

Department of Social Sciences

**Modern Witchcraft in Suburban Australia:
How and What Witches Learn**

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DECLARATION

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

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ABSTRACT

Existing anthropological research and discussion related to contemporary Wiccan and Witchcraft practice is growing and indeed has been explored by anthropologists and other writers from the northern and southern hemispheres. However, there has been limited discourse on *how* and *what* Western Australian Wiccans and Witches learn. This ethnographic research fills that gap by exploring, in two separate sections, how Wiccans and Witches have developed relevant skills in a social learning structure and what ritual practice they have learnt as a result. The thesis proposes that the current theories of learning and ritual fail to adequately describe the social processes and outcomes observed.

In the first section, focusing on how the participants learn, I argue that cognitive, behavioural and humanist learning theories as well as the most relevant social learning theory, Communities of Practice, fail to explain adequately the holistic learning processes with which the Wiccans and Witches are engaged. Instead I propose a new and complementary theory of learning that I identify as 'Whole Person' theory that more effectively describes the holistic and intuitive nature of learning the research participants undertook.

In the second section I go further to show that the existing theories of ritual fail to explore and consider ritual as a product or outcome of learning and instead focus heavily on ritual either as a process contributing to and reflecting the social order in which it takes place or they describe the structure of ritual. This research shows that ritual can be both a process of a social group as well as a product and an end result of learning and social interaction. The ethnographic materials presented extend our understanding of both learning and ritual.

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GLOSSARY

Many Wiccan terms are specific only within the Witchcraft environment and several terms used in Wicca have one meaning within the Wiccan demography, whilst having a different and occasionally derogatory meaning in the wider community.

Alexandrian – Named because it was developed by Alex Sanders, this is one of the original traditions or forms of Wicca. Most covens in Perth, Western Australia are Alexandrian or sympathetic with it.

Amulets – Small tokens that symbolically hold magickal intent so that the owner can stay connected with the magick conducted and use it to reinforce the power of the spell.

Athame – A black handled, double edged knife used symbolically as a tool in erecting the circle and in various Wiccan rituals.

Beltaine/Beltane – A Greater Sabbat and one of the four major festivals celebrated by the Wiccan community.

Besom – A broom traditionally made with a handle of ash with birch twigs as the brush. The besom is used to symbolically sweep the sacred space clear of residual, negative energy before a circle is cast.

Book of Shadows – A documented list of rituals and rites, meditations, rules of practice, dream interpretations and related materials personal to the individual or the coven.

Chalice – A ritual tool to hold wine and/or water used during Wiccan rites.

Circle – The sacred space in which rituals take place. This can be indoors or outside and is essentially a psychically erected space that contains the generated magickal power.

Correspondences – Magickal ingredients in spell-craft and ritual work that relate specifically to the four elements of Earth, Air, Fire and Water.

Coven – A group of men and women who have banded together under an oath of group initiation in order to share Wiccan rituals, practises and social support.

Craft – An abbreviated term to describe modern, westernised Witchcraft or Wicca.

Dedicant – A seeker or non-initiate. Someone who is learning about Wicca and the practice of Witchcraft and who has not yet been initiated.

Deosil – The clockwise direction around the circle in which many rituals take place. This is based on the direction across the sky that the sun takes from dawn to dusk in the northern hemisphere.

Elements – The four components that make up the physical and spiritual planes of the planet. Earth, Air, Fire and Water.

Esbat – The regular ritual gathering of coven members held on or near the night of each Full Moon.

Gardnerian – The first modern tradition or form of Wicca developed by Gerald Gardner in the late 1940s.

Hex – A spell or magickal working designed to bring about negative results for a particular person or event.

High Priest – A male who has reached the level of 3rd degree initiate and who is entitled to be the male leader of a coven.

High Priestess – A female who has reached the level of 3rd degree initiate and who is entitled to be the female and highest leader of a coven.

Imbolg – A Greater Sabbat and one of the four major festivals celebrated by the Wiccan community.

Inner Court – People who have undergone initiation into the inner, core membership of a coven.

Lughnasadh – A Greater Sabbat and one of the four major festivals celebrated by the Wiccan community.

Magick – The ritualistic practise of creating outcomes from intent using spells. The use of the “k” at the end of the word separates the Wiccan use of magick from the entertainment performed by stage magicians.

Neophyte – A seeker or non-initiate. Someone who is learning about Wicca and the practice of Witchcraft and who has not yet been initiated.

Outer Court – The group of seekers who have been accepted to train for a year and a day prior to initiation. Outer Court includes people not yet admitted to the inner core membership of a coven.

Pagan – Someone who believes in one of the nature based religions such as Wicca or Druidism.

Pentacle – A plate or tile, marked with a pentagram and often with additional symbols, used as a ritual tool during most rites. It is a ceremonial plate on which salt or other magickal ingredients are laid for consecration.

Pentagram – A five pointed star enclosed with a circle that is the basic symbol and label of Wicca, much like a cross is the badge of a Christian.

Sabbat – One of eight festivals celebrated by the Wiccan community each year. There are four Greater Sabbats that focus on deity and its relationship with the season and four Lesser Sabbats which celebrate the equinoxes and solstices of the sun.

Samhain – A Greater Sabbat and one of the four major festivals celebrated by the Wiccan community.

Seeker – The same as a neophyte or non-initiate. Someone who is learning about Wicca and the practice of Witchcraft.

Spell – The content of a predetermined ritual designed specifically to bring about a particular outcome.

Skyclad – the practice of being naked during ritual. Original Wiccan text talks about the need for new initiates to be reborn and to divest themselves of clothing, jewellery etc that labels them as that person. Thus many covens will work skyclad as a symbol of their intent to be pure, open and without any hierarchical mask.

Solitary – A Witch who practices in isolation either through choice or circumstance and who is not an Inner Court member of a coven.

Tradition– Wicca is divided into different forms of practice each of which develops their own set of rituals. Essentially all the traditions follow the same principles but individual ritualistic practices may be modified to meet a particular tradition's requirements. The original tradition was Gardnerian, named after its founder Gerald Gardner. Other popular traditions include Alexandrian founded by Alex Sanders, a predominantly female oriented tradition titled Dianic, Celtic, Saxon, Irish Wicca and Faerie.

Wheel of the Year – The annual liturgical calendar that describes the celebratory festivals of Wicca.

Wicca – A body of beliefs that form the basic tenets of the religion.

Wiccan – Someone who has been initiated into a traditional Wiccan coven or who has devoted themselves to the religious foundations of Wicca.

Widdershins – The anticlockwise direction around the circle in which some rituals may take place. This direction is sometimes seen as a reduction process rather than a productive ritual process. This is based on the opposite direction across the sky that the sun takes from dawn to dusk in the northern hemisphere.

Witch – Someone who practices rituals and magic as a means of manifesting their Wiccan beliefs.

Chapter 1

ONCE UPON A TIME: THE RESEARCH CONTEXT, METHODOLOGY AND BACKGROUND

Introduction

Learning, particularly culturally explicit learning is more than just a cognitive exercise, a behavioural activity or even a shift in attitude. Learning is often a holistic experience that also incorporates the inherent intuitive skills and powers that lie dormant in many of us. Flora describes intuition, or gut feelings, as “sudden, strong judgments whose origin we can't immediately explain” (2007, p 68), while Carr describes intuition as “our own natural, instinctive awareness” (2006, p.33). More detailed descriptors of intuition include those from Leiberman et al. who link intuition to the “growing body of research suggesting the existence of implicit, tacit, or automatic self-processes that operate without effort, intention, or awareness that could lead to self-judgments based on accumulated experience without the explicit retrieval and evaluation of autobiographical evidence” (2004, p.422). In essence then, we can describe intuition as the ability to look within ourselves to locate perhaps already existing knowledge, and use that to develop our decision making and judgement strategies moving forward.

Witches are one group of people who actively encourage and foster their intuitive capabilities as an important part of their Witchcraft apprenticeship. This research explores *how* Witches learn their religious skills and *what* they learn and sets the findings against a broad anthropological and andragogical theoretical backdrop in order to better understand the processes they undergo and the outcomes they achieve. Andragogy, a term originally introduced by Knowles (1984), describes the science and art of how adults learn and underpins much of

contemporary adult teaching practice. Focusing on the mechanisms through which adults, rather than children, learn, Knowles argued that adults are motivated to learn when the subject matter has relevancy to them at this stage of their life and when they can be responsible for their own learning. The characteristics of learning for adults he stressed are therefore different to those of children who rely more heavily on the direction of others for their academic and skill development. Using the foundations of intuition and andragogy, and during a four year ethnographical study, I shared with a group of suburban Witches their journey toward, and through, 'Witch-hood' and learnt how to design, lead and conduct the fundamental tool of Wicca and Witchcraft, that of ritual as the product of that learning exploration.

Pelissier suggests that, "Learning and teaching are fundamental, implicitly or explicitly, to human adaptation, socialization, culture change, and at the broadest level, the production and reproduction of culture and society" (1991, p. 75). This research reflects her definition and shows that becoming a Witch is more than just learning a set of skills but is also a personal and social journey of growth and achievement. During their Witchcraft apprenticeship, Witches need to learn how to *be* Witches and this is, by far, a more in-depth process and outcome than simply learning to practice *as* a Witch. It is a holistic endeavour that engages the Witch in a 'Whole Person' learning process rather than a set of discrete learning modalities and is the route through which the practitioner identifies, embraces and becomes part of Wiccan and Witchcraft culture and community. Learning to be a Witch is therefore a comprehensive, integrated journey during which the practitioner engages their brain, their hands, their heart and their soul.

Current educational learning theories and the contemporary discourse around the anthropology of learning make limited reference to this

holistic nature of the learning process and instead focus on the cognitive, behavioural, humanist or situational approach to learning. Knowles (1978) was the first theorist to distinguish between the learning processes of children and those of adults and proposed the term, 'andragogy' to describe the inclusive, learner centred approach to teaching that adults required as opposed to the subject centred approach that children were exposed to. Even though Knowles spearheaded a more holistic approach to learning for adults it was however still essentially based on cognitive or behavioural methodologies of increasing skills and knowledge sets (Burns, 1995). In recognising this gap in existing theories, this ethnographic study offers an alternative framework of learning that encompasses the holistic and intuitive nature of learning amongst Australian Witches.

In exploring the intuitive processes where Witches look within themselves for existing knowledge as they apprentice through Wicca within the situational learning milieu of their teaching coven, the study also examines the product of that learning. Rituals are the primary tool of Wicca and Witchcraft and the skill of ritual making enables a Witch to practically apply the underpinning beliefs of the religion. Ritual is thus the physical manifestation of the belief system of Wicca and successful ritual performance is the trademark of an effective, well trained Witch. In Western Australia, successful ritual making includes how Witches modify an imported religion and its ecologically inappropriate northern hemisphere rituals into an effective, locally sensitive, southern hemisphere faith system. Wicca is sensitive to, and indeed built upon, seasonal, climatic and ecological contexts and therefore Australian Witches cannot model, in totality, their own practices on those of Wicca's northern hemisphere originators because of the climatic differences. The southern hemisphere seasonal cycle is in opposition to that of the northern hemisphere and to compound matters, there are even

seasonal differences in different locations across the single state of Western Australia itself. In her seminal study of Australian Witchcraft, Hume points out that dependent on geographical location, there can in fact be between two and six seasons in the Australian climatic year thus, “The southern hemisphere truly presents a problem” (1997, p. 120). Witches are thus engaged in a complicated, multifaceted learning process that demands not just a holistic learning experience to gain basic skills but also an advanced program of learning to cope with the need for rituals that are localised, relevant and useful as the operational aspect of their religious practice.

In exploring this issue, the study highlights a limitation of the current anthropological theory of ritual which focuses heavily on the definition of ritual either in its processual capacity or alternatively explores its structure and elemental construction. The contemporary theoretical dialogue expands on the historical context and pioneering framework and most often describes ritual’s function as a stabiliser and influencer on social schema (Durkheim, 1976; Geertz, 1957; Rappaport, 1968) or discusses the symbolism, the language, the performance and the construction of ritual and thus its meaning to the social order in which it operates (Deflem, 1991; V. Turner, 1986; Van Gennep, 1960). Whilst this focus on ritual as process is appropriate and effective for the most part, my own research expands on those foundations by further exploring ritual as an end product, rather than observing it as a process through which social interaction and individual learning take place. It thus develops a greater appreciation of ritual as an outcome of a social group and as an example of the results produced by Witches as they learn. This research therefore expands on Geertz and Turner’s exploration of ritual as having multiple functions and offers an alternative, symbiotic and additional approach from which to view the concept of ritual as it explores the complexities of the Wiccan view of ritual purpose.

There are therefore two pivotal points of focus for this research, that of the intuitive, holistic process of learning undertaken by a group of Witches in Western Australia and an exploration of their ritual practice as a product of their social learning process. In researching these two facets of the local Wiccan community, I inevitably explore, dissect and discuss the strengths and inadequacies of contemporary theories of learning and the theoretical frameworks of ritual.

Contemporary Learning Theories Explored

As this research focuses primarily on Witches who learn in groups rather than solitaires who learn in isolation from one another, social or situational theory is one of the most appropriate frameworks in which to evaluate the learning journey undertaken by the Witches in this research. In particular the most relevant contemporary learning theories are Lave and Wenger's (1991) Communities of Practice (CoP) and the notion of habitus expanded on by Bourdieu (1977). CoPs are, Lave and Wenger argue, spontaneous modalities through which practice acts as the primary social function and precursor to learning. Learning is thus the by-product of practice and so the act of engaging with learning through practice is what drives the CoP forward and maintains its communal stability. People engage with CoPs voluntarily and use their cognitive and behavioural mechanisms to learn using the situational context of the CoP as their motivator. The social setting of learning that occurred for the Witches in my study supports Lave and Wenger's theories to a degree but also highlights areas of theoretical and practical omission that will be explored later in the findings.

In contrast to CoPs, Bourdieu argues that habitus is the existing internal schema an individual holds that will determine their connection with and therefore their ability to contribute to and learn from the social group (Bourdieu, 1977). Rather than the CoP acting as the driver of cognitive

and behavioural enhancement, it is instead the inherent worldview of the individual that determines the degree of learning that will take place.

Both these theories however present challenges in terms of understanding the micro process the Witches went through as they developed their skills. Whilst CoPs and habitus are valuable vehicles to understand the context of learning, they are theories in which individuals must still engage their own learning modalities to take advantage of the learning vehicle in which they find themselves. These micro modalities most commonly fall into two main areas of theory, those of behaviourism and cognition. Behaviourist learning principles draw on the notion that an individual's behaviour is a learned response to repeated stimuli (Hull, 1935; Skinner, 1953; M. Smith, 1999, Watson and Rayner, 1920) while cognition favours the modification of internal schematic constructs as the mechanism by which knowledge is increased (Bruner, 1960; Fetterman, 1998; Foley, 2000; Piaget, 1950). The theoretical concept of behavioural learning argues that an individual can be conditioned to change their behaviour by being repeatedly exposed to a negative or positive stimulus and being rewarded for performing the desired behaviour (Skinner, 1953). What this theory does not address is any modification that may occur in the individual's internal intellectual function or schema. By focusing only on action it denies the advancement of conscious mental change. Cognitive theories of learning address the other end of the continuum by ignoring physical action and instead concentrate on the relationship between learning and the functional capacity of the brain (Bruner, 1960). Both these polemic and opposing notions address ways in which humans can gain new skills and increase their knowledge but they fail to take into account any emotional impacts the learning may have and they do not consider the humanist, intuitive ability to source and use innate wisdom and insight that practiced individuals can develop (Rogers & Freiberg, 1993).

Whilst the Witches in this research did employ their cognitive and behavioural abilities, they also used innate intuition as a credible means of learning, a skill that is in fact honoured within the Wiccan community. Intuition, according to Klein (2003), is the result of extensive experience and learning. He suggests that as individuals develop vast and repeated experiences, the resultant construction of internal data systems enables them to tap into their system instantly for information. He further suggests that this ability to construct an internal data system and the ability to retrieve data from it without conscious effort or thought increases the more it is used.

This would suggest that individuals can retain immense tracts of knowledge even without being consciously aware of the sum and content of such knowledge. It would further suggest that through the use of effective triggers, individuals can access this information immediately and may come up with decisions and knowledge without having a supposedly rational or logical explanation for its source. In these circumstances people will often defend their choices by saying “I just know” without being able to explain why they “just know” or where that knowing originated from.. Betsch supports this view suggesting that intuition is the retrieval of data collected through experience which is then stored in the long term memory. The main point here is not that information is already stored internally but that a conscious awareness of its existent is minimal and thus individuals have no way of explaining how they “just know”. Although theorising on organisational rather than individual learning, Weick (as cited in Crossan, Lane & White, 1999, p. 525) reflected this concept of unconscious knowledge in his earlier working suggesting that intuition or “intuiting” is “ the *preconscious* recognition of the pattern and/or possibilities inherent in a personal stream of experience” (my italics). Using this type of construct,

individuals, even as part of an organisation, *know* without knowing they know.

Academic skills and the ability to articulate one's beliefs and practices are an important factor in the education of an emerging Witch but the ability to source and apply wisdom or "knowing" is a skill most revered by the Wiccan community. Current adult learning models explore the relationship between learning and knowledge but do not explore in any depth the validity of intuition as a credible means of increasing knowledge or "knowing". Instead they draw primarily on cognition and behaviourism as accepted learning mechanisms both for individuals and within social situations.

To further compound the omissions and contradictions with the current theoretical constructs, contemporary anthropological learning theories have in part been born from psychological and educational learning disciplines (Lave, 1982, Strauss, 1984) which themselves have focused heavily on the teaching and learning relationships between teachers and children. In exploring the theoretical discussion about the anthropology of learning, I am struck by the plethora of dialogue that focuses on the pedagogical learning process and learning within compulsory education (Bonini, 2006; Pelissier, 1991; Randall Koetting & Combs, 2005; Wolcott, 1982) at the expense of in depth discussion about adult learning. Whilst there is discussion on the manner in which adults learn, it often focuses on training rather than learning and this polemic discussion reinforces theory development from the viewpoint of the person delivering the learning topic rather than from the viewpoint of the learner who is undergoing a process to absorb and receive the expertise under offer. Whilst a pedagogical milieu is a valid and critical theoretical concept in the existing dialogue, it does not fully explain how the adults in this research learnt to be Witches. Pedagogical constructs employ

subject centred learning as the main methodology of learning rather than focusing on the actions of the learner as the central learning process. Adults employ more robust mechanisms to learn than children and they demand far more self responsibility in their learning journey. Thus we need to explore andragogical approaches that encompass and engage with the inherent tools that adults use in order to develop their knowledge and skill base and furthermore we need to dismiss learning theories that are in fact teaching theories centred on the teacher, not the learner.

Thus after more in-depth inspection, when applying contemporary theories of andragogy to the observed situational learning that was the focus of this research, there appears to be deficiencies in those theory sets that ignore intuition as a valid learning mechanism and that focus on the teacher rather than the learner. Using ethnography as the research methodology, this study therefore aimed to fill the gaps in contemporary theory and uncover the story behind how Witches, as informal collectives of people dedicated and impassioned by Witchcraft and Wicca, learnt how to *be* Witches. *How* did they learn their Craft and *what* did they learn? What multiple and simultaneous learning modalities do Witches need to employ to become successful Witches and what skill sets do they need to acquire in order to be ‘real’ Witches as defined by their own Wiccan community?

The data informed the generation of a new, more holistic theory of the mechanics of adult learning, particularly where that learning involved intuitive rather than cognitive or behavioural actions only. The ‘Whole Person’ approach I designed as a result of this research and which is introduced in this thesis, attempts to define and explain the holistic, broad but predictable pattern in which the participants learnt how to *be* Witches rather than *act like* Witches. This approach draws upon the fundamental essence of the cognitive, behavioural, humanist and situational learning

theories and adds an intuitive element to deliver a more holistic approach to the manner in which the adult Witches in this study learnt about Wicca and its place in their worldview.

The Anthropology of Ritual

The second branch of this research explored the product of the Witch's learning experiences, that of ritual. The current theoretical frameworks that underpin much of the discussion about the function, purpose and structure of ritual are drawn in significant part from the numerous works of Durkheim (1976) and V. Turner (1967). Together they have provided a degree of insight and description which has shaped the theoretical discourse for many years, primarily resulting in a duality of theory. On the one hand ritual theory focuses on the function and purpose of ritual and its contribution to the social group in which it is conducted (Durkheim, 1976; Geertz, 1957; Rappaport, 1968) whilst on the other hand it explores the elements that collectively produce and make up the performance that is ritual (Deflem, 1991; V. Turner, 1986; Van Gennep, 1960). Geertz described ritual as a mechanism that "reinforce(s) the traditional social ties between individuals" (1973, p. 142) but although he believed in principle in ritual as a service to the social order, he criticised Durkheim's idealist concepts of ritual as a social stabiliser suggesting that he focused predominantly on balanced societies and well integrated social groups and in so doing failed to consider those social orders that were dysfunctional or in disarray. This notion however of ritual as the functional glue that aids a social group in maintaining coherent, shared sets of social parameters is one that has had considerable input and discourse over the years. The data from this research confirms that ritual enacted within the Wiccan community does in fact engender enhanced social ties and goes a considerable way to identifying an individual as a valid member of that group and marking their station of authority within that community.

As well as ritual as a process, the other major theoretical concept discussed in this thesis considers the manner in which ritual is constructed and the elements that contribute to its overall architecture. Rappaport (1968) and Victor and Edith Turner (1974 and 1987 respectively) described in detail the symbols, language and performance that collectively sum up a ritual event. They explored both the meaning of the elements that make up a ritual as well as the impact of that meaning on the group to which it pertains. Like the discussions about ritual as a process, the data within this study confirms the suggestions and descriptors put forward by the aforementioned theorists and this will be explored within the body of this work.

However, while both approaches are important to our understanding of ritual and are examined as comparisons to my own observed data and experiences, their inclusion of ritual as a product of situational learning within a defined group is limited at best. My contention is that ritual is not only a processual function of group interaction but that it may also be the result, or one of the end products of that same relationship. In other words, while ritual is often the vehicle for learning, it is also the result of that same learning as well. This thesis will therefore expand on the notion of ritual as a means of better describing the meanings the Witches themselves applied to their ritual practice. They saw ritual not only as a means of cementing their ties with each other and of enhancing their relationship with the divine but also as a mark of success post the learning process.

Learning about Wiccan practice and thus engaging in successful ritual thereafter is the primary tool of Wiccan practice and it constitutes a major vehicle through which they identify as Witches. The value of effective ritual is all the more important given that Witches frequently have to modify commercially published ritual, largely because of the northern

versus southern hemisphere dilemma. Witches in Australasia often struggle with the problem of implanting a foreign religion into a local setting. Although several Witches argue that Wicca is the revival of an ancient, pre-Christian religion, most agree that modern practice was developed by Gerald Gardner in the late 1940s in England and as a nature religion it is based firmly in the seasonal aspects and ecological relationships of the northern hemisphere. Wiccan festivals celebrate seasonal milestones such as midsummer and midwinter, the equinoxes, sowing and harvest times and the beginning of the seasons. The southern hemisphere of course has its seasonal milestones at the opposite points in the calendar year and so celebrating traditional festivals at the wrong time of year poses fundamental problems for Witches everywhere in Australia. Most Australians already have an understanding of this dilemma when we purchase British produced Christmas cards and festive objects that depict freezing snow, Mistletoe, Holly and so on when in fact in Australia, we are sheltering from the fierce heat of our summer. Thus, transposing a foreign religion into a wildly different seasonal pattern and environment poses significant problems for the Wiccan community and the ritual-making that is the hallmark of Wiccan practice.

As a result, Witches have to negotiate their way through the maze of matching traditional festivals and rituals to an appropriate local season and as part of their learning apprenticeship, they are introduced to ways in which they can overcome this problem. My research explored how they used their holistic learning process to overcome the problems and design a localised faith system that matched their needs yet still remained true to the fundamental tenets of Wicca.

Whilst Australian Witches have had to modify northern rituals, there are some northern principles they have adopted and embraced rather than changed. The widespread language of Wicca appears to be universal the

world over and Australian Witches use much of the accepted terminology including 'magick' with a k and the term 'tradition' to denote a particular denomination or sect of Wicca. The added k in magick is seen as a deliberate measure to remove the practice from that of the magic performed by entertainers. Thus 'magick' identifies a ritual or practice that operates within a spiritual context rather than one simply for amusement. Likewise, Witches around the world prefer the term 'tradition' to 'denomination' as they believe it differentiates them from Christian paradigms and allows them to identify with what some believe is the resurgence of ancient spiritual practices that may once have been social traditions of ancient peoples. Several covens in Australia operate by using original European ritual practice or certainly as close as they can to these rites. However, the majority of groups veer towards a more localised Australian version of Wicca and this diversification of practice requires a more intense and alternate learning journey.

Just as re-engineering northern hemisphere doctrine and processes into rituals that meet southern needs is a product of the learning journey Witches undertake, so too are the advanced rituals and magick they develop. Witches learn basic rituals and magick during their apprenticeship but the development of more advanced rituals requires considerably more practice and experience as well as a far greater understanding of ritual theory, the stories of Wiccan deity and knowledge about underpinning Wiccan doctrine. Given that I argue that Witches learn in a holistic manner and rely heavily on intuitive practice to develop and increase their skill set, I was interested to examine how they design specific rituals and measure their resultant success. Rituals are Wicca and Witchcraft manifested and successful rites are the product of a successful learning process. Through observation and discussion I examined firstly how Witches design advanced rituals, what process they go through and what resources they use and compared that to the methodology they used

in learning basic Wiccan practice. However, the measure of any learning, regardless of the topic and modality, is in the success of the outputs so I was also interested in how Witches measure the success of their ritual work. Thus this study will explore and discuss the methodology and perceived success of individual rituals as articulated by the participants.

Gathering and Analysing the Evidence

Ethnographies are by their very nature qualitative exercises. That is, the ethnographer observes and/or participates in interrelationships within and between groups of particular peoples and produces an account that is both descriptive and analytical. This ethnographic research is no different, and indeed encompasses traditional ethnographic practices to deliver an outcome.

The evidence was collected through ethnographic observation of my own coven whose membership, like most covens, is dynamic but was essentially made up of eight Inner Court or long term, active, core members and a dynamic Outer Court of between four and six people. Inner Courters included six women and two men ranging in age from their early twenties through to their late fifties. All but one of the Outer Court members were female and they too ranged in age from their mid twenties through to their late fifties. Both Inner and Outer Courters each chose their own pseudonym and as a collective elected to use the name, 'The Grove' as the pseudonym for the coven. Coven members' chosen names were: Abigail, Diana, Lilly, Cath, Horatio, Sammy, Fred, Iona, Wally and Anna. Not all Outer Courters were included in the research specifically as several of them were only present at meetings once or twice before choosing to leave the group. Those who stayed with The Grove for only a short time are not individually named in this research but are referred to anonymously from time to time to illustrate certain points. As well as recording the gatherings of the coven, I also

interviewed four members of my coven including the High Priestess Sammy and the High Priest, Fred.

In addition to the evidence collected through this medium, I interviewed a further fourteen Perth based Wiccans who were either from other covens or practised in isolation. This was to ensure that I obtained a broader dataset and a more generalised viewpoint than that gained only from members of The Grove. As with my own coven members they each chose their own pseudonyms and these were: Jake, John, Rose, Alan, Mark, Margaret, Kathryn, Peter, Bob, Paul, Theresa, Winston, Helen and Narkia. Interviews over and above the ethnographical field notes were a vital element of the data collection process because of the ratification they provided to the evolving hypothesis and because of their ability to provide a wider representation of evidence. Angrosino (2004) notes that interviewees will often only deliver a measured amount of precise information to an interviewer in order to “create the desired impression” and thus I felt it important to have a data set comprising evidence from participants from my own coven as well as from a number of other covens and groups (p. 20). Armed with evidence from both my own coven in the form of interviews and ethnographic evidence as well interviews from other coven members and solitary practitioners, I was able to identify a broader set of themes and pursue their validity via a more generalised demographic.

To locate the interview participants who were not members of The Grove, I advertised using existing local Pagan internet bulletin boards, and this yielded five random participants to interview, three of whom were solitary practitioners while two were members of a local coven. The remaining nine participants were located using established Wiccan networks after initial introduction from The Grove High Priestess to other coven leaders. Wiccan political protocols expect that any introduction

and official communication between coven members must be conducted initially through the High Priestess of each coven. Thus my own High Priestess, Sammy introduced me to three further coven leaders specifically so that interview invitations could be offered and through those politically appropriate channels the interviews took place with members of those three covens.

This official and appropriate introduction further established my legitimacy with the other coven members and thus allowed me greater ability to generate enough interview opportunities. Any cold calling on High Priestesses or their coven members without this initial introduction would more than likely have been rebuffed because of mistrust. Like Fadzillah (2004) I realised that my participants, “were studying me as critically as I was studying them” (p. 39) and so trust and legitimacy were vitally important. Furthermore, as a practising Wiccan myself, it would have been extremely bad manners to approach any other coven without the consent and interaction of my own High Priestess.

To further compound the political issues surrounding cross-coven communication, coven members are bound by cultural and political prescription to ensure their coven’s ritual practices remain confidential. Foltz (2000) found similar issues of secrecy in her studies of Dianic Witchcraft and noted that at the commencement of her research the group she observed was, “unique, secretive and closed” “ (p. 410). Luhrmann (1989) noted that, “Witchcraft is a secretive otherworld” (p. 48) and suggested contentiously, that the use of Witchcraft tools and the nudity of some rituals were often what triggered this secrecy. In fact I found that the secrecy is more to do with maintaining the beauty of mystery and the protection of individual coven practices than to hide the use of non-existent dangerous tools and inappropriate activity. Each coven has its own set of ritual practices and although they may follow a similar pattern

to one another, they still encompass coven-specific practices known only to its membership. Thus without an official introduction from my own High Priestess to legitimise my approach, I would not have been able to glean information on ritual practice in any coven other than my own. By virtue of the official introduction I was thus able to gain more interview opportunities, gain the respect of coven members and develop enough trust to learn about what would normally be coven specific, secret ritual activities.

Of the fourteen interviews outside The Grove, exactly half were with male Wiccans and half were with women. Their ages ranged again from the early twenties through to the late fifties with the majority being in their thirties and forties.

All eighteen interviews were conducted during the ethnographic fieldwork and were semi structured around three main questions that included;

1. How did you become a Wiccan or Witch?
2. How did you and how do you continue to learn the practises, skills and arts of being a Wiccan or Witch?
3. How do you develop rituals and magick and how do you know if these activities have worked?

As a known Wiccan myself and having been ‘vouched for’ by my High Priestess, I was regarded as an insider and so establishing rapport was relatively easy with the interviewees. However I found, like Colic-Peisker (2004), that asking the interview participants to sign a consent form, “undermined my insider status” and made me appear to be more ‘official’. My research was approved by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee but a condition of that approval was the

requirement for all participants to sign a consent form. Thus, to counteract the perception of officialdom, I needed to ensure the interview continued in more of a relaxed discussion format than a structured question arrangement in order to encourage freedom of dialogue.

Once collected, the data was analysed using two simultaneous and complementary techniques, those of triangulation and searching for patterns (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). The ethnographic field notes were written during or shortly after each event and the interviews were recorded on audio tape and then transcribed post the interview. Emerging patterns were then noted and codified. As the interviews were conducted during the same time period that the ethnographical field notes were recorded, the interviews served as additional elements for the triangulation analysis.

Thus, as with most ethnographic studies, the hypothesis and findings evolved and were tested as a result of capturing recurring themes and then re-tested through continuing observations and ongoing interview opportunities.

Establishing my Position

At the outset it was important to explore and clarify the most appropriate ethnographical modality in terms of either engaging in distanced observation or participatory inclusion within the group under study. The Wiccan population in Perth, Western Australia is similar to other Wiccan communities around the world in that it is occasionally marginalised by the often incorrect perceptions and stereotypes of the broader community (Hume, 1995) whilst also deliberately maintaining its own marginality for the protection of its spiritual ‘mysteries’.

While the instances of harassment or vilification toward Wiccans and Witches across the globe are diminishing, there are still significant

pockets of negativity that force some Wiccans to hide their spiritual choices from their family, social and vocational peers. Cookson (1997) found that there still lingered the ill-informed opinion that Wiccans were followers of Satan and as such they were immoral members of undesirable cults. Such stereotypes mean that some Wiccans choose not to identify their spiritual alignment to others, even to family in several cases. Moreover, they are often reticent to discuss their spirituality with officialdom or outsiders more generally, (as I may have been perceived without the introduction from my own High Priestess) for fear of ridicule and reprisals. As John admitted to me during his interview, “I don’t introduce myself by saying, “Hi, I’m John and I’m a Witch”. That would probably be social suicide.” Thus studying Wicca requires some trust on their part in order to obtain valid data sets.

Anderson (2003) witnessed a similar degree of mistrust and apprehension in seeking participants for her research on the intimate and secret friendships that individual Catholic priests had. They were deeply concerned that in confiding their position to her, they may be risking not just their spiritual and religious reputation but also their jobs and livelihoods. In an eerie echo of John’s statement, one of Anderson’s participants noted, “To speak out would mean priestly suicide” (p. 30).

Branagan and Boughton (2003) also found parallels in terms of suspicion about academic field research in the social protest movement groups they studied. Activists within these groups campaigned through awareness campaigns and non violent civil disruption techniques to advance their cause for either peace or environmental protection and thus were often marginalised by the powers and governmental systems they were lobbying. In studying the manner in which individuals learnt the art of being an activist, the researchers noted, “there is often a great suspicion of universities, and an unwillingness among activists to subject

themselves to the kinds of rules and regulations that surround academic study of a field” (p. 358). It is not just the participants themselves who have reservations about ethnographic research. Shuttleworth (2004) noted that organisations and institutions designed to support disabled persons ensure that research is conducted under increasingly strict conditions, “with the purpose of protecting disabled people against possible exploitation by researchers” (p. 47).

Such resistance, primarily born from suspicion, reflects similar characteristics found by other researchers attempting to study marginalised groups. In her studies of Witches in New Zealand Rountree (2004) found similar issues and suggests, “I think a would-be interviewer who did not belong to the movement would have had a difficult time finding Witches willing to be interviewed” (p. 80). She further points out that, “Spectators are not admitted” (p. 80) and in keeping with her experiences and observations, I doubt that I too would have been admitted to rituals for field research had I not been a legitimate member of the Pagan community. Given this and the fact that the practical skills and in-depth knowledge of Wicca are only revealed through hands on training and apprenticeship to Inner Courters, the opportunity to gain first hand understanding of coven relationships could only be obtained through authentic membership. In addition, any closed ritual such as Full Moons, initiations or advanced Inner Court practices are disclosed only to initiated Wiccans and usually only to members of their own coven. As an initiated Wiccan myself, I was thus able to learn about rituals and magickal practises that would otherwise have remained most definitely off limits to a non practising Wiccan. Branagan and Boughton cite Kellehear’s description of ethnography undertaken as a full participant as coming from an “emic” perspective (Branagan and Boughton, 1993, p. 21). In this instance my own ethnographical stance is clearly that of an insider working from an emic viewpoint.

Wiersma (2000) identifies three types of researcher in ethnographic practice. They are either the active participant who in conducting the research takes on the role of a participant, the privileged observer who observes without participation in the phenomena being studied or the limited observer who because of research restraints can only use supplementary data and not direct observation to gather information. Given that I am an initiated Witch and recognised by the Wiccan community as such, I would fit Wiersma's description of an active participant rather than a privileged or limited observer.

Fetterman (1998) expands this view by identifying several additional and different types of ethnographers including academic ethnographers, administrative, action and advocate ethnographers. These streams of ethnography position the researcher politically, morally and ethically in relation to the topic, the research subjects and their situational and social contexts. For my own part I must admit to falling into the advocacy stream of ethnography and this bias must therefore be noted by the reader. Whilst it would have been impossible to gain valid and meaningful evidence without being an authentic member of a coven or Wiccan group because of the generalist Wiccan propensity to withhold information unless there is some trust, my allegiance was and continues to be first a Wiccan, second an ethnographer. Thus my research was a consequence of my coven membership and not the other way around.

This has implications for both the outcomes and the process of this ethnography. In his detailed essay on the then current state of affairs in anthropology Firth (1975) suggested that anthropologists have recognised that their own perceptions, position and interests will play a part in their recordings and thus these recordings will become, "a series of personal versions or refractions" (p. 10). He took this thought one step further by asking a philosophical question about the part that objective reality plays

in any ethnography. Because an ethnographer will view the process and outcome of their research through their own inherent position, does this nullify the absolute reality of their findings?

In this case, my own argument is that it may be difficult to fully understand the Wiccan social milieu from the research subject's viewpoint until, or unless, one is part of that milieu on equal terms. In other words, it may be easier to understand where research subjects walk and why if the researcher walks in the shoes of the people they observe. To try and make sense of the social interactions that occur within the Wiccan community without being an integrated member is to simply draw conclusions based on one's own viewpoint. Whilst this may become a diarised recording of events as observed, it may offer less than complete insight into the meanings of events for those involved. While always helpful, a distanced version of activities is much like a movie film where the director presents a view of the author's story. At worst the distanced process and outcome assumes the ethnographer has the authority and the right to interpret events. Such interpretations may not reflect the complete truth from the participants' points of view and may in fact be a distortion that corrupts the social meaning for that group completely. Developing an authentic descriptor of another culture or a practice alien to our own "may entail suspending our normal ways of perceiving in order to see what is literally in front of our faces" Wilson tells us (1994, p. 198). In her research on New Religious movements, Arweck "(2002) expands this viewpoint to suggest that not only should the observer suspend their normal ways of perceiving but that they must be,

willing to be exposed to other cultures and communities, listen to what their representatives have to say, refer their values and beliefs back to our own values and beliefs, and thus have our own culture scrutinized and questioned (p.118).

Eisenhart (2001) argues that participant observation, face to face interviews and reflective journaling are the mainstays of qualitative ethnographic work and that quality results, “depend fundamentally on first-hand, personal involvement in the lives of people who are being studied” (p. 18). Bowie (2003) suggests that distanced and dislocated ethnography denies the researcher the ability to, “communicate, or even appreciate, the flavour of a given religion and the inner experiences and motivations of its followers” (p. 50). In his study of Benedictine monks Angrosino (2004) came to the same realisation and noted that, “because the essence of membership in this community-of-vows was one I could not share, I could never be a true participant” (p. 29) and this of course served to distance him from his participants. In certain circumstances, this objectivity may well serve as an important filter to maintain credibility. Indeed all observers, regardless of their position contribute to academic research but like Bowie and Angrosino, I would suggest that privileged access and the ability to be party with, rather than party to, the group being observed provides for a more authentic representation of the community being described.

Therefore, to encourage honest viewpoints and to ensure contextualised relevancy remained paramount in telling the story of this coven and the interrelationships and meaning of coven membership, I chose to work from first-hand, personal involvement in the lives of these people. I chose to work from within rather than from without the group. Thus this research is unashamedly participant observation. Whilst I made every effort to reconstruct the events from an objective viewpoint to ensure neutrality, there will inevitably be subjective meanings overlaid on events, on discussions and ultimately on the outcomes of this research.

Wiccans are, generally speaking, a fairly well educated group of people (Adler 2006) who are well aware of the recent academic research that has

been conducted on Witchcraft, Wicca and Paganism. Allen (2001) notes that Pagans, “tend to be white, middle-class, highly educated and politically involved in liberal and environmental causes” (p. 18). As such they are familiar with the work of ethnographers such as Luhrmann (1989), Greenwood (2000), Berger (1999) and Rountree (2004) and view continuing ethnographic observation with some hesitancy. Many Wiccans I spoke to felt betrayed by Luhrmann’s doctoral thesis from the late eighties that focused on how Witches in London adapted their worldview to accommodate magickal practices. They felt that she had ‘sold them out’ by infiltrating various covens under what they perceived as being false pretences only to later ridicule their world view constructs. Harvey (2004) found similar misgivings about research conducted on Paganism and indeed noted not just misgiving and mistrust but outright, antipathy stating that Pagans felt that these researchers were often, “visitors who ask lots of questions, gain access to otherwise restricted ceremonies and private lives, and then leave to write the book that will establish a reputation and career” (p. 172).

Berger (1999) was a little more forthright and made her intentions clear right from the start. Whilst she studied Witches in Northern America, she made it clear that she was not a Witch herself but was instead a sociological researcher. Whilst this up front declaration removes any doubt as to her allegiance, her research findings were not viewed by a small number of participants in my research as sympathetic and one participant in particular argued that she felt “betrayed by academia”.

By contrast, in her ethnographical research of Witches in New Zealand Rountree (2004) made a point of reassuring both those she studied and the dissertation reader that her desire was to write from an objective viewpoint. She argued that in her view, “Witches’ beliefs are no more or less rational than those of any other religious belief system” (p. 29). Foltz

(2000) allowed herself to see her new Witchcraft experiences without pre-conceived prejudices. In discussing her relationship with the Witches in her study she states,

We came to realize that they were important co-collaborators in the research process, and the extent of their collaboration depended on our willingness to view their beliefs and practices with open minds (p. 411).

Whilst Greenwood, Rountree and Foltz receive a warmer reception for their more sympathetic approach to Wicca, there is still a lingering mistrust of academia. Thus it was important to reinforce with my own coven that my research came not from a sceptical point of view but from one of empathic partnership. I wanted to tell their story and not a story veiled by my own agenda. Having said that, whilst my perspective was one of empathy with Witchcraft practices and beliefs, my viewpoint is simultaneously situated within, and therefore influenced by, the analytical distance of my vocational and academic discipline; that of the theory and practical application of adult education in the workplace. Thus I was able to comfortably live and research within the demographic boundaries of the Wiccan community while also affording myself a level of objective distance when viewing the relationships and experiences through the lens of my vocational expertise.

The Changing Discipline of Ethnography

In reviewing the research conducted on Witchcraft over the last thirty years I found a curious dichotomy. Where ethnographers researched the traditional Witchcraft of ethnic communities such as Africa and South America, their work was often seen as more legitimate than those ethnographers who studied westernised Witchcraft in white, middle class America, Europe or Australasia. Locke (1995) found the same thing with the related topic of Shamanism and located an, “avalanche of folk and

scientific interest” but very little anthropological study (p. 30). Hume (2000) notes that researchers themselves may in fact be biased toward or against certain religions and that this bias is at both an individual and often at a departmental level. Foltz (2000) too experienced similar questionable approaches to her work and felt she was stigmatised for her subject matter and branded as “guilty by association” (p. 413). Because she was studying Witches, apparently she must automatically be one. Would the same accusatory approach be made if a researcher was studying Catholicism, childhood abuse, criminality or the practice of African voodoo specialists? One wonders if this disparity is based on religious bias against Paganism born from inappropriate historical propaganda or hesitancy about location and demographics. Other ethnographers who have gone ‘native’ with marginalised or small groups do not appear to have faced a similar degree of ridicule or questioning. Quite the reverse in fact. Their research findings are often eagerly awaited by academia as further contribution to the developing understanding of communities about which we still have limited information.

Berger (1999) and Luhrmann (1989) both found it necessary to clearly position themselves as researchers rather than as Witches and in fact they made it very clear that they were not aligned to the beliefs of those they studied. In her discussion about the apparent need to clearly position oneself Rountree (2004) suggests that,

Had Berger or Luhrmann been studying witchcraft in an exotic context rather than in their own societies, the kind of context in which academic studies of witchcraft were traditionally conducted, I doubt that either would have felt the same necessity to explicitly distance herself personally from the magic and witchcraft by such statements (p. 74).

Schechner (1982) described ethnographers as researchers who could transcend different cultures, engage with different peoples easily but who were never really at home in any alien culture. In other words they had the ability to move between cultures like chameleons whilst never being fully engaged in any one society. Rountree (2004) sympathised with this viewpoint when conducting her research. When asked if she was a Witch or social scientist, she felt unable to decide which side of the fence to sit on because to do so would mean dislocation from the other. Thus she decided to sit on the fence in the space between both worlds whilst, at the same time, she chose to, “inhabit and participate in both worlds” (p. 72). She did however expand on this notion and suggested that rather than being forced to live in one worldview or the other, she felt as though she was expanding on the ways she already viewed the world. In other words her existing viewpoints were sympathetic with those of the people she was studying as well as those of academia.

In considering this question of which camp one should align to, given I had clearly labelled myself a Witch, I began asking the same question of my coven colleagues. Each of them have jobs, families, lives and social interactions outside the coven so they too have lives and roles to play that exist outside the coven paradigms. One coven member is employed in an independent high school, another manages a large department in a retail outlet and another is a librarian. Each of these people have to manage their duality of life as both a coven member and a citizen of the wider world. If I was struggling with this multiplicity of roles, how were they coping? The answers were enlightening. While all coven members declared dedication to the coven, they each had ways of coping with their other roles ‘on the outside’. Anna had chosen to label the coven as a meditation group when discussing her evening visits to The Grove with her mother. This effectively meant that she could be free to live her life with religious meaning whilst with her coven sisters and still live in the

role she occupied with her family. Iona works in the conservative environment of an independent high school that teaches from an underpinning Christian philosophy and she manages her dual roles in a similar fashion to Anna. Diana by contrast had a variety of roles across her life including part time nursing at an aged care facility as well as studying toward her naturopathy diploma. She described how she was unable to discuss her spirituality in her working environment because of tacit disapproval but with her fellow naturopathy students she could discuss her beliefs fairly openly. What emerged was that I was not the only one who occasionally struggled with role identity. We all had learnt to position ourselves relative to the environment in which we found ourselves at the time. For me, I could share my philosophy on my religious convictions in my vocational career as a training coordinator, in the academic sector of my life and in the spiritual environment of the Wiccan community because I had comfortably and conveniently tied them together by researching how Witches learn. Others had learnt that one can live two or more lives, perhaps not always seamlessly but certainly role multiplicity was not an isolated phenomenon.

This notion of multiple roles begs the question of paradigm alignment and true understanding of the subject group. If one has multiple roles, can one understand them all completely? Can one conduct effective participant observation without at least having a degree of empathy with the group under study? Is an ethnographer truly able to understand as an insider when they do not have an alignment with the thought paradigms of their subjects? Rountree (2004) clearly did have similar ways of viewing the world and this allowed her to understand the interrelations of her study group whilst still remaining within her own discrete identity and role. If this is so, then how can researchers who absolutely define themselves as not being aligned with the community they are observing ever gain a true understanding of the meanings for those people? Both

Berger (1999) and Luhmann (1989) made it clear to their readers that they were not Witches and that they did not at any time believe in the practices, rituals and thought paradigms of their subjects. For my own part I claim to be an 'in-between' rather like Rountree (2004) and my roles and identity are truly multiple. However, I reinforce, as detailed earlier, that I am first a Witch and second, a researcher.

Perhaps my own ease of fit within both worlds is born from the fact that whilst conducting this research I was not employed as an academic. I was, and continue to be, professionally engaged full time in the strategic and operational development of vocational education. As such my vocational interest and expertise falls heavily into the development of effective learning processes for members of the resource sector workforce and not in the development and delivery of teaching materials for the tertiary sector. My anthropological research was conducted as a means of further developing my understanding of the learning processes within informal groups under liberal conditions but also enabled me to foster a deeper connection with my chosen lifestyle and spiritual path. For me there was no competition between the two realms of researcher and participant. I did not feel any pressure to conform to any academic establishment or to exhibit the characteristics of an academic role model to tertiary students. There was no need to conform to the institutional dogma of fieldwork behaviour simply because I was not exposed to that as an institutional, tertiary employee. That is not to say however that I was not acutely aware of my responsibilities as a researcher. In reading previous dissertation works and in my continued review of ethnographical epistemology, I was reminded constantly of the need to ensure that whilst I could claim to be an 'insider' in relation to the people I was studying, I still had a responsibility to report my findings back in a manner and from a viewpoint that translated meaning in an appropriate fashion.

Reading reviews however about the dilemmas other researchers had confronted whilst they conducted research on westernised Witchcraft left me hesitant about revealing my topic when in the company of other researchers. For the first year of my research I felt like an apprentice researcher and my perceptions of the topics of other researchers was that their subject matter was much more meaningful, important and of value than mine was. It was not until my second conference presentation that I began to realise that there was a definite level of interest in my work. Whilst some of the interest was from curious onlookers, titillated by what they perceived as a spooky or odd topic, by far the greatest majority of interest was genuine and came in the form of robust discussion and dialogue. These discussions came from both academics and postgraduate researchers alike and also served to introduce me to a wide range of research being undertaken on subjects related to my own. Such interest and eagerness to read my findings increased my self confidence that in fact my research was legitimate, authentic and as valuable as any traditional and more widely accepted subject matter. Perhaps this interest reflects the diminishing suspicion and indeed the growing tide of acceptance for Paganism from mainstream Australian society.

Much has been discussed and written about the misguided perceptions that society has held about contemporary Witchcraft and Witches, and in particular about the hesitancy of conservative academia to adopt and accept research in that area. However, with only two exceptions I have never yet met anyone who was negative about my research topic or my personal choice of spiritual path. In all but two cases the responses to dialogue about my religious views and research program have been extremely positive and refreshingly encouraging. In one of the instances of disapproval, the person was a fundamentalist Christian and deeply opposed to Witchcraft arguing that I must be practising devil worship without even being aware of what I was doing. He and I continued to

have respect for one another's viewpoints but did not form a strong friendship bond with each other! The other person, a working colleague whom I had known for several months was surprised when I told her about my religious convictions. Her response was one of instant withdrawal signalled by her sitting further back from me. Silent for a few moments, she then quietly said, "I've always been taught to fear Witches. You're all supposed to put hexes on people you don't like and do evil things". Needless to say I offered her some sources of accurate information about modern Witchcraft and then allowed her to make up her own mind based on more appropriate information. She and I remained firm friends thereafter.

I wonder if the positive responses I have experienced when discussing my research and religious viewpoint is a result of my professionalism when discussing the topic or whether it is a reflection of society's growing willingness to accept what was once taboo. In all fairness I have no doubt that other researchers were equally professional in discussing their work and that in fact society is now more willing to accept a number of previously taboo topics such as homosexuality, sexual activities previously considered private discussion and even homelessness and incest. These topics were until the last two decades areas of discussion not readily accepted or embraced by the broader community.

I am heartened however by the recent increase and interest in groups who engage in Pagan pastimes. In Australia, as in the rest of the world, there has been a steady rise in the number of research activities looking at Wiccans, Witches, Druids and the broader group of Pagans and these studies appear to be more balanced in their viewpoint and reporting. Indeed it appears there is a generalised and growing interest from both academia and from the wider community in spirituality per se that is more robust and balanced than has historically been the case. Whilst this

is of course manifest of the current contemporary view of objective participant observation, it may also be the result of increased acceptance of practices once thought 'spooky' and inappropriate for academic scrutiny. Taylor (2003) found the same to be true in Vietnam where academia is showing significant interest in subject matter previously stigmatised and in fact such "superstitious material until recently was banned by the state" (p. 384). Locke (1995) has also noted a significant rise in academic interest in all things esoteric and Hume (2000) suggests that new religious movements are now more widely accepted and, "are incorporated into the comparative study of religion in most Departments of Religion at university level" (p. 27). This of course may be admirable but before we all congratulate ourselves on our enlightened viewpoints and our ability to encompass and embrace all things once seen as forbidden ground, it may be wise to consider 'fashion' in anthropology.

In using the term 'fashion' I am of course not referring to the clothing or accessories we adopt as researchers in the field. I am referring to two fundamental elements of anthropological practice that form the framing skeleton of our work and the meat on those bones. They are first the research methodology and second our subject matter. This shift in favoured practice for these two dimensions was being discussed thirty years ago and the discourse still continues. In his discussion in the mid seventies on the dynamics of the anthropological discipline Firth pointed out,

... it seems that nowadays there is not merely a different idiom in vogue in social anthropology; there are also different ways of looking at problems and different questions being asked of material from what was customary, say, even 20 years ago (Firth, 1975, p. 1).

Geertz (2002) has, in an autobiographical essay, discussed at some length, his thoughts on the changing patterns, the continued debate and what he considered as the, “trumped up ‘wars’ between imaginary combatants over artificial issues” (p. 10). Thus these shifts in accepted norms of methodological practice, subject matter and the way in which we examine the resultant material have long been a point of professional dialogue. Eliade (1976) rightly pointed out that anthropologists have a responsibility to consider the work they produce in the light of the epistemology they choose to use.

Anthropology is a grand old master of sociological research and has a history rich in breadth of material and in breaking new ground in evidence gathering modality. In terms of research methodology, ethnographical research has been the mainstay of understanding communities and societies in faraway lands who engage in practices and relationships, rituals and lifestyles not normally open to the ordinary person on the street. Anthropologists have, at times, been the story tellers who bring us riveting tales of life in distant and exotic places that enable us to grasp a level of understanding about a vast array of human conditions we will probably never see for ourselves. But these stories, these collections of information, have followed patterns in both their content and the manner in which they are reported. There have been ‘fashionable’ stories to tell and ‘fashionable’ ways in which to gather those stories.

A century ago it was of course fashionable to observe the ‘natives’ in their home state and to write about their lives, their family relationships, their ritualistic practices and their day to day activities and make judgements about the meaning and significance of those actions. All this was conducted from the safe distance of civilised practice and thus without an ‘insider’s’ ability to understand the true meaning of such

activities. Ethnographers naively recorded their subjects' lives from the safe haven of their own world view and this was considered admirable and academically authentic. This methodology was rendered 'old fashioned' when ethnographers decided that such a viewpoint was no longer legitimate in trying to gauge a true and accurate description of the interactions of foreign peoples. Malinowski (1922) was the first to coin the term 'participant observation' and indeed demanded that ethnographers fully immerse themselves in the language and day to day practices of the social group they were observing.

Ethnographers moved then into the fashion of 'going native'. The pendulum swung from distant reporting to 'becoming one of them'. Being on an equal footing with the research participants supposedly offered the reader a more accurate view of the society in question. Whilst for the ethnographer it meant immersing themselves totally in their new life, it also apparently resulted in more meaningful data. The question is, to whom was it meaningful? Assuming ethnographers could immerse themselves so absolutely that they engaged in the most complete and holistic experience possible with their participants, how distant then does the recording and resultant evidence become from those who would read the material? The interpretation of the experience is then made by the reader rather than the ethnographer and as the reader has presumably had no first hand encounter of the field experience, they have little or no ability to filter the material before them and make it meaningful for themselves. Ethnographers have a responsibility to not only obtain appropriate material but to deliver it in a fashion that makes sense of their experience whilst also making sense to the readership. Eisenhart (2001) points out that there is still considerable concern from the anthropological profession that ethnography is not taken seriously by faculty administration because, "their methodology is not seen as valuable or 'scientific'" (p. 19). Weiner (2002) agrees arguing that anthropological

investigation and its methodology are crucial to delivering academically robust outcomes while Ezzy (2001) supports this notion but suggests that it is the pressure from, “the purely scientific disciplines that appear not to appreciate and understand the fundamental nature and process of qualitative research” (p. 294).

The current fashion is somewhere in between and probably based on a more common sense, practical and down to earth view of the world. The anthropological community now recognises that whilst the ethnographer may ‘go native’, they will always be influenced by and reflect the world they are visiting through the lens of their own native environment. Fetterman (1998) suggests that, “The ethnographer’s task is not only to collect information from the emic or insider’s perspective but also to make sense of all the data from the etic or external social scientific perspective” (p. 11). Bowie (2003) described this as, “inductive rather than deductive” anthropology (p. 49). It is naïve to consider that the two ends of the spectrum, going native and the conceit of distanced observation, will ever provide us with accurate descriptions of societies and communities foreign to us. We can only ever report on what we see and experience through our own prevailing paradigms and world views. Thus the current fashion is to be a participant observer, actively involved in the community under study whilst still recognising our unique and discrete appreciation of that community.

In terms of my own research I fully appreciate and bring to the reader’s attention that whilst I did ‘go native’, I am in fact already ‘native’. I did not choose to become a Witch in order to gather information. I was already one and I continue to be a Witch. Harrington argues that perhaps more ethnographical studies should be conducted by researchers who have substantial experience in their chosen Pagan path so that they can “bring to their work the depth that a theologian or priest might bring to a

Ph.D. on Christianity, as opposed to a recent convert conducting the same study” (2004, p. 79). She had many years experience as a Wiccan prior to conducting her own research in that field and she suggests that whilst this enabled her to have easier access to the subjects, it also provided for more empathic outcomes. Harrington goes on to defend the balance she maintained between the requirements of academia and the spiritual expectations of her Wiccan and Witchcraft path. Pearson also discusses this same dilemma in her research. She was an initiated Wiccan before she commenced her research and struggled with the necessary balance between being an insider with all the biases that this may have with the requirement to produce authentic and valid outcomes. She argues that it is thus “necessary to apply a rigorous self-reflexivity in order to bracket off personal beliefs and values, *whether one is an ‘insider’ or an ‘outsider’* to the community one is researching”(2002, p. 106, existing italics).

Like Harrington and Pearson, my research findings will reflect the worldview I hold, that of an ‘insider’, a Witch but that also like Harrington and Pearson, I was always aware of my research role and responsibilities in terms of the ethical and reporting requirements. Using Rountree’s (2004) analogy of fence sitting, where she suggests she sits not just in the middle but also on each side, I too sit firmly and proudly in both camps. My research findings are influenced not just by my spiritual path within Witchcraft but also by my professional life in the world of adult education. I am seated comfortably in the middle of the spectrum, as well as in both camps, looking at my research participants, acting with my research participants and writing about my experiences through the lens of my own conditioning.

It is worth noting at this point that in coming to terms with the notion of where I placed myself in relation to my participants and my responsibility to report my findings appropriately, I also considered how I should

address the research I had undertaken. What was my relationship to that research once completed and how should I label it? Was it ‘my’ research or was it ‘the’ research? I was unsure whether to distance myself from the research and resultant findings during the presentation of this thesis or whether to claim full ownership throughout the text. Anthropological professionals continue to debate this issue as I have done here with seemingly no decisive and accepted outcome. On reflection I chose to refer to the research throughout this thesis as being ‘mine’ rather than ‘the’ for three reasons.

Firstly, given that I felt strongly that this research needed to be done from a participant rather than a distanced observer’s viewpoint, how then could I legitimately change tack by distancing myself once the research phase had concluded? It seems ineffectual and hypocritical to consider oneself an insider for the purpose of obtaining valid research evidence only then to detach oneself from the end result and address it as ‘the’ research, rather than ‘my’ research.

Secondly, given academia’s reluctance in the past and current hesitance, albeit diminishing, to engage in and encourage any kind of research around ‘fringe’ topics, those of us actively immersed in the spearhead of change in terms of subject matter need to be proud of our work and take ownership of it. In doing research that pushes the edge of traditionalism we have a responsibility to ensure we are heard, to ensure our work is recognised as having equal value to that already embraced and accepted and to passively lobby the tertiary sector to accept all manner of work and not just the ‘safe’ subject matter. To instead offer work from the safety of disconnected distance by referring to it as ‘the’ research rather than ‘my’ research is simply disrespectful to the topic at hand. As Boyer (2001) pointed out, “Serious scholars often ignore nonserious stuff and they are wrong to do so” (p. 89). I, like my research colleagues and supervisory

team, am a serious scholar and my subject matter has serious significance, worthy of merit by the academic community.

Finally and most importantly, there is the issue of respect for the participants of the research. As a participant myself and having immersed myself within the Wiccan community, I am in effect writing about my friends, my teachers, my spiritual family. The participants graciously gave me their time, their wisdom and their love and to dislocate myself from my research would in fact translate to dislocating myself from them. Such an action is disrespectful and ill mannered. Thus I choose throughout this work to proudly refer to it as 'my' research, 'my' findings and 'my' work. It is not 'the' research and in fact should be regarded as 'our' research given the input and effort provided by all the participants.

My ability to connect completely with my research whilst maintaining a professional, anthropological approach to my reporting may be due not just to my academic training but also to my professional activity in the workplace. In my professional role as an adult educator and training manager within the resource sector, I have been educated and trained to design, deliver and audit a learning set that meets the needs of operational staff. This sets me apart from my academic counterparts whose professional responsibilities are more inclined toward the delivery of theoretical notions to tertiary students and the design and execution of research in related practice and theory. Thus my professional conditioning has forced me to develop a schema of learning that is firmly embedded in the practicalities of learning and teaching. In terms of the research methodology and analysis, my approach was firmly embedded in the practical rather than the theoretical and while this study presents an alternative theory to those existing in contemporary adult learning, it remains more as an illustration of what was actually observed rather than a hypothetical quest that was then tested.

But let us return to anthropological fashion. The second fashion fad in anthropology is that of subject matter. Like any discipline, “there are popular themes that interest a number of people at the expense of less exciting topics” (Colson, 1985; Eliade, 1976, p. 5). Exploring meanings in native interactions has always been an understandable quest. The human condition is one of constant search for meaning and finding new schemata and concepts in different and untested contexts can add greater dimensions to the predictability of our own lives.

However, there have always been subjects that are taboo and out of bounds for serious researchers. Many of those topic areas are now opening up as academia and society as a whole become more amenable to exploring what was once considered frightening, embarrassing, threatening or simply a waste of time. Such topics as sex, particularly same sex relationship issues, underarm body hair, malicious parenting and other equally disturbing subjects are not often the ones we choose to explore through research. Not legitimate academic research anyway! Frightening ‘cult’ religions such as western Witchcraft of course also fall into this category and as such have been neglected by serious researchers and academic institutions until recently. What commercial value is there in studying outlandish topics such as the habits of white, middle class Witches or indeed in trying to understand our socially conditioned view of armpit hair?

However, fashions do change. Indeed that is the nature of fashion. Its very transience is what makes something fashionable. Our academic interests have broadened and as a society we are more willing to explore, albeit tentatively, those topics once considered less than acceptable. Shave’s (2004) interesting and thought provoking, feminist doctoral study on the social perceptions of armpit hair for example is an example of the liberalisation of subject matter. That she was able to pursue such

strikingly unusual subject matter is testament to academia's burgeoning love affair with the unusual. Not surprisingly enough there was considerable interest from scholars and the research community when she delivered a paper at a graduate research conference. This interest in her topic reflected the interest I noted when I also delivered conference papers and clearly indicates increasing academic encouragement and acceptance of topics once considered out of bounds.

This welcoming of an ever increasing range of subject matter such as armpit hair and contemporary Witchcraft in our own back yard is symptomatic of the increasing number of post graduate theses and ongoing institutional research being conducted. Whilst it is refreshing and uplifting to see some relaxation of subject matter, in particular that of Pagan practices, I cannot but be left with the nagging suspicion that this fashion for pursuing the unusual may do more damage than good.

Pagan practices and Wiccan rituals in particular generally follow the principle of most mystery religions. That is that the fundamental rituals of basic practice, particularly those around initiation should be made available only to those who have been initiated into the faith system. Wiccan custom expects that initiates are not to openly advertise rituals or to actively encourage and draw new entrants into the faith. Wiccans hold firm to the belief that each person has the right to choose their own spiritual path and that no one has the right to force their opinions on others and as such Wiccans do not proselytise. Thus, many Wiccan practices remain secret unless a person exhibits genuine curiosity and interest in following the Wiccan path. Apart from the fact that most Wiccans see that forcing their opinions on others is simply bad manners, there has also been the need to withhold their own spiritual opinions from others in case of recriminations or harassment. To further strengthen the value of keeping ritual content within closed circles, there is also the

belief that many rituals, again particularly initiation rituals, are far more powerful when the initiate themselves is not aware of what will occur. To experience something without rehearsal or without preconceived ideas enables the ritual makers and participants to engage with an experience utterly new and probably more meaningful. One's senses are heightened when one is entering into an experience where the content and outcome are a mystery rather than a rehearsed event. With the increasing number of researchers studying Wiccan practice, there is the risk that the beauty and mystery of these hidden rituals may be revealed in too much detail and thus lose their impact when conducted with new people who, having read the academic findings, may already know the rituals inside out.

There is a balancing act to undergo therefore in revealing information about practices, communities and societies that were once mysterious or even feared. The more that is known about a community, the less likelihood there is of recriminations, discrimination and harassment. Wiccans have had to face their fair share of retribution for following their faith. The incidents of harassment are diminishing significantly as more and more people begin to realise that Witches are not the fearsome creatures they imagined them to be complete with pointy black hats, warts and bad tempered feline companions; neither do they sacrifice babies, cast hexes on unsuspecting victims or have wild sex orgies in isolated pockets of forest. More appropriate and enlightened exposure has enabled Wiccans to lead a more peaceful life and not be so afraid to reveal their spiritual allegiance.

However, there is also another element to consider when revealing information about an otherwise private group of people such as Wiccans. Witchcraft itself has become a fashionable commodity during the last five years and there are increasing numbers of Wiccan followers (Allen, 2001; Badie, 2003; Bevilacqua, 2003; Marty, 1999; Stream, 1999; Warwick,

1995). Many of these followers are teenagers who have a romantic notion of magick and spell casting that does not in fact reflect the true practices of 'real' or serious Wiccans. Many Wiccans I interviewed have lost patience with the endless stream of "teeny bopper bunny huggers" as Sammy labelled them and whom they consider to be naïve. Serious Wiccans despaired of the misguided teenagers who often approached them to learn ways to magically change their hair colour or snare the next boyfriend with a love spell. Television programs such as "Charmed" and "Sabrina the Teenage Witch" have provided a fairy tale version of the life of a Witch where magic is seen as the remedy for all ills. In her discussion on the teenage love affair with Witchcraft, L. Bell (2000) suggested that, "Witchcraft is not just something to dabble in or a cool affectation but a lifestyle choice" (p. 2).

It seems the balancing act between revealing all and maintaining some mystery for serious followers is one where academic research can play a responsible part. Research into sensitive and extremely personal spiritual interactions for Wiccans must be tempered with respect for the value of secret rituals whilst also ensuring that sensationalism does not play a part in publicised reports. For the most part academia takes its ethnographic role very seriously and of course all research conducted on humans must undergo strict and robust ethical examination and approval. However, anthropological research must also reflect on its own epistemology to ensure it is not following the latest fashion and disregarding the true value of academic reporting in observing societies. To be a dedicated follower of fashion does not do justice to the historical legacy bequeathed to us by past ethnographers.

In manifesting this ethical approach to reporting my findings I have also chosen to write selectively about what occurred, what I observed and the experiences I had. This is not to maintain any position of power through

the use or misuse of information but rather to maintain a sense of dignity, respect and trust for my coven colleagues and interviewees. During my research and the years I have spent with Wiccans and Pagans I was a witness of, and a contributor to, several rituals, conversations and actions that were personal, private and sensitive. When living within and researching a subject area as deeply personal as religion is to most people, there are inevitably occasions where people reveal parts of themselves not normally revealed in the public arena. Full Moon circles for instance are regarded as safe spaces as Osgood (1995) also noted, where coven members can be true to their own feelings and thoughts and where much is discussed that is deeply personal. There were often times when we cried, when we laughed, when we explored the deeper meaning of some event or vision and we did so knowing that we could trust one another in that sacred space. Part of the commitment to a coven is the understanding and covert promise to always protect one another's trust both in ritual practice and in the broader community. Whilst this is said to come from the need to protect each other from community harassment, its true value comes from being able to fully trust each other when emotions run high under ritual conditions. That trust extends to the world beyond the coven and to reveal these interactions would be disrespectful and unethical.

Ritual practice is by its very nature an emotive arena for connecting with one's inner self. Meditation and vision work involve deliberately trying to grow as a person, as a parent, partner, worker or whatever role is valued by the individual at that time. Rituals are often rites of passage from one life condition to another and can be extremely powerful vehicles for connecting with perceived deity and the impact of buried emotions. The initiation rite is an example of where ritual practitioners can feel elated, fearful, excited, apprehensive, emotionally drained yet passionately connected to a higher being and purpose often all within the

space of a few minutes. Other rites of passage such as a ceremony to say farewell to a coven member who has left the group or died, a meditation that enables someone to come to grips with their failed marriage or the celebration of a new baby all evoke powerful emotions that can be freely displayed and discussed within the safety of the ritual circle. I have neither the authority under Wiccan protocol nor the academic ethical right to openly discuss these events. To do so would deny my interviewees and coven colleagues their own right to sanctuary within the sacred space of the circle and the safety of the Wiccan community.

With this in mind, and prior to the commencement of the study, the coven members and I explored what could be revealed and what they believed to be sacrosanct. In fact these discussions continued both formally and informally over several months as we mutually explored what was appropriate to report on and what should remain “behind closed doors” as Sammy labelled it. The details of initiation rituals and the vows taken were agreed as being sacred and secret, as were any magickal processes, their reasons for being conducted or outcomes undertaken as a group. It was further agreed that whilst we could all take photos of rituals and each other for our personal use, these were not to be used for external publication. The parameters for what could be revealed were broad however and reflected the openness and the willingness to participate in the research that permeated throughout the group. I was allowed to reveal the teaching strategy and practices of the group, the theological principles that underpinned this teaching and the resultant rituals, the relationships between members and their various Wiccan related interactions with the core membership and the general day to day practices, discussions and rituals that reflected who the group and individuals were and what they believed in. We further collectively agreed that where an occasion warranted secrecy or non disclosure, I would honour the commitment for that event or activity to remain unpublished.

These discussions occurred both informally before, and as the occasion demanded it after, the application for ethics approval for this research project was submitted and approved. Understanding the need for prudence in terms of personal and sacred non disclosure, I specifically informed the ethics committee that some discussion on the degree of disclosure had already taken place and that whilst the members of the group were fully supportive of the study and that the majority of their ritual activity would be published, there would be ongoing discussion as and when it were required to determine if a particular event, activity or situation would be included in the study or not.

Another dimension of responsibility for the 'insider' researcher in terms of trust and respect for participants is that of their possible impact on the group they are studying. For the reasons detailed earlier, it became apparent that meaningful evidence could only be achieved through full and dedicated membership to a practicing coven but such membership also meant that I was party to and in some cases the instrument of change within the group.

I was already a member of the coven prior to engaging in this research and the actions of seeking permission from the group to conduct research and then deliberately recording events occasionally manipulated the resultant rituals and discussions. Coven members humorously suggested that I write down certain events and they individually and collectively engaged in ways to introduce supporting information where they deemed it appropriate to my research. These searches for additional information and background history led to the group opening up invitations to other covens and developing stronger learning relationships with likeminded covens and solitary practitioners. Such invitations and introductions may not have occurred had I not been researching using my own coven as a vehicle. Thus my part as participant observer redefined relationships for

the coven with its sister and likeminded covens. Whilst I had some misgivings about my role in the coven and the changes that my research introduced, I also learnt to understand that all covens change with time. My own coven, The Grove, is no different and there will always be different influences that generate relational dynamics, that close covens down, that shift membership and that create new covens. The Grove is a fairly stable coven with several years' history behind it so it works from a platform of predictable reliability. This longevity, based largely in the continued dedication of its High Priestess and High Priest goes some way to stabilising it and protects it from the politics and wider community assaults. However, it was obvious that my research and the discussions it evoked did introduce a different element that impacted on the workings of the group.

I struggled with my role in this dynamic, concerned as always that my role as researcher must not also fabricate and manipulate the very environment in which I was participating. I had of course asked the group if I might do an ethnography that explored and detailed the interrelations of the group and of the wider Wiccan community. They were happy to accommodate my wishes and indeed welcomed the opportunity to review their own dynamics and paradigms through the vehicle of my research. For the first year of my research I deliberately held back from designing any rituals or from taking a lead role in the group. This was partly because my standing with the group did not allow it (I had only been a member of this group for a year before my research began) and Wiccan protocol demanded that while I might contribute, I was not expected to lead at that time. In addition I deliberately chose not to contribute too deeply to group practise for fear that my involvement might be regarded as manipulative. Such excessive participation would of course have rendered my research ludicrous having then constructed the community I was supposedly observing.

However, a year into my research and thus two years into my membership of the group, my role naturally developed into a more central placement. Having been initiated I was expected to then contribute equally to the development of rituals and to the design of our celebratory year. Each Inner Court member was expected to design their own Full Moon ritual at least once during 2005 and then as I began to move toward training for a higher grade membership, my contribution to the group grew in both importance and quantity. All this time however, I took great pains to work reflectively to ensure that I had not inflicted undue influence or excessive change that might detrimentally affect the group.

After much internal dialogue and external discourse with fellow researchers about the level and balance of contribution we make to the groups we study I began to realise that I alone was not responsible for the dynamics of the community. I began to understand that whilst I have a contribution to make, all community members have equal right to contribution. Our High Priestess is a particularly strong woman with defined views about how a coven should be run and clearly articulated viewpoints about the ethics and morals that must be obeyed when conducting Wiccan rites. All members of The Grove are 'inducted' through a process of ensuring they have a clear understanding of the ethical dilemmas of manipulative magick and that ritual passage is something to be honoured rather than abused. This position of ethical facilitator ensured that the coven continued to run on a shared set of values that were embraced by all. Any contribution made by anyone including myself was moderated by the group under the guidance of our shared ethics and the leadership of our High Priestess.

To further compound the influence my own research had on the development of the coven and the wider Wiccan community, it became apparent during the discussions I had with interviewees that the Wiccan

community at large had undergone a series of changes. These changes were reversed a little as a result of the questions I posed to interviewees. The interview participants all agreed that over the last decade or so the covens and solitary practitioners had diversified their practises and as a result covens no longer chose to work together to the degree they once had. This diversification process followed a previous decade when covens and higher level Wiccans had worked closely together. Interviewees spoke with some disappointment about how during the last five years in particular, covens rarely engaged in joint rituals. In asking participants why they thought this had come about, many of them admitted that they missed the cross coven interactions and suggested it was because individual covens had chosen to explore different ways of engaging with their ritualistic practices and this diversification had led to isolation. Furthermore they could see no feasible reason why the isolation should continue.

I noticed over the year following my interviews that many covens, including my own, began reversing that trend. There appeared to be a significant increase in the number of Full Moon and Greater Sabbat invitations between covens. My own coven invited their sister coven to a Full Moon which was reciprocated and another coven did likewise. These increased coven activities seem to have stabilised at a level higher than was previously noted by all the participants.

This change in the relationships between covens is likely to have occurred as a result of my interview questions and active participant observation. As a result of this I suggest that as ethnographical researchers we should be asking ourselves what the difference is between ethical intervention and participation. For my own part I did not actively set out to modify the relationships within the Wiccan community and indeed I can argue that I would have no motive for doing so. I gained the

evidence I required through legitimate means and thus the communal increase in shared practice was a result of questioning, not of artificial and deliberate manipulation for deceitful or hidden purposes.

Members of The Grove did openly admit that access to other covens allowed them to gain a greater appreciation for their own practice and for those of others and members of covens we visited noted the same points. Cross coven ritual sharing enhanced the learning process for all involved and facilitated a wider breadth of understanding. In addition it allowed practitioners to gain a different viewpoint on established practise and enhanced social networking opportunities at the annual open events held by the Combined Covens Social Club. Thus the benefits of cross coven sharing were mutually appreciated by all.

Therefore while this increased cross coven interaction may have come about as a direct result of my research, the results were at worst satisfactory and at best advantageous to all participants. Rountree (2004) admits in her work that she too initially found it difficult to cope with the responsibility of the repercussions that her research might have had on her participants. She eventually came to the conclusion however that, “the research act itself had the potential to contribute to the Witches’ consciousness-raising objectives, one of the basic epistemological principles of feminist research” (p. 71). Jencson (1989) also suggests when speaking of anthropologists that, “We influence our informants, and we influence those who read our books” (p. 4). Given that my own participants were actively engaged in a journey to explore their personal relationships with deity, my research also influenced and contributed to their level of self understanding but I suspect this only furthered that journey to self actualisation rather than hindered or negatively modified it.

Purists might argue however that my participant research modified the Wiccan community dynamics artificially and thus damaged what may have been an otherwise sustainable and pure phenomenon. Whilst I accept this criticism, I would also suggest that no community is static and any group or community is subject to the shifting tide of change as it relates to the broader political, emotional and psychological agenda of the society in which it is housed. When returning to Africa after a lengthy absence to conduct more ethnographical research, Edith Turner was dismayed to see some of the changes that had occurred in the way the people she and Victor Turner had studied thirty years ago now viewed themselves. As a result of watching international media coverage of their own traditional medical practices, the Ndembu people now viewed themselves through the lens of a foreign camera and thus had shifted their perceptions of their own social structures and medicinal ritual performances. In describing the differences she writes,

At that time [30 years before] no traditional doctor appeared costumed in anything but an old jacket and pants, or a dingy waistcoat. Now a doctor will descend on his patient amid a waiting crowd, wearing a lurid genet hat headdress, grass skirt, tortoise medallion, and leg rattles along with a professional-looking doctor's black bag (E. Turner 1986, p. 17).

Thus social change, structural shifts, ritual performance and modifications to the perceptions that individuals and societies have of themselves, will continually move as the web of global influences reaches further into the very fabric of who we are. Anthropologists of course may endeavour not to actively modify the social environment in which they actively participate but at the same time they need to ensure

that they do not take on the guilt of societal change when in fact they are not the only element that influences that change.

Significance of the Study

Wicca, as part of the neopagan body of belief systems, has mushroomed in the last fifty years and was at one point the fastest growing belief systems in the westernised world (Allen, 2001; Harris & MacGuire, 2003; Out of the broom closet, 2003; Wilkinson, 1999). This growth is reflected in the academic literature, most notably in anthropology, where there is growing interest in exploring and documenting Western contemporary Witchcraft, particularly in Australasia. However, with the ever evolving and diversified practice both across Australia and even within localised areas, it is vitally important to capture the changes taking place as solitary Wiccans and covens develop more individual practice.

As the traditional churches struggle with dwindling congregations and an increasing number of people migrate to the eastern religions and to the neo-Pagan movement, Australian anthropologists and social scientists need to become better acquainted with the religious and spiritual demography in their own back yard. Whilst engaging in ethnographies to learn about the lives of foreign peoples has been and will always be a valuable, necessary and credible pursuit, so too is ethnography in our own suburban environment. Ethnographers such as Hume (1997), Ezzy (2001) and Rountree (2004) have already begun to capture a considerable amount of knowledge about Australasian Wicca but with its continued diversification, still more information needs to be gathered.

Because Witches deliberately do not proselytise and choose only to teach those who actively seek learning opportunities in Wicca, church leaders, social scientists and the broader community have a limited understanding of the underpinning tenets and the evolving practices of this faith system and the ritual practices that are the manifestation of westernised

Witchcraft. Witches are happy to, and indeed crave to live beside their neighbours and to work with other spiritual bodies to bring about peaceful relationships yet because of their reticence to come forward, much of the Wiccan and Witchcraft philosophy is either misunderstood or completely overridden.

Furthermore, whilst there are increasing numbers of anthropological studies being conducted on Western Witchcraft in Australasia, Europe and the USA, all of which are providing valuable insight into the practice, ritual and worldview of Witches, very few of these studies discuss in depth how Witches learn intuitively to *be* Witches. In her study of English Witches Luhrmann explored the learning process by discussing how Witches changed their worldview to accommodate their new esoteric practices. She coined the phrase “interpretive drift” suggesting that as the Witches became more involved in the practice, their interpretation of phenomena gradually drifts from a previously held paradigm to another (1989, p. 312). However, interpretive drift focuses more on a cognitive model of learning rather than an intuitive one.

Bado-Fralick (2005) studied the process undertaken by Witches as they work towards, and engage with, the initiation ritual. This work is important in that it provides a clearer understanding of the journey toward full “Witchdom” but whilst touching on the learning process, it does not explore in depth the underpinning mechanics that identify *how* the Witches use intuition as a learning tool. Hume (1997), Ezzy (2003) and Rountree (2004) each studied Pagans and in particular Witches in New Zealand and Australia, and all provided specific information on the history and development of Witchcraft practice in their respective countries. However, in all cases they stopped short at explaining in depth exactly how Witches develop their skill and knowledge sets. Whilst it is gratifying to see a growing body of information exploring and explaining

Witchcraft in contemporary Europe, the USA and Australasia, there continues to be limited discussion about the actual processes through which Wiccan participants go in order to develop a set of recognised Wiccan skills and knowledge. My study aims to contribute toward that gap.

Wicca is a new religion with only a fifty year history and whilst it may be grounded in what we understand of ancient practices, it is still 'finding its way' as it settles into localised versions of a global philosophy. Wicca is a nature based religion and so Witches in different locations, across different countries need to adapt their practice to meet their own geographical requirements. While there is considerable ongoing debate and dialogue amongst Wiccans and Witches via the internet and relevant national networks about how they can adapt practices yet still remain true to the basic tenets of their Craft, there is no central hierarchy to capture that information and set standards for unified approaches. Indeed one of the very principles of Witchcraft, that of encouraging all people to find their own spiritual connection with divinity, would denounce such a centralised dogma. Thus Witches themselves often do not know what other Witches are doing in other countries or even in their own regions. This research looks at Witches in Perth, Western Australia and provides an insight into how Witches here are modelling their spiritual journey in a southern hemisphere environment in contrast to their northern hemisphere counterparts. Thus this study informs Witches in Australia and internationally about some of the West Australian practices that are being developed in this evolving religion.

From a more theoretical viewpoint, this research may further contribute to the discourse about how adults develop new sets of skills, increase their knowledge sets and embrace new cultural norms using broader learning techniques than those previously explored. Whilst there are a

growing number of contemporary theories that may explain how adults learn, for the most part these can be distilled down to the three traditionalist approaches which are behaviourism, cognition and humanism. Cognitive and behavioural learning methodologies alone cannot provide all the answers to the questions surrounding andragogical learning, especially when that learning is situated in social milieus rather than formal settings. In depth discussion about the symbiotic relationships and the missing components of singular learning theories based only on cognitive, behavioural or humanist modalities, may increase the repertoire of social scientists including anthropologists, psychologists and adult educators who are employed to design, deliver, assess, monitor and research learning programs and paradigms for individuals and groups. Vocational trainers and instructional designers, academics and leaders of informal groups may benefit from a greater understanding of the holistic capabilities of students as they employ their inherent, intuitive abilities to increase their skill sets.

In terms of the ever increasing understanding we have of ritual practice, this study contributes to overall debate by offering theorists an alternative means of considering ritual. The architecture of ritual and its functional contribution to society is already understood but ritual as a product of learning is yet to be fully explored. The relationship between situational learning and ritual as an end result of that social action has not been explored in any depth within the contemporary theoretical discourse and so this body of work contributes a new and different perspective to existing framework through which we explore the anthropology of ritual.

Overview of the Thesis

In order to present the story of the Witches in my study and to understand how they learn their craft and what they learn, this thesis is presented in chapters, each designed to guide the reader through the narrative of the

ethnography. The edited field notes throughout are presented in italics to differentiate them from the study text. The study branches into two sections with the express aim of examining within section 1 the process of learning, and then within section 2 the product of that learning.

Chapter one acts as an introduction and a platform to anchor the reader to the foundations of the research, provides a synopsis of the study, its objectives, methodology and approach and delivers an indication of the underpinning theoretical framework to be explored within the following chapters. Chapter two introduces the first of the two sections of the study, that of how the Witches learnt and develops a description of contemporary learning theories to act as both a comparison and contrast through which the research data can be interpreted. Chapter three explores world through Wiccan eyes and locates the study within the learning practices of Witchcraft in Perth, Western Australia. This enables the reader to better contextualise chapter four in which an alternative, more holistic theory of practical, intuitive learning, that better explains the ‘whole person’ nature of the Wiccan learning experience is presented. Chapter five moves into the second section of the research, that of what the Witches learnt, by exploring two major theoretical viewpoints; that of ritual function followed by the construction and architecture of ritual. Chapter six accompanies that theoretical discussion by exploring how Wiccans themselves view ritual as the outcome of their learning experiences and how they make sense of ritual’s functionality. Finally in chapter seven, the thesis draws the two sections back together and offers a set of recommendations for further study.

Section 1 – How Witches learn
Chapter 2

**WITCH SCHOOL OF THOUGHT? CONTEMPORARY
LEARNING THEORIES**

7th September 2004, Outer Court.

The spirit of the evening was, as usual, one of strong communal essence, a sense of enjoyment and of course shared learning. The topic of tonight's training was the concept and practice of magick but as usual, the night's topic was preceded by general catching up with everyone's news followed by a discussion about any dreams members had experienced.

The first half hour or so, like every time we get together, was a time to share personal stories, learn about how life had gone for one another over the last couple of weeks and generally share gossip and news. I always feel that these pre and post discussion times are the periods where the group bonding cements itself. It's where we learn about each other as people, as women, men, parents, workers, partners, neighbours and friends. It's where we learn to trust one another with the secrets we'd only share with those closest to us. It's where the strong bonds of friendship develop that facilitate and enable us to then share our magickal practice together.

The format for the evening's training topic included each person writing down their own answers to a short series of questions and then discussing our individual responses as a group. Sammy led the discussion but allowed, and indeed encouraged, free discussion around each question. On most occasions, the group agreed with each other's answers and

although the actual wording they used might have been different, there was a very clear sense that we all meant the same thing.

I wonder if this training helps not only to raise our skill and knowledge level regarding the actual topic but also helps to bring cohesiveness to the group. By sharing our understanding of topics, by listening to each other, group members clarify their own concepts and also seem to develop a shared understanding that bonds them closer together. It's as though the training facilitates not just increased practical skills but increases the personal and communal connections so that group members become engaged within a 'group mentality'. This group mentality and shared understanding then seems to be known by all and willingly accepted as a link through which current and future psychic interaction continues. The group that trains together grows together...

The Mechanics of Learning – Behavioural, Cognitive and Humanist

As a means to theoretically contextualise the journey of learning the individual Witches in my research underwent, it is helpful at this point to expand upon and explore the underpinning learning theory frameworks which explain how people learn. In the account above it is apparent that the coven members in this instance, learnt that lesson's subject matter via discussion and practice, or cognition and shared behaviours. In this chapter, the thesis will explore the contemporary learning theories that may explain the activities observed as the coven members shared their learning experiences.

Behaviourist, cognitive, and humanist learning theories apply to individuals and explain the mechanics through which someone acquires new skills or knowledge. However, of themselves they do not provide the context for learning, only the automated processes undertaken. Social and situational learning theories do provide the context and vehicle through which that mechanical learning takes place and therefore offer a much

more robust and relevant framework to examine how these Witches developed their skill and knowledge sets. This chapter will therefore briefly discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the behaviourist, cognitive and humanist learning theories as a precursor to, and in favour of, the more relevant social and situational learning theories. However, the reader will note that in this chapter I argue that none of the contemporary learning theories, regardless of genre, deliver a broad enough, all encompassing descriptor of the holistic learning process through which the participants of this study underwent but instead the theories, even when grouped together, provide for only partial explanation of the experiences observed during this research. In confirmation of this claim, the preliminary discussion herein will help to highlight and identify the notion of intuitive learning that both the mechanical and contextual learning theories fail to address and for which these Witches had a strong connection.

Essentially there are three major streams under which the various learning theories can be categorised that include behaviourist, cognitive and humanist approaches. These form the mechanical processes that individuals engage with in order to advance or generate new skills and knowledge. These three mechanical concepts can in turn be placed within the dimensions or circumstances in which learning occurs. For example, learning might take place within the confines of a formal setting such as school or university, an informal setting such as a community, hobby workshop or one to one coaching within an apprenticeship. Equally, learning might occur in solitary situations such as when someone undertakes individual research. The setting or dimension in which learning takes place will be discussed at length later in this chapter but initially it is important to understand the mechanical process an individual undertakes in order to gain new skills or knowledge.

As the research on adult learning processes grows in scope and content, the plethora of theories continues to develop and whilst there may be some overlap and several subheadings and inter-relationships between theory streams, most theories of significance sit comfortably within one of these three categories. The scope of my thesis does not allow for an extended examination of the advantages and disadvantages of each theoretical construct but does warrant a description of the theory bodies as a means of highlighting the most appropriate framework against which to compare and contrast the processes that the Witches in my study underwent.

The table below diagrammatically represents the major learning theory streams and places them within the locus in which the relevant learning might take place. Thus behavioural learning is more likely to occur where the subject is provided with appropriate external stimuli from another party. By comparison, cognitive theories emphasise that internal mental activity is the process through which learning is achieved.

Theory Stream	Learning Process	Locus of Learning
Behaviourist	Overt and observable changes in behaviour	External environment provides the stimuli for behavioural shift
Cognitivist	Mental perception and processing of information and the use of memory to store information	Internal mental development and reconstruction of schemata
Humanist	Learning as a means of expressing one's full potential	Internal mental and psychological development

Figure 1 Learning Theories Matrix

Behaviourist theory descends from the initial work of Pavlov and considers that learning is a product with a tangible outcome rather than an internal, mental process (M. Smith, 1999). 'Pavlovian' or more appropriately 'classical conditioning' therefore prescribes that learning is said to have occurred when there is an observable change in behaviour (Burns, 1995). Pavlov (as cited in Myers, 1986) showed that under normal circumstances a dog will salivate (unconditioned response) when presented with food (unconditioned stimulus). The involuntary salivation or unconditioned response can however become a learned, habitual activity (conditional response) when paired to an unnaturally, occurring incident (conditional stimulus) when that unnatural, conditional stimulus is repeatedly paired with the unconditional stimulus. This type of learning is appropriate for shaping the automatic and naturally occurring behaviour of animals into something they would not normally do but the theory does not fully explain how humans modify complex behaviours in learning situations.

Skinner (1953) addressed this issue of complex human learning by advancing Pavlov's theory of classical conditioning into what he called 'operant conditioning'. He argued that where classical conditioning was merely the modification of naturally occurring behaviours in animals, operant conditioning was the mechanism whereby the learner voluntarily changed their behaviour as a response to an environmental factor. He proposed that individuals will change their behaviour through successive approximations in response to reinforcement provided by an external stimulus, most notably repeated positive rewards for appropriate behaviours and repeated punishment for unacceptable behaviours. Primary or innate reinforcement and secondary or conditioned reinforcement, when delivered randomly, provide for a conditioned learned response that has far greater longevity than reinforcement provided in every instance. Thus Skinner developed the behaviourist

theory that focused on the development of learned behaviours in relation to environmental stimuli.

Whilst operant conditioning may in fact bring about a change in behaviour, one of the failings of this theoretical model is in explaining *how* someone learnt to change their behaviour. Overt changes in behaviour do not explain what internal cognitive, psychological or emotional processes and changes occurred that directed such behavioural modifications. Behaviourism explains actions but does not discuss the development of internal schemata and reference frameworks and thus also fails to explore how someone is personally affected by their learning experience. Furthermore, this theory assumes that the learner is passive and that the environment is the active provider of stimuli. The learner appears to have limited control over what he is required to learn and offers virtually no contribution to the manner in which he must learn. The balance of control over choices such as the most appropriate and effective learning mechanism, the learning environment or the subject matter is heavily in favour of the teacher rather than the learner as an individual.

In the case of the Witches in this study, most of them explained with some passion that their learning experiences were more than simply learning how to do things and being at the mercy of their teachers. They felt in control of their own learning and in so doing, they suggested they had changed as people and therefore some cognitive, psychological and emotional shifts had occurred that behaviourism fails to address. One of the participants, Theresa, pointed out, “It’s in your heart, it’s not in your hands or what you do. Anyone can cast a circle but only some people can *feel* the circle”. Fred, another participant, illustrated the same point when he talked about his own Wiccan apprenticeship. “Of course I had to read books and I learnt by watching people. But I learnt a whole lot more by feeling my way through it all”. The Witches in this study felt strongly

that Wicca is not simply a physical, behavioural process one goes through. They argued that you don't *do* Wicca, you *feel* Wicca; you don't *do* Witchcraft, instead you live your life *being* a Witch. It is more than a set of actions they suggest and is instead a religion, a philosophy and a way of life. Behaviourism then cannot describe the full range of personal events and processes that Witches undergo as they learn to be Witches. It implies that their learning comes about only as a result of external stimuli but many Witches would argue that being a Witch is a personal journey that connects their internal senses and soul with that of divinity.

If locus of control in behaviourism lies with the external stimuli that bring about behavioural changes, then the opposite is true in the cognitive suite of learning theories. Cognitivist theory argues that learning occurs as a result of internal mental processes that redefine the thinker's mental schemata. Cognition answers some of the criticisms of behaviourism in that it discusses learning as a process rather than merely an outcome and embeds that process within the control of the learner. It suggests that learning is a set of events wherein the learner uses their internal reference frameworks and knowledge as platforms for additional knowledge gathering and framework development (Foley, 2000).

Piaget (1930) was one of the first to develop the concept of reasoning, knowing, memory and internal cognitive activity as a prime mechanism for skill development and intellectual growth. He argued that juvenile intellect develops in four stages and these stages identify a chronological series of descriptors, not of *what* children think but more about *how* they think. From birth to 2 years children undergo the sensorimotor stage where their reasoning develops as a direct result of physical interaction with the world around them such as touch, taste and sight. This stage is followed by the preoperational stage wherein children can begin to develop intellectual concepts without the need to physically interact with

them. They can use language and can conceive of and explore simplistic and sequential notions that relate one mental concept with another. At this stage however, they cannot use logic as a problem solver so while they may be able to understand the relationship between the mental concepts of 2 and 5 and grasp that by adding them together you get 7, they cannot conceive that reversing the numbers and thus adding 5 and 2 together also equates to 7. By the time they reach seven years of age they enter the concrete operational stage that enables them to think logically but only about concrete, tangible things and not about nebulous concepts. From the early teens, children move into the formal operational stage where they begin to understand abstract notions and can also develop their own hypothetical ideas about conceptual constructs.

Piaget's cognitive theories shaped the development of our understanding of learning for many years but his focus was the intellectual maturation of children. Tolman (1948) supported Piaget's notion of intelligence as a primary factor in the learning process but was much more interested in how adults use internal mechanisms to develop their already mature mental schema. As a result of experiments with rats and their ability to navigate mazes, discern colours, solve problems and find their way to food rewards, he developed the notion of cognitive maps. He argued that whilst the rats may have developed learned behaviours as a result of external stimuli they also developed the ability to discern between different mental challenges through visual discrimination and overt decision making. He compared his work on rats to the psychological descriptors of human behaviour abundant at the time and hypothesised that the cognitive maps and thus intelligence displayed by the rats reflected the mental processes through which humans navigate when problem solving.

One of the main difficulties in understanding, explaining and demonstrating cognition as a primal factor in the learning process is that it is a hidden process without any means of clearly observing the mechanics of the functional activity. One way cognitive theorists address this issue is through the use of language. Fetterman (1998) suggests that the measure for cognition is the language we use and as such, “Cognitive theory assumes that we can describe what people think by listening to what they say” (p. 6). Chomsky (1975) suggested that in developing language, children operate from an innate set of capabilities that shape how they develop speech and the ability to communicate. However, this assumes that all children follow a pre-determined path of development influenced by genes and environment where they are not necessarily contributors to their own intellectual growth. Johnstone (2000) opposes Chomsky’s arguments instead stating that, “formal modes of linguistic competence usually ignore individual differences” (p. 408). Approaching cognition by engaging language use and development as a measure is thus fraught with difficulties and challenges. In addition, while cognitivist theory goes a considerable way to describing how humans acquire new knowledge, like the behaviourist theory it fails to address how they may be affected by that knowledge. Cognition focuses only on mental processes and the maturation of the intellect, but the influence of, and on, emotions is missed entirely. Cognition is seen as an isolated process, devoid of connection with the effect that such learning may have on the individual. As with any emotionally powerful journey such as that undertaken during religious activities, Wicca can be the catalyst for intense emotional responses that cognition alone does not explain. Several Witches expressed how they experienced a range of emotions during various rituals and meditations including surprise, delight, joy, shock, fear. One such occasion occurred in the summer of 2005 for me as I sat with my coven colleagues during a Full Moon meditation.

December 2005, Full Moon

We did a doorway exercise tonight and I couldn't believe how it affected me. We often do these meditations where Sammy asks us to find somewhere that feels right in the circle and then we sit down, relax, and begin to breathe rhythmically. She then takes us through a guided imaginary journey where we can eventually meet someone like a God or Goddess or person of some significance or perhaps we just gain some insight about something. We've done these things before, in fact it's almost a usual thing at Full Moon but tonight for some reason, it really got to me.

We'd already done a bit of magickal work for a friend of Iona's who had been unwell and so we were already quite loaded with energy. Doing magick is really intense. It's not about thinking, it's about being. It's about utterly immersing yourself in the moment and merging with the energy you create. It affects your whole body so that every cell is alive so it's invigorating. It's my regular battery top up!

Anyway, we began the meditation and Sammy asked us to follow a particular path she described. We all sat cross legged on the floor or seated on one of the wooden benches and heard and felt her words. I followed the path she described and found myself sitting in amongst a field of red roses. A sea of velvet, sensuous, luxury. Pools of deep red flowers, petals lying all around me, gentle breezes brushing the soft caress of petals over my skin. It was warm, comforting and gentle. I reached forward and carefully picked one of the roses from its stem and as I held it in my hand, it withered away right in front of me. Its petals darkened and shrivelled and fell to the ground and it perished right before my eyes. Then all I was holding was a bruised and broken stem and the beautiful rose was in chaos at my feet.

I pulled myself out of the meditation and as was the custom, we then shared what happened with each other and tried to piece together what our visions had meant. I couldn't discuss what I'd seen. I had to ask if I could keep this one to myself because as I thought about it, I sobbed. For some reason the change from the soft beauty of a delicate and perfect rose to the crumpled devastation of a broken flower had left me deeply affected. It was as though my environment, my safety, my routine had fallen away and left me confused and upset.

I learnt that night that having visions is not always white light and champagne! Neither are they always easy to comprehend and rationally explain. I had to learn very quickly that not only were my visions sometimes not what I wanted to see but that they could affect my emotions quite intensely. Since then Sammy has taught all of us how to prepare ourselves for such intense reactions as I'm not the only one who occasionally felt such overwhelming results from a meditation. On several occasions Cath's circle meditations resulted in emotional responses she had not expected at all. Anna too was quite overcome during one Full Moon circle in 2005 when her unexpected vision presented her with some answers and alternatives to a personal issue she was dealing with. In these instances, clearly these responses were not simply cognitive and our reactions to the meditative outcomes were not a detached and rational process. Like these two coven sisters, my emotions played a significant role in my learning that night.

Cognition then, as a process for understanding learning is a valuable tool but the Witches in this study seemed to do more than simply acquire new sets of knowledge. As mentioned earlier, they felt they had changed as people and that their relationship with Wicca was more than simply a learned response. It was a relationship of the heart as well as the brain. Thus, like the behaviourist theories, the cognitive approach does not

provide a broad enough scope to explain the learning events and journey that I and the Witches in this study encountered.

Humanist theory, by comparison, goes a considerable way to addressing the need for an all encompassing learning journey that involves the development of self as well as the development of the brain. In other words, it attempts to hinge the strengths and weaknesses of cognitive and behaviourist theory and in addition offer a holistic approach that encompasses both process and effect or outcome.

This theory, born from Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of motives and his discussions of self actualisation, suggests that people need to grow and evolve as individuals and not just become robotic beings armed with learned skill sets as the behaviourists would suggest or the walking, talking, internal libraries of rote information as in the cognitivist approach. The self worth, self confidence and peace of mind of individuals are elements that contribute to quality of life and the learning process makes a fundamental contribution to that personal progression (Burns, 1995). This is particularly so when people deliberately choose to learn more about a topic or skill set that they feel passionate about such as their political point of view, their religious conviction or a similar emotive and personal commitment. Such learning affects more than just the brain in the learner. It achieves more than an increased skill set and knowledge repertoire. It also makes an impression on and affects the inherent self worth of the learner so that they see themselves and their relationship with the world differently (M. Smith, 1999).

Rogers (1980) proposed that within the learning milieu, three conditions need to be present in order for a learner to achieve their ultimate and innate tendency toward self fulfilment and actualisation. The teaching practitioner must provide genuineness, acceptance and empathy in order to create an environment where the learner can grow, learn and develop a

healthy self concept. His proposal rested on the understanding that all individuals are, “basically good and capable of self-improvement” (Myers, 1986, p. 413) and as such are the motivators for their own learning. “What is learned reflects, not the goal of the teacher, but the values and ends of the learner” (Burns, 1995, p. 131).

Such a holistic approach to learning, encompassing the contribution of both the learner and the teacher, bridges the gap between cognition and behaviourism, but its critics argue that the humanist approach is vague and conceptual. Brewster Smith (1978) goes as far as suggesting that Maslow developed his theory based on personal heroes who were not necessarily an example of “ordinary people” (p. 190). His scathing argument suggests that Maslow failed to establish a link between the facts of his self actualisation theory and the values that people hold and instead he, “Stayed in the closed circle of his own values” (p. 190). Such criticism argues that the humanist approach, while delivering the learner from the discrete, coarse and cold-blooded environment of cognition and behaviourism, fails to clearly articulate *how* a learner learns and instead relies on a broad, nebulous concept of self driven learning aimed only at reaching ultimate fulfilment and creativity.

In the case of the Witches in this study, for them apprenticing to a coven was not just about learning *how to do it*, or indeed *why it should be done so*, but it was also about learning how to grow into their own beliefs about themselves and realise their full potential in terms of their spiritual conviction. The fundamental principle of humanist learning theory dictates that learning is about fulfilment for the individual in a cognitive, psychological and emotional manner that enables them to gain a clearer and more in-depth understanding of their place in the world and of their own inbuilt processes of being. Thus this approach is more holistic in its assumptions about the process and outcome of learning. However, while

humanist learning theories address many of the points lacking in the behavioural and cognitivist disciplines, they do not fully explain the communal manner in which coven based Witches gain their skills, their knowledge and their appreciation for their place in their spiritual world. Furthermore, it fails to explain how intuition acts as a learning tool and outcome as was the case with the Witches in this study. They learnt about Witchcraft by communing with their inner wisdom and deep seated understanding of divinity and through their relationship with deity. Therefore, while humanist theories provide us with a much closer example of Wiccan learning than behaviourism and cognition alone, there is still a missing link to the intuitive and inherent sense of knowing that the Witches employed.

From this discussion, it becomes apparent that all three theory streams have considerable strengths in terms of explaining how the Witches in my study learnt using their cognitive abilities and gained learning outcomes as defined in behaviourist theory. In addition, humanist theory helps to explain some of the fulfilment that the Witches expressed as they developed and became comfortable with their spiritual role but none of the three universally recognised theory sets go far enough to explain how the Witches developed and used their intuitive abilities as learning tools. In the case of the practitioners in this study, their intuitive capabilities became highly developed, intense and a primary tool for further gains in wisdom and self understanding. None of the popular contemporary learning theories allow for the use of intuition as a primary means of learning or for intuition as a credible, valued outcome.

In order to fully explain both the learning processes and the learnt outcomes that the Witches achieved, we therefore need a theory that includes not just elements of all three existing learning streams, but one that also allows for the concept and use of intuition as a process tool of

equal value to cognition with intuitive output as an acceptable outcome as well as behavioural actions or skills. While such a holistic, broad-brush learning theory may not be suitable in some learning milieus such as the need to gain technical skills for flying aircraft or other clearly defined, assessable skills and knowledge with base standards of measurement, such an approach is far more explanatory in situations such as those explored in my study. In chapter four the self developed 'Whole Person' learning theory aims to address some of these identified deficiencies.

Context of Learning - Social Learning Theories

Social and situational learning complements all three previous approaches by suggesting that learning occurs when someone interacts with both the others in their environment and with the environment itself (Burns, 1995). As such this learning process can provide opportunities not just for individual behavioural or cognitive learning but also offers opportunities for humanist learning episodes as a consequence of engaging with likeminded peers and teachers. Social or situational learning is thus a vehicle through which the mechanics of cognitive, behavioural or humanist learning might occur. While individuals can learn in isolation from others, social and situated learning can offer different ways to access, engage with and benefit from the learning process (Foley, 1999).

Further, while the cognitive, behaviourist and humanist theories describe the mechanical process through which individuals go in order to gain skills or knowledge, those processes can be adopted while engaging in learning across a broad spectrum of contexts or circumstances. People can learn in isolation doing their own post graduate research, they can learn in formal situations such as the classroom or in informal milieus like community workshops. Thus, in addition to examining the mechanical processes of learning, it is important to also study the theories

of context in which that learning takes place. The Witches in my study learnt in both the small group setting of their coven and as a result of their own individual research. However, because I was only able to observe them learning in social contexts such as Outer and Inner Court meetings, rituals, festivals and coven workshops, I have chosen to compare and contrast their learning experiences with relevant social contextual theories rather than those that describe other circumstances such as formal or individual learning circumstances. I concentrate in particular on situational learning as described in Lave and Wenger's (1991) Community of Practice (CoP) which explores the informal and social contexts of learning.

Wiccans, like most individuals, gain their competence through a variety of means. They gradually become skilled and knowledgeable about their religion, its ritualistic practice and its theoretical underpinnings through study, hands-on practice, discourse with likeminded peers and teachers and from observing others. They learn by tapping into their own sense of knowing and using that to bridge the gap between conscious cognitive thought and private discussion with divinity. They learn all this through their own personal study but they also learn through social interaction. As individuals they learn by adjusting their behaviour, thoughts and approaches to their world view as a result of new information from their personal environment but learning through social milieus comes about as a result of gaining information from their peers and the generalised environment in which they act (McElreath, 2004). This process of gradual skill development and knowledge acquisition through facilitated, encouraged sharing and practice opportunity is similar to that observed in many informal groups. In studying social learning practices in two discrete groups of people, Allen (2000) noted that in both cases, "All leading practitioners in both studies identified groups of critical friends or professional development groups, as critical to their learning" (171).

Harrison (2003) agrees suggesting, “Much that is learned in life comes, not from schooling, but from our experiences in life and involvement with families, neighbourhoods and communities” (p. 25). Foley (1998) too suggests that learning comes about as a result of acting and engaging with members of a community and that implicit knowledge evolves from those encounters. Learning in a socially relevant setting contextualises learning and makes it more meaningful. These constellations of practice provide appropriate venues not just for learning but for practising that learning. Most Witches learn their craft through social interaction and interdependency. Bado-Fralick noted in her own study of the dedicant’s learning journey toward initiation, he and the Witches “have constructed an intimate community (2005, p. 137). The Witches in my research were quick to affirm that the power of their learning was accentuated when they could share knowledge and learn from the practices of others. “She was a fantastic teacher” Paul told me referring to his early teacher. “In fact the whole group were great. I learnt heaps more from them than I ever would have done from a book”.

Lave and Wenger (1991) first postulated the theory of CoPs or “social microworlds”, as Lagache (1993, p. 3) refers to them, to describe this shared learning process within groups of likeminded people. Born from anthropological beginnings the theory adopted a more socialised concept of learning that acknowledged the relationship between the individual and the context in which learning takes place. CoPs are the vehicle through which cognitive, behavioural and humanist learning theories operate. They are the framework that allows the individual learning theories to manifest. It is recognised that learning occurs not in isolation as a discrete cognitive, behavioural or humanist event but as the result of participation within a broader social milieu using all modes of learning. Poindexter (2003) suggests we need to understand learning in the context of a more holistic approach and incorporate all these streams of theory.

Such socially or situationally based learning does not merely facilitate increased knowledge for the individual, but also provides a modality that allows for meaningful proficiency and a greater sense of self identity (Foley 2001).

CoPs are essentially informally organised groups of people who share a similar set of understandings and who come together to learn from one another and to practice their shared skills and understandings. The Grove is a perfect example of a CoP in that its purpose is not only to create a shared space in which to connect with divinity but also to create an environment where people can teach each other through a relaxed but focused sharing of knowledge and practice. CoP theory suggests that a considerable percentage of adult learning occurs within informal groups like The Grove and that these are often formed from one's family, social, civic or work networks. These groups are dynamic in nature and thus grow and diminish with the ever changing membership. Indeed Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) describe the interaction that occurs within a CoP as the "nursery for change" (p. 38). As new members enter the group, they learn from existing members and use the group as a milieu for practicing the knowledge and skills common within it. They may then move on or remain, contributing to the fluidity of the group. The dynamics of The Grove's membership reflect exactly this notion with its Outer Courters, some of whom stay while others move on. While the Inner Court membership is more stable, it too has a degree of fluidity as members join, learn and then leave albeit over a longer time scale.

Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that the fluidity of the group is simply a function of its role and that the CoP's sole purpose is that of increasing the opportunity for learning and thus learning is the driver of the community in question. They further suggest that while learning is the agenda for that group, the practice is in fact the end result of that

learning. Therefore a CoP is a self directing, self serving group of people, loosely banded together without prescribed hierarchy and whose dedicated purpose is simply to learn and thus practise the community's shared skill set. "The community is defined by its practice in which explicit and implicit knowledge are negotiated, that is, meaning is constructed through what the community actually does" (Merriam S, Courtney B & Baumgartner L, 2003 p. 172). However, Lave and Wenger's original theory was broader in concept than that. It postulated that a CoP was not just a milieu but was in fact a *process* encapsulated within a social context. In other words it is in fact the support structure for knowledge:

A community of practice is an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge, not least because it provides the interpretive support necessary for making sense of its heritage. Thus, participation in the cultural practice in which knowledge exists is an epistemological principle of learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 98).

In the light of this, one could argue that The Grove was therefore a construct or vehicle for the capture and sharing of knowledge. But it is more than the infrastructure, it is, as Lave and Wenger argue, also the process through which learning is generated and shared. In further development of this theory, Wenger (1998) went on to argue that CoPs are centred on the need to share common learning and as such, that is their singular role and aim. CoPs are not built on existing formalised, prescribed learning theories but are rather simply milieus for social learning activity (Creese, 2005). The acts of sharing and practising common skills and knowledge are a means to their own end and enable the group to be self sustaining. In other words, the learning opportunities motivate the group to continue and the practice becomes the

manifestation of that learning. With the Witches in The Grove, the act of coming together to conduct rituals as a learning process generated the ongoing motivation to continue to generate further knowledge and therefore further ritualistic opportunities. The learning agenda therefore became the foundational role and function of the group. Merriam *et al.* (2003) reinforce this by suggesting that, “Learning is a meaning-making activity inherent in the activity of the community” (p. 172). Certainly the coveners in The Grove and the Witches I interviewed supported this notion. Jake, when discussing his reasons for practising Wicca explained that, “You can’t really *be* a Witch without learning *how* to be a Witch.” Thus the relationship between learning and practice is in fact the meaning derived from both. So what differentiates a CoP from other groups of people who may be in the process of sharing their learning?

Given that, “communities of practice are important places of negotiation, learning, meaning and identity” (Roberts, 2006, p. 624) it is vital to explore and determine the elements that identify a CoP and set it apart from other groups of people who may also be learning tasks and gaining knowledge. Wenger (1998) suggested that just because a group of people came together to learn does not automatically mean they will become a CoP. He argued that while practice is the origin of community coherence, there are three factors that clearly demonstrate a viable CoP and these are mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire.

Members of a CoP will actively engage with one another and will develop community mores, norms and relationships that will become the standard modality for interaction. Members will work towards the same goals and this, “requires constant attention to coordinate action” (Guldberg & Pilkington, 2006, p. 161). This mutual engagement enables the membership to operate within a mutually acceptable framework. Covens are more than groups of people who come together simply to

celebrate religious occasions. They are groups of people bound together by a shared and accepted set of principles and goals that identify them as a committed collective. They devise their own group expectations and ensure that all group members engage with those. Joint enterprise is the cement that glues members together and gives them a sense of shared accomplishment. It encompasses continuing negotiation and shared accountability. Through these actions and over time, the group develop their shared repertoire which may include both the output from group practice and the tools that encourage further activity. These may include language and stories, objects and artefacts, routines and methodologies of practice. Covens develop a history and heritage that becomes their identity. Peter and Kathryn are proud of the traditional heritage that their coven is rooted in and the artefacts of their history and the stories of their development are the tools that bind their membership together. One of their central ritual tools, the pentacle, was handed down to them from one of the founding covens in Perth and thus is a valuable artefact that binds the coven to its past and creates a sense of shared heritage. The Grove has a similar history and for all covens, regardless of the shifting membership, there is a constant sense of identity and ownership bound in the group identity and often in coven artefacts.

As well as collective characteristics that identify a CoP, individual members also have different relationships with the community in question. They may fall into one of three ways of belonging to the group that will influence their experience of meaning and identity. Firstly engagement is the process through which members work together to practice, produce outputs as a result of their learning or simply through discussion. The second modality of belonging is that of imagination where individuals develop a sense of themselves and their place in the community and the world. These constructs enable the individual to develop an understanding of their 'fit' and to understand their

relationship with others. Thirdly, alignment allows for the opportunity to explore and understand how local practices line up with those that we may not have active control over both within and outside the community. In other words, alignment offers the ability to develop a sense of what local practices might mean in other contexts.

With these characteristics a CoP may spontaneously develop and flourish and will wane when learning is no longer the prime agenda. Indeed members may not even realise they operate within a CoP and the group itself may evolve without ever labelling itself. The Grove clearly operates as a CoP as one of its overt functions is to create a learning environment. The same is true for the other teaching covens in Perth. However, even for those covens that do not consider themselves teaching covens and do not operate an Outer Court, they may still in fact be a CoP, albeit a closed one as their membership will continue to share practice and thus learn from one another as a result.

By comparison groups that do not exhibit these characteristics such as organizationally based teams, constructed with a specific end in mind or compulsory education classes, will exhibit different characteristics and may operate only under prescriptive direction without self producing motivation. These hierarchically governed groups, which may have a commencement and conclusion date or where sharing common skills is an external means to an end, will not fit the CoP model. Indeed in the early stages of the theory Lave and Wenger (1991) pointed out that CoPs could not be deliberately created. Organisations can form teams which may later evolve into CoPs but the process of bringing people together does not automatically generate a CoP.

This is because the aim of an artificially created team or collective is not to grow in knowledge for the sake of it but rather to gain or increase knowledge and skill sets for a discrete, prescribed and publicised

outcome. A true CoP comes together only to share learning and offer practice and is not concerned with any further outcome that may result from that shared learning. The learning itself is the agenda and the practice the outcome. Thus as the group generates more knowledge they reinforce their strength.

In addition, any group that is brought together to learn for an express and discrete outcome such as classroom based learning disassociates the learner from the context in which that learning may be used. This disconnected approach to learning supports the cognitivist idealisation of learning and perpetuates the pedagogic and andragogic notions that learning takes place as an isolated event without the need for social context and identity connection. This standard and much used paradigm of learning is the platform on which our schools and universities were based with prescribed curriculum designed to teach the individual a defined set of symbology that enables them to act in the world. Thus the process involved a learner who was a, “receptacle of (taught) knowledge, and learning as a discrete cognitive process that largely ignored its meaning in the ‘lived-in world’ ” (Fuller, Hodkinson, Hodkinson & Unwin, 2005 p. 51).

In the case of members of The Grove, successful learning outcomes could not have been achieved from following defined, narrow cognitive prescriptions. To become fully skilled practising Wiccans, they needed more than knowledge and skills, they also needed context to help define meaning and a community in which to develop their own sense of identity. These additional elements of learning, meaning and identity, are essential ingredients that add to the cognitive experience and enable the learner to take full advantage of their learning opportunity (Poindexter, 2003). Wiccans and indeed any individual will leverage off their learning where it is connected to a context that helps define purpose and self.

The membership of a CoP can range in number from just a few through to several hundred and the enthusiasm and passion of its core membership are the key ingredients that ensure its longevity. The essential criterion for membership is the simple desire to learn more about the shared interest and thus membership is often self-selected. Invitations to join a group may occur however and this often occurs where the existing membership, “operate on a gut sense of the prospective member’s appropriateness for the group” (Wenger & Snyder, 2000 p. 142). Clearly this is the process in action at The Grove and all the other teaching covens I visited. Initially a seeker will self select a group but ultimately their inclusion is as a result of an invitation by the coven in question.

Once invited, subsequent activity within the group often determines position within the membership. Thus newcomers may have a limited level of activity while they learn the mores and social constructs of that group. They participate at the outer edge of the group in a kind of apprenticeship but with time and gradual up-skilling through participation, they may gravitate toward a more core membership role (Lave, 1993). This is reflective of the Outer and Inner Court structure of most teaching covens including The Grove where participation is gradually increased as the learner engages in more group practice. When in Outer Court or the outer edge of the CoP, members engage in participation at a minimal level. However, once admitted through initiation to the Inner Court, their engagement intensifies and they gravitate toward a more core and central membership role. Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest that this gradual trajectory from peripheral activity to central participation acts as an agency for meaningful learning and ensures longevity of the community.

Legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) is a construct that empowers learners to gain increasing skills through gradually increasing activities within the CoP. It is a positive term that describes the, “progression toward full participation in the activities and practices of the community” (Light, 2006 p. 158). Rather than viewing the CoP as a sphere with the core members at the centre and the new learners on the periphery, LPP suggests there is no centre and no single, linear path toward that core. Rather LPP is simply a process of gradually being given greater opportunity to participate and thus share with and learn from the membership. Initially newcomers may be given opportunities to learn simpler tasks that provide them with an opportunity to feel a credible and legitimate member of the group but that do not also expose them to significant risk. As their confidence and skill levels increase, so too does their participation and in turn they both share their knowledge with others and gain additional knowledge along the way. Outer Courtiers in The Grove are given opportunities in each of the training sessions to work with their more experienced Inner Court tutors and to practice the skills of Wicca and Witchcraft under supported supervision. As their confidence and skill set grows, so too does their engagement with the group. This form of learning or apprenticeship enables the learner to gradually increase knowledge levels and associated risk levels to the point where they become core members whose skill and passion can provide optimum opportunity for continued group renewal and refreshed communal skill level. Like The Grove, Peter and Kathryn work in a similar fashion with their Outer Courtiers gradually being offered more responsibility as their engagement and practice increases. Rose and Alan encourage their newer Outer Courtiers to learn from their peers by following in their footsteps and copying the actions of their colleagues. As the date for festivals approaches, they offer opportunities for fledgling members to become involved by suggesting ways the festival could be celebrated. The more experienced coven members will take on the task of

designing the ritual but will use where possible the input and contribution from newer members.

This participation at the periphery may include a number of modalities. Individuals may engage actively in discussion and in practice at a safe level that minimises their exposure to failure yet still enables them to be a legitimate group member. Margaret's Outer Court program uses this approach consistently as a means of engaging seekers without pressuring them to perform at a level they're not yet comfortable with. This peripheral activity may also include mentoring and modelling as both these activities offer sheltered access to learning through connection with someone more experienced. In fact in most covens, these two forms of providing learning opportunity are the mainstays of teaching. There is however a distinct difference between mentoring and modelling and this difference has an impact on the participation levels of the individual.

Mentoring in the traditional sense involves a partnership between the mentor as leader and the mentee as learner. The mentor's role is to actively guide the learner and provide a framework of learning that moves them toward a greater level of meaning (Harrison, 2003). Both parties are aware of the relationship and play an active role within it. This method of transferring skill and knowledge is an authentic modality of participation within the CoP concept. Modelling however is slightly different and the relationship is not as overt as it is in the mentoring relationship.

Modelling as suggested by Brennan (2003) is the process whereby an individual observes the actions of another, internalises the behaviours and then models their own behaviour on that of the observed role model. When seekers attend their first open festival, most High Priestesses will suggest that they just follow what everyone else does so that they learn by copying the actions of others. Indeed the same occurs when initiated

practitioners attend the circle rituals at other covens. The unspoken rule of thumb is to watch how the coven leaders and coveners work and follow their lead. Bob explained that when she visits and attends the rituals presented by other groups, she follows the protocol of politely engaging with the practice as it is done in that circle rather than imposing her own practice on them. “It’s like ‘when in Rome’. As long as their ritual requirements aren’t offensive or dangerous, you just go with the flow” she commented. This form of learning is a safe means of gaining skills and of developing a clearer understanding of both the topic in question and the meta processes that foster the generation of knowledge. The learner can increase their understanding of the learning agenda through watching and simulating the actions of others but they can also gain a clearer understanding about the protocols through which that learning takes place. These protocols are the shared repertoire that Wenger and Snyder (2000) described as being one of the three elements that identify a CoP and as such modelling is an authentic means of LPP that provides a safe means of practice for the new comer.

Brennan (2003) expands on the modelling concept and suggests that it is a natural process of learning and, “is unfettered by the rules and boundaries of mentoring” (p. 404). It is not an organised process and as such sits comfortably with LPP as a natural means of gaining tacit knowledge. Rather than its cousin mentoring, which needs to be organised and which can only operate effectively if there is shared understanding and acceptance of the learning practices, modelling is a natural learning process and is an inherent participation modality in any CoP including covens like The Grove.

In his study of PhD students and how they gained their research skills, Hasrati (2005) noted that doctoral students were ‘initiated’ into the research environment and agenda. They were given mock or simulated

tasks and assignments that, “were challenging but not defeating” (p. 560). These activities legitimised their membership within the research team and also offered them opportunities to practise new skills without serious risk of failure. He likens this to LPP in that students were apprenticed into the research faculty through increasing activity and supported to achieve greater participation as their skill base increased.

Another issue surrounding sharing knowledge with others is that of trust. In both offering and requesting knowledge there is inherent psychological risk. In offering knowledge one is exposing oneself to perceived ridicule or rejection while those requesting knowledge are admitting deficiencies and inadequacies that again may expose the requester to ridicule or rejection. Thus, before any transfer of knowledge can take place, trust must be present. This is particularly important where the members are sharing personal information about themselves that involves emotional elements and controversial thought patterns and beliefs. Indeed Roberts (2006) suggests, “Without trust, members of a community may be reluctant to share knowledge” (p. 628). In her earlier work exploring the transfer of knowledge through information and communication technologies she noted that the transfer of tacit knowledge occurs once the pre-requisites of trust, familiarity and shared understanding have been established with the membership. This concept of trust as a precursor to learning is of vital importance to Witches within the situated learning environment of the coven. Witches must have a deep and unshakable level of trust with one another in order to work magick and mutually engage in ritual. In order to learn the art of Witchcraft where so many of the skills involve introspective meditation and thought, the learner must be completely comfortable with their teacher. How can an apprentice Witch discuss her innermost feelings and meditation results with her teacher if she doesn’t feel comfortable and at ease with them? Similarly a Wiccan teacher will not be able to ascertain the level to which the

apprentice has achieved intuitive learning if there is no mutual degree of trust and subsequent open communication. “Some of the stuff you get in meditation is pretty personal” Mark explained. “I wouldn’t want to be sharing that with just anybody!”

One of the other elements that affect the way in which people learn, particularly within the situated environment of a CoP, is that of meaning. In order to gain a better understanding of the relationship between meaning and learning when considering the theory of CoP, it is valuable to distinguish between the interchangeable terms ‘practice’ and ‘participation’. In continuing dialogue theorists use both terms often to mean the same thing but on further analysis, meaning from learning can only be an element when one considers the modality in which engagement in the community occurs.

Handley, Sturdy, Fincham & Clark (2006) describe this issue succinctly in their thought provoking essay on the strengths and limitations of situated learning theories. Essentially they argue that one can learn and ‘practice’ a skill or knowledge set without a clear understanding of its value. In other words, monkey see, monkey do. The learner can *do* the skill set without being able to discuss *why* they’re doing it. If instead we consider the term ‘practice’ as ‘praxis’, we then suggest that the individual is engaging in their community in a meaningful way and such a notion suggests ‘participation’ rather than simply activity as ‘practice’. This participation denotes meaningful activities through relationships and using shared language and tools. Thus practice is simply an observation and mimicking activity while participation includes activity that connects the learner with others through relationship and identity. For instance, when Bob attended the ritual held by a coven not her own, she followed the lead of her host coveners by “going with the flow” as she put it. This kind of polite but disconnected activity is more like practice than

participation. However, when her Outer Courtiers help her to construct a festival rite and actively engage with the process, they are participating rather than just practicing. For the sake of the discussion within these findings, I assume that the terms ‘practice’ and ‘participation’ describe activities in which the learner actively engages with the tools, language and relationships open to them within the group. In other words, they are fully engaged with and an integral part of the process and outcome rather than an observer. For the participant then, meaning is derived as a result of their active engagement but is also a driver of further activity.

In his study on how young people gain skills in an Australian surf club, Light (2006) determined that, “Learning is essentially a social process that is situated within, and shaped by, social and cultural contexts” (p. 156). Situated learning is thus the vehicle through which contextually sensitive up-skilling can take place. Light goes on to suggest that the notions of CoP and situated learning are agents that facilitate holistic learning that in turn, “involves the whole person and not just the mind” (p. 156). Davis, Sumara & Luce-Kepler (2000) further postulate that up to 80% of our learning takes place through our involvement in social milieus and this learning is in fact ‘non-conscious’. The learning is not discretely cognitive and indeed is not always a prescribed outcome of an activity. The learning takes place tacitly, as a by-product of activity and in fact this notion supports the theoretical underpinning of the CoP construct. Lave and Wenger (1991) argued that the CoP is a vehicle for practice and the learning is in fact an end result of that practice. Thus the learning is in fact the meaning that is derived from the practice. Resnick (1987) suggests that individuals need to develop, “Situation-specific forms of competence” that build on their academic understanding and thus enable them to engage with their society in a manner that is more meaningful to them (p. 15). This suggestion reinforces Lave and

Wenger's concept of situation specific practice that results in meaning as learning.

Garrison and Anderson (2003) take a different and somewhat expanded viewpoint on meaning. In discussing education through virtual networks they suggest that there are two goals in education. The first is to use personal perspective to construct meaning while the second is to redevelop and refine that meaning through shared understanding in a learning community. In fact what this suggests is that the CoP is in fact a modality for reflective rather than productive practice where pre existing meanings can be fine tuned through collaborative participation. This is in contrast to the purist CoP theory that would argue that meaning is one of the shared outputs of a CoP and not an ingredient that is brought to the CoP.

In their work on CoPs as knowledge management tools in organisations, Lee and Valderrama (2003) suggest that CoPs are essential modalities for harnessing intellectual capacity that might otherwise go untapped and that they,

... assist an organization with gathering tacit knowledge; knowledge that is hard to transfer, difficult to quantify, and highly personal. This type of knowledge is essential to capture, as it is typically not documented for others to utilize (p. 29).

One of the limitations of this organisationally structured viewpoint of CoPs is that situated learning is relegated to that of a knowledge gathering tool rather than a process of learning. CoPs are the processes and vehicle through which learning takes place and through which meaning is constructed. From an ethnographic standpoint, situated learning and CoPs are more useful concepts when viewed as processes

and vehicles for continuing dialogue and relational milieus rather than a simple means to gain preconceived ideas. When used as a tool, meaning for members is influenced by the prescriptive agenda laid down for the group and is thus controlled by the power brokers.

This meaning in relation to power and position within the group may have a direct influence on the manner in which members interact and relate to their practice. In her thought provoking article in which she explores some of the limitations to situational learning theory, Roberts (2006) suggests that those at the core of a community are likely to hold greater power and thus be better placed to determine meaning. Because they engage in more activity, because they wield greater influence over those at the periphery they are better placed to negotiate meaning. Certainly in a teaching coven, meaning is often derived from the contribution of the Inner Court members. They are the ones who generate the learning agenda for the group and who engineer the overt rituals, the magick and general practice of the coven as well as the covert norms and mores that guide coven participation. Roberts develops this argument further by suggesting that some of those engaging at the periphery of the collective may not move toward greater participation and in fact may remain within the community only ever engaging in limited activities. Thus meaning will continue to be dominated by those who occupy the most dominant positions of power through primary participation. Bob described how some of her Outer Courtiers had chosen to remain as non-initiates and thus not seek full membership of the coven. One could argue that they illustrate Roberts' point but in fact as an experienced High Priestess, Bob makes sure that even the Outer Courtiers who choose to remain uninitiated are provided with a plethora of opportunities to actively engage with group processes and outcomes. They contribute equally to making coven tools and artefacts and often provide more input to festival planning than Bob herself.

Brown and Duguid (2001) suggested that, “Learning is inevitably implicated in the acquisition of knowledge but it is also implicated in the acquisition of identity” (p. 200). They were suggesting that individuals do not simply learn about the topic they are engaged with but they also learn how to *be*. Witches too need to learn more than the sum of knowledge and behaviours of Witchcraft. They also need to learn to *be* so that rather than acting as a Witch, they are in fact *being* a Witch. CoPs, as part of the Wiccan learning agenda, also facilitate the development of identity for the learner and apprentice Witch. Light (2000) argues that long term engagement within a CoP provides the tools that enable the individual to develop their sense of identity using the community as the reference point for that identity. Indeed, he suggests that this embedded learning is, “inseparable from the development of identity” (p. 156). Witches see their Wiccan practices as more than just activity and indeed argue that being a Witch is their identity. “I don’t *do* Witchcraft” Narkia told me, “I *am* a Witch”.

Whilst engaging in practice, individuals have the opportunity to observe others, imitate them, test their own knowledge and skills against the understanding of others and model their practices on those available. This process of skill development occurs using the tools, the language and the concepts inherent in the group and the individual will develop their own skill set to match those already existing and then test them against their own sense of integrity and self identity. This continuing practice and self appraisal within the shared environment of the CoP will enable individuals to, “develop and possibly adapt and thereby reconstruct their identities and practice” (Handley *et al.*, 2006). Allen (2004) suggests that, “Identity, or the way a person perceives their ‘self’, is embedded in culture, knowing and social membership” (p. 161).

The terms 'Witch' and 'Wiccan' are the manifest tools through which the participants in my study labelled themselves and through which they established social membership. These terms have become identification labels that describe not just who Witches are but what they believe and how they live their lives. For many people, particularly the young, the self identified label 'Witch' is a badge to be flaunted for its shock value and for sensationalism. Within the Wiccan community, there is grave concern for the damage that can be wrought from the irresponsible use of these labels. The teenage "fluffy bunnies" as Sammy described them, who see Witchcraft as a fashionable tool that makes them appear 'cool' or rebellious, serve to detract from the meaning that the labels have come to stand for. Amongst the serious Wiccan community there is even more disdain for and frustration with people who generate a public profile for themselves as Witches and who then commercialise that identity for personal fiscal advantage. Ezzy (2003) describes these high profile celebrities as, "media Witches" (p. 8) and some of the people I spoke with had serious misgivings about the material and persona that was being delivered and projected by some of these public figures. While Wiccans generally appreciate the serious material delivered by those they consider 'real' Witches, they expressed increasing frustration at the damage caused to their religion and the meaning of the term Witch by those they felt were more interested in the publicity, fame and fortune than the pursuit of less public adoration. "Do me a favour! How we can take her seriously and embrace her books when it's really about money making and not about true worship?" one interviewee claimed while we were discussing a well known esoteric author. "What value does it bring to Witchcraft?" asked Rose when we discussed the same issue. "How does this commercialism affect how people see Witchcraft? It demeans it. Would the Archbishop of Melbourne write this kind of stuff about Christianity? I think not!"

The identity of a Witch is connected to the label they choose to give themselves and their personal choice of label comes about after informed activity, discourse and engagement with the meaning makers of a coven and the broader Wiccan community. One of the first training sessions most Outer Courtiers go through is a thorough exploration of what Wicca and Witchcraft mean and thus what their personal relationship is to both terms. Seekers learn from their teachers to draw their own conclusions about the meaning and application of Witchcraft and Wicca to their religious practice but also to their lives in general and it is this element that imposes and informs their Wiccan identity. Eisenhart and Finkel (1998) suggested that learning in a social setting enables the learner, “to develop a new or different sense of self” (p. 7) and Witches thus choose their badge of rite as a result of this social interaction within the supportive environment of the CoP.

In addition, this examination of their relationship to Witchcraft also informs their positioning of their Wiccan self with their more public self. Some practitioners choose for whatever reason to keep their Wiccan principles to themselves while others are happy to ‘come out of the broom closet’ as it is commonly termed amongst the Wiccan populace. This identity, and a Witch’s comfort with it, guides how they continue their practice and compounds the meaning of their engagement with their peers, with their practice and with divinity.

Conflicts with Social Learning Theories and the Role of Habitus

While CoPs may provide us with a partial theoretical framework to understand meaning, identity and the part that learning plays in the acquisition of knowledge, there are still some apparent gaps in the CoP structure. The issue of multiple memberships of CoPs and the concept of LPP pose particular problems. Thus we need to explore alternative

explanations that may complement or indeed challenge the CoP construct.

One key factor that may have an impact on meaning for CoP members is that of membership multiplicity. Individuals may be members of a number of CoPs, some of which may overlap in terms of the knowledge development they foster and support. While it is usual practice for Witches to have an allegiance to and thus be bonded to a single home coven, many Witches attend, by invitation, the open rituals of other groups. In participating with other groups on these occasions they contribute to and take from the learning process of that visiting attendance. Moreover, Witches do not learn Witchcraft exclusively from their coven any more than a butcher would learn his trade in a single environment. The apprentice butcher attends a college to gain cognitive skills and usually has a period of indenture in various stages of meat preparation in his workplace location. Likewise the apprentice Witch learns predominantly from her own coven but she may also learn from local psychic fairs, specific workshops held by visiting or resident experts and through the social interactions that take place within the Wiccan community. In addition Witches, like most people, are often members of other CoPs quite distinct from Wicca such as a reading club, informal hobby workshops or volunteer groups. These discrete CoPs are likely to have totally different sets of practice and participation protocols and group expectations that may complement or even contrast with the person's Wiccan CoP and thus provide alternative avenues to create and embrace identity. How do Witches assimilate complementary or contrasting group expectations and develop a broader, holistic self identity that incorporates all stimuli? The Witches in my study were clearly very much at peace with their learning journey, with their place in the world and with the various opportunities for learning presented to them. They had no trouble discarding the potential CoPs they felt were

ineffective at that time even if they might be primary forms of learning adjacent to their coven CoP and they also embraced membership of a variety of CoPs where they deemed them complementary even if the Wiccan community disagreed. The existing theory of CoP fails to address this question of comparative or contrasting CoP membership and ignores the question of how members simultaneously identify with multiple groups where the identity of one might contrast with another.

Furthermore, CoPs do not have a rigid boundary that strictly defines membership criteria, nor are the numbers of members prescribed. As such members may move between CoPs and choose to participate in multiple groups that offer complementary opportunities (Roberts 2006). Situational learning theory determines that meaning is derived from participation within a CoP. It is both the end result of practice and also the phenomenon through which the membership re-defines meaning. Thus members of a CoP will develop a unified and shared set of paradigms that define meaning for them as a collective. This is all very well and good and indeed supports the inter-relationships' that Witches have but CoP theory does not provide an answer to the problem of conflicting CoP memberships. Where a member of one group also chooses membership of a second, third or even a multitude of groups, that second or subsequent CoP may well have a contrasting or alternative viewpoint that challenges the authenticity of the first. How then do individuals grapple with the contrasts and challenges that may develop as a result of multiple CoP membership? Where a Witch who is bonded to her home coven enters the circle environment of another coven whose approach and/or practice challenge her existing CoP schema, how does she conduct herself and enter into meaningful participation, even at the periphery of that second group? The CoP framework does not provide for this conflict.

Using the workplace as a further illustration of this possible conflict situation, a manager may be a member of a specialist technical team and in that capacity is a member of a CoP operating to support and develop that specialist group. Such a CoP may have a shared world view and thus a meaning set that helps them define their role and contribution within the organisation. That manager may also be a member of the organisation's leadership CoP whose shared understanding and worldview may compromise that of the specialist group because of management styles, leadership developments and general organisational politics. How then does this manager sustain meaningful membership with both groups when the shared resources such as dialogue, world views and outputs may be contrasting or competitive?

One answer may be that meaning is not necessarily defined by a CoP but that meaning is brought to the CoP by individual members. This fits with the notion of habitus postulated by Bourdieu (1977). His notion of habitus declares that meaning is the result of association with a particular set of conditions. "Habitus consists of modes of thought that are unconsciously acquired, resistant to change, and transferable between different contexts" (Roberts, 2000, p. 629). Bourdieu suggested that habitus is both the process and the resultant system or structure of dispositions, that is acquired frameworks of perceptions, beliefs, thoughts, actions and postulations, held by the individual as a result of normal exposure and engagement with the social environment in which they act. Thus the social structures experienced by the individual are inculcated into the cognitive and mental frameworks that determine ongoing and permanent meaning for the individual. Bourdieu went on to say that these internal dispositions become embodied so that rather than simply providing direction for the individual at an explicit and conscious level, they become fundamental and durable constructs of meaning that define beliefs and perceptions and inform individual decisions and

actions. As a result Bourdieu argues that the dichotomy between the individual the social environment in which they engage is diminished as the individual reconstructs their systems and structures of belief and meaning (Smith, 2003).

This suggests that meaning is a pre-existing condition, already unconsciously present before we engage with a CoP and thus we bring this meaning paradigm with us and only re-negotiate it if required in the new set of circumstances. This would allow someone the ability to engage with complementary or contrasting CoPs without compromising their own meaning sets and world views. There is then a conflict in terms of meaning between the CoP concept and the notion of habitus. While the theory supporting CoPs would determine that meaning develops as a result of practice within the CoP, habitus prescribes meaning is something we bring to the CoP.

Using habitus as a construct, Bourdieu argues that individuals already own their identity and meaning sets before they enter a new CoP. Thus the Outer Courters who come to The Grove to learn the basics of Wicca and Witchcraft come armed with a schema that already determines the meaning of Wicca and their identity with it. They would have acquired these through engagement with the environments they have continued access to and engagement with. For Alan this would have been with his family as a young child. He was exposed to divination from an early age and already had a clear understanding of esoteric arts. Abigail came to The Grove as an Outer Courter late in 2004 and already had experience with a different tradition of Wicca. She brought to her participation process her existing set of references and applied these to and merged them with the practice she undertook in Outer Court. In discussing learning Call (2004) suggests that, “Every action a person undertakes is accomplished based on the prior learning of that person” (p. 21). This

supports the concept that people come to a new situation with predetermined sets of understandings that inform their continuing learning processes. These meaning sets or world views can be used across different and new groups, contexts and environments and are the platforms of generating practice within different contexts. Thus, through a set of existing conditions, habitus is produced which for each individual consists of “transposable dispositions”, a systemic structure of meaning that will “generate and organize practice” (Mutch, 2003, p. 388). These dispositions and structural meaning sets are then used as the platform to generate practice in new contexts.

This is in direct opposition to the theory of CoP which says that practice generates meaning sets, identity and dispositions. Thus, in each CoP these meaning sets are relevant to that CoP, whereas habitus would argue that the same dispositions are used across a variety of different contexts or CoPs. Mutch (2003) illustrates the role of habitus beautifully when he states, “Rather than a focus on particular contexts in which principles can be employed, the emphasis is on the way in which a similar set of principles is employed across contexts” (p. 389).

Because, according to habitus, the meaning sets and structures already exist for each individual, when an individual enters a new context they will absorb any new ideas and assimilate them into their existing paradigms. This in effect expands their existing thought structures rather than creating new ones as would be the principle within CoP theory. While this absorption and of course expansion of knowledge would indicate a continually growing set of knowledge parameters for each individual, there is in fact a contradiction to this within the notion of habitus. The theory states and reinforces that the predispositions that individuals develop become not just a stable platform from which to operate but a rigid paradigm that expects adherence rather than

modification. People will develop meaning sets that make sense to them and that become their principles of operation. They will use these principle sets to solve similar problems in the future and thus reinforce their value as operating paradigms (Murray & Chapman, 2003). To be faced with an alternative or contrasting principle of operation renders their own predetermined principles invalid and would demand a complete reworking and rebuild of thought paradigms. Such an undertaking is of course hard work and dangerous. Losing the stability and predictability of an individually built, tested and owned meaning set means the owner risks possible failure when faced with new problems. They would not have the fall back of a predictable set of paradigms to guide them through a problem set. Carlile (2002) suggest that, "Changing their knowledge means an individual will have to face the costs of altering what they do to develop new ways of dealing with the problems they face" (p. 446). Thus habitus demands that individuals will hold on to their existing patterns of thought and meaning sets because they provide them with the security to deal with new sets of problems. Whilst this may be valuable within a CoP at times where new situations require innovative thought, it may provide challenges to adapting knowledge across different CoPs. Within a CoP, it is advantageous to hold on to existing meaning sets because to do so reinforces, supports and generates further levels of understanding for all members. However where members operate within multiple CoPs that may have alternative or conflicting agendas, the inability to easily modify principles of operation and meaning sets may prove a hindrance to successful participation across all those CoPs.

With regard to my own research, while the theoretical concept of CoPs supports the manner in which members of The Grove learnt their practice, the notion of habitus goes a considerable way to illustrating why some prospective members continued their association with the group and Wicca while others chose to leave this group or perhaps move away

from Paganism altogether. Habitus makes the assumption that one enters a new experience already armed with an internalised, tested and reinforced world view and this world view allows the individual to either work with a new experience or to reject it because it doesn't fit with their existing pattern of references. When prospective Outer Courters came to The Grove, they usually came with two sets of ideals. One was their pre-existing knowledge set and ingrained beliefs about their world order and the other was a set of expectations that their new experience would deliver a story of experiences that fitted with their existing view of the world. All Outer Courters, myself included, came to The Grove with empathy for the Pagan belief system even if we were not armed with a complete understanding of its intricacies. Just as someone can feel comfortable with a group of people because they are of like mind without knowing everything about the new concept, so too do most seekers come to a coven with at least a level of empathy and comfort with the Pagan philosophies of multiple deity, connection with the planet and a belief in magickal principles and practices. Without that of course, they cannot really consider themselves as Pagan. The differences between individuals who do approach covens are their level and range of expectation about the detailed knowledge they will gain during their association with a teaching coven.

At The Grove, during my time at Outer Court, there were several seekers who came to their first New Moon meeting hoping to find a coven that suited their particular needs. Two of these people came once and never returned, one or two others came for several sessions then moved on while others remained for the long haul. For the two seekers who came once only, their ideas about the way The Grove practised didn't coincide with their existing viewpoints about how they wanted to manifest their belief. In one instance the seeker was in her early twenties and had a rather romantic and unrealistic 'cute' approach to Wicca. In

conversations with the group during her one and only visit she seemed to hold the belief that the craft of magick could provide her with an instant fix for happiness and success in all things. She had no concept of balance with magick and that there is a cost to all magickal work. The group had a nickname for people who had this misguided, romantic, juvenile approach to what they considered a serious belief system. These seekers, usually young and female, were 'fluffy bunnies', so called because the group members felt they only wanted to pursue an unrealistic, fairy tale version of Wicca. In conversations about this, Sammy, Iona and Diana would often blame television programs such as 'Charmed', 'Sabrina the Teenage Witch' and 'Buffy' as well as publications in the popular press that represented Witchcraft as a fun method of performing magical tricks for personal gain without responsibility. They argued fervently that this genre of entertainment trivialised a lifestyle, philosophy and religion that they held dear.

In the instance of the two seekers who never returned, the notion of habitus might suggest that they brought with them their own set of pre-determined dispositions and that there was a clash between those and the dispositions held by The Grove. As such a successful continuing partnership would not be possible. However, with those seekers who chose to continue their association with The Grove, their dispositions were a match with those already evident within group members. Thereafter the process as defined in the theory of CoP took over to ensure ongoing development of knowledge and sharing of practice with those people whose existing predispositions were a good fit with that held by members of The Grove coven. Thus habitus may be seen as the entry agent through which subsequent membership of a CoP is either cemented or rejected. Using the notion of habitus in this manner enables it to become the conditioning agent of initial engagement with a group and

thus the process that determines appropriate fit or mismatch between the seeker and the coven.

In support of the theory of habitus as a means of identifying the match between a newcomer and the group they are entering, Mutch (2003) conducted research on a collection of pub managers in northern England to determine how they created new sets of knowledge as they moved into their new vocational roles. These managers had moved into the hospitality career from a variety of roles and most of them had very little previous experience in managing public houses. Thus as they commenced the role of a managing publican, they had a considerable body of knowledge to develop both from existing staff and current customers. His research indicates that rather than developing CoPs in order to gain the required knowledge, the pub managers used their existing meaning sets to learn the ropes. They were mostly local people and thus were already familiar with the demographics within their area. They knew the world view of the people they served and worked with and they used that existing knowledge to gain vocational control and understanding. Indeed, even when encouraged by the employing brewery to engage with institutionally provided learning and prescribed operational procedures, they invariably chose to use their prior knowledge to modify the required practices to fit within their own pre-conceived notions of quality customer service and operational practice. Such a response to new situations and contexts would support the notion that habitus was at work rather than CoPs. Had the new managers actively sought to gain new skills and knowledge from experienced staff, from brewery provided programs and from standard operating procedures, then the researcher may have been able to identify behavioural patterns associated with recognised CoP paradigms. However, this was clearly not the case with this study. In other words, the pub managers used what they already knew

to help them in their new context rather than, as in a CoP milieu, allowing the new context to direct their practice.

But habitus may not be the answer to all our questions regarding initial meaning transfer for newcomers to a group. Indeed while the concept of habitus goes some way to explaining how our existing meaning sets can influence our engagement within a CoP and to addressing the dilemma of how existing masters, as opposed to apprentices, can engage successfully when they join a CoP, there is still the challenge of the creation of new and foreign knowledge within newly formed or evolving groups.

This issue is compounded by the findings of Guldberg and Pilkington (2006) who studied discussions between tertiary students in a blended learning course designed to provide post-experience professional upskilling to carers and parents of people with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). The students were all either parents or carers of ASD sufferers and thus already members of an overarching and unlabelled CoP from where their identity had already evolved. The researchers noted that while the university fostered a CoP for all students, they self identified within a subset of either parent or carer and formed their own unofficial CoPs as a result. Thus, rather than have their identity shaped by inclusion within a prescribed CoP, students reformulated the COP themselves for a better fit into a more personally defined subgroup. Does this mean then that the range and extent of experiences that one brings to a CoP will determine the validity of one's membership and the subsequent 'fit'? Purist CoP theorists would argue that of course this is the case because CoPs spontaneously form where there is shared understanding.

In this particular instance the identity and relationship with existing CoPs and society as a whole influenced their sense of identity and of belonging within the newly established CoP. Existing experience gave rise to legitimacy of membership and enabled people to move through the

construct of LPP to core membership with authenticity. The researchers noted however that this legitimacy was tested through discussions to determine similarities and differences between the experiences they shared. In other words it was a staged development that grew as a result of trust generation from discussion and experiential comparison.

The staged and gradual process of LPP poses more riddles and challenges than those discussed above however. Fuller *et al.* (2005) argue that whilst LPP may describe apprenticeship trajectory for a new learner, the theory neglects to describe the participatory relationship for the new entrant to the community who already has an existing master level of knowledge. Disregarding habitus, which might say the new entrant uses existing meaning to engage in continued relationships, LPP describes a trajectory from the periphery to the core in line with meaningful participation whilst simultaneously increasing proficiency. However, where a new member already has an extensive range of skills, under the construct of CoP theory they would already be a core member but this cannot in fact occur without exposure to, and a sense of acceptance of, the group mores, concepts, tools, language and shared understandings. This exposure and acceptance can only come about through repeated participation to gain a sense of rapport and group camaraderie especially within the deeply personal environment of Witchcraft. How does one gain that under the LPP prescription, which expects participation to occur depending only on existing skill sets? Thus the LPP theory is only valid when describing new entrants with limited knowledge and understanding of the practice within the CoP in question.

To compound the inadequacies of the CoP theory further, Lave and Wenger (1991) argued that the CoP's sole purpose was to increase the opportunity for learning and thus learning was the driver of the community in question. If this is the case, then the Witches in my study

would more than likely disagree with this concept citing instead that the primary function of The Grove was as a communal opportunity to honour the Divine and to network with likeminded persons they could trust. Lave and Wenger state that a CoP will wane when learning is not the main agenda or function, yet a teaching coven operates for a multitude of reasons, the teaching component of which is frequently a secondary function rather than the primary. How then do covens that operate for the purposes of shared worship but that also teach, continue to operate where teaching is not the prime reason for existence? Taking this question a step further, how do covens continue, as they have in Perth for many years, when they do not offer a teaching opportunity? The members of these covens obviously continue their individual and shared learning journeys but one would suggest that for those closed covens, they could not be described as CoPs because they have an agenda that includes primary functions other than learning?

To examine the issue from another angle, while there has been considerable discourse around CoPs, particularly as a means of organisational development in the business sector, there has been relatively minimal discussion on the most effective modality of actual practice and participation. There seem to be copious articles in academic materials as well as in business journals and periodicals that defend and describe the most effective way to foster CoPs. Indeed the magnitude of business directed articles on CoPs now outweighs those discussing the value of, and the means of, developing learning organisations. CoPs have thus become the current corporate discussion topic of favour. There has however been limited accompanying description on the most effective means of practice itself. In other words how do cognitive, behavioural and humanist theories fit within the vehicle of social learning and in particular a CoP? Whilst an organisation can deliberately create an environment in which CoPs can generate and flourish, there is scant

documentation detailing the most appropriate and effective means of operating within the fostered CoP. There appears to be a recipe to develop CoPs in almost any environment, be they in business, social or academic settings but very little information on how to describe and detail their major ingredient, that of practice. This is extremely important in the corporate sector where capturing knowledge, particularly hard-to-gather tacit knowledge, is of primary importance with a transient workforce. Indeed Roberts (2003) states that in capturing knowledge perhaps we should, “focus more on the practice rather than on the community” (p. 636). This supports Brown and Duguid (2001) who note that the popularity and fascination for the community may well have been at the cost of the importance of the practice itself.

This leads us perfectly to the crux of my research; namely that while I could study how and what Witches learnt, I could not find an all encompassing learning theory that described in totality, or at least to an acceptable degree, the definitive, intuitive processes the Witches underwent to gain their final outcome of ritual knowledge and skills. Moreover, whilst CoP theory goes some way to explaining how Witches learn in the social and situational settings of Inner and Outer Court training sessions and sacred space circles, like their behaviourist, cognitive and humanist theoretical counterparts, it still leaves considerable gaps in explaining exactly how Witches use and gain their intuitive skills of knowing as opposed to simply gaining knowledge. Teaching covens are natural environments for spontaneous CoPs and operate as shining examples of what Lave and Wenger theorised. They naturally employ cognitive, behavioural and humanist learning processes as they share and increase knowledge sets within the CoP infrastructure but even when used as a vehicle for mechanical learning constructs CoPs still fail to explain the intangible element of intuitive learning and the

sense of knowing that Witches develop as a result of their learning journey.

The discrete learning theories and the social theory of CoPs ignore two vital points. First they ignore that learning in fact takes place as a holistic event incorporating all three mediums, behaviourism, cognition and humanism within the social and situational setting of a CoP (Miller, 1999; Poindexter, 2003), but more importantly they ignore the fact that Witches, like other impassioned, dedicated and committed learners, employ additional learning techniques over and above the mechanical constructs of learning to increase their practice skill set. Witches, like their equally passionate counterparts in the political arena, in other religions and in the dedicated volunteer sector, learn using not just recognised modalities but by also employing their inner wisdom, their intuition and what Luhrmann (2004) describes as ‘metakinetic’ learning. She argues that people, “learn to identify bodily and emotional states as signs of God’s presence” (p. 519). They use that fluid, nebulous sense of knowing for which we have no formalised learning theory and that the existing theories have no means of embracing as serious and inherent inclusions. The ‘Whole Person’ theory described in the following chapter incorporates the discrete, mechanical learning processes plus the concept of intuition within the shifting framework of a social learning context. Thus, the model is a more holistic construct that expands and builds on existing theories including CoP as a vehicle for particular learning modalities and incorporates the learning methodologies employed by the Witches who participated in this study. As a result of this more holistic learning experience, the outcomes for the Witches included an advanced knowledge set and a more complete set of Craft skills. But their outcomes are not restricted to simple behavioural skills or cognitive knowledge. The Witches reported gaining a deeper sense of self and a sense of wisdom and knowing. “I don’t just *do* it or *know* it” Rose said, “I *am* it.”

Alan attempted to distinguish between having subject matter knowledge and having wisdom when he said, “It’s not just in your head, it’s in your being”. Thus in order to clarify the outcomes the Witches did achieve through the learning process, it may be beneficial to discuss the concepts of knowledge, knowing and wisdom and the associated constructs that support those differences.

Learning, Knowledge and Knowing

The Witches in my study learnt as many other people in informal groups do. They learnt cognitive references using their mental and intellectual frameworks; they learnt new behavioural skills by observing their peers and they did this all in a social and situational setting. They learnt from and with one another but in the process of learning, they gained more than simply knowledge, they gained a sense of ‘knowing’ or wisdom. They used more than just the usual cognitive and behavioural modalities to learn; they used their intuition and inherent inner skills to come to this position of knowing and added it to their existing framework of intellectual knowledge.

Whilst at first glance the difference between ‘learning’ and ‘knowledge’ may seem elementary, there is in fact a fundamental point here that needs to be explored, that of process versus outcome. My research focused on *how* Witches learnt followed by *what* they learnt and therefore learning and knowledge are the functions of both those dimensions. When studying the manner in which people gain new skills or increase their knowledge base, it is important to ensure that the difference between the process of learning and the outcome of knowledge is clearly defined. In the case of the Witches in this study, they discussed the difference between learning and knowing and felt there was a definite and absolute difference between the two. “Yeah sure” Paul said, “We all learn and in fact we keep on learning all the time even when we’re in the circle, but

it's the feeling we get from connecting with the Goddess that really makes the difference". What Paul was saying was that the process of learning never stops and continues unabated, often without deliberation, throughout a Witch's practising lifetime. While the learning is important, the outcome is what they strive for, that is the knowledge and skill of connecting with divinity.

Knowledge, or 'intellectual capital' as it is more often termed in a workplace organisational sense, is that body of skills and knowledge that enable an individual or group to operate effectively and engage with their world. That knowledge body can include work and life skills, information about the implicit and explicit processes within a group, information about group stakeholders and about the outputs delivered by that group (Cieri and Kramar, 2005). Thus each organisation or group of people have at their disposal a shared body of knowledge and skills that enable them to operate more effectively. Call (2005) expanded on this when he said, "Every day members of an organization use what they learn from the knowledge that is available to them to take advantage of the opportunities and solve the problems they face" (p. 20). What this indicates is that knowledge encompasses two realms of existence. On one hand it is an existing community commodity available to relevant individuals that can be used as a tool for improvement. On the other hand it is a personal knowledge set that each individual has stored. Thus, there are two groups of knowledge that exist. The first is that shared by members of a community that exists as both the provider of shared understanding as well as the pool into which new community knowledge can be placed. The second is the knowledge set that each individual carries with them that enables them to engage with the world in which they live.

The Grove as a community provided a pool of knowledge from which the Witches in this study were able to glean a considerable portion of their learning content. As a collective, The Grove membership shared their knowledge freely with new Outer Courtiers and new initiates and thus operated as a teaching community. In addition The Grove collective also stored new knowledge, deposited from members as they learnt and shared new skills and knowledge with one another. This knowledge was the end result of their learning processes and while the learning process may have been different for each individual, the knowledge outcome was both a shared tool available for all members and an individual library of information used as necessary.

These two sets of knowledge, that shared by the community and that owned by the individual, are of course not mutually exclusive and they may be duplicated across the community and the individual. Individuals may give their expertise to the group thus enriching the community knowledge pool. Furthermore, any individual can modify that same community knowledge pool by offering it new ways of engagement with its membership. The individual may learn or discover a new way of doing things and may introduce this to their colleagues, thus modifying the existing shared understanding and knowledge. Horatio learnt how to work with metals and shared that knowledge with us all so we could make our ritual tools. One of the Outer Courtiers was an expert with herbs and taught us European herb lore that we then used in our home cooking.

Knowledge doesn't travel one way of course and so individuals will increase their own knowledge set by 'dipping into' the community pool to gain new understanding sets as required, rather like a community library where knowledge is stored centrally for all members to access and increase their own skill and knowledge sets. The library can also be increased by the addition of new material supplied by its membership.

During Outer and Inner Court training sessions and indeed on many other occasions, members would frequently ask each other for advice and guidance on dream interpretation, vision messages and practical use of tools. On one occasion Magnolia asked the group how she could meditate when she had no private, quiet space at home to do so without being disturbed. Each member offered ideas as a result of their own meditative practices and this impromptu activity enabled the coven members to gain additional ideas for their own meditations and further developed the pool of shared knowledge.

Knowledge is thus a fluid commodity that is both the end product and the generator of new paradigms and schema. It is both the outcome and the source property for newer and more advanced knowledge. Learning on the other hand, is a discrete process an individual or group goes through in order to access that knowledge, to gain and develop both the community and the individual knowledge sets. One learns by utilising knowledge but one also gains knowledge through learning.

Whilst there are a considerable number of learning theories that discuss how we utilise and gain knowledge, usually grouped under the behaviourist, cognitive and humanist disciplines as already noted, each theory assumes that learning occurs only within that discipline's framework. The theories do not allow for overlap of process and outcome and they prescribe therefore that one learns using one form of learning at a time rather than multiplicity of learning modalities simultaneously. In his explanations of learning Burns (1995) summarises it as, "a relatively permanent change in behaviour with behaviour including both observable activity and internal processes such as thinking" (p. 99). This of course marries the behaviourist and cognitive approach to learning into a rather simplistic statement but does imply that different learning modalities can be employed simultaneously. However when comparing that to the

humanist or phenomenological approach to learning he suggests that learning, “is becoming” (p. 131). In other words learning is a process of discovery that enhances the individual and leads them to greater achievement (Marsick, 1987). Eisenhart and Finkel (1998) suggest that, “the measures of learning become new ways of being” (p. 8). This would imply that through the process of learning, one gains not just knowledge or skills but a sense of self or inner wisdom and knowing.

In the case of the Witches in my study, knowledge as an outcome is inadequate as a descriptor. Whilst of course the Witches all obviously gained knowledge and indeed behavioural skill sets, they also gained a less tangible outcome that defies definition according to conventional learning theories. They gained the ability to look within themselves to find answers rather than simply using cognition, behavioural or humanist learning modalities and in so doing they used this ability to build an additional body of schema that became their sense of knowing rather than a body of knowledge. Knowledge then became more than the sum total output of the learning process and instead was transformed into knowing or wisdom. This wisdom, an intuitive, holistic skill, is the hallmark of effective Wiccan learning and is what ensures a Witch is in fact a ‘real’ Witch as opposed to simply someone going through the motions. This distinction between learning, knowledge and knowing is important because in following The Grove, it was important to determine not just how its members learnt, but what they learnt and then what they perceived as intuitive knowing.

Members came to The Grove as most seekers go to any coven, to gain the skills and learn the underpinning knowledge of Wicca and Witchcraft. They do so assuming that the people from whom they’re learning are providing them with appropriate knowledge that will benefit them on their own spiritual path. When looking for new knowledge or to gain

additional skills in any field, individuals will seek out subject matter experts from whom to learn. In the Grove I observed the flow of knowledge between the 'experts' and the learners. One would automatically think that the experts would be the leaders in the group who had crafted their skills over a period of years, however, this wasn't always so. Each member of The Grove, regardless of the length of time they had been a member, came armed with a knowledge set. Sometimes this knowledge set was limited while other times it was substantial. Abigail and Anna had both been members of covens prior to their membership with The Grove and thus already had a significant level of understanding and expertise. Lilly by comparison had very little practical previous experience when she first joined the group but she still brought with her a sense of dedication and a willingness to share her existing limited understanding. Likewise, the level of knowing, as opposed to knowledge, was also different across the group. The more experienced members, particularly those in Inner Court, exhibited a greater sense of knowing than those who were new to the Wiccan path. This sense of knowing could be observed in the comfort level and the ease with which they assimilated, examined and used new psychic information and experiences in meditative and magickal practices.

In essence it would seem that knowledge is a commodity that can be owned, confined, converted and shared and that can be absorbed and advanced upon by an individual or by a group. However, knowledge as an outcome is a construct generated by an individual or group, most probably using existing schema as a foundational platform on which to build additional schemata. Those foundational schemata are sourced from external opportunities such as research materials, discussion, observation or a similar form of interaction with another person or object. Knowing, or more precisely wisdom, is a suite of intuitive understanding achieved not from external sources such as conversation, research or observation

and thus cognitively based but from internal processes such as meditation, visioning or even accumulated knowledge. Thus, knowledge might be the product of learning but wisdom is the product of self actualisation. From this perspective wisdom is discrete from knowledge and in fact quite separate from the intellectual capacity of the individual. Bado-Fralick suggests that the learning journey of the Witch toward initiation involves the whole self and is the journey through which the practitioner transforms themselves. Using meditation, ritual and magickal practices, the Witch develops knowledge but she also gains wisdom and “she eventually attains those qualities that reflect her true or higher self” (2005, p.73).

If wisdom then is more than or different to knowledge, the Witches within The Grove offered differing contributions of both knowledge and wisdom to the shared pool of experience and these contributions were not necessarily related to their length of membership. Their experiences were freely shared throughout the membership via open discussions, comparison and shared skill practising. Every member supported every other member regardless of their length of tenure and every member’s contribution was valued.

Whilst everyone brought with them their own intellectual schemata and their wisdom, the community experiences were held largely within the longer standing group members and thus were a knowledge commodity held predominantly by the core members of Inner Court. However, one important characteristic of The Grove was that members always strived for equality of knowledge across the group while always understanding that wisdom could not be taught but had to be learnt through experience. With the exception of ritual practices that were shared only at certain degree levels, all other knowledge was freely available to all members regardless of membership status or tenure. Individual group members

tried always to share what they knew and to validate each others' understandings. In all the New Moon and Outer Court learning evenings, everyone's opinion was always welcomed, qualified where necessary but always accepted as important and valid.

There were isolated occasions where this wasn't so and where a single member was 'counselled' about their behaviour or their approach to the fundamental beliefs of Wicca. On each of the three occasions where I observed this, it was with the same Outer Courter and he later elected to leave the group when his request for initiation was turned down.

25th January 2005 Full Moon

Tonight we had an 'open circle'. It happens only once a year and the circle is open only for our own Outer Courters to show them how a circle is erected and to experience the feelings that can occur when in that sacred space. Those of us who have been initiated put up the circle as usual while the Outer Courters looked on. When the circle was up, we cut the door, challenged each one at the entrance and then admitted them. It's an occasion where they can learn the 'practical' side of Wicca rather than just the academic and theoretical part that they're exposed to during Outer Court training sessions. In this event, they get the opportunity to see the circle being erected and to really begin to learn what happens at full moons. It's their first coven exposure to 'being' Wiccan rather than just learning about being Wiccan.

In the weeks leading up to this annual event, the Outer Courters are taught circle theory, including circle etiquette, about the ritual practices that occur and an overview of why the rituals occur as they do. All this is so they can be prepared and can have an appreciation of the experience.

Circle work is serious stuff. While we always have a giggle when things go wrong or not quite according to plan, there's an element of dedication and seriousness about the ritual practices. Rather than just 'following a script' the rituals are reverent, special and follow a methodology that gears the brain toward a deeper level of self insight. Each Outer Courter has been schooled over the last few months about expectations that we may have of them in relation to their behaviour when in a sacred space. They are visitors in our sacred space and this must be honoured. As such, we were all horrified, very angry and frustrated that yet again Wally had messed up.

Right in the middle of the quiet solitude of a group meditation, when we were all peacefully introspective, trying to learn how to become more intuitive than cognitive, his mobile phone went off! It was one hell of a shock for us all! Sammy was furious; all of us could see that. For each one of us it felt like we were violently shocked out of our meditation and it completely ruined the process.

We had a group discussion, right there and then to reiterate how important it is to observe circle etiquette and to ensure that the knowledge taught and shared within the group is seen as important and an essential tool in continued development. Bringing mobile phones into the circle is prohibited not just because they can cause disruptive noise but because it is simply rude and arrogant to have such mundane equipment within a sacred space. To have the phone in circle and to allow it to ring and disturb ritual practice is seen as the height of bad manners and extremely rude and inappropriate.

All of us learnt a valuable lesson tonight. Outer Courters learnt some practical lessons on circle etiquette and those of us from Inner Court learnt firsthand exactly what damage can be done from sudden disruptions to quiet ritualistic meditation. We each had a headache and

some of the group had stomach pains from the psychic disturbance. We also learnt what tolerance a High Priestess has to have as she teaches newcomers!

On the other two occasions where Wally was counselled, it was because he showed the group that he wasn't learning from the discussions and schedule of events in Outer Court. On one occasion, after a year or more of Outer Court lessons, he was discussing a dream he'd had and his description of its meaning showed that he had not taken in any of the knowledge presented to him over the previous year. After more than a year of Outer Court, his knowledge should have been such that he could have easily explained the significance of his dream using existing schemata. Instead he chose to explain the dream using illustrations that were clearly at odds with basic Pagan tenets. This was the first time I ever saw the group reject rather than validate a contribution from any Inner or Outer Court member. I believe their patience with Wally was fast diminishing at that point.

The final occasion where the group members openly rejected his discussion was at a festival in 2005. For Wally it was his final downfall and the occasion that sealed his fate never to be initiated into The Grove.

Lughnasadh, 2005

The ritual went really well and like all times after an open festival, I was feeling very close to deity, calm and at peace. I suspect most other group members felt that way too. The feasts after a festival are always a wonderful opportunity to talk, laugh and socialise with both members and their partners who might not have a working association with the group. They're always fun and a great time to catch up with the elders of the group.

While we were all seated around the table enjoying our luscious dishes of cheese topped roast pumpkin, hot soups, colourful salads and delicious deserts, we were discussing which local groups were taking in learners in their Outer Courts and which groups were choosing to work as closed covens. These discussions always fascinate me because I'm constantly amazed how each coven teaches a slightly different way of Witchcraft and how members thus learn slightly different practices dependent on whose group they join. During this comparison of groups and their Outer Court practices, Wally said he had heard of a new group that had an Outer Court and was open to taking seekers. When asked the name of the group he replied "The Grove". There was stunned silence for what seemed an eternity till someone broke it and said, "You silly sod, that's our group!"

Personally I was horrified that he didn't even know the name of his own group given he'd been coming for nearly two years. To me it showed that he hadn't really taken it seriously, that he hadn't truly 'lived' with us. The reactions from the other group members were interesting. I could see that Anna was appalled. She obviously was quite annoyed at his apparent lack of commitment. Iona was quite tactful and remained quiet but it was obvious she was amazed at the absurdity of Wally's statement. I think there were a lot more thoughts buzzing in the Inner Courters heads that we're going to need to discuss at a later more appropriate time.

After Wally had gone later that night, the Inner Courters had a discussion about his continuing membership of the group. Many of us wanted him to be expelled but the ever patient High Priestess, Sammy wouldn't allow that and instead said that whilst he wasn't ready for initiation, his lack of connection with the group after all this time might also be his own pathway toward moving out of Outer Court and on to another group that he might better connect with.

A few months later, Wally asked for initiation and was turned down. Sammy didn't feel he had learnt enough and apparently offered him the opportunity for some intensive learning with a group elder which he didn't take up. Meanwhile the Inner Courtiers didn't trust his level of dedication enough to vote in his favour and admit him either. Wally left a few months later and joined another coven.

Wally's inability to grasp the fundamental, shared paradigms of this group ensured his inevitable departure. Whilst his knowledge set might have been slightly different to that owned by the group, was it so divergent that it meant he could not be admitted either as a core or continuing peripheral member? This is an interesting point because it begs the question of knowledge legitimacy. Is certain knowledge legitimate whilst other knowledge is superfluous and is the difference between the two based upon who within a group owns that knowledge? In this instance Wally was a peripheral member who often did not display behaviours that indicated dedicated membership but more importantly who did not appear to encompass or use the knowledge offered to him. He did indeed learn, he did indeed go through the processes of learning, but what knowledge did he gain as a result? Certainly not knowledge considered appropriate by The Grove membership. Was it then that the group members self determined that the knowledge they had accumulated and the experiences they had undertaken had allowed them to develop wisdom rather than knowledge and that Wally had not extended his capability that far? Using Sternberg's (2004) approach and his Balance of Wisdom theory, one could argue that the group's impatience came from their belief that they had developed individual and unilateral wisdom through experience but that even after continued teaching and sharing, Wally was still refusing to utilise that shared knowledge and develop his own platform of wisdom.

Blackler (1995) suggests that, “rather than talking about *knowledge*, with its connotations of abstraction, progress, permanency and mentalism, it is more helpful to talk about the process of *knowing*” (p. 1035, original italics). This pulls knowledge back to learning, as outcome is to process and expands on that outcome to give it a more appropriate descriptor for the intuitive work the Witches in The Grove performed. During the later stages of their training, Wiccans are engaged more with the learning outcome as knowing rather than with an ongoing process to gain knowledge. Once initiated and having learnt the basic practicalities of erecting circles and ritual design, the main focus for Wiccans is then on using that wisdom or collected knowledge to have greater insight into their own core self. At earlier stages of training, when they are still learning or gathering knowledge about theoretical underpinnings or ritual practice, they are still testing that new knowledge against existing paradigms. The new knowledge is compared with and tested against existing meaning sets to find out where it fits in the existing internal schemata. However, as Witches become more comfortable with what they have learnt, they’re no longer actively seeking knowledge and thus going through the learning process but instead use their existing knowledge and knowing as outcome to reinforce their place in the world. The Witches in The Grove were using their outcome of knowing to continue their practice rather than using their process of learning to gain further knowledge.

Lave (1993) supports this notional contrast between knowledge and knowing. She suggests that knowledge is in fact simply a set of internalised resources and that these resources can be used in given situations. Knowledge is thus regarded as universal truth and stands alone as an object in and the end product of the learning process. With a universal truth as the object, an individual either has it or not and thus may either be correct or incorrect when problem solving. By contrast

however, if one focuses on the process of knowing rather than the end product of knowledge, the individual becomes free of the constraints of a fixed object or resource. The Witches I spoke to would support this approach citing their ability to ‘feel’ knowing and that knowing is a fluid construct that can be accessed after fervent practice. In response to my asking John what he tries to learn from any specific meditation session he answered, “It’s not about predetermined answers or even questions necessarily. Sometimes you just go within and whatever comes out is what was supposed to be given to you”.

This notion that contrasts the process of knowing with the product of knowledge poses a new set of questions for ethnographic researchers. Whilst we can observe, discuss and ask questions to determine the type and amount of knowledge a subject or society may have, we cannot easily determine how individuals and societies engage in the process of knowing. With knowledge as an end product we can examine our research environment to locate the manifestation of knowledge. We can ask questions, study community documents and make informed assumptions about the knowledge developed within a society and for an individual. However, we cannot so easily generate as clear an understanding about the process an individual goes through to know something. This contrast between process and outcome suggests the researcher needs to approach their study topic in a different way.

Blackman, Connelly and Henderson (2004) suggest that, “knowledge stems from learning stimulated by a perceived problem” (p. 17). This reflects the work of Argyris and Schon (1996) and Popper (1999). Argyris and Schon postulated that a greater degree of quality learning within organisations occurs where double loop learning takes place. Single loop learning occurs where individuals and thus the organisations adapt to new situations by adopting new practices or processes that model

themselves on existing values and norms. In other words when facing a new issue or problem, the individual, the group or organisation develops solutions using existing, accepted norms as a model of process (Wright, 2001; Korth, 2000). When this occurs, they argue, no quality learning takes place. The outcome is based solely on existing paradigms and is merely a modification to processes utilising current expectations. This limited outcome “prevents organisations learning from their errors” (Blackman, Connelly and Henderson, 2004, p. 18). Thus if Witches engaged in single loop learning, they would never utilise their intuitive sense of knowing because knowing can and usually does lead to totally different solutions to those devised during cognitive thought alone. Intuitive, internal knowing taps into understandings at a deeper level not usually available in normal conscious thought.

Double loop learning, by comparison, doesn't rely on existing paradigms in which to locate the solutions to issues and new situations. When individuals engage in this process they explore completely new parameters from which to source solutions and thus gain a new set of skills and knowledge in the process. Groups and organisations that actively engage in this form of learning process increase their ability to master new skills and to gain new knowledge. Rather than reinventing the wheel as single loop learning would, the individual or group breaks new ground and develops an entirely new method of locomotion, perhaps based on hydraulics or even matter transference. They may even determine that the originally required movement from point A to point B is in fact not necessary at all.

Single-loop learning results in the organization continuing its present policies or achieving its current objectives. Double-loop learning leads to the organization modifying its underlying norms, policies or objectives (Korth 2000, p. 87).

Wright (2001) further described this most eloquently when he said,

The distinction between single and double-loop learning can be seen as the difference between trying to discover better ways of doing what we are already doing and questioning if they are the right things to do in the first place (p. 753).

Double loop learning is therefore the process of tapping into resources and schemata not normally available at standard levels of cognitive functioning. During magickal, ritual and meditative work, Witches go into a deeper level of consciousness. They travel further within their own internal pools of knowledge and wisdom and find insights and answers they would possibly never have found had they maintained a purely cognitive process.

Double loop learning however, like the sense of knowing that Witches develop, is hard work and not the usual practice for individuals or indeed workplace organisations. It takes much more energy to develop an entirely new concept or find an inherent intuitive solution than it does to modify an existing one. Thus, most organisations and individuals naturally gravitate toward single loop learning and cognitive levels of consciousness rather than a sense of knowing.

Conclusion

The Witches in my research identified that learning about Wicca and Witchcraft is not simply about studying fundamental practices and theoretical underpinnings associated with cognitive processes. Neither is it just about learning the mechanical tasks of ritual design and conduct or circle casting in a behavioural fashion, or even only about a humanist endeavour to grow as a person. Apprenticing to Wicca includes those elements as contributing learning ingredients within a relevant Wiccan situational setting but it incorporates so much more. As well as using

their brain and their hands, they use their minds, their hearts, their soul and the potent, pure essence of their core being. They *feel* their learning as well as *know* their learning.

Summer 2004 An Outer Court visit to Jorgensen Park

We've been talking for several months now about the comfort we've developed and the reliance we all place on the security of a known environment. We all feel comfortable at Sammy and Fred's house for Outer Court and we all feel so secure in our home circle on Full Moons. Sammy has been saying for quite some time that this comfort can limit our ability to cast circles and do magickal workings anywhere else. She's also been telling us that we need to learn more about what the world around us feels like and not just from the comfort of our home circle. So we all met at Jorgensen Park tonight to learn about ley lines.

We gathered at the picnic tables as the sun was going down and made sure we had on our walking shoes, had our torches for some light and jackets to ward off the coming evening chill. Tonight Sammy was going to teach us to feel ley lines and the energies of the earth. I've only ever really felt this once before and coincidentally it was at this place but that was a couple of years ago, so I found this evening's activities a fairly new experience.

Sammy led the way down a hill, along a wide path. The gumnuts were strewn across the ground and we slid over them like ball bearings. To our right a path branched off into the woods and Sammy and Fred forged their way through the bracken and bush toward our first stop of the evening. It wasn't a long walk, just a few minutes but as the sun went down over the hill and darkness began to descend, the environment changed as though we had travelled a thousand miles. We came to a large rock, big enough for us all to scramble up on to and there we sat

and waited for darkness to fall completely. The forest surrounding us was quiet, peaceful, still. The trees were tall and towered above us as we lay looking up at them. Diana sat cross legged looking toward the South, quietly contemplating her own private thoughts. Anna, always the chatty, bright and vibrant one, sat chattering to Cath. I lay on my back staring up at the porthole of sky above me and feeling the stored warmth of the summer sun inside the monolith below me.

When we were all settled, Sammy began to teach us about ley lines and about the different energies that surged along these invisible lines around the planet. It must have been about half an hour as we listened to her and discussed ley lines and what it might feel like to experience them. But it was later on that evening when the real learning took place.

We moved away from the rock and headed south down another path through the bush that led us to a different area of the park. By now the moon was up and while it wasn't a big moon to flood us with light, it was enough to give us silhouette, monochrome views of our surroundings. Around us were native trees of many types but mostly pale ghost gums that appeared as stark relief against the dark background. As we walked further, Sammy asked us to look to our right and tell her what we saw. In front of us stood two tall ghost gums, white, and strong like sentinels. Just beyond them was a grove of smaller, juvenile ghost gums that seemed the same as any of the other trees that surrounded us. But at the centre of this grove were a patch of dark, grizzled trees that bent outward and away from each other in a bizarre circle formation. It was as though they were all desperately trying to escape from the centre point they surrounded but were tied at the roots to their own inevitable destruction. It really was quite eerie. "They look dead" someone said. We were all struggling for words. Sammy suggested we move closer to the patch of dark trees and tell her what we felt. "It's so cold" Cath said. "It's so dead" was all I

could say. The feeling of negativity, of desperation, of blackness was quite overwhelming and I forced myself to put my hands to one of the blackened trees to try and feel its energy. It felt like it was struggling to escape but knew it never would.

I remember thinking at that time and later that evening that it was a little odd and possibly irrational to be *feeling* a tree. How does one feel what a tree might feel? How does one feel something that you cannot see or cannot explain? But I did feel an extremely strong raft of negative energies around that circle of trees, as did my peers. Sammy taught us that night that such energies are not something to be afraid of but rather to be respected and while we could have discussed this forever during Outer Court lessons, the actual experience and overwhelming feeling of being engulfed in a wash of negative energy is something no text book, no verbal discussion or demonstration could ever completely describe. I could not have gained the depth of understanding, the depth of *knowing* I did without being engaged in a situational learning milieu that encouraged learning with who I am rather than what my brain could consider.

In the next chapter I will contextualise situational learning within the coven and Wiccan community by exploring the structure of a coven and how individuals relate with both the coven and Wiccan community.

Section 1 - How Witches Learn
Chapter 3

**THE WICCAN WITCHES OF THE WEST: WITCHCRAFT AND
WICCA IN PERTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

Wicca and Witchcraft

We've all read the fairy stories; you know the ones. The Witch who eats children like Hansel and Gretel, the wicked Witch of the East who enslaves an entire race of Munchkins, Witches who cast evil spells that ensure they achieve their dastardly, wicked ends. Then there's the occasional story about good Witches like the good Witch of the north who gives Dorothy the magic shoes, or Hermione Granger whose friendship with Harry Potter brings about positive results. Whether the portrayal is good or evil, the stories are usually woven to conjure feelings and thoughts of mystery, magic and secret rituals and practises known only to a select few. So what really happens in the world of Witchcraft and Wicca in contemporary Western Australia? Who are Witches and what is Wicca? In this chapter I describe the learning opportunities and teaching responsibilities that evolve as one enters and learns to operate within the social and spiritual construct of the coven and the Wiccan community of Perth, Western Australia.

Witches and Wiccans are a group of people who come from diverse backgrounds and socio-economic groups throughout Europe, America, Australasia and indeed most of the Western world (Cookson, 1997; Griffin, 1995; Hutton 2000). Here in Perth, Western Australia, Witchcraft and Wicca has a particularly strong base of practitioners, due in part to the early creation of a well publicised organisation known as the Church of Wicca. Whilst this organisation no longer exists, its legacy is a mature, well developed and growing community of people with close ties to their Australian spiritual heritage and to the ongoing development of their

faith. Apart from the Church of Wicca there were also numerous other groups in the 1970s generating a hereditary group of practitioners and together this robust platform of origin has resulted in a strong community of Pagans within the Perth metropolitan area.

But before we explore local practises, let us first discuss what the terms 'Witchcraft' and 'Wicca' mean to the participants of this research who follow these paths in Western Australia. This issue is fundamental to the broader Western Australian community and to the wider Pagan community in general and provokes intense discussion amongst its membership largely because the terms present a dichotomy. On the one hand the two words are descriptors of different practises, each of which conjure different images for both practitioners and the wider society. On the other hand the two terms are used interchangeably within Pagan community and often mean exactly the same thing. Whilst the debate about the correct use of the terms continues, the community is beginning to identify with and agree that each term may refer to a different aspect of the same practise.

Thus the term Wicca is gradually becoming recognised as the label for the belief system that one follows. It is the body of religious fundamentals that makes up the core foundations of practise. Therefore a person is a Wiccan because they believe in the fundamental principles of that religion. A Christian for instance believes in a single deity known as God whilst a Wiccan believes in the balanced multiplicity of deity. Thus a Wiccan follower may classify themselves as Wiccan rather than a Witch.

Witchcraft on the other hand is the practice and methodology of *being* a Wiccan. Just as Christians attend church for services and celebrations such as Easter and Christmas and pray and engage in rituals such as Holy Communion so too do Wiccans follow similar practises. Where Catholics

may go to Mass and ritually eat wafers and wine as representations of the body and blood of Christ, Wiccans may eat cake and wine as symbolic representations of the bounty of the planet. Like Christians, Wiccans attend their services and celebrations and engage in rituals that help them identify with their deity and recognise the spiritual significance of the time of year. Just as Christians celebrate Christmas on December 25th, Wiccans may celebrate their own festivals such as Midsummer on the longest day of the year or Imbolg on July 31st. Following these rituals, the festivals and practice associated with them is regarded as the craft of Wicca or Witchcraft. Wiccans may therefore also classify themselves as Witches partly because that's the traditional terminology for a Wiccan and partly because their religious practices are those of Witchcraft. Thus a Witch is someone who uses the practical elements of Wicca as a means of manifesting their beliefs. Many practitioners are happy to label themselves with either title while still others prefer to label themselves simply as Pagan. This overarching term affords them the luxury of aligning themselves with the broader agenda of nature based religions and rather than being associated with a defined dogma, they have the freedom to practice a broad range of Wiccan, Druidic or similar earth based traditions. Whilst some practitioners may strongly identify with one term over another as a self descriptor, most practitioners use the terms interchangeably.

However, just as there are people in the broader community who would not consider themselves religious but may occasionally pray for a particular outcome during times of trouble, so too do some people engage in magickal workings and rituals without necessarily believing in the Wiccan fundamentals. These people are regarded only as Witches but not as Wiccans because they perform rituals and use magick but do not follow the religious components of Wicca. Thus one can be a Witch without being a Wiccan but one cannot be a Wiccan without being a

Witch. As such someone may pray and hope for a solution to their problem as might a Witch or in fact any member of society without necessarily being religious but a devoted Wiccan or Christian, Buddhist or Muslim would also engage in the accepted practices of that religion.

To further compound the complexities of this discourse, the descriptive title of Wiccan versus Witch is also sensitive to the initiatory practices of the traditional elements of Wicca. Many people feel that in order to be considered a Wiccan one must have undergone the traditional initiation into first degree. This embeds the Wiccan into their religious history and introduces them into their spiritual community as a valid, authentic member. Initiation is seen as the rebirth into their spiritual home and is a foundational element of traditionalist practice. Just as baptism, christening and confirmations in the Christian faith are rituals of welcoming and acceptance of a new member to the community, so too are initiations. Thus many people feel that without such initiation, one will always only ever be a Witch. These Wiccans would argue that one cannot be Wiccan without an initiation into the coven through an initiatory rite of passage.

Throughout my thesis I have used the term Witch rather than Wiccan or Pagan predominantly because several of the interviewees preferred that title. Many of the practitioners I interviewed preferred to follow a less traditional path than that taught to them and instead of following the Alexandrian or Gardnerian philosophies which are the founding traditions of modern Witchcraft, particularly in Perth, they had expanded their practice to include aboriginal influences, Egyptian, North American and African deities and concepts. Whilst all but one of the interviewees had in fact been initiated into an Alexandrian or Gardnerian tradition and thus were entitled to label themselves as Wiccan, many chose instead to view themselves as having a broader range of practices available to them.

Where this text refers to traditionalist Wiccan principles, then the term Wiccan is used. Otherwise, the term Witch is used as a means of offering respect both to those practitioners who practice the traditional elements of Wicca and to those who have developed a wider platform of ritual practice.

As a mark of respect for the Witches I interviewed and as is Wiccan protocol, the term Witch, Wiccan and Wicca have all been capitalised as would occur with any other mainstream faith system with the exception of references to fairy tale characters or other non religious titles. The titles Witch, Wiccan and Pagan are also not gender specific and a male practitioner is equally a Witch as would be a female practitioner.

The patchwork of complementary and differing use of the terms Witch and Wiccan is reflected in the diverse membership of the Wiccan community in Perth, Western Australia. Witches may follow their religion and engage in Witchcraft alone or they may work with a specific group. Those who work alone are known as solitary practitioners and they may work alone for a variety of reasons. Perhaps because they live too far away from any local group, perhaps because they have not found a group whose beliefs and practises reflect their own specific needs, perhaps because they simply prefer to explore their religious practise without the influence or contribution of others. Many solitary practitioners who primarily work alone may, after invitation, choose to work with an open group for a particular festival or event without necessarily being an accepted member of the inner core of that group.

Whilst there are many practitioners who work alone, there are also several groups across the Perth metropolitan area that reflect the diversity of Pagan beliefs and the richness of practice choices. These groups, self titled as group, coven or circle may be open, may teach and allow new membership or may be closed and include only original core members.

Some of the current covens are the direct progeny of the Church of Wicca and continue the traditions set by that organisation while other covens, born from alternative but equally traditional sources continue their own streams of practice. Most covens regardless of their heritage have shifted their practices over the last decade to reflect a developing and dynamic exploration of their craft.

The Beliefs of Wicca

So what do Wiccans in Western Australia actually believe then? One of the easiest ways to explain Wicca is to cast it into relief against its mainstream counterpart in Australia, that of Christianity. The main difference between Wicca and Christianity is the multiplicity and loci of deity. Unlike Christians who believe in a single, patriarchal God, Wiccans believe in multiple deities, both female and male (Adler, 2006; Bado-Fralick, 2005; Hume, 1997; Hutton 1999). Other than strict Dianic traditions that tend to follow only female Goddesses, “the Gods and Goddesses of different pantheons are viewed as different manifestations of the same forces” (Berger, 1999, p. 16). Some Wiccans consider that whilst each deity may have a particular aspect as their main strength and focus, they are in fact just different ways at looking at a single energy or higher being while other practitioners prefer to see the Gods and Goddesses as entirely separate and discrete deities. Regardless of this difference in approach virtually all Wiccans see the Gods and Goddesses as an, “archetype or source energy” and thus although they are known to be an all powerful, amorphous energy, they are often personified for the sake of simplicity and better understanding (Eason, 2001, p. 20). Each God and Goddess is the personification of a particular aspect of that higher source energy and they are invited in to rituals and workings at specific times for specific reasons. Thus during ritual if a Wiccan individual or the coven wishes to discuss, work with and learn about a particular value such as forgiveness, parental love, physical health or

dogged determination, they will invoke or 'call in' a God or Goddess whose aspect represents that particular value. During that ritual, that deity will be the patron or matron deity and the reference point in which the ritual is based. Similarly if an individual or coven wishes to perform a particular work of magick, they will call in the most appropriate God or Goddess to aid them in that ritual.

While Luhrmann's work focuses largely on magick, she does note that the Goddess is "the personification of nature" and that the theme of deity within Witchcraft is "cyclicality" (1989, p. 46). This cyclicality is evident in the repeat invocation of favourite deities from one season to another. Berger notes that "the deities are worshipped at the celebration of the eight sabbats at the beginning and height of each season (1995, p. 24). Bado-Fralick reflects this observation stating that different deity will be invoked depending on the season. "Goddesses and Gods are generally worshipped within the context of the seasonal cycles of Nature" so that depending on seasonal reason for the ritual, the most appropriate deity is invoked (2005, p. 35). For example the Goddess Brigid may be invited to attend a ritual held at Imbolg in the height of winter, on or around the 31st July in the southern hemisphere. Brigid traditionally provides protection to the home during the cold and dark winter months and so her presence is particularly valuable at this time.

Whilst some covens in Western Australia may use only Celtic pantheons and others perhaps only Egyptian pantheons, still other covens that have expanded their repertoire of references will have a variety of pantheons including Roman, Hawaiian, North American or any other useful family of Gods and Goddesses. The Grove is a non traditional coven that is happy to explore a variety of pantheons and as such its members learn about a broad range of Gods and Goddesses. Indeed, during 2005 when each coven member was required to design a Full Moon ritual and

dedicate it to a particular God and/or Goddess, we invited in a broad array of differing deities. For example, Diana dedicated her Full Moon rite to a Hawaiian Goddess while Cath chose an Egyptian Goddess.

The Wiccans I encountered also believe, and were quick to point out, that divinity is resident within, and is the makeup of every human, animal, plant and part of the environment around us. “Through religious ritual and magic, feminist Witches and women in the Goddess movement attempt to link what they believe is the divine within them to the divine around them in the natural world” (Griffin, 1995, p 39). Mark, like many others I interviewed, was quite adamant about this and declared that, “We are God and Goddess. It’s not some bearded guy living up in the sky. It’s in us, it is us”. The Wiccans in this study therefore believe that searching for external answers to internal, personal problems is pointless.

It is worth noting that this is not necessarily universally adopted amongst Wiccans worldwide. Many practitioners believe that deity is discrete from the individual and thus the practitioner has a relationship with the divine rather than being a manifestation of the divine. Bado-Fralick experiences indicate that the Gods and Goddesses are “*not merely metaphors, but exist as real members of a spiritual community*” (2005, p. 36, her italics).

However, given that the Wiccans within this research believe that deity and divinity resides within each one of us, these Wiccans would argue that the answers should also be within. This is articulated in one of the most frequent and basic of all Wiccan rituals, that of Drawing Down the Moon. In this ritual, the High Priest calls in the Goddess and focuses that energy into the High Priestess. She thus receives messages from deity and can pass those on to those gathered around her. Having received the focused, concentrated energy of divinity in this rite, the High Priestess

will often deliver a speech known as “The Charge” which ends with the following words.

And thou who thinkest to seek for me, know thy seeking and yearning shall avail thee not unless though knowest the mystery; that if that which thou seekest thou findest not within thee, then thou wilt never find it without thee (Farrar & Farrar, 1981, Part 2, p. 298).

This foundational principle, that the Divine is within each person, is what directs so much self exploration within Wiccans through meditation and other divinatory practices. They believe that they hold the answers to their own issues and simply need to access that material. Engaging with the God or Goddess within is the doorway through which such knowledge becomes available. This belief in internal divinity also commands that Wiccans must respect the beauty and value of all beings and the environment in which they live for all this also makes up the divine. Thus Wiccans hold dear the principle of reverence and respect for their fellow humans and for the environment around them. Many Wiccans are also keen activists for environmental protection and similar causes as they believe this is a way to truly manifest their belief in the value of planet Earth as a mother Goddess and protector.

As a complementary element of the God and Goddess being internal energy sources and thus each individual having control over themselves rather than being controlled by an external, distant deity, this also means that Wiccans believe they are capable of controlling their own futures. Given that they are in fact the God and Goddess manifest, they have the ability to arrange their own lives and bring about circumstances that will meet their needs. Fate of course is not completely discounted as serendipitous and accidental situations are a natural by-product of a chaotic universe but generally speaking Witches and Wiccans believe

they are fully capable, equipped and indeed entitled to manifest their life in the most effective way for them. This then is magick in its simplest form.

Magick amongst Wiccans is often spelt deliberately with a “k” to distance and, “differentiate it from illusions or miracles” (Amber K, 1998, p. xvi). Witches take their magick and spell-craft very seriously and indeed the practice of all magick is governed by a self imposed law titled the Wiccan Rede. The Rede may be worded slightly differently depending upon the Wiccan tradition to which the Witch belongs but more often than not is quoted as, “An it harm none, do what you will” (Farrar & Farrar, 1981, Part 2, p. 135). Essentially it is an ethical proposition that demands that magick can only be conducted for good purposes and must not interfere with the free will of any other person. It cannot harm anyone, including the person performing the spell, neither must it bring harm to any creature or living object or to the planet. Thus the popular misconception that Witches frequently perform hexes and destructive magick is exactly that, an ill-informed misconception.

Magick can be contrasted and compared to Christian prayer. Prayer as a ritual is often seen as a conduit to God and a means of asking for circumstances and events that are needed or desired. Magick is often used as a similar conduit for asking for, and indeed generating, those same circumstances or events. Many Witches will argue that one difference between some forms of magick and prayer is that while Christians may pray to an external deity and seek permission for their needs and wishes to be granted, Wiccans may use a ritual of magick to generate those circumstances and events for themselves. Given that many Wiccans, and indeed most of those I observed, believe that deity resides within them, in fact *is* them, rather than an external being, they believe they already have the power to bring about the end result. That is not to say that Wiccans

will work magick for any immature, irresponsible or trivial desire, far from it. The Wiccan Rede would preclude such flippant magickal activity.

September 2006, Full Moon

We did some slightly different work tonight than usual. I get the feeling that Sammy is letting us experiment with different ways of working magick and connecting with deity. Anna and I are getting much closer to going 2nd now and I think both of us feel much more confident in our abilities than we did one and two years ago. Sammy seems to see that and lets us try new ways of doing things.

Normally if we want to raise some power perhaps to send some healing energy to someone we'll do it through a guided white light meditation but tonight we supplemented that with some candle magick. Anna has an award dinner coming up. Her employer has entered her into the national Young Retailer of the Year competition and of course she's hoping she'll win. She wanted to do some candle magick to increase her chances of winning. Iona and Cath both had things they wanted to work some magick for as well so armed with candles, they did some magickal workings.

I've done quite a bit of magick myself for various things and always found it incredibly powerful so I tend to do it sparingly and only when I think it absolutely appropriate and essential. So tonight I chose not to do any magickal working as I have no outstanding needs. Having said that, I still raised energy and pushed it into the collective white light ball that the girls dipped their candles in to. I love candle magick, it's one of my favourite ways to send my will and intent out to the universe. The gentle light of the flame and the power of the energy it releases is quite calming and restorative.

On this occasion the group performed candle magick as a means of generating desired outcomes for themselves. The methodology included practices designed to connect with the deity they believed resided within them so they could be their own catalyst for change. In addition, the practices hinged on the belief that all change comes about as a result of direct connection with energies that create outcomes. Shanafelt (2004) suggests that, “magic is a type of manipulation of ultra-natural forces to bring about desired results” (p. 336). Barnes (1990) suggests that magick is simply the use of tools, words and processes that control naturally occurring forces. In his seminal work Frazer (1975) described two principles of magick that he titled the Law of Similarity and the Law of Contact or Contagion, both of which he suggested were related to, and in many instances a precursor to science. By comparison, Hume proposes that Wiccans see magick as,

the art of bringing about changes in the physical world by using subtle mental energies aligned with the Divine forces in the universe and channelling those forces to serve a particular end (1997, p. 144).

The Witches in my research would agree with Hume and much of the Wiccan material support’s Hume’s claim. Cunningham, a prolific Pagan writer prior to his death saw magick as, “moving energy with purpose” (1993, p. 77) or bringing about outcomes as a result of intent. How that intent is channelled toward an outcome is via spell-work and spells may be crafted in a number of different ways using a variety of ingredients. Buckland (2001), a Saxon Witch, suggests there are seven different types of magick while other Wiccan authors from differing traditions suggest there are more and others suggest fewer types of magick. Again the details differ between different forms or traditions of Wicca.

Magick can be worked alone or as a group by members of the whole coven using candles, herbs, cords, talismans, poppets or even simple meditations. The tools of magick are used as focal points for directing personal imagery and power and visualising the desired outcome. Most of the magick done at Full Moon Esbats by members of The Grove is done using guided meditations and visualisations rather than tools and objects.

In my research I was exposed to the values of the Wiccan Rede consistently with invitations to attend various rallies or expressions of concerns for situations that worried some practitioners. When I first met Rose and Alan, they were doing a considerable amount of magickal work to support the plight of captive and abused bears while others were involved in either activist or political lobby groups aimed at preventing damage to flora or fauna both locally or globally. After violence or natural disasters across the world, our Full Moon magick at The Grove, like that of many other covens, would often focus on sending healing energy to those affected by such events. One such event was particularly touching for me and left what will probably be a permanent memory of the devastation that can be addressed and healed by the simple intent of healing magick. At the time, I was working for an international humanitarian organisation, running their training college, but like all the staff in this organisation, when a national or international crisis occurred, all staff were required to respond according to their skills.

September 28th, 2004, Full Moon.

What a powerful night it was tonight. As always I feel reinvigorated by our Full Moon rituals. It seems to charge my batteries but tonight it seemed to do much more than usual, probably because it was so personal. It also made me so tired though as well. It was like I gave so much of myself tonight but I got so much in return.

The Jakarta bombing occurred just over two weeks ago on September 9th, where terrorists exploded a bomb outside the Australian embassy in Jakarta that resulted in 9 dead and 161 people getting injured. This is not the first time Indonesia has been rocked by such ripping violence that has emotionally devastated the Balinese and Australians. Like 9/11 where it seems the whole world was touched beyond anything known before, these bombings have forced shock waves through many of us. Not only do I feel the pain of those events but also know firsthand about the devastation it leaves behind. Part of my job working for a humanitarian organisation involves facilitating the necessary surgery and health care here in Perth for those victims unable to be treated in Bali. Right now I'm looking after a young mother whose hand was blown off by the bombing and who can't be treated in Indonesia because her injuries require specific expertise not available in her own country. She's a young woman, a student, a wife, a mother. She's a normal person, just like me. She's not an activist, a terrorist or a political target. She was just an innocent woman sitting in a bus as it drove past when the bomb went off. She was in the wrong place at the wrong time but she was so lucky as well because the woman sitting directly behind had her head blown off and was killed. How strange fate can be sometimes. My job is to make sure she gets the surgery she needs, to make sure her family are cared for, to give her support, comfort and to just 'be there'. I'm so blessed, so privileged and so overwhelmed at being given the opportunity to help someone whose life has been turned upside down by such utter devastation and violence.

Tonight we did some magickal work to help her heal. She's had two lots of surgery already with months and months of recuperation to go and more operations over the next six months to restore her shattered hand. While I'm in awe of her inner strength, I can also see that the bombing has left a deep scar in her psyche that constantly bubbles below her calm mask of coping. I really like her, she's an amazing woman. To honour

and help her, Sammy led us through a white light meditation where we stood in a circle, and generated a huge ball of pure, healing, restorative energy and then we sent it to her and all those people affected by that horrible event. I know we've done this kind of work before with other natural disasters or acts of violence but I've never been so close to it myself before as I am this time. This time it wasn't just like I was giving and sending some love and energy to someone I didn't know, this time I do know them. I see her every day, I see her pain, I see not just the bandages on her hand that hide her ripped tendons and shattered bones but the smile that hides the shock and the unspoken question of "Why me?". This time it's personal, this time it's my pain too. I cried as did Cath. This time the terrorists bombed us too.

Many of the groups in Perth and the solitaries that practice alone sent healing energy to those affected by that event and to those affected by 9/11, the other Bali bombings, the tsunami and so many other global events. High Priestesses and Priests use these events to teach their coven colleagues about the strength of magic and the need for constant respect, reverence and awareness of the forces around us. While the subject matter of the learning may not always be joyous, the events are often used as opportunities to re-evaluate our own gifts and to revisit our need to see divinity in all beings no matter how geographically remote.

The Organisation of the Coven

Wicca, like many mainstream religions, has various different streams within it. Practitioners of a given stream may adhere to the fundamental tenets of that religion but may hold differing views and thus practice their faith in slightly different ways. Samples (1993) suggests that, "While the church's unity is of central importance, Catholicism possesses incredible diversity - Catholics are anything but monolithic in their beliefs" (p. 32). He goes on to suggest that there are in fact six main streams of

Catholicism including ultra-traditionalist, traditionalist, liberal, charismatic/evangelical, cultural and popular folk. Whilst all these people may be regarded as Catholic, each stream focuses on and supports a particular methodology of practice.

Similarly Wiccans have different streams or forms within the broader umbrella of the faith. The original form, or 'tradition' as each of these forms is known within the Wiccan community, was Gardnerian, named after the founder of modern Wicca Gerald Gardner. Contemporary Gardnerian Wicca thus follows the original principles and practices laid down by Gerald Gardner and most Wiccan traditions stem from this legendary pioneer. Alex Sanders trained with Gerald Gardner but after being initiated by another Gardnerian practitioner he later deviated slightly in practice and a new tradition was born entitled Alexandrian. Further traditions developed and indeed continue to develop and span the scope from the ultra-traditionalist Gardnerian through Celtic, Faerie and female centred Dianic traditions to eclectic practices that revere and tap into all manner of deity pantheons and indigenous practices from a variety of continents. However, regardless of the diversity of tradition, Witches all follow a core group of fundamental beliefs that guide their practice (Hume, 1995). So the Wiccan tradition that one follows will most likely affect the hierarchical organisation and most certainly the functional practice of the coven with different traditions exhibiting different customs. Essentially each tradition follows the basic fundamentals of Wicca with its belief in a polytheistic paradigm, magick, the Wiccan Rede and so on but the details of how they practice may be slightly different. The groups in Perth span a variety of traditions, some are closed to new members, some loose with a shifting membership, some simply practice in a closed group while others offer teaching opportunities to those wanting to learn.

The groups that I visited in Perth were all teaching groups. The interviewees I met were primarily from four covens plus my own and there were also two solitary practitioners. Whilst The Grove is an eclectic coven following a broad pantheon of deity, another is strictly Celtic, another is based in the Alexandrian tradition but uses other pantheons and indigenous additions where appropriate, and the other two are traditionally Alexandrian, one more fundamentalist than the other. My own High Priestess Sammy and another interviewee and High Priestess Margaret, both did some advanced training with the same teacher and thus run their covens along similar lines. These five teaching covens, The Grove included, are the main ones in Perth and form the mainstay of the teaching community.

There are a small number of other groups, mostly closed and access to their membership is more difficult to obtain. Whilst closed groups do not allow new membership or restrict their membership, the teaching covens will occasionally allow new members to join but only where there seems to be a mutually acceptable level of spiritual and personal comfort and then only through a specific hierarchy of membership that reflects the depth of knowledge and experience of its membership.

Generally speaking, teaching covens in Perth follow the European model of membership and thus are made up of two groups of members known as Outer and Inner Court. Within the Inner Court there is also a hierarchical level of membership and in order of skill level and knowledge they are known as first, second and third degree levels. Each circle of membership is open only after discussion and agreement from coven members of that circle and above and then only after an initiatory rite specific to that level. Inner Court is in fact the dedicated core membership of the group while Outer Court members remain at the periphery until after their initiation.

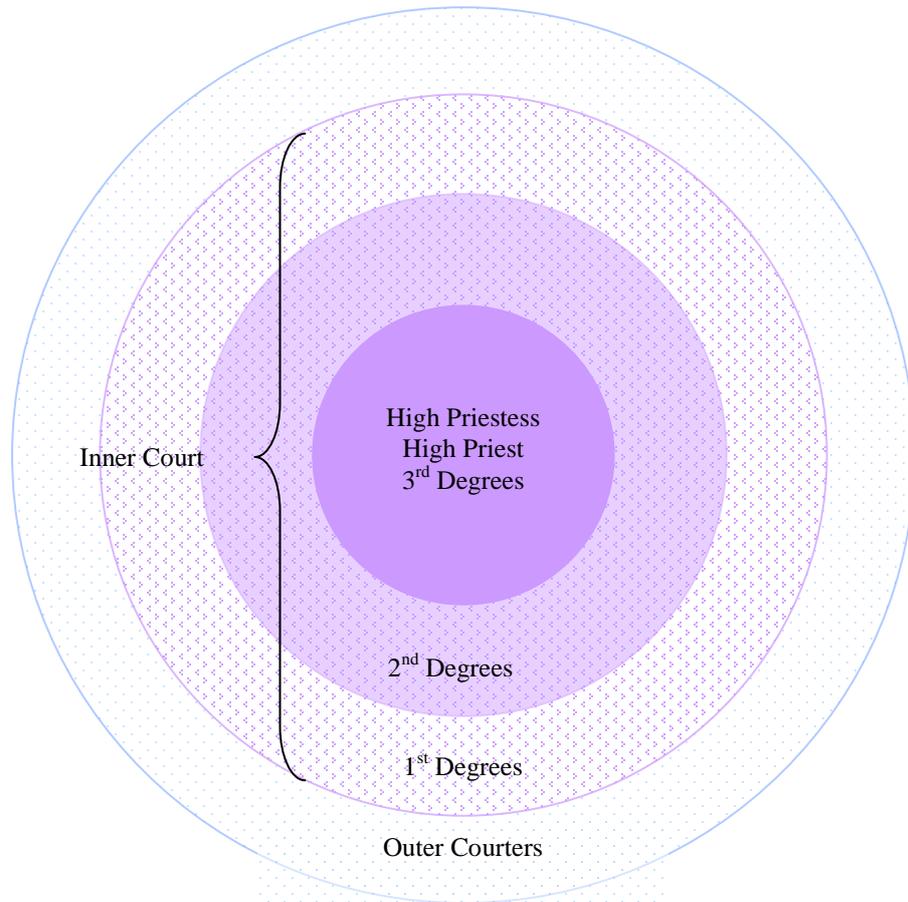


Figure 2 Coven Hierarchy

People looking to join a coven are usually termed ‘seekers’ although some groups call them neophytes or dedicants. Anyone seeking to join a coven is initially interviewed by the leadership of the coven, the High Priestess and her partner, the High Priest. The High Priestess is usually regarded as the ultimate coven head but in most covens this leadership is a joint affair between her and her male counterpart. The object of the interview is to ascertain the aims of the seeker, to ensure that the seeker has the same set of fundamental beliefs and philosophies as the coven membership and to find out if the seeker and the coven members are likely to get on well with each other.

Coven members become very closely linked with each other and it is imperative that the members can trust one another and share personal details all the time knowing they will be supported. The coven is essentially a spiritual 'family' where members are tied together through loyalty, friendship and dedication to the coven and its members. It is a community of support, shared understanding and spiritual growth and the High Priestess therefore has a responsibility to ensure that any new members do not upset the happy balance she strives to maintain within the group. In addition to acting as a spiritual family, the coven's hierarchy is structured in a similar way to that of a westernised family. Indeed Osgood (1995) points out that, "The coven is often equated with a family; its 'parents' are the leaders of the coven, the High Priestess and High Priest and the coven members are their 'children' " (p. 12).

The degree structure, from first to third acts as a support mechanism that channels initiates through a learning program. Many first and second degrees choose to remain at that level rather than advancing their studies further and this choice is always supported. One of the fundamental principles of Wicca is that in order to learn and develop through the degree system, the initiate must be the one who takes responsibility for doing so. Teaching will not be offered unless the learner requests it. The Grove, like many other covens will only initiate a seeker to first and second degrees when the learner has requested it and then only if they are assessed as being ready and capable of working at the new level. Initiation to third degree is by invitation rather than by request but this invitation is forthcoming only after the learner has demonstrated a skill level commensurate with the expectations of a third degree Witch. Once a Witch has been initiated to the third degree, she is then free and in fact encouraged to 'hive off' and form her own coven.

The Grove has predominantly first degree Witches in its Inner Court, one second degree Witch and the third degree High Priestess and High Priest. During the last year of this research, Anna and I both worked toward our second degree initiation and this involved additional, advanced ritual workings to practice and prove our capabilities at that level. Each degree level has a different rank of responsibility regarding the relationship between Witch and deity and also to their level of duty to the coven. This gradient of commitment and duty also reflects the westernised structure of the family unit.

The role of the High Priestess and High Priest is traditionally that of leader, facilitator and teacher. Like parents in the nuclear family, the High Priestess and High Priest lay down the rules and guidelines that enable the coven to operate according to their expectations and formulate the program of ritual events for the Wheel of the Year and for Full Moon Esbat rituals. The degree to which the coven rules are adhered to are determined by the level of control the leaders choose to have over their coveners. Some coven leaders have strict rules of practice and behaviour within their coven while others prefer to share the leadership responsibilities throughout the coven membership. The High Priest of The Grove, Fred was usually happy for Sammy, the High Priestess to take the lead and while he supported her in his role as teacher and facilitator, the majority of coven administration and leadership fell to Sammy. Thus Sammy, the natural and traditionally appropriate leader of the coven provided each initiate with a copy of the rules of the coven and discussed her expectations in terms of working with the group within the parameters of those rules. However, her approach to general coven practice was flexible and she encouraged and expected initiated coven members to design some of the festival rituals as part of their learning program and as a means of contributing to their coven commitments. During 2005, each initiate, regardless of their experience was required to

design and lead at least one Full Moon Esbat ritual and the dates for these were discussed, agreed to and planned at the beginning of that year. Whilst one of the benefits of this was that each initiate developed experience in ritual design and leadership, it also allowed Sammy more freedom to concentrate on other aspects of coven leadership such as support for the more experienced initiates as they advanced their learning activities, the design of the coven's major annual festival and general coven administration.

Like a parent, Sammy's role as High Priestess is also that of confidant, mentor and part time counsellor. Indeed Amber K (1998), a respected American High Priestess, suggests that her role and that of all High Priestesses within a coven is that of a "spiritual mother" (p. 97). Members of The Grove frequently went to Sammy for advice on family and relationship matters, on their spiritual experiences or growth and indeed on a myriad of other personal situations that they felt could be helped through their Wiccan relationship with deity. There were a number of occasions when I experienced personal difficulties and requested Sammy's help in devising magickal workings to alleviate issues or discussed with her the most appropriate means of meditating to determine answers to my questions. Likewise other members of the coven approached Sammy for similar discussions and advice. Thus coven leadership is a fairly time and effort intensive task just as parenthood is, and underlying all this activity is the need to ensure that the coven activities and relationships continue to run smoothly and for the benefit of all. Just as parents cater to the individual needs of their children and develop household routines to maintain a peaceful and productive family life, so to do the High Priestess and High Priest. They observe, support and encourage individuals within the coven to grow to their maximum potential whilst also providing support mechanisms that maintain the stability and productivity of coven life.

Rose and Alan as leaders of another teaching coven provide a similar family type structure for their coveners and use a support framework that encourages individualised learning while always ensuring the longevity and stability of their group. Margaret and Bob, both teaching High Priestesses for their own, individual covens, operate in a similar fashion although Margaret maintains a tighter, more structured program of learning than Bob. Like Bob, Margaret's Outer Court program lasts for a year but her Outer Court members are fed through an extremely well planned and documented training program. Bob's approach is a little more relaxed and some of her Outer Court members have chosen not to seek initiation until after they have participated in at least two or three years of Outer Court sessions. Peter and Kathryn teach their seekers using a well defined learning program which is considerably more traditional and defined than that provided by Sammy. Thus the detail and control level of the coven is determined by the approach the coven leaders take but in all instances, the High Priestess and High Priest take the responsibility, as parents do with their children, to provide individualised care and encouragement while also maintaining an overarching structure that supports the coven as a collective.

The second degree initiates, as the next level down in terms of experience also have a defined set of responsibilities for their level. With a far greater depth of experience and a broader range of skills than the first degrees and Outer Court members, second degree Witches are expected to help the High Priestess and High Priest by teaching the lower level Witches in Outer and Inner Court training. Like the older siblings in a family, the second degrees nurture the lower levels of Witches in a coven and provide role model examples of advanced practice. By the time they are second degrees, Witches in The Grove are expected to be able to cast a circle completely without prompting, to be able to design and lead effective rituals for most occasions and to demonstrate advanced skills in

divination, meditation and magickal workings. As such Sammy's expectation of her second degrees is that they commit to a greater level of responsibility to the coven by teaching others and by engaging in more advanced workings to further stretch and grow their own talents. The current second degree Witch in The Grove acts as a 'big sister' to the first degrees by offering herself as an unofficial tutor and impromptu teacher aid to Sammy during rituals. Sammy offers additional New Moon teaching opportunities for her advanced coveners, including The Grove's existing second degree Witch and those who are working toward that level and these sessions are over and above the Inner Court training sessions that focus on higher level rituals and magickal workings. In turn, those people are expected to act as teacher aids, role models and 'grown up teenagers' to their less experienced siblings.

Second degree Witches in other covens have similar expectations placed upon them by their coven leaders and whilst most High Priestesses and High Priests are happy to allow their seconds to remain as seconds if that is their choice, they will usually provide continued teaching opportunities as a means of further growth on the path toward taking the third degree initiation. To reflect that advanced level of practice, they expect their second degrees to offer assistance in teaching the lower levels and to design and lead rituals throughout the year. Margaret explained that her advanced initiates were expected to take an increased level of responsibility within coven life and this included the development of certain rituals. Peter and Kathryn also have the same expectations for their advanced practitioners and indeed provide them with tasks that reflect their standing. During a first degree initiation I attended as an invited observer for one of their Outer Courters, one of their advanced coveners (I will call her Lisa) acted as a teacher aid by taking on a specific role within the initiation. There are a number of tasks and roles that need to be completed during an initiation and it is usual that these

roles be taken up by experienced people but that new initiates learn those roles by observation and later practice. Lisa partnered with a woman who had been initiated only the month before and in her role as the fetch (the covener who leads the seeker to their initiation rite) showed the new initiate what the fetch does. Lisa acted as the fetch while the newer initiate shadowed her and learnt the role requirements. Second degrees thus are engaged not only in advanced learning practice themselves but are also the older children of the family helping the coven parents take care of the younger family members.

First degrees by comparison are still learning the ropes themselves and thus have limited expectations placed upon them. Their time as a first degree is dedicated to learning the skills of Witchcraft and deepening their bond with other coveners and with deity. Many initiates choose to remain at this level and thus spend all their time as junior members of the coven regardless of the length of time they have been involved. In terms of a family structure, the first degrees equate to the primary school children as they have just been initiated into the Inner Court or just entered the official stream of school for the first time.

The first degrees in The Grove, myself included, were encouraged at each Full Moon Esbat to repeat sections of the circle casting ritual each month and to refine and get to know that section before moving on to the next. Like young children in school, our learning program was bite sized pieces, reinforced, rehearsed repeatedly and then built upon through the next section. Sammy's approach to teaching first degrees is very relaxed and Anna, Cath and I each took three or four turns at each section of the rituals before we moved on to the next. We supported and prompted each other as we made our way through this learning process, all the while taking encouragement from Sammy, Fred and the other more experienced members of the coven.

The Outer Courters are the family toddlers, still learning how to walk, talk and take their rightful places in the family when and if they choose to do so. An Outer Courter is never truly a member of the coven until after initiation and prior to this rite they can leave the group at any time. Some of the Outer Courters who came to The Grove came for only one or two sessions before they chose to move on to another group that they thought might suit them better or to move away from Wicca altogether. However, Sammy took great pains to interview seekers in some depth before she offered them an invitation to come to an Outer Court session. Seekers are potentially the future of the coven and so High Priestesses and High Priests take as much care with admittance to Outer Court as they do with initiations. The Outer Court for The Grove was a rolling process where new seekers, if deemed to be acceptable, were admitted at any time of the year. Rose and Alan work in a similar fashion, as do Peter and Kathryn. Margaret takes her Outer Courters through a year long program that begins in January and ceases in December. Thus her seekers are admitted only at the beginning of the year to ensure that all the Outer Courters go through their program together in one supported network.

Outer Courters are invited to all the festivals at The Grove and may be invited, through Sammy's relationship with other coven leaders, to other groups' festivals. However, they are not allowed to attend the Full Moon Esbats of our own or any other coven until post initiation with one exception. Around February of each year, Sammy designates one Full Moon Esbat as being a training event where the Outer Courters are allowed to attend and observe the ritual. During this training evening, the process of circle erection, and other ritual practices normally open only to initiated Wiccans are conducted and explained. Outer Courters observe these rites and are encouraged to engage with path workings or a meditation during the process of the evening. Such a training event enables the Outer Courters to observe, engage with and experience the

routine activities of an initiated Wiccan within The Grove and to make an informed decision about their 'fit' with longer term coven practice and possible initiation.

With only Outer Court experience and one Full Moon Esbat, Outer Courters haven't had the opportunity to spend as much time with the Inner Courters and develop a deep bond of trust and companionship with everyone. Their role is simply to learn the basics of Wicca and Witchcraft before they can be admitted to the initiation process. The Grove Outer Court meets monthly and this is attended by both Inner and Outer Court members. This is so that first degrees can further consolidate their learning, so that the more experienced initiates can contribute as teacher aids and so that Outer and Inner Courters get greater opportunities to develop trusting relationships. By comparison Rose and Alan as well as Peter and Kathryn hold an Outer Court weekly while Margaret holds her Outer Court sessions every three weeks or so.

The final two membership sections of the coven are not considered direct members but rather hold membership by association. The coven elders are usually the original teachers of the coven's High Priestess and/or the High Priest but in the case of The Grove, this is not so. Theresa and Winston are elders to The Grove not because they taught Sammy and initiated her to third degree but because she went to them for advanced teaching and adopted their approach to Wicca. Sammy is however regarded as running a 'daughter' coven to Winston and Theresa because of this advanced teaching and close association to their systemic practice. Elders are the grandparents of a group, the ones who offer advice, support and encouragement to the coven leaders and by association to the coveners. They often attend both open and closed coven rituals as invitees and may or may not also run their own coven as well as having elder membership association to their daughter covens. In their capacity

as grandparents to The Grove, Winston and Theresa ‘babysat’ us when Sammy and Fred were away on holiday during 2005. For two Full Moon Esbats they led the coveners through the rituals and in fact offered complementary and supplementary advice and suggestions about further psychic development.

The other group that holds membership by association are daughter covens or the grandchildren of the coven. The Grove has no local working daughter covens so Sammy is not required to attend any hived off coven rituals or festivals. However, there are several High Priestesses in Perth who have taken some of their coveners through to third degree and who are then considered elders and have membership by association to their daughter covens. These daughter covens are traditionally supported by the elder until they can operate effectively alone and without guidance from the parent coven.

Entering a Coven and Initiation

Wenger and Snyder (2000) suggest that within the Communities of Practice paradigm an invitation from the existing membership to a prospective new member is often based on, “a gut sense of the prospective member’s appropriateness for the group” (p. 142). Thus with covens, members will ascertain the ‘fit’ of the proposed member and make a judgement about the usefulness of the exchange of knowledge and energy that will occur during their membership.

Within the Grove, if our High Priestess was satisfied that the potential new member would fit well with the group, she usually asked the group if they were happy to have another Outer Court member. If we agreed, the seeker is admitted to Outer Court where they then engaged in basic training over a period of at least a year. Traditionally this training period lasts for at least a year and a day (Bado-Fralick, 2005) but for many covens around the world, however, some training periods can last only a

few months while other seekers may elect to remain in the Outer Court for a longer period as was the case with some of Bob's seekers.

When the seeker feels ready for initiation into the Inner Court, they can ask the High Priestess for permission to join. Protocol demands that a seeker must be the one to instigate their own initiation. It is considered bad form for a High Priestess to suggest a seeker be initiated but rather the seeker must want the rite rather than have it offered to them. The High Priestess will already have an idea about the seeker's suitability for initiation depending on their skill level, their contribution to the group and their spiritual readiness. Bado-Fralick (2005) noted that in observing the learners in her own group, she and her fellow teachers would often already have ascertained who may or may not be ready for the initiation rite and who would or would not fit with the dynamics of the existing coven membership. Prior to allowing the initiation, the High Priestess will ask the Inner Court members to vote on the seeker's suitability for initiation and entry to the core membership of the group.

Where the Inner Court members feel comfortable about this person joining their circle, they will vote accordingly and the person may be allowed initiation. This decision comes about as a result of group discussion and sharing feelings about the relationships with this seeker. Usually Inner Court members will have met the person on numerous times at festivals and Outer Court over at least a year and will have had sufficient time and opportunity to formulate a view on their suitability and readiness for initiation. The stability of the group is paramount and Inner Court members must feel comfortable with the new person before accepting them. Once initiation occurs they will be sharing very personal details with them that reveal their inner most thoughts, desires, weaknesses and wishes. They will be working magick with them and this requires the utmost trust in those also working that magick. The usual

questions discussed amongst the group are, “How well do we get on with this person?” and “Are they ready for the journey with us into Inner Court?”

Once initiated, the seeker becomes a first degree Inner Courter and can remain at that level or work towards the two higher levels if they choose to do so. This is the foundational rite of entry into the coven and marks a definitive shift from being a peripheral member to being a core contributor with rights and responsibilities to coven colleagues. Initiation is not just about entering the group officially but is also about a commitment to the belief system and its practices. During initiation, the seeker promises to live their life using Wiccan principles and to work with and protect their Wiccan family. This doesn't exclude them from their responsibilities to their own biological family of course but raises the importance of their spiritual family within their hierarchy of values. Once initiated, the seeker loses the title of neophyte, dedicant or seeker and becomes a fully fledged member of their coven and the Wiccan community as a whole.

31st August, 2004 (Full Moon for Inner Courtiers)

As a Full Moon, the Inner Court members were required to attend the covenstead for the usual Full Moon ritual. This was my first attendance as an Inner Court member and I was aware that as such, it was my first real opportunity to learn from the members in the 'real' environment. It also meant that finally I got see the ritual practices of this coven as they are conducted on a regular basis rather than the 'watered down' rituals conducted for open festivals or the training ritual available for Outer Courtiers in February of each year. As such, tonight was a significant learning experience for me.

I noticed throughout the evening that there was a similar sense of community that existed for the Outer Courters but this community spirit was much more intense. It was significantly different and I felt it as a much stronger pull within this group than within the Outer Courters. This group was definitely 'tighter' and there was a much more overt familiarity and closeness between one another. The terms 'Inner' and 'Outer' Court now have a new multiplicity of meanings. Prior to initiation, I had always considered that the difference between the two was simply one of who was initiated into the group and who was still learning. Watching and being part of this evening's discussions and behaviours showed that the difference between Inner and Outer Courters was also about differentiating between the group of trusted peers who formed the spiritual family and those who were still on the outside looking in. Whilst I had always felt part of the wider group whilst an Outer Courter, I now felt a much stronger tie with the core of the group. It was almost as though I'd got this far, passed the tests and so was now able to be fully integrated into the fabric of the group. I felt comforted by this and supported within my spiritual family.

Outer Court then is the time during which apprentice Witches learn the fundamentals of the faith systems such as the concept of multiple deity, the tools of Wicca and their significance, the festival schedule and its relationship to the seasons and the basic expectations of a practicing Witch. Outer Court seekers are expected to read and research Wiccan topics to learn not just what their own coven holds as important but to identify the multiplicity of traditions within the faith system. This broad understanding affords seekers the opportunity to either choose a more personally appropriate means of following Wicca or cements their existing choice of path. During the Outer Court year, the seeker will also be given the opportunity to practise some basic and affiliated Witchcraft

skills such as divining, herb use, spell-craft, tarot reading and numerology.

After the Outer Court learning year, the initiation rite is seen as an important step in the ongoing training of a Witch. Not only is it a commitment to the coven, to deity and to the ongoing Wiccan learning journey, but it is also seen as a spiritual rebirth (Osgood, 1995). Eliade (1969) describes initiation as, “a body of rites and oral teachings whose purpose is to produce a radical modification of the religious and social status of the person to be initiated” (p. 112). Initiation for Witches is a defining moment in both their mundane and religious life and heralds a fresh journey into a new spiritual way of living. It is a step that requires significant consideration on the part of the seeker before being undertaken but is seen as a joyous occasion for celebration for both the person being initiated and the coven family that they have been re-born into.

Attendance at the initiation ceremony is open only to current initiates and whilst members of other covens can also attend, this is by invitation from the initiating High Priestess only. Whilst there are a number of different details within the ritual depending on the Wiccan tradition to which one belongs as there are with any ritual, essentially the components of the mystery initiation rite follow the same pattern. The seeker is expected to undergo the ‘ordeal’ that proves their dedication and whilst this may sound alarming, it is usually no more than a token requirement. Most seekers are not made aware of the details of their initiation and as such, the entire process can be a little disconcerting. Having read the standard Wiccan texts and thus having made myself aware of what to expect during my own initiation, I was none the less still nervous. Engaging in an event without any prior experience or detailed understanding of what is about to happen is often a trial for anyone. Anna, Cath and I had many

conversations during the winter of 2004 where we discussed our nervousness at our upcoming initiation ceremonies. We were all initiated within three months of each other so together we shared our nervousness and our delight at the journey.

Once the ritualistic ordeal has been completed, the seeker is then introduced to deity and finally accepted into the coven. It's a joyous occasion, with gifts for the newly initiated Inner Courter, and much celebration over their new membership.

Once an initiate achieves their first degree initiation, they then commence a period of experientially learning the ropes of being Wiccan. This can take anything from several months to many years and the length of time is determined by the desire and motivation of the individual and the level of skill they display. Should they wish to continue to advanced study, Wiccans will then begin their year long training toward second degree then a further two or three years at that level before tentatively seeking an invitation for initiation to the third degree. Within the Gardnerian, Alexandrian and several other traditions That I studied in Western Australia, only a third degree initiate can become a High Priestess or High Priest and lead their own group. Most people having reached that level break away from their parent group and form their own coven. The friendship and alliance with their parent group usually remains strong and related and sister groups will often share major festivals together.

The tiered degree system allows for a gradual learning process to take place and encourages a methodical, well paced out approach for consolidating practice skills. Witches need to learn three dimensions of Witchcraft; the theoretical, underpinning knowledge of their faith system, the 'craft' or the ritualistic practises that are manifest to their beliefs and the intuitive feelings and knowings that will inform a significant proportion of their practice. Thus the learning they go through needs to

be theoretical, practical and experiential, or cognitive, behavioural and humanist. However, one cannot learn the practical until after initiation because of the secrets and mystery around the Inner Court practices so this delayed learning aids in the gradual and controlled increase of skill. As well as refining the behaviours and practices of being a Wiccan post initiation, there is also a need to learn and refine one's intuition or psychic abilities and this is done through situated learning opportunities. This is probably the most important factor in any Witch's learning journey and is essentially what distinguishes them as a respected Witch within the Wiccan community. It may well be appropriate to display all the right ritualistic practises and have a thorough understanding of underpinning theory but a 'real' Witch will also have a sense of spiritual experience and an ability to connect her innermost mind with deity. This intangible skill is not one currently explained by existing learning theories, neither is it recognised as an essential element in many contemporary learning models. The ability to understand and explain meditative messages, psychic visions and similar intuitive practices is something every Witch aims to achieve and is the defining ability that sets them apart as a respected Witch and Craft teacher within the Wiccan community.

Thus once admitted to the Inner Court, the first degree initiate can then undergo in-depth training under the tutelage of the Inner Courters in the applied and intuitive components of both Wicca as a faith system and Witchcraft as its practical component. These skills may include how to erect a circle for magickal work, more in depth use of spell-work, healing work and an introduction to the development of ritual. This practical post initiatory apprenticeship introduces and begins to teach the initiate to 'feel' rather than 'think' their Craft. They begin the difficult task of learning how to go within themselves through meditation to find out more about themselves and to learn the answers to their problems. They

learn how to develop magickal work and what elements or ingredients each spell should include. Their learning focuses on understanding the relationship between the rituals they will routinely perform and the divinity of such practice. Geertz (1973) suggested that ritual is in fact “consecrated behaviour” and Witches would agree with this statement (p. 112). They feel strongly that ritual is a reverent act that honours their relationship with divinity and the manifestation of the God and Goddess in the environment around them. Thus the year immediately after initiation is one of intense learning both about the practice of Wicca and about themselves.

The Dynamic Wiccan Community

As Wicca develops, so too does the breadth of its rituals and practice and this divergence has brought with it some interesting changes to the manner in which covens interact with one another.

October 2004

The pine needles dug into the soles of my feet as I followed the procession across the clearing toward the prepared circle. The quarter candles flickered gently in the dusky light of sunset and the altar candle helped us determine the locus of our destination. It was one of the first times I'd ever been party to a ritual that wasn't conducted with my own coven and it felt strange. I felt disconnected. I was following the direction of people I didn't know well but I knew I had to try and trust them. They were after all fellow Wiccans.

The ritual was an open festival held by a neighbouring coven and although the whole Wiccan community had been invited, I was the only attendee from my coven. I know that every coven conducts their rituals in a slightly different way and to me that has always been one of the enduring concepts of this faith system. There is no prescribed manner of

dogma and we are all free to celebrate our connection with deity in a way that feels right for us. Nice concept but now, when it came to the crunch I was feeling a little out of my depth. I suddenly realised that the familiar comfort that came from being with my coven brothers and sisters was the same comfort I got from wearing my old, worn and tatty dressing gown. It was familiar, it was comforting, and it was mine. This evening I was wearing a new dressing gown and it felt a little odd, a bit like breaking in new leather shoes. In this unfamiliar location with these people I'd never met I took a deep breath, calmed my racing mind and trusted my faith. Tonight I was going to learn something new about connecting with our planet and with divinity.

It was a simple ritual, one of thanks for the bounty of the passing season. The hosting coven had designed a ritual that enabled the visitors to engage as equally with the proceedings as the established members and I was grateful for that. They were welcoming, warm and approachable and opened their hearts to those gathered, regardless of their coven membership and allegiance.

I learnt a valuable lesson that night about cross-coven fellowship and the importance of broadening your spiritual experiences to avoid limiting your outlook. During the preceding year of Outer Court apprenticeship, I had learnt the accepted protocol that dictated membership to a coven was exclusive and a Witch was bound to her own coven. Should she choose to leave her home coven for any reason, she must wait at least three months before joining another and seriously consider the effect of cutting these bonds on herself and her coven colleagues. Initiation and thus commitment to a coven was total, binding and not to be taken lightly. Like the vows of a Catholic Nun, the commitment by a Witch to her coven was sacred.

Such depth of commitment made sense to me and I had embraced that concept but I had felt that it was dangerous to exclude one's self from exposure to any other coven's rites because of the danger of becoming insular. All too often within the teaching environment of the Outer Court we had heard that while many covens conducted their rituals and practices in ethical ways, yet others were practising substandard rituals and engaging their members in immoral acts that were designed only to bring gratification to the minority. These horror stories of suspect groups had left us all a little wary of experiencing anything other than the safe rituals of our own group. The Grove had become our nest and our safety and comfort was guaranteed there. To venture outside that boundary posed some serious risks to our physical and spiritual safety or so we had begun to believe.

Here I was engaging with 'the others' and all those stories of distasteful activities hung in the back of my mind making me wary and disconnected. But I needn't have worried, 'the others' were in fact just like me!

Since that night I've been blessed to have attended many different festivals, rituals and celebrations with a number of different groups. Most of these occasions were open events for Pagan friendly invitees or closed rituals for which I was granted permission by my own High Priestess, thus I've never crossed the boundary of inappropriate cross coven attendance. To do so would of course be unacceptable under the protocol of bonded membership unless sanctioned by your own High Priestess.

One of those open celebrations occurred during the Wiccan Spring Camp of October 2004. This annual event is a three day gathering where several of Perth's Pagan population come together for workshops and community networking and sharing. On one of the days, late in the afternoon, we were treated to a surprise handfasting between two members of the Pagan

community. Handfastings are Wiccan weddings and depending on how the bride and groom want to proceed through the ceremony, it can be a legally binding marriage or simply a symbolic pledge to join together in partnership.

Wiccan Spring Camp, October 2004

Late this afternoon as the sun began to make its way down toward the horizon, we gathered in the prepared sacred space beside the stream. The trees all around sheltered us and formed a naturally majestic circle and the gently running stream sang charming songs to us of water nymphs and merriment. The area had been marked with flowers lain in a circle and an altar was prepared in one quarter. By the time we gathered at the Eastern entrance to circle, each of us had already guessed what was to happen so when the bride and groom entered the circle and held hands in front of the altar, everyone was smiling in expectation.

The ceremony was traditionally Wiccan and included some of the romantic rites that pledge two people together. The celebrant tied the hands of the bride and groom together (hence the name 'handfasting') and they also had to jump over the besom. This rite is the definitive Wiccan symbol of partnership and is the moment when their partnership is recognised as binding.

It was only the second handfasting I've ever been to and it was really quite moving. There was no puffy white wedding dress, no stiff suit for the groom, no rows of bridesmaids, groomsmen and flower girls. There was no suggestion of the formality and strict protocol that I've experienced in 'normal' weddings but instead the rite was relaxed, calm and full of a sense of joy and elation. There was laughter and smiles and hugs between people who hardly knew one another.

Every one of these events including this beautiful Wiccan wedding ceremony has broadened my view of the Wiccan faith and allowed me to observe how others celebrate their relationship with each other and with this faith system. I have learnt that rather than insulate yourself within one viewpoint of practice, it is much safer to listen to the views of many, watch the practices of your peers and gain additional insights into hitherto unknown rituals so that you can broaden your own relationship with your faith. By learning from a variety of sources, you can either reassure yourself that your own practices are already perfectly suited to your needs or you can adapt your approach to embrace your new experiences and gain an even broader sense of connection with deity. This holistic and eclectic approach however has not always been the universal viewpoint of the Wiccan community in Perth.

As with any emerging community, the interaction between parties has been dynamic. For the first fifteen to twenty years, from the early seventies, community elders frequently met for a variety of reasons not least of which was to hold discourse and ultimately vote upon the proposed second and third degree initiation of a community member. These meetings, to test a candidate's suitability for higher degree initiation, were known as 'inquisitions' largely because the candidate had to answer a series of questions to prove their level of knowledge and provide an example of their ability to design and deliver ritual practice.

These frequent meetings served also to engender strong relationships between groups and to foster cross group learning and consultative teaching. Covens, whilst always remaining autonomous groups, frequently gathered together for major festivals, Greater Sabbats and for social interaction.

However as the covens began to develop their own practices and to gradually experiment with alternative forms of ritual, the previously

shared understanding of belief, practices and ritual, born from Gardnerian and Alexandrian heritage, began to diversify. This was a gradual shift from traditionally taught practices to more eclectic and self directed practice.

As coven leaders began to experiment and find alternative ways to follow a path that suited them and their coveners more effectively, there also emerged the need to protect their new found practices, to justify their differences and thus covens began to move away from inter group relationships. Elders gradually shifted from sharing their practices to protecting and justifying their newly modified workings from criticism and this diversification led to a break down in the historical community inter-relationships that once abounded.

For about seven or eight years through the late eighties and nineties, covens in Perth shared festivals with one another far less frequently and the movement of initiates through second and third degree occurred largely without the traditional elder inquisition. Initiates sought higher degree initiation and this was approved by their own High Priestess rather than a shared decision by the community elders.

One of the resounding results of this individual and coven isolation was that initiates no longer had the benefit of observing the diverse rituals of other groups or learning from the other complementary views of differing elders. Instead they were exposed only to their own group's view and in fact were often actively discouraged from discussing rituals and learning from external practitioners. Initiates were isolated from one another except during the limited social gatherings and this isolation further impacted upon the community dislocation and led to the supposition by many that group interaction and cross group learning was in fact dangerous. Gossip about inappropriate group activities and offensive ritual practices served as warnings to impressionable newcomers and new

initiates to stay clear of covens and individuals considered dangerous to the wellbeing of Wicca.

Having said that, there continues to be a degree of shared festival activity between linked covens such as daughter and sister covens and with other trusted covens and this sharing appears to be on the increase again. Our own coven, The Grove, now frequently shares festivals with another coven whose High Priestess trained under the same elder as Sammy. This did not happen during my Outer Court time with the group although Sammy has said that it did used to occur quite frequently. Another teaching coven often holds festivals where other known covens are invited and Peter and Kathryn's coven recently invited The Grove members and another coven to one of their festivals. In addition, linked covens will occasionally invite one another to a Full Moon ritual to share knowledge and as a means of exposing and thus teaching new Inner Courters other groups' practices born from similar beginnings to their own. Some of this shared activity has come about as a direct result of the questions I raised within the research interviews about the apparent diminishing communal contact. Most interviewees agreed that shared rituals had diminished over the last decade but were slowly on the rise again. Margaret however disagreed.

Shared rituals were really quite rare (*a decade ago*). Now there's more. I invite some people to our rituals. I don't invite everyone but I do invite your group and the --- group and --- but I've always done that (*My italic inclusion*).

Whilst these group inter relationships appears to be continuing and in some cases increasing there is no evidence to suggest that the community elders are returning to the old practice of sharing the decision and coming to a consensus to approve second and third degree level initiations. This seems to have become a redundant practice as High Priests and

Priestesses have moved away from the traditional practices of the past and thus no longer feel the need to moderate the inclusion and acceptance of another higher level candidate. Several coven leaders I interviewed did explain that invitations to higher degree initiations still occurred but that the inquisitions no longer happened. “Oh crumbs yes, we still get invited to initiations as people move through the ranks but the elders don’t approve those higher level initiations anymore,” Rose said. She went on to express her sadness over that saying, “It means that as a community, we run the risk of initiating people who might not actually be ready or suitable to lead their own group but when it’s being approved by only one person, what can you do?” Peter agreed but said that oftentimes, there were informal email or telephone discussions where a High Priest or Priestess might confer with his or her elders and trusted community networks to make sure their sole decision to initiate was appropriate. Bob admitted,

Yeah sure we don’t do that whole inquisition thing anymore but sometimes I’ll still talk to people I trust to use them as a kind of sounding board. That way I get to really make sure I’m making the right decision to take someone second or third.

More often than not people going through second or third degree initiations had been to shared festivals and inter coven Full Moons so the community elders and other High Priests and Priestesses have already had the opportunity to see them work and make decisions about their skill levels.

This issue of discrete coven activity and minimal inter group sharing leaves the religion as a whole in a precarious situation in terms of achieving and adhering to a basic set of shared expectations. Whilst Wicca began essentially from the directives laid down by a single

proponent, Gerald Gardner, over the last fifty years it has developed across the world into a raft of different activities that supposedly reflect and uphold a single set of beliefs. Even across continents, the manner in which Wicca is practised differs. In England, the birth place of Wicca, many coven practices still adhere to traditional ideals with practitioners often working nude (known as skyclad) as was the original requirement. In addition, many covens still use original ritual scripts and follow practices laid down in the early 1950s. In America Dianic and feminist Wicca seem to be the strongest modality of practice while in New Zealand and Australia, indigenous and eclectic forms of practice have made a vast impact on traditionalist ideals. Many groups in America and Australasia choose to work in robes rather than skyclad and have moved away from original ritual doctrine. “Get real! I’m not running round the circle nude so the mossies can snap at my ankles!” laughed Jake.

Obviously some of this has to do with local geography in that it is difficult to celebrate traditional northern hemisphere festivals of harvest when at the same time of year we are planting crops rather than reaping them. However, some of this divergence from traditional practice must also be related to the lack of central hierarchy that might act as a governing point of direction.

Religions with history behind them such as Christianity and Buddhism usually have a central body that reflects and directs activity and laws of operation. These bodies act in a number of roles as representatives of the church and these might include church government, media releases, updating accepted doctrine and lobbying where required. The Vatican is the central body for the Catholic Church and directs accepted practice for its practitioners and clergy. Other faith systems have a similar body that acts as both director and administrator for their communities and these bodies are often cascaded through regional administrative hierarchies to

aid local church government and support. Wicca has no such central body to govern, to administer or to act as agent and representative for its membership. In fact the very notion of a governing body is in direct opposition to a fundamental Wiccan principle that demands that everyone has the right to follow their own spiritual path in a way that suits them. To then have such a right 'policed' by a central hierarchy would undermine the notion of spiritual freedom of expression for Wiccans.

The Pagan Alliance is an informal group of practitioners whose task, amongst others, is to lobby government for equality and respect for its membership, some of whom are Wiccans but other than this loose band of dedicated Pagans, Wiccans are supported only by their own coven and to a lesser degree by linked covens in their local vicinity. The discussion that occurs then about appropriate ritual behaviour, initiatory principles and general practice often occurs in localised pockets and thus the diversification continues across regional areas, countries and even continents. There are a limited number of commercially available national and international journals, newspapers and magazines that generate and moderate Pagan discourse and activity but without the central body of support and representation, there is very little framework to maintain continued shared, core practices.

Wicca is still in its infancy as a religion with only fifty years history to guide its path into the future. As such it is still emerging, still growing and developing both as a spiritual path and as a context for a religious community. At this early stage in its youthful journey, it still has a long way to go before it can declare itself an established, stable religion like its long standing counterparts such as Catholicism and Buddhism. As a result, Witches, whilst continuing to develop and modify Wiccan practices to meet their own local needs, also need a relationship with their Wiccan community in order to locate, and in some cases authenticate,

more appropriate ways to design local practice. Witches who work within the demographic of an established coven, or who have ongoing relationships with the broader Wiccan community, use their Wiccan colleagues as a locus of relevant information and ratification. Solitary Witches tend to rely on commercially available materials and the internet to aid their efforts to developing personally satisfying practices. In both cases, the community acts as a resource, measure and ratification process that aids continuing learning for individual Witches.

From initial entry into the coven social and spiritual construct and later into membership of the broader Wiccan community, the learning opportunities continue to develop, multiply and deepen. Apprentice Wiccans grow and progress through a dynamic but organised pathway of learning milieus that reflect, and are generated by, the coven structure and the expectations of local and global Wiccan practice. The ongoing education program from non-initiate to teacher is a well worn path based on local and global Wiccan liturgical history and as each person journeys through acquiring the appropriate skills, knowledge and wisdom, they eventually graduate as an accepted member of the Wiccan community and in so doing, inherent responsibilities to conduct ethical practice and to act as a teacher where required. This is the ongoing cycle of learning and teaching that is a hallmark of Wicca in Perth just as it is in the indigenous home of Wicca in the northern hemisphere.

Section 1 - How Witches Learn
Chapter 4

**IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED, FLY, FLY AGAIN: HOW
WITCHES LEARN THEIR CRAFT**

An Introduction to the Whole Person Approach

Having spent a considerable period of time learning from my coven colleagues, from observing the manner in which my coven peers learnt for themselves, observing Wiccans from other covens and listening to interviewees describe the way in which they learnt how to create rituals as part of their Wiccan practice, the research results indicated that there is in fact an established pattern of learning amongst Witches. Across all the covens I visited and all the individuals I spoke with and observed both within and outside my own coven, learning how to master the skills, knowledge and the intuitive knowing of Wicca and Witchcraft practice seemed remarkably similar.

The Witches in my study came to their Wiccan apprenticeship usually as a result of realising that they believed and/or experienced things that mainstream society hadn't overtly taught them. For several of my participants, their childhood had been peppered with esoteric experiences and a vague and nebulous inbuilt belief system mirroring Paganism. Some participants had been exposed to Pagan systems of belief and practice as a deliberate learning experience by their parents or other family members. Alan reminisced about frequently coming home to find his mother reading tea leaves for the neighbours in his kitchen. Other participants too had similar memories of their parents, aunts or grandparents telling them stories about the use of magick, herbs and ancient rituals for healing and divination. Yet others talked about how their parents, grandparents or other relatives discussed with them their notion of a spiritual earth or their relationship with the divine Gods and

Goddesses. Several of these participants were aware of their family's connection with Pagan or Witchcraft friendly practices but many others, whilst feeling an affinity with Paganism and Witchcraft had not found a label for this inbuilt sense of understanding and spiritual belief. Several of them came from traditional Christian backgrounds but had a level of uneasiness with the monotheistic deity system and the dislocation between nature and their own spirituality. Like many of the other Witches in this study, Horatio had felt a strong connection with nature right from early childhood but had not been able to actively label his belief system until he explored Wicca. Yet other Witches like Magnolia and Lilly had no religious or esoteric experience at all and came to Wicca without any pre-conceived ideas or constructs.

Thus several Witches already had a vague exposure to and subsequently a familiarity with the underlying tenets and practices of Wicca while others did not. Those participants who reported not having any definitive exposure to Wicca or Witchcraft at all instead explained how they simply felt an affinity with some kind of nature based philosophy that echoed their nebulous thoughts about deity and their personal life choices. Regardless of how they came to Witchcraft as an apprentice, most of them undertook a similar route through the learning process, either to clarify and refine their existing understanding and experiences or to generate a more identifiable means of exploring their loose thoughts, curiosity and developing belief system.

In this chapter I present my own, self-developed theory, the "Whole Person Theory" which shows that the way in which the participants in this study learnt about Wicca and Witchcraft encompassed more than the usual behavioural, cognitive and humanist learning methodologies housed within a situational learning framework. They also learnt holistically with their whole being, using alternative skills and techniques

and thus developed a sense of knowing, or a degree of inner wisdom, that appeared to be based largely on inherent, internal intuitive practice that defies traditional learning prescription.

In developing those skills and in using additional learning techniques to acquire them, most of the Witches in this study went through a foundational, universal learning journey that incorporated three different elements.

- **Thinking:** This element entails developing intellectual familiarisation with Wiccan philosophy, fundamentals and the theory of practice in line with cognitive learning theories.
- **Feeling:** During this element, the apprentice learns from experience in situated learning activities that utilise behavioural, humanist and intuitive practice.
- **Acceptance:** The last element amounts to a ratification process that enabled them to come to grips with their own part in and responsibility for practicing Wicca that reflects the humanist approach to learning.

The three elements formed their ‘macro learning foundation’ and underpinned their progression through Outer Court. Later, when their training progressed through the degree hierarchy, they repeated or continued this macro journey as they were exposed to new learning areas fundamental to advanced Witchcraft. This underpinning journey appeared to be universal to all the Wiccans within my study and thus provided a predictable path of learning that formed the learning modality for the coven apprentices.

In addition the Wiccans I studied also progressed through smaller ‘micro learning journeys’ to master discrete skills such as ritual design, divining, numerology and magickal correspondences. These micro journeys followed exactly the same model as the foundational, macro journey but were much quicker, were related only to discrete topics and were repeated for each new topic. Thus there were micro learning cycles that supported the participants through their longer, broader macro learning path and occurred simultaneously within it.

What was remarkably noticeable about these learning journeys was not necessarily the similarity that they seemed to take but the breadth of learning that occurred. The Witches remarked repeatedly that their training was not just limited to intellectual growth, neither could it be described simply as holistic learning. Rather it was more than the sum of those two forms of learning and involved learning with their body, heart and mind. Mark explained this by saying, “Witchcraft isn’t about brain stuff, it’s about feeling it in your heart”. Existing learning theories tend to migrate their content toward either cognitive processes, behavioural changes or humanist outcomes but the Witches here talked about how they learnt and experienced Wicca with their body as well as their brain and this cused all three learning theories so that they learnt their Craft using their whole body and being. In addition, they learnt using a sense of knowing and later used that intuitive wisdom to inform and direct their ritual and Craft practice.

This Whole Person learning can be described using massage as an illustration. Receiving a massage is an experience that engages you in multiple forms of stimulation. Having undergone a deep tissue, relaxation massage, your brain ‘knows’ you’ve had the massage and can cognitively process the experience, merging it with its existing schemata. In addition however, your body can ‘feel’ the result with relaxed muscles and

rejuvenated cellular activity. Your cells, muscles and skeletal frame have benefited from the experience and you can physically notice the difference. There is however another, less tangible, more nebulous result that occurs and it can be described as a sense of wellbeing that often accompanies these multi stimulus events. After a massage you often feel more able to cope with the demands of the day, more in control of your actions and generally more relaxed mentally, physically and emotionally. This 'sense of experience' seems to be an additional result of the massage that complements the cognitive and physical aspect of the event just as the Witches' sense of knowing complements their other learning modalities.

Learning Witchcraft and the practice of ritual seemed to touch and engage with all these personal elements including the 'sense of experience' so that Witch apprentices learnt by using their brains to cognitively develop their understanding and by using their bodies to connect with ritual events. These elements equate to the cognitive and behavioural elements of learning theories but the Witches also used their inherent sense of experience to further grow their learning results. This intangible and qualitative result is more than just the humanist approach to learning and is the missing element within existing contemporary learning theories. Humanism suggests that the learner grows as a person and develops a more robust sense of their relationship with the world. While this did undoubtedly occur for the Witches in this study, the humanist approach does not go far enough to describe the intuition and wisdom that the Witches developed. It was more than gaining a greater ability to place themselves in their worldview as humanism would prescribe. It also enabled them to tap into hitherto unseen, undefinable tracts of internal wisdom and knowing; wisdom that went deeper than conventional cognitive processing. Thus their learning journeys were more than the sum of simply behavioural, cognitive or even humanist

learning models. Their learning encompassed all those learning approaches and more besides.

This Whole Person learning model endeavours to describe and capture the entire learning experience the Witches underwent by noting at what points the participants learnt cognitively and behaviourally and how that learning journey also incorporated their 'sense of experience' or sense of knowing as a primary ingredient. As such this model spans the breadth of existing, contemporary learning theories and extracts elements of them into a single description that unifies those elements of learning into a more productive and illustrative definition of practical informal learning. It also acknowledges that learning, at least for the Witches in this study, included more than just those conventional elements but instead also included that elusive dimension of intuition, wisdom and knowing.

Whole Person Learning Model Explained

I have designed the Whole Person (WP) learning model so that essentially it is made up of two or more simultaneous learning journeys or cycles. One is the macro or foundational cycle which underpins and holds up all other learning. It is the major means through which the Witches travelled through their learning process and for many a single cycle can last several years. Occurring in a simultaneous and supporting manner are other micro learning cycles, each one of which is related to a single topic of learning and may take only a matter of days, weeks or months to complete. These micro learning cycles are often subparts of the macro cycle and together they form the total learning experience for Witches as they develop a comprehensive and effective relationship with deity and a repertoire of Wiccan and Witchcraft practices.

The three elements of the macro cycle are;

- Thinking. Individuals initially gained an intellectual level of knowledge about Wicca through reading, discussions with ‘experts’ and from watching their peers and mentors. This gave them a cognitive framework in which to place their understanding of basic deity beliefs, open ritual work (closed ritual work for initiates only came later), magickal arts and peripheral practices such as tarot reading, runes and other divining tools.
- Feeling. Once they had been initiated, they were then given access to the closed rituals for Inner Courtiers and so the Thinking stage was replaced by a more experiential period. This is the time where they experienced the sensations, physically and emotionally, of practical Craft work, rituals, meditations and magick rather than simply reading, talking or watching others. It was a time during which they had to learn new ways of *feeling* Wicca rather than *thinking* about it and it incorporated the behavioural and humanist elements of conventional learning theory.
- Acceptance. Finally they often seemed to return to intellectual resources, both trusted written materials and consultative discussions with peers to ratify and better understand the ritual, meditation or psychic experiences they felt through the Feeling stage. This appeared to be a short stage used only as a means to authenticate the new experiences in the Feeling element and was where they accepted and trusted the wisdom they experienced.

Most people seemed to journey through these macro elements in a predictable manner as they travelled from being an initial Outer Courter through to an experienced initiate. This cycle lasted anything from two to ten years or more, depending on how long the Witches took to be comfortable with their ritual workings and Witchcraft practice. However,

the typical learning journey looked like the illustration below in terms of the length of time per element.

Thinking	Feeling	Acceptance
Outer Courter 1 year approximately	1 st , 2 nd and 3 rd degree initiate Anything up to forty years in those observed	

Figure 1 Learning Journey

There were of course individuals or occasions that appeared not to conform to this pattern. When I interviewed Rose and Alan for instance, Alan described how he had been brought up within a Craft family and so by the time he began to pursue his own spiritual education, he was already comfortable with the psychic experiences he repeatedly had felt and had observed as normal practice within his family unit. Thus one could argue that his Wiccan learning journey was reversed and that he initially underwent the Feeling element throughout his entire youth and then entered the Thinking element to better understand his childhood experiences. However, my study specifically looked at how the Witches learnt their skills as a deliberate and overt action within the Wiccan environment. Several of the Witches had, like Alan, childhood experiences of Pagan or esoteric origin and whilst all of them understood those experiences to be important as contributors in formulating their current worldview, they were simply contributors to their worldview, not necessarily deliberate actions of Wiccan education. With or without those initial experiences or feelings of Pagan empathic circumstances, my research clearly indicates that when the Witches decided to deliberately engage in a journey of learning how to design and conduct ritual as part of their Wiccan activities, they all initialised that by entering at the Thinking element.

This point illustrates however, that the macro cycle must be seen as a fluid journey of learning. All three components, Thinking, Feeling and

Acceptance, do not have fixed points of entry or exit but rather are dynamic channels through which learners enter, flow, and periodically exit usually to re-enter at the same or a different stage depending on circumstances. The three elements illustrate the fundamental journey through which the Witches in my study flowed but when generalised to other learners, more fluidity of the stages may be appropriate depending on the contextual learning situation in which the learner is placed.

While there was some consistency and predictability about the length of time individuals remained in each stage, there were some individuals who again did not conform to the pattern observed. Anna has spent a considerable time, more than four years, in the Thinking element as she capitalised on every available opportunity to master a greater intellectual framework for her beliefs. This time was rather elongated for her largely because she chose to change groups during her Outer Court journey and thus had to start again with the new group. Mark however spent only a few months in Outer Court and in the intellectual element of his journey before being initiated and moving into the more experiential phase of his learning process. Margaret's journey through the Thinking element was also fairly short. She was intensely committed to her spiritual path and worked extremely hard to reach her Wiccan goals. In addition she said, "I'd always been close to nature so I'd already done my basic learning. I knew the patterns of nature and how the seasons affected me so I was already part the way there".

All the people I interviewed reflected on the fact that their learning journey would never end. That in fact they were always gaining new experiences, trying new rituals and techniques, forging new opportunities to learn and create a greater connection with their beliefs. Those people who were considered elders, or who were at least significantly experienced as second degree Witches or higher, agreed that whilst they

already had the fundamental skills to practice, they often cycled between the Feeling and Acceptance elements as they tested out new ways to practice and developed new rituals. They no longer had to maintain an intellectual program of knowledge acquisition (the Thinking element) because they already knew the fundamentals, but instead they were experimenting with their relationship with deity and the practices of Wicca (the Feeling and Acceptance elements). They might use the Thinking element within a micro learning journey to learn more about a specific topic but fundamentally, at a macro level, they felt they had cognitively learnt most of what they needed to learn about their relationship with deity, about ritual design and conduct and about Wiccan and Witchcraft practices in general.

However, those people who led teaching covens such as Rose and Alan, Margaret, Bob, Sammy and Fred and finally Peter and Kathryn, talked about how their journey of learning straddled differing elements at different times. While, like most experienced Witches, they cycled between the Feeling and Acceptance elements, they also dipped back into the Thinking element periodically. As part of their responsibility to teach the basics to Outer Courtiers, they were repeatedly 'going back to the books' to develop and fine tune the curriculum for their own learners. Sammy spends a considerable amount of time on the internet trawling for further information to provide to her Outer Courtiers while Peter and Kathryn have an extensive library of books they read and lend out to their Inner and Outer Courtiers as an added service to their learning activities. Alan has had many years as a teaching High Priest while Rose only underwent her third degree initiation and thus became a High Priestess a few years ago. They work closely together to constantly re-develop and define their teaching program. In so doing, it means constantly referring back to basic texts and to valid sources of information and to solidify their teaching program. Rose relied on the extensive knowledge that Alan

brought to their partnership saying, “When I’m not sure about something, he helps me find the answers”. Kathryn talked about how she loves reading so that she can aid her students better. “I’m really busy with work but keeping myself grounded in the basics makes sure I stay connected to where the Outer Courtiers are”.

Winston and Theresa by comparison no longer teach. They continue to work together as High Priestess and High Priest but without a coven. Considered elders by many within the community, they have trained several people over the last twenty years who are now third degree High Priestesses and Priests in their own right. In discussions with them, they talked about how they now work primarily in the Feeling element and neither of them sees any need to ratify or validate the experiences they undergo when in circle. “Why would I need to do that? I *know* that what comes out of our work is right” Winston pointed out. Theresa agreed with Winston saying, “Look, I’m no spring chicken anymore and I’ve been in Craft longer than I care to consider. It’s part of who I am. I don’t need a book to tell me what I know.” They’re both comfortable enough with what happens for them and trust utterly their ritual experiences. As such they do not *need* to cycle into the Acceptance element to authenticate or confirm their experiences when experimenting in the Feeling element.

For newer initiates, this need to validate their experiences remained a constant. Thus they spent a considerable amount of time cycling between the Feeling and Acceptance elements over a period of several years before they felt comfortable enough to fully believe and accept their own abilities. Only then did they settle into a comfort zone of experimentation in the Feeling element without the need for constant authentication from an Acceptance element. Paul has a library of materials he still refers to quite frequently but less so as his experience develops. “Yeah sure I check the books out but not as much as I used to. Sometimes if a

particular Goddess comes in or a message comes through I might check it". He was typical of most mid level Witches who were developing a comfort level with their experiences.

The Thinking Element

2nd November 2004, Outer Court.

I sat frustrated and annoyed this evening. My beautiful set of hand cut, amethyst Runes were carefully spread before me and I couldn't make head or tail of what they were supposedly saying to me. It's always the same. For some reason the ability to read Runes evades me. Give me a deck of Tarot and I can understand and read them with ease but Runes are obviously not my divination strength. As a dedicated perfectionist, this lack of ability is a continuing frustration to me!

I always enjoy Outer Court though. It's the opportunity for the Inner Court members of the coven and the newer, uninitiated Outer Courters to get together and learn with and from one another. Tonight, like the last few months, we were gathered at Iona's house. As a second degree Witch, one of her expected responsibilities is to act as a junior teacher under the leadership of the High Priestess, Sammy. As a Witch gains more esoteric skills and understanding and moves through the three degrees of initiation, their level of responsibility toward the coven also grows. I'm not sure but I'm guessing that Sammy is grooming Iona toward third degree so that eventually she will 'hive off' and develop her own coven if she chooses to accept that challenge and opportunity.

This traditional practice ensures that developing Witches have the opportunity to learn how to lead a coven under the tutelage of the High Priestess while contributing to the ongoing teaching of those in Inner and Outer Court. The duality of the practice is also a valuable lesson to me in coven-craft and the ongoing job a High Priestess has of maintaining the

core stability of a dynamic group whilst also allowing it to grow, to blossom and to generate its own offspring.

While I sat inwardly pleading tonight with the Runes to talk to me, Anna worked with her Runes with ease. For her, reading Runes comes easily as it seems to also for Diana. I'm always in awe of how Diana can pick up a Tarot card or a Rune symbol and immediately understand its meaning and how it's connected within its surrounding cards or symbol presentation. Diana in fact reads Tarot professionally and appears to have a thorough understanding of the symbology and meaning of the deck.

Iona facilitated tonight's learning milieu by asking each of us to take a Rune, research its meaning in the myriad of books spread before us on the floor and then discuss the symbology with the group. We were able to choose one of our own Runes or a Rune from a neighbour's deck. There were several different decks before us made from stone, wood or crystal. Having researched our symbol we reported back to the group and discussed the overlap or differences between the different reference materials.

These evenings usually follow the same pattern and are an incredible opportunity to gain not just the academic understanding of the night's topic but also to learn more about each other and increase the bonds we feel. We each arrive around 7.30 with our plates of food and pre-prepared materials for the night's topic, catch up on personal news from one another about our families, partners, work and spiritual events and having filled ourselves with mutual bonding, settle down to begin learning. Sammy or Iona ask us all to relate what dreams we might have had in the last month so we can gradually learn how to interpret those messages, maybe discuss the changes in nature we've observed during the last month and then launch proper into the evening's topic. More

often than not we open the topic with a group discussion to ensure everyone understands the basic principles, then maybe have a practise exercise or two and finally discuss again what we've learnt and how we could continue our practising at home. Having gotten the instruction out of the way, we all indulge in our shared plates of food and return to our social chat.

I'm always fascinated that while Sammy isn't a teacher by trade, she has learnt through several years of teaching Outer and Inner Courts that one of the best ways for people to learn is through mutual discussion to verbally explore a topic before then sharing the experiences through supportive practice. An unattached observer would be forgiven for thinking that our discussions were sometimes the undirected ramblings of an excited group of people, eager to explore peripheral topics rather than the specific topic at hand. But Sammy knows better. She's skilled at allowing the conversation to meander this way and that, exploring side issues that are important to us whilst still ensuring that we came back to the topic and gain an understanding about how we can relate to and work with whatever we're learning. We're learning, I think, through sharing our thoughts, our experiences and our ideas. We're learning through researching the topics presented to us using books, the internet, journal articles, encyclopaedias and various resources, and then exploring our own interpretations of that information to gain greater understanding and connection with it. We're learning our skills and gaining our understanding without also realising that we're learning about our connections with one another at the same time. These are wonderful journeys into each other's lives.

While some non-initiates may already have experienced some profound insights into their spiritual awareness and may bring a sense of esoteric understanding with them to their Outer Court apprenticeship, most non-

initiates come to Wicca and learn initially via their own research and from the directed tutelage of a High Priestess and High Priest as in the example above.

Research indicates that because most covens do not advertise their whereabouts and Witches in general do not believe in actively recruiting membership, most new Witches came to the faith through their own search for knowledge (Jencsen, 1989; Merriam et al, 2003). They rely on commercially available texts to guide their initial learning and by chance, or through determined searching, eventually find a group to learn with in concert with their Outer Court peers.

Once the seeker has found a group willing to take them their High Priestess will usually supply them with a suggested reading list to further enhance their study. Other than books, the web is also a primary source of information and these resources, together with materials written by the High Priestess to guide her group, form the basis for a new Wiccan's study program. Having had considerable experience the High Priestess is usually well versed in the most appropriate and valid written and internet materials for her new students. She can suggest the most appropriate material to read and the most inappropriate to avoid. In addition she has usually developed her own teaching curriculum including self written guides available only to her coven members. These materials may form part of a collection of materials known as a Book of Shadows that houses the coven's rituals and shared practices and generally constitute the underpinning rules that all members are expected to work within. Most covens have a communal Book of Shadows and Witches who work alone will generally develop a similar set of materials for their own use. Margaret's teaching curriculum is an expansive body of materials, based on her coven's Book of Shadows, that embraces all the basics Wicca and Witchcraft, a broad array of the rituals the coven uses and the other

necessities of working practice. Her Outer Courtiers are given homework assignments and expected to deliver their contribution in a timely manner and with a degree of appropriate quality.

In addition, each coven comes to Wicca from a slightly different reference point and thus the High Priestess will have a preference for certain sets of materials. For instance a Dianic coven would probably prefer a more feminist resource set than perhaps a Gardnerian or Alexandrian group. A Dianic High Priestess therefore, might request that her new comers read “The Spiral Dance” by Starhawk to introduce them to the flavour of that coven. An Alexandrian High Priestess in contrast may prefer that a newcomer read “What Witches Do” by Stewart and Janet Farrar. Both these texts make up a fairly staple diet of reading for the newcomer but each text comes from a slightly different view point and thus describes ritual practice and Wicca in a slightly different way.

Regardless of the tradition each High Priestess belongs to, she will provide a program of intellectual development for newcomers to enable them to engage with their own spiritual growth and to develop a shared understanding with coven members about basic Wiccan concepts and ritual practice. This is essentially the first phase of their apprenticeship and forms the Thinking macro element in the learning path as described in the WP model.

The Thinking element of this model is thus where new Wiccans feed their thirst for knowledge and learn through intellectual reasoning and questioning. Their knowledge level increases as they absorb Wiccan and Pagan friendly documentation. During the cognitive phase in their learning path, seekers are *thinking* their way through the materials to develop their own internal framework of understanding.

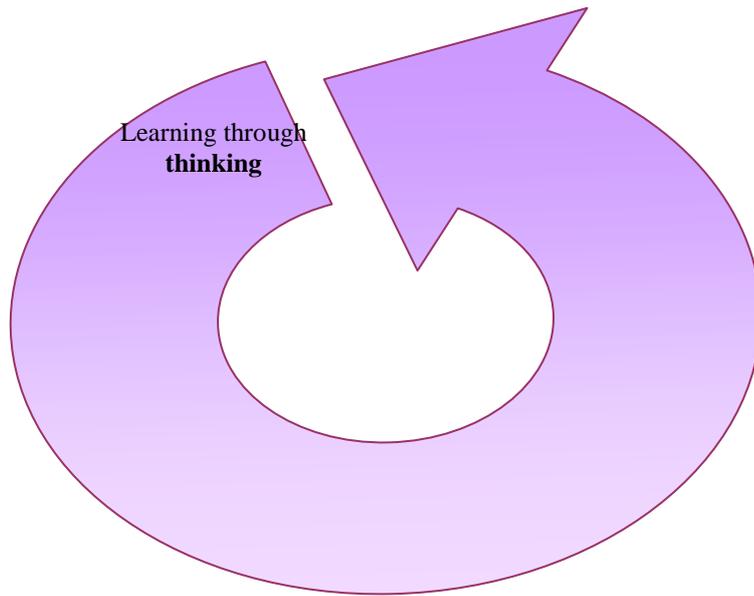


Figure 2 Learning Through Thinking

Research topics for Outer Courtiers generally include learning about the underpinning principles of polytheistic belief, the connection between deity and nature, principles of ritual and magick, the history of ritualistic tools and their current uses, the festivals and their significance to both mythology and the seasonal cycle and different forms of divination. These topics are the grounding principles that guide most covens regardless of the tradition or faction they choose to follow.

Where covens follow specific traditions such as Alexandrian, Gardnerian, Dianic, Faerie or even non-specific, eclectic approaches, seekers will also be given materials that refer to the pantheon of deities that coven follows, the particular set of principles they adhere to and the practices they follow. Some covens have a matron and/or patron deity and where this is the case, newcomers are expected to learn about those figures including the legends, the character traits and the powers associated with them. In addition they will be taught why that Goddess and/or God is important to the coven and what the significance of the coven's name is. The Grove does not have a matron or patron God and Sammy has chosen this as a

deliberate mechanism to ensure that coveners can draw upon the myriad of Gods and Goddesses and learn a broader skill set than a restricted pantheon might allow for. Instead Grove members learn about lots of different pantheons and add to this the comparisons and similarities between different pantheons to broaden their understanding of divinity. All these topics are fundamental in enabling a newcomer to any tradition to gain a sound understanding of Wicca and of their responsibilities to Wicca and the coven if initiated. These intellectual topics form the basis of their later practice and enable the newcomer to learn the significance of specific ritual events, festivals and daily Wiccan practice.

Whilst written materials can, and usually do, form a primary source of information, discussions in the training setting also equip newcomers with a firm understanding of the basics. Outer Court as a training milieu is the prime opportunity for non-initiates to learn from their peers in a non-ritual and thus relaxed setting. The discussions that occur, the teaching sessions that ensue and the practical exercises provided in Outer Court all feed the intellectual development program for the seeker and enable them to practice new skills in a supportive, nonthreatening environment. Whilst written materials might be the academic element of their apprenticeship, the Outer Court training sessions are their practical opportunity and a venue for testing out their emerging cognitive theories and viewpoints. Each High Priestess I spoke with has her own curriculum and time table, and these generally operate as a year long apprenticeship with tasks allocated to each Outer Court meeting. Seekers may have homework that needs to be completed both before and after each session to supplement their group participation. Essentially Outer Court is both the 'lecture' and 'tutorial' that directs the newcomer's own reading, study program and facilitates a pathway of guided, supported education in preparation for initiation and hands-on circle and ritual practice.

Each High Priestess and High Priest I spoke with take their duties as coven leader and teacher extremely seriously and work laboriously to ensure they provide a balanced, well structured and supportive program of learning. A coven's future relies heavily on the Outer Courters' preparation for and later entry into Inner Court. This means that in order to retain a high quality, stable group with shared interests and beliefs, the High Priestess and High Priest must make sure they are preparing their 'undergraduates' in an appropriate manner.

Underneath all this is the belief amongst the High Priestesses and High Priests that they have a duty to the broader community in teaching their newcomers a sensible approach to their religion. Sammy and Fred spoke to members of The Grove often of their experiences with people both within and outside Paganism whom they considered to be less than ethical in their approach. Rose and Alan too discussed the perceptions that some members of the public have about Craft practices and all senior members of the Wiccan community felt it important to provide a sensible, balanced and down to earth learning program to minimise the damage left by hundreds of years of propaganda about Witchcraft. Their shared opinion was that they had a duty and responsibility to ensure that those people they taught could go into their own communities and be seen as sensible practitioners of a valid religion rather than "insane members of some nutter's cult" as Alan joked. Their dedication to Wicca meant that they had appointed themselves the responsibility to develop a generation of Wiccans able to deal with and overcome the lasting prejudices held by some factions of the wider community. They believed that in offering valid programs that would stand up to scrutiny by their Wiccan peers and by the public, they would go some way to increasing the acceptance of an emerging religion.

For Margaret, a strict program of learning was extremely important to ensure her students were prepared for initiation if they chose it but also meant that she could play a part in ensuring the respectability of Wicca. Peter and Kathryn had a lengthy reading list for all their Outer Courtiers and provided free access to their prolific library to enable this study to occur and this they suggest, embeds the learner's practice in a legitimate framework. Like most teaching covens, Rose and Alan provided each newcomer with both a reading list and a schedule of training for the next year so that the Outer Courtier could be well prepared in their self study and prepared for a responsible spiritual lifestyle.

The Feeling Element

28th October, 2004. Full Moon.

Anna and I sat beside each other, crossed legged on the pea gravel in the Western quarter of our circle. It was a pleasant spring night and clothed in our usual ritual robes, we were celebrating a normal Full Moon Esbat with our coven brothers and sisters.

Anna and I were initiated into the coven only a few months earlier this year and with only a month between our initiations we've developed a close bond through our shared experiences. We're 'learning the ropes' together as this season's new initiates and so we often compare notes to reassure ourselves that we're learning the right things. Frequently as we come across new experiences we share our stories and wonder at how we have seen the same things, felt the same experiences and learnt the same lessons without ever having said a word. On one occasion tonight we talked about the spirit circle that Fred cast at the beginning of the Sabbat ritual and the particular type of light that his energy generated. We laughed and were enthralled that we saw exactly the same thing. It seems to cement our experiences into reality when someone else can see the same thing and reinforces our confidence that we're gaining the right

skills. We often compare notes like this to help us gain confidence and to check our levels of understanding.

This particular night as we sat together after the usual white light meditation, I lent over to Anna and in a hushed whisper asked her, "Can you feel that?" "You mean the cold breeze across our backs?" she asked. I nodded. It was a warm evening, there was no wind and yet both of us felt the icy chill of a draft across our backs. It was quite bone chilling and was odd considering the gentle warmth around us.

We had already learnt through experience that after the circle was cast, the area becomes quite warm, even on cool nights so this cutting breeze didn't fit with what we knew. After some hushed discussion we agreed that the fabric of our protective circle was rent and that the cold air from outside was ripping through the opening. Together we stood and passed our hands over the area where we felt the circle had ripped open and imagined the circle being patched closed again beneath our outstretched arms.

The chill stopped, the warm circle enveloped us again. We immediately told Sammy what we had felt and she told us that we had indeed felt the wind rushing through the hole that had emerged as the circle deteriorated. She went on to say that while the circle kept the warmth in for a while, eventually the fabric of the circle would deteriorate, the outside air would seep through and bring the temperature back down. Anna and I were so excited that we had actually felt the chill and that we had experienced the phenomena that we had been taught about! What excited us the most I think, was not just that we felt it but that we both felt it independently of one another and had verified for each other our experiences. It made it that much more real knowing someone else felt it too. We're real Witches at long last! We really can 'feel' the circle! It

wasn't just in our heads, it wasn't just something we had learnt about, now we can actually feel it. Now we understand it.

Many times after that we were to feel the same thing in tandem again and it was comforting to know that we really were *experiencing* our faith, not just *thinking* it. Feeling the icy chill from the air outside the sacred space of the circle was quite a challenging feeling for Anna and I at that point. On occasions like this it was tempting to not seek clarification for new and unknown feelings because as supposedly rational adults, we have been taught since children that all events have a logical explanation. Feeling a sudden cold chill in an otherwise warm environment, when there should be equilibrium of temperature is arguably illogical and a challenge to established patterns of experiencing. Sammy would argue that to *feel* rather than *think* a sensation is to overcome years of suppressed skill and to thus recognise that this dormant skill is still available is a hallmark of developing Wiccan talent and experience.

Thus with an acceptable level of intellectual knowledge at their disposal gained in the Thinking element, the Witches then moved into the Feeling element. What was fascinating at this point was that all the initiates I spoke to said their real learning didn't take place until they were in circle, conducting rituals after initiation and thus were actually *feeling* rather than *thinking* their learning. They argued that they could read books till they knew the theory backwards but nothing compared to learning from live, ritual experiences within a sacred space. In other words although they knew they needed the theoretical grounding to inform their ritual practice (the Thinking element during Outer Court prior to initiation), the true learning of Wicca occurred in practicing and experimenting with their connection with deity (the Feeling element post initiation). So whilst the Thinking element was the *why*, the Feeling stage became the *how*.

Merriam et al's 2003 study of twenty different Witches from different covens supports this. They found that they considered this the vital learning period. The study participants suggested that, "The real learning of Wicca, where it all came together, was in the hands-on experiential activities-the practice itself" (p. 173). One of their study participants said, "Well it's one thing to read about something. It's another thing to experience it first-hand. It's the difference between a word experience and a world experience" (p. 173). Luhrmann (2004) suggests that in becoming closer to one's chosen deity, it is the experience or 'metakinetic' learning that acts as the most powerful conduit toward understanding a connection with divinity.

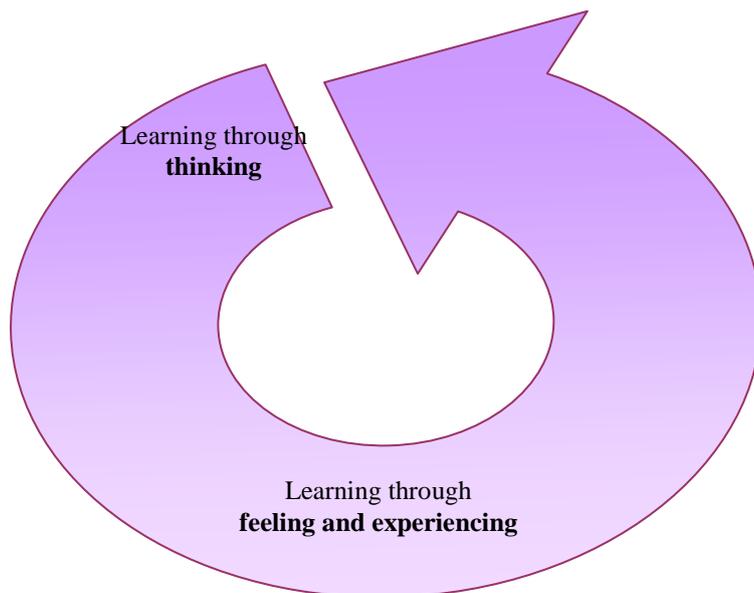


Figure 3 Learning Through Feeling and Experiencing

This Feeling element, whilst probably being the most important, is also the most difficult phase for any Wiccan student. This is usually their first supported opportunity to experience sensations and events that they may not have experienced before. These experiences and feelings may well challenge their longstanding view of their world as well as present opportunities that they are initially unable to comprehend. While they

have been provided with a basic intellectual framework of reference during the previous phase, now they have to learn to fit their feelings and experiences into that preliminary theoretical framework.

This is the element where Wiccans learn the basic principles of ritual practise and magick. In a very early and well known piece of Wiccan teaching material, it was noted that, “every Witch must learn how to cast a magic circle” (Farrar, 1971, p. 45) which is the foundational ritual for Wicca. There are of course a multitude of other things to learn as well but casting the circle is probably the most fundamental as most workings are conducted inside the sacred space of the circle. For those people who are members of a coven, this dedicated practise time usually doesn’t happen in earnest until after initiation. It is post initiation that Wiccans are introduced to the ritual of circle casting, to advanced Sabbat rituals and to the more in-depth practises of divination and ritual design. Wiccans who had engaged in this ‘hands on’ learning argued that this is where they ‘feel’ and ‘experience’ the learning through their whole body, not just their brain. Meditation, ritual and magick interact with the entire body and not just the head and thus Wiccans suggest that this is the ‘total’ learning experience. This is the time where they learn and *feel* their growth rather than *think* their growth. They learn with their body and intuition, not just their head. Merriam et al (2003) noted that whilst the Witches they researched each chose to study written materials to gain a platform of knowledge, they also expressed that “their learning became much more embedded in the practice of Wicca” rather than in simply gaining theoretical underpinnings (p. 170).

This sense of feeling has also been noted by other, often unrelated study areas. In their research into why people chose to visit specific historical sites and sacred places, Cameron and Gatewood (2003) found that sites that invoked “strong affective associations” attracted greater crowds than

sites and locations that had no underpinning emotional draw (p. 66). “Places that focus on human suffering and sacrifice are most likely to foster a strong affective response” (p. 67). Perhaps this association to the emotional undercurrent of a certain location is one of the reasons that practicing the faith system and learning about Wicca within a sacred circle is so effective in connecting Wiccans to one another and to ritual work itself. Maines and Glynn (as cited in Cameron & Gatewood, 2003, p. 66) termed this affective association with places and objects ‘numinous’ and suggested that certain places have, “special sociocultural magic”. Hume (1999) noted that for Witches the circle they construct is sacred and has a “special nature” about it (p. 97). It is felt to be on a different plane than the mundane world around them and they believe it exhibits a special level of energy that defines it from normal space. She writes, “These places have a numinous quality and otherworldliness that can actually be felt” (Hume, 1999, p. 98). Eliade (1976) too suggests that some places have a different quality about them than others. “There is a sacred and hence strong, significant space; and there are other spaces that are not sacred and so are without structure, form, or meaning” (p. 21).

Most individuals once they undergo initiation have already experimented at home with casting a circle, creating their own sacred space with form and meaning and doing meditation in that sacred space or performing some kind of additional ritual or magickal work. However without on the spot guidance, support and reassurance from their teacher, very often the end result is less than they had expected. With their apprenticeship within the coven now moving into another gear, post initiation, they’re now provided with the opportunity to really learn how to *do* Wicca rather than learn theoretically *about* Wicca. This practical stage of the learning cycle was where Bob said, “Wiccans actually have a go at being a Wiccan rather than learning about it”. Andresen, Boud and Cohen’s (2000) view of experiential learning would support Bob’s thoughts. They argue that

learning as an experience, “has a primary focus on the nature of learners’ personal engagement with phenomena” (p. 227). Indeed at this point Witches are facing experiences they may never have faced previously and this connection with learning as a personal and supported social activity is central to their journey.

The Feeling element is also where newly initiated Wiccans begin to wonder if what they’re experiencing is real. While they gradually come to grips with finding inner peace, tranquillity and a connection with divinity, this also comes with questions about the reality of such inspirational wisdom. It appears to be a testing time for new Witches as they grapple with new experiences and emotions, many of which are quite alien. Many people I interviewed reported that when they first began experiencing psychic events, the magick of ritual and the power of circle work, they often wondered if they were imagining it, pretending or even generating it in their mind to meet some pre-determined, expected outcome. When I quizzed people about this, they repeatedly explained that having learnt what normally happens in ritual and meditations through their High Priestess or coven mentor (the Thinking element) they go into the ritual, meditation or magickal work loaded with both their own self expectation and the perception that their teacher will expect them to feel something in particular or experience some psychic event. Very often when they do get the discussed outcome, they would then wonder if they generated it in their own mind to get the desired outcome rather than really experiencing a genuine event. “Did I make that vision up unconsciously to please my High Priestess I used to ask myself” admitted one interviewee. In interviews, almost everyone talked about how they would frequently question the validity of their experiences when they first learnt how to engage with Wiccan ritual and practice. It seems from the observations and discussions with the Witches that feeling their way through these experiences and thus developing their sense of intuition as a learning tool

was a little like riding a bike. They had repeated attempts at practicing intuitively before they felt comfortable with the outcomes and before they gained enough confidence to continue without questioning themselves.

In the early days after our initiations in the summer of 2004, during our own coven meditations at Full Moon, Anna, Cath and I would often ask if perhaps we had imagined our experiences. “I wonder if I thought that up?” Anna asked one night. Sammy’s reply was usually the same and consisted of reassuring us that what we had experienced was valid and that eventually one day we would learn to trust it. In the meantime she instructed, “Let it flow”.

In his study of a diving community Lagache (1993) found that the member’s knowledge of diving included a theoretical component but was largely situated in the practice of diving. He argued that a person learning to dive can read the prescribed materials and undergo formal training but without the practice of diving itself, they cannot answer the question, “How was the dive?” In other words, some diving knowledge has to be gained in context. For Wiccans this means that learning about magick, the practices of Witchcraft and the rituals of Wicca must involve some contextualised skill development at a more advanced level. This ‘in the field’ up-skilling adds to the Thinking element’s theoretical learning and brings to life the reality of Wiccan ritual. In this study, such situational learning was the platform for an additional learning set not covered by traditional learning theories, that of intuitive learning.

Not only did the Witches engage in cognitive, behavioural and humanist learning processes, they also underwent a more intangible learning process that enabled them to tap into a deeper level of internal and inherent wisdom. They learnt with their whole being rather than simply with their brains and bodies. This type of learning and its outcome, wisdom and knowing, strike at the core of our spiritual existence and

enable Witches to truly connect with divinity. It appeared to provide them with a greater sense of connection to deity and to themselves and was the vehicle through which they achieved greater peace of mind. “Wicca isn’t just about running round the circle doing rituals. It’s about getting in touch with your inner self, your Goddess within” explained Jake.

Wiccans are taught during their apprenticeship and beyond to trust in the intuitive messages their head and body may receive. Many of us have experienced similar feelings of intuition. Some people describe having a ‘bad feeling’ just prior to a traumatic or disappointing event while in a more simple and common example, many people feel butterflies in their stomach prior to a new or difficult task such as public speaking. Wiccans would argue that this is the body’s way of communicating and that these intuitive, almost gut level instinctual messages, when coupled with theory and knowledge of ritualistic processes, combine to form the major skill set of Wiccan practitioners.

Theoretical frameworks and ritualistic processes constitute recognisable and tangible elements of the Wiccan skills acquired through the Thinking and Feeling elements. But the Feeling element also encourages the development of intuition, or as some might describe it ‘psychic messaging’. This sense of experience or sense of knowing becomes a powerful tool in determining the success or otherwise of any ritual practice. Where a Witch has a sense of experience, they will usually deem that ritual as being successful. This becomes a definitive measure of psychic development and overrides cognitive appraisal and behavioural methodology in determining successful psychic outcomes and ritual results.

One of the first times I really experienced this intuitive sense of experience happened in late 2004. Sammy had asked each of us to bring with us an object that we had handled that day. She took each of the

objects, hid them away so that we couldn't see what each person had brought and then later asked us to choose an item and to try and *feel* who it belonged to.

November Full Moon, 2004

Like most of us gathered in the circle tonight I was worried that I'd make a fool of myself but I chose a piece of rose crystal from the tray of objects and held it close. With my eyes closed I tried my hardest to tune into this unknown object. To my absolute surprise I 'knew' it belonged to Sammy and that she'd used it for a healing ritual within the last few days. I have no idea how I knew that and I was extremely unsure of my own supposed 'knowing'. Was I guessing? Did I in fact know this somehow but had since forgotten? Was I just making it up? I couldn't see how I could make it up because I hadn't seen any of the objects before but I found it hard to trust something I hadn't experienced before. Hesitatingly I said what I had 'felt' and to my shock Sammy said that it was indeed her crystal and she had indeed used it for some healing work a few days earlier. I couldn't stop the grin! I got it right! I don't know how I'd got it right but I did.

It took me a few more months to learn to trust that new sense of 'knowing' or that wisdom and several other members of the coven also agreed that it had taken them some time to trust these gut feelings and to give them free rein in their consciousness.

Crandall (2004) calls this sense of knowing, "interpretive knowledge" and suggests that,

A knowledge of the veracity of one's moral reality is something that all people require, since such knowledge constitutes a major core of one's identity. Such knowledge is

also the source from which one derives that critical sense of constancy or anchorage amid the flux and flow of life (p. 308).

Crandall argues further that such knowledge is derived from firsthand experience most notably gained either through ritual or through using one's knowledge as a basis from which to practically apply that knowledge as a skill. He terms these methods of cementing such information into knowing as, "conviction-generating experiences" (p. 309). They are indeed conviction-generating experiences for Witches who use them not only as a means to connect to a deeper level of consciousness within themselves but also to ratify and authenticate those connections.

Rappaport (1979) proposes that the milieu for gaining this sense of knowing is that of ritual. So for Wiccans ritual is the platform and vehicle through which they gain the opportunity to experience their knowledge and thus understand both themselves and their relationship with their faith system. Lambek (1995) adds to Rappaport's arguments by suggesting that this knowledge or conviction is the end result of ritualistic practices during which one marries together the knowledge and experience to produce a sense of knowing or certainty.

It is a time of great experimentation where both experienced and new Wiccans engage in ritual practise and magickal work that stretches their understanding capability and adds to their skills set. They modify existing rituals, develop new ones and create new magickal workings as they become more confident with the amount of knowledge and knowing they've gained. In addition, they experiment with different ways of achieving their desired outcomes and also adapt ritual practise or festival scripts to personalise them to their own needs or to "make them feel right" as Jake explained.

The Acceptance Element

This final element is often very short, or in the case of more experienced Wiccans often no longer required. It is where Wiccans learn to accept, trust and embrace the feelings and experiences they undergo through the Feeling element. This confirmations component facilitates the process whereby Wiccans learn to trust that their experiences in the Feeling element are not just coincidence, pretend or imaginings. In fact they use this element in their early days as an initiate to authenticate their practice so that they can trust themselves and the wisdom they have gained and used.

Thus the Acceptance element is important as it provides two vital principles for both the well experienced and the still learning initiate.

1. Confirmation that their experience was in fact real.
2. Delivers further information that enhances or helps to explain visions or messages provided during ritual workings.

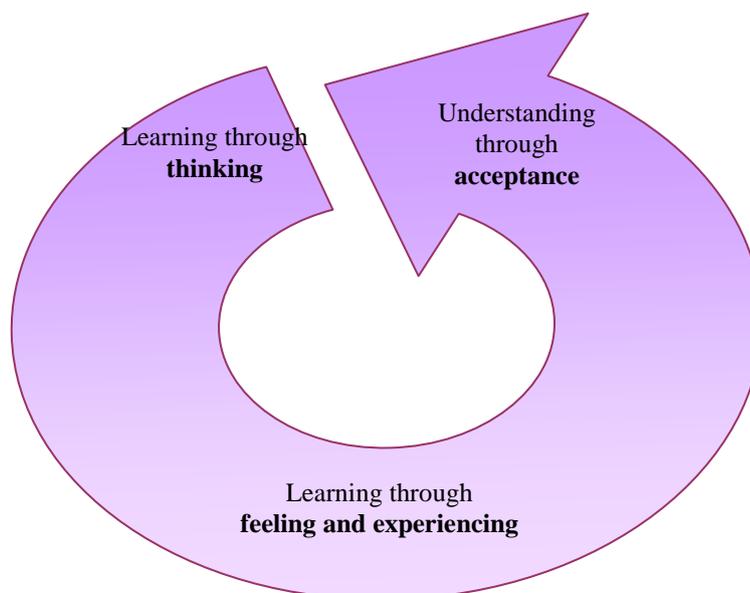


Figure 4 Understanding Through Acceptance

When talking with first degree initiates with minimal experience I found that they dipped into this Acceptance element far more frequently than their more experienced peers. Those who had practised Wicca for some considerable time such as Sammy, Peter, John and Mark, Winston, Theresa, Bob and Margaret all seemed comfortable and at ease with their experiences during ritual work. Through years of experience they had learnt to trust their sense of intuition, the feelings they experienced, the visions and messages that came to them and their sense of knowing. They no longer needed ratification and authentication. They 'knew' that what they felt and experienced was real and trusted utterly in that.

They did admit however that occasionally they would return to their theoretical resources to try and learn a little more about a particular experience and so give it greater context and meaning. For example Peter talked about an occasion where one of his Outer Courters had requested initiation but did not want to be skyclad. Because she had a very strong fear of being naked in front of others and of their nudity, she had requested her initiation be conducted with everyone, including her, in robes. Given that Peter runs a traditional Alexandrian coven in which nakedness at first degree initiation is a basic expectation, he talked about the dilemma this presented him. "My own training said that being skyclad was very important and I had taught my group that same thing. Now I had to challenge mine and the group's own basic tenet. I didn't really know what to do" he told me. Peter went back to some of the texts he owned to trawl through them and try and work out a compromise based on traditional wisdom rather than just the request of a single Outer Courter. He did in fact find a way to initiate the person with everyone in robes including the initiate and to justify that action based on both a credible text and consultation with his senior Inner Courters.

By comparison other interviewees who had not long been initiated like Anna and Cath, who were initiated in the winter of 2004 along with me, all reported frequently going back to the books or discussing their experiences. In many cases they were looking for authentication or verification that their experience was in fact real. One of those occasions for me occurred in the summer of 2005.

Full Moon at Boulder Rock

Crumbs what a night! The whole coven of Inner Courtiers went to Boulder Rock to do the Full Moon Esbat. It was the first time that Anna, Cath and I had worked a circle outside our home covenstead at Sammy's. I didn't realise till tonight how used to a single venue we were and how comfortable we'd become in our home circle. Trying to remember the rituals and normal practice that we all know pretty much off by heart was just blown out of the water. To make matters even more alien, the place itself, the rock, is pretty overwhelming as well. It's a huge monolith that's been used by many Wiccan and other Pagan groups in the past as a venue for Sabbats, initiations and many other rituals. It's also an aboriginal site of significance and so it harbours a great mixture of indigenous and Wiccan energies, some good and some not so good.

Cath, Anna and I just weren't prepared for the way the environment affected us. I guess that's not fair because Sammy had talked at some length about preparing ourselves to erect a circle somewhere we had never worked before. She also spent a long time talking about the energy fields at the rock and how they might affect our own feelings and the energies we raised. So theoretically we were prepared. Practically, it hit us like the proverbial rock!

Since our initiations each of us has been practising certain parts of the circle erection ritual and have taken it in turns to do the quarters so we

can learn our way around the ritual gradually. We all know our lines pretty well and to combat any fears we might have about erecting the circle in 'uncharted waters' we each chose to do a quarter we'd already done and knew well. We set up the perimeter candles and the altar regalia in the circle space on top of the rock, with an amazing view across the valley to the south of us and the rest of the gigantic monolith to the north of us.

Well heck, we forgot everything! We looked like real fools I'm sure! Here we were in a different place, completely overwhelmed by the energies around us and we couldn't remember a thing! We had to be prompted all the way through. It was so frustrating. Once the circle was up though, Sammy led us through a meditation and we settled into the familiar warmth and comfort of our safe sacred space.

Anna was sitting to the East of the circle, me in the Southern quarter and Cath in the West. I had a bird's eye view of the northern quarter opposite me and the northern section of the rock beyond that and what I saw pretty much blew me away. It wasn't just a case of seeing them but of 'feeling' them as well. There were some energies or a presence on the outside of the circle that had a pretty sinister air about it and certainly wasn't very friendly. I can't say I've ever really felt such blackness before as it presented. A kind of prowling hyena or dingo, waiting to pounce as soon as the circle began to fade. Anna started to notice it too, I think about the same time as I did and she mentioned what she was seeing to Sammy. I was so grateful that someone else could see it too! I wasn't just going nuts then! It really was there! Even though I didn't like the feeling it gave off I was so relieved that someone else actually felt and saw it too. Sammy calmly reiterated about the competing energies in this area and again talked about how the rock had been used as an aboriginal site for ritual and also for various Pagan rituals. She reassured us that it was

quite normal to feel those kinds of feelings up here and that at any given time the feelings or energies might be quite different depending on the dominant energies at that time.

That somewhat perplexing occasion was one of the times when it really helped to know that what I had experienced was not in fact my brain auto suggesting weird things but was in fact a real phenomenon. Having Anna see the same thing and having Sammy and later Fred reassure us that our feelings were authentic was an important validation of our learning process and an illustration of how Witches use the Acceptance element of WP as a tool to authenticate their experiences. We were blessed at that point to have more learned practitioners with us so that we could dip into an Acceptance moment to verify the reality of our experiences. It also gave us the confidence to deal with things sensibly and appropriately. This was one of the growing number of occasions when Anna and I 'knew' as opposed to thought our experiences and our wisdom and inner strength helped us make sense of what was happening around us.

Many of the other people I spoke to also said they were grateful for the validation that these Acceptance opportunities provided. It aided their learning process considerably and gave them added impetus to test themselves even further with more new experiences. Magnolia and Lilly, although not initiated until later in 2006, frequently asked the group for validation of their meditative experiences. They used these discussions to test that their experiences were credible and acceptable within a Wiccan environment and culture.

Magnolia and Lilly's questions highlight the additional benefit that this element offers inexperienced Wiccans. The Acceptance element generates opportunities to contextualise experiences and to develop a greater depth of understanding about the feeling or experience contained in the Feeling element. On many occasions after an Inner Court practice

session or even a Full Moon ritual, we would discuss our visions and findings to see if we could learn more about what they had meant. Cath would very often go home and look up her resources to find out more about a deity who had presented themselves to her or the meaning of a particular crystal or token offered in a meditation. This post ritual study often provided further information that made the vision more meaningful and opened further doors about how to then use that meditative information more wisely.

This return to study acts as a means of reinforcing the Witches' knowledge and in many instances confirms the feelings they experienced during ritual as having some academic basis in Wiccan 'fact'. For example, during a meditation, a vision might offer the practitioner a story, a program of suggested action or a message from a particular God or Goddess. In researching that God or Goddess, the practitioner is better able to understand their insights.

During most of 2004, Diana was working toward her second degree initiation. Having been initiated into first degree almost two years before, she had felt ready to work through the messages she was being given. Throughout that year I noticed after each festival, after each Outer Court and later after I was initiated each Full Moon Esbat and Inner Court, Diana would carefully write down her experiences so she could research them later. Part of the purpose of this recording, I was to learn later as I followed my own journey toward second degree, was to capture the insights while they were still fresh and then research the messages to verify them, to gain a better understanding of what they meant and to use them for appropriate purposes.

In my own path toward second degree, I recorded my dreams where I felt they were significant and I recorded the results of meditations or ritual doorway exercises. Each of these inward journeys revealed more about

my own thinking patterns and also furthered my capabilities in the esoteric arts. Where it felt important enough to follow up, I would search the internet and my own reference resources and confide in Sammy to locate relevant information about the dream, meditation or ritual experience. This often helped me better understand what had happened.

On one occasion in early 2006 during a meditation, I intuitively knew I had to buy or find a particular coloured, blue stone and give it to someone. I had no idea what type of stone this was although I could clearly see its colour and pattern and I had no idea who I was supposed to give it to, much less why. The act of recording the vision however, enabled me to clearly remember it and allowed me the time to then research what the coloured stone represented. Within a week I had managed to find a small piece of stone identical to the vision I had encountered during the meditation. This alone buoyed my belief somewhat in what I had seen and encouraged me to research further the stone and its meaning.

I learnt later that same month through the internet and hardcopy resources that the stone I had seen in my vision was a Blue Lace Agate. The information suggested that it's a stone that has a connection with the throat chakra and various resources suggested that it can be used to aid someone who is unable to articulate their frustration or concerns. The stone 'unblocks' the meridian that is stopping the person from openly expressing themselves and thus enables them to more comfortably express opinions or feelings that may be challenging or upsetting.

Armed with that knowledge I decided to keep the stone with me at all times so that I'd be prepared to offer it to its supposed rightful owner when the time came. It was only a matter of days before the opportunity arose to pass the stone on. A distressed work colleague was confessing to me how she was having trouble talking to her partner about a personal

issue of great significance and that her marriage was in turmoil as a result. I had completely forgotten about the stone and listened to her story without once thinking of the vision two weeks earlier. It wasn't until a few hours after this conversation that it struck me that the stone belonged to her. I walked from my office to hers down the hallway and gently placed the stone on her desk. I had no idea what to say to her and in fact felt quite foolish. Who would believe that I'd had a vision and that this stone was destined to belong to her? Who in their right mind would believe that a chunk of rough hewn rock was going to help her marriage? It was ridiculous but I took my courage with me and hesitatingly suggested she take the stone and hold it tight when the opportunity next arose to discuss her problems with her partner.

It would be fitting if I could report that her marriage is now strong and robust and that we both attribute this remarkable outcome to the strength she gained from holding the Blue Lace Agate. Nice, happy ending but not one that's true. She did in fact finally discuss the problem with her partner and he later left to live overseas. She is now a content single but I doubt her current state of peace and tranquillity is the sole result of a piece of blue rock! Perhaps the rock acted as a placebo and thus enabled her to express her feelings with more ease; perhaps it was all just coincidental. Part of the enigma of Witchcraft is that currently there are no definitive answers to these mysterious types of events.

This kind of event does however illustrate how individual Witches may cycle between the Feeling and Acceptance elements frequently, dependent upon how long they have practiced and thus how much confidence they have in their own intuitive capabilities.

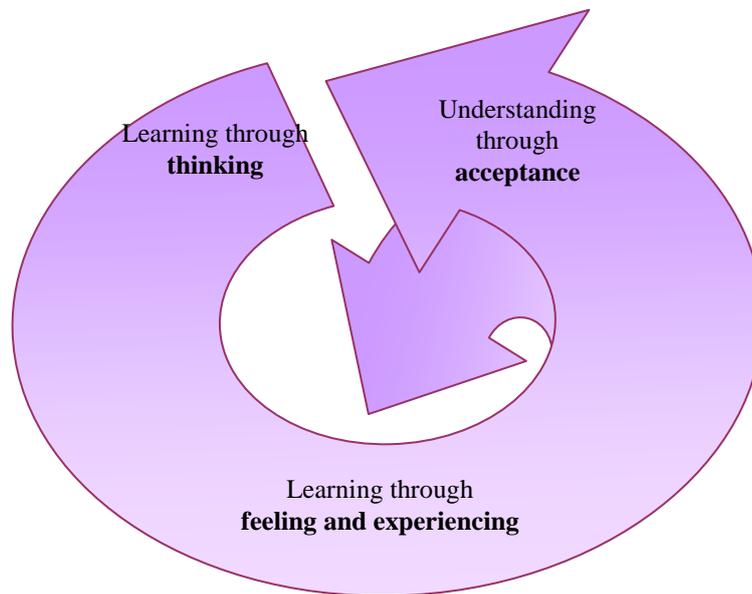


Figure 5 Cycling Between Elements Two and Three

However, my research indicates that the longer the Witch has been experientially practicing within the Feeling element, the less frequently they need to dip into an Acceptance opportunity for authentication.

The Whole Person in Micro

The three macro elements of learning described above, Thinking, Feeling and Accepting, develop as the underpinning journey of learning. This journey can take many years as the individual progresses from being a seeker through the degree system to the level of a High Priestess or High Priest. However, along that macro journey there are many instances of micro learning opportunities that together supplement the macro path. Each of these micro learning opportunities tends to follow the same cycle as the macro model and include the same three elements. Thus the micro learning cycles are mini versions of the macro journey and thus a reflection of what occurs at that broader level. They are however, discrete learning journeys both from each other and from that predominant and longer term macro learning path.

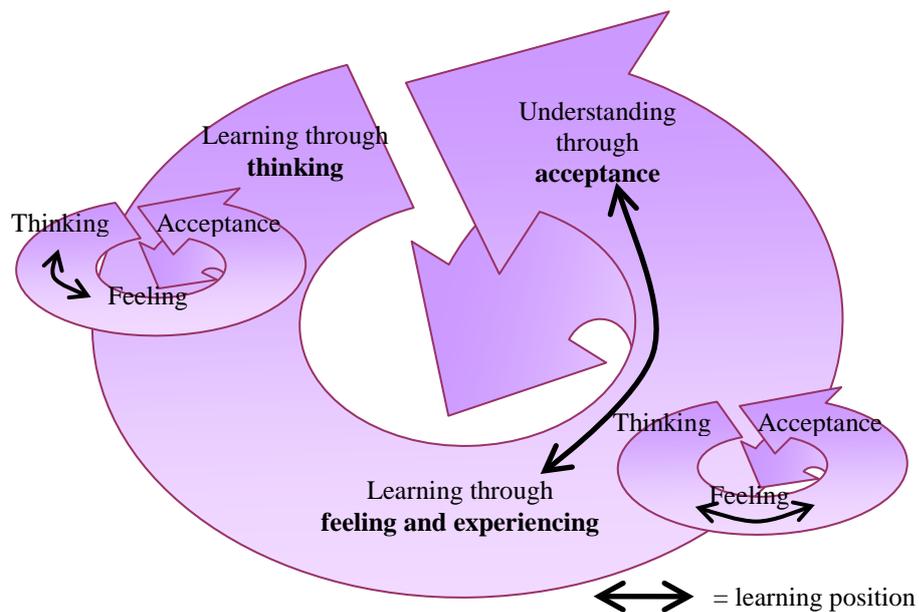


Figure 6 Whole Person Learning Model

The major difference between a macro and micro learning opportunity is the difference between whether the learning topic is fundamental to the initiatory path for the Wiccan or whether it is a topic that merely up-skills them in peripheral but supportive knowledge and skill sets. For example, learning about the polytheistic nature of Wicca is a fundamental paradigm of the faith system and as such a foundational topic of learning on the path toward being a Wiccan. Similarly, learning the theory that describes ritual tools and experiencing the use of ritual tools when in a sacred space is also a fundamental element of being Wiccan. By comparison, learning the theory of numerology and gaining experience in that skill is not a fundamental requirement of Wicca. It can supplement the Wiccan skill set and offers another means of gaining hitherto unknown information about one's self or others but it doesn't constitute underpinning knowledge about the Wiccan faith. One can be a Wiccan without necessarily being a numerology expert. Similarly, the theory and practice of reading tarot, using crystals or herbalism does not constitute primary knowledge and skills required for initiation and subsequent

inclusion in and adherence to the Wiccan faith system. Thus, as the seeker learns the general philosophy and necessary elements of living a Wiccan life and of relating to Wiccan faith principles, they are on the macro learning path. Other peripheral topics supplement and add to the overall level of esoteric knowledge and skill sets but are not necessary in Wiccan practice and thus form the micro learning cycles. These topics are of course important in that they add to the Witch's toolkit, broaden their esoteric skills and enable a more holistic relationship with Wicca and Witchcraft but in and of themselves, they are not the foundational building blocks of being a Wiccan.

Furthermore, whilst engagement in any micro learning cycle may range from a few days to several years depending on the topic's complexity, engagement on the macro path is slow, predictable and fairly stable. My research indicates that Witches can be predominantly at one point in the macro path whilst simultaneously being at various points in several micro cycles. As such there are multiple levels of learning occurring simultaneously at all times.

As an example, a fairly new initiate may be predominantly within the Feeling element of the macro journey, with frequent dips into an Acceptance opportunity to validate and expand on experiences gained whilst in that Feeling element. They will probably be only a first degree initiate and will also be learning the ritual practices associated with erecting a circle and learning how to meditate more deeply and intuitively when in circle. At the same time the initiate may also be studying for their own benefit and to aid them in their esoteric practices the art of numerology reading. This discrete learning topic constitutes a micro learning opportunity and whilst it might take a few years to master, it is supplementary information to the macro learning program because it is not a staple and underpinning knowledge set necessary for initiated

Wiccan practices. Thus as a micro learning opportunity it becomes a sub journey. So while predominantly within the Feeling element in the macro learning model, the individual Witch may also be within the Thinking element of a micro cycle as they study the theoretical underpinnings that govern the art of numerology. In addition to that, their High Priestess may have introduced a new learning topic to coven members such as tarot and provided them with appropriate reading material and then exercises to test their skill levels in determining the symbolism and meaning of the cards in the major arcana. Tarot is a particularly complex area of study but again not one that is of fundamental importance to initiated Wiccan practice. Like numerology, the study of tarot is a micro learning opportunity and as such remains as a sub journey. The Witch in this illustration may already have studied the tarot decks with some dedication and may be following the exercises given to her to test her skill levels. As such he or she may be at a Feeling element in this specific tarot micro learning cycle, whilst still simultaneously sitting within the Thinking element for her numerology topic, all the time underpinned by being within the Feeling element in the macro journey.

At any given time, members of The Grove are simultaneously studying a variety of topics. Anna is a continuing student of the Runes as it's her chosen form of divination. In addition, she also has an interest in magickal practices, spell-work and traditional Alexandrian festivals. Each of these topics are personal areas of study for her that she continues to follow in addition to the set tasks for Inner Court members in the regular New Moon training sessions. Recently the Inner Court members began studying palmistry and as part of the Inner Court training, Anna will be required, like her peers to read, practice and test her skills in that divination activity. Thus Anna will be involved in a variety of micro learning cycles and will be at various points of progress for each of them. Underpinning all that, as a first degree working toward her second degree

initiation, she will be cycling between the Feeling and Acceptance elements of the longer term, underpinning, and macro learning path.

Anna is a typical example of how the Witches I observed were on several micro paths at the same time. Whilst always being at a fairly stable and predictable point in the macro model, they were at different points in several different micro cycles.

Whole Person vs. Communities of Practice

This model of course reflects and describes the pattern of learning for individuals rather than the group to which they belong. Communities of Practice (CoP) describe both the learning pattern of the individual and the framework of the group that encourages and facilitates that individual's learning. From this research we can see how the theory of Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP) can be applied to seekers when they first join a coven. During their membership of Outer Court and as they initially remain within the Thinking element of the macro path, they do so by listening to their peers, by modelling, by researching the groups' suggested materials and through discussion with group mentors. This activity of course, is practice and participation as defined by Lave and Wenger (1991) in their discussions and prescriptions about the methodology of knowledge transfer. By gradually increasing their participation with the group and its practices, by slowly and safely developing their responsibility levels and by increasing their engagement with ever more important knowledge, the seeker moves from the periphery of the group toward a more core position through the process of LPP. However, where seekers remained with the Outer Court for only limited time before they moved on to another group or worked alone, CoP theory does not adequately explain their choice to leave, particularly when they initially expressed a strong desire to learn the Wiccan path. Habitus, as discussed in an earlier chapter, may provide a meaningful

solution to this dilemma and from my observations of those seekers who membership was brief, habitus as a theoretical notion offers a sound basis of explanation.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Bourdieu uses the notion of habitus to argue that each person brings with them a set of paradigms based on their previous engagements with their existing community that they then use as a reference point for further encounters with the world around them. These paradigms are difficult to modify and shape all their ensuing relationships and behaviours with their world. They bring their viewpoint to a new group and use it there rather than allow the group to shape their viewpoint.

In all the cases where Outer Courters chose to stay with the group for either one meeting or in Wally's case for over a year before moving on, their own inherent belief system appeared to be in opposition to and challenged by the paradigms held dear by The Grove membership. One seeker who joined us for one meeting only in late 2003 was clearly horrified when we discussed the negative energies and how they can impact on people. She had what Sammy described as the "fluffy bunny" viewpoint of Witchcraft that held on to the fairy tale flavour of magick and denied the presence of any negativity that might also be apparent in Wiccan and Witchcraft proceedings.

Wicca is a religion of balance and the traditional Wiccan Three Fold Law prescribes that whatever one does will come back threefold, much like Karma. Thus Wiccans make a firm choice to ensure they never engage with negative magick or rituals, either for their own benefit or to hex someone else, for fear it will come back on them threefold. Furthermore, there is no such thing as white or black magic. Witches argue that both types of magick are just different sides of the same energy coin. Magick is simply the action of determining and directing will and in working

magic there will always be a balance of good versus not quite as good and quite often the particular value of that magick is determined by the magician. For example someone may work some magick to ensure they get a particular job that obviously suits them extremely well and whilst this is advantageous for them, it may not be as productive for the people who miss out on the job. This is the recognition of balance in all things. For most Goddesses there is a male consort, for summer there is the opposite in winter, where there is light there is always dark. Thus whilst Wiccans do not believe in the devil, neither do they do any rituals that would conjure up such destructive energies, they have a healthy respect for the possible repercussions from dabbling with such dangerous entities and energies. It is a sensible and wise High Priestess who ensures her Outer and Inner Courtiers know this basic staple of Wiccan lore so that at all times they can behave responsibly. The seeker who visited us for one meeting that summer preferred only to think of magick, Witchcraft and rituals as fun processes that would enable her to have a fun packed life that met her immediate needs regardless of the repercussions on others. To be confronted with the reality and nastiness of 'the other side' simply did not fit with her existing paradigms and she chose to remove herself from the group rather than adapt her existing viewpoints to those of The Grove. This is habitus in practice and is also illustrated in the way in which Wally engaged with The Grove during his year with us.

Wally had been brought up as a Christian but in his adult years had gradually moved away from this religion. He was clearly Pagan sympathetic but even after a year of teaching he still retained some points of view in opposition to fundamental basics of Wiccan practice. As an example, there was a discussion in 2005 during an Outer Court session at which he was present where we were discussing our dreams. Wally always had vivid dreams, usually destructive and often tinged with some form of sexuality issues. On this occasion, his description of how he dealt

with his feelings in the aftermath of his dream illustrated how he had not embraced a basic staple of Wicca.

7th September 2004. Outer Court

In discussing our dreams, Wally as usual had experienced some pretty powerful ones that gave him considerable food for thought. These dream discussions have become very interesting over the last few months due largely to the reaction that most people have to Wally's dreams and his interpretations of them. It seems as though no matter how often we gently let Wally know that perhaps he needs to look at things in a different light, he chooses always to follow the same repetitive path and it's not always in concert with what a Wiccan is traditionally supposed to believe! This has become almost embarrassing because everyone around him tells him what the Wiccan perspective is and yet each month he still keeps going down this dark path in spite of all the suggestions offered by group members. Tonight was ridiculous and probably the most blatant time so far that the group really said that he was way out of line with his beliefs as they were illustrated in his interpretations of his dreams.

On this occasion he had had a dream that yet another creature had erupted from his belly, this time a large cat. The cat sat on his chest and would not let him move. It then turned into some kind of green "leprechaun" type being he called it and became very aggressive and nasty. Wally said in his dream he felt very threatened and woke himself up. By this time several members of the group were already stifling smiles and lowering their eyes because Wally always seemed to have dreams about things erupting from his body, cats sleeping on him or green entities threatening him. I could sense the frustration in some, the hilarity in others and the withdrawal from the conversation from the rest of the group. Sammy asked Wally what he did once he woke up and this was where the group really realised how their teachings had fallen on

deaf ears. Wally proceeded to describe how having woken himself up, he then drew up some energy from the planet beneath him (a usual and well taught process to help refresh and cleanse yourself) but then to our amazement talked about how he consecrated that energy! Energy from the planet is already consecrated, that's why you draw it up to cleanse yourself, to refresh and re-vitalise yourself. In an extremely surprised manner I immediately asked why he had felt the need to consecrate energy that in fact was the purest energy you could get. Sammy nodded her head but remained silent, Abigail and Iona repeated much the same thing and Diana sat shaking her head in disbelief. The scene was hilarious in fact. Here we were having taught each other, him included, about some of the basics of Wiccan practice and still after a year he didn't get it! As an adult educator, supposedly an expert on teaching adults, I was horrified at my own obvious inability to get this simple stuff through to him. I know it's not my sole responsibility and is in fact a shared one throughout The Grove but why oh why won't he learn?

This inability to engage with basic Wiccan principles even after repeated training may in fact be due not to ineffectual teaching or the inability of Wally to learn but instead may simply be because of habitus. Wally clearly came to the group with a pre-determined set of paradigms that he then used to modify the taught Wiccan principles so that they would fit into his existing thought patterns. Again, habitus determines that individuals come to a community and choose to use their existing knowledge sets to inform their interpretations of events around them. Wally was clearly using his existing and hard to modify thought patterns to filter engagements with The Grove and its teachings. Rather than allowing Wiccan principles to modify his existing paradigms, he chose instead to hold on to his tried and tested reference points and use them to guide his new experiences.

One of the things this highlights is certain inconsistencies with the notion of habitus. Whilst it would be impossible to say that Wally's inability to embrace utterly the Wiccan principle was born from his Christian upbringing, the question must be asked about the tenacity of existing paradigms. Why is it that some people can move to a group that clearly challenges their long held existing beliefs but gradually shift their position to one of support for the new paradigms while others cling stubbornly to their long held beliefs and knowledge sets? People generally have firmly held beliefs that inform and govern their spiritual alignment, whether that is toward polytheistic religions, monotheistic religions or no religion at all. Some people are raised in households that strictly enforce certain beliefs, only later to change from that to either another belief system, often in direct opposition to the one that informs all their role models, or to abandon any form of spiritual comfort altogether. Many members of The Grove and people I interviewed had been raised as Christians, often in quite dedicated Catholic homes.

One of the interesting cases that illustrate a difficulty with the notion of habitus in relation WP is that of Margaret. She described her childhood as a Christian one and said she was "always heavily involved in the Anglican faith" when she was young. She then had a break and when her children were born, later taught at Sunday school. She also mentioned that she'd always had an interest in nature. In her early forties, she met a Wiccan who challenged her long held, negative beliefs about Witchcraft. Initially she was unable to grasp that someone so "normal and caring" as she called him could in fact be part of a religious group she had been taught was less than wholesome. As a result of her developing questions, her Wiccan friend offered her some books to read and having read the books Margaret went on to say, "Wow, this was what I'd always believed!" She is now heavily involved in the Wiccan faith and as we have already seen, runs a teaching coven. What is interesting about this is

that if she had “always believed” in Wiccan principles, why was she so heavily involved in a faith system that was obviously in opposition to her innate thought patterns? Why did she spend so many years and so much energy following the Anglican faith when it wasn’t what her thought paradigms actually were arguing for? Was she herded into a Christian faith system because it was the mainstream, respected and expected pathway and then internally adapted it to meet her own needs? If so, how did this influence her Wiccan apprenticeship through the Thinking, Feeling and Acceptance points of WP later on?

Kathryn explained her upbringing as strictly Catholic and in fact she remained a dedicated Catholic until she was well into her adulthood, married and had young children. Her partner, Peter, who was not fixed in any religion, developed a keen interest in Wiccan practices, joined an Outer Court and gradually became more involved. Eventually he requested initiation and it was at this point that he and Kathryn had to really come to grips with their opposing belief systems. Having met some of Peter’s Wiccan colleagues she began to learn a little more about Wicca and eventually joined an Outer Court, keeping the fact secret from her strict Catholic family. Kathryn now works in partnership with Peter to also lead a teaching coven.

Like Margaret, Kathryn moved from a strictly held belief system based in monotheistic principles of deity and prescribed dogma to a religion that encompasses multiplicity of deity and great freedom of ritual expression. If habitus determines that existing thought paradigms, particularly long held and firmly entrenched ones are so resistant to change, why do so many Wiccans come from Christian backgrounds that obviously prescribe radically different principles to those of Wicca? Is the strength of habitus based on other elements such as personality types, the effectiveness of the new argument to overcome existing paradigms, or the

innate ability of some people to encompass and embrace new experiences and situations more openly than others? Whilst habitus does in fact go a considerable way to describing how some people are unable to modify their existing practices and reference points, it fails to shed light on why others can quite easily modify their thought patterns to embrace new concepts as occurs when Witches learn their Craft, particularly within the Thinking element of the macro learning journey.

What differentiates the Whole Person (WP) model of learning from other contemporary models is its appreciation for and inclusion of holistic learning. When exploring and learning about issues and situations that are potentially life changing, such as religious and spiritual journeys, political affiliations or other volatile and sensitive debates, adults often undergo changes not just in their behaviours but in the way they view their world. This learning is transformative and opens the doors for individuals to reframe their existing references and to accommodate and embrace instead whole new ways of *being*. It is more than simply a cognitive modification or a behavioural shift. It involves changing their entire way of engaging with their environment. Learning via academia and the classroom setting primarily involves the transmission of cognitive frameworks that are designed to prepare the learner for life beyond the classroom. For instance, an accountant can attend university to develop their intellectual skills and gain the techniques necessary for gainful and satisfactory employment but this learning experience doesn't fundamentally change the way he views the world. Once in the workforce he will probably undergo workplace training perhaps to induct him into his new environment and to provide him with the skills and tools required in that specific setting. Again this training provides for a cognitive modification and an addition to his behavioural skill set but it's not usually the catalyst for life transforming consideration. Learning about something that someone is passionate about, that inspires them to greater

things, that empowers them to view situations more openly and teaches them something about themselves is a more holistic form of learning and addresses other elements of the self.

Freire (as cited in Foley, 2001, p. 78) labelled this holistic learning “conscientisation” and Branagan and Boughton (2003) characterised it as moving, “from a relatively naïve worldview to a more sophisticated one” (p. 353). They suggest that this type of learning is extremely difficult to describe because while it may be easy to quantify a change in intellect or skill it is difficult to measure a change in one’s perspective. With members of The Grove and the many other Witches I interviewed, they felt that their journey of learning was more than simply a development of their intellect and skill. It wasn’t just about knowing which deity represents what characteristic or how to erect a circle through ritual, it was also about connecting with one’s inner self. Mezirow (as cited in Foley, 2001, p. 78) calls this, “perspective transformation” and indeed the Witches in this study did feel that their perspective on life and on themselves was altered as a result of the learning journey they had undergone.

In her humanist view of education Marshall (2006) notes that,

Emotions and feelings are not enemies of reason or deterrents to rational thinking; they are essential to learning. It has become clear that our mind cannot be separated from our body and our emotions, that cognition and emotion are inextricably connected (p. 24).

Thus, the WP model captures not just the cognitive acquisition but also the knowing and sense of experience that occurs when someone transforms their relationship with the world. Marshall went on to say that in this type of learning that touches the core of our being, “There is a

conscious shift in our awareness perception, and meaning about who we are” (p. 24). This type of learning needs not just the brain or hands to work but the whole body including the mind and the soul. When Wiccans move into the Feeling element of the macro learning path and begin to explore how ritual impacts on them, they learn through their senses and their body, not just through their brains or their hands. This type of learning is not about doing or thinking, it’s about feeling, and *being* and developing a sustained confidence in that process of *being*. The acquired wisdom comes from more than just explicit, formal knowledge. Knowing and wisdom come from implicit, tacit understanding. “Wisdom is the ability to hear your own inner voice, and even more importantly, the ability to act on it” (Whitecloud, 2006, p. 46). The participants in Merriam et al’s (2003) study, who were Witches in America, talked in interviews about the intuitive knowing they gained during their training. For them the learning was not just about theoretical pursuits or how to use sacred tools. It was also about learning to access their inner voice and trusting the messages given to them. They had to learn to use their intuition and to see that as equally as important as any traditionally known learning modality. This was learning a new topic, in a new way, to gain a new holistic view of oneself.

During the later points of the Feeling element and often during points of Acceptance, Wiccans are engaged more in knowing rather than with an ongoing process of gaining even more knowledge. This is about wisdom or collected knowing that is then used in its own right. When a Witch is still learning or gathering knowledge, he or she is still testing that knowledge (Thinking and Feeling elements) against existing paradigms. The new knowledge is compared with and tested against existing meaning sets to find out where it fits in the existing thought patterns. However, when that Witch gets to the later points of the Feeling element and uses Acceptance opportunities, they are no longer actively seeking

knowledge but rather using existing knowing to reinforce their place in the world. The Witch is using his or her process of knowing to continue their practice rather than using skills to gain further knowledge.

Whole Person as Practice and Theory

Adult learning theories and models have become fashionable in both academic and commercial arenas over the last two decades as organisations and governments realise the potential benefit from more empowered learning structures. There has been and continues to be considerable funding allocated for research into learning modalities, training structures and methodologies particularly where these have the potential to positively impact upon commercial and national productivity. The learning organisation as initially described by Senge (1999) spawned an empire of commercially available consultants willing to reengineer organisations into more productive and effective change agents that supported learning. While the theory went a considerable way to advancing our understanding of learning within organisations and generated significant academic outputs, the same is also true of other popular social learning theories. CoPs likewise generated a cohort of business experts available, for a fee, to refresh and revitalise an organisation to facilitate an improved learning culture. It too provided food for thought at an academic level and was another catalyst that generated productive, quality academic consideration that went a considerable way in raising our understanding about how organisations are affected by their learning strategies.

Whilst these and other popular learning theories of the last two decades have paved the way for a deeper level of understanding about learning, they have also become cash cows for consultants who may or may not have a firm appreciation and a robust understanding of the dynamics involved in engineering stable, effective learning architectures. As a

result of the evolving fashionable trend in learning theories we now see two separate groups of resource materials with one authored, serviced and read by academics while another group of materials on exactly the same topic is generated and read by the practitioners (Easterby-Smith, Snell & Gherardi, 1998). The theory and practice of learning organisations is a prime example of this dichotomy of resources. Whilst academia may be the birth place of theory, the marketplace is where it is practised and this difference is reflected in the materials developed for each sector.

Theories are simply that, theories. By themselves they do not generate any productive avenues to overcome problems and issues that an organisation or individual faces regarding learning. They are merely platforms from which practitioners can generate the real and practicable tools of the learning trade. That is not to say they are not valuable. Of course any theory is valuable where it can provide a framework of understanding that facilitates productive outputs. The real test of a theory however, is whether it works in practice. Bandura (1977) demands that a theory be rigorous in practice as well as in concept saying, “The value of a theory is ultimately judged by the power of the procedures it generates” (p. 4).

Senge (1994) recognised this very issue as he fervently discussed his theory of learning organisations with the very people who could be its practitioners. Whilst they love his theory he said, “many of them are still not certain how to put the concepts into practice” (p. 5). In response to this overwhelming feedback that showed his theory was important but in which he was frequently asked, “but how do you *do* it”, he produced support material that offered the *how to*. Here then was an example of the theory versus practitioner resource material and the diverging paths of discourse between the two groups.

So where does this dichotomy leave us in terms of the theory and practical application of this proposed WP model of learning? To answer that question, one must refer back to the purpose of this research. As an ethnographer, my intention was always to observe and learn from the participants, to empathically interpret what I saw, listened to and experienced and then to offer a body of information that effectively articulated those observations. Whilst I could then have mapped that evidence to existing theories of a social, cognitive, behavioural or humanist nature, instead I chose to generate a complementary model that better described the experiences I observed and participated in. In so doing I do not in any way propose that this model would work in all situations, rather that it may provide a model that enables us to better understand how people learn and practice knowledge and skills that are based holistically and relate to their perceptions of themselves, their spirituality and their perceived world.

Newman (as cited in Branagan & Boughton, 2003, p. 349) described three levels of learning which are instrumental learning, interpretive or communicative learning and critical or emancipatory learning. These three levels operate simultaneously for individuals and the groups in which they are cited. Individuals tend to learn at all these three levels to enable them to better work with and for their group.

The instrumental learning level refers to the need to gain the basic skills and required knowledge to become actively involved in the chosen topic of the group. For instance, if an individual chose to work as a volunteer for a political organisation during an election campaign, they would probably need to learn how to answer the phone, how to teach voters the best way to vote, how to make flags or even how to doorknock for support. Like the Thinking and Feeling elements in the WP model, this level includes the basic building blocks necessary for active participation.

Branagan and Boughton (2003) noted that their study participants learnt the practical skills needed to support the groups they had chosen to be involved with. They learnt how to drive buses to get activists to a rally and they learnt how to write journal articles that would raise social awareness of certain environmental issues. Likewise, Wiccans learn how to prepare a circle through ritual, learn about necessary circle etiquette and learn to perform basic tasks that enable them to better practice the rituals of their faith system. These skills and this underpinning knowledge are the basic tools and techniques vital to Wiccan participation and ritual development.

The second level, that of interpretive or communicative learning focuses on the connections between the learner and their counterparts and the symbolic interactions between the individual, the group and its counterparts. It is where people learn to express themselves in a manner conducive to group paradigms of behaviours and where they learn to use shared beliefs as a means of social discourse. In their study, Branagan and Boughton (2003) observed the study participants as they learnt how to make artistic banners and effigies that made bold, volatile social statements and created social comment. They learnt how to use symbols and art as a means of hard core, public impact. In addition this is the level at which individuals choose to engage in in-depth study about the topic at hand so they can better understand the connection between themselves and the world around them. Again in the same study the researchers noted that participants eagerly studied their environmental and peace objectives including the legal issues at a state and national level, the ecological dilemmas and the political architectures that held the power structures they wished to transform. They read academic journals and legal acts and regulations to gain a greater understanding of the issues presented to them. Such active reading enabled them to gain a better understanding of not just their own topic but the people and stakeholders

that were equally as engaged whether on their side of the campaign or in opposition to it.

In their apprenticeships through Outer and Inner Court, Wiccans too learn at this level. In the Thinking and Feeling elements of the WP model, Wiccans actively study and research the theoretical underpinnings of their practice. Their study provides for a greater level of understanding about the legends behind the rituals and allows their practice to have greater personal meaning. In addition, Wiccans learn how to develop sigils, ritual designs and other patterns of symbology that act as reference points and conduits to hidden meanings. For instance, the five pointed star or pentagram is a symbol with immense meaning for practicing Wiccans. Newcomers learn about its significance and power. Likewise with the magickal tools such as the athame, pentacle and chalice, each tool holds symbolic meaning and it is necessary and appropriate that Wiccans have an appreciation for the value of these symbolic tools.

Finally, critical or emancipatory learning involves reframing previously held beliefs or thought patterns by questioning the world. It is the level of learning that transforms someone's perception of themselves and others into something more sophisticated and original. Branagan and Boughton (2003) described how participants' internal reference frameworks were altered at this level as they came to new realisations about their strengths and place in the world. "As activists come to understand the nature of power, and struggle to achieve their objectives, they learn also about their capabilities, and are often surprised at what lies within" (p. 353). The WP model reflects that same level of learning during the Feeling and Acceptance element of the macro path. It is during this time that Wiccans will experiment, test out new ways to interact with their faith and build new assumptions both about their place in the Wiccan world and about their own self worth. This level of learning reflects the holistic element of

learning that is based not just in the brain but in the holistic being, in the mind and soul. It is here, at this level, that people including Wiccans begin to understand more about *who they are* rather than *what they are doing*.

Conclusion

Wicca is without doubt recognised as one of the fastest growing belief systems in America (Allen, 2001; Badie, 2003; Marty, 1999; Warwick, 1995; Wilkinson, 1999). The Australian census and various other research reports indicate that the same is true in Australia (Bevilacqua, 2003; Burke, 2003; Chynoweth, 2002; Jeffrey, 2003; Mandizonneveldt, 2002; McLean, 2002; Patterson, 2001; Petrys, 2002; Wills, 2003). Whilst there are a number of suggestions about why this may be including the possibility that people are now demanding greater freedom to move away from the traditional dogmas of the past and the need for a less patriarchal approach to religion, one of the factors in this growth may be surprisingly that Wiccans do not proselytise. As Fred said, “We don’t talk Wicca unless we’re asked”. This reflects one of the basic Wiccan principles which is that Wiccan knowledge and skills will not be passed on to anyone unless someone has specifically sought it out. Wiccans are not permitted to proselytize and coax others into joining the religion, neither are they permitted to discuss certain mystery ritual practices and beliefs with anyone unless invited to do so although they may discuss ‘routine’ rituals not associated with mystery outcomes. One of the reasons for this is to protect Wiccan practitioners from engaging in discussions with people who may be violently opposed to Pagan beliefs and thus present a possible danger to the individual. The other and more important reason is that by discussing the religion and teaching only with those who have genuinely shown a dedicated interest, there is a greater chance that that person will choose to further their path toward Wicca. Thus followers of the Wiccan faith system have made a conscious choice to foster their

spiritual development along this route, often in opposition to the expectations and wishes of those people important to them and as such their strength and tenacity is often more prevalent than followers of more traditional religions.

Wiccans are also encouraged and taught to take control of their spirituality and their relationship with deity and to express this relationship in a way that is meaningful for them. This individualism and freedom of expression, say the Witches in my research, offers many people a more personalised religious and spiritual experience and thus meets their needs more effectively than the traditional dogma prescribed by existing, conventional religious systems. While many people in traditional faith systems are obviously comfortable with the prescribed manner in which they are expected to relate to their God and/or Goddess during ritual and prayer, Wiccans see this approach as offering a limited range of choice in terms of learning modality for its individuals. They argue that the manner in which the practitioners of mainstream religions learn about their faith system is determined by the hierarchy of a pre-determined curriculum that often does not allow for the individual needs of the learner. In contrast, while Wiccans learn from the curriculum laid down by their High Priestess, their practice and relationship with deity is not set down in any particular predetermined fashion but is instead a supported process developed from and by individual need. Wiccans argue that this freedom of expression within a supported framework of learning offers a greater degree of self responsibility to the learner and thus enables them to find a path and outcome that suits them rather than one that, by necessity, suits the majority of a congregation.

The concept of the WP learning model is also valuable to many other individuals and groups who engage in learning processes that involve more than just cognitive or behavioural requirements. WP as a learning

modality ensures that individuals not only learn the skills, knowledge set and attitudes required of them but that they view themselves and their environment in a more connected fashion. In other words, their learning involves a transformative component that re-engineers, reinforces and authenticates their place in their world. This depth of learning takes place in many different milieus including in volunteering organisations, caring and support institutions, political and lobby groups as well as religious groups and bodies. In fact WP learning takes place in any environment where passion and absolute commitment are the hallmarks of membership. What appears not to be recognised currently is the value and impact of WP learning in the process of skill and knowledge transfer within those types of groups.

The learning principles adopted by most adult teachers and trainers regardless of the environment in which they teach, the subject matter and the needs of the students, reflect those espoused by contemporary adult learning theories which in turn fail to take into account the WP multi dimensionality of learning. These contemporary theories construct learning primarily either as a cognitive, behavioural or attitudinal process and outcome, thus denying that the learner may transform their understanding about themselves though a more holistic process that is situated within their whole being and not just within their head. The learner's sense of experience, their intuition and their knowing is not factored in as an essential ingredient in the learning process, when in fact this ingredient is often the glue that binds their learning together and cements it as a long term outcome. Trainers, teachers and people responsible for designing and delivering learning outcomes and modalities to people in informal, impassioned groups need to become better acquainted with the WP approach so that they can gain a broader understanding of learners as active participants in their own holistic learning environment. WP is not just a theory of learning practice but is

an example of the practical reality of learning that takes place when committed, passionate people engage in learning that offers transformational opportunities to learn more about themselves and their connection with their innate intuitive self. Whilst it is reported here as theory, it is in fact simply a reconstruction of the process that Witches undergo every day as they learn and develop their ritual and Wiccan skills. This then is the theoretical report about the practicality and intuitive experience of becoming a Witch.

Section 2 - What Witches Learn
Chapter 5

**WITCHFUL THINKING: THE THEORIES OF RITUAL AND
MAGIC MAKING**

The Theoretical Definition and Context of Ritual

Having examined one branch of this research, that of *how* Witches learn, I now turn to *what* Witches learn. Whilst of course they learn a broad spectrum of skills, both those associated with fundamental Wiccan practice and those more akin to esoteric support practice, this study focuses on the primary product of their learning, the outcome of their dedicated learning journey, that of ritual practice. This chapter will discuss aspects of the anthropology of ritual as a means of situating the Wiccan rituals within a theoretical and conceptual background and will explore the notion that ritual is more than just process but is also the end result of the Wiccan learning journey. I argue that in the context of Wiccan situational learning, ritual can be both a social affective instrument and also a consequence of either coven or solitary practice.

In exploring the relationship between application and theory and in using ethnographic examples to either support or refute the theory of ritual, it is of course usual to provide examples of the field work conducted and observed. These examples are then systematically compared or contrasted with theoretical constructs. One of the difficulties with this approach in this case is that many of the rituals conducted were conducted within the confidential safety of the circle sacred space and so were either personal in nature for the participants or were mystery rituals.

The rituals that were deeply personal to those present are represented here in a somewhat skeletal nature minus the detail as a means of ethically protecting the participants' right to privacy and respect. Mystery rituals

are those rites which include a degree of in situ experience that cannot be fully explained prior to, or separate from the ritual in hand. Participants in mystery rituals are led through a process whereby they discover their own experience within the rite and to describe the content and possible outcome is to deny them the right of first hand experience. Initiation is one such rite where the participant is provided with a personalised ritual vehicle through which they derive their own experience. Not only would a full descriptor of an initiation rite destroy the beauty and sanctity in the discovery of one's own personal mystery experience, it would also be disrespectful to the Wiccan community. To reveal more than the intent and simplest content of such rites is to openly defy and disregard the mores and expectations of Wiccan protocol. The ethnographic examples contained within this chapter are therefore devoid of any private materials and I have chosen deliberately not to discuss the details associated with Wiccan mystery rites.

Full Moon Esbat, May 2005

Tonight the moon was in Sagittarius, a fire sign and it was Diana's turn to lead the ritual. She chose to invoke the Goddess Pele and to create for us a meditative ritual where we could find some balance in our fire energy. She gave each one of us a sparkler and asked that we light it and use its symbolic relationship to fire as a tool through which we could bring to our conscious a behaviour or situation that we need to rebalance. We all sat round the edge of the balefire, lit our sparklers and retreated into our own meditative practice.

After all this time practising this developing skill, I think I'm getting the hang of this. I can really find outcomes now as I listen to the messages and visions that come from meditation. I notice as well that Anna's meditations now seem much more 'real' and intense than they were a year or more ago. Because she and I have been through the initiation

process at around the same time, I tend to compare the quality of my learning results with hers and she's admitted that she does the same with me. We use each other as a kind of mutual measurement to see if we're progressing! I notice that the newer members of the group, and in fact particularly the Outer Courters really have to 'try' when they're asked to visualise something or meditate whereas Anna and I now seem to find meditation and certainly visualisation much easier. Like we've finally got the hang of it somehow.

This occasion, like many others since, illustrated that for The Grove membership, their solitary and group rituals served a multiple of purposes. While we worked together in many rituals, we also often detached ourselves from the group and worked on our own outcomes and then came together again to share them if that was appropriate. Rituals were thus both a means to an end but were also often the end in themselves. In this instance, our coven invocation served to cement our identity as practicing Wiccans and to deepen our sense of shared belief and cohesion while our private meditations were moments that delivered personal messages as outcomes. These ritually meditative outcomes were attainable only after considerable practise and skill development under the tutelage of our teacher Sammy. We could not have received intuitive messages with such clarity and definition had we not first put months and months of practise into it.

Reflecting this ritual diversity, there has been considerable discussion and debate for many decades across the anthropological, sociological and related disciplines about the definition and purpose of ritual and this diversification has yielded a broad range of theories that both compliment and refute one another. Indeed Grimes stated, "There is no one place at which an interpreter of ritual must begin to study it, because ritual itself has no single origin, and thus no one explanation" (1995, p. 3).

For example, In describing a Javanese Slametan, a community feast and gathering of religious significance, Geertz (1957a) described the ritual as a, “Commensal mechanism of social integration” (p. 35) suggesting the ritual enables a social group to strengthen its sense of community. This approach reflects Durkheim’s view that the purpose of ritual is, “To evoke, maintain, or re-create certain mental states of those groups” (2002, p. 38). Rozen (2004) picks up the theme of welding social groups through ritual constructs stating, “Rituals are a medium for communicating core symbolic forms and passing traditional cultural information from one generation to the next (p. 529). Barnes (1990) agrees stating that ritual is, “one of the ways a culture transmits its interpretation of reality to new generations” (p. 216). J. Smith (1996) takes that approach one step further and rather than positing that ritual “transmits interpretations of reality”, he argues that instead, “Ritual is a means of performing the way things ought to be in conscious tension to the way things are” (p. 480). In contrast, Droogers (2005) sees ritual as, “The temporary emergence and playful enactment, in its own right, of a shadow reality” (p. 138) and this definition leads to the theme of exploring the elements of ritual rather than the function of ritual. Davis-Floyd (1996) sees ritual in this light and suggests that, “A ritual is a patterned, repetitive, and symbolic enactment of a cultural belief or value” (p. 148). Arno (2003) describes ritual as, “a form of reference that is embedded in the direct experience of deeply significant aspects of social life” (p. 807) while Tambiah (1996) compliments this view by saying that ritual is the, “charged use of certain vehicles and devices of communication as a mode of experiencing and activating the extraordinary and extra-mundane” (p. 496). Rappaport (1979) argues that whilst ritual may indeed be a conduit to transmitting social beliefs and constructs, of itself it is, “the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not encoded by the performers” (p. 175). Like Rappaport, V. Turner (1987) disassembled ritual and explored its constituent parts such as symbolism and metaphorical performance

concluding that, “Rituals, dramas, and other performative genres are often orchestrations of media, not expressions in a single medium” (p. 23).

These synoptic definitions of ritual appear to treat the topic from one of two main standpoints and thus focus on either ritual functionally as a service to, or a process of, the social context in which the ritual takes place or alternatively comment on the construction and assembly of ritual itself and extract those components as exemplars of shared social schemata. In both cases, there appears to be limited reference to ritual as a product or outcome of the social learning process and this omission highlights deficiencies in the effective definition and explanation of the ritual act. In conducting my research I chose to focus on two key concepts; that of *how* the Witches in my study learnt their craft and that of *what* they learnt. The *what*, and thus the product or outcome, was their ritual and magickal practice. In reviewing the literature on ritual, it became obvious that the greatest majority of ritual theory, discussion and debate focuses around either the function and process of ritual and therefore the service it provides to the social construct (Boissevain, 1992; Douglas, 1973; Durkheim, 2002; Geertz, 1957a; Gluckman, 1954; Leach, 1976; Malinowski, 1954; Radcliffe-Brown, 1931; Van Gennep, 1960; Weber, 1965) or the construction of the ritual such as the ritual dialogue, the symbolism or its performance (Bloch, 1989; Goffman, 1972; Kapferer, 2005; Langer, 1957; Levi-Strauss, 1969; Myerhoff, 1974; Rappaport, 1979; V. Turner, 1986). There appears to be limited literature that views ritual as a product or final outcome of situational learning rather than as a function of social interaction.

To further compound this omission, in discussing the traditional and contemporary theories of ritual, Grimes (1995) like many other authors dismisses ritual as product completely and instead suggests that many theorists polarise ritual process and ritual structure. He goes on to argue

that rather than seeing those two elements as complimentary or even simultaneous notions, these polemical discussions are pointless given that, “every process presupposes a structure, and vice versa” (Grimes, 1995, p. 77). Such a viewpoint is admirable and offers a degree of common sense but his discussion still omits to refer to ritual as a product and instead discusses process versus structure, not ritual outcome as the product of a social process.

This omission is reflected generally across the broader discipline of the anthropology of ritual, where in fact the various theoretical standpoints neither support a study of ritual as a social learning product nor do they discuss process or structure in a holistic and symbiotic sense.

“Summer Begins” Festival early December, 2005

What a great afternoon! Traditional Alexandrian or Gardnerian covens would have celebrated Beltaine a month ago and be thinking about celebrating the Summer Solstice at the end of this month but given The Grove is more in tune with Western Australian seasonal cycles, Sammy and Fred have us celebrating what’s actually happening with local nature, rather than just what the liturgical Wheel of the Year says we have to celebrate. So today was all about focusing on the start of our Western Australian summer season and using that to conduct magick.

Toward the end of the ritual, Sammy and Fred consecrated a bowl full of small amulets by holding the bowl over the balefire candle and visualising the sacred energy of the candle flame flowing through the contents. This meant the amulets were free of any negative energy and ready to be filled with whatever energy we wanted them to have. After handing an amulet to each person present, she then informed us that we were each to charge our own amulet with good luck and prosperity for the year ahead. Each one of us held our amulet over the purifying flame

of the candle and pushed good luck and prosperity into the heart of the amulet.

I love this kind of ritual where magick plays such a vital role. It's not like when I was a kid and when going to church was like 'going through the motions'. It's not like you do it because it's just something you do. Magickal ritual is much more than that I think. For a start, we can't do it till we've learnt what magick is and how you put a spell together properly so it's like the culmination of a series of lessons. It's also much more 'alive' than routine ritual. You walk away with something, in this case an amulet that is the result of some pretty deep and special ritual moments.

This seasonal festival was one where the ritual was more about conducting advanced Witchcraft than about acting out a liturgically relevant ritual. Many festivals are ritual celebrations that act as symbolic references to archetypal stories, or to illustrate seasonal activity, perhaps to bond a group together through shared activity, or to facilitate the journey of a coven member through a life changing rite of passage. But this ritual, with its magickal addition was more of an opportunity for advanced members to demonstrate and use their hard learnt skills in magickal competence. Wiccans view magick as a skill, something that a learner eventually becomes proficient in after considerable practise and repeated application. Thus it is not a ritual ingredient used unless experienced practitioners are present. In this instance the "Summer Begins" Festival included a section that was much more about using learnt skills than about participating in a functional activity.

In reference to this broad range of Wiccan ritual activity and to bring a degree of structure to the diversity of ritual theories available for review and dialogue, I propose a simplistic but functional diagrammatic framework that organises the prominent traditional and contemporary

theoretical discussions into a recognisable pattern. In order to discuss those theory groups most relevant to this particular research topic, ritual as the product of a social learning milieu, I will concentrate on the contrasts, comparisons and omissions within two key theoretical areas, that of ritual as a tool to bind a social group and that of symbology and performance as elements of ritual structure. In particular I shall explore the work of Durkheim and Geertz in relation to the former theoretical area and V. Turner and Rappaport in relation to the latter.

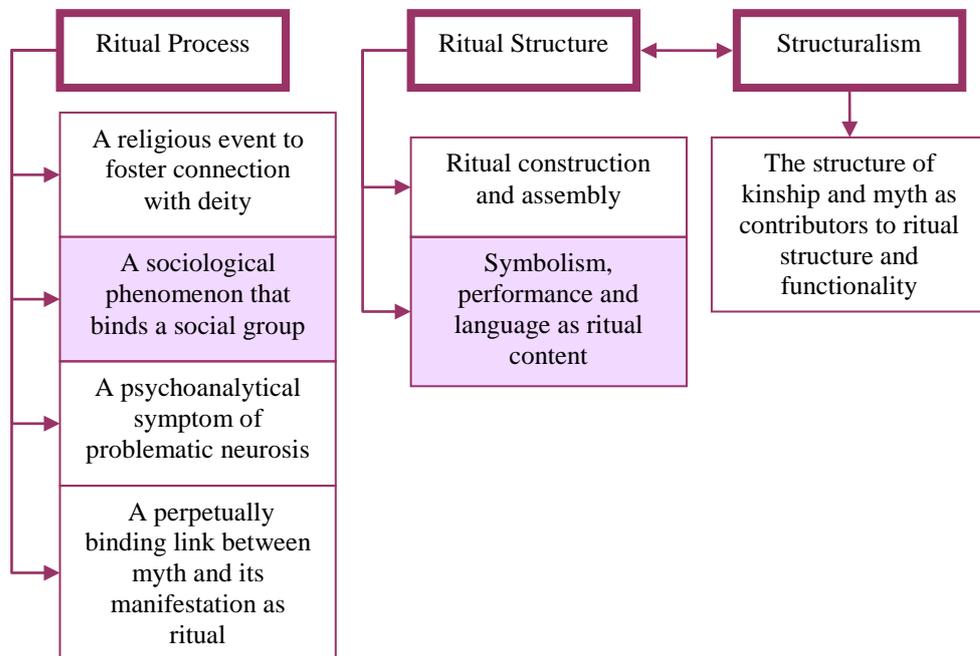


Figure 9 Composition of the Theories of Ritual

I will preface this discussion by pointing out that the notions of ritual as either a functional process or a structural representation of social schema are appropriate and valid. The ritual acts observed whilst undertaking my research were clear examples, and often deliberate acts, of social and community fusion.

Beltaine with Margaret's group, October 2005.

I caught up with --- today, haven't seen him since the Midwinter Ball. I also met --- after hearing so much about her from Margaret and Sammy. She's as amazing in ritual as they both said she would be!

Margaret was holding a Beltaine festival at her place and had invited everyone in The Grove over for the ritual. They all came to our place for Full Moon Esbat a couple of months ago so it was nice to go over there and catch up again. Her group had all gotten together to write the ritual so it had a real sense of sharing to it.

This festival is about Spring and the birth of new life so it has a degree of fertility associated with it. They had written part of the ritual as a treasure hunt and we all had to go off and find these particular things throughout the garden that symbolised new life and we had to do it in teams. Margaret organised us into teams with members from both groups in each team so we got to work with people from her group as well as our own. It was so much fun because the teams ended up in competition with each other and by the time we finished, everyone knew everyone and we were in absolute fits of laughter.

It got even better though because Margaret had also organised a dance around the Maypole. We each had a coloured ribbon attached to the Maypole tip and we were supposed to dance in unison to plait the ribbon round the pole. So much for good plans because we were all hopeless at coordinating the plait and the dance! We couldn't work out who was supposed to go under and who was supposed to go over and so the end result was a rather jumbled and tangled ribbon plait covering the Maypole. It was so much fun though. I don't think I've laughed so much in ages!

This was one of the several occasions where different covens got together to celebrate festivals or Esbats. It was a ritual designed not just to celebrate the religious significance of the time of year but also to weld two groups together who had a natural social and spiritual connection. Sammy and Margaret had both been trained by the same teacher so the teaching they provided to their coven members was born from the same principles of practice. Shared festivals were therefore a time to celebrate that ongoing legacy and the shared history of the two groups.

The Witches used the rituals, and in particular the inter group rituals, to strengthen their bond to one another, to their group identity and to the Wiccan ideals and community. Several Witches, most notably Margaret and Bob, both commented on the benefit of increased communal cohesion that shared rituals offered to practitioners. “It’s a way to keep us unified as a community” Margaret pointed out while Bob noted, “When we get together, we get to see what each of the groups are doing and we all learn from that”. Bob’s comment highlights my contention however that whilst I agree ritual is a vehicle for increased social integration and a tool for communicating shared communal social symbology, the academic explorations to date do not go far enough in explaining ritual as a phenomenon of learnt outcome. To illustrate this point I shall refrain from providing an in-depth explanation of the work of the four theorists but rather will concentrate on the elements of their work that relate directly to my research results, that of ritual as a product or outcome of the learning process.

Ritual Process Contrasted to Ritual Product

The classic Durkheimian notion of ritual describes it as a functional process or tool that influences the shared social constructs of the group in which and for which it is being performed (Durkheim, 1976). Durkheim’s theory of ritual is a micro element of his broader, macro

interests in the explanation of social order and development and thus his ritual theory is complementary to and an adjunct of his explorations of society at large (J. Turner, 1990). He couches his discussions of ritual within the broader topic of religion, citing the concept of a shared religion as both a framework of beliefs that encourage a social group to consider the interests of the wider group before their own and a body of rites. “The first are states of opinion, and consist in representations; the second are determined modes of action” (Durkheim, 1976. p. 111). Thus religion he argues is the construct that influences the behaviour of a social group and is a conceptual tool for social discipline. This influence and discipline occurs via the separation or “bipartite division” of the religious and physical world into two opposing classifications, the profane and the sacred, “which embrace all that exists, but which radically exclude each other” (Durkheim, 1976. p. 40). Thus ritual becomes the exemplar of appropriate social behaviour and acts as the mechanism through which that group identifies itself as a discrete body and welds and connects itself more firmly together. C. Bell (1992) suggests that this casual means of group cohesion via ritual occurs by the, “Promotion of consensus and the psychological and cognitive ramifications of such consensus” (p. 171). Indeed this consensus and enhanced dedication to The Grove was an obvious consequence of the group rituals I observed and participated in within this study. The group members took great pride in their contribution to shared rituals and the atmosphere during and post each event was one of a close knit family or community.

Spring Equinox, September, 2006

We all met at a park in Armadale this afternoon to celebrate the Spring Equinox. It's a great little park with a stream running through it and

barbeques and it's fantastic for holding festivals because it's so peaceful and quiet. Pretty much everyone from the coven was there and also Winston which was just fantastic because I hadn't seen him for ages.

Sammy organised a ritual where we all had to play a part in it together. In fact it wouldn't have worked as well at all if you were a solitary or if there were just one or two of you. We each took a flower and after projecting what we wanted to work on about ourselves into the flower, we carefully removed the stems and put them together in one pile and then pulled the petals off our flowers and put them in a communal bowl in the centre of the gathering.

Sammy had asked us to hard boil an egg, paint and decorate it so that it was a beautiful piece of artwork and bring it with us. Anna, Cath and I figured we'd somehow honour Spring with our carefully created pieces of egg art but how wrong we were! With the flower petals in the bowl, Sammy asked us to each take our egg and throw it as high as we possibly could up into the air above us. She explained that the higher they went, the better our luck would be for the coming Spring season. What a hoot! There were broken eggs scattered all around us on the grass and we were so much falling about laughing that half the time we didn't see the eggs till they fell back on our heads! It was a good thing we were in a quiet part of the park because I swear people would have thought we were nuts had they seen us throwing eggs in the air! We then had to peel what was left of our egg (Winston's went so high that when it came back down it was mush!), eat what we could without eating dirt and grass and put the peel and inedible eggs bits into the pile with the flower stems.

We then each took a handful of the petals in the communal bowl and threw them up in the air as well. This was not just for good luck but was an offering to Air, the corresponding element with Spring.

With the petals scattered to the four winds we then very ceremoniously buried the flower stems and the broken egg shells we'd so carefully painted and created as an offering to Earth and as a means of saying thank you for the bounty that Spring brings us.

By the time we'd done this, the barby was hot, Fred was busy cooking on it and we all started playing Boules. These afternoons together are such a load of fun. The ritual was fantastic and so was the company. I remember as a child going to church and always having to wear my Sunday best and sit quietly and behave. I know some Wiccan rituals are sombre and quiet and on occasions that's very fitting but this afternoon's ritual couldn't have been further from my childhood memories of religious ritual. Getting hit on the head by a hardboiled egg after you've thrown it skyward was probably not my childhood pastor's idea of a serious religious event I suspect!

This was one of the many occasions where our coven ritual was as much about honouring the Wheel of the Year and the Divine as it was about bonding as a group. After so long together, we always felt very comfortable in each other's company and these ludic rituals and socialising events were opportunities to cement our shared ties and revel in our friendships.

While Durkheimian theory goes a considerable way in helping to define the social function and purpose of ritual for the Witches in my research, there are inherent problems with the theory content and approach. Deflem (1991) argued that Durkheim laid the foundation for conceptual consideration of ritual purpose and placed considerable emphasis on the causal effects of ritual but did not discuss what occurs during ritual itself. In examining Durkheim's work in relation to my own research, it is possible and plausible to compare his discussion of the casual effect on social cohesion with the results of ritual for the Witches in my study but

it goes a minimal distance in exploring how the Witches' rituals were actually conducted. In his paper in which he developed a model of Durkheimian macro social theories, J. Turner (1990) reflected Defflem's criticisms and suggested that many of Durkheim's theoretical notions cannot be translated into replicable scientific models of process. Rather he argues, several elements of the theory are conceptual and idealistic rather than practical and that Durkheim placed those concepts within the confines of a perfect social environment rather than a realistic situation. He terms this approach, "Durkheim's' non-scientific advocacy for a "moral society" " (J. Turner, 1990, p. 1189) and goes on to say that Durkheim focused on causality at the expense of ritual construction. Grimes (1995) suggests that one way to look at theory is via the descriptors 'hard' and 'soft' where a hard definition of ritual is a model of clearly observable and defined rituals. By comparison a soft definition of ritual, "is a "model for" attending to what is yet relatively unknown about them" (Grimes, 1995, p. 60). Using this descriptor, Durkheim's theory of ritual could be seen more as a model of the notional concept rather than the known practice. In defence of Durkheim's theory of ritual, I would suggest that it would also be difficult for a researcher to replicate empirically the process of intuitive learning rather than cognitive or behavioural learning as suggested within my own study. For that very reason, this thesis is based heavily in qualitative research methodologies rather than quantitative. Intangible elements of social activity are by their very nature difficult if not impossible to describe through quantitative measures.

However, even given this sympathy with conceptual intangibilities, Durkheim fails to discuss at length or in depth the relationship between the intuitive learning process and ritual as a product. He focuses heavily on ritual as a functional process and whilst I would agree with Kapferer, who suggests that the, "emphasis on ritual as process is of course

crucial”, the exclusion of dialogue in which ritual is discussed as product is a serious omission (Kapferer 2005, p. 36). The magick element of the Summer Begins festival in December 2005 as discussed earlier in this chapter is an example of ritual that is much less a functional activity and instead much more a product of previous social interaction and situational learning.

Durkheim goes as far as proposing that rites precede beliefs, clearly reinforcing his opinion that ritual is pure process and contributor rather than being the outcome of any social progression or situation. In discussing Durkheim, Bell (1997) says that he, “argued that belief is the effect of rite, that action determines belief” (p. 27). If this is so, then ritual activity cannot be regarded as product in any sense of the word and thus my contention that the rituals the Witches in my research conducted were the product and outcome of their social, situational, learning milieu is not reflected in the work of Durkheim at all.

Like Durkheim, Geertz (1973) postulates that ritual is a tool to, “reinforce the traditional social ties between individuals” and extends this by suggesting that ritual provides an emphasis on the underpinning social values that bind and sustain the structure of a society (p. 142). He postulates that in fact religion itself, “actually shapes social order and psychological processes and that the symbols and myths are believed to sum up what is known about the world and to teach people how to react to it” (as cited in Griffin, 1995, p 38). However, unlike Durkheim who favours the notion that rituals influence beliefs and thus the social order, Geertz prefers to see ritual as a tool of meaning within a two way street that acts as both an influencer of social order and an outcome of that same order. He postulates that ritual contributes to the ongoing social constructs of meaning but also takes its representation elements from that same body of shared meaning.

Meaning is materially embodied, that it is ... formed, conveyed, realized, emblemized, expressed, communicated, via ponderable, perceptible, construable signs; symbolic devices, like passage rites or passion plays, differential equations or impossibility proofs, which are its vehicles (Geertz, 2005, p. 6).

Thus rather than seeing ritual simply as an analytical tool, Geertz was more concerned with unveiling, exploring and developing the meaning encoded within the ritual process so that one could view the culture that the ritual contributed to and was a reflection of. He stated that, "Culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their actions" (Geertz, 1957a, p. 33). From this vantage point Geertz described two symbiotic notions, "worldview" and "ethos" that underpin his proposed relationship between ritual and religious belief and thus deliver cultural meaning. Geertz (1957b) proposes that worldviews are the foundational, cognitive, existential schemata that inform people about reality and, "their concept of nature, of self, of society" (p. 421). This worldview is the underlying principle of social order. Ethos, by comparison, is described as two kinds of "dispositions", moods and motivations and these two dispositions are the mechanisms through which individuals develop their attitudes to both their place in society and to the world around them. In addition, ethos describes the climate, the mood and the quality of life. C. Bell (1992) notes also that Geertz sees ethos, "Not as activity but as the likelihood of activity taking place under certain circumstances" (p. 26). He goes on to equate worldview to belief and ethos to religious ritual so that worldview becomes cognitive thought while ethos is the action or manifestation of that thought. He proposes that these elements of worldview and ethos or belief as thought and ritual as action are complimentary to, yet confrontational with each other. He argues that ethos as ritual and action

becomes cognitively sound and is thus accepted into belief and thought. This is because the process of ritual embeds the symbolic meaning of its content into the cognitive psyche of the individual. There is then a defined correlation and a cyclic, symbiotic relationship between belief and thought or worldview and ritual as action or ethos. Meaning therefore is not just the end result of a process but is the continued interpretation of both ritual and religion.

This is a more unified and holistic approach than Durkheim's theory of ritual and offers a more sympathetic explanation of the data from my own study. Where Durkheim's view delivered a more conceptual, idealist notion of ritual as process only and thus as an influencer to and shaper of cultural and social meaning, Geertz provides for a better relationship to ritual as both process and outcome. His version of ritual as a social bonding mechanism is professed to be both an influencer on and a recipient of the meaningful symbols that constitute ritual activity. Therefore it is both a process and a product of social interaction. However, Geertz also does not describe in detail the relationship between learning, particularly intuitive learning and ritual activity as the resultant outcome of that course of action. Whilst he suggests that ritual is both the informer and the recipient of social interaction, there is no clearly articulated correlation with my own observations which identify ritual as a product or outcome of that social interaction.

Ritual Structure Contrasted to Ritual Product

Having discussed the theory of ritual from the viewpoint of process or its service to social cohesion, let us now turn to the structure of ritual and the componentry that constitutes meaningful ritual activity within the social group to whom it relates. Theories that explore the structure and composition of ritual including symbolic elements (Geertz, 1957a: Langer, 2002: Rappaport, 1979) and drama as the fabric of ritualistic

assembly (V. Turner, 1986) discuss ritual in terms of its construction and makeup and while this has significant relevance to my research, like Durkheim and Geertz, such theories still limit their discussion of ritual isolating it from a dialogue about ritual as the product of a learning process. As before, I shall endeavour to explore these comparisons and conflicts and detail the apparent gaps in these works with regard to my own findings.

Where Durkheim and Geertz proposed that the function of ritual was to develop social cohesiveness and explored the underlying symbolic forms of shared cultural schema to give meaning and identity to a social group, V. Turner focused more on the relationship between ritual and the individual, particularly during transitional life changes. Kapferer suggests that he was, “directed to ritual as process in the more philosophical meaning of becoming” (2005, p. 38). V. Turner initiated more holistic discussions about the way in which rituals manage those transitory phases of individual human life such as birth, adolescence, marriage and death and also the transitions that affect a social situation such as healing, seasonal festivals and various transitory events within a society. Initially V. Turner relegated rituals to the position of escape apparatus or, “mere compensations, or redressive mechanisms for the tensions produced in the secular order” (Deflem, 1991, p. 3). However in developing his work on liminality and *communitas*, he provided an opportunity for more robust and in-depth dialogue about the meaning and function of ritual and rites of passage as tools and processes for dealing with life change rather than simply seeing them as mechanisms of social discipline and order. He suggested that ritual enables an individual or a collective to temporarily escape the normative demands and expectations of the prescribed social order thus experiencing liminality and in so doing they create *communitas* or ‘anti-structure’ (V. Turner, 1969). The ritual participant is thus dissociated from the normal expectations and practices of the

defined social order. “Liminal entities” he suggested, “are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial” (V. Turner, 1969, p 95). The concepts of liminality and *communitas* built upon the work of Van Gennep (1960) who originally suggested that rites of passage as discrete phases or events within a greater social whole, contained three phases; separation as preliminary, transition as the liminal stage and incorporation as post liminal. He proposed that these rites of passages acted as portals or passageways through which people or collectives journeyed.

September, 2004

I never realised before how much we use ritual to help us through periods of our lives. I've always considered christenings, weddings, funerals, naming ceremonies and the like simply as ceremonies that mark your life change but in fact they can be so much more. They can aid you through the trauma of a life change or help you celebrate the beauty of a life change.

This afternoon, Sammy and I did a private ritual together to help me get through from being married to being single again. I'm not finding this transition particularly easy, I wonder who does I suppose.

Anyway, she helped me work through a very private ritual, away from the rest of the coven members that symbolised the end of one era and the start of a new. I brought with me a couple of items that are symbolic of my marriage and together we buried them. She explained that this was a way to ‘lay that part of my life to rest’, to let it go. Then I planted some sunflower seedlings and we agreed that these seedlings were the representation of the sunshine and happiness that was about to be mine as I entered into the next phase of my life. I was surprised by the

simplicity of the actions but I've got to say I feel a lot more at peace tonight that I have been feeling previously.

This very short and private ritual was a demonstration of my own movement from one life stage to another and contained many of the hallmarks that V. Turner described. He explains that during the liminal stage of ritual, the participant or indeed collective lose their normally recognised status so that they can be prepared for reintegration into a new level of status or state of social being. The liminal stage is thus the deliberate act of stripping away the identity of the participant so that they are a 'clean slate'. In this state of dissociation, they are able to experience the death of their old status and the rebirth of their new and in describing this stage in a particular rite of passage he suggested it was a, "milieu that represented both a grave and a womb" (V. Turner, 1969, p. 96). With no identity, no social ranking, no ownership of any personal motto of being, liminal participants are free to adopt and engage with the new status delivered to them and then return to a state of renewed social normality as their *communitas* declines. In the case of the rite above where I focused on the movement from a married to a single life, the rite was one that illustrates V. Turner's notion. I buried the symbols of marriage that tied me to that life which then freed me up to take on the challenge of the new life ahead. Several Wiccans I talked to discussed how they too had conducted their own rites, either in private or as part of a coven, to help them move from one life stage to another. These included relationship changes, the death of a friend and the birth of a child.

This approach to ritual as a vehicle for dealing with transitory life change is a useful descriptor of the initiation rites that I observed and participated in during my research. From my own experiences during my initiation into The Grove, the liminal phase of my rite of passage lasted several hours and followed a week long process of separation. Prior to the ritual

proper, I spent a week in isolation from my coven colleagues, was instructed to eat certain foods on certain days as a means of consecutively connecting with the spiritual elements and told to consider and meditate on the imminent 'death' of my current life in preparation for my dedication to a new, Wiccan existence.

27th July, 2004

I kind of feel a bit disconnected somehow. I've been learning so much in the last year or two about me and about Wicca and about how I connect myself to Wicca and I thought I pretty much had this nailed. But this week has been quite strange. I have my instructions for what to eat and what to do in preparation for my initiation in four days time but I wasn't prepared for this feeling of anticipation, and this feeling that I'm stripping my old life down in preparation for a new life. It's almost as though I'm chipping away parts of myself that had become stuck to me over the years that are examples of mundane life, of an unobservant life. Things like how I've become so used to seeing ants on the patio without seeing what that actually means in terms of the seasons and the cycle of the environment. Things like how on the way to work in the morning, the anonymous mass of people throng on the bus almost as though they're a single cell organism and how I'd never really thought that each and every one of them has a life with kids, money problems, health issues, the neighbourhood dog barking keeping them awake last night or how their letterbox needs fixing or whatever. They each have a real life just like mine and they're not just a communal mass. It's like I'm seeing myself and the world around me in a slightly different way, as though the blinkers are coming off...

This sense of disconnection, of the death of my old existence lead me into the liminal phase which commenced four days later when I was collected from my home and taken to the covenstead for the rite. From the moment

my courier arrived, I was instructed not to look at or talk with anyone and on arrival at the house, I was left alone in a room alone to ponder my decision and to consider myself as neither in my old life nor in my next. Having then been blindfolded and led to the garden to be walked in a maze of directions so that I had no idea in the end of where I was, I was finally pushed into the ritual circle so that the ‘rebirth’ into my new Wiccan life could begin.

The initiations I observed, both those of my own coven colleagues and those of initiates into other covens, followed a similar tripartite process in the fashion V. Turner describes. In all cases the initiate spent some time, usually several days, in isolation from his or her normal life as a means of beginning the process of evaluating their current worldview and then stripping away their accepted social status and life identity. The few hours directly prior to the initiation rite itself were used as a deliberate and scripted opportunity to thoroughly ensure the initiate had no identity, was featureless and was a ‘blank canvas’ ready for the adoption of a new, Wiccan identity and life. The final stage began at the point the initiate chose to dedicate themselves to Wicca and thus take on the identity of a Wiccan. V. Turner observed that people in this middle, liminal phase of ritual are often naked or near naked and that this nakedness takes away any insignia or ability for the participant to identify with a peer group. Bado-Fralick supports V. Turner’s observations suggesting that “baring the body is tantamount to baring the soul, and expresses a condition of vulnerability (2005, p. 99). V. Turner goes on to describe how the ritual participants he observed in Ndembu in Zambia became compliant, passive and that they obeyed the commands of their ritual leaders without question (V. Turner, 1969). Such observations are astonishingly descriptive of traditional Wiccan initiations where the neophyte is often required to be naked during the liminal stage of the rite. Indeed, they are often not provided with clothing until they accept their new Wiccan

identity. Whilst this nakedness did not occur with any initiations at The Grove, I did observe this state of nakedness and thus heightened state of non-identity during an initiation into another coven. The symbolic action of being presented to the initiation rite naked was a deliberate act of sending a non verbal message to both the neophyte and the ritual participants that this person was 'blank', without identity or status and was ready and willing to adopt a new identity and become a new person with a different social status. There was a sense that this person was empty, barren and vacant and although the nakedness was not referred to verbally at any point of the ceremony, it resounded intensely both for me and also for those present. Davis-Floyd suggests that the right brain hemisphere decodes these non verbal, symbolic messages into holistic interpretations of accepted meaning. She says, "Instead of being analysed intellectually, a symbol's message will be *felt* in its totality through the body and the emotions" (1996, p. 149, her italics). Indeed the neophyte's nakedness presented a powerful message to all those present as well as to him that he was a void, was hollow, empty and without identity.

Furthermore, the liminal stage of the Wiccan initiation rite, more than any other stage, demands total obedience of the neophyte as V. Turner suggested. This expectation of absolute submission and compliance is interesting in that, unlike the symbolic meaning of nakedness, the expectation of conformity itself is not discussed with the neophyte in detail prior to the event. The initiate remains dutiful to the ritual leaders throughout the rite by virtue of the ritual atmosphere unless of course they choose to abdicate their Wiccan dedication in situ. This obedience and submission is reflective of V. Turner's observations of Ndembu ritual behaviour, from which he posited that during the liminal phase of a rite of passage, the participant experienced "outsiderhood" and was, "situationally or temporarily set apart" (1974, p. 233). This state of outsiderhood, or *communitas*, enforced upon the participant the need to

be detached from the social structure. This state was characterised by their position of non membership with the normative social order and rendered them subject to new leadership and direction. In Wiccan initiations, rarely are neophytes indulged by having the full rite proceedings explained to them prior to commencement. This symbolic omission reinforces the neophyte's ignorance and thus removes them from the group of people who know already about the ritual proceedings and the new identity the neophyte will adopt in the final stage of the ritual event. The initiate is set apart, deprived of a community and instead delivered to a state of outsiderhood.

Whilst the tripartite states of ritual proposed by V. Turner (1969) and van Gennep (1960) compare favourably with the initiation rites I observed during this study, they do not fully explain the structural composition or function of the Sabbat festival rituals or the Full Moon Esbats regularly conducted by The Grove membership. These rituals more often than not followed a structure dissimilar to the tripartite model proposed by van Gennep and expanded on by V. Turner. The Sabbat festival rituals, associated with the solar events of solstices and equinoxes, and the intervening seasonal festivals often revolved around storytelling and myth, folklore enactment or existential activities as symbolic representations of long lost traditions or practices. For example, using the southern hemisphere Wheel of the Year, at midsummer many covens, The Grove included, will design and act out the story of the Holly and Oak King as symbolic descriptors of the seasonal change from summer to winter. In this eternal story, the Holly King who rules in the dark, winter half of the year and Oak King who rules in the lighter, summer half vie for leadership of the earth. At midsummer the Holly and Oak Kings battle for supremacy which results in the death of the Oak King only for him to be reborn in the latter half of the year ready for his return to leadership. The myth itself resembles the death, liminality and rebirth V. Turner

described in his model of rites of passages but the ritual participants and observers do not themselves undergo this state of transition and liminality either before or during the event.

Midsummer, February 2007

We all gathered at the covenstead as usual to celebrate the height of summer and the symbolic death of the old sun and the rebirth of the new sun. As part of the ritual, we all sat on the ground in a circle and two of the male members acted the part of the old and new sun.

The old sun danced in one direction, in and out between each of us seated on the ground and the new sun did the same thing but in the opposite direction. We all clapped the beat for the dance and shouted, "Lugh" on each clap. At the 12th stroke, the old sun fell to the ground outside the circle and the new sun jumped over the top of Anna seated there to the outside of the circle and ran round the circle behind us. When he reached the old sun, he helped him to his feet and we all cheered and clapped.

The rituals, like the one described above, are storytelling events where myth, legends and folklore are explored and offered as the symbolic explanation for changes in seasonal activity. These, often ludic rituals, are seen as occasions to celebrate the ever changing seasons but are also occasions to gather together as a group and celebrate shared identity and ideals. Thus they are more explained by Geertz's notion of social cohesion rather than the concept of rites that transit a person from one stage of life to another.

On many occasions, The Grove chose to celebrate Sabbat festivals not by recounting mythical and legendary stories but by engaging in activities expressing a more existential representation of the long lost activities of our ancestors. The final harvest festival of the year, Samhain, was usually

celebrated within The Grove by people bringing and swapping a jar of preserves. The jars of preserved goods served as symbolic representations of the need for ancient peoples to gather and store food in order to survive the harsh winter months when fresh food was scarce. Again the ritual participants were not subjected to social separation or deprivation and neither were they required to undergo compliance with direction as they moved from one life stage to another. As with the previous example, these occasions were seen more as opportunities to celebrate the ongoing gift of life and survival and as reinforcers of communal cohesions and bonding.

These two types of Wiccan storytelling, based on myth or fact reflect V. Turner's account of the two distinct and different levels of storytelling amongst the Ndembu. He noticed that the Ndembu use the term 'kaheka' to describe story telling that is related to myth, legend and folklore and that this story telling is often sung and well as spoken. Often the audience as well as the ritual leader will sing in between the unfolding narrative. The other concept of storytelling was that of 'nsang'u', which is more akin to telling the stories of factual events that have occurred either recently or in the distant past. This storytelling is in fact oral history and the narratives are based on or a direct discussion of real events. This poses a further question of comparison between the Ndembu concepts of storytelling and those of the Witches in this research. When The Grove membership and other covens related mythical stories or re-enacted mythical events, they were reflecting the Ndembu concept of kaheka. Like these people of Zambia, the Witches I observed occasionally interrupted the mythical narrative with songs, the lyrics of which depicted related mythical events. V. Turner observed that, "At key points in the narration the audience joins in a sung refrain, breaking the spoken sequence" (1980, p. 147). There is in fact a growing availability of Wiccan music composed especially for use during festival activities that

increasing numbers of Wiccans are purchasing so that they can add musical content to their activities. Such activity is reminiscent of the observed Ndembu kaheka concept. Furthermore, when The Grove members brought preserved foods to a Samhain festival and told stories of the need for ancient peoples to store food for the winter months, this parallels the concept of nsang'u.

Whilst the examples cited here appear to correlate with V. Turner's experiences of kaheka and nsang'u, they do not parallel those of his expanded tripartite ritual model of separation, transition and incorporation. He described the tribal rituals and rites that mark both physical and psychological transitory stages in human life such as birth, adolescence, marriage and death as 'life-crisis rituals' while 'rituals of affliction' are those that are conducted when the spirit or 'shade' of an ignored deceased relative invades the physical being of a Ndembu person (V. Turner, 1967). In later years he expanded his theory of ritual to include not just tribal rites, but also the rituals and their symbolic content and composition within western, industrialised society. However his focus, whilst broadened from the narrow band of rural African tribal ritual practice, still remained within the confines of process and the relational dynamics of symbol and practice to intra group structure, form and function. Deflem calls this his, "processual view of ritual" (1991, p. 5) and again it highlights that the generalised academic dialogue around ritual either discusses it as a process or service to and with social structure or talks about the symbol structure and syntax of ritual rather than also seeing ritual as a product or end result of social learning interaction.

In the discussion of symbol as a ritual constituent and contributor to social meaning, V. Turner provides one of the most useful and widely acclaimed theories. He describes symbols as the smallest "storage unit"

of religious ritual and suggests that these symbols were packed with information. (1968, p. 2). In his lengthy examination of V. Turner's work, Deflem suggests that, "Rituals are storehouses of meaningful information" and that these represent and expose the intrinsic values of that culture (1991, p. 5). As a symbiotic concept to symbolism as an intrinsic ingredient in the composition of ritual, V. Turner's contribution to the discussion about the structure of ritual focuses on the performance and drama that constitutes its delivery and meaning. He suggests that ritual is a holistic tool to communicate the reality of a society and that via symbols and performance, ritual is the social expression, reflection and explanation of the inherent fabric of its culture (V. Turner, 1986). It therefore provides an illustration of embedded beliefs and norms and of the spiritual symbology that is a valued component of human existence.

Thus, V. Turner expands on the previous notions where the rituals themselves were the vehicle for meaning and also focuses on the symbols within ritual. His argument then is not that the rituals alone are the meaning maker but that the symphonies of symbols that contribute to ritual practice are also discrete instruments of meaning and knowledge transfer. He proposed that symbols were dynamic and that the meaning they reflect could be modified as the social worldview developed. "Ritual and mythical systems" he argued, "develop as the new symbols are related to each other under the influence of social interests and the process of institutionalization" (V. Turner, 1975, p. 157). Furthermore, he suggested that symbols may represent different things to different people because each individual will interpret them in ways that reflect their own worldview and experiences. This approach means that while symbols, especially when grouped within the broader vehicle of a ritual situation, will provide a social reinforcement of the underpinning collective paradigms. They will also strengthen and support the individual's perception of their relationship with the world via their own interpretation

of that symbolic reference. In the light of this Prueitt suggests that, “The symbol takes on different shades of meaning depending on the life experience of the one who is doing the interpreting” (2003, p. 225).

Inner Court, February 2006

Tonight we did a guided doorway exercise where we all closed our eyes, made ourselves comfortable and then listened as Sammy guided us through a meditation. We’ve done this many times before so we’re pretty skilled at it but this time she took us through a particular doorway and through a particular scene and eventually led us to an Egyptian tomb. She asked us to look around and take notice of what we saw and to bring back with us any messages we received there. As soon as we came out of the meditation we each wrote down what we saw and what we thought it meant and then shared our results with each other so that we could try and understand what we were given.

Iona had seen a particular drawing which was essentially a flower inside a triangle. The flower was green and brown but the triangle it sat inside was red. She thought perhaps the flower represented the Earth element and that the red triangle represented Fire and that she needed to balance her current emotions about her new partner. She said that much as she loved being with him and was quite passionate about him and the relationship, she somehow had to balance this with the reality of the situation and slow down.

Anna by contrast saw the drawing as less about elements and Iona’s new relationship and more about Iona’s love of her garden and nature. Cath came up with something completely different again and in the end we wondered if perhaps we all just bring different parts of ourselves to a single message.

This particular night brought home to me that the symbols given to us through meditation or ritual are often interpreted in the light of what's important to the individual. This may therefore be different from one person to the next. This view of symbols as personal meaning vehicles is a more accurate reflection of the use of rituals for the Witches in my research. They see ritual not just as a social mechanism for honouring deity and for sharing religious experience but also as a personal and often private relationship with their construct of the divine. Lilly talked about how the rituals she conducts when alone are her personal, "journey with the Goddess" and Narkia, a solitary practitioner, saw her ritual practice as, "a very private talk with Her". Witches generally do not subscribe to the notion of worship through a third party such as a parish priest or congregation leader. They argue that each person has the right not only to a relationship with deity but also to decide how they conduct that relationship. Scott Cunningham wrote several very well received Wiccan and Pagan guidebooks prior to his death that have been published and republished internationally. As a result, a great many practitioners reference his works for their own personal Wiccan journeys. He argued that there was no single path to deity but that instead every individual must create their own personal relationship with the divine. "I can never fit my feet into someone else's footprints in the sand" he suggested when discussing the options to personalise one's ritual practice and Wiccan lifestyle (2004, p. 17).

Using V. Turner's idea that the interpretation of symbols may differ slightly from one individual to another based on their personal schemata and world experience, one would suggest that symbol meaning must inevitably evolve and change over time both for each individual and thus by default eventually across a social group. This means that eventually the shared meaning of all symbols would no longer be shared and would become instead highly personalised interpretations of dynamic

phenomena. This poses a serious question of authenticity about the ongoing shared meaning of a single ritual and its symbol constituents. Ritual instruments that express the underpinning collective beliefs and social constructs may in fact be resistant to change but conversely may also evolve to reflect social dynamics. In the case of the former, many rituals, their symbol constituents and their practice often outlast the actual realities of the society in which they are enacted. Rituals are fluid, dynamic constructs in their own right and can remain static when the society they represent alters, or they can be modified and thus challenge or contribute to shifting dynamics of a culture. In many cases, in many cultures, rituals have an enduring quality where the narratives continue to tell stories even though the realities they represent have been modified by the dynamics of political, economical or even demographic change (Conrad, 1987; Jennings, 2003; Taylor, 2003). Rappaport (1979) suggests that in both oral and literate societies, every rite maintains content that is traditional and unchanging. As an example, Roman Catholics still follow and engage in religious rituals that have been liturgical process for hundreds of years. Whilst the actual wording in some rituals may have been updated perhaps from traditional Latin to contemporary English, many rites still remain true to their original or near original format. The specific practices and customs that form the process of electing the Pope for instance still remain as a long standing tradition that continues unabated even though the political power of the state no longer resides with the church. This ritualistic practice has become an icon of Roman Catholicism and is regarded as an illustration of the beauty and complexity of a well established, long term religion. In observing boys' initiation rituals in the Congo, Droogers (2004) found this type of ritual enabled the participants and significant actors to hold on to their connection with their heritage while the society in which they lived was modified as a result of colonial influence. He notes, "The ritual sets the rules and boundaries for their identity construction as a society" (p. 141).

This is particularly so in literate societies where traditional norms, cultural heritage and spiritual knowledge are passed from generation to generation via the written word. But even in societies that use text as the main means of storage and maintenance of ritual resource material, the tacit knowledge and expectations contained within the ritual experience are difficult to transcribe and locate in a tangible format. Cultural expectations and social, spiritual schemata are not explicit in the transcription of either the content or ritual performance but are instead inferred through the process of the performance itself. One can detail the scripted content, the ritual tool requirement and use, the spiritual or historical significance of the ritual and even describe the step by step process that is the ritual story but one cannot articulate the unspoken, inherent cultural framework that underpins the ritual. Neither can the narrator describe the emotional, spiritual and intuitive element that each participant may feel as they engage with the rite. Rituals in literate societies then, can become static historical narratives rather than expressions of contemporary emotion. By comparison, rituals that are passed on via oral tradition are often transient, dynamic and frequently more closely reflect the realities of current social understanding than ancestral understanding.

Where V. Turner approached the study of ritual from a construct of symbolic meaning and performance to both the individual and the collective in which they act, Rappaport introduced a new way of thinking about the links between ritual and people. The neofunctional approach, in which arguably he was the leading theorist, integrated not just a body of people and the cultural schemata in which they operate but also the sustainability of the ecological backdrop in which they function. In his research of the Tsembaga Maring of New Guinea, he argued that the prescribed ritual practice known as 'kaiko', the ritualised slaughter of farmed pigs, served to moderate and maintain a healthy balance and relationship between the social group and their natural resources (Rappaport, 1968). Bell explains,

Ritual, Rappaport argued, not only regulates the interaction of one human commodity with another but also can regulate the interaction of humans with local materials, foodstuffs and animals – especially pigs in the New Guinea case, since they are an important component in the diet and economy (1997, p. 29).

Thus to Rappaport, the kaiko was a functional ritual process that holistically served both the people and the environment in which they lived. This ritual was not just an instrument for the delivery and representation of inherent and underpinning cultural meaning, it also regulated the numbers of pigs in a timely manner, to a level that was conducive with the cultural and physical requirements of humans and it maintained the pig population to the numbers required at any given time. Pigs were ritually slaughtered at the point of warring conclusion, for bride price and where the increasing numbers of pigs escalated to the point where they became parasitic in terms of competition for the same food as their human keepers and the land and labour required to care for them. As a counter balance, the pig numbers needed to be regulated so that sufficient stock was available when the cultural norms demanded ritual killing, thus this ongoing, symbiotic relationship between pig and human crossed at the point of the kaiko ritual.

Rappaport's contention was thus that this particular ritual had a significant effect on the entire ecological environment and on the human activities that affect that environment and are affected by that environment. He called this construct a, "ritually regulated ecosystem" and the people that operate within it a, "ritually regulated population" (1979, p. 41). Given this ritual definition as, "regulated", the logical suggestion would follow that the rituals he observed were both conditions of the environment and influencers to it and thus processual rather than

end products. Again this view of ritual as a process rather than the end result of a learning process provides for limited explanation of the observations explored within my own research. One could argue that the rituals conducted during the Full Moon rites designed to send healing to the Earth post the 2004 Asian tsunami and to aid the victims of the Indonesian bombings could be regarded as contributing to the psychic environment and thus by extension to the Witches' description of their own ecosystem. However, this link to Rappaport's work on ecological anthropology is admittedly tenuous at best. I would suggest therefore that whilst Rappaport contributed a significant degree of understanding to the disciplines of ecological anthropology and ritual, these constructs of ritual still fail to explore and explain ritual as a final product and end result of the social process.

Given this limitation however, Rappaport did contribute a significant body of work describing the structure, rather than the function, of ritual which provides for favourable comparison with the rituals I observed. Rappaport suggested that rituals were, "The basic social act" and that, "Ritual is not simply an alternative way to express certain things, but that certain things can be expressed only in ritual" (1979, p. 174). He proposed that rituals could be recognised via a suite of elements that identified them as such. These included formality, performance and instrumental communication.

Notwithstanding that Rappaport agrees there is a continuum of formality, from the formal use of language within everyday conversation through to the invariant, liturgical practices of some religious orders, it is valid to note that much of the ritual that occurred within The Grove had a degree of formality and supports Rappaport's contention of formality as an inherent component of ritual. For example, the Full Moon Esbat rituals for Inner Court members within The Grove were conducted following

precise scripting that included formalised, specialised and rather poetic language as well as invariant behaviours and actions designed to bring about pre-determined outcomes. Immediately post initiation, Inner Court members were provided with copies of the Full Moon circle erection ritual and expected to learn the language and action rote over a period of months. This is not to say that the rituals became mundane or mechanical, but rather that the words flowed freely enabling the participants to consider more deeply the semantic meaning and their simultaneous actions. Sammy repeatedly told us that in learning the words and actions, it freed up the mind to work on the visualisations required of the ritual acts. “If you know the words off by heart, you can concentrate on what they mean and not be always trying to remember what you’re supposed to be saying” she would tell us. Thus the Full Moon rites were liturgical in nature and formalised but this served more to enable us to engage with the function of the ritual rather than be servants of the ritual script.

Festival rituals, although formalised, were more relaxed in nature than their Full Moon counterparts. Usually someone was charged with or volunteered to write the ritual content and act and this invariably resulted in a written script that was provided to all participants just prior to the ritual and used as the informant of the proceedings. Given this methodology, most rituals were pre-determined and not subject to any more than limited spontaneous adjuncts or modifications. Even with this pre-emptive approach, the rituals were most often convivial and entertaining and sat somewhere around the middle of Rappaport’s continuum of ritual formality.

Winter Earth Elemental Ritual, mid 2006

Wow! Talk about ritual on the run! This weekend was my second degree Earth ritual with Sammy and the last of my second degree preparation rituals. I thought I had this whole elemental ritual thing really well

planned and arranged but the Gods and Goddesses obviously thought differently.

I decided that for this ritual I was going to plant sage seedlings so I took the potting mix, pots, and other paraphernalia with me to Sammy's. I had the trowel all ready and all the items set out exactly as I'd planned in front of the altar which I'd deliberately placed in the North. I had plastic on the ground ready to catch any stray potting mix and in my usual Capricornian way, I was well planned, prepared, even rehearsed. I cast the circle but with much more emphasis on the North element with its correspondence to Earth and Winter, invoked Gaia and Cernunnos and sat before the altar ready to go ahead with the seed planting. And then it hit me. I was doing it all wrong.

It suddenly dawned on me that this was my Earth ritual and that if I wanted to connect with Earth then I had to touch earth and dirt and get in amongst it. I had to really feel the earth and the dirt and potting mix. So I discarded the trowel and lunged my hands straight into the potting mix. By the time the sage seedlings were planted, there was potting mix everywhere and my hands were black but I really did connect with Earth!

This ritual was one of four over the period of a year and part of my second degree training. As such, its importance was personally significant and warranted dedicated planning and preparation. However, the success of the ritual was less in the planning and more in the spontaneity and the formality of the event was quickly overturned.

In his discussions about formality, Rappaport makes a distinction between ritual and rituals citing the former as the, "Formal, stereotyped *aspect* of all events, and the latter as, "relatively invariant *events* dominated by formality" (1979, p. 176, his italics). This distinction is interesting because although he was simply trying to ascertain the

difference between ritualised behaviour or customs and religious or spiritual rituals, by using his definition when discussing the formality of The Grove's ritual content, one automatically discusses both the ritual *act* and the *acts* of ritual. In other words the formal language inherent in the Full Moon and in some cases the Sabbat rituals of the Grove are one of the *aspects* of the event that by Rappaport's own definition also then describes ritual itself. In critiquing Rappaport's theoretical notions, Fabian argued that he was, "guilty of a tautological reduction" (1982, p. 205) and I would suggest that this criticism is a valid argument against Rappaport's proposal that ritual and rituals are in effect the opposite sides of the 'formality coin'.

Rappaport also cited performance as a key element of rituals (as opposed to ritual). He surmised that performance was the mechanism through which an individual or group expressed intent but that it was also an inherent element of what was being expressed (1979). Whilst this may seem obvious at first glance, Rappaport does in fact provide for significant dialogue here that contests such a claim.

Many if not all rituals include an element of drama and participant performance and his observations of the kaiko amongst the Tsembaga Maring of New Guinea that resulted in his 1968 publication would support this. Rituals are frequently displays of symbolic myth, enacted stories to explain and connect with social or spiritual archetypes or opportunities to collectively share words and behaviour that express communal beliefs and group schemata. The rituals conducted within The Grove more often than not were shared performances and psycho dramas that fostered community bonding, enhanced relationships with divinity and also were the exhibits of shared learning. However, Inner and Outer Court Grove members, like the broader Wiccan community, often engaged in both group and individual meditations and quiet

contemplation to reinforce personal connections with the Gods. On occasions, these deliberate states of reflection and deliberation would be preceded with ritualised preparation such as anointing oneself with oil, lighting incense, being seated in a particular position, or laying out an altar table with relevant objects for divination purposes. Thus one would suggest that the meditation was merely one component of an entire ritual performance designed to reinforce the relationship with divinity.

However, on many occasions, in fact the greatest majority of occasions, such meditative acts were conducted as discrete activities without any ritual preparation and in isolation from any formalised ritual process or performance in terms of physical movement. Witches are taught visualisation and meditation techniques as fundamental and foundational elements of Wiccan practice. Successful meditation enables a Witch to maintain a direct connection with the divine and to gain deeper insight and wisdom. They are taught that Wicca is not just about the art and craft of 'doing' but that it is also about developing a deeply personal relationship with divinity that can be enhanced through personal meditative techniques. An experienced Witch can switch from the mundane tasks of the day into the introspection and the ruminative practice of quiet meditation in order to connect with their patron or matron Gods without the need for pre-emptive elaborate ritual performances or preparation. Furthermore, Witches would argue that given meditation and contemplation enable them to connect with the divine in the same way that ritual does, the meditative process, by default, also constitutes ritual activity. However, in many cases, this meditative ritual is done without any performance whatsoever, either pre-emptively or as part of the meditative act. Thus the question arises, if performance is an inherent and necessary element of rituals, the acts of which Wiccans will argue are a result of their learning and a means of maintaining their relationship with divinity, then how can ritual

meditation conducted without performance but that also maintains the same divine relationship not be regarded as ritual? I would suggest that meditation is a fundamental ritual practice amongst Witches and one that is necessary to their ability to *be* Witches.

Full Moon Esbat February, 2006

The more I learn, the more I forget how much I had to learn. Tonight we had a Full Moon Esbat for the Outer Courters to show them how it's done. It's an annual event around this time of year and the only Full Moon the Outer Courters are allowed to attend before initiation.

One of the things we had to explain was visualising the elements and the circle casting. There are ritual actions we do of course that follow a set pattern but the actions are only the overt performance. While we're performing these actions, we're also visualising what they mean or what happens as we perform them. I've become so used to the visualisations (like meditations) that I do them now with ease and tonight I remembered how difficult they were when I first began. The poor Outer Courters had a bit of trouble trying to see what we all see and take for granted.

We explained to the Outer Courters that when you walk round the circle with the coven sword or your own athame casting the circle perimeter, you actually visualise a blue white light charging forth from the blade tip to spread around the circle perimeter. We also had to tell them what we visualise when we call the quarters in as they had no idea what we were bowing for or to.

Visualisation, as in the example above, is the basic tool of ritual and magickal practice and one of the first skills taught at the beginning of any Wiccan curriculum. In circle erection rituals, Witches are taught specific visualisations that enable them to create the sacred space around them.

Magickal workings are conducted almost entirely using visualisations, with props and tangible ingredients used simply as the vehicles for that visualised intent. While these visualisations are conducted as part of performed rituals, in many instances they are also conducted in the absence of performance but still within a ritual event. The visualisation itself becomes an act without 'acting' and whilst Witches would regard it as a necessary element of all rituals it in fact requires no performance or dramatic display. With practice, a Witch can cast the sacred space of a circle around her without any performance at all. It can be erected totally through visualisation rather than through action and this ability is a revered capability amongst established and experienced Witches. This skill becomes a tool through which individual practice can continue on the spur of the moment, even when the Witch is in the workplace or any other environment where overt circle casting would be inappropriate.

Rappaport also discussed the instrumental communication inherent within rituals. He suggested that rituals had the potential to be both non-instrumental and instrumental. His proposal was that as non instrumental, rituals were simply, "Fill or decoration that communicates something about the performance or performer" (1979, p. 177). Thus rituals are merely existential tools or vehicles of communication supporting the performance itself as the ultimate symbol of meaning. The opposing view he suggests is that rituals are themselves the meaning tools and that the performance is simply a manifestation of that communication mechanism. This polemic argument suggests that either ritual is communication or that the performance is communication and whilst Rappaport argues that both points of view are symbiotic and not at all mutually exclusive, it does present a rather circular argument that still results in both the performance and ritual being instrumental communication tools. This is especially so given that he has already determined that performance is a necessary criterion of ritual. If

performance is an inherent element of ritual, then it must by default also be instrumental in the delivery of symbolic information and tacit knowledge to both the participants and the ritual observers.

Rappaport postulates that these three alleged intrinsic criteria, formality, performance and the symbiotic attributes of both instrumental and non-instrumental communication, are the markers that identify and define rituals. However, we can see from the arguments discussed in this chapter, that these criteria are not necessarily always present within a Wiccan ritual event. I would suggest then that Rappaport focuses heavily on the elemental construction of ritual but fails to explore rituals where such criteria are not in fact present.

To further contrast Rappaport's approach to ritual, like V. Turner he discusses ritual from the viewpoint of ritual construction and does not consider ritual as the outcome of social interaction or the end product of social, situational learning. Whilst my research about Wiccan rituals would support some of Rappaport's arguments regarding the structure of the rituals he observed and his theories about rituals as a broader topic, my data and observations cannot be explained in total using either V. Turner or Rappaport's theoretical constructs. Wolf laments of Rappaport that, "His analysis was implicitly structural, understanding the part as constituent of an overarching arrangement" (1999, p. 19). Rappaport is a functionalist and his notion of ritual confines it within the boundary of process or functionality without discussing its attributes as a product of social learning. He himself suggests that he has, "interpreted the ritual cycles of the Tsembaga and other Maring as regulating mechanisms" thus relegating them to functional processes rather than allowing them to be end products (1971, p. 60). Whilst his discussion in this article centres on exploring and expanding upon his previous ethnographical work, he does later discuss his observations as generalisations thus assuming that his

theories can be applied to other situations. Kapferer suggests that Rappaport proposes, “The kaiko intervenes through its own internal dynamic that switches and transmutes ongoing processes around it” (2005, p. 43). This descriptor clearly applies to an ongoing ritual mechanism that acts on its environment. Bell concurs stating that Rappaport judges the rituals of the Tsembaga as a mechanism to, “maintain the environment, limit fighting, adjust the person-land ratios, and facilitate trade and the distribution of surplus pork” (1992, 126). Again this description highlights rituals as a vehicle through which services are provided to the community rather than also as an end product in their own right.

Full Moon Esbat June, 2005

The moon was in Capricorn tonight and it was my turn to lead the Esbat ritual. I'm a Capricorn so I chose to focus on Earth and the bounty of the planet in my ritual.

For each person I created a Horn of Plenty, a sort of Horn of Cornucopia made from a sheet of paper and asked them to fill it with magickal gifts and talents for themselves. They each had to choose magickal gifts that were relevant to them, that were needs rather than wants and that were appropriate for where they were in their lives at that time. They then had to take their Horn home and bury it so that their requirements could come to fruition.

I know this was more magick than ritual really (magick is my strength) but I think everyone in the coven is skilled enough to be able to use magickal ritual by now. I know Iona does a fair bit of magick and Cath does some now and again.

This ritual was one designed much more for advanced practitioners who had spent several months or years honing particular skills in magick and Witchcraft. It was not designed as a functional tool or mechanism that reflects or contributes to social constructs but rather was designed after many months and years learning how to perform magick. Magick, meditation and visualisation are ritual components that can be performed usually only after considerable training and often do not contribute to any recognisable social functionality. They are therefore much more related to ritual as a product than ritual as a process. By comparison the rite that Sammy and I conducted to smooth my path from marriage to being a single again was much more relevant as a process and reflected a need for ongoing personal and emotional stability within the social setting of my family, workplace and friendships.

Rather than merely bemoan the omissions within the four main theorists discussed above, I have endeavoured to offer an additional viewpoint on the definition of ritual that can be used in conjunction with the processual and structural theories of ritual. Ritual is indeed a function of the society in which it operates and it both contributes to and draws from that social order. However, the ethnographic examples cited within this chapter and elsewhere within this work, illustrate that ritual is not just a process of a social group. It can also be, or in some cases, *only* be, the end product of a learning journey. Ritual can be the ultimate experiential outcome of Wiccan learning as well as a function that draws a coven or community together. It can be an identity maker but can also be the result of social interaction and situational learning. It can be both the affective agent and a consequence of social or solitary practice. The anthropology of ritual to date appears not have given sufficient credence to ritual as product to the same degree that it has for function and this omission highlights a deficiency in our anthropological understanding of the theory of ritual.

Section 2 - What Witches Learn
Chapter 6

**HUBBLE BUBBLE, TOIL & TROUBLE: CRAFTING RITUAL TO
MEET LOCAL SOUTHERN NEEDS**

In earlier chapters of my thesis, I discussed the *process* of learning the Witches underwent as they developed their knowledge and skill repertoire and the previous chapter explored ritual as the *outcome* of that learning. The major product of their learning journeys as well as my own was the ritual workings we developed and conducted, both within the coven setting and as solitary practitioners in our own homes. We did of course learn a variety of other skills including the use and importance of magick, divination and a plethora of esoteric techniques and skills designed to expand and strengthen the holistic nature of our Wiccan practice. However, by far the most important, versatile and universal skill gained was that of ritual making and participation. Thus I have chosen to focus on this product rather than discuss the full array of supporting tools and skills also developed.

Whilst anthropological theorists may have generated a considerable body of credible discussion describing the definition, purpose and relevance of ritual, my research indicates that the divergence of Wiccan worldviews about ritual as a process and an end product of Wiccan teaching both reflects and contrasts those theoretical narratives. This chapter will explore the complexities of practical Wiccan ritual activities in Perth, Western Australia as both process and product, thus comparing and contrasting them to the theoretical backdrops discussed in the previous chapter.

The Wiccan Definition and Context of Ritual

Greer (2005), a self described scholastic writer of Pagan related materials, argues that Pagan religions and practitioners have concerned themselves far more with practice than with theory but there are a growing number of Pagan and in particular Wiccan writers who would deny this. MacMorgan-Douglas (2007), an American Wiccan Priestess who has written several commercially available, scholastic publications discussing the history and theory of Wicca, describes ritual in terms of its sacredness and suggests this must be defined by the individual. It is the intent of the ritual rather than the act of the ritual which is the key element of any Wiccan rituals she proposes. Other well known Wiccan writers have defined ritual using a variety of approaches including Farrar and Farrar (1981) who describe ritual as an enactment of myth that facilitates a connection with the unconscious and thus, “performs the same function as myth” (Part 2, p. 150). They argue that myths are narratives, born from a psyche that holds wisdom and a deep sense of connectedness with nature and the world around us. Chetwynd (1982) suggests that, “Mythology is dramatised psychology” and thus using Farrar and Farrar’s description of ritual, it would appear that ritual is a tool that uses the conduit of mythology to access inner wisdom encoded within the symbolism and stories of those myths. These mythological stories tie us to the nature of the world around us and to the wisdom held within our own unconscious.

Margaret, a teaching High Priestess, described similar attributes of ritual as she discussed the development and participation in ritual as a teaching modality. “It becomes a teaching tool to show seekers how to relate to deity and how the seasonal pattern of life fits with the Goddess story”.

The underpinning religious foundation of Wicca is based upon the marriage between the natural seasonal cycle of the planet and the

mythological stories of the Gods and Goddesses. Each Sabbat festival within the Wheel of the Year carefully intertwines the primary aspects of the seasonal changes, such as the planting and harvesting of grains or the birth and death of animals, with the activities of the Gods and Goddesses who are influencers of and contributors to the recurring seasonal patterns of life. The mythical stories, enacted within the annually recurring festivals, help to foster a deeper understanding amongst the Witches of the relationship between land and life.

Many groups in Australia and more specifically in Perth use the Wheel of the Year to exhibit and explain these underpinning mythological concepts. However The Grove's calendar was built on a more localised version of the Wheel of the Year and chose to interpret that cycle via a combination of traditional concepts and localised seasonal conditions. This group focused their calendar more heavily around the equinoxes and solstices rather than around the traditionally accepted Sabbats of Imbolg, Beltaine, Lughnasadh and Samhain. In addition, toward the end of the year they also celebrated the Arachnid Festival which explored the mythology of death and rebirth. This was one of the foundational festival rituals for this group and the one most intensely linked to underpinning archetypal myth. In addition Sammy took great care to ensure the membership were aware of the local indigenous traditions associated with the seasons and this marriage between traditional Wiccan practice and localised application of indigenous concepts afforded a more eclectic and broad education on Wiccan myth and ritual practice.

Cunningham (2004), who was a prolific writer of respected Wiccan materials, moved away from myth as the central element of ritual and instead described ritual as, "A specific form or movement, manipulation of objects, or a series of inner processes designed to produce desired effects" (p. 47). His definition is one that is a recurrent theme within

popular Wiccan materials. Other respected Pagan writers have also contributed to the commentary on ritual definition including Monaghan who suggests that ritual is, “simply action undertaken with a specific intention” (p. 26) while Amber K (1998) presents ritual as, “a logical series of actions designed to use energy for change” (p. 125). Eason (2001) agrees but expands on these somewhat simplistic statements by arguing that, “ritual involves channelling the life force that runs through all forms of existence and transforming it into higher spiritual energies” (p. 32). This theme of connection with higher spiritual energies was prevalent within the discussions with my own research participants. They did however provide less theoretical definitions for ritual and instead postulated on the practical purposes for ritual reflecting Greer’s (2005) contention of practice taking precedence over theory. Of ritual Jake commented, “It tells me the stories about the Gods and Goddesses”. Abigail agreed pointing to ritual as, “the way I understand how the Gods and Goddesses relate to me and my life”. Narkia, one of the solitary Wiccans interviewed, saw ritual from a more personal perspective and thus described the rituals she undertook as, “emotionally charged, personal journeys into myself and the Goddess. I love that feeling of absolute clarity that ritual gives me”. As a teaching High Priestess, Bob had explored the purpose of ritual a little further and suggested that, “ritual teaches the people in my group about how they fit into the bigger picture of life”.

All this emphasis on ritual by the Witches in my research, like that of other Pagan researchers, indicates that Wiccans thoroughly enjoy the design, the performance and the effect of ritual (Hume, 1997; Hutton, 1999; Rountree, 2004). Several of my own research participants described how they enjoyed a childhood rich in the beauty of religious or even family ritual associated with Christian festivals or family events such as weddings. Margaret smiled as she described her childhood in the

church. “I loved the paraphernalia, the altar tools, the singing, all those beautiful embroidered robes and the general magic and euphoria of the services”. Kathryn’s fond memories of religious ritual reflected those of Margaret. “There’s this amazing sense of awe as a kid when you’re with a group of people who are collectively in love with God”. In the present, The Grove members clearly loved learning about the reasons behind a forthcoming ritual, the process of writing it and then what they considered was the glory of conducting it. Across the broader Wiccan community, there seems to be a sense of absolute enjoyment and fulfilment when developing and participating in ritual practice.

Witches enjoy the beauty and reverence of ritual and they take great pains in ensuring that the rites they design and engage with are appropriate conduits for connection with deity. “Getting together for rituals is often a deeply personal and moving way of connecting with the Goddess” Mark told me. Margaret agreed and pointed out that, “we use ritual as a way of expressing how we as mundane humans connect with the divine environment we live in”.

Australian Wiccans Philips and Philips describe ritual as a means of escalating a connection with deity. They suggest that appropriately designed ritual will, “awaken within the initiate an aware-ness of the Mystery, which leads to contact with the divine force” (1991, p. 4). Rountree noted that the Witches she studied were drawn to feminist Witchcraft and subsequently the rituals in part because this helped them find, “A spiritual path with intellectual, moral, political and spiritual appeal” (2004, p. 103). Hume suggests that ritual’s purpose is, “to impress upon participants the overwhelming power of the holy” (1997, p. 112). Certainly the Witches I talked with, worked with and observed argued fiercely that ritual is a major mechanism to connect with their patron and matron Gods and with deity as a whole. “I love ritual because

it's my personal telephone to the Goddess" Narkia remarked. Every Witch participant in this study felt the same proposing ritual and meditation as their primary tools of spiritual connection.

Anna saw ritual as a personal tool to reinforce and dedicate herself to the divine. "When I'm in ritual, I'm in another place. I'm talking to the Goddess". Many of the Witches I spoke to had similar stories to tell about ritual being their means of personal connection with their deity of choice. Like Narkia, Rose saw ritual as her spiritual instrument of communication or her, "postal service" as she termed it, where the messages from the Goddess she was communing with were delivered to her. Paul described his relationship with deity as being the ultimate experience that Wicca provides and saw ritual as the process through which that occurs. "It's the practical way I talk with Her". Iona talked about ritual as the "way She gives me answers to my problems" and Abigail concurred. "I love doing rituals because it's the way I share myself with Her".

In her Wiccan publication describing how to foster a deeper connection to divinity, Monaghan (1999) suggests that both spontaneous and liturgical ritual can be the primary mechanisms through which a deeper relationship with the Goddess can be attained. "She is best honoured in actions" she states proposing that dancing and movement within ritual are a better means of communicative technique than less demonstrable methods (p. 26). Other Wiccan writers disagree including Cunningham (1993) who states that, "Prayer is the process of attuning and communicating with the Goddess and God" (p. 54).

In our own coven, The Grove, Sammy and Fred both made frequent reference to the need for individuals to design their own means of personal connection with deity, be they loud, demonstrative and vibrant or quiet, peaceful and meditative. On one occasion, during an Outer

Court discussion, Fred commented that, “when you write a ritual, it belongs to you. It’s your way of talking to Her”. Sammy would often warn seekers and initiates alike within the coven that always using pre-published rituals robbed them of the opportunity to create their own means of personal connection. “What someone else wrote might work for them and it might work for you but if you meditate and then write your own stuff, it comes from you and it’ll work much better”. During my interview and discussions with Theresa and Winston they agreed with this viewpoint arguing that, “your talks with the Goddess are your business and you’re the best one to work out how to make that happen”.

To enable seekers and initiates to make this personal connection through ritual, all the teaching High Priestesses and Priests I spoke with described how the study of ritual design is a pivotal element in their teaching curriculum. Bob commented, “Learning how to write your own ritual teaches you how to make your own connections”. Both Inner and Outer Court members of The Grove are routinely invited to contribute to the content of rituals as a means of facilitating the development of this skill set. Indeed at the commencement of each calendar year, the initiates are asked to take charge of at least one Full Moon Esbat and to write a ritual specific to that moon’s alignment with the astrological charts. Sammy’s purpose in this task allocation is not just to share the responsibility for annual event planning but to enable initiates to become better acquainted with the process of effectual ritual design and performance. The year long process of working towards second degree initiation within my coven also includes, like most covens, additional responsibilities to write and conduct personal rituals that deliberately engage the practitioner directly with deity.

Outside The Grove and in the global Wiccan community, there are numerous ‘recipes’ for the development of all manner of rituals in the

myriad of commercially available Wiccan publications. Wiccan beginner books routinely include the structure of ritual writing and whilst each of these books may present different options for ritual development dependent upon the tradition from which the author comes, they all seem to follow similar steps in describing why personal ritual writing is important and offer the major inclusions in any ritual design.

Wiccan Ritual as Product – An Alternative View

While many of the sentiments expressed by the Witches in my research show that ritual was a function of their practice and a social and personal process thus supporting the theories of the major writers discussed in the previous chapter, they also described ritual in terms of product. Many of them viewed ritual as the end result of their endeavours. Jake articulated this very well when he mentioned, “Ritual isn’t just what we do for Wicca, it’s also what we get from Wicca.” In almost all cases the Witches seemed to see ritual as a positive outcome that provided them with refreshed energy and life. “Oh crumbs! Look ritual regenerates me!” Mark enthused. Rose described similar feelings when referring to certain ritual practices designed to connect to deity. “It gives me passion I guess. It’s like a dose of high energy that She gives me.” Smiling, Peter said that for him ritual was his, “regular top up. It fills me up and makes me glow”. This sense of enjoyment and invigoration seemed common across all the Witches in this study and was a central theme in their discussions about ritual. “Oh ritual is beautiful” Margaret offered. “It’s fun, it’s laughter, it’s energy boosting and it binds us to each other and to the Goddess. It’s our battery charger”.

In discussions with all the participants of this study, they mentioned that during their training, their most valued learnt skill was that of ritual making. Bob remarked, “I teach my group how to design rituals because it’s a way for them to *be* Wiccan. You don’t just *do* Wicca, you *are*

Wicca". Margaret has been teaching Wiccan students for several years and she commented, "Ritual is a way of connecting with the Gods but it's also the mark of being a Wiccan". Her comments, like those of many others expressed the point that whilst ritual is a mechanism that brings about desired outcomes, it is also the end result of a strenuous learning path that identifies a Wiccan within their tradition. It becomes the badge or label that codifies a Wiccan within their chosen path and celebrates their success through the preceding learning process. In discussion Wally mused, "If I couldn't do ritual, then I wouldn't be Wiccan really would I?" This is not to say that ritual itself identifies someone as Wiccan but rather that the learned art of ritual becomes a signal that enables a Wiccan student to become recognised as a trained member of a group to themselves, to that group and to the wider Wiccan community.

For solitaires, who more often than not have no option but to teach themselves, the same outcome appears to be true at least for those solitaires included within this study. Ritual is the mark of Wiccan practice and whilst most Wiccans would fall short of declaring themselves deficient in their training if they could not participate in ritual, almost all of them would declare themselves not yet fully conversant with Wiccan practices if they were unable to design their own rituals, regardless of ritual complexity or simplicity. Thus the ability to develop, lead and modify rituals provides for a recognised mark of respect within the Wiccan community. Ritual is therefore not just a mechanism through which one *becomes* Wiccan, it is also the end product that defines you *as* Wiccan.

With rituals firmly established therefore as both processual mechanisms and also as end results of the learning process, the theories discussed in the previous chapter, whilst explaining a considerable degree of the data I observed, show a distinct lack of consideration for ritual as resultant

outcome. Therefore an alternate, supplemental and symbiotic theory is necessary to fill the gap. Proposing a theory that explains ritual as product does not deny the validity of functional or structural theories. Rather it adds to the landscape of theory so that we are better able to apply these academic frameworks across a broader range of situations. In the case of this research, ritual was clearly a product of shared understanding, of shared beliefs and communal schemata. It was frequently the manifestation of learned techniques and shared ideas that came about as a result of planning, experimenting and mutual consideration. The Grove membership frequently came together at planned group meetings and in many cases in pairs and triads adjacent to the group as a deliberate means of designing ritual content and performance. The process of learning how to construct those rituals was used as an inherent element of the training program and this learning continued well past initiation. Seasonal and routine rituals are rarely repeated and so each year a new set of replacement rituals are required. As mentioned previously, part of the continuing responsibility to consolidate the theoretical component of ritual design was met by each Grove individual by taking charge of one Full Moon Esbat per year and designing, leading and reviewing a ritual using appropriate elemental and astrological correspondences. Whilst this ritual development was a continuing education process, the ritual was the end result that showed success or otherwise and then provided more opportunities for discussion and follow up learning.

Solitary practitioners too used ritual to determine their personal success and to mark, and of course re-mark, their identity as Wiccans. Without a group to seek feedback from, they were reliant on their own self designed measurements of success to determine what else they needed to learn and how they should be manifesting their own Wiccan journey. Ritual was for them, much as it was for group trainees, a test result, an 'exam' outcome

and a learning conclusion. Like their group counterparts, they scored their own achievements by using rituals as well as other esoteric skills such as magick and divination. Ritual however, as the frequent vehicle for magick, appeared to be the prime objective in any learning path. These discussions and the observations of the Witches in this study appeared to reflect the general opinion of Wiccans worldwide, that ritual as both process and product is “operative witchcraft” (Farrar & Farrar, 1981 Part 2, p. 145) and that it serves as the overt expression of the religion. This operative or ritual practice as outcome appears not to be reflected in the current anthropological debate and dialogue. It seems to have been a neglected topic during the discourse and focus on ritual as process and on the diagnosis of ritual structure.

How Witches Shape their own Rituals

Wiccans are prolific writers (Jencson, 1989) and record their ritual practices not just for their personal use but for the purpose of engendering it as coven culture and heritage. Each Witch and indeed each coven usually has a Book of Shadows in which they record basic rituals and rites such as circle casting, Drawing Down the Moon and Sabbat festivals. These books will usually also contain any one-off rites, perhaps for a handfasting or to honour the death of a loved one, as well as any magickal workings conducted. Individual Witches often have a number of these books and may record basic celebrations in one, festivals in another and dreams and meditations in yet another. Sammy for example has several books that in effect form a journalised history of her progression through Wicca. In addition to a personal Book of Shadows, she is also the guardian of the coven book which details the basic rituals and fundamental Wiccan practice necessary for initiated Witches in The Grove. On initiation, the new Witch is presented with the coven Book of Shadows and expected to copy it out for his or her own use. The book becomes a resource that helps to guide future ritual development and lays down the rules, expectations and explicit processes

that govern the group. All the covens I visited had a similar recording mechanism and indeed felt that their Book of Shadows was extremely precious. It documents not just what they do, but how they do it and details the fundamental principles of their coven's spiritual relationship with divinity.

For members of The Grove, in the year in which they work towards their second degree initiation the Witch is expected to make extensive use of their Book of Shadows. The book becomes a diary of meditations, dreams, rituals and magickal workings and illustrates to Sammy the depth of work undertaken for this higher degree initiation. It also helps to define the clarity with which the practitioner is using his or her intuition and sense of knowing to gain access to inner wisdom and divine direction. During her year of preparation toward second degree, Diana would often sit writing in her book immediately after Full Moon ritual work and the aim was not just to record the ritual event but also the outcome in terms of her reaction and connection with deity during the rite.

While Wiccans are creative in designing and modifying existing rituals, particularly it seems in Australasia, many Wiccan rituals still continue to be performed according to the original doctrine. Peter and Kathryn employ traditional, Alexandrian ritual practices in their coven and believe the beauty of tradition is what keeps Wicca alive as a sustained belief system. "Some of these rituals are rich and beautiful. They're filled with passion and intensity. Why would you want to change them?" Peter argued. Rose agrees and believes that the essence of Wicca can be lost if ritual practice diversifies too much. "We are Wiccan, we are Witches. The Craft is a religion and we need to make sure we don't deface it by changing it too much into something it was never supposed to be".

In contrast with rituals that stand the test of time, some are actively used by pockets of a society as localised metaphors to reflect or bring about

change (Corr, 2003; Fisher, 2003; Hegland, 2003; Kertzer, 1988; V. Turner, 1987; Young, 2005). Ritual, like the society in which it is performed, shifts and evolves as new events impact on the constructs and the social infrastructure supporting its identity. In her study of indigenous ritual in central Australia, Dussart (2004) noted that ritual is a fluid expression which both evolves in line with the society it represents and takes its expression from it. She noticed that whereas the men used to control ritual some fifty years ago in this area, women are now the, “gatekeepers of the public expression of Warlpiri ceremonial knowledge” (p. 254). She suggests that,

Indeed, the modified functionality of Aboriginal ceremony, by virtue of its dramatic evolution both in purpose and structure, offers tremendous insight into the dynamic construction of indigenous social identity in a context of extended external colonial pressure (p. 253).

Wiccan evolution attests to this phenomenon of cultural shifts driving and resulting in ritual modifications. My research showed that Witches, particularly those who are new and inexperienced, face a tremendous struggle in ensuring their rituals meet their own needs instead of their northern hemisphere counterparts. Given that many Witches first learn their craft from books rather than from social interactions (Jencson, 1989), their first taste of Wiccan ritual usually comes from a foreign ecology and environment totally alien to the one in which they live. Indeed, even if they locate Australian Wiccan materials, they still face the problem of identifying the number and timing of the seasons in their location and then adapting their ritual calendar and content to match that local requirement. Having achieved all this, and indeed all the Witches I spoke to had overcome these dilemmas eventually, they are then in a

position to reengineer their rituals to make them personal representations of their own schema about divinity, deity and nature.

However, even once these basic rites have been adapted or even significantly re-written, the ongoing ritual development never ends for a Witch. All the Witches I met change each of their festival rituals with each passing year. While their basic rites such as circle casting remain static, individual celebrations are usually custom developed from a menu of relevant options and correspondences. The underpinning narrative remains constant from one year or occasion to the next but the approach, the emphasis, the scripting, the characterisation, the tools and ritual objects may change depending on the intuitive direction the Witch chooses to follow. “You let the creativity come to you and She tells you how the ritual should go, if you let Her” Paul told me, referring to the Goddess. Jake admitted that he likes change and feels that each new season brings a new opportunity to draw different energies into a ritual. “Last Spring isn’t the same as this year and it won’t be the same as next year either so you have to think about what’s happening now when you write rituals.” Sammy agrees with this and finds the dogma of static and traditional liturgy too restrictive for her spiritual growth. “Ritual should reflect who you are now and what’s going on around you now. Always keeping the same stuff becomes stifling and boring. It needs to move and flow like life does”. Witches draw from their experiences, their intuition and their Book of Shadows to create new and meaningful rituals for each season and event. They have and use, “a distinct repertoire of schemas for behaviour as it is thought, performed and experienced” (Droogers, 2004, p. 149). Ritual is the language or symbology of those schemata, while the content of that ritual is the syntax and that syntax when modified can change the language and further cement or modify the meaning of that ritual. Griffin (1995) argues that symbolism is thus the framework of meaning or the reference symbology that enables society to learn about,

accept and engage with or reject a set of principles on which that society bases itself.

While its detail and syntax may change as in the case of many Australian Wiccan rites, religious ritual generally still maintains a long standing place in its society. Religious ceremonies and rituals are the unifying bond that cements the shared norms, beliefs and values of a given group (Durkheim, 1976; Sosis & Ruffle, 2003). Young (2005) states that ritual plays, “an important role in many religions in uniting devotees, manifesting religious principles and representing and drawing on the powers of the divine” (p. 54) while Fisher (2003) suggests, “Ritual form and performance carry meanings about commitment to a certain order” (p. 117). Indeed Wiccan initiation, like Christian baptism and confirmation, is a rite of passage that explicitly depicts the participant’s commitment to their chosen belief system. Ritual itself is a social commitment to religion and each time a coven comes together in ceremony at a Full Moon, New Moon or any other rite, they are reconnecting with and committing to their Wiccan philosophy and way of life. Barnes (1990) notes that several ethnographies depict religious ritual as being a solemn and sombre occasion and indeed many rites do require respectful reverence and restraint. Wiccan rituals to honour newly departed friends and family are naturally occasions where participants show respect for the feelings of those in grief but also for the spirit of the loved one who has moved on. In this instance, “ritual serves to make people feel they have the techniques for taming the wild powers of the universe” (Barnes 1990, p. 214) and for focusing their emotional responses into a meaningful process that aids in the recovery process.

Not all rituals however are serious events requiring muted participation. Droogers (2004) suggests, “More than a solemn occasion, useful because of its social and cultural functions, ritual is a festive enactment of counter

reality” (p. 138). Witches would agree with his uplifting take on ritual, since while they revere divinity through ritual, it is also an event of celebration and jubilation. Furthermore, ritual depicts the reality of spiritual life through the reality of the ritual. It becomes an existential representation of life. Droogers goes on to suggest that one of the reasons why ritual is so prevalent in all cultures is because it is fun and enjoyable. Whilst the ritual itself is always conducted with serious intent and with respect for the underpinning story, Witches enjoy their ritual as a refreshing and enjoyable way to tell the story of the festival or ceremony at hand. In circle, members of The Grove ensure that ritual is taken seriously but not at the expense of natural humour and enjoyment. On many occasions we have laughed when the balefire would not light or when it became so smoky that our eyes watered; we have laughed when the wind blew out our candles at a particularly important part of a rite. One occasion where the humour almost overtook the ritual itself was during Anna’s initiation. Initiations are usually joyous but intensely dramatic celebrations where every endeavour is made to make sure the event is satisfying, uplifting and memorable for the initiate. The drama is designed to focus only on the initiate to enable them to feel a total connection with the unfolding event. In Anna’s initiation, for a few minutes, all that intent unintentionally disappeared.

As Anna, blindfolded and with her hands bound, entered the circle, we waited in anticipation and suspense as the fetch slowly and carefully delivered her before the altar. Anna would probably have known where she was by then because she could probably hear the shuffles and sense us around her. It’s supposed to be a very spiritual time with the silence and suspense building but suddenly, erupting through that silence and suspense came the muffled noise of one of the coveners as they passed wind. Although we were all supposed to be serious and utterly intent on Anna, we could not stifle the giggles. The dichotomy between the

religious silence and the irreverent rumble of someone passing wind was too much to bear and for several minutes the ritual had to be suspended as we desperately tried to regain our composure and recapture the required serenity of the moment. Poor Anna just stood there obviously utterly unaware of why the people around her whom she was supposed to trust to take care of her were doubled up in uncontrollable fits of laughter. Even Sammy laughed out loud and eventually after we managed to calm down, the ritual continued.

Obviously and fortunately, not all rituals have such unplanned and irreverent interludes! In this instance one of the participants, the very person for whom the ritual was taking place could not comprehend or even guess why the ritual she was participating in as the central character was temporarily collapsing around her. Initiations are usually examples of full participation by all those present including the initiate and Hume (1997) suggests that, “Ritual is sacred drama, where one is both audience and participant” (p. 113). Participants are actively involved in the proceedings rather than being dislocated and distant observers and this means they have a greater connection with both the process and the outcome. They participate fully with their whole being and are thus co-creators of the social process and the social experience (Amber K, 2003; E. Turner, 1986). Ritual is an expression of the mental, emotional and spiritual schema of the individuals and the social ideologies of the society or culture in which it takes place. E. Turner (1986) postulated that ritual is drama and that as well as being entertainment for the core and peripheral participants it is also a means of engaging people in the pseudo reality of life. She argues that the performance of ritual has a need, “to take you over, to “inter” “tain” (hold) you” (p. 13).

Ritual doesn't always have to be a grand or large affair though and rituals with limited numbers of people often actively encourage individuals to

become more involved as participants. Helen, one of my interviewees, and I have been friends for many years. Our children grew up together and we frequently bumped into each other at our children's day care centre and later at their school. In the early summer of 2003, quite by chance, we sat together at our children's school Christmas concert and it was during this event that we both recognised our mutual allegiance to the Pagan way of life and set in place a continuing journey of shared Wiccan sisterhood. A year later we shared our first ritual, a stumbling but jubilant occasion where we experimented with ritual and explored our ritual preferences together.

October 2004 Samhain

Helen and the kids arrived at tea time and we all shared a thrown together meal. Our main task after dinner was to try and set the children up with an activity that kept them busy and safe so we could venture into my back garden and do our Samhain ritual. Helen hasn't been formally initiated, and in fact I think she's quite happy working as a solitary anyway, so I know I can't erect the circle in her presence (Sammy would throw a fit at the release of secret Grove ritual process and quite rightly so). That said, instead we robed up and went out into the warmth of the evening air and prepared the physical garden environment for its transformation into a sacred space. We put the quarter candles on the ground and lit those and laid our ritual requirements on a makeshift altar in the northern quarter of our pseudo circle. I didn't cast the circle as we would at The Grove and to be honest I don't think I could have remembered how to do it yet without prompting so instead, we just created the sacred space within our minds and spoke a few spontaneously chosen words of dedication to the elements and deity.

Helen and I had worked out previously that we were going to make this a ritual that signified the birth of new, more productive behaviours for us.

We figured that Spring with its correspondence to the quickening of the planet and the birth of new life was the best time to reflect the growth of the budding flora around us and to symbolise our intent to create new and more positive situations. We decided last week that to symbolise this new approach, we'd plant seeds, dedicate them to the Goddess and nurture them to fruition.

Helen brought some seeds and pots with her and I had some different seeds with yet more pots and the potting mix and we placed all these in our sacred space. We consecrated the seeds and planted them in the mix in the pots and made labels so we knew what seeds would produce what plants, we watered them and then sat and talked about how we felt that ritual had gone.

It was a really relaxed ritual and different to what I normally experience at The Grove. I guess this is largely because during ritual in the 'real' circle, we're psychically linked to one another and to the physical space we're in. Tonight it seemed much looser than that and although Helen and I had a great time and I felt a connectedness with divinity, it was different to what I normally experience. I'm wondering if that feeling of difference is because I didn't erect the circle first and thus somehow didn't create the right space in the first place or whether it was just because Helen and I hadn't worked together before. As a fairly new Witch, writing and performing rituals on my own is obviously still something I'm learning. I really recognised that tonight!

In this instance, Helen and I designed our own ritual to meet our own needs using the local seasonal factors as symbols to interconnect and influence the ritual content. As relatively new learners of Wiccan practice at the time and still with limited experience in ritual design, we used the fundamentals of Wiccan ritual practice as we knew them to underscore

what we did. However we also incorporated a degree of spontaneity using our intuition to guide what we did.

As illustrated here and with all Wiccan practice, Witches frequently bring a degree of intuition to their ritual development. There is of course the traditional, skeletal narrative of the ritual to express, whatever that relevant narrative may be but the details in the content are where Witches show their true creativity. Many rituals are rich with symbology and provide an opportunity to experience a truly moving event. One of those was in the winter of 2004.

Midwinter Ball 2004

What a fantastic night this was! Every year the Combined Covens Social Club organises a number of events that they invite the Perth Pagan community to. One of those is the Spring Camp over the long weekend in October and another is the Midwinter gathering. This year's Midwinter ball was a masked ball and almost eighty Pagans, all beautifully dressed in honour of the occasion arrived to celebrate together. Many of The Grove members were there and we've spent the last few weeks planning our costumes and comparing notes on masks and themes.

While the whole night was great fun, the highlight was the winter ritual where all the guests came together in the garden and shared in an informal, relaxed but moving rite to send our wishes out to the universe for a brighter summer ahead. Winter solstice, or Yule, is the time of year where deep in the throes of a wet and chilly Perth winter, we take the time to think ahead and conceive our plans for improving our lives and our environment in time for Spring. This season is traditionally when those plans are actually born along with the seasonal birth of the flowers and animals. Bob and her coveners led the ritual and as we all gathered round in a circle she stood in the middle and explained what we were

going to do. In her hand she held a large ball of wool and as she held on to one end of the wool, she threw the ball to one of the guests gathered around about her. As she threw it she made a wish, out loud, for the future. Each person was then required to keep hold of a section of the wool, throw the ball on to someone else and make a wish as they threw it. After just a few minutes of this, there was a growing web of wool that spanned the circle and connected everyone to everyone else through the single strand of wool.

Some of the wishes were beautiful and touching. There were wishes for peace from terrorist attack, freedom from cruelty for the Moon bears in Asia and various other ecological and environmental wishes. But there were also personal pledges which were promises to improve on things that were holding some people back and to put in place actions to overcome stumbling blocks. "I promise to listen more to my teenage son" said one Mum. "This Spring I'll stop procrastinating and I will write that book" one of the gathered decided. "I'm fed up with my weight" said one gentleman, "so from now on I'm taking charge of my life and I will be the weight I want to be by this time next year". (There was a hum of agreement and support for that one around the garden!) "I'm going to go back to TAFE and get my naturopathy Diploma". "This year I will relax more, work less and balance my life". "I need to overcome my fear of flying so I can go on holiday so I'm going to do something about it now".

The list of personal pledges and promises went on till the ball of wool ran out and by then the web was tangled and spanned the entire garden with everyone having had at least a couple of turns at making a wish for their future. Everyone was connected to every other person through the length of wool and through their witness to the personal promises of improvement. Personally I felt really quite empowered by the ritual and the feeling around the garden was one of mutual respect, support for one

another's pledges and caring. The atmosphere was warm and encouraging and at the end of it, everyone was smiling and congratulating Bob and her coveners for a wonderful and productive interlude to a fantastic evening of laughter, dancing, fun and catching up with friends.

This ritual, although planned, relied on the spontaneous contribution by those gathered around. There were about fifty people involved in that ritual and each one of them gave something of themselves to the energy that flowed through the web of wool. Several people were shy at first and stumbled over the words of their pledges but as the web grew, so too did the confidence and comfort of the group.

This kind of spontaneous ritual can be equally as moving as one that is planned and scripted. All the Full Moon Esbats that we each had control of during 2005 were emotional but Anna's ritual was particularly creative and well thought out and each of us considered it a success on the night.

Full Moon Esbat, mid 2005

Tonight it was Anna's turn to lead the Full Moon ritual and she did a fantastic job. She'd chosen this moon as it was in Gemini and the Goddess she'd chosen to dedicate this ritual to and to call down was Eos (or Aurora). Anna asked each of us to choose a particular tool from a tray of them she had prepared to use as a divination object. I chose the piece of amethyst but the other choices included particular tarot cards and other pieces of crystal. We each spent a few minutes using our chosen objects to try and connect with our inner wisdom and then the Goddess Eos was called in. Anna did a brilliant job of this ritual and everyone one of us tonight seemed to be totally involved in what she was doing. She drew us all together, she had obviously done her homework and she led a really well thought out, beautifully orchestrated ritual.

Anna's ritual was seen as successful because it was obvious that she had made a great deal of effort to make all her ritual components complementary to one another. The experience was reverent, moving and helped each of us connect, along with her, with the cosmological, mythological and astrological correlations of that particular moon. During the casual discussion afterwards, as we all sat relaxing in the sacred space, Iona mentioned that she had felt particularly connected to the Goddess that night. As a second degree Witch, she has had considerably more experience in the design and conduct of ritual and for Anna, her endorsement was a significant reward.

Ritual is not always successful however. Fisher (2003) suggests that, "Rituals are unsuccessful when they fail to accomplish the conventional effect that they are supposed to cause" (p. 122). One example of that for The Grove membership was a particular annual festival in 2004. While the ritual performance itself went as planned, and the liturgical content was embraced by those who participated, the coven had asked an outside guest to act in a central ritual role. Although a long term Wiccan, very few of The Grove members had met the guest and thus had not had the opportunity to create a bond of trust and friendship with him. As a result the physical, emotional and spiritual contact and connection between the existing members and the guest was not apparent and instead of being a deeply meaningful event that heralded the rebirth of a new year and all the opportunities for advancement and personal evolution that accompanies that, it was a 'play' enacted but not felt.

Arachnid Festival, Spring, 2004

Disappointing evening really. This festival is a primary festival for The Grove and although it's not one found in the principle, traditional Wiccan Wheel of the Year, it is a festival that Sammy and Fred have introduced as an Australian and geographically local celebration of new

life, new beginnings and the shedding of old habits. As an open festival, we're allowed to bring Pagan sympathetic friends and partners with us and so one of the group brought a friend along with them, as indeed had many of us. Their guest was well known to the older members of The Grove and to the wider Pagan community in fact, but not to several newer members of the coven and it was this that seemed to cause the problem later on.

Because the guest was a well known Wiccan and the only male of suitable rank available to act the part, Sammy asked him to step in and take the role. It's a role central to the narrative of this festival's story and one that requires a commitment on the part of the actor to really embrace its symbology. The guest had to enact their own death and rebirth so it's quite a strong role requirement. The other participants in the ritual have to enable his death and in fact be co-conspirators of his demise, so it's quite a personally challenging event for them as well as for the central character. The problem appeared to be that because the ritual involved close physical contact between the coveners and the central character and because it involved enacting a serious process of death in which they have a vital contribution to that guest's death, there was a degree of hesitancy on their part in becoming totally involved. Normally Anna, Iona, Cath, Diana, Lilly and all the coveners would be whole heartedly engaged in the rite but not tonight. They hung back, and 'went through the motions' rather than deliberately and actively trying to connect with the essence of the festival. It was as though the distance and lack of familiarity with the guest disempowered them and rendered them unable to connect with the basic and fundamental symbology of the festival. Pity really because otherwise, it's quite a powerful ritual.

Not surprisingly, there was a considerable amount of conversation post the festival centred on the fact that several of the coveners felt

uncomfortable enacting a ritual that involved such close physical and emotional contact with someone they didn't know and hadn't had the opportunity to build a degree of trust with. The ritual scripting itself they agreed was appropriate but the inclusion of an unknown person in such a central position stripped them of the power that this festival ritual is capable of delivering. "I just couldn't connect with what was going on" Anna said. "I think it might have gone better if we'd had Fred or Winston play that part" Cath admitted. This occasion highlights that while the process and content can be appropriate, the participants can be well acquainted with their ritual roles, and the symbology of the festival can be perfectly understood by everyone, one small issue can still upset the balance and thus prevent the successful outcome of a ritual.

Ritual is therefore not just a creative act of symbolic and implied social order, it is an opportunity to express individual and collective spirituality and touch the heart, minds and soul of the participants. Witches take their rituals seriously and employ them as more than just Wiccan process and religious practice. They are connections with divinity and conduits to inner wisdom, growth and divine direction and support. They are opportunities to cement coven solidarity and commitment to one another, to the coven as a collective and to their dedication to Wicca. Rituals are the public expression of private spirituality and religious devotion and as such the backbone to Wiccan commitment.

This dedication to Wicca and its ritual practices poses significant problems for many southern hemisphere Witches however. While the religious doctrine of the northern hemisphere might direct the essential content of a ritual, it does not present a meaningful language or syntax through which to honour nature and divinity here in Australia. Many Witches feel that their rituals need to be re-shaped so they reflect their own heritage, landscape and seasonal activities. They therefore need to

re-build their ritual language and syntax and learn to speak their Wiccan tongue with a local dialect.

Wicca is not indigenous to Australia, nor indeed to anywhere in the southern hemisphere. Although some of its practitioners argue that it is the rebirth of an ancient, pre-Christian religion, most Wiccans will admit that the current format of neopagan Wicca, regardless of the Wiccan tradition, is rooted in the work of Gerald Gardner, who raised the consciousness of modern Witchcraft in the United Kingdom in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Wicca is thus a northern hemisphere religion and its celebratory calendar, the Wheel of the Year, focuses on the seasonal attributes and characteristics of the northern European environment.

In researching the process and outcome of Wiccan learning, one of the significant and recurring themes appeared to be the dilemma Perth Wiccans faced in matching the festivals of a northern hemisphere calendar to those of a southern hemisphere ecology. Wiccans are taught the basic Wiccan rituals and processes but these are turned upside down down-under and this poses significant problems as Witches learn their way around their new found spiritual path. Hume (1997) noted similar dilemmas in her study so a decade later Perth Witches are still troubled by the same issues, especially those covens like The Grove that choose to follow more eclectic and localised festival patterns..

The Wheel of the Year

We were 'The Three Amigos', Cath, Anna and I. We'd all been initiated to first degree in the winter of 2004 a month apart and we had bonded closely. With a shared set of experiences, we had learnt together about the journey from Outer Court to the inner sanctum of post initiation. We had survived the experiences together through sharing our fears, giggling at our mistakes and honouring our pledges of faith.

Our coven, The Grove, is an eclectic one and doesn't always follow the traditional pattern of Alexandrian or Gardnerian festivals. We do not set our festival calendar according to the 'old ways' as the Wiccan community refer to it, and instead choose to celebrate our festivals when the seasons dictate to us the correct fit. That sets us apart to some degree from traditionalist practice but at the same time also typifies the problems that southern hemisphere covens face when deciding which festivals to celebrate throughout the year. As newly initiated Witches we were fast learning that the beauty of traditional festivals brings with it some angst about timing and content. We wanted to celebrate the original festivals and when we hesitatingly approached Sammy to ask if we could do so, she suggested we write a festival and see how we went. We thought we'd won a great coup, but quickly realised we'd just fallen into one of the oldest traps for southern hemisphere Witches.

31st October is traditionally Samhain in the northern hemisphere and the most important festival on their calendar. It's a festival of thanksgiving for the harvest, a celebration of the bounty of the summer and an opportunity to say goodbye to the Sun God ruler of that season. We understood all that and were spellbound by the beauty of the rituals but in October, here in Australia, we weren't saying goodbye to the summer Sun Gods, we were saying hello! There was no harvest to rejoice about in October. Instead we were looking at the time of year in Western Australia when growth begins, not when it's slowing down. We were faced with a conundrum and the endless discussions about what we should do and how we should celebrate this festival were no doubt reflections of the same discussions many Wiccans before us in this country have also had.

September 2005

The three of us sat on my lounge floor this morning, Anna, Cath and I, surrounded by the pages of ideas we had written. Spread all around us

were piles of reference books open at pages specific to the Samhain festival. The early spring sunshine poured through the windows leaving bright shafts of light across the pages of our thoughts. The weather was warming up, as it usually does at this time of year in Perth and we sat drinking tea, eating chocolate biscuits and desperately trying to work out the connections between a traditional Autumn festival celebrated at this time of year in the homeland of our religion and the Spring season budding around us, in the homeland of our everyday lives. We pondered and talked back and forth about how other covens had swapped Samhain and Beltaine to make things easier. Should we be writing a festival then about Beltaine signalling the beginning of summer? Or should we write a Samhain festival to say goodbye to the Sun God and pretend that's what was actually happening to honour our religious roots? It was all so hard for three Witches new to the religion but desperately trying to respect both its traditions and the connections with the reality of nature around us.

In the end, and after considerable debate, we settled on using the bulk of Anna's ideas and symbolised Samhain using hollowed out, blown eggs as a symbol of fertility and new growth and built on that as our foundation for a Samhain festival. We finally understood why Sammy had moved away from trying to capture the traditional northern hemisphere festivals. The timing was so wrong. We all felt that this was a religion where we were supposed to 'feel' the planet around us, observe the natural seasonal changes and honour them as they occurred. How could we feel that and then fit it into a framework built for a seasonal pattern in direct opposition to our own? It just didn't work. It was so frustrating but we all learnt so much from this dilemma about modifying traditional expectations to merge with personal gut feel.

Our frustrations that morning were typical of the frustrations many other Witches across Australasia have expressed. How do you transport and transpose an imported religion into an alien environment and ecology without denigrating its fundamental principles?

Modern Wicca, as a faith system, originated in England under the creative influence of Gerald Gardner in the middle of the 20th century. As a nature based religion, its rituals focus on the cycle of the seasons and the outcomes of those seasons. For example in the northern hemisphere where Wicca was initially developed, the festival of Beltaine, held traditionally on the 30th April, celebrates the beginning of summer and as such the rituals focus on elements that signify the commencement of the warm weather and the growth of plant and animal life. By comparison in Western Australia we are saying goodbye to the warmth of summer by the end of April and preparing for the cooler months of the winter. Thus Perth Witches have a dilemma about the timing of their traditional festivals and this is evident in the ever growing ingenuity with which groups and individuals overcome the problem and choose the timing of their festivals.

Like all established religions, Wicca has an annual calendar of events that directs the festivals that practitioners can follow. Just as Christians attend church on Sundays and Jews attend services on the Sabbath, Wiccans likewise attend 'services' on each full moon. In addition just as Christians celebrate annual festivals such as Christmas on December 25th and Muslims celebrate Ramadan in the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, so too do Wiccans have a cycle of festivals of their own. However, due to the seasonal influences that guide the festivals of Wiccans, there are considerable difficulties for Wiccans in the southern hemisphere as they try to abide by the calendar set by their northern hemisphere cousins.

The Wiccan calendar is tied to both lunar and solar cycles. Full moon services known as Esbats are the mainstay of Wiccan practice and are the monthly rituals where a coven honours divinity and does magickal workings agreed to by the group. In addition, the annual passage of the sun across the sky provides for eight regularly spaced festivals known as Sabbats that enable practitioners to honour the seasonal activity and milestones which are current at that time. Of those eight Sabbats, four are known as Lesser Sabbats (the Equinoxes and Solstices), while the remaining four occasions are the Greater Sabbats that directly celebrate seasonal activity; harvest at the end of summer, fertility based rites in spring and so on. In addition these four Greater Sabbats are linked more closely with stories and legends of Gods and Goddesses than the Lesser Sabbats.

The original northern hemisphere Wheel of the Year is as follows:

2nd February - Imbolg (also known as Candlemas)

21st March - Spring Equinox (also known as Ostara)

30th April - Beltaine

22nd June - Summer Solstice (also known as Midsummer)

31st July – Lughnasadh (also known as Lammas)

21st September – Autumn Equinox (also known as Mabon)

31st October – Samhain (also known as All Hallows Eve)

22nd December - Winter Solstice (also known as Yule)

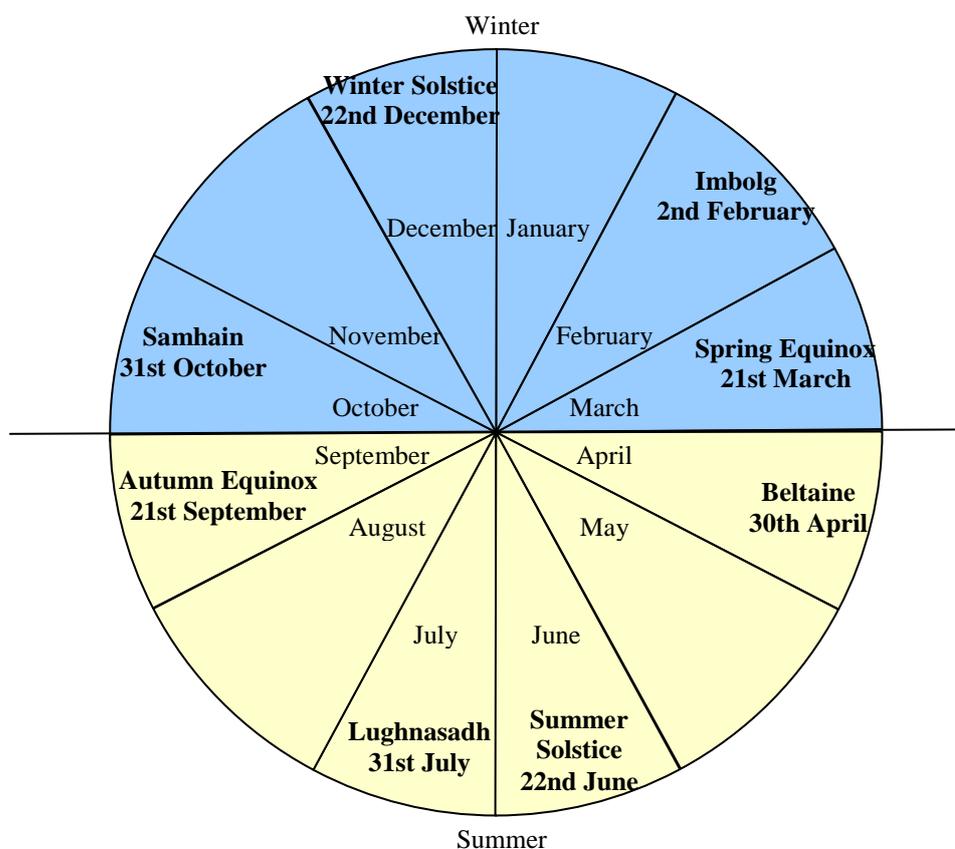


Figure 10 Northern Hemisphere Wheel of the Year

Whilst this may appear to be a simple pattern of nature based rituals, the discrepancy and difficulty comes about when Perth Witches try to adopt and celebrate Sabbats that symbolise a certain natural event for the northern hemisphere. For instance Summer Solstice obviously does not occur for Australians on the 22nd June and likewise the Equinoxes are also on the opposite sides of the seasonal cycle. What poses even more difficulty is that of celebrating the Greater Sabbats which are more than simply recognitions of the sun's passage across the sky. The four Greater Sabbats, Imbolg, Beltaine, Lughnasadh and Samhain each symbolise particular events that would naturally occur and relate to that time of year in the northern hemisphere. Laing (2003) asks the questions most Witches ask themselves,

Do we follow the traditional Wheel of the Year timings even though they are opposite to our seasons? Or do we adapt and reverse the wheel so it is in rhythm with our own environment? (Wheel of the Year data file).

While it may be a simple task to merely transpose the four celebrations to their opposite half of the seasonal cycle, this dislocates the celebratory cycle from its traditional roots and poses disturbing questions of allegiance for Witches across Australasia. As a result some covens choose only to swap Beltaine and Samhain over leaving Lughnasadh and Imbolg where they are while other covens swap all the festivals to their opposite dates. Most covens however tend to follow this general pattern of events.

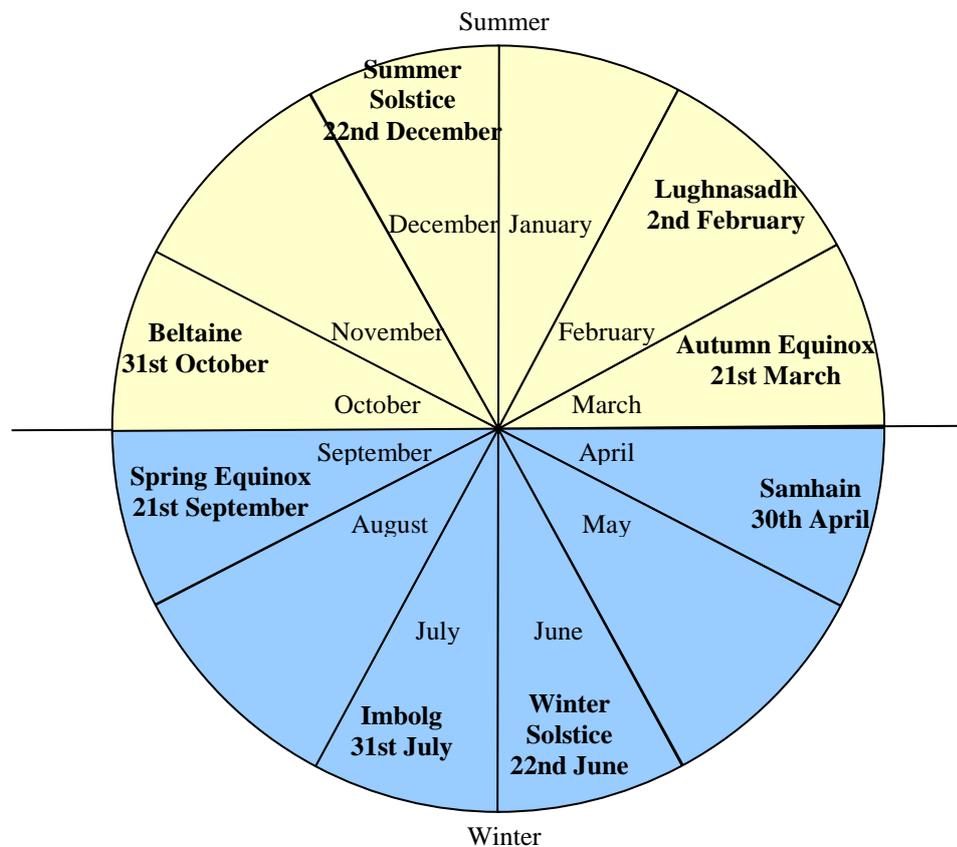


Figure 11 Southern Hemisphere Wheel of the Year

In an effort to maintain some kind of allegiance with traditionalist practice, some covens celebrate the festivals using this wheel of events to dictate festival content but swap the names to match those of the southern hemisphere. Thus on 31st July they will design a festival celebration that incorporates Lughnasadh principles but will call it Imbolg. Still other covens, including The Grove and its sister coven led by Margaret, choose to forgo the traditionalist celebrations altogether and instead have aligned their celebratory calendar to a far more localised version that takes note of local conditions and seasonal weather patterns. The Grove still celebrates the traditional festivals but in a much more localised and relaxed fashion that honours familiar geographical and ecological milestones rather than foreign, unrelated events. For example, as Outer Courtiers study their surroundings during the Outer Court year, Sammy asks them to observe and note what is happening in nature around them. When do the spiders and ants become active? When does the grass start growing and then die from the scorching rays of the sun? When do the cattle and sheep mate and produce their offspring? When do the desert winds begin to come in off the Western Australian plains? All these questions tune the Outer Courtiers into their local environment and help ease them into a celebratory calendar aligned with their local ecology.

All this adaptation and change however, contributes to considerable confusion between covens about who is celebrating what event and when. On one occasion I was invited to what was termed a Samhain ritual by the host coven when in fact the underpinning ritual drama was based in the Beltaine tradition. On another occasion with a different coven, I attended a Lughnasadh ritual which was a diasporic ritual depicting this Sabbat. Hume (1997) found similar confusion in her seminal research on Wicca in Australia and indeed noted that not only do the festival dates cause confusion amongst Wiccans but so to do the direction, clockwise or anticlockwise, that one is supposed to work in within the circle, as does

the location of the four quarters in that same sacred space. The ensuing description of each of the Sabbats is from the northern hemisphere perspective and thus the original principle on which the rituals are based but highlighted against the southern hemisphere Wheel of the Year. This will allow for a clearer illustration of the issues Perth Witches face.

Lughnasadh

Although Lughnasadh is traditionally celebrated on 31st July in the northern hemisphere, it was originally celebrated at the time of the first harvest (Cunningham, 2004). From a seasonal perspective it signifies the beginning of the harvest period and the approaching end of summer's warmth and growth period. The harvest has started and the plants are going to seed and dying off. The days are still longer than the nights but their length is slowly shortening and the heat of the sun is diminishing. Wiccans give thanks for the food they are about to reap from the crop harvest and for the food they can store in their larders in the form of pickled and preserved fruits and vegetables.

From a spiritual perspective, this is a time of both rejoicing and reflection. With the lessening of the heat, the power and the light from the sun, the darkness of winter seems closer and the significance of diminishing light is a key factor in this festival. Lugh, for whom this festival is named, is a Celtic Sun God of fire and light and mythological tales suggest that he killed his own father in order to reign supreme. At this time Wiccans celebrate the Goddess as she gives birth to a son just as the planet Earth gives birth to the first fruits of the harvest. Wiccans often use this festival to reflect on the bounty of the summer and to begin the preparations for winter.

Here in Australia, July 31st is not the time for the first harvest, neither is the summer drawing to close. Instead, depending on where we live in this vast continent, we are emerging from the winter months or heading from

the dry season into the wet. The problem is magnified however because it is not a simple case of swapping the festivals around to their opposites. Whilst the summer months in the northern hemisphere are the growing times for crops, the same is not always true in Australia. Indeed our summer months here can be either extremely dry, arid, barren and a time for nil growth or they can be times of monsoonal rains that deluge the countryside and again inhibit growth. Thus, even if we could do a straight swap of festivals, the seasonal significance would still not match the growth cycles we experience in Australia.

Hume (1997) notes that depending on your location within Australia, you can experience anything from two to six seasons per year and thus northern hemisphere seasonal festivals do not always match our own seasonal cycles regardless of where in this country one resides. She suggests, “our ‘upside-downness’ does not easily accommodate an imported religion based on a different set of assumptions about climate and ecology” (Hume, 1997, p. 120). Bodsworth (1999), an Australian Witch who wrote commercially available Wiccan materials specifically for Australians, echoes this point. She points out that even in the same state the aboriginal people recognise different seasons. In the Uluru region of the Northern Territory the local people count six seasons while in the same state, “At the Northern Territory’s top end, the Larrakia count sixteen” (p. 15). Across the border in Western Australia the Walnajarri at Fitzroy Crossing only count three. Ezzy (2003) also noted the seasonal disparity across Australia and the subsequent mismatch between festival milestones and Australian ecology. All these differences serve only to compound the complex issue of implanting a northern hemisphere set of principles into a nonconforming Western Australian environment.

Samhain

Samhain is the Wiccan New Year festival and recognised as the most important festival of the entire year. In the northern hemisphere it is celebrated on 31st October and is now celebrated in America as Halloween. It is supposedly the time of year where the veil between this mundane, earthly world and the world of spirit is at its thinnest. This night marks the end of one year and the beginning of the next and was seen in legend as the, “mysterious moment which belonged to neither the past, nor the present, to neither this world nor the Other” (Farrar & Farrar, 1981, p. 121). Often termed the Feast of the Dead, this is the time of year where the spirits of dead friends and family sit with celebrants and share a meal of remembrance and reverence with them.

From a seasonal perspective, this was the time of year where the farmers would slaughter all but their breeding stock knowing that during winter there would not be enough feedstock to ensure the survival of all the animals. The meat was preserved with salt to last through the winter months, the final crops were harvested and the fruit and vegetables preserved for the long cold winter months ahead. This was a time of contemplation for people on the land as they hoped they had gathered enough food to last the winter and that they had kept the best stock available ready for breeding in the Spring.

By comparison, here in Perth at the end of October, we are looking toward the burning heat of summer and celebrating the emergence from our winter months. The sheep have delivered their lambs in the South of the state, the wheat crops have been planted and are developing their flower heads in the North and the days are getting longer. Wiccans find this festival a particularly difficult one to arrange within their Wheel of the Year. Given its major significance as the Wiccan New Year's Eve, many Witches prefer to celebrate it on its northern hemisphere date while

others feel that to contemplate the depth of winter as our sun is developing the strength of its summer heat simply makes no sense. When talking about his celebration schedule, Paul revealed how difficult it was to get uniformity across differing celebrations. “Many of the covens have open rituals for the big festivals like Samhain and Beltaine but the problem is that one coven celebrates Samhain in October, another one celebrates it in April and another one calls it Samhain but the content is about Beltaine so what do you do!”

Imbolg

Imbolg is known as the Feast of Torches because when it is celebrated in the northern hemisphere on the 2nd February, the darkness of winter is diminishing and the warmth and light of Spring are beginning to emerge. There is much celebration that the cruel harshness of winter is over and that once again, the animals and people have survived to welcome another season of light. It is the quickening of the Earth as new life begins its pathway toward blooming for plants and birth for animals.

In Western Australia during February on the other hand, we are struggling through the remnants of fierce country and hill bush fires, droughts in some southern areas and floods from monsoonal rains in the north. Like our northern hemisphere cousins we are also coming out of a dearth of plant and animal growth but for us this is because of the strength of our summer rather than the harshness of their cold winter. We do not celebrate the glimpse of the sun and the promise of longer days but instead crave the cool release of winter. We are awakening from our air-conditioned summer hibernation while the northern hemisphere is awakening from their winter hibernation. The timings and environmental contexts simply do not match as Hume notes again, “It is obviously ludicrous to be holding celebrations according to the northern hemisphere

– how can one plausibly be celebrating winter solstice for example, during a hot arid time of year” (1995, p. 96).

Beltaine

Beltaine, celebrated on 30th April in Europe is second in importance behind Samhain and as such a major festival. As Samhain celebrates the beginning of the northern hemisphere winter, Beltaine celebrates and marks the beginning of their summer. It is a festival of fertility and indeed the dancing round the phallic Maypole signifies the union between male and female and the fertility of that union. It's a feast and a celebration full of jubilation and rejoicing as the promise of new life is abundant. As in previous Greater Sabbats, the match between the northern and southern hemispheres does not translate the intent of the festival even when transposed to the opposite quarter of the year. If celebrated on 31st October, the opposite of 30th April, we are indeed enjoying the resurgence of summer but it doesn't necessarily signify a time of fertility. Indeed the opposite is true as in many areas of the country flora and fauna are ending their growth cycle and making preparations for a summer hibernation.

In her role as a High Priestess, Bob celebrates the traditional festivals but again admits defeat by the paradox that exists when trying to celebrate a traditional festival in a non traditional ecology. “Yes it's a bit of a problem but the trick is to work out what feels right for you and stick to it”. Her words echoed those of many Wiccans I spoke to who had experimented with a variety of ways to fashion their own Wheel of the Year. Sammy argues her point, “We can't celebrate some foreign season that has no bearing on what we're experiencing in our own back yard”. Abigail disagrees. “I know it's difficult but if we change the festivals around too much then I ask you if we're celebrating Wicca or a whole new indigenous religion.”

Elemental and Altar Placements

The confusion and disagreement arises not just over when the festivals should be celebrated but also about the very foundations on which basic and festival rituals in Perth are conducted. Traditionally the Wiccan sacred circle is divided into four quarters. The Northern quarter corresponds to the element of Earth, the East quarter to Air, South to Fire and West to Water. Each of the elements connotes certain characteristics including the season, the ‘personality’ of that quarter, astrological affiliations, herbal and other correspondences. Wiccans build their circle casting rituals and magickal workings on the foundational principles of the locations of each quarter. The traditional locations of each quarter reside in northern hemisphere folklore but are based on geographical allegiances. For example in the northern hemisphere it makes sense to have the Fire quarter in the South because it points to the equator where the heat of the sun is focused. However, many Wiccans in Australia reverse the locations of the quarters so that Fire is in the North and pointing to the equator and, “the South is the dark of the Pole, far away from the sun” (Horne, 1999, p. 17). While some of the commercially available materials indicate that this reversal is warranted in the southern hemisphere, none of the covens I visited and none of the Witches I spoke to work with that configuration. They all prefer the traditional quarter set up. However, in interviews they did comment that the debate on quarter location was a valid issue particularly when referenced against the need to transpose the dates of festivals.

The other basic bone of contention amongst Perth Witches is the placement of the altar. This is less a northern/southern hemisphere issue and more an issue of traditional style. It does however contribute in part to the hemispheric discussion. The Alexandrian tradition proposes that the altar should be set in the northern or Earth and dark quarter of the circle and my research indicates that the majority of Witches in Perth

follow this suggestion. Saxon Witchcraft however requires the altar to be, “set up in the centre so that when you stand in front of it you are facing East” (Buckland, 1986, p. 65). Yet other traditions require the altar to be in the Eastern quarter. So already there are some differences based on the Wiccan tradition to which any Wiccan belongs. When that Witch then attempts to place their altar in a southern hemisphere circle, the complexity is increased. The East and West quarters are rarely swapped because they are positioned to reflect the rise and fall of the sun and no matter where in the world you are, the sun will always rise in the East and set in the West. This means if you follow the Saxon tradition in the southern hemisphere, your altar will still remain in the centre of the circle facing East. However, if you follow the Alexandrian tradition or a derivative of it, as do many Witches in Perth, the altar is supposed to be placed in the Northern or dark quarter. As already discussed, the North and South quarters are sometimes transposed so several Witches suggest the altar should sit in the South quarter rather than the North. Without a High Priestess to explain and justify the positioning of their coven’s altar, a solitary is often left perplexed by circle set up instructions. “Your altar can be placed in the centre, in the East, or in the “dark” quarter, which in the northern hemisphere is North, and in the southern hemisphere, South” (Philips, 1991, p. 17). No wonder so many Witches have trouble working out the most appropriate configuration for circles and rituals!

Clockwise or Anticlockwise

Another fundamental point of contention about ritual and sacred space configuration is the direction around the circle that one takes in order to create both ritual and magickal workings. Traditionally in the northern hemisphere Witches move in a deosil fashion which is a reflection of the trajectory across the sky that the sun takes from dawn to dusk. It rises and travels in a clockwise fashion and as such this direction is seen as the most natural direction in which to cast a circle and to execute ritual work.

By working in the same direction as the sun travels, Witches see themselves as reflecting the natural currents of the Earth and the planets of the universe. However, in the southern hemisphere, the sun travels in an anticlockwise direction from East to West and this can clearly be seen during the winter when the sun is low in the sky. Thus if the direction of the sun's travel indicates appropriate energy directions for ritual working, then logically Witches in the southern hemisphere should be working in the opposite direction to their northern hemisphere cousins. This is not always the case however.

In many traditional circles around the world, particularly in England, one must always move in a deosil direction around the circle and to walk widdershins (anticlockwise) is to reverse the polarity of the magickal intent and to undo any ritual work already created. In Rose and Alan's circle here in Perth, they teach their seekers and Inner Courtiers that this is fundamental to showing respect to the Gods and Goddesses. In casting their circle and in movement once it is erected, the coveners are expected always to work in a deosil direction. By comparison, Sammy is not as strict about this protocol. In The Grove, the ritual of casting the circle itself is one where balance in both directions is observed and thus Sammy has created a way to work that she sees as being a fitting and respectful balance between the two energies of direction. This use of both deosil and widdershins is the way she teaches her first degree initiates to create the sacred space of the circle but once erected, we can move freely in any direction. Other covens such as Peter and Kathryn's employ a deosil only direction for circle casting but allow their coveners to move in either direction once the circle and sacred space are erected. Some Wiccans I spoke to argue that to work in a deosil direction goes against the natural currents that exist in this country while others felt that productive energy always flows in a clockwise direction regardless of the location.

The discussion continues within the Australasian Pagan community about the most appropriate direction in which to cast a circle and to perform ritual and magickal workings, and then on whether to allow free movement within the sacred space. The Grove's balanced approach to direction Sammy argues ensures that we allot equal reverence to both positive and negative energies and is less about the traditional requirements of fundamentalist Wicca. As traditionalists, Rose and Alan and Peter and Kathryn all follow the original prescription suggesting that it adheres more closely to the expectations and principles of Wicca. Kathryn said that having been taught, "the old fashioned way", it now seemed natural to her to keep going that way. Peter agreed and said that he preferred to stick with the original directions to maintain, "the purity of our religion". Bob also works using the original teachings and thus works deosil but Margaret follows a more balanced ritual process working both deosil and widdershins in a similar fashion to The Grove's processes. This may be a reflection of the fact that Margaret and Sammy both did their advanced training under the guidance of the same teacher.

Conclusion

It appears that with festivals, quarter locations, altar placement and the direction in which one works within the sacred space, the Wiccan community is faced with a series of dilemmas about fundamental practice and circle configuration. All this creates interesting dialogue and the occasional volatile discussion not just within the Wiccan community but within each coven. For the individual who works as a solitary or even for a group with no affiliation or connection to any other coven, most of this can be resolved after careful consideration but problems can arise when one group visits another to share a working event and where their practices work in opposition to one another. Fortunately, where a decade ago this might have been one of the contributors to the groups choosing not to work together, this now no longer seems the case.

From discussions with interviewees, it seems that in Perth from the late eighties through to the late nineties many covens declined to share mutual magickal workings, primarily because of their strict adherence to their own style of ritual. Many groups believed that their own manner of circle erection and ritual work was the only correct way and that groups who worked in a different fashion were not working effectively. Paul talked about the dislocation between groups as they “protected their own style of doing things” and considered what other groups were doing as “incorrect”. Some groups for instance cast their circle in a given way and if another group had modified that practice for their own benefit or to reflect what they felt to be more geographically appropriate and relevant, then it was seen as wrong and incompatible with the first groups’ working manner. Such ritual modification was rife as new covens sprung up or developed from the existing roots in the New Age explosion of the last quarter of the 20th century and as Perth’s Witches experimented with ways to do things that suited their locality and climatic and ecological differences, diversification meant that there were a variety of ways of doing basic rituals and setting up the sacred space. Some people saw this as “watering down” the traditions, as Abigail put it, while others felt that adhering to northern hemisphere dogmas just wasn’t appropriate in a different environment.

However, based on my own research and in discussion with the interviewees, it seems that this need to isolate and protect one’s ‘patch’ is no longer the accepted position of High Priestesses and their group members. Rather than isolating initiates from opposing ritualistic styles, my research indicates that High Priestesses now teach their Inner and Outer Courtiers to appreciate the diversity within the Wiccan community. One of the fundamental tenets of Paganism is that everyone has a right to choose their own path to deity and that no path or spiritual approach is better or more appropriate than any other. Thus what one group or

individual does is right for them, while another group who works in a different or even opposing fashion has found their own right path. These differences are to be respected and celebrated rather than rejected. One of the lessons initiates are given is that of circle etiquette when visiting another coven. When our own group was invited to share a Full Moon Esbat with another group, Sammy taught us the basic principle of 'When in Rome'. Margaret and Bob both echoed this principle and agreed that when visiting another circle, it is respectful and expected that you will follow the host coven's tradition rather than enforce your own upon them. "You just go with the flow and watch what they do. It's all good learning, I mean to see how other people do things" Bob remarked. Of course if after visiting another coven, a Witch does not feel comfortable with the ritual practices of that group, he or she has free choice not to take up a subsequent invitation to visit them again.

Many of these differences within Perth have come from local experimentation and not necessarily out of allegiances to opposing traditional teachings. In 1989, the Church of Wicca, founded by Lady Tamara von Forsslun, was incorporated under the Associations Incorporation Act 1987 (Section 5(1)) and became one of the most public teaching opportunities for new Wiccans in Perth. It followed the Alexandrian tradition of Wicca and taught several hundred initiates during its lifetime. It was disbanded in the mid nineties but left behind a population of Alexandrian based Witches who have since hived off and formed their own covens to teach others. Some High Priestesses and their coveners in operation in Perth now are either directly descended from the Church of Wicca or have been taught and initiated to third degree by those who learnt the religion within the Church of Wicca. Thus many of the rituals conducted are similar in content. There are however, equal numbers of groups that have no hereditary relationship with the Church of Wicca and one in particular practices a totally different form of Wicca

to the mainstream community. I did not interview any of this particular group's coveners because they tend to prefer privacy and do not associate with the broader Wiccan community. However, generally speaking, the majority of practitioners in Perth, regardless of their spiritual heredity are either Alexandrian, eclectic with sympathy for Alexandrian tradition or at the most extreme exclusively eclectic. Even the groups that label themselves as eclectic however, still tend to follow the basic concepts of Alexandrian practice and either modify or add to their rituals other native practices from indigenous peoples around the globe. This means that in Perth, any diversification from original ritual practice has come more from individual experimentation than from opposing Wiccan traditions. This common background enables groups to have an empathy with each other even though the details of their practice may be slightly different.

So what does this mean for Witches as they learn the fundamentals of Witchcraft in the southern hemisphere, particularly in the ecological diversity of Western Australia? Essentially it means they are required to learn more than their northern hemisphere counterparts. They are required to learn and embrace the fundamentals of Wicca even though they were engineered in an ecology and environment alien to Perth and then to consider the ramifications of that mismatch. They then need to consider the references they have been taught, match them to their own inherent sense of knowing and wisdom and come to a decision about their own practice. For most Perth Witches, this involves a considerable period of experimentation and contemplation. Many Witches I spoke with had tried different configurations of the Wheel of the Year and had tried or observed different circle architecture and circle erection rituals. Having found a set of practices they felt comfortable with or having grown used to the examples provided by their High Priestess and High Priest, most Witches agreed that they then stuck to those chosen practices and embraced them as their personal manifestation of Wiccan principle. On

many occasions they told how they had been required to defend their choices of circle configurations and ritual design as they related to and engaged with their peers from other covens.

Many of these Witches defend their practice even after the decade of coven isolation and dislocation. They see their rituals as the end product of years of trying to develop a southern hemisphere practice that works in their local environment but that still encapsulates the original foundations of Wicca. For solitary Wiccans who have no need to ingratiate themselves with the broader Wiccan environment, their rituals are the consequence and result of years of continued experimentation and practise to increase their skill and understanding of their connection with deity. For practitioners who work within groups, their ritual is both a means of reinforcing self and group identity but is also very much an artefact of their continued group and solitary practice. It is the outcome of years of learning, years of experimenting, years of study.

If nothing else, learning Witchcraft in Perth presents some interesting opportunities for Witches to learn basic problem solving skills, added creativity and a thorough understanding of why they practise they way they do. "Listen to the Goddess within," one of my participants told me as we discussed this issue. "Choose your path, choose how you want to connect with the Goddess and then be proud of it. This is your path, this is your country, live with it!"

Chapter 7

WITCH WAY NOW: WHERE TO FROM HERE?

The aim of my research initially was to explore and examine how contemporary Western Australian Witches learnt their craft and to identify the outcomes of that learning in terms of their ongoing practice. In observing and participating in this shared journey I gained a clearer insight into exactly that, but I also developed a more precise understanding about the specific manner in which individuals and groups gained holistic skill sets and the importance of ritual as the primary manifestation and end product of that learning process. In this chapter I draw together the two sections of this thesis to present a set of synoptic conclusions and resultant suggestions for advancing the study of intuitive, holistic learning and the exploration of ritual as product rather than just process.

Holistic, Intuitive Learning within the Wiccan Community

My observations show that in learning about Wicca, Witches do not follow the existing and accepted processes laid out by cognitive, behaviourist or even humanist learning principles. Most certainly of course, they use situational learning as a vehicle to learn but they do so while engaging in all those three learning modalities plus another, less tangible modality all at the same time. They learn intuitively and so as well as gaining cognitive knowledge, behavioural skills and a deeper sense of self, they also gain a sense of knowing and wisdom.

Australia, like its developed counterparts around the world discusses and expects its population to develop knowledge and skill sets based on traditional curricula, pedagogic and andragogic teaching methodologies and specified content that overtly denies the human capacity to learn

using intuition and to gain intuitive skills along with the desired cognitive and behavioural capabilities. Indeed in the vocational setting, accredited competencies specifically demand of assessors the ability to observe repeatedly in students, “skills and knowledge needed to perform effectively in the workplace” (DEST, 2006, Training Packages data file). Competency design, training delivery, assessment and validation in the workplace does not take into account the inherent, intuitive, holistic nature of learning and instead embeds its learning practice squarely on observable and explainable tenets. No one would claim that developing appropriate and effective skills in the workplace is anything other than a necessity for safe and productive working practices but I suggest there is a component of holistic learning in most milieus. Regardless of whether a trainee butcher is learning how to chop a carcass into marketable joints of meat or a horticulturist is learning how to gauge the health of a sapling, there will always be the inherent element of intuition included to some degree. As discussed previously, learning is not simply a case of feeding the brain and developing behaviours but is also a process of self growth, self confidence and self worth.

Embedded Learning in Deeper Contexts

In areas of informal learning, particularly those areas where learners have a heightened degree of commitment, passion and enthusiastic dedication to their subject matter, there will be a significant increase in the amount of personal effort injected into that learning. People with deep concerns and dedication to specific topics such as their political affiliation, to the protection and preservation of habitat, perhaps a dedication to specific volunteering tasks such as famine and disaster relief or of course to religious conviction, will contribute more than their cognitive and behavioural aptitude for learning. They will also bring to their learning, and extract from it, a deeper sense of self and a more impassioned connection with their topic. They will engage with their learning at a

deeper level of consciousness and create a sense of knowing and wisdom as well as the conventionally prescribed and expected learnt frameworks. Popular current learning methodologies do not make allowances for this additional component either in learning process or its flip side, teaching modalities.

Western Australian Witches, like their global counterparts, have already recognised this omission and Wiccan and Witchcraft teachers include within their programs processes and opportunities for learners to engage in and be comfortable with this embedded connection to their own inner knowing as well as adding to their existing cognitive and behavioural skill sets. Wiccan teachers actively encourage this added component of learning, this intuitive, experiential, feeling mode of learning along with its academic and practice counterparts. The Witches in my research clearly understood and articulated the value of this intuitive knowing and indeed considered it the most important component in effective learning for connection with their inner strengths and with deity. They understood the power that comes from connection with self and with a higher entity and revered that part of learning as all-important. The outcomes of this learning affect Witches at three levels; as individuals, at the coven level and at the level of the Wiccan community. At the individual level, Witches talk about how their lives and their relationship with their environment are transformed after learning about Wicca and Witchcraft. Significant individuals and covens act as conduits for that learning and subsequent transformation and as a Community of Practice covens have responsibility to ensure the most appropriate learning modalities are employed. At the community level, Wiccans have undertaken, by choice, the responsibility to gently educate the broader society so that they can break down the long held and damaging stereotypes that have plagued them for sixty years.

Inner Court, mid 2004

“Say what! You want me to do a what? A past life regression?” I cried in astonishment. “Yep” she answered calmly “But I’ve never read how to do it. I can’t do it!” I cried. “How about we forget the books and learn to do it instead of learning about how to do it?” Sammy suggested. “But I’m a researcher” I thought, “I research things, that’s what I do”.

That was an Inner Court training session held not long after I’d been initiated and was one of the first times I’d ever experimented in something I’d not researched and read about previously. I admit that as a beginner, it was a scary event, not in terms of topic matter but because I had to use untested, unpractised skills I had little familiarity with. However, I took my courage in my hands and trusting Sammy and the experienced coveners around me, I went with them on this journey to one of my past lives. This was one of the first occasions where I learnt to trust and build on my intuition rather than my well developed cognitive skill set. As a training professional and researching ethnographer, I had already developed, refined and maintained a useful cognitive tool kit that enabled me to research just about anything, make informed decisions about that topic and then write a well crafted piece in explanation of the findings. But I now had to learn using different tools that I’d not developed previously. I could use and was well practised with my cognitive tools and my behavioural tools but now they wanted me to use my ‘feel’ tools? What were they?

It struck me during that Inner Court session that in all my years of designing training materials and programs, in teaching adults various workplace skills, in assessing them and in validating training programs for organisations, I had not considered in any depth that learning for an individual both informally and in the workplace was often more than just a case of increasing cognitive capacity and modifying behavioural

actions. There was also another element to learning and that was based in trusting one's intuition and experiencing the wisdom and knowing that comes from a connection with one's inner self. Like my fellow Witches, these 'feel' tools, this intuition or heightened sense of inner wisdom and knowing became the master outcome of my learning and the product of the years of study and training I participated in within the deeper learning milieu of Wicca.

Whilst the individual Witches within my research taught me about the value of intuition as an authentic, and indeed, necessary learning modality and learning outcome, I also unearthed a considerable amount of information about the social dynamics of Wiccan learning within the coven environment.

"I'm not responsible for their learning, I'm responsible for creating the environment in which they learn best" Peter said. Like all the coven leaders I was privileged to visit and interview, Peter and Kathryn take their responsibility as teachers very seriously. They have an enviable library of resources that rivals that of many public libraries and are proud to teach not just the history of Wicca but the hereditary lineage of covens around Perth. Both professionals in their vocational fields, they approach their teaching program with attention to detail and with the same degree of professionalism as they inject into their work. Margaret is a professional in the education sector and so brings to the teaching program of her coven a formidable skill set firmly founded on appropriate teaching principles. Her Outer Court program is detailed, well planned and includes a thorough examination of esoteric practices that ensures the Outer Courters are well prepared for initiation. Of all the covens I visited and of all the leaders I spoke to, not one of them felt that teaching was unimportant, that it should be approached in a casual manner or that it was a subset of honouring divinity. While they each had slightly different

approaches about the modality of teaching, minor differences in content and session frequency, every one of them took great pains to ensure they provided the best possible introduction to Wicca for their seekers. They all however agreed that their covens delivered multiple functionality and included not just teaching duties but also the most important factor, that of worship. Moreover, they also agreed that covens are a core modality for communal sharing and identity provision and as such learning the art of Wicca within a coven does not just provide for a defined set of Wiccan teaching but also helps the learner place themselves within the broader Wiccan community and tradition family tree.

Summer 2004.

The TV crew came tonight to film us doing some ritual work. It was rather contrived because normal ritual work makes for boring TV apparently. They wanted something a little more mystical and mysterious. We all thought it was a bit silly really trying to portray what we thought was normal practice into something that resembled entertainment rather than reverent ritual. After a couple of hours interviewing us all, on and off camera, the reporter finally cottoned on that while Witchcraft might have a reputation as being spooky and mysterious, it's actually quite down to earth and full of common sense. The following week the piece aired on national TV and to our delight the reporter really did show us as being sensible grownups with a common sense attitude to something regarded by many as a little 'out there'. One part really made us laugh. He asked Sammy what spell or magick or ritual she would suggest for someone with a head cold. She looked him straight in the eye with this look of ridicule on her face and said, "I'd suggest they take a Panadol and go and see their doctor". We all fell about laughing because the answer was so obvious. There's no magick about recovering from a cold, it's pure common sense.

During the years I have been a member of The Grove, Sammy has made her position very clear with regard to the role of Wiccans within the broader community. She is extremely forthright with her opinion, stating that Wicca must be seen as a valid, responsible, credible belief system along with all other mainstream religions and that Wiccans themselves hold the responsibility to shape the social opinion. While she believes in and practises alchemy, she is a realist and her frank response to the journalist is a testament to her down to earth attitude about a religion that is often seen as make believe. She doesn't advertise to all that she is Wiccan or a High Priestess but is happy to provide realistic contributions to sensible discussions whenever newcomers ask questions about Wiccan and Witchcraft activities. She sees herself not as an advocate for Wicca but more as an example of Wicca at a grassroots level and a model for how sensible people can choose different spiritual paths without being abnormal or dangerous. Rose and Alan by contrast, view their role far more as advocates. They campaign whenever possible for the acceptance of Wicca as a credible means of connection with deity and for Wiccans themselves to adopt and embrace impeccable behaviours that elevate them above suspicion and criticism. They have been active lobbyists for several years, holding committee positions on various Pagan networks as a means of contributing to the movement for greater acceptance of the religion within the broader community.

Where to From Here for the Anthropology of Learning?

If nothing else, my research indicates that there is a need for more observation and study both on the effect that intuition has in the learning process for individuals and on the outcome of knowing rather than knowledge as a product of learning. Intuition or connection with one's inner spirit is obviously a primary tool in learning for Witches and indeed I suspect for any student of the esoteric arts. However, it is likely that intuition also plays a part in the learning process in many other topic

areas particularly where people learn to aid and support others. Such topic areas might include volunteering with sick children, displaced persons after trauma, war and other disasters, veterinary practice or caring for injured wild animals who cannot explain their maladies, caring for newborn babies, nursing and other occupations and pastimes that include working with people and animals. In many of these situation words alone are not enough to explain the underlying emotions of the situations and indeed there may not be any articulated language that can adequately express the experienced emotion by all parties. Perhaps further research could test both the part that intuition plays in learning about dealing with situations for which there is limited language availability and its level of importance therein.

In addition, I have already identified that a heightened sense of intuition becomes a product of the learning environment within Wicca. Witches develop a deeper sense of knowing or inner wisdom and this is also an area that has not been thoroughly researched to date. Witches clearly use their inner wisdom to identify and explain the results of magical workings and meditations and this phenomenon is not unique to Witches. Mothers will often *know* when their children are unwell, even when the symptoms are particularly subtle and when they are told otherwise by learned medical professionals. Whilst this may be put down simply to the parent having more experience reading the body language of that child, to what degree is that knowing the subject of intuition rather than simply observable body language?

In terms of further research using existing learning theories such as habitus and CoP, there is still much to be learnt from studying the manner in which people new to a group either embrace the processes of that group by modifying their own schemata, or reject group norms and continue to use their own reference points. The notion of habitus suggests

that individuals use their own schemata to determine their behaviour with the group, while CoP theory would hold that newcomers gradually adopt the schemata put forward by the group. This contrast may in fact have more to do with the self selection process than with the induction process once someone joins a group. This begs the question therefore of how individuals self select a group to be begin with and then once they are accepted, how they continue to determine if that group meets their learning needs. Perhaps habitus is a preliminary means of identifying the possible match between a prospective member and the group, while legitimate peripheral participation is the subsequent process of adopting the group's norms and learning opportunities. If this is not the case, then how, if habitus prescribes that people come to a group with established knowledge sets, do some people adapt their existing schemata to the new group situation while others move on to other groups instead?

To further this consideration of group and in this case coven learning, this research focused on the specific learning processes that occurred within my own coven and then complemented and supplemented that with interviews and discussions with other coven members about their learning processes. Perhaps this type of research could be extended by taking an in-depth look at a multitude of covens and thoroughly detailing the teaching practices that take place and how that affects the learning of the individuals and their later practice. How does the teaching that occurs in each group influence how that group's practitioners develop responsibility in their later endeavours to learn and teach advanced Wicca? To what extent does the approach of the coven leader impact upon the learning ability of its coveners and how do other more experienced initiates within the coven contribute to the learning that takes place? How do individuals develop a sense of their position within the Wiccan community based on the teachings of their coven leadership or on their perceptions of the community as a whole? The Grove is just one

example of coven-craft and the modality of teaching from one coven cannot and should not be regarded as representative of all coven teaching processes.

At a community level, it may be advantageous to conduct research into how Wicca as an emerging religion is connecting with the community and what effect its practitioners are having on society's collective mindset and stereotypes of Witches. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that society is now more accepting of Witches than it once was and that far more people accept Witchcraft and Wicca as an alternative spirituality rather than the supposed evil cult status it once held (Adler, 2006). What is not understood fully however, is why that is the case. Is it because Witches have indeed made some effective inroads into the mindset of society and if so how has this been achieved? Is it because Witches have made serious attempts to teach serious content about a serious religion? Is it because esoteric practices and the New Age boom have just softened society's hard line stance against Witchcraft? Have such programs as "Charmed" and "Buffy" made an impact on society and suggested that Witches may in fact be magicians of good or at least have benign intent rather than be black robed monsters hunched over a cauldron brewing foul smelling potions to bring evil upon their enemies? If that is the case, have the media just responded to a cultural shift, have they generated that shift themselves, or is it as a result of the concerted effort by the Wiccan community to educate society and project themselves as responsible, considerate practitioners of a much misunderstood religion?

In a more political sense, how do societies modify their views of religions and the followers of those religions in such a short space of time? As a result of 9/11 and other global political issues, a growing sub section of Australian society now views Muslims as the new Witches and subjects

them to persecution for following a faith system which is seen as negative and in some cases destructive. The news is peppered with examples of violence and vandalism against Muslims, their places of worship, their workplaces and homes. How does this shift come about and what can members of a persecuted faith do to contribute to a more accepting viewpoint of alternative beliefs? Sammy summed this up with poise and wisdom one day as we sat at her kitchen table over a cup of tea.

January, 2006

“So how are we going to teach people about Wicca if it’s all so secret?” I asked. “Who said it was all so secret?” Sammy replied. “But I thought we weren’t supposed to tell anyone about what we do”. Sammy sat back in her chair obviously perplexed by the supposedly silly question I had posed in my naivety. She’s a wise woman whose considerable experience as a High Priestess has provided her with untold opportunities to gain wisdom, to generate a clear headed and realistic approach to Wicca and its practical sister Witchcraft and to teach those of us still ignorant of its beauty and mystery. “It’s not that it’s secret, although as a mystery religion there will be parts of it off bounds to the non-initiated, but there’s no reason why people can’t know the truth about us. We’re normal people, living normal lives, doing normal things. It’s just that what we consider normal, some other people don’t see as normal”.

Ritual as Product Rather than Process

While this research introduces a new way to consider learning modalities and what Witches would describe as normal for them, it also questions the current predominant thinking on the functionality of ritual. To date, ritual has been seen as a contributor to and an influencer of the underpinning schemata for social interaction and expectation (Durkheim, 1976; Geertz, 1957a). In contrasting my experiences with that, I do not argue that such an approach is incorrect but rather that it doesn’t tell the

full story. The Witches in Western Australia clearly use ritual as a means of explaining archetypal symbolism and their experiences also support very much the notion that ritual is a social binding mechanism that fosters greater connection with one another and with the mores and norms of the group and community. The shared, communal rituals that occur each year at the annual Harvest Ball and the Wiccan camp are an obvious testament to such an approach. Moreover the very fact that Western Australian Witches and groups support the Combined Covens Social Club with steering committee membership and their ongoing presence at the various functions backs up this construct and in fact raises it from being not just a theory but a theory in practice. That covens are now also actively working together with each other rather than in isolation as was the case until three years ago also supports the notion that ritual acts as a social binding agent.

Furthermore, V. Turner's (1967) description of ritual as the vehicle for delivering meaning through symbolic action and performance and his explanations of the tripartite construction of tribal ritual (1969), provide an absolutely viable means of explaining much of the ritual that occurred during my ethnographic experience. However, both in the case of ritual as a social process and in describing the componentry of ritual, a significant proportion of the ritual practice I observed and participated in cannot be described by these theories alone. All the participants argued that their ritual practice was also a test or an opportunity to assess their grasp on a recent learning topic. They saw ritual as their way of exhibiting what they had learnt and thus as a means of delivering practice to the theory. Therefore ritual was as much a product as it was a process. In addition, much of the construction of rituals, most notably isolated meditation and the harvest festivals could not always be explained by the existing contemporary theories.

In the absence of existing effective theoretical descriptors, I suggest therefore that ritual practice is not just a process within a social group but is also the outcome of interaction within that group. It is the tangible, observable and measurable output of a social, holistic learning function that operates in conjunction with the Wiccan worship of the Divine. Ritual also serves as a tool to identify an individual as a learned and skilled member of a group and within the broader Wiccan community. Magick, meditation and visualisation are key ritual mechanisms that mark the Witches within the Wiccan community as skilled and successful. Their use is regarded as a primary measure of successful training and practice. The learning environment thus enables Witches to learn not just about Witchcraft but also how to *be* Witches. Through the ongoing, 'Whole Person' learning process they learn what Witchcraft means and they also learn what Witchcraft is. Like their coven counterparts, solitary practitioners also see ritual as a measure of their success against learning objectives and they suggest that it serves as their badge and tool of self determined achievement.

Where to From Here for the Anthropology of Ritual?

The explanation of discrete rituals and ritual practice as a medium of religious worship is a complex and dynamic discourse within the anthropological discipline. I suggest that this thesis both provides an alternative viewpoint in contrast to existing theories and raises significant questions about the continuing and widening research opportunities relevant to the thesis discussion. Moreover, a doctoral thesis is limited by its scope and word length and thus I propose that this work is the precursor to a lengthier and in-depth exploration and examination of peripheral, yet important factors highlighted within the treatment of the subject at hand. I would very much have liked to further develop the discussion on ritual in a variety of directions but instead propose that

such work needs to be explored within additional research and by a cohort of anthropologists across the globe.

Some of the resultant questions and opportunities for research from this work include the examination of the juxtaposition between ritual as process and ritual as product. Can a universal theory incorporate both applications of theory, or are the two approaches polemic? I would suggest that the answer to this conundrum lies less in the examination of ritual itself and more in the discussion about the environment in which the ritual takes place. The function of ritual as product versus process may in fact be a direct result of its relationship with the people conducting the rituals and the manner in which they view their own use of this social service. As an example, do Catholic parishioners participating in liturgical ritual bound by historical prescription and tradition view existing ritual as their primary means of worship and thus a functional part of their practice, while Wiccans who are encouraged to develop their own rituals see that same ritual opportunity as the objective and outcome rather than simply as a methodology of worship? Put differently, does the ability to create one's own rites transform ritual from a rote process of worship into a means of exhibiting creative, achievement orientated output?

Pursuing the nebulous notion that ritual product versus process could be dependent upon the creative objective of Wiccans, one could also ask what other esoteric practices could ritual be the product of? Is ritual as product dependent on the Wiccan tradition? Is this an Australian phenomenon or do Wiccans in other countries see ritual as an outcome of their interactions? Could ritual also be described as a creative product and objective in other religions that encourage innovative, valid input to parishioner or participant practice?

In terms of how the rituals that Wiccans construct are designed and formatted, there are a number of further opportunities to explore or even generate potential solutions to the dilemma of the non-conformance between contemporary theories and the activities observed during this research. The structure of meditative practice, as explained in the previous chapter, fails to conform with V. Turner's theory on ritual construction, so how should we describe meditation? Is it in fact not a ritual at all but a discrete practice of introspection? If so, how do we explain the fact that Wiccans describe meditation as ritual and in fact see it as a prime contributor to effective ritual conduct? What other Wiccan rituals within other groups do not conform to existing theory on ritual structure and why? What alternative theory on structure would explain those rituals?

Lastly, in looking at the relationship between learning, and ritual and in fact drawing the two branches of this study back together, is ritual as product dependent on the style of teaching within the setting of the coven? How do covens who do not teach as one of their primary functions explain ritual? Do they see ritual as an agent of social binding as it brings them together in shared worship or do they also see ritual as an objective and outcome of their continued quest for greater connection with divinity? If ritual is a product, then how can it be measured in terms of success against its learning objective?

The questions raised by the research herein offer us a plethora of trajectories for further study, particularly within the ethnographic modality. One of the strengths of ethnographic anthropology is its ability to explore and articulate the beauty in differences between peoples and their social constructs from an empathic yet balanced viewpoint. That in essence is what anthropology has been teaching both its own practitioners and the world for the last hundred years; that there is beauty, wisdom and

insight in difference. My own research adds to this anthropological domain by offering further insights into a demographic still largely unknown to the Australian society in which it exists. Witches learn how to be Witches by engaging with their own Wiccan community, and by using that knowledge and expertise in their everyday lives with their neighbours in Australia. They forge a link and bridge the gap between the magick of their world and the everyday lives of their neighbours' world. Anthropology plays its part in this relationship by bridging the gap in another sense to bring the wisdom and magick of both worlds together for everyone to share.

Having explored both how and what Western Australian Wiccans learn I leave the final comment to my own Wiccan teacher, the person who allowed me the opportunity to share with The Grove membership a remarkable journey of self growth and empowerment.

“Our job now is to help others learn about who we are and what we do. We can't force our views on people but we can give them the opportunity to learn for themselves the gentle beauty that is Wicca.”

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