowley's position that Wiccan symbolism promotes psychological development rather than regression is echoed by Dion (2006) who examines parallels between individuation and Wiccan practices, especially in relation to the shadow archetype.

Faber (1993), although writing from a more Freudian perspective, is particularly critical of what he sees as the regressive character of contemporary witchcraft. Faber is erudite and certainly eloquent in describing the potential for the spiritual seeker to enter into a regressive rather than developmental psychological process; however, his unrelentingly negative depiction of Wicca seems unbalanced. For example, he considers the Great Rite only as an opportunity to enact an Oedipal fantasy, while the obvious *Hieros Gamos* symbolism is entirely ignored. Similarly, the potential of the circle, which plays so central a role in Wicca, to symbolise psychological wholeness (Jung, CW 14 513) is not mentioned, even to be rejected after consideration; rather it must represent the primordial mother which can be controlled in an elaborate fantasy. Everything is reduced to narcissistic wish fulfilment and failing to grasp the nettle of life in favour of retreating into a comforting delusion of infantile omnipotence.

Although Faber's perspective seems overly critical, the 'oceanic' type of mystical experience was certainly valued in participants' accounts and might be exemplified by Rowan's description of quite looking forward to losing her individuality following death in quote 1.2.C. Tacey (2001, p50) has expressed dismay at this type of sentiment, which he sees as representing "a love-affair with death and non-

existence”. However, it did not seem that the experiences of unity described by the participants in this study had the tone of disavowing life, but rather in making peace with mortality. Given that acceptance of death represents a key stage of the developmental process, both as conceptualised within self-actualisation, and individuation, these descriptions need not be construed as regressive; Flea’s account of his long standing anxiety around death being resolved through an experience of this type particularly seemed to capture this function rather than expressing a life denying impulse. However, there is no need to conclude that an individual practising Wicca enacts an entirely developmental project of integration any more than an inherently regressive fantasy of cosmic wish fulfilment and identification with the mother archetype, as both positive and negative impulses may exist within different, or the same, individual.

**Perception of Self as Outsider**

Other than in the case of Rowan the participants implied the perspective of outsider in relation to ‘mainstream’ society, although they also adopted strong in-group identities as Wiccans and counsellors. Viewing things from outside might be seen as consistent with the role of psychotherapist; although a counsellor aims to remain fully engaged with a client’s story/distress/process they not become lost in it and remain able to both reflect on what is happening and contain the process of therapy.

From an individualistic perspective, the maturity of a human being is largely based on self-sufficiency, being emotionally and psychologically self-contained; in this context, the themes of self-development and outsider sit well together. Brooke (2008), however, contends that to build a notion of development around the end product of becoming an individual, with a sense of self separate from wider society, reflects a relatively contemporary western perspective and contrasts the Kenyan theologian John Mbiti’s statement "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am." with Descartes’ “I think therefore I am.’ Brook argues that Jung’s emphasis on separation from the collective stemmed partially from the culture of his time and place.

The tendency of to promote independence rather than interdependence is examined by Cheung (2000) in a deconstruction focusing on the transcultural applicability of

Counselling Psychology. If considered from a collectivist or systemic hermeneutic perspective, in which self-development is assessed according to the extent to which a person is integrated into society, the image of occupying a 'cottage outside the village' acquires a different, less positive, meaning. Nblick (2013) argues that the non-conformist tendencies of self-identified Pagans are best captured in the statement 'I am, therefore we are.' The assumption that one's own world-view, for example that of individualism rather than interdependence should work with all people, and that it can be applied in all contexts, suggests that therapists can implicitly perceive this to be the case on one hand although acknowledging the constructed nature of reality. This underscores the need for the counsellor to examine and remain mindful of their own cultural and philosophical assumptions in the professional context and not unconsciously privilege their own world-view as they seek to relate authentically to clients and supervisees.

**Context: Christianity**

The descriptions of those participants who felt that they communicated with Gods regarding clinical work seemed consistent with Gubi's (2004) finding with Christian therapists that one of the functions fulfilled by prayer was of helping to regulate the counsellor's internal state. The belief of the participants that their spiritual lives improved their capacity to work clinically without it needing to be openly acknowledged was also comparable to Baker and Wang's (2004) research with Christian clinical psychologists who similarly described their religious lives as facilitating their professional work. Indeed, when considered as a whole, much of the experience of the Wiccan participants in this study was comparable to past findings with Christian therapists: most were willing to accept the covert use of dialogue/prayer; a minority (Flea) were willing to employ their religious perspective overtly if it felt appropriate; and the perception of the work environment was significant factor in their decision of whether to disclose with clients and colleagues.

Wicca is sometimes cast as being at odds with Christianity, and monotheism more generally; from the Wiccan side this has partially been derived from the perspective of its own pseudo historical narrative of the 'burning times'[8] inspired by Murray

[8] A reference to those found guilty of witchcraft having been burned alive during the European witch hunts of the middle ages, although in England the penalty was hanging rather than burning.

(1921). This remains influential today and some popularist Pagan writers have adopted an overtly antagonistic stance (cf Ravenwolf, 1998). Secondly, from the Christian perspective, other than to the most liberal apologists, the polytheistic perspectives and acceptance of magic in Wicca are likely to be considered misguided - if not actually evil. This position is presented in a balanced and coherent way by Slick (2011) but many more alarmist, less accurate, and far more sensationalist writings are available; Schnoebelen (1990) represents a particularly extreme example of this type. Thirdly, as Wicca is a religion which places an emphasis on the Goddess, it has often been framed as contrasting with the more patriarchal emphasis found in the Abrahamic religions; this formed a particularly strong strand of thought within the feminist Goddess spirituality movements originating in the United States (Starhawk, 1999).

Despite these dialogues, it is not surprising that the experiences of the Wiccan counsellors in this research were comparable in many ways to those of their Christian colleagues. The bulk of the research on religious therapists has been conducted in Europe and America; namely, with ‘educated’ persons, who live in countries with a largely Christian heritage, but which also have a strong secular influence. Christianity and Wicca are interestingly enmeshed as Wicca developed within a predominantly Christian cultural matrix and Christianity itself can be identified as a factor influencing its development (Pearson, 2007). This enmeshed but occasionally antagonistic relationship between Christianity and Wicca was captured strongly in the narratives of Star and Rowan.

Although all the participants were committed to practising in a non discriminatory way some narratives suggested a potential for some Wiccan therapists to experience counter transference dynamics towards Christian clients who express their religion in a way the therapist perceives as being imposed upon others, especially if in connection with assumptions which privileged men. It is certainly not a novel observation that a therapist from one religion might experience countertransference feelings toward a client from another. However, while all therapists are liable to experience countertransference, this underscores the importance that therapists with a Wiccan, or any other, religious identity should feel safe to explore this part of

themselves during clinical supervision. Despite this, research (Tejeda, 2015; Crowley, 2018) has show that this is not necessarily the case.

**A Question of Faith**

Researchers have typically examined religion from the perspective of faith or belief; certainly, this is of importance within the Abrahamic religions where faith represents a central virtue; however, the question of faith was never raised by any of the participants. Denisoff (2008) cites Restall Orr (2005) as arguing that it is the non-requirement of Paganism to believe, but rather to experience, that distinguishes it from other religions, and this view tended to be supported in the present research. Three participants adopted an overtly questioning stance, saying they did not know whether there was an underlying metaphysical reality to their experience but that it was not of great importance if there was or not. Flea similarly avoided statements about any objective metaphysical reality through his liminal focus and use of dyadic pairs; for him the gods or magic were neither real nor unreal but occupied a transcendent space between the two. Even in the case of Salem, who adopted a more realist ontology regarding metaphysics, faith was never presented as something which was virtuous in and of itself.

The results can be more clearly understood though employing a distinction made by Zinnbauer and Pargament (2000) who identified four approaches which the therapist might adopt toward religion: rejectionist; exclusivist; pluralist; and constructivist. Rejectionist therapists take the position that religion was best excluded from their world-view; indeed, proponents of this perspective such as Freud (1913), or Faber (1993), contend that a religious life or mystical experience represents a neurotic symptom or regressive coping strategy. In contrast, an exclusivist therapist takes their own religious perspective as offering the correct view of reality. Pluralist therapists similarly accept a spiritual dimension to existence but view the varieties of human religious / mystical experience as offering different ‘paths’ all of which contain some universal truth. Finally, constructivist approaches conceptualise religious or mystical experience as actively constructed, yet valid, ways of experiencing the world; therefore, the therapist may enter into the client’s spiritual life as a means of exploring their reality.

There is a substantial literature considering the provision of therapy by the Christian counsellor and this has included writings from those adopting both the pluralist and exclusivist perspectives i.e. those who present Christianity as being one of many valid expressions of spirituality as well as those who consider it to be the correct path. An example of the language of pluralism may be seen in Brian Thorn's (2001) description of the use of the bible in relation to pastoral counselling:

> "The `Song of Songs' rightly finds its place in the canon of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures and the spiritual and the sexual are seen there as the twin pillars of the human being's response to God or Goddess or ultimate Reality or whatever terminology most resonates with the experience of the spiritual aspirant." Thorne (2001) p 437.

There is a much smaller body of work (at least as available in English) considering counselling delivered from the Islamic perspective. While there are a significant number of Muslims working within the field of counselling (for example see mcapn.co.uk) research examining of the experience of clinicians with a Muslim identity working within a secular context or organisation is lacking and studies have tended to examine the accounts of therapists working from an exclusivist perspective and in which the religious context is openly acknowledged within the therapy. Al-Thani and Moore (2012), for example, argued that the person centred approach was successfully employed within an Islamic context in Qatar but that it was necessary to modify it from its western secular form in order to work within their cultural context; this included not condoning things which were considered wrong from the Muslim perspective, such as being critical of parents. CBT has been more widely employed as a psychological approach within the Islamic world precisely because it does not rest on suppositions that could feel dissonant in a Muslim context.

**Patriarchy and Gender Differences**

The interviews suggested that gendered subjectivities played a part in how the participants made sense of being Wiccan counsellors. In the emancipation theme, present in all three of the women's accounts, there was an emphasis on managing imbalances of power in relation to patriarchy and all included their personal experiences of Christianity in this. In contrast neither of the men focused on

Christianity or raised their gender as advantage or disadvantage. It should not be surprising that gender issues around patriarchy were not raised by the men given their social privilege in this respect, i.e. being male in a patriarchal context they would not experience challenges of this type. However, given that Wicca is often described as placing more emphasis on the Goddess, and even theoretically places the final say regarding coven matters in the hands of the High Priestess, it was notable that none of the men described their gender as impacting on their experience of Wicca.

**Aspects of Integration**

For the most part the participants in this research practised in a way which would have been indistinguishable from secular clinicians from the perspective of the external observer. On those occasions when therapists described their spiritual lives entering the realm of clinical experience it was almost always in terms of implicit rather than explicit integration, to use Tan's (1996) distinction, and therefore remained covert. When implicit integration occurred it took such forms as: the therapist entering into an internal dialogue with their Gods, or a more universal divinity; mental exercises to clear the energy of a space prior to working; and ritual actions such as washing hands to leave work behind at the end of the day.

The use of ritual or symbolic acts in therapy has a long history and forms an important part of clinical work (Goodwyn, 2016). Some psychotherapists have suggested that, just as prayer may be included in Christian Counselling, acknowledging a Pagan spiritual dimension to ritual actions might find a place within psychotherapy (Harrow et al, 1996; Cole, 2003; Seymour, 2005); however, such a prospect inevitably elicits debate regarding role boundaries (Chapin-Bishop, 1999; Friedman, 2012). The participants certainly perceived a connection between ritual in therapy, and magic as employed in Paganism. However, they were generally not open to to the idea of acknowledging a Pagan spiritual context explicitly within clinical practice due to boundary concerns. This was not without exception, however, and this balance seemed was reflective of that found in the wider literature.

The Wiccan participants of this study were typically attracted to psychological models of therapy which sought to include spirituality; for example, psychosynthesis

(Assagioli, 1975) or analytical psychology. In part this was due to the participants' pluralism and general willingness to entertain constructivist perspectives about their own religious experience. Such models helped them to hold the dual identities of being both Wiccan and therapists in a way that felt more authentic, and this was consistent with Dion's (2006) analysis of Wicca as 'consciously psychological' in that adherents located their Gods within as well as outside of themselves. In contrast they were less drawn toward approaches which did not focus on spirituality but placed an emphasis on rationalism rather than phenomenological experience; for example, CBT or RET. Despite this tendency to employ psychological models which could encompass their experience as Wiccans none of the participants raised the prospect of transposing ethical frameworks and behaviours from clinical work to the practise of Wicca in the way proposed by Friedman (2001). This may have been connected to differing UK and USA cultural contexts or differences in approaches to Paganism on different sides of the Atlantic.

The question regarding divination had been intended to investigate whether the participants might seek to understand what was happening in a clinical relationship outside a session i.e. *about* a client; however, the interviewees interpreted this in different ways and also addressed the question of using tarot cards *with* a client, with all except Flea explaining why they would not do this. The participants seemed to focus primarily on tarot due to its rich symbolism, and whether tarot can be employed within the context of psychotherapy has actually been considered in some depth from an analytical perspective; Nichols (1980), Rosengarten (2000) and Gad (2004).

The idea of divination, framed as an intuitive process of reflecting or accessing unconscious knowledge about client work and conducted outside a session, was more acceptable to the participants; although only Rowan described doing this. Only Flea had ever used actual tarot cards *with* any clients as means of exploring symbols, and this was unusual for him. Divination, if framed as a supernatural event, was far more threatening to professional boundaries; therefore, Salem saw any divination about clinical work as 'tempting' but out of the question. This reflected the impact of ontological perspective on how the participants held their Wiccan / therapist roles alongside each other: Salem, who was less subjectivist, preserved his sense of professionalism through separation; in contrast Rowan's more constructivist

approach meant divination did not require such compartmentalisation from her clinical identity.

**Questions of Disclosure**

As members of a minority religion which has experienced a significant degree of discrimination, especially during the last century (Valiente, 1989; Ethen Doyle White, 2016), disclosure could have been seen as especially risky. Paganism and has been framed as a Concealable Stigmatized Identity (Crowley, 2018) and both Kirner (2014), and Crowley (2018) have found that clinicians with a Pagan identity can experience anxiety around their religion becoming known to colleges. At the time of interviews, however, none of the participants in the present study felt they were unable to be less than candid with colleagues or supervisors, which likely reflected changes in society and legislation in the United Kingdom and could be regarded as consistent both with Weller et al's (2015) finding that British Pagan self-censorship had diminished and Crowley's (2017) assertion that Paganism is becoming more mainstream in the UK. While discrimination was not raised as a current issue, however, this had certainly not always been the case, and the potential consequences of being 'found out' were features of both Star and Rowan's' descriptions of the eighties and nineties, even in relation to their colleagues.

In contrast, the prospect of whether the participants might ever acknowledge their religious identity with a client was viewed with extreme caution. Arguably the potential impact on the therapeutic relationship of a thoughtless disclosure could have been particularly significant given the unusual nature of Wicca and its attendant stereotypes. Therefore, it was not surprising that all but one of the participants had never disclosed in session and had no plans to; although they tended to adopt the position of 'never say never'. The exception was Flea's commitment to transparency, to the extent that it was in the service of his client. This, together with working in the context of private practice, meant that he was willing to acknowledge his Pagan identity if it seemed relevant - although this was by no means a routine event. Of all the participants he described the most obviously relational way of working and the emphasis he placed in understanding and resolving difficulties in the therapeutic relationship as a means of therapy rather than something to avoid was notable. Yalom, whom Flea noted as influential on his practice, has explored abandoning the

‘blank screen’ in favour of transparency in considerable depth as well as placing a similar emphasis on the relational means of therapeutic change (Yalom, 1991, 2006, 2009a, 2009b, 2014, 2015).

**Context, Strengths, and Limitations of the Research**

In constructing the results it has been attempted to adopt the *questioning* hermeneutic perspective advocated within IPA (Smith et al, 2009); in this mode the interpretive component of research is intended to reach beyond what is directly stated to capture the essence of phenomenological experience without employing material drawn from outside the data. This contrasts with a *critical* hermeneutic approach; in this context ‘critical’ does not indicate a negative assessment, but rather an interpretive perspective which seeks to interpret the data in line with an external body of thought. For example, adopting the critical hermeneutic employed by Faber (1993) would have equated the narratives of regaining / rediscovering childhood authenticity as reflecting regression rather than striving for development or healing, the interpretations offered as contributing towards the outsider theme such as Flea’s feeling of being apart from the other children, but protected by the sunrise, and Star feeling herself to have been claimed by the Goddess Sekhmet, would presumably be interpreted as a wish for a cosmic parent. Rationalist, systemic, or feminist perspectives would have invited still further alternative interpretations.

The research benefited from initial efforts to ground the research question within the literature, which was sometimes difficult to obtain. Furthermore the topic itself was novel and has been paid scant attention hitherto. Subsequently substantial investment in the interview process generated a large corpus of data, comprising nearly seventy thousand words of transcription across five interviews, providing a rich data set from which to draw the interpretive themes of the results. In reviewing the transcripts themselves I feel that I did well as an interviewer, at least for a first time researcher, in asking non leading questions and focusing on what the interviewee wished to say rather than what I wished to hear; this likely reflected my own training in psychotherapy as a counselling psychologist.

That two of the participants were previously well known to me could be regarded as a weakness since these interviews took place within a previously existing social

context. A related criticism might be that the research was conducted by a Wiccan and that insider perspectives dominate, and potentially distort, the field of Pagan Studies as a whole (Davidsen, 2012). It is, perhaps, analogous to argue that research into counselling itself is similarly dominated, and potentially distorted, by insider perspectives. However, these criticisms may be mitigated in so much that transparency was maintained during the course of the research, and considerable effort has been directed to achieving this. Both in terms of being willing to acknowledge rather more of myself than is usual for a researcher as part of reflexivity, and in paying particular attention to the hermeneutic processes which produced the results. Smith (2011) has argued that the predominant challenge to quality in IPA studies is a failure to sufficiently ground the analysis in evidence and recommends that, in a study comprising 4-8 participants a minimum of three carefully chosen extracts should be expected to illustrate each theme; this recommendation has been somewhat exceeded in the present research.

Another challenge to fulfilling the ideal of a questioning hermeneutic is the researcher's own confirmation bias. While much might be done to minimise this through employing the discipline of the phenomenological reductions (Husserl & Kersten, 1982), Heidegger (1962) demonstrates the impossibility of separating them due to the enmeshment of observer and observed. Therefore, qualitative results can only be understood to the extent that there is transparency on the part of the researcher. In this case the results can only be realistically evaluated in the context of my own identities; as a man, a Wiccan, and a therapist. That I made particular efforts to bracket my assumptions though the phenomenological method of and to be transparent about the process of research and situating myself in relation to the created data may be considered a strength of the study. The research may, also, be considered to have benefited from the honouring of the hermeneutic tradition which underpins the methodology of interpretive phenomenological analysis.

**Reflexivity**

On several occasions during my training I was struck by parallels between Wicca and psychotherapy and many of the perspectives adopted by the interviewees felt

resonant for me. As an example, a supervisor suggested that, were a client to make a disclosure which caused them some distress, it could sometimes feel useful to invite them to write down the topic we discussed, seal it in an envelope, and for me to keep this until we could open the letter and continue with the conversation at our next meeting. On the occasions I employed this technique I was struck by the ritual character of the act, which seemed so similar to spell work in the way it consciously employed thought action fusion to impact the experience of reality. Therefore, Flea's description of ritually burning words at the request of his client, or Star's perception of a parallel between spells and CBT did not feel dissonant for me.

I experienced some significant resistance to Faber's (1993) work when I first read it - which I have found to be common among Wiccans who have done so. However, I would be doing a disservice to the transparency demanded by the phenomenologist were I not to acknowledge that I spent much time in analysis working with my own mother complex; although this is hardly unusual for somebody in therapy. Certainly, my choice of religion is partially reflective of my own early experience, however, and I found both Faber and Neumann's work useful in informing my own developmental process. My hesitancy be critical of my own group became evident at viva when it was questioned whether my research suggested any potentially negative impact of holding a Wiccan identity for the participants and, if that were the case, why I did not state it? This provided me with the catalyst to return to the issue of potential countertransference around Christianity which some of the participants discussed and I realised had not been considered in sufficient detail.

**Future research and Implications for practice**

The results suggested that Wiccan counsellors are likely to have a particular concern with their own inner journey, and may well describe their intuitive sense of being with a client to themselves in unconventional ways (for example in terms of auras or chakras). What they do, from the perspective of the external observer, however, is unlikely to vary significantly from the practice of secular or other religious counsellors. Although participants very much valued their experience of spirituality the tendency to hold what this meant in terms of 'reality' lightly, and to value other people's ways of knowing the world as valid, seemed to help them hold their dual identities as clinicians and Wiccans. These findings are not consistent with the

perspective of some professionals, alluded to by participants in in Tejeda's (2015) research, that being Wiccan could be seen as making a person less suited to practise as a licensed professional.

Additionally, since there could be the potential for some Wiccan clinicians to experience counter transference towards clients with a strongly held Christian identity, it is important that clinical supervision provides a space in which the therapist feels safe to acknowledge all aspects of themselves in order to provide the best client outcomes. Most religious therapists are able to access a body of literature on which to rely in making sense of holding the dual identities specific to their religious perspective. Pagan therapists represent such a minority, however, that little work considering their situation has been produced. There seems to be a need for further work to support clinicians holding Pagan identities; whether in the context of providing 'mainstream' counselling while holding a religious identity themselves, or of offering a religiously informed therapy.

The development of a body of literature of this second type has begun to emerge, for example in Fox's (1995) development of a twelve-step program recovery program modified to accord more easily with Pagan perspectives, Seymour's (2005) consideration of integrating Pagan practices within psychotherapy, and Friedman's (2012) research examining dual relationships. When the therapists in this research considered if there were any situations in which they might acknowledge their Pagan identity with a client it was either as an act of self-disclosure with a hypothetical client who was also Pagan; or if they were referred, or were sought out by, a person specifically searching for a therapist whom they perceived as having a similar world-view to themselves. In future research might focus on examining questions around how Pagan psychotherapists, counsellors, and their clients experience therapy if a shared religious perspective is acknowledged, and developing a body of knowledge which can inform such work.

The practise of Pagan spiritualities, such as Wicca, for those also experiencing mental health challenges remains an under researched area and little has been published to investigate the interface between the practise of, and belief in, magic, Pagan spiritualities, and mental health. Historically well-known figures within the

occult word such as Regardie (1998) have suggested that magic should only be practised by those who are in good mental health; Israel Regardie's belief that psychotherapy should precede engaging with esotericism has been influential in this context. Perhaps from lack of knowledge, and certainly from fear of litigation, books and workshops with occult content often include disclaimers that the techniques taught should not be practised by those experiencing mental health challenges. Pagans and Wiccans, however, experience mental health problems just as other people do, and some of these experience their spiritual / magical practice as very helpful during times of crisis (Aburrow, 2015; West, 2015). Despite this practitioners in mental health services are not always understanding of the importance of context, and Pagan spirituality is more likely to be pathologized than that of more well known forms of religion (Crowley, 2018).

# Chapter 6

# Conclusion

Both witches and therapists see themselves as developing knowledge and understanding, enabling them to penetrate a reality of which most people are unaware e.g. they may not possess ‘the sight’ or be ‘psychologically minded’. Identity may be confirmed though progressive initiations, qualifications, or accreditations reflecting increased knowledge, understanding, and self-developmental journey; and these convergences capture something of the experience of ‘witch’ and ‘therapist’ in a way that helps the Wiccan therapist to feel more consistent between both identities.

No participant adopted an exclusivist approach to their religion and it was interesting to see the constructivist perspective so strongly represented within the research sample given that the literature usually associates this with an absence of religion. However, the concept of ‘faith’ was not important to these interviewees who focused on phenomenological experience more than metaphysical beliefs. The participants seemed drawn to psychological models incorporating spirituality and used the shared concern of ‘self-development’ to unify counselling and Wicca as different aspects of the same project; for the three women, this was linked with feminism.

Even those with a Rogerian training referred to a perceived intersection between analytical psychology and Wicca; however, this did not necessarily transfer to their clinical practice. This was notable as many writers adopting an analytic perspective have construed ‘oceanic’ mystical experiences, in which the self is perceived to merge with a larger whole, as regressive (Neumann, 1954; Faber, 1993; Tacy, 2001). Experiences of this type, however, were of particular significance for the participants, who described them in terms of accepting their own mortality, and supporting the self-development they saw as facilitating their work with clients. Most participants implied an ‘outsider’ perspective in their accounts ‘the cottage outside the village’ consistent with the ‘being back’, or ‘watching’ stance required by a therapist engaged in clinical work; this worked for the participants due to the undercurrent of individualism shared by western psychology and the western esoteric tradition of which British Traditional Wicca is a part.

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# Appendix A
# INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

These are some questions which we will consider during the interview. They are not intended to be exhaustive and we are not constrained to address only these questions if you wish to bring in other material.

**PART 1: Experience of Wicca:**

1. How long have you been involved in Wicca?
2. What attracted you to Wicca?
3. How would you describe your theological perspective? (for example: animism, pantheism, duo-theism, atheism etc.)
4. How do you experience spirituality?
5. What, if any, practices do you perform? (for example, ritual, medication, prayer etc.) What is your view on magic?
6. What is your view on the 'supernatural'? (E.g. divination, auras, astral projection).
7. What is your experience of the social dimension of Wicca?

**PART 2: Experience of being a therapist:**

1. How long have you been involved in therapy?
2. What attracted you to it?
3. What type of therapy?
4. Are any schools/theorists which are particularly influential on your practice?
5. What type of clients do you work with?

**PART 3: Therapy and Wicca:**

1. Does being a therapist have a spiritual dimension?
2. Do you feel that your experience of being a Wiccan has any influence on the therapeutic relationship?
3. Do you consider the spiritual life of the client? In what way?
4. Do you feel that the Gods or spirits are ever present in relation to your work?
5. Would you pray in relation to your work as a therapist either for yourself or a client?
6. Might you consider or have you ever engaged in divination around a case (Astrology, Tarot, Etc)?
7. Spells in relation to your work or development as a therapist? (e.g. on self, on others).
8. Are you open about being Wiccan to other people, e.g. clients or colleges, in relation to your work?

# Appendix B

# PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

"The Experience Of Being A Wiccan Therapist: an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis."


**Researcher**

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**The aim of this research**

Thank you for your interest in participating in this research. The aim of the study is to describe how people experience being both Wiccan and a therapist and to explore the meaning this experience has for them.

**Who are you aiming to work with?**

We are aiming to interview a small number of counsellors or therapists who are also Wiccan. In order to sufficiently focus the research we are aiming to interview people from initiatory Wiccan traditions such as Alexandrians and Gardnarians who are also 'mainstream' therapists. Simply for the purposes of our study we are defining this as having a training that would enable one to practice as a therapist or counsellor in the U.K. National Health Service e.g: member of BABCP, UKCP, British Psychoanalytic Council, Health Care Professions accredited psychologist et al.

There is no intention to denigrate the experience of witches outside of initiatory traditions or of people who practice other forms of therapy; this is done simply so that we can be specific about the group of people we interview. Within this group we hope looking to find a small number of people with a range of experiences. It is unlikely that we will be able to interview every potential participant and it is important to note that people are neither included nor excluded on the basis being judged 'better' therapists or witches.

**What does the study entail?**

The study uses a particular research method called interpretive phenomenological analysis. The research consists of an informal interview in which you and the researcher will explore your responses to a set of questions which you will be invited to think about beforehand. This interview is expected to last about an hour and will be digitally recorded. Following the interview the researcher will transcribe the interview and reflect on what was said, both attempting to accurately capture what you described and attempting to infer any additional meaning. Following this you will be invited to read the researcher's thoughts about the interview and respond to them.

**Is this anonymous or confidential? What will happen to the interview data?**

The interview will be anonymised during the write up, any potentially identifying information removed and a pseudonym used instead of your real name. When we ask for feedback on the researchers thoughts we will also seek to confirm that you are happy with the extent to which we have maintained your anonymity. While only the researcher themselves will know who you are the transcript of your interview may be seen in full by their academic supervisors and may be quoted from in the finished work.

**What if I wish to withdraw?**

If you decide that you no longer wish to participate you are free to withdraw from the study at any time and your interview will not be used. Obviously this is not possible after publication.

**Who reads the final work?**

This research is to be written up both as a thesis submitted as part of a professional doctorate in counselling psychology that may be accessed online through the university library and in a shorter article intended for publication in an academic journal. It is also hoped to make presentations of the results both to academic conferences and/or to the wider Pagan community.

Appendix C.

Letter regarding confidentiality and consent


**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

"The Experience of Being a Wiccan Therapist: an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis."

I have read the Participant Information Sheet and consent to participate in this research.

I understand that:

- All reasonable attempts will be made to preserve my anonymity.
- Verbatim extracts from my interview may be published or presented as part of the dissemination of this research.
- I may withdraw from the study at any time prior to publication.

Name: Date:

Signature:

# Appendix D

An example from a transcript including analysis

| Original Transcript | Exploratory Comments |
|---|---|
| Star: In another part of my life I went off to a women's re birthing day and a couple of the women there were heavy duty Greenham Common women, at the magick gate, if you know. And they introduced me to Starhawk so I guess, it was really quite an interesting 'opposite poles of the spectrum' really. So there was, sort of Gardnerian... Well, it is interesting because I'm... Certainly my second, stroke third degree was Gardnerian, of Gardnerian linage. I think, in some retrospect, I sometimes think there was more Alexandrian influence in my first initiation. It is all a bit of a mash though isn't it? Well, purists aren't though I suppose. Um, so I think there was an initiatory, you know, hierarchical tradition and then there was the feminist, the American import version. | Star describes her life as divided into parts; suggests some sense of keeping them, or feeling that they are, separated.<br>Star does not want to, or does not feel able to, fit herself into a neat Gardnerian/Alexandrian category.<br>Star acknowledges the existence of Wiccan 'purists' but distances herself from them. (Contrasts with how she is able to frame herself as a purist in relation to Rogerian counselling at other points.)<br>Star changes direction from time to time suggesting that she is exploring the question as she speaks.<br>It is hard to be exact because things are complicated and intertwined.<br>Star seems to be conveying that while British Traditional Wicca and 'American' types of Wicca are distinct neither are invalid.<br>Contrasts the hierarchical traditions with feminist goddess spirituality, which deliberately adopts non-hierarchal structures. |
| | |
| Stuart: Um, mm *nods* | It is not necessary for me to say much to draw out Star's description; she seems to be engaged with the subject and finding it easy to speak with me. |
| | |
| Star: And I quite liked the Starhawk | Magic and witchy things are 'weird' in some |

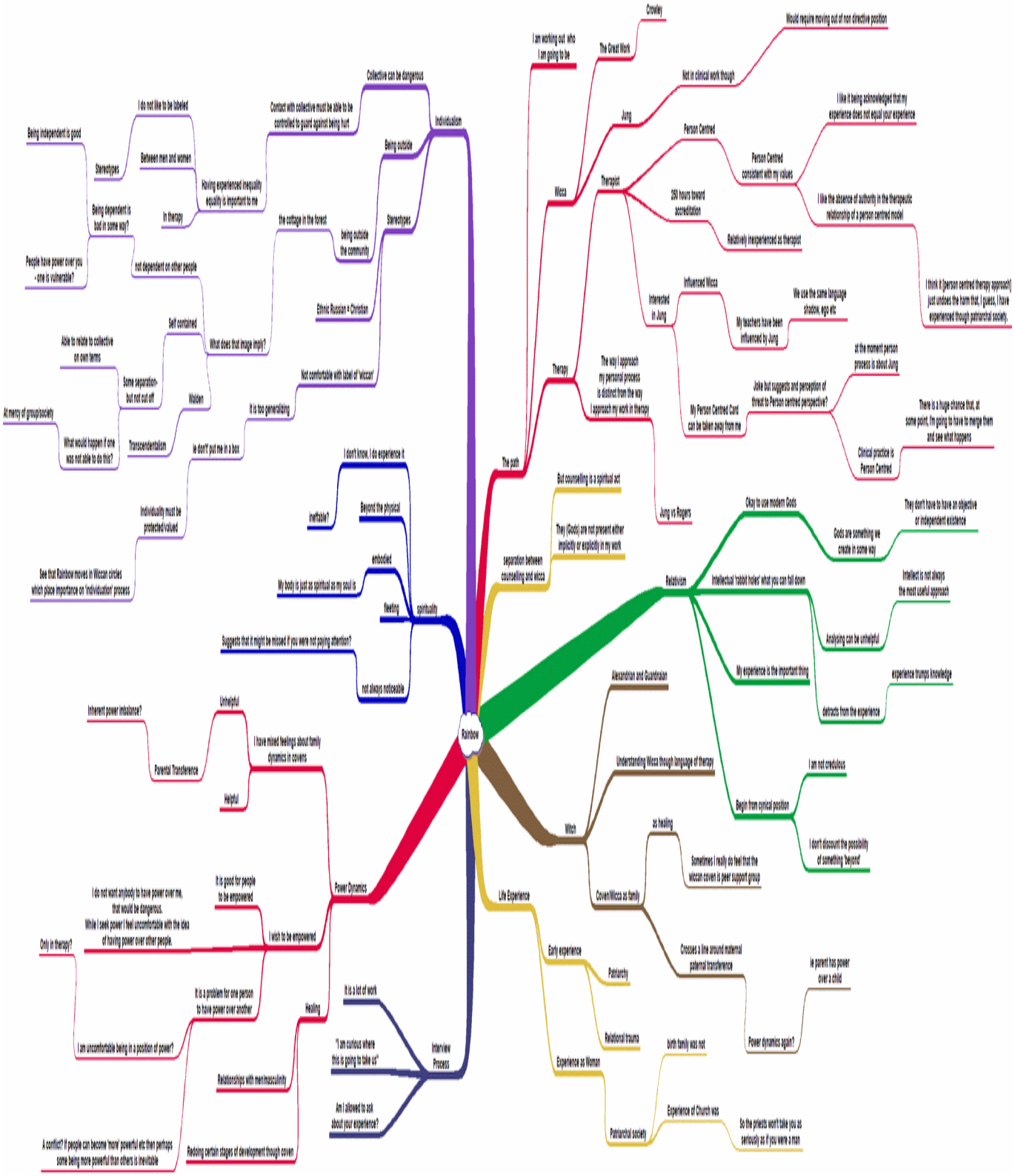
| | |
|---|---|
| and, in fact that was why I was thinking of doing a pentagram on my room. I had always been interested in magic and weirdness and witchy things. Um, So I wasn't I... I think in those days that was all there was really. I mean Pagan and witch was synonymous in those days. And I'm talking about the late eighties, the mid-eighties. Whereas now, I think, in Paganism, it is much more clearly defined, different paths which people can identify with. Or 'multi-purpose Pagan' So, in a way, I've always joked and said that the Gardnerian tradition is like the Church of England and the Alexandrian is like the Catholic Church even though historically they were the other way around in Wiccan terms. | way. (consider the etymological route of Wyrd too, this is generally well known in Pagan circles, e.g. The Way of Wyrd)<br>The 'always' suggests that this part of her life is something deeper, more fundamental than any old interest. Implies having 'always' having experienced herself as being somewhat apart/ different from non-weird people.<br>Things have changed: and Star describes having been around long enough to watch this happen; she implies having a boarder perspective than those who have come in more recently.<br>Another simile about Christian / Wiccan parallels. Again 'always' suggests this not to be a throw away remark but part of how she has seen the things in an ongoing way. |
| | |
| Star: There was nothing else I suppose. I think there is the feminist bits; stuff about women that got to me by having a massively fundamentalist Christian upbringing. Seriously heavy duty. Seventh Day Adventist. Weren't allowed to question anything. *sighs* And it never did it for me; that a man was supposed to save me. So I think the feminist idea, feminist spirituality, I think it what attracted me but I did not | Heavy duty suggests a power and robustness previously used in relation to the heavy duty "Greenham Common women, at the magick gate" but now it acquires a more oppressive tone.<br>Christianity is associated with not being able to question.<br>As a woman Star does not want to be saved by a man. The need for Independence is suggested as being important – at least from men. |

| | |
|---|---|
| know that was what I wanted. I just fell upon it really. And, also, I think what is really interesting; when I was about twelve I used to go horse riding, I grew up in Watford, I used to go horse riding in Bricket Wood next to a nudist colony and, years and years later, I realised it was Gardner's place. So, somehow, I've, I don't know, there is a bit of me, I can wax lyrical and say maybe, in my sort of puberty time I was 'in the zone'; you can make all sorts of stories up. So I quite like that story. | Again a story about a 'coincidence' which had a meaning but which Star finds significant. Again she softens it, makes it tentative.<br><br>With the phrase 'wax lyrical' Star seems to be seeking to soften, or perhaps minimize what she is saying. She goes on to say 'you can make all sorts of stories up' She seems to be emphasising that she remains critical, sceptical of her experience although she does not deny it either. |
| | |
| Stuart: You said 'wax lyrical' and then, like, you weren't quite sure about continuing. | Perhaps some influence from my own psychotherapy training in that I'm articulating what I notice taking place in our interaction. |
| | |
| Star: Well, I mean.. It is all this sort of thing about syncronicity and things that happen. If you choose to look then, can make it significant. I can say 'oh yes, I was called' and I think there is too many priestesses up themselves, you know, direct lineage from Atlantis, type airy fairy astral junky sort of stuff really. I really, I feel uncomfortable with stuff like that. I feel uncomfortable with all these grandiose claims that people have really. So when I say 'wax lyrical' I sort of have to say with with tongue | We create our reality through interaction. Implies co-creational ontology.<br>Some people in the Pagan world are not grounded – airy-fairy. (Fluffy bunnies)<br>Some people in the Pagan world get on ego trips, become grandiose<br>I do have experiences which seem significant and important but I don't want to be like those people.<br>Although several times Star describes herself as having been claimed by Sekmet she does not wish to portray herself as specially selected.<br>Perhaps suggests there is a tension between |

| | |
|---|---|
| in cheek really because, yeah, I think it may well be significant but I don't want to claim that I'm some sort of superior being as a result of it or specially selected. | genuinely experiencing oneself as chosen and concern she could be dismissed as airy fairy if this is acknowledged without sufficient qualifiers? |

# Appendix E

## Example of a Mind Map Developed During Analysis



# Appendix F: Article Prepared for Journal Submission

# The Experience of Wiccan Counsellors: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis


## Abstract

This research examines the experience of Wiccan counsellors through interpretive phenomenological analysis (Smith et al 2009). Five Wiccans, whose professional accreditation would enable them to deliver some form of 'talking therapy' within the UK National Health Service, were interviewed in a semi structured format intended to capture participants' experience as therapists and Wiccans. Emergent themes were: Developmental Spiritual Quest, containing the two subordinate themes of Transformative Mystical Experience and, in the case of the three female participants Spiritual Emancipation as Women. Secondly, Perception of Self as Outsider in that most participants saw themselves as eccentric to the mainstream. Weighting Experience over Rationalism addressed how most of the participants described reality. Fourthly, Balancing Spiritual Identity with Professional Role in that all worked to balance authenticity with understandings of 'professionalism' as articulated within clinical healthcare discourse. Spiritual Life Supports Work as Therapist reflected the sense that participant's spiritual lives supported their clinical work. Employing Zinnbauer and Pargament's (2000) framework describing religion and psychotherapy it was found that no participant adopted an exclusivist approach, rather they adopted either pluralistic or constructivist perspectives. A shared concern for self-development unified counselling and Wicca as different aspects of the same project, and participants were drawn to psychological models that included spirituality as a means of holding their dual roles, particularly Jungian analytical psychology. This was notable as many writers adopting an analytic perspective have construed 'oceanic' mystical experiences, in which the self is perceived to merge with a larger whole, as regressive (Neumann, 1954; Faber, 1993; Tacy, 2001). Experiences of this

type, however, were of particular significance for the participants, who described them in terms of accepting their own mortality, and supporting the self-development they believed supported work with clients.

## INTRODUCTION

This research aims to explore how therapists, who are also part of the Pagan religion of Wicca, make sense of holding these dual roles of counsellor and spiritual adherent through employing the method of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith et al 2009). Whilst the interplay between client and therapist's' spiritual beliefs can form an important part of the therapeutic relationship, for example through perceived similarity or dissimilarity, or therapist disclosure (Keeling et al, 2010), the amount of research directly examining the experience of psychotherapists or counsellors who also hold a Pagan religious identity has been small (Seymour, 1998; Friedman, 2012; Crowley, 2018). Most research examining Wicca has been conducted within sociology and anthropology with ethnographic approaches representing the most common methodologies.

### Wicca

Wicca is a form of Paganism, which became prominent during the 1950s as an initiatory religion in the United Kingdom, has been deeply influential on Paganism as a whole. Probably the largest group of people who might describe themselves as Wiccan today are ‘solitary’; through choice or necessity they work alone, choosing a ritual of self-dedication over initiation. Another form has been Feminist Wicca, a more politically involved expression of spiritually which emerged in the United States during the 1970s, and the subsequent founding of Dianic Wicca (Budapest, 1989) which focuses on the worship of a Goddess rather than God and Goddess together.

Generally speaking, however, Wicca centres on the veneration of two primary divine forms. Firstly, a triple Goddess associated with the waxing, full and waning phases of the moon in the forms of Maiden, Mother and Crone. Secondly a masculine solar deity, the Horned God. Wiccans tend to believe that the Goddess and God have

many names and may therefore employ different pantheons and images of the divine; with Celtic, Norse, Egyptian, and Hellenic deities often being chosen.

The participants in this research have been recruited from what has become known as British Traditional Wicca (BTW) (Pearson, 2007). Wicca is sometimes referred to as 'The Craft', a term both suggesting the word witchcraft as well as the influence of Free Masonry; another craft organisation with three degrees of initiation (Hutton, 1999). British Traditional Wicca (BTW) Wiccans meet in small informal groups (covens), typically, although not invariably, naked (skyclad), and commonly use the terms 'High Priest (HP) and High Priestess (HPs) to refer to the leaders of a coven. Many Wiccans are not open, or 'out', regarding their religious affiliation and the act of publicly owning one's identity as a witch is often referred to as 'Coming out of the broom closet'.

**Magic**

Pearson (2007) writes that Wiccans often consider magic in terms of Aleister Crowley's definition of 'The science and art of causing change to occur in conformity with Will' (Crowley, 1991 p.XII), or that ascribed to Dion Fortune 'The art and science of causing changes in consciousness according to the will' before identifying three strands of magic as existing within BTW Wiccan practice: 'goal focused 'everyday' witchcraft, aspects of 'high' ceremonial magic, and that of 'spiritual alchemy' which takes inner transformation as its goal. This internal transformation describes what is known as The Great Work, a term common in the western esoteric tradition, and found in such writings such as those of Elphis Levi (1896). It denotes a path of self-development which inherently includes a spiritual attainment, and Pearson (2011) has described The Great Work as "…the very transmutation of the Self, central to Wicca as an initiatory system." p369. High magic refers to the forms of magical practices found within occult orders such as The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, which draw on complex systems of correspondences and elaborate ceremonial rituals. In contrast 'everyday' witchcraft is used to denote simpler charms with practical applications and a generally more rustic tone.

Writing from the perspective of psychology, Subbotsky (2011) draws on past work by writers as Frazer (1890) and Tambiah (1990), to describe magic as an act which

breaks physical causality in one of four ways, either: changing the physical world through consciousness; causing an inanimate object to act with apparent life; causing a violation of the laws of physics; or through creating a 'sympathetic' nonphysical link between objects and events. Moe et al (2013), however, argue that magic, in the context of Paganism and Wicca, is often misunderstood, citing Wise (2004) who argues that it can be considered in terms of focusing attention, aligning with nature, and employing symbolism to enhance an awareness of the sacred, and Moe et al (2013) therefore argue for a distinction between magical thinking (West & Willner, 2011) and a Wiccan belief in magic.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Beliefs and Practices

The beliefs and practices of Wiccans, and Pagans more generally, vary considerably. Moe (2013), however, argues that a core belief is that of the imminence of divinity, the sense of spirit being infused with, rather than distinct from, the material world and that this may be contrasted with religious traditions in which the ‘worldly’ is perceived as separate from the divine. It has been argued that Wicca, with its inclusion of the dark or destructive aspects of the divine. and focus primarily on a pre-Christian past rather than a spiritualized future, is largely, distinct from the New Age movement and, therefore, fits more comfortably within the category of Western Esotericism (Pearson, 2000). Crowley (2020) has argued that healing is integral to the identity of Witch, citing its central role both within the Reclaiming Tradition (Starhawk, 1999; Roberts, 2011) and initiatory forms of Wicca (Salomonsen, 2002; Nash, 2010).

### Numbers and Distribution and Demographics

The international distribution of Wiccans has been concentrated in the Anglophone countries although there are certainly smaller numbers in the rest of Europe and South America. Doyle White (2016) has argued that there has not yet been a satisfactory answer to how many Wiccans there are; partly as a result of: questions of religious identity not always being invited on official census data; the reticence of Wiccans to acknowledge their religion when they are asked (Crowley, 2014); and also due to tendencies of some Wiccans to overestimate their own numbers. Doyle White (2016) concludes that Wiccan populations have generally been found to

contain more women than men, to be derived primarily of members of the upper working, or lower middle classes, to be overwhelmingly Caucasian, and educated to a higher degree than the general population. As a group they have generally been found not to possess the economic status which might be expected on the basis of their education; while this may be due to the larger proportion of females, who have been found to earn less than their male counterparts it could also be that this group places less emphasis on pursuing conventional markers of success than the wider population.

**Discrimination**

The Satanic Panic of the 1980s and 90s (Nathan and Snedeker 2001) had a particular impact on Wiccans and other Pagans, who were often confused with Satanists in the popular imagination (Hoadley, 2016), and Doyle White (2016) writes that the topic of children in relation to Wicca has often become particularly heated and that numerous Wiccans have had their children removed by social services due to their beliefs.

More recently in the United Kingdom the Equality Act (Legislation.gov.uk, 2010) offered a legal framework to prevent discrimination in the workplace. However, Crowley (2014) reported that concerns around discrimination remained present in responses to a questionnaire regarding the completion of the 2011 British census. It cannot, however, be concluded that discrimination towards Pagans has been largely eliminated, and Crowley (2018) later described one Wiccan working in the National Health Service recounting how her medical director commented about ‘dirty Pagans’ on learning of her religious affiliation.

A contemporary study in the United States (Tejeda, 2015), employing a mixed methods design, investigated the experience of workplace discrimination and concluded that Pagans reported more workplace discrimination than members of most other religions. From interview data, Tejeda reported that Pagans in professions requiring a licence to practise, including one psychologist, experienced particular concern around self-disclosure, or of being ‘found out’. One participant described how their religion being discovered would call their ‘personal seriousness’ as a professional into question, another felt that their employer would begin

searching for reasons to get rid of them. These findings were consistent with results reported by Kirner (2014) who found that some Pagan healthcare workers in the United States were only willing to be included in her research following an assurance that she would not 'out' them to colleges due to concerns regarding discrimination.

**Academic Perspectives**

Pearson (2001) argues that, for a researcher, the insider perspective offers a number of advantages. Writing from the perspective of a witch who became a religious studies scholar she frames her identity as researcher as 'going native in reverse', arguing that the position of insider can aid research if reflexivity is managed with sufficient care. Davidsen (2012) criticised Pagan Studies as a discipline, however, on the basis of it having become dominated by insider voices threatening its academic objectivity.

Some critical interpretations of Wicca have been offered. Faber (1993) considers Wicca from a psychoanalytic perspective, adopting the argument that: a focus on the worship of a Goddess represents a regressive instinct reflecting a failure to successfully negotiate fear of separation from the mother; and that the belief in magic represents a narcissistic wish for gratification. Tacey (2001) argues that the resurgence of 'New Age' Goddess worship is indicative of the ouroboros mystic described by Neumann (1954) who offers the view that the ouroboros, the snake eating its own tail, symbolises the original unity of pre-consciousness, and that the ouroboros mystic seeks to return to this state rather than embarking upon the hero's journey to re-forge the psyche into a new unity through the process of individuation (von Franz, 1964).

However, the symbology employed within British Traditional Wicca places an emphasis on the worship of a complementary God and Goddess does not readily fit ouroboros mysticism in Neumann's terms. Crowley (1996) has made an exposition of Wicca informed by Jungian psychology, and Dion (2006) has considered Wicca in relation to analytic psychology with reference to the role of the shadow archetype, arguing that Wiccan ritual reflects an integration process. Dion emphasises that analytical psychology and Wicca are distinct entities but goes on to argue that, as Wicca is "consciously psychological" in that its adherents tend to conceptualise their

Gods as both internal and external realities, psychological interpretations are very much within the spirit of Wiccan practice.

**Religious Therapists**

Tan (1996) drew a distinction between the implicit and explicit integration of religious perspective in psychotherapy. In the first case, the therapist holds some religious perspective but integrates it with their clinical practice implicitly. While they hold values consistent with their religious life, they do not bring their religious perspective explicitly into the room with their client. For example, while they might pray in relation to their work, they would not do so with their client, or inform a client that they did so. In contrast, in explicit integration the therapist is overt, rather than covert, about the religious dimension of their work.

The literature suggests that a recurring issue for the religiously committed therapist has been whether they should ever disclose their religious identity to a client and, if so, under what circumstances (Shafranske & Newton, 1990; Gubi, 2004; Baker & Wang, 2004). In 1992 the American Psychological Association issued ethical guidance stating that therapists should provide an honest answer if questioned about their religion (APA, 1992). Tillman, however, (1998) addressed this critically arguing that, from a psychodynamic perspective, an unthinking disclosure may impede therapy as the patient's fantasies about the therapist can have clinical significance for their work and because it may influence ongoing dynamics of transference/counter transference.

**Wiccan Therapists**

Harrow (1996) argued that the values of secular counselling were entirely compatible with those of Wiccan religious values and that both magic and divination could be effectively employed by a counsellor who was working within the Pagan community; which is to say offering a religiously informed counselling. Chapin-Bishop (1999), however, sought to draw a clear distinction between the role of the Wiccan priest or priestess and that of psychotherapist; arguing that, even if she were working with another Pagan, it would not be appropriate to bring her identity as diviner or ritualist into a session since, on top of the already potent role of therapist, it could place her in too powerful a position relative to her client.

Seymour (1998) compiled the views of Pagans who had experienced therapy, or wished to do so, as well as those of therapists with a Pagan identity. Whilst practitioners usually acknowledged that their Pagan/magickal world-view informed their work they were generally against the idea of an overtly Pagan approach to therapy. On the other hand, a significant number of clients and potential clients were clear about their desire to work with a therapist whom they felt shared something of their world view; Seymour characterised these two voices under the headings of 'Pagan/magickal counselling as an oxymoron' and 'There are times I would have given my eye teeth for a Pagan counsellor'.

Friedman (2001) drew parallels between Wiccans and counsellors, in that both are guides and healers whose position invites an imbalance of power. She argued that the ethical values common to professional counsellors, therefore, have particular relevance to Wiccans and suggested a code of ethical practice for the Wiccan priesthood informed by the American Psychological Association (1992) and American Counseling Association (1995).

Chartered counselling psychologist and psychotherapist, John Rowan has written about the use of transpersonal therapy (Rowan, 1993), and described how his involvement with Wicca came to influence his clinical work (Rowan, 2002), especially with regard to his relating to clients on the subtle level of Wilber's (2000) framework of transpersonal psychotherapy where the awareness of other is held within a perception of fundamental connection but the sense of individual identity is retained.

Writing from the perspective of psychotherapist, while acknowledging her own background as a Wiccan in the Reclaiming Tradition, Cole (2003) proposed a five-stage model for the use of ritual within therapy. Noting that the inclusion of ritual acts in the context of psychotherapy had a long-standing history she presented them as "a structured set of actions developed collaboratively by the therapist and client to effect a transition from one psychological state to another." Cole (2003) p47. Drawing on Krieger's (1979) stages of therapeutic touch Cole suggested a process of: centring, assessment, gathering energy, directing energy, and gratitude, Cole argued that difficulties which were long standing and had a seemingly irrational element

were particularly apposite for a ritual approach, and that this was likely to be more effective when a client held a faith in something beyond themselves.

Seymour (2005) examined Pagan approaches to healing in relation to therapy and cites Orion (1995) in asserting that psychological conditions may be especially responsive to magical approaches for Pagans themselves. Seymour argues that healing, as conceived within Paganism, shares key features with two commonly held within psychotherapy; an assumption that integration and empowerment are paths to healing, and that negotiating crisis may result in growth.

Friedman (2012) addressed the possible ethical problems for Wiccan therapists in an US context with regard to the potential for being placed in dual role situations and illustrated her review with material gained through informal contacts with Wiccan therapists. Friedman argues that if the therapist were working with a client who was or became Pagan, and was also aware of the therapist's religious identity, this would place the therapist in a dual position in which transference issues are intensified as the therapist now has to work with being “the all-powerful priestess and the all-compassionate therapist” in the words of one of her respondents, a comment echoing the concerns raised by Chapin-Bishop (1999). Another consideration is that the Pagan world is small and, as another priestess observed, there is always the chance of meeting a client in a ritual context, which would be problematic given the intimacy which such events encourage.[9] However, Friedman acknowledged that, because people might seek out therapists whom they knew held similar beliefs to themselves, avoiding these situations might not always be possible and cited the work of Zur (1999; 2000) who has explored the extent to which dual roles can be managed in, or even facilitate, therapy.

From the perspective of clients Kirner (2014) examined data from questionnaires completed by 1598 self-identified Pagans in the United States and found that a significant number described their religion as being pathologized when accessing mental health services; findings which were consistent with those found by Seymour

[9] There are more ‘open’ rituals which take place within Pagan communities and this does not imply the very personal contact which might be experienced within a coven.

(1998) in the UK more than a decade previously. One respondent in Kirner's (2014) research wrote:

> *"I have never been so blessed as the day I found a licensed therapist who was also a witch. For a long time I wasn't able to get the help I needed because I knew my religion would be on trial, not the guilt I needed help handling."* Kirner (2014) p94.

Crowley (2018) examined how Pagan identities, as well as issues of self-disclosure and authenticity, could impact therapeutic relationships for both of clients and therapists. As clients, Pagans were sometimes concerned their experiences might be misunderstood or pathologized; Crowley argues that such concerns are not necessarily unwarranted, citing Buxant et al (2007) in asserting that non-mainstream spirituality is more likely to be treated as indicative of mental illness than conventional types. Crowley argues that, since Paganism may be considered a concealable stigmatized identity (Quinn and Chaudoir, 2009), the decision to disclose for a client may represent a significant yet delicate moment in the process of therapy, partially due to anticipated stigma, and that the reception to this disclosure, on the part of the therapist, is important. It seems likely that, in the case of the Pagan therapist, such dynamics would extended to the context of supervision. Crowley (2018) writes that, as therapists, Pagans must, decide how 'out' they are prepared to be on the assumption that clients and colleges may well be unsympathetic to their religious identity and argues that there is a particular role for healthcare professionals with a Pagan identity in helping other professionals to distinguish between psychiatric symptoms and pagan experience.

**Rational**

It may be concluded that there are psychologists, and other clinicians, who identify as Pagan, or Wiccan, and some, perhaps especially in parts of the United States, feel justifiably anxious about the impact of this becoming generally known might have on their career. This is of particular relevance to Counselling Psychology, which places an emphasis on pluralism and the promotion of non-discrimination both in relation to its clients and its members (Douglas et al, 2016). However, it also raises the question of the extent to which an identity such as 'Wiccan', or 'Pagan' sits easily

alongside that of ‘Counsellor’, and the extent to which holding these dual identities might be experienced as either dissonant or resonant by clinicians.

## Method

### Situating the Researcher

As a researcher I am a white, middle class male from the South West of England in my mid-forties, having qualified as a mental health nurse shortly before embarking on my doctorate in counselling psychology. For me the research topic is not an abstract question but a personal one as I have been a Wiccan in the Alexandrian tradition since 2011 and identified as a Pagan for more than a decade prior to that.

### Procedure

Five British Traditional Wiccans, who were also qualified therapists, whose training would have qualified them to work within the National Health Service of the United Kingdom, were recruited. Given that Wiccans are low in number and research has show that they are especially wary of disclosing their religion if working in a clinical setting a non purposive snowball sampling strategy was adopted. Two participants (Flea and Rowan) were already known to me through Wicca and were able to identify a other sources. At the beginning of their interview participants were invited to chose a pseudonym rather than having one assigned as this was hoped to prove helpful in capturing something more personal than employing a number or letter.

**Table 1: Participants**

| ***Pseudonym*** | ***Gender*** | ***Age*** | ***Type of Therapy*** | ***Experience as Therapist*** | ***Years as Wiccan*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Rowan** | Female | 50s | Integrative | 20+ years | 10 |
| **Flea** | Male | 60s | Integrative | 30+ years Supervision Experience | 7 |
| **Star** | Female | 60s | Person Centred | 25+ years | 20 |

| | | | | Supervision Experience | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Rainbow** | Female | 30s | Person Centred | 2 years | 5 |
| **Salem** | Male | 60s | Person Centred | 3 years | 20+ |

Semi structured interviews (Appendix A), were designed to highlight the intersections between their religious and professional identities. Analysis of individual interviews was completed using the questioning hermeneutic approach employed within interpretive phenomenological analysis, with mind maps additionally being employed to help organise the emerging themes. This resulted in Individual interpretations ranging from roughly 3,250 to 4,500 words written for each participant summarised in Table 1. Participants were invited to comment on the interpretation of their individual interview in order to preserve their voices in the case of disagreement with the researcher; had a disagreement emerged, it would have been detailed in the results.

**Table 2. Individual Interviews**

| Participant | Summary | Themes |
|---|---|---|
| **Flea** | Spiritual life adds to clinical practice, and the Identities of counsellor and witch are enmeshed in a consistent individual moving between contexts. Synthesis of some type described as a precursor to experiencing spirituality and magic, often through the resolution of dyadic pairs.<br>Flea experienced spirit and magic as energies which could be felt and possessed a numinous quality. Spirituality described in terms of stillness 'a place I go to', with properties of protection and nurturing. Magic was directional. It could be influenced but which also had its own movement to be aligned with and was associated with the coincidence of events in a meaningful way. | Considered but flexible management of Boundaries;<br>Synthesis of Witch and Therapist identities;<br>Authenticity as both Witch and Counsellor |
| **Rowen** | Rowen described ways she experienced things while with a client as linked to her practice as a Wiccan, often as 'enhanced empathy'. When she discussed spirituality, it was in terms of its enmeshment with other facets of life. The importance of promoting equal relationships emerged as a theme and was contained within the phrase: 'Power with rather than power over' This striving toward equal partnerships extended to Rowen's clients, her colleagues and also her Gods. | Enmeshment of spirit with other aspects of life;<br>Wicca Enhancing Empathy;<br>The importance of promoting equal relationships;<br>The interview as an Exploration of ideas. |
| **Rainbow** | Rainbow saw her engagement with Wicca as personally healing and helpful for her development as a therapist. She also sought to maintain a strong boundary between her work as a clinician and spiritual journey as a Wiccan. | Power Dynamics – Empowerment vs Power<br>Individualism vs being |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | In our interview striving for individuality and freedom was contrasted with collective forces which tended to have an oppressive tone, such as patriarchy and stereotypes. | overwhelmed by a dangerous collective.<br>Focusing on Experience rather than Rationality |
| **Star** | Although Star seemed to enjoy exploring how Wicca and Counselling might interact she always returned to her position that they were fundamentally separate. At the same time she described what she called her 'central dilemma'; the feeling that she might be more effective as a healer, and more authentic in the work, if she allowed some of her Pagan worldview in certain circumstances. At the same time she had to “play it straight” both to accord with her classically Rogerian definition of what counselling was and because of the context in which she worked. | Lifelong Developmental Quest<br>Central Dilemma<br>Feminism<br>Christianity as:<br>a) Difficult Personal History (negative)<br>b) Obedience to authority (negative)<br>c) Influence on current spirituality (positive) |
| **Salem** | Salem was a man in his early sixties. He framed himself as gifted but also as an outsider, although in some communities, such as Wicca and Counselling, he described his feeling of having come home. While Salem’s spiritual beliefs were intrinsic to his understanding of what took place in therapy on a deeper level he was adamant that he would never acknowledge this with a client. However, he also felt his gifts to perceive a spiritual reality was helpful for him as a therapist. | Being a Gifted Outsider<br>Having come home<br>The developmental journey of both the individual and the cosmos itself. |

Following this the five individual interpretations were analysed in a second interpretive phase order to establish themes which extended across cases. At this stage the large quantity of the material which focused on lifelong self development in some form started to become apparent, as did it’s centrality to how the participants made sense of their experience as both witches and psychotherapists. A significant strand of this data, which focused on the process of development having being catalysed or informed by spiritual experience, was identified as forming a subordinate theme. Partially on the basis of its being dependent on there being a process that it could inform but also on its quantity, consistency across all participants, and relevance to the research topic. The narrative of emancipation and growth as a woman formed a particularly strong and consistent aspect of a lifelong path of development for the three female participants, but was absent from the accounts of the two men; given it’s central importance to these participants it was also ascribed it’s own theme. During this phase levels of interpretation (Smith, 2011) were deeper and moved further from a descriptive toward an interpretive analysis.

## Ethics

The project was designed in accordance with the Code of Ethics and Conduct laid forth by the British Psychological Society (2009) and a submission for ethical approval for the research was made to the University of the West of England Graduate School and was approved prior to data being collected.

## Super-Ordinate and Subordinate Themes

**1. Developmental Spiritual Quest**

The interviewees saw themselves as being on a path or spiritual quest which they traced back to childhood and incorporated both Wicca and counselling; for the three female participants this was further embedded/located within a narrative of finding their spiritual agency as women. They also placed importance on a direct relationship with the spiritual in their lives, with all but Rainbow spontaneously offering vivid accounts of mystical experiences which had been transformative or significant for them.

Salem saw human beings as inherently engaged in a process of development but, although he ascribed to humanism, he did not use the phrase self-actualisation, but rather:

> *1.A. Salem*: *"My own working on myself is the Great Work that we are all participating in."*

One statement which seemed to reflect a merger between Star's occult and humanistic perspectives in the form of following the path was:

> *1.B. Star: "For me it is doing your true will, is about following your organismic self. Being authentic, whatever, being yourself.*

Star incorporates terms from the domains of counselling and occultism. She relates True Will, the desire of the 'higher self', which leads to fulfilling the Great Work (Crowley, 1991), to the idea of the organismic self (Rogers, 1967).

### 1.2 Transformative Mystical Experience

For Flea the narrative of quest begins both with his seeking solace from an unhappy situation and being confronted by the reality of death during childhood. After spending years exploring Sufi, Buddhist and Pagan mysticism he experiences a transpersonal state of connection with the universe which resolves his fears.

> *1.2.A Flea: "I suddenly realised 'of course, that's what happens'. I came from the earth, I'll go back to the earth. I felt complete calm; knowing that, somehow, it felt safe."*

Rowan, similarly, describes a state of transcendence, which assuages her sense of existential threat;

> *1.2.B. Rowan: "I experienced a moment - and it was a moment- of non-existence, nobody, no... Just being part of everything and feeling that interconnection..."*

Rowan went on to expand on this, saying that, while reincarnation 'of some form' formed a part of her world-view, she did not necessarily expect her individual sense of 'I' to continue after death, saying:

> *1.2.C. Rowan: "Oh, no. No, not the sense of 'I'; I'm quite looking forward to losing that."*

Salem also had a particularly strong narrative of being on a path, but it begins with his sense that he was born into his spiritualist family for a reason. His 'coming home' into counselling and Wicca both form facets of a journey which he sees as culminating in still being able to offer guidance to others after death.

> *1.2.D. Salem: "And I realised that becoming part of the Craft was the path to becoming more than human eventually. Maybe not in this incarnation [...] Not that I'm looking to become a bodhisattva, but that idea of a spirit guide."*

The way these participants made sense of their altered states of consciousness may be seen as working to resolve their sense of existential threat. However, while Rowan and Flea experience their separate existence as relatively unimportant or illusionary, Salem's experience of spirits and altered states provides a belief in the continuation of his individuality.

**1.3 Spiritual Emancipation as Women**

While all participants included establishing their individuality in relationship to the collective, for the three women, this was associated with finding their own power in the face of patriarchy. Rainbow's journey is particularly linked with her identity as a woman, and her feeling of being marginalised in her country's church, while living in a patriarchal society.

> *1.3.A. Rainbow: "And, I guess I sought spirituality as a meeting of those needs; however, being a woman, they were not met. The priests won't take you as seriously as if you were a man. Especially once you have hit adolescence, [..] because of all the sexuality you represent."*

As she grows up the spiritual elements of her quest are developed as she discovers Wicca, discovering her own spiritual agency, and enabling her to relate to men in a positive way. Similarly, Star's narrative of discovering Paganism is intertwined with her sense of having been constrained as a woman and having to fight to find her freedom; being a counsellor, her personal therapy, Wicca, feminism and magic were all included in a strong narrative of individual development.

> *1.3.B. Star: "There was always a quest actually. I always did feel it was a quest and, coming across the feminist spirituality stuff; knowing that there were cultures where women were revered and respected as opposed to second class citizens.".*

In the three women's descriptions there was a narrative of having to overcome oppression to pursue their path. They seemed more aware of potential risks, both of being compliant, which included not being able to think for one's self and rape, and marching to their own drum which might have entailed losing their children or job as

a result of their involvement with Paganism. All expressed frustration at being expected to relate to spirit through a male intermediary and discouraged from questioning what they were being presented with.

> *1.3.C. Rowan: "Completely different to how I experience monotheistic religion where you weren't *pause* Where I wasn't, I'll own it, I was not encouraged to question, and you had the intercession of a priest; you couldn't approach the deity directly."*

The women seemed to find something closer to the equality in power they were searching for in Wicca, and which they experienced as supporting their spiritual journey, and this was especially captured by Rainbow's description of healing through positive experiences of masculinity in Wicca. However, they did not describe a situation in which power dynamics were switched in their favour[10].

**2. Perception of Self as Outsider**

Participants tended to adopt an 'outsider' perspective. Rainbow told me she loved everything about the word 'witch', specifically it's connotations of empowerment for women and being outside. While I initially thought she meant being out of doors she explained that it was the idea of:

> *2.A. Rainbow: "Being outside the mainstream, the symbolic cottage outside the village and all it represents."*

The cottage is not described as isolated or remote but 'outside the village' suggesting that, while separate it is not cut off from community life. Beyond the romanticism of a rural idyll this suggests being able to relate to the collective on one's own terms and that, since the village is something one wishes to be outside, it includes a dangerous or overwhelming aspect.

[10] N.B. There are other forms of Wicca, such as Diannic, in which the situation would be different to that described in the context of British Traditional Wicca.

The preference for individuality was often associated with exceptionalism, and this was developed in Salem's interview as he situated himself outside of the mainstream and seemed to prefer doing so.

> *2.B. Salem: "Touristy wise it was great, but the tourists just don't get it. It is like things hidden in plain sight and they are invisible to those who choose not to see in this incarnation."*

Conventionality tended to be described with a negative tone suggesting mediocrity, or an awareness of the dangers of failing to conform rather than positive attributes such as security or safety. For Rainbow, even the label 'Wiccan' could feel problematic:

> *2.E. Rainbow: "I still struggle with the word 'Wiccan' because that sort of implies some sort of belonging to a movement or something like this, which I don't like. I like to identify as 'That's me. Rainbow' and I practise, or walk the path of, Wicca."*

Star's account, too, includes the sense of being set apart when she was "*claimed*" by her patron Goddess:

> *2.F. Star: "...and I heard Sekmet, the name Sekmet, being called. I didn't know anything about Sekmet. Like I said I've always avoided Egyptian stuff because it just felt too trendy. Everybody is into it; right I'm not going to be."*

While the sense of being claimed by a Goddess is, inherently, to experience being set apart from those who are not so chosen, this passage clearly describes a preference to adopt the position of outsider through her words *"Everybody is into it; right I'm not going to be."* That the 'everybody' here is, itself, a reference to a very small section of society who concern themselves with Paganism or occultism in the first place underscores an inclination to stand apart.

**3. Weighting Experience over Rationalism**

There was a post-modernist tendency to ascribe value to subjective experience which fulfilled the function of reconciling unconventional perceptions or beliefs against a culture valuing rationalism, and which might be hostile to an enchanted world-view. As a result experiences did not need to be rooted in 'objective' reality in order to be valid, although it was important for the participants that this remained possible. Star describes holding the perspective of 'not knowing' which was echoed on several occasions by both Rowen and Rainbow.

> *3.A. Star: "Well, I think the first thing is the debate, and for me the jury is still out, are all these [Gods, Spirits] manifestations our internal projections, or are there real disincarnate entities around? I don't know. I really don't know. […] I tend slightly on the: 'It's all projection.'"*

Rowen, Star, and Rainbow made explicit statements asserting their own criticality and reflective stance in interpreting spiritual experience. Star also expressed disapprobation of people whom she perceived as failing to achieve this.

> *3.C. Star: "Well, I mean... It is all this sort of thing about synchronicity and things that happen. If you choose to look then you can make it significant. I can say 'oh yes, I was called' and I think there are too many priestesses up themselves, you know, direct lineage from Atlantis, type airy fairy astral junky sort of stuff really.*

Here Star references the active role a person plays in constructing experience and meaning with the phrases 'if you choose' and 'you can make it significant', before going on to distance herself from those 'airy fairy' people whom she perceives as lacking in criticality. Similarly, Rainbow described how she started from a sceptical position, assuming none of 'it' was real before returning to her experience as being of primary importance.

> *3.E. Rainbow: "So, staying with that sort of sceptic, slash, cynic theme; I do start from the place 'let's assume it is not real' and sort of find my way […] I still am not certain whether I have experienced people's auras or I make that up. However, it does not stop me from working with it."*

Although describing herself as beginning from the position of sceptic and cynic Rainbow leaves open the possibility that there may be something ‘more’; a magical reality underpinning her experiences. This view was echoed by the other participants. Therefore, as Rainbow ‘is not certain’, Star ‘tends toward’ subjective explanations. Rowen’s framing of magic as being the result of a change in consciousness similarly allowed for either psychological or enchanted world-view interpretations.

Flea’s description of his experience with the god Pan strongly captured acknowledging subjectivity, while valuing experience as profoundly important, while at the same time leaving space for a spiritual reality.

> *3.I. Flea: “Pan is a symbolism of, um, for me, is a symbolism of the spiritual aspect in which we are often frightened of. [...] Now I don't believe that there is an actual man out there, hoofed and bearded, and with the horns but it is a great explanation of that sort of energy, you know. So I could see him, I actually saw him when I was doing a meditation, I saw him in a ritual which we were doing. I saw him in the garden, it was superb. When I saw him I really connected.”*

Flea’s subsequent comment, “I suppose it is in the separating it and defining it that makes it not what it is.” was echoed by Rowen and Star who both made statements to the effect that too much intellectual analysis of experience was unnecessary. However Flea implies that while the vision of Pan is ‘what it is’ subsequent analysis might even diminish its mystical quality.

In contrast to the other participants Salem’s discourse was generally free from qualifiers such as ‘in my opinion’ or ‘as I experience it’ and at no point did he suggest that his experience of a spiritual world might be a self-created reality rather than objectively real. For him spirit entities, Gods, angels, and the spirits of the dead had an independent existence, and magic was a force which certainly went beyond a person’s capacity to alter their experience of the world through a symbolic act.

## 4. Balancing Spiritual Identity with Professional Role

While all the participants were committed to professional practice they varied in how they addressed separating vs synthesising their identities as Wiccan, and Counsellor. This took place both internally (e.g. whether they would entertain thoughts of their Gods during a session, if they would ever pray in relation to their counselling) and externally (e.g. the extent to which they would self-disclose, or how anonymous they made their counselling room). Drawing correspondences between theoretical models of development in both the psychological and occult literature also allowed a move towards additional internal synthesis.

The participants generally found the idea of internal dialogue with their gods regarding client work acceptable. Rowan did so freely. Salem said he prayed each time he set off for work but, for him, the boundary was that he would not dialogue with a specific deity regarding counselling, only a more general sense of cosmic divinity.

> *4.B. Salem: "I don't specify, oh this God, that God. Or this spirit, that spirit. It is just to the Cosmos. If I'm doing specific work as a witch [I would], I wouldn't do it for clients."*

Therefore, for Salem, moving from the general to the particular felt too personal and would have threatened his sense of professionalism as a counsellor. For Flea the idea of prayer seemed to have little meaning unless it was in the sense of meditative contemplation. Star only conversed with her Gods regarding clients occasionally, and about those for whom she was concerned. While Rainbow described counselling as a spiritual act, she sought to maintain a strong boundary between her work as a clinician and spiritual journey as a Wiccan.

> *4.D. Rainbow: "Wicca is separate. Counselling is separate. Um, so I don't call on my Gods to help me work. I don't teach about Gods to my clients. So no they are not present in the counselling relationship."*

A tension seemed to be experienced by most of them, whether they sought to integrate or separate. Star wrestled with what she called her 'central dilemma'; the feeling that she might be more effective as a healer, and more authentic in her work, if she allowed some of her Pagan world-view in certain circumstances. Although Star seemed to enjoy exploring how Wicca and Counselling might interact, she always returned to her position that they were fundamentally separate.

> *4.G. "And not feeling I can integrate, but I would not want to integrate Wicca into... *pauses* If I was running a coven and I had trainees, no problem. I think it is the context that makes a difference and counselling is counselling in its rarified oasis."*

The 'high' or poetic nature of the phrase 'rarified oasis' conveys something about how Star experiences the profound depth of person centred work; it is a place of life sustaining water amidst an arid environment, pure and refined, and firm boundaries are necessary to preserve this. However, while Counselling must be insulated from Wicca, she does not worry about Wicca remaining isolated from counselling; indeed, were Star to have Wiccan trainees, she would actively bring the oasis water to her coven. Flea, however, was resolved to answer any questions a client might put to him about his own experience as transparently as possible, and his adoption of synthesis in the search for authenticity was by far the most pronounced of the five; he correspondingly exhibited none of the 'central dilemma' tension.

The idea of casting a spell intended to impact a client was generally considered out of the question, as the participants felt that it would step outside their professional role; only Flea had once cast a spell at a client's request, although not with the client. Most respondents were open to casting spells on themselves in support of their therapeutic work however. For example, Salem and Rowan described using ritual to bracket countertransference they had found problematic, and participants commonly referred to clearing the energy of the room in some way before working, or performing a ritual act, such as washing their hands, to leave work behind.

## 5. Spiritual Life Supports Work as Therapist

The participants saw their spiritual lives as adding to their professional work both by helping to perceive clients more sensitively or intuitively, and through their own self development. Rainbow also saw her engagement with Wicca as being personally healing, and helpful for her development as a therapist regarding her relationship with men.

> *5.A. Sexuality is welcomed and is present in our rituals, however, it is safe. And I have no fear of being raped any more. And that means that I can work with male counsellors and male clients much better; so that has had a really big impact on me as a therapist."*

Rowan used the phrase 'enhanced empathy' to describe the feeling that her sensitivity to clients had been improved through Wicca e.g. by seeing auras, perceiving chakras (energy centres of the body), and having flashes of imagery which seemed to contain an allegorical meaning.

> *5.C. "So it is not something that I'm overt about. It, it's like another tool. Like enhanced empathy is how I would describe it."*

Rowan's description of one of Roger's (1957) core conditions being *enhanced* by experiences linked to her Wiccan identity illustrated how she perceived the impact of Wicca on her clinical work. Similarly, Salem described counselling as enhanced by his gifts, such as perceiving auras which he experienced as enabling him to be both more perceptive and empathic. Beyond giving the participants a language to describe, and perhaps a framework to develop, an intuitive sense of their clients, Participants described their spiritual life as catalysing changes in themselves which helped connect therapeutically in a deeper, more significant way.

# Discussion

### Narratives of Self-development

A strong narrative of personal development runs through the practise of Wicca. The process of becoming a 'seeker', finding a coven which will provide training and then

progressing through the three degrees of initiation all imply a process of inner growth. Pearson (2000) framed British Traditional Wicca as part of the western esoteric tradition, drawing on previous work by Fairvre (1994) and the descriptions of spiritual quest and inner transformation contained within the interviews seemed consistent with this conclusion.

All the participants referred to Jung when asked about theorists who had been influential on them. The process of development in analytical psychology is described in terms of individuation, which takes place through differentiation from wider society (Jung, CW 6 757), integration of unconscious material into awareness (Jung, CW 6 825-828), and development of consciousness from an original state of identification with the mother (Jung, CW 6 757-762). While a central aspect of individuation is separating from the wider cultural/psychological matrix, the worship of the 'Great Goddess' has been examined from psychoanalytic perspectives as potentially seeking to return to a perinatal undifferentiated state of unity (Neuman, 1954; Faber, 1993; Tacey, 2001). Similarly Jung (CW 7 260-261) describes the danger of identification with the collective psyche. This did not seem to fully capture the participants in this study however; as, while they valued the experience of the divine feminine, none of them dismissed the vitality of the god image, and they seemed to emphasise their separation from the collective through the outsider theme. This could be seen as consistent with Crowley (1996) and Dion's (2006) depictions of Wicca in terms of psychological development rather than regression.

The mystical experience of dissolution of self into a collective whole was certainly valued in participants' accounts and might be exemplified by Rowan's description of quite looking forward to losing her individuality following death. Tacey (2001, p50) has expressed dismay at this type of sentiment, which he sees as representing "a love-affair with death and non-existence". However, it did not seem that the experiences of unity described by the participants in this study had the tone of disavowing life, but rather in making peace with mortality. Given that acceptance of death represents a key stage of the developmental process these descriptions need not be construed as regressive; Flea's account of his long standing anxiety around death being resolved through an experience of this type particularly seemed to capture this function rather than expressing a life denying impulse.

**Perception of Self as Outsider**

Other than in the case of Rowan, participants implied the perspective of outsider in relation to 'mainstream' society, although they also adopted strong in-group identities as Wiccans and counsellors. From an individualistic perspective, the maturity of a human being is largely based on self-sufficiency, being emotionally and psychologically self-contained; in this context, the themes of self-development and being an outsider sit well together. Cheung (2000), however, deconstructs the tendency of western psychology to promote independence rather than interdependence and Brooke (2008), contends that the analytic ideal of becoming an individual, with a sense of self separate from wider society, reflects a relatively contemporary western perspective. If considered from a collectivist or systemic hermeneutic perspective, in which self-development is assessed according to the extent to which a person is integrated into society, the image of occupying a 'cottage outside the village' acquires a different, less positive, meaning.

**Cultural Context**

Much of the experience of the Wiccan participants in this study was comparable to past findings with Christian therapists (e.g. Gubi, 2004; Baker and Wang, 2004). Most were willing to accept the covert use of dialogue/prayer, which seemed to help regulate their internal state, and they perceived their spiritual lives to improve their clinical work. A minority (Flea) were willing to employ their religious perspective overtly if it felt appropriate; and the perception of the work environment was a significant factor in their decision of whether to disclose with clients and colleagues.

Although Wicca developed within a predominantly Christian cultural matrix and Christianity itself can be identified as a factor influencing its development (Pearson, 2007) Wicca is sometimes cast as being at odds with Christianity, and monotheism more generally; often framed as contrasting with the more patriarchal emphasis found in the Abrahamic religions. This formed a particularly strong strand of thought within the feminist Goddess spirituality movements originating in the United States (Starhawk, 1999) and the interviews suggested that gendered subjectivities played a part in how the participants made sense of being Wiccan counsellors. In the emancipation theme, present in all three of the women's accounts, there was an

emphasis on managing imbalances of power in relation to patriarchy and all included their personal experiences of Christianity in this.

Although all the participants were committed to practising in a non discriminatory way some narratives suggested a potential for counter transference towards Christian clients who expressed their religion in a way the therapist perceived as being imposed upon others, especially in connection with assumptions privileging men. It is certainly not a novel observation that a therapist from one religion might experience countertransference feelings toward a client from another. However, this underscores the importance that therapists with a Wiccan, or any other, religious identity should feel safe to explore this part of themselves during clinical supervision. Despite this, research (Tejeda, 2015; Crowley, 2018) has show that this is not necessarily the case.

**Ontology**

Zinnbauer and Pargament (2000) identified four approaches a therapist might adopt toward religion. Rejectionist; religion excluded from their world-view. Exclusivist; their own religious perspective is the truth. Pluralist; different religious ‘paths’ all contain some universal truth. Constructivist; religious or mystical perspectives are actively constructed, yet valid, ways of experiencing the world. The participants in this study relied upon either pluralist or constructivist perspectives in describing their spiritual life. Three adopted an overtly questioning stance, saying they did not know whether there was an underlying metaphysical reality to their experience but that it was not of great importance if there was or not. Flea similarly avoided statements about any objective metaphysical reality through his liminal focus and use of dyadic pairs; for him the gods or magic were neither real nor unreal but occupied a transcendent space between the two. Even in the case of Salem, who adopted a more realist ontology regarding metaphysics, faith was never presented as something which was virtuous in and of itself. Denisoff (2008) cites Restall Orr (2005) as arguing that the non-requirement of Paganism to believe, but rather to experience, distinguishes it from other religions, and this view tended to be supported in the present research.

**Aspects of Integration**

The Wiccan participants of this study were typically attracted to psychological models of therapy which sought to include spirituality; for example, psychosynthesis (Assagioli, 1975) or analytical psychology. Such models helped them to hold the dual identities of being both Wiccan and therapists in a way that felt more authentic, and this was consistent with Dion's (2006) analysis of Wicca as 'consciously psychological' in that adherents located their Gods within as well as outside of themselves. In contrast they seemed less drawn toward approaches which did not focus on spirituality but placed an emphasis on rationalism rather than phenomenological experience.

The use of ritual or symbolic acts in therapy has a long history (Goodwyn, 2016). Some psychotherapists have suggested that, just as prayer may be included in Christian Counselling, acknowledging a Pagan spiritual dimension to ritual actions might find a place within psychotherapy (Harrow et al, 1996; Cole, 2003; Seymour, 2005); however, such a prospect inevitably elicits debate regarding role boundaries (Chapin-Bishop, 1999; Friedman, 2012). While the interviewees certainly perceived a connection between ritual in therapy, and magic as employed in Paganism, they were generally not open to to the idea of acknowledging a Pagan spiritual context explicitly within clinical practice due to boundary concerns.

All interviewees other than Flea rejected the idea of using divination (e.g. tarot cards) with a client. The idea of divination, as an intuitive process reflecting or accessing unconscious knowledge about client work, conducted outside a session, was more acceptable - although still contentious. When perceived as a supernatural event, it was more threatening to professional boundaries; therefore, Salem, who was less subjectivist, saw divination about clinical work as 'tempting' but out of the question. In contrast Rowan's more constructivist ontology meant divination did not require such strong compartmentalisation.

**Questions of Disclosure**

As members of a minority religion which has experienced discrimination (Valiente, 1989; Ethen Doyle White, 2016), disclosure could have been seen as especially risky. Paganism and has been framed as a Concealable Stigmatized Identity

(Crowley, 2018) and both Kirner (2014), and Crowley (2018) have found that clinicians with a Pagan identity can experience anxiety around their religion becoming known to colleagues. None of the participants in the present study felt they were unable to be less than candid with colleagues or supervisors, which likely reflected changes in society and legislation in the United Kingdom, and was consistent both with Weller et al's (2015) finding that British Pagan self-censorship had diminished and Crowley's (2017) assertion that Paganism is becoming more mainstream in the UK.

In contrast, the prospect of whether the participants might ever acknowledge their religious identity with a client was viewed with extreme caution; even in the hypothetical scenario of being asked a direct question and all but one of the participants had never disclosed in session and had no plans to; although they tended to adopt the position of 'never say never'. The exception was Flea's commitment to transparency, to the extent that it was in the service of his client.

**Context, Strengths, and Limitations of the Research**

In constructing the results it has been attempted to adopt the *questioning* hermeneutic perspective advocated within IPA (Smith et al, 2009); in this mode the interpretive component of research is intended to reach beyond what is directly stated to capture the essence of phenomenological experience without employing material drawn from outside the data. One challenge to fulfilling the ideal of a questioning hermeneutic is the researcher's own confirmation bias. While much might be done to minimise this through employing the discipline of the phenomenological reductions (Husserl & Kersten, 1982), Heidegger (1962) demonstrates the impossibility of separating them due to the enmeshment of observer and observed.

Therefore the results can only be evaluated in the context of my own identities; as a man, a Wiccan, and a therapist. That two of the participants were previously well known to me could be regarded as a weakness since these interviews took place within a previously existing social context. Additionally the research was conducted by a Wiccan and it has been argued that insider perspectives dominate, and

potentially distort, the field of Pagan Studies as a whole (Davidsen, 2012). However, these criticisms may be mitigated in so much that transparency was maintained.

I experienced some significant resistance to Faber's (1993) work when I first read it - which I have found to be common among Wiccans who have done so. Certainly, my choice of religion is partially reflective of my own early experience, however, and I found both Faber and Neumann's work useful in informing my own developmental process. My hesitancy be critical of my own group became evident at viva when it was questioned whether my research suggested any potentially negative impact of holding a Wiccan identity for the participants and, if that were the case, why I did not state it? This provided me with the catalyst to return to the issue of potential countertransference around Christianity which some of the participants discussed and I realised had not been considered in sufficient detail.

**Future research and Implications for practice**

The results suggested that Wiccan counsellors are likely to have a particular concern with their own inner journey, and may describe their intuitive sense of being with a client to themselves in unconventional ways (for example in terms of auras or chakras). What they do, from the perspective of the external observer, however, is unlikely to vary significantly from the practice of other counsellors. Although participants very much valued their experience of spirituality they tended to hold what this meant in terms of 'reality' lightly, and to value other people's ways of knowing the world as valid. None of these findings suggested Wiccans to be less suited to the practise of psychotherapy than other religious therapists. However, since there could be the potential for some Wiccan clinicians to experience counter transference towards clients with a strongly held Christian identity, it is important that clinical supervision provides a space in which the therapist feels safe to acknowledge all aspects of themselves in order to provide the best client outcomes.

## Conclusion

Both witches and therapists see themselves as developing knowledge and understanding, enabling them to penetrate a reality of which most people are unaware e.g. they may not possess 'the sight' or be 'psychologically minded'. Identity

may be confirmed though progressive initiations, qualifications, or accreditations reflecting increased knowledge, understanding, and self-developmental journey; and these convergences capture something of the experience of ‘witch’ and ‘therapist’ in a way that helps the Wiccan therapist to feel more consistent between both identities.

No participant adopted an exclusivist approach to their religion and it was interesting to see that the constructivist perspective so strongly represented within the research sample given that the literature usually associates this with an absence of religion; however, the concept of ‘faith’ was not important to these interviewees who focused on phenomenological experience more than metaphysical beliefs. The participants seemed drawn to psychological models incorporating spirituality and used the shared concern of ‘self-development’ to unify counselling and Wicca as different aspects of the same project; for the three women, this was linked with feminism.

Even those with a Rogerian training referred to a perceived intersection between analytical psychology and Wicca; however, this did not necessarily transfer to their clinical practice. This was notable as many writers adopting an analytic perspective have construed ‘oceanic’ mystical experiences, in which the self is perceived to merge with a larger whole, as regressive (Neumann, 1954; Faber, 1993; Tacy, 2001). Experiences of this type, however, were of particular significance for the participants, who described them in terms of accepting their own mortality, and supporting the self-development they saw as facilitating their work with clients. Most participants implied an ‘outsider’ perspective in their accounts ‘the cottage outside the village’ consistent with the ‘being back’, or ‘watching’ stance required by a therapist engaged in clinical work; this worked for the participants due to the undercurrent of individualism shared by western psychology and the western esoteric tradition of which British Traditional Wicca is a part.

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