

Contemporary Paganism, unlike Christianity, does not emphasize belief and has no sacred cannon, but rather grants preeminence to religious experience and practice.¹ The current study seeks to identify the prevalence and importance of impediments to practice experienced by Pagans in the United States.

As a new religious movement, beginning in the 1930's and emigrating to the United States in the 1960's,² Paganism has grown to an estimated 682,000 adherents in the U.S.³ Upon being imported from England, it found fertile soil in the counterculture.⁴ Part of the appeal of Paganism to many of its adherents is its non-institutional nature.⁵ However, perhaps as a result of the growing numbers, contemporary Paganism seems to be in the nascent stages of routinization.⁶ It is, therefore, an interesting case study for scholars

¹ Carol Barney-Barry, *Contemporary Paganism: Minority Religions in a Majoritarian America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

² Berger, Helen A., *A Community of Witches: Contemporary Neo-Paganism and Witchcraft in the United States* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1999); Chas S. Clifton, *Her Hidden Children: The Rise of Wicca and Paganism in America* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2006).

³ "Table 76: Self-Described Religious Identification of Adult Population: 1990, 2001, and 2008," *Statistical Abstracts of the United States*, accessed January 21, 2014, <http://www.census.gov/copenia/statab/2012/tables/12s0075.pdf>

⁴ Berger, Helen A., *A Community of Witches: Contemporary Neo-Paganism and Witchcraft in the United States* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1999); Chas S. Clifton, *Her Hidden Children: The Rise of Wicca and Paganism in America* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2006).

⁵ Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today* (New York: Penguin/Arkana, 1997); Berger, Helen A., *A Community of Witches: Contemporary Neo-Paganism and Witchcraft in the United States* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1999); Helen A. Berger, "Witchcraft and Neopaganism," in *Witchcraft and Magic: Contemporary North America*, ed. Helen A. Berger (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 28-54; Barbara Jane Davy, *Introduction to Pagan Studies* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2007); Judy Harrow, "The Contemporary Neo-Pagan Revival," in *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 9-24.

⁶ Berger, Helen A., *A Community of Witches: Contemporary Neo-Paganism and Witchcraft in the United States* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1999); Helen A. Berger, Evan A. Leach and Leigh S. Shaffer, *Voices from the Pagan Census: A National Survey of*

interested in the process of religious routinization. It will be interesting to observe whether or not Pagans, who are well aware of the dangers of routinization and are often alienated from the mainline religions in which they were raised, will be able to meet the needs of their members without reproducing the same characteristics that exist in mainstream religious institutions.

Furthermore, studying contemporary Paganism is important for all those concerned with the freedom of religion and the rights of minority religions in the United States. Carol Barner-Barry's tome, *Contemporary Paganism: Minority Religions in a Majoritarian America*, addresses some areas of concern about the relationship between contemporary Paganism and the dominant American culture. Her work is a valuable contribution, but since its methodologies are qualitative, legal and philosophical, it does not provide a quantitative understanding of the prevalence or relative significance of obstacles faced by Pagans. Also, appropriate to the purpose of her endeavor, her work emphasizes high-harm problems rather than investigating more common but less dire hindrances. Furthermore, many of the impediments to practice experienced by the participants in the current study, such as the prevalence and importance of clergy/leader burnout, are not specifically related to mainstream culture.⁷ However, since the publication of Barner-Barry's seminal work in the area of Pagan rights, the United States Supreme Court has rendered decisions that may challenge the religious rights of Pagans, such as enshrining "sincerely held belief" in a privileged position for determining religious rights in *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby*.⁸ It is challenging

Witches and Neo-Pagans in the United States, (Columbia, South Caroline: University of South Carolina Press, 2003).

⁷ Carol Barney-Barry, *Contemporary Paganism: Minority Religions in a Majoritarian America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

to imagine how this will be used to uphold the religious rights of non-doctrinal religions that are not based on faith but on practice. It is easy to envision how this re-emphasis on belief and doctrine could be used to deny Pagans their rights.

Since contemporary Paganism is a new religious movement, the scholarly record is also emergent. There are now a number of excellent qualitative studies on various aspects of Paganism. These studies focus on the history of this evolving religious movement, thick description, analysis of the meaning created through religious practices, identity construction, and common beliefs.⁹ There are also two relevant monumental quantitative studies that address contemporary Paganism within the United States. “The Pagan Census,” administered by Helen Berger, Andras Corban Arthen and the Earthspirit Community in 1993 and 1995, was analyzed and reported by Berger and her colleagues in *Voices from the Pagan Census* in 2003.¹⁰ Fifteen years later, Helen Berger conducted “The Pagan Census Revisited.” Although the entirety of the findings have not yet been reported, preliminary results provide important information on trends in Paganism.¹¹

⁸ Supreme Court of the United States Syllabus *Burwell, Secretary of Health and Human Services, Et Al. v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc., Et Al.* http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/13pdf/13-354_olp1.pdf. Accessed March 18, 2015.

⁹ For Example: Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess Worshipers, and Other Pagans in America Today, Revised and Expanded Edition* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997); Nikki Bado-Fralick, *Coming to the Edge of the Circle: A Wiccan Initiatory Ritual* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). Helen A. Berger, *A Community of Witches: Contemporary Neo-Paganism and Witchcraft in the United States* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1999); Clifton, *Her Hidden Children*; Kermani S. Zohreh, *Pagan Family Values: Childhood and Religious Imagination in Contemporary American Paganism* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); Sabina Magliocco, *Witching Culture: Folklore and Neo-Paganism in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Sarah M. Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

¹⁰ Helen A. Berger, Evan A. Leach and Leigh S. Shaffer, *Voices from the Pagan Census: A National Survey of Witches and Neo-Pagans in the United States*, (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2003).

Taking seriously the evidence presented by qualitative researchers that religious experience and practice are of paramount importance to contemporary Paganism, the author conducted a large-scale, national quantitative study to ascertain the prevalence and importance of categories of religious practice.¹² This current study, using the same dataset, builds on the author's prior work and seeks to determine what impediments to practice Pagans face. It investigates both the prevalence and importance of obstacles. This study should contribute to the scholarly record in several ways: it provides quantitative data to interpret the scope and scale of challenges faced by Pagans in pursuing their practice; it complements qualitative studies, such as Barner-Barry's work, that provide deep analysis of limited cases by presenting a larger-scale perspective; it adds to the existing quantitative record by asking new questions; and it highlights areas of concern regarding the rights of religious minorities and for scholars interested in the process of routinization.

Methodology

This study utilizes data collected from "The Pagan/Witch/Heathen Community Needs Assessment Survey," which was designed and conducted by the author through the SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com) platform. The sample was limited to United States citizens and residents who were at least eighteen years of age. The survey included

¹¹ Helen A. Berger, "Are Solitaries the Future of Paganism?" *Patheos*, August 23, 2010, accessed January 21, 2014; Helen Berger, "Solitary Practitioners in the United States" (paper presented at the annual meeting of The American Academy of Religion, Baltimore, November 26, 2013).

¹² Gwendolyn Reece, "Prevalence and Importance of Contemporary Pagan Practices," *The Pomegranate* 16:1 (2014) 35-54.

314 different information points and collected mostly nominal and ordinal data with open text boxes for comments. It was conducted from January 23, 2012 through May 1, 2012.

The sample size was 3,318 people who saw themselves as being part of a target population for a survey entitled “Pagan/Witch/Heathen.” All 3,318 respondents who completed the survey were included in the analysis. This sample was created using a variant of snowball sampling, relying heavily on the internet and peer network sharing through social media. This is appropriate because Paganism is not an institutionalized religion and because Pagans, Witches and Heathens are hidden populations, so it is not possible to generate a sampling frame from which to draw a random population.¹³ A press release about the survey was published on Witchvox (www.witchvox.com), which is an important website for Pagans, and an open event was created on Facebook (www.facebook.com) which encouraged people to both take the survey if it was applicable and share it with others. The link to the survey was widely shared through Facebook and was picked up and promoted on Pagan blogs. The sample is national, including respondents from all over the United States and U.S. military personnel, some of whom were stationed abroad.

The instrument, which was also used to gather the data for the author’s article, “Prevalence and Importance of Contemporary Pagan Practices,”¹⁴ was constructed through an iterative process and relied on feedback from partners within a number of widely varying Pagan communities for its content. For the section of the survey that was designed to determine the prevalence and relative importance of impediments to practice, the researcher

¹³ Rowland Atkinson and John Flint, “Sampling, Snowball: Accessing Hidden and Hard-to-Reach Populations,” in *The A-Z of Social Research*, eds. Robert L. Miller and John D. Brewer (London: SAGE Publications, 2003), 274-81; Berger, Leach and Shaffer, *Voices from the Pagan Census*.

¹⁴ Gwendolyn Reece, “Prevalence and Importance of Contemporary Pagan Practices,” *The Pomegranate* 16:1 (2014) 35-54.

compiled lists of topics discussed on the Pagan segment of the internet and Pagan literature, especially those debates that address the lack of Pagan infrastructure and interactions with the dominant culture. Additionally, as a practitioner herself, she has been privy to numerous conversations concerning challenges to practice. The researcher reformulated this emerging list into rating scale questions, framed by the overarching section explanation: “This section is about gauging what challenges/barriers you face in YOUR practice.” The question was then worded, “How significant a challenge/barrier to you personally are the following?” Each potential challenge was listed with the options: “Not a problem; A slight problem; A problem; A significant problem; N/A.” Additionally, there were nominal questions in this section addressing two topics. The first asked, “Can you worship openly in your home?” The second asked, “Do you hide your practices from” and then provided a list of populations (*e.g.* family, neighbors, medical professionals).

After an initial draft of the survey was compiled, it was distributed to leaders in a wide-variety of different Pagan/Witch/Heathen communities with instructions to think about their own practice and situations of people they knew and to add anything that was missing. They were also asked to comment on any wording that was confusing. The author received feedback, made alterations to the instrument, and then sent it back out to a second group of contacts within various communities with the same instructions and revised the instrument a second time. Finally, open text comment boxes were included in case any major challenges had been overlooked.

Sample bias is a concern in non-probability sampling methodologies. The fact that this instrument was distributed online and promoted through social media and Pagan blogs may have resulted in older and poorer populations being under-represented. Initial testing on obstacles to practice did indicate that age and income are related to the prevalence and

importance of some impediments to practice. Furthermore, it seems highly likely that solitaries are under-represented and leaders are over-represented. In Helen Berger's work, "The Pagan Census Revisited," she discovered that approximately 79 percent of the Pagan practitioners identified as solitary.¹⁵ By comparison, 52 percent of this population identified as solitary with another 6 percent transitioning between groups. Leadership is an interesting concept within Paganism because it does not have many formal institutions. Therefore, within the sample, 989 (30 percent) claim to hold a leadership position of some sort, while only 884 of them belong to any formal group. Within Paganism, there are leadership opportunities outside of group structures, such as being a teacher, an author, running a conference, or writing an important blog. However, from a sampling perspective, it seems the possibility of over-representation of leaders and group members is important because group membership is related to the prevalence and significance of some obstacles. Also, in the case of some barriers, the leaders seem to shoulder a significant portion of the burden for upholding community structures.

The data were analyzed using SPSS. In order to determine the prevalence of particular challenges, all three categories that indicated that a barrier was present were added together. The significance of the impediments was calculated by assigning a value of 1-4 to the answers "Not a problem; A slight problem; A problem; A significant problem." A comparison of means was performed on some relevant demographic variables as well as by tradition. Whether any particular religious activities that constitute the respondents' overall practice was related to any specific obstacles was also tested. Where there was variation that

¹⁵ Helen A. Berger, "Are Solitaries the Future of Paganism?" *Patheos*, August 23, 2010, accessed January 21, 2014; Helen Berger, "Solitary Practitioners in the United States" (paper presented at the annual meeting of The American Academy of Religion, Baltimore, November 26, 2013).

required deeper analysis, independent sample T tests were run to check statistical significance. Additionally, there were important ranked demographic variables, such as income category, age category, education category, and level of advancement whose relationship to various barriers were analyzed using Spearman's ranked correlation coefficient.

Impediments to Practice

Given the putative centrality of practice over belief within Paganism, this study strives to identify both the prevalence of different barriers to religious practice that Pagans experience and the severity of those impediments. Of the thirty-seven types of challenges identified in the survey, fifteen were reported as affecting the practice of over fifty percent of the sample (N=3318). At least one third of respondents reported that an additional eighteen of the barriers identified negatively affected their practice. In the aggregate, none of the impediments are severe, but the level of significance for some obstacles is more keenly felt by certain subsets of the overall population.

The obstacles experienced can be interpreted as representing the following categories: those rooted in interactions with the dominant culture in which Pagans live; challenges arising from the non-institutional nature of Paganism; requirements related to the practice of magick; demands stemming from educational/developmental trajectories; and pragmatic challenges encountered when trying to live according to one's values.

Table 1. *Prevalence and severity of impediments to practice*

Challenge/barrier to personal practice	N=3318	Severity 4	Percent of point scale sample
---	---------------	-------------------	--

Impediments to Practice in Contemporary Paganism by Gwendolyn
Reece

Living a green lifestyle is too expensive	2321	2.1594	70
Dominant culture's educational system is in conflict with my beliefs and practices	2195	2.3273	66.2
Accessibility of appropriate groups to join	2146	2.3062	64.7
Access to conferences/gatherings	2079	2.1215	62.7
Access to workshops	2052	2.1028	61.8
Have to hide my identity because of prejudice	2018	2.1190	60.8
Insufficient time to practice	1972	1.9922	59.4
Insufficient funds for study	1950	2.1184	58.8
Lack of "upper level" educational resources	1945	2.1028	58.6
Accessibility of qualified/trained clergy or leaders	1913	2.1302	57.7
Difficulty travelling	1878	2.0368	56.6
Holidays not recognized by the workplace	1876	2.1582	56.5
Supplies too expensive	1778	1.9385	53.6
Clergy not available in institutions (hospitals, prisons, military, etc.)	1734	1.9991	52.2
Resources for living green lifestyle inaccessible	1710	1.7969	51.5
Living green lifestyle is too complicated	1653	1.6980	49.8
Holidays not recognized by schools	1596	2.0148	48.1
Lack of clear path for training	1593	1.8596	48
Lack of quiet	1590	1.7984	47.9
Lack of access to outdoor spaces to worship	1577	1.8689	47.5
Lack of opportunities for participation in interfaith work	1534	1.7818	46.2
Lack of clear path to advancement in community	1492	1.8282	45
Ethics of clergy/leaders	1455	1.7815	43.9
Lack of space for group to worship and hold rituals	1393	1.7547	42
Clergy/leader burnout	1374	1.7963	41.4
Lack of opportunities for meaningful volunteer work	1363	1.6603	41.1
Lack of educational resources for children	1341	1.7737	40.4
Supplies are not readily available	1287	1.6163	38.8

Impediments to Practice in Contemporary Paganism by Gwendolyn Reece

Lack of private place in home to worship and work	1236	1.6673	37.3
Clergy/leaders not adequately prepared for pastoral counseling	1201	1.6790	36.2
Volunteer clergy/leaders unable to commit sufficient time to the group/members	1084	1.5609	32.7
Lack of access to nature	1062	1.4979	32
Clergy/leaders not adequately prepared in theology/metaphysics	1054	1.5552	31.8
Lack of quality introductory educational resources	973	1.4753	29.3
Clergy/leaders not adequately prepared for leading rituals	964	1.4738	29.1
Access to books	490	1.2089	14.8
Access to the internet	127	1.0539	3.8

Challenge Arising from Interactions with the Dominant Culture

The obstacle that was ranked as the most important and was reported as being a barrier to practice by 66.2 percent (2195) of the respondents is that the dominant culture’s educational system is in conflict with the beliefs and practices of the respondents. This was the most unexpected finding and it requires further investigation to understand what this result is actually communicating. Given the lack of shared doctrines, it seems unlikely, although not impossible, that Pagans would have the same types of conflict with school curricula as, for example, creationists. It could, however, be a reference to the influence of Christianity on the curricula, especially since conservative Christians have, in some school districts, been able to insert materials that privilege Christianity or Christian-centric values into the compulsory education systems they govern.¹⁶

¹⁶ Carol Barner-Barry, *Contemporary Paganism: Minority Religions in a Majoritarian America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Mark A. Chancey, “The Bible, the First Amendment, and the Public Schools in Odessa, Texas,” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of*

Another interpretation is also possible. As the author discussed in a previous article, the magickal aspects of contemporary Paganism continue to be a prominent part of what constitutes Pagan religious practice.¹⁷ The view of reality taught in the mainstream educational systems would not consider magick to be real. Our contemporary educational system socializes people into what Max Weber has called “the disenchantment of the world.”¹⁸ The practitioner of magick claims to be working in non-ordinary states of consciousness and performing activities that have real effects.¹⁹ A possible interpretation of the high reported prevalence and severity of this impediment is that the socialization into a disenchanted world creates a significant barrier that practitioners must overcome in their

Interpretation 19:2 (2009) 169-205; Melissa M. Deckman, *School Board Battles: The Christian Right in Local Politics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004); Kent Greenawalt, *Does God Belong in Public Schools?* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005); James T. Spears and James C. Carper, Eds. *Curriculum, Religion, and Public Education: Conversations for an Enlarging Public Square* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1998).

¹⁷ Gwendolyn Reece, “Prevalence and Importance of Contemporary Pagan Practices,” *The Pomegranate* 16:1 (2014)35-54.

¹⁸ Max Weber, “Science as Vocation,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: A Galaxy Book, 1958) pp. 129-156.

¹⁹ Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess Worshipers, and Other Pagans in America Today* (New York: Penguin/Arkana, 1997); Berger, Helen A., *A Community of Witches: Contemporary Neo-Paganism and Witchcraft in the United States* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1999); Helen A. Berger, “Witchcraft and Neopaganism,” in *Witchcraft and Magic: Contemporary North America*, ed. Helen A. Berger (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 28-54; Chas S. Clifton, *Her Hidden Children: The Rise of Wicca and Paganism in America* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2006); Dennis D. Carpenter, “Emergent Nature Spirituality,” in *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft*, ed. James R. Lewis (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 35-72; Barbara Jane Davy, *Introduction to Pagan Studies* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2007); Adrian Ivakhiv, “The Resurgence of Magical Religion,” in *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft* ed. James R. Lewis (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 237-265; Richard Kyle, *The Religious Fringe: A History of Alternative Religions in America* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1993); Berger, Helen A., *A Community of Witches: Contemporary Neo-Paganism and Witchcraft in the United States* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1999); Sabrina Magliocco, *Witching Culture: Folklore and Neo-Paganism in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Sarah M. Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

ability to practice magick. In essence, those Pagans who have been educated within the dominant culture's educational system may have absorbed a message that belief in magick is a form of delusion. The responses might be an indication that the struggle against such internalized messages are an important impediment. The fact that there is not a statistically significant variance between those who are parents and those who are not suggests an interpretation that is related to the effects of socialization on adult practitioners.

Regardless of the meaning, what is clearly communicated in the response is that the educational system is an area in which Pagans find their interactions with the dominant culture to be problematic. It is an area of inquiry that is worthy of further attention.

The sixth most prevalent and seventh most severe obstacle to practice identified by the respondents is that they have to hide their identity because of prejudice. Of the sample, 60.8 percent (2018) stated that this created a barrier for them in their practice, although, interestingly, only 56.3 percent (1868) claim that they hide their practices from someone. The discrepancy cannot be explained given the data, although it is possible that respondents chose to indicate that hiding their identity was a barrier but may not hide their practices. For example, it might be that an individual could publically discuss reading Tarot without claiming a Pagan/Witch/Heathen identity. It is also possible that the respondents chose to identify hiding their identity because of prejudice to be barrier as method of indicating that prejudice is an important issue.

Table 2. *Hiding practices*

Hide practices from	N=3318	Percent of sample
I don't hide my practices	1450	43.7
Co-workers/employers	1176	35.4
Neighbors	1076	32.4
Family	903	27.2

Legal system	661	19.9
Health practitioners	556	16.8
Spouse/romantic partner	90	2.7

As will be discussed in discussions concerning Paganism's lack of institutional infrastructure, when groups do exist, they often meet in private residences.²⁰ Therefore, the 32.4 percent who hide their practices from their neighbors are indicating a barrier that could seriously inhibit group practice. Hiding one's religious identity at work may be simply an effort to make a distinction between personal and professional identities, although given the number of people who hide their identity because of prejudice, it is likely self-protection is the motivation of at least some of the respondents who hide their Pagan practices from co-workers/employers. The fact that 19.9 percent (661) hide their practices from the legal system and an additional 16.8 percent (556) hide their practices from health practitioners suggest an anxiety about how some of the major institutions in the dominant society that have the power to exert real control over individuals' lives might use the knowledge of the respondents' Paganism to their detriment. In the comments, custodial situations and family law seem to be areas of particular concern.

Given that over half of the respondents claim they are hiding their practices from someone and three of every five members of this sample claim that in some way they are hiding their identity as Pagans because of prejudice, in a religiously pluralistic society this topic deserves further investigation. Furthermore, in a nation that putatively values freedom of religious expression, ensuring that practitioners of minority religions enjoy the same

²⁰ Berger, Helen A., *A Community of Witches: Contemporary Neo-Paganism and Witchcraft in the United States* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1999); Barbara Jane Davy, *Introduction to Pagan Studies* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2007).

protection of rights as the majority should be a priority and the responses concerning the legal system and health care practitioners, in particular, are worrisome.

The twelfth most prevalent but fourth most important obstacle to practice is that the holidays celebrated by Pagans, Witches and Heathens are not recognized by the workplace. Presumably, for the 56.5 percent (1876) who indicated that this was a problem, this means that it is difficult for them to take off from work in order to worship and celebrate their holy festivals. This is also interesting in light of the fact that 35.4 percent (1176) reported that they hide their practices from their co-workers and employers. Similarly, the fact that Pagan holidays are not recognized by the schools is a barrier for 48.1 percent (1596) of the sample. The lists of holy days for various religions that are frequently kept by human resources departments and schools communicates legitimacy of the religions listed and may convey the opposite when a religion is excluded.²¹

The effects on Pagans' ability to practice their religion due to the lack of formal recognition of Pagan holidays may interact with two other barriers arising from the structure of Paganism and produce compounded results. The third most common (64.7 percent) and second most important obstacle is that there are insufficient appropriate and accessible groups. Unlike mainstream religions in which a worshiper is likely to have several houses of worship from which to choose, Pagans report that they have more limited options, often encountering difficulties in locating an appropriate and accessible group. Given that another 56.6 percent (1878) indicate that difficulty traveling is an impediment to their practice, it seems likely that many Pagans who do want to celebrate their holy days with others may have to travel in order to do so. Therefore, if many Pagans must travel in order to celebrate

²¹ Carol Barner-Barry, *Contemporary Paganism: Minority Religions in a Majoritarian America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

their seasonal festivals, the lack of formal recognition of their holy days in their places of work or the schools, which would enable them to be excused, could be a considerable challenge.

Impediments to practice related to the non-institutional nature of Paganism

The non-institutional structure of contemporary Paganism is one of its striking qualities.²² The lack of dogma, doctrine, and rigid hierarchy is, for many Pagans, one of its most appealing and important characteristics.²³ However, contemporary Paganism within the United States has grown considerably, having an estimated 682,000 adherents in the United States as of 2008.²⁴ Within the Pagan community there are conversations about whether or not Paganism needs to develop infrastructure to meet the needs of its participants, typically coupled with concerns about losing an essential part of the spirit of contemporary Paganism in the process and anxiety about reproducing what are seen as the failures, often resulting in oppression, in other institutionalized religions.²⁵

²² Carol Barner-Barry, *Contemporary Paganism: Minority Religions in a Majoritarian America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Helen A. Berger, "Witchcraft and Neopaganism," in *Witchcraft and Magic: Contemporary North America*, ed. Helen A. Berger (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 28-54; Barbara Jane Davy, *Introduction to Pagan Studies* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2007).

²³ Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today* (New York: Penguin/Arkana, 1997); Berger, Helen A., *A Community of Witches: Contemporary Neo-Paganism and Witchcraft in the United States* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1999); Helen A. Berger, "Witchcraft and Neopaganism," in *Witchcraft and Magic: Contemporary North America*, ed. Helen A. Berger (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 28-54; Barbara Jane Davy, *Introduction to Pagan Studies* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2007); Judy Harrow, "The Contemporary Neo-Pagan Revival," in *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 9-24.

²⁴ "Table 75: Self Described Religious Identification of Adult Population: 1990, 2001, and 2008," *Statistical Abstracts of the United States*, accessed January 21, 2014, <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/tables/12s0075.pdf>.

²⁵ Helen A. Berger, Evan A. Leach and Leigh S. Shaffer, *Voices from the Pagan Census: A National Survey of Witches and Neo-Pagans in the United States*, (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2003).

The results of this section of the Pagan/Witch/Heathen Community Needs Assessment Survey verify that Pagans experience considerable obstacles to practice that have been addressed by other religions through creating infrastructure. This is not to suggest that institutionalization is the only way that these needs could be addressed or to indicate any particular form of infrastructure, but to elucidate the obstacles as reported.

As previously discussed, 2,146 respondents (64.7 percent) indicated a lack of appropriate and accessible groups to join is a barrier to their practice. Collectively, this problem was ranked as the second most important. Additionally, for the 1,912 who identify as solitaires²⁶, 1,459 (76.3 percent) of the solitaires indicate the lack of appropriate and accessible groups is an obstacle and 598 (31.3 percent) of solitaires in this sample name this impediment as a significant problem. Helen Berger discovered in her “Pagan Census Revisited” that 79 percent of her sample identified as solitary, as opposed to the 57.6 percent of this sample.²⁷ This suggests that a substantial portion of those who are solitary do not necessarily practice this way by preference. Given the likely sample bias that includes greater numbers of group members and leaders, it is likely that the prevalence and importance of the lack of appropriate and accessible groups is an even greater challenge for Pagans than it appears from this data.

²⁶ There are two different questions in the survey that ask about group membership. One asks to how many groups does the respondent belong. Another asks about, in relationship to Paganism, whether they are solitary, a member of a group, or transitioning between groups. This was necessary because of the fact that many Pagans have multiple religious subject positions and may, for example, simultaneously be a solitary Pagan and belong to a Christian church, a Buddhist temple, or some other group outside of Paganism.

²⁷ Helen A. Berger, “Are Solitaires the Future of Paganism?” *Patheos*, August 23, 2010, accessed January 21, 2014; Helen Berger, “Solitary Practitioners in the United States” (paper presented at the annual meeting of The American Academy of Religion, Baltimore, November 26, 2013).

Most Pagan groups are similar to house churches. They are typically small, intimate groups with volunteer leadership and often meet in the residence of a member.²⁸ Without public spaces, the numbers of potential members that can be accommodated in a group are small. Additionally, perhaps because members are opening up their residences, these groups are frequently not open to all interested parties.²⁹ Therefore, a solitary wishing to join a group must often find a way into a community in which they might receive an invitation to come to a group meeting in an individual's home. The small size of the group also means its viability is deeply dependent on the willingness of the leader and/or the host to continue in that role.

Accompanying the lack of appropriate and accessible groups, 42 percent (1393) indicated that the lack of space for a group to worship and hold rituals is a barrier to practice. For those 1391 respondents who are members of groups, this is a problem for 621 (44.6 percent) and for those 989 who are group leaders, who presumably might be called upon to host, it is a barrier for 459 (46.4 percent). It is possible that a lack of public worship spaces combined with the house church model are causally connected to the lack of sufficient appropriate and accessible groups if there is an insufficient number of people who are both able and willing to open their homes to host groups. Whether or not they belong to a group, 47.5 percent (1577) of the sample cited their lack of access to outdoor spaces to worship as an obstacle. Given that 32.4 percent of the population is hiding their practices from their neighbors, it is likely that many Pagans, even if they are solitaries, do not feel

²⁸ Carol Barner-Barry, *Contemporary Paganism: Minority Religions in a Majoritarian America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Berger, Helen A., *A Community of Witches: Contemporary Neo-Paganism and Witchcraft in the United States* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1999); Helen A. Berger, Evan A. Leach and Leigh S. Shaffer, *Voices from the Pagan Census: A National Survey of Witches and Neo-Pagans in the United States*, (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2003).

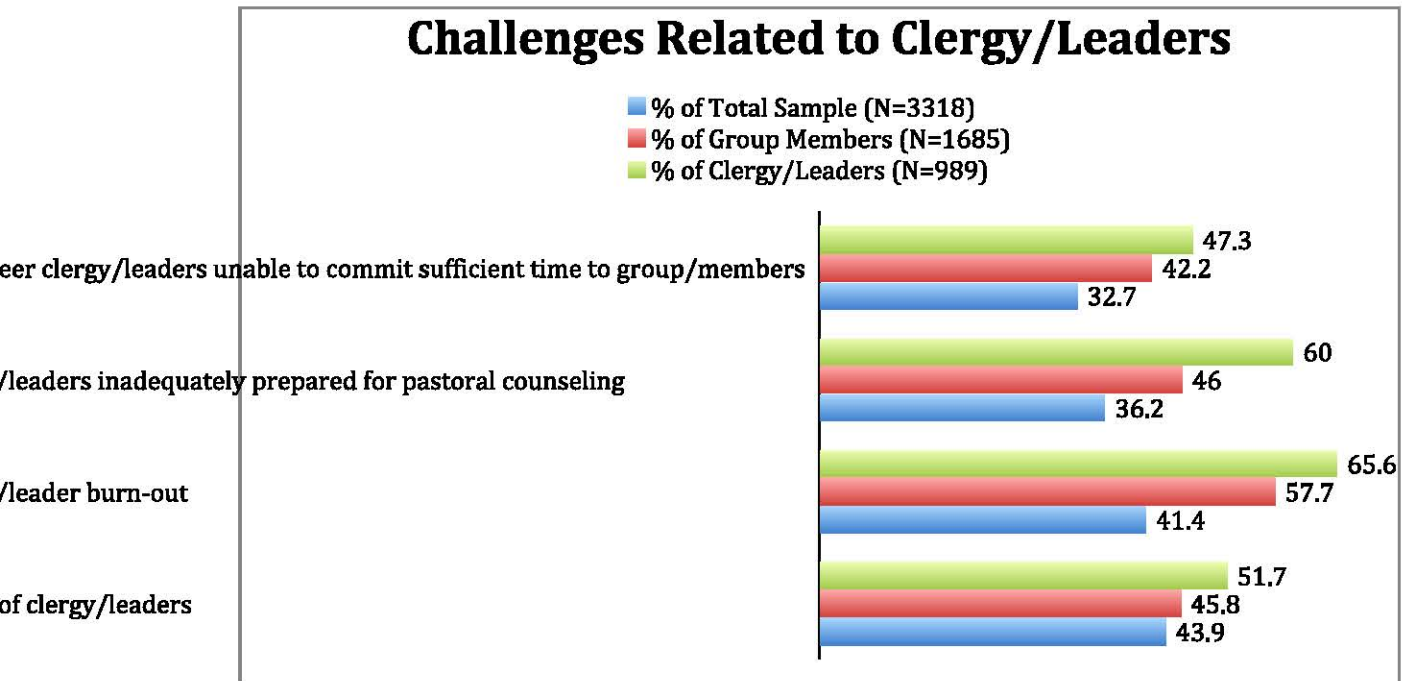
²⁹ Barbara Jane Davy, *Introduction to Pagan Studies* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2007).

comfortable practicing outside on their own property, should they even have private access to outdoor spaces.

Likely related to the lack of appropriate and accessible groups to join, 57.7 percent (1913) cite lack of access to qualified/trained clergy or leaders as a barrier to their practice. Many religions have created institutions, such as seminaries, to train their clergy. Accompanying this training, which takes time and fiscal resources, there is an assumption of a future professional practice. Not only do Pagans typically lack public meetings spaces, there are few paid clergy. Of the 989 leaders and members of clergy, only seventeen respondents reported that they are earning their primary income as Pagan clergy, which is 1.7 percent of those people who identified as clergy and leaders. An additional 9.7 percent of clergy earn some supplemental income, but if the comments indicate that this is likely to be quite nominal and occasional payments for services such as being a celebrant in a wedding. Almost all Pagan clergy and leaders operate as volunteers and must have their income from another source.

From this data, a number of results indicate that the current model of volunteer clergy creates real, pervasive challenges posed not only to Paganism in general, but especially to the leaders and clergy themselves. It is possible that these challenges are sufficient threaten the viability of continued growth in contemporary Paganism and may contribute to the explosion of solitaries that Helen Berger discovered.³⁰ Many of the barriers listed concerning clergy are more serious to group members, but are even greater impediments to those who identify as clergy and leaders.

³⁰ Helen A. Berger, "Are Solitaries the Future of Paganism?" *Patheos*, August 23, 2010, accessed January 21, 2014; Helen Berger, "Solitary Practitioners in the United States" (paper presented at the annual meeting of The American Academy of Religion, Baltimore, November 26, 2013).



Under the current conditions of contemporary Paganism, operating primarily in small groups and as solitaires, most leaders and clergy are either trained within traditions or are self-taught. Clergy and leader inadequacy in leading rituals does not seem to be a much of a problem for the respondents. Rituals are centrally important in the practice of Paganism, with 96.1 percent participating in individual ritual, 95 percent in seasonal rituals, 87.3 percent in making offerings, 87.3 percent worshipping deity/ies and 77.9 percent designing rituals.³¹

The lack of appropriate preparation in theology and metaphysics for clergy/leaders is more of a barrier to people who are in those roles, being cited as an obstacle by 44.6 percent of leaders (441), versus 31.8 percent of the overall sample. Although the question was phrased to ask respondents to indicate barriers to personal practice, it is unclear if this

³¹ Gwendolyn Reece, "Prevalence and Importance of Contemporary Pagan Practices," *Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies* 16, no. 1 (2014): 35-54.

indicates that individuals who find themselves in clergy/leadership roles feel unprepared in theology and metaphysics, or if they deem their peers to be unprepared. However, I think the data does suggest that in the types of training that Pagan clergy and leaders receive, ritual prowess is more heavily emphasized than theological and metaphysical training.

The other questions concerning Pagan clergy and leaders raise concerns. The fact that over half of those who identified as clergy or leaders indicate that the ethics of clergy/leaders is a problem is troubling and raises questions that cannot be answered without further investigation. It is unlikely that these 511 clergy and leaders are engaged in self-reproach, but it indicates strong concerns within the peer group of Pagan leaders and clergy about ethical issues. Without formal doctrine, the two most common statements of ethics are The Witch's Rede (Harm None), or a variant of Crowley's Law of Thelema, "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law. Love is the law, love under will." The Law of Three, that what one does will return three-fold, is also stated as a foundational ethical precept.³² All of these approaches do not rely on proscriptions of behavior but on deeply individual and nuanced interpretations.³³ Using these approaches, it is quite likely that two reasonable people could reach different judgments about whether a particular course of action is ethical. There is no centralized institutional structure for supporting clergy and leaders, no method of ensuring some level of quality control through credentialing, and no agreed upon professional code of ethics. Therefore, the standards of ethical behavior by

³² Chas S. Clifton, "Some Sources of Modern Pagan Ethics," in *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 269-275; Barbara Jane Davy, *Introduction to Pagan Studies* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2007).

³³ Chas S. Clifton, "Some Sources of Modern Pagan Ethics," in *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 269-275; Barbara Jane Davy, *Introduction to Pagan Studies* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2007); Judy Harrow, "The Contemporary Neo-Pagan Revival," in *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 9-24

which clergy and leaders ought to be judged are unclear. Similarly, there is no method, other than through the court of public opinion, for censuring a leader for an ethical violation that is not an illegal activity. This data does not necessarily reveal rampant ethical abuse by leaders and clergy, but it does reveal an area of concern that requires more study and consideration.

As was discussed, Pagan clergy and leaders are virtually all volunteers, most often performing their Pagan service on top of other employment. What is abundantly clear from this sample is that burnout is a real challenge for those people who are serving in leadership roles. Of the 989 participants who self-identify as leaders, 65.6 percent (649) name burnout as a challenge, and 22 percent (218) gave this barrier the highest severity ranking. The data reveal some of the possible reasons for burnout. Although 46 percent (775) of group members indicate that clergy and leaders are not adequately prepared for pastoral counseling, suggesting an unmet need, 60 percent (514) of the clergy and leaders themselves indicate a lack of preparation in pastoral counseling as an impediment. In mainstream religions, training in pastoral counseling is included in seminary training. Since most Pagans in this sample (80.9 percent) left Christianity, they may have brought with them expectations for being able to go to their clergy and leaders and receive this type of counseling. Although Cherry Hill Seminary, an online Pagan seminary, does offer training in pastoral counseling, given the lack of remuneration, most Pagan leaders and clergy are not receiving this kind of education. Therefore, what the data suggests is that there is an expectation laid on volunteer clergy and leaders who are being called upon to provide pastoral counseling, which frequently involves interacting with people in crisis, and they are not adequately prepared to perform this function. Given the large number of clergy and leaders who identified the lack

of preparation for pastoral counseling as an obstacle, it is likely that it is a significant contributor to burnout.

Another impediment that is likely to contribute to the problem of clergy and leader burnout is the inability on the part of the volunteer clergy and leaders to commit sufficient time to their groups and members. The lack of sufficient time, and presumably attention, from leadership was considered an obstacle for 42.2 percent (711) of the people in groups, but 47.3 percent (468) of leaders identified lack of time as a barrier. This suggests a likely contributor to burnout. It may be that the leaders were indicating a greater awareness of the time required to adequately perform their functions and perhaps the stress of time being taken from other priorities. It is also possible that the leaders have higher expectations for themselves than their group members have of them; however 42.2 percent of group members indicating neglect due to time constraints suggests that the model of volunteer clergy/leaders has a heavy cost for leaders and participants.

Despite the stresses on the volunteer clergy, there is a strong desire, both on their part and on the part of group members, to see an expansion in their role to put them more on par with clergy in mainline religions. Of the total participants, 52.2 percent (1734) indicated the fact that Pagan clergy are not available in the context of institutions such as hospitals, prisons, and the military is an impediment. A slightly higher percentage (55.3 percent) of the clergy and leaders agree. This communicates a wish to have the same access to their own clergy that is enjoyed by followers of mainstream religions, particularly within the institutional contexts that are likely to be accompanied by increased stress. However, given that this type of chaplaincy often requires pastoral counseling, for which leaders feel underprepared, and additional time, which having insufficient time is already a challenge, it is

not clear how this expressed need could be met in the current model of volunteer clergy and leaders without further contributing to the problem of clergy and leader burnout.

Requirements that Arise from the Practice of Magick

Contemporary Paganism arises from numerous sources. Among the most important and direct are western esoteric and occult traditions that emphasize magick.³⁴ This heritage is reflected in the prevalence and relative importance of many Pagan practices, with 85.5 percent of the sample performing magick or spells on behalf of the self and another 80.3 percent of the sample performing magick or spells on behalf of the greater good as a part of their religious practice. Additionally, the respondents indicated high degrees of participation in a number of other arts related to magick, such as divination, herbalism, reading signs and omens, astral travel, and shamanic work. A number of other magickal practices were less common but were highly important to those who participated in them, indicating types of magickal specialization. These specialties did not relate to specific traditions.³⁵

The magickal aspects of Paganism have additional requirements that are different than those found in mainline religions. For example, 53.6 percent (1778) indicated that the expense of supplies was an impediment to their practice. Not surprisingly, this obstacle was significantly related to income ($r = -.300, p < .000$). A smaller number indicated the

³⁴ Helen A. Berger, "Witchcraft and Neopaganism," in *Witchcraft and Magic: Contemporary North America*, ed. Helen A. Berger (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 28-54.; Chas S. Clifton, *Her Hidden Children: The Rise of Wicca and Paganism in America* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2006); Susan Greenwood, *The Nature of Magic: An Anthropology of Consciousness* (New York: Berg, 2005); Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Sabrina Magliocco, *Witching Culture: Folklore and Neo-Paganism in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Sarah M. Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

³⁵ Gwendolyn Reece, "Prevalence and Importance of Contemporary Pagan Practices," *Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies* 16, no. 1 (2014): 35-54.

availability of supplies as an obstacle (38.8 percent). Supplies are important because many magickal practices require material goods. Spells used in magick often include specific physical items, whereas herbalism and divination, both of which are practiced by over 80 percent of these populations, tend to require supplies.³⁶

Perhaps most importantly, the continued importance of magick to Paganism may be related to the emphasis on learning trajectories, since practitioners of the different domains of magick can develop varying levels of mastery in magickal skills. Therefore many of the demands related to continuous learning are likely arising from the practice of magick.³⁷

Demands that arise from the educational/developmental trajectory

One survey question asked the participants whether they considered themselves to be exploring, a beginner, intermediate, advanced, or adept (high-advanced). The fact that 3299 of 3318 answered this question and that it made sense to them suggests a powerful relationship between Pagan practice and identity and the sense of a trajectory of learning and development.³⁸

Access to conferences or gatherings (62.7 percent) and access to workshops (61.8 percent) are challenges that clearly relate to the desire for continuous development and instruction. These obstacles are likely related to another common and relatively important obstacle, having insufficient funds for study (58.8 percent). Challenges arising from

³⁶ Barbara Jane Davy, *Introduction to Pagan Studies* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2007); Gwendolyn Reece, "Prevalence and Importance of Contemporary Pagan Practices," *Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies* 16, no. 1 (2014): 35-54.

³⁷ Adrian Ivakhiv, "The Resurgence of Magical Religion," in *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft* ed. James R. Lewis (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 237-265;

³⁸ Richard Kyle, *The Religious Fringe: A History of Alternative Religions in America* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1993); Gwendolyn Reece, "Prevalence and Importance of Contemporary Pagan Practices," *Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies* 16, no. 1 (2014): 35-54.

difficulty travelling reported by 56.6 percent (1878) may not be solely related to the need to travel for group participation, but could also present obstacles for those wanting to travel to take advantage of opportunities for continuous learning. Using Spearman’s ranked correlation coefficient, there is a weak but statistically significant relationship between income and a number of obstacles that are related to continuous development, suggesting that these barriers have greater impact on those with lower incomes.

Table 3. Relationship of Income to Continuous Development Obstacles

Challenge or Barrier to practice	Spearman’s Correlation and Significance
Insufficient funds for study	$r_s = -.290, p < .000$
Difficulty travelling	$r_s = -.253, p < .000$
Access to workshops	$r_s = -.209, p < .000$
Access to conferences/gatherings	$r_s = -.202, p < .000$

Insufficient time to practice was also common (59.4 percent), but although it was the seventh most prevalent barrier, it was only the thirteenth most significant. The lack of a private place in the home to worship and work was a problem for 37.3 percent (1236) and has a weak but statistically significant negative correlation to levels of advancement ($r_s = -.218, p < .000$) suggesting that this is a greater barrier to those who are less advanced.

Whether this is causally related to advancement or is an indication of dedication with more advanced practitioners prioritizing creating space in their living quarters dedicated to practice cannot be determined from this data. There were a number of weak correlations between levels of advancement and various characteristics, but the survey instrument developed is not sufficiently sensitive to draw conclusions about the weaker correlations. Given the importance of the developmental trajectory to Paganism, a study investigating more

specifically what attributes and behaviors positively contribute to advancement would be a worthwhile contribution to the field.

This sample of respondents has a median number of twenty-years of experience in Paganism. Another regularly reported obstacle is the lack of “upper level” educational resources, identified as a problem by 58.6 percent (1945) of respondents, while access to quality introductory resources was a much less prevalent and severe barrier. Given that there is a positive correlation between years in the craft and level of advancement ($r_s = .521, p < .000$), it is not surprising that 79.2 percent of this experienced population identifies as intermediate to advanced. They would, therefore, require more advanced materials to support their continuous learning. The lack of “upper level” educational resources was the only obstacle tested by tradition that had a reasonably large effect size that was statistically significant. From this data it seems the need for educational resources intended for a more advanced audience is particularly pressing for those who practice African Diaspora traditions and the Kemetic/Ancient Egyptian traditions.

Table 4. *Difference between the needs for upper level resources for African Diaspora Traditions*

	What is your religion/path? Check as many as apply.	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Lack of "upper level" educational resources	Not African Disapora	3177	2.0919	1.10545	.01961
	African Diaspora Traditions (e.g. Voudou, Santeria, Umbanda)	141	2.3475	1.14633	.09654

Table 5. *Difference between the needs for upper level resources for Kemetic / Ancient Egyptian Traditions*

	What is your religion/path?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
--	-----------------------------	---	------	----------------	------------

	Check as many as apply.			Mean
Lack of "upper level" educational resources	Not Kemetic/Ancient Egyptian	3238	2.0911	1.10551
	Kemetic/Ancient Egyptian	80	2.5750	1.12255
				.12551

The situation concerning children and education in Paganism is interesting. Of the 1,632 participants who have children, 65.4 percent (1068) are raising them as Pagans, including 319 who are raising them in Paganism and another religion. Of Pagan parents, 34.6 percent are not raising them as Pagans, which is a slightly higher overall percentage than was found in the original "Pagan Census."³⁹ The fact that over one third of Pagan parents are not raising their children in their own religion is an important finding and worthy of further investigation. Determining the parental motivations is important since the socialization of children into the religion of their parents is essential for a religion's survival.⁴⁰ However, of those Pagan parents who are raising their children as Pagans, 64.8 percent name the lack of educational resources for children as a barrier. This lack of sufficient educational resources for children may be an artifact of the magickal training heritage, which does not emphasize training children. It may also be the result of the comparative newness of contemporary Paganism, although at this point Paganism has grown enough and been in the United States long enough for multi-generational Pagan families to exist.

Pragmatic Challenges of Living One's Values

³⁹ Helen A. Berger, Evan A. Leach and Leigh S. Shaffer, *Voices from the Pagan Census: A National Survey of Witches and Neo-Pagans in the United States*, (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2003).

⁴⁰ Berger, Helen A., *A Community of Witches: Contemporary Neo-Paganism and Witchcraft in the United States* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1999); Thomas Robbins, *Cults, Converts, and Charisma: The Sociology of New Religious Movements* (London: Sage Publications, 1988).

One of the great challenges in sociological research is that there is often a reported mis-match between people's stated values and their behaviors.⁴¹ Given the emphasis placed on nature within most Pagan traditions, it might be expected that Pagans would make sustainability a lifestyle priority.⁴² Not surprisingly, 87.1 percent of this sample says that they engage in environmental/green practices as a part of their religious practice, but a full 70 percent of the sample (2321) also claim that living a green lifestyle is too expensive. This is the most common reported barrier to practice. Not only is green living expensive, but for 51.5 percent (1710) the resources for living a green lifestyle are insufficiently accessible. The complication of living a green lifestyle was also frequently indicated, but was reported to be a less severe obstacle. These responses indicate a religiously motivated desire to live in a sustainable way, but the participants find the expense, especially, to be an impediment. A more in depth study investigating the specific green practices Pagans both do engage in as part of their religious practice and those in which they desire to engage but do not, and the reasons for the gap between their values and actions would be an interesting addition to the literature.

A large number of participants also identify that they pursue volunteer or charity work as a part of their practice (65.9 percent). It is clear that they are doing so within non-

⁴¹ James Blake, "Overcoming the 'Value-Action Gap' in Environmental Policy: Tensions Between National Policy and Local Experience," *Local Environment: The International Journal of Justice and Sustainability* 4:3 (1999) 257-278; Rob Flynn, Paul Bellaby, and Miriam Ricci, "The 'value-action gap' in public attitudes towards sustainable energy: the case of hydrogen energy," *The Sociological Review* 57 (2009) 159-180.

⁴² Dennis D. Carpenter, "Emergent Nature Spirituality," in *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft*, ed. James R. Lewis (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 35-72; Chas S. Clifton, *Her Hidden Children: The Rise of Wicca and Paganism in America* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2006); Barbara Jane Davy, *Introduction to Pagan Studies* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2007); Susan Greenwood, *The Nature of Magic: An Anthropology of Consciousness* (New York: Berg, 2005); Richard Kyle, *The Religious Fringe: A History of Alternative Religions in America* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1993); Sarah M. Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

Pagan contexts but understand their participation to be an expression of their Pagan practice. The lack of opportunities for meaningful volunteer work was identified as a barrier for 40.4 percent (1363). It is unclear whether this indicates a desire for charities or volunteer organizations that are specifically Pagan charities, or if the volunteer opportunities that are available are insufficiently meaningful, or if there is a lack of charity or volunteer organizations accessible in which a Pagan would feel welcome.

There also are indications that Pagans would like to be more engaged in interfaith work with 46.2 percent stating lack of opportunities to participate is an impediment. This is interesting in that a 48.7 percent of the population claims to be engaged in interfaith work as a part of their practice; however, this may communicate a desire to be more deeply or regularly involved in these dialogues and activities. It is also possible that it is communicating a perceived barrier of not feeling welcome. The high level of participation matched with an almost equally high number of participants claiming lack of opportunities to participate is surprising and deserves further investigation.

Summary and Suggestions for Further Research

Contemporary Pagans face a number of obstacles to their practice, some are highly prevalent, affecting over half of the respondents to the survey. Other impediments are not as widespread, but because they indicate challenges that inhere within the current structure of contemporary Paganism, they are worthy of attention.

Conflict with the educational system of the dominant culture

The results of this survey indicate a pervasive and relatively important sense of conflict with the dominant culture's educational system, but there is not sufficient data to ensure an appropriate understanding of the dynamics of this conflict. Since the educational

system is both one of the most important vehicles for socialization and the public schools are an essential government institution, this is a potential arena for civil rights conflict. Of particular interest is the claim that this is an impediment to the ability of contemporary Pagans to practice their religion, and that this holds true whether or not the respondents are parents, which may indicate that the skepticism inherent in the Weberian “disenchantment of the world” actually becomes a psychological barrier that inhibits Pagan practice. David Hufford makes an interesting case that the worldview of “disenchantment” is not an indicator of the evolution of reason, but reflects an enforced silence about extraordinary spiritual experiences, in which people who claim to have experienced extraordinary spiritual experiences are subject to socially sanctioned discipline, such as an *a priori* assumption of mental illness. Especially in relation to his work with veterans who experience visitations from the dead, he argues strenuously that the societal promotion of the disenchanting worldview is actively harmful and drives all of the evidence against its accuracy underground.⁴³ “The Pagan Census” revealed that a high percentage of Pagans claim to have had psychic experiences.⁴⁴ As the foremost institution involved in socializing the young, it could be that interactions with the school system is a common venue for silencing their psychic experiences. Without additional investigation, however, all interpretations are speculative. Further studies that would elucidate the nature of this conflict would be a worthwhile contribution.

The effects and dynamics of prejudice against Pagans

⁴³ David Hufford, “Sleeping Reason, Dreams of Disenchantment,” American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, November 23, 2014 in San Diego

⁴⁴ Helen A. Berger, Evan A. Leach and Leigh S. Shaffer, *Voices from the Pagan Census: A National Survey of Witches and Neo-Pagans in the United States*, (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2003).

This survey revealed that over 60 percent of the respondents experience prejudice that affects their ability to practice their religion. Well over half of the sample hide their practices from someone. In a society that theoretically prides itself as religiously tolerant, understanding the specific dynamics of these problematic interactions with the dominant culture is essential. Some areas for further research include determining how the perceived risk relates to actual experiences of oppression; how the legal context of religious freedom impacts Pagans; and the psychological effects of anti-Pagan rhetoric on contemporary Pagans.

The lack of Pagan infrastructure

Most Pagan groups operate using a house church model, meeting in the home of a member. These groups tend to be small. The results of this survey indicate numerous impediments that arise from this model's inability to adequately meet the needs of contemporary Pagans. There are not enough appropriate and accessible groups to accommodate all who want to worship in groups. Lack of space for groups to meet and lack of outdoor spaces to worship are a problem for many Pagans and may directly contribute to the insufficient number of appropriate and accessible groups. It seems likely from the number of people who name difficulty travelling as an impediment to their practice that many of those who do worship with others must travel to do so.

Many contemporary Pagans do not have sufficient access to quality, trained clergy or leaders. The leaders themselves are virtually all volunteers. Numerous challenges related to clergy and leaders are obstacles for the practice of the people who rely on them, but they are especially challenging to the volunteer leaders and clergy themselves. Clergy and leader burnout is a significant problem. Some of the other obstacles, such as a lack of

preparedness for pastoral counseling and insufficient time to spend on the group and members likely contribute to the high rate of leaders who claim that burnout is a serious obstacle.

If the American Religious Identification Survey is correct in its estimates, Paganism and Wicca have hundreds of thousands of adherents within the United States. If the respondents to this survey reflect the obstacles of the greater community, especially the situations emerging from clergy and leader burnout, contemporary Paganism has reached a point in its modern history where it is going to have to find a way over the next few decades to address the needs that are usually met through institutions.⁴⁵ It will, therefore, be interesting to watch how contemporary Pagans move forward and whether the solutions they develop verify some of the scholarly theories about the process of routinization and institutionalization or provide counter-models.

Ethics

The high level of concern about the ethics of clergy and leaders does not necessarily reflect a condemnation of clergy and leaders nor an ethical crisis in behavior, although it might. It does indicate that ethics are an area of significant concern, especially for the leaders and clergy themselves. Beyond merely repeating an admonishment to “harm none,” which is a vague proscription, it would be interesting to investigate the reasoning process used by Pagans in determining their actions.

Learning trajectories and magick

⁴⁵ Berger, Helen A., *A Community of Witches: Contemporary Neo-Paganism and Witchcraft in the United States* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1999); Thomas Robbins, *Cults, Converts, and Charisma: The Sociology of New Religious Movements* (London: Sage Publications, 1988); Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, translated by Ephraim Fischoff (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963).

The importance of magick to contemporary Paganism includes domains of activity over which practitioners may develop levels of mastery. A learning trajectory tends to be a strong part of Pagan identity, which creates demands that might be different than for members of mainline faith-based traditions. There are a number of challenges that are related to the continuous development required by Paganism that are less of a barrier to those who are more advanced. It would be interesting to know which factors causally contribute to advancement.

Children

Over one third of Pagans in this sample who have children are not raising them in their own religion. Although some barriers are identified in this survey, such as lack of educational materials appropriate for children and lack of recognition of Pagan holidays by the schools, these data are silent on the motivations of Pagan parents in not raising their children to be Pagan. This is a pattern that is different than most other contemporary religions, is causally connected to whether a religion survives or not, and is therefore worthy of investigation.

Pagans and nature

Paganism is often called a “nature religion,” which is an incomplete characterization, and yet 87.1 percent of the respondents in this survey to indicate that sustainable practices are a part of their religious practice. However, the most common obstacle to practice is that living a green lifestyle is too expensive, indicating a struggle to pragmatically live one’s values. It would be interesting to have more information about how the ideas of nature reverence, which are often romantic ideals held by a population that is largely urban and

suburban, are translated into lifestyle choices, especially those concerned with sustainability. Given that ecological damage is a desperately real, pressing issue and that Pagans should be, according to their own values, at the forefront of trying to change environmentally destructive attitudes and activities, they would form an interesting population to study the interaction between beliefs and practical environmental behaviors.