

Magical Activism

by

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis.

This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted
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I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

Lack of knowledge about the lived experience of leisure is a result of the distanced, objective way in which it has primarily been studied (Hemingway, 1999), and there is an increased interest in conceptualizing leisure as a dynamic force for social and political change (Shaw, 1994; 2001; Mair, 2002/03; Sharpe, 2008). Constructs such as resistance (Shaw, 2001), critically reflexive leisure (Mair, Sumner & Rotteau, 2008) and pleasure-politics (Sharpe, 2008) illuminate the role and potential of individual and collective leisure in social change.

Within a critical constructionist, qualitative research design, this study of witchcamps and magical activism was informed by feminist, queer, and leisure theories. Data were collected through participant-observation at 2 witchcamps, 21 semi-structured intensive interviews, 11 focused interviews, and 19 elicited electronic text submissions. This research reflects the emerging trend within leisure studies of using qualitative approaches and reflexivity to look at our own leisure (Axelsen, 2009; Collinson, 2007; Havitz, 2007; Lashua & Fox 2006; MacKellar, 2009; McCarville, 2007; Parry & Johnson, 2007; Rowe, 2006; Samdahl, 2008). As a member of the witchcamp community under study, the research was carried out in the researcher's own community 'backyard' (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992), and as insider research, it provides a detailed description of alternative culture from the viewpoint of a professional researcher and personal insider. Data analysis followed a constant-comparative method, and employed memo writing, thematic, and focused coding.

The study provides insight into the intersection of leisure, ecospirituality,

community, and social change. Setting, activities, beliefs, and community intersect to function as a container for personal and social transformation, and provide an ‘antidote’ to alienation and isolation experienced by individuals in the dominant culture. The study provides empirical evidence of the centrality of leisure to community responsibility for broader social, political and environmental concerns, as theorized by Arai and Pedlar (2003). This research furthers the perspective that community is multidimensional, and has the potential to unify marginalized groups (Arai & Pedlar, 2003). The findings of this study also reflect Mair’s (2006) conceptualization of community as one that provides a space for celebration of diversity.

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A special and heartfelt ten-fingered twinkle to study participants for being willing, open, thoughtful, smart, and funny. I am humbled and awed by the wisdom, talent, and edgy insight of witches. Indeed, another world is possible.

~ Rest in Peace Rosemary, Mom, JoJo, Babe, and Vic ~

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MAGICAL ACTIVISM

Chapter One: INTRODUCTION

Each year, Witchcamps rise up like little Brigadoons across the face of Gaia. Communities form as stars from the scattered dust of our diaspora, each of us drawn by the irresistible power of love, and our belief that Magic is real and can transform the world. More than Pagan festivals, Witchcamps are intensive spiritual retreats that are nevertheless great fun. Each camp is created in sacred space and provides a safe venue for practicing Magic and exploring the myriad ways to connect to the divine within us all. Each is a place where mundane inhibitions fall away and our true Selves can emerge and be celebrated... Skyclad bodies leaping in the firelight, whirling figures in flowing robes fanning the flames, drummers beating a frenzied rhythm, Witches dancing their passion for life in this amazingly beautiful world, each heart a blaze of prayer. Young and old, women and men - gay, lesbian, straight, bi and trans - the music moves each to dance in their own way. Each brings to the circle their art, their music, their culture and their own unique voice. (Wolf, 2006, ¶7).

The catalyst for this research was my personal experience in the world of Witches and Witchcamps. After my initial adventure with a Reclaiming Tradition witchcamp in 1997, I became enchanted by the world of myth, magic, and mystery that unfolds each year at various witchcamps around the globe. Although I had been engaged with feminist Witchcraft for some time, it was not until I attended a witchcamp that I experienced a deep sense of community, a profound reconnection with the natural world, and a curiosity about the intersection of spirituality and activism, personal change and social change. The creative interpretation of cultural constructions of spirituality, sexuality, gender, family, and community played out at camps pushed me to imagine that another world is indeed possible and that perhaps heteronormative culture could not only be resisted, but also transformed. My

spiritual beliefs have evolved and changed since 1997 but I have continued my engagement with witchcamps for community, fun, personal growth, and to find spirituality in nature.

I entered the research process with both professional and personal lenses already intact. Queer and feminist theories, along with a particular personal fondness for the community are the ground in which all else is ultimately rooted. While my positionality and role as the researcher is discussed more fully in Chapter 3, it may be helpful to the reader at this point understand the particular lens that I brought to the research. Along with a well-established interest and engagement with feminist witchcraft and Reclaiming WitchCamps, I am a Social worker by profession and a practicing clinical psychotherapist. My work is rooted in feminist theory and radical feminist therapy; I actively support positive queer identity and spaces, and work toward social justice. I also have professional roots as an activist in the women's movement of the 1980's. To my role as a researcher, I brought well-honed interview skills, a feminist, queer positive, anti-oppressive ethic, and finely tuned reflexive skills.

Through my connection with witchcamps, I was introduced to the notion of magical activism, a notion that binds spirituality and politics. Magical activism refers to the spiritual practice of magic with a political intention (Starhawk, 2010). Over the years, I have had opportunities to reconsider and engage in magical activism in novel ways. Whether facing down the frightening riot-gearred police squad fully equipped with batons, shields, dogs, horses, and tear gas at a World Trade Organization protest in 2003, or participating in a peace-honouring ritual of

magical activism, I have learned the import of bringing spirituality down to earth by practicing, nurturing, and promoting positive social change. In spite of holding such a value, I do not formally practice activism to the extent that I might and I was curious about the range and types of activist engagement that other witchcampers pursue.

The third factor that helped focus the research lens for this study was an earlier study that I conducted at Wild Ginger WitchCamp (Calley Jones, 2010). In that autoethnographical study, I specifically engaged the lens of queer theory, initially theorized by Terese de Laurentis, Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Michel Foucault (Plummer, 2005). While this research did not specifically pursue this framework, it certainly undergirds the project in both subtle and not so subtle ways.

Context and Scope of the Research

Modern Paganism was initially studied as a new religious movement or cult (Davy 2007). Now considered a world religion (Davy, 2007), academic researchers have explored contemporary NeoPaganism, Wicca, and Witchcraft from a variety of disciplines, including ethnographic theology (Salomonsen, 2002), anthropology (Greenwood, 2000; Hume, 1997; Rountree, 2004), folklore (Magliocco, 2004), and sociology (Berger, 2005), and in a variety of Western cultures, including New Zealand, Australia, Great Britain, and America. Such studies reflect the multiplicity of disciplines involved in the newly emerging field of Pagan Studies (Blain, Ezzy, & Harvey, 2004). While witchcamps have received minor note in the few academic

texts mentioned above, they had not been examined as a unique entity and experience, nor considered within a leisure framework.

This project was encouraged by recent trends within Leisure Studies. The qualitative examination of alternative practices, politics, and spiritual activities, along with the recognition of leisure as a site of social change provided the context for an examination of the role and meaning of witchcamps in the lives of participants, and in the broader social context. As insider research, this project also reflected an emerging trend within the field to examine our personal leisure lives (Axelsen, 2009; Collinson, 2007; Havitz, 2007; Lashua & Fox 2006; MacKellar, 2009; McCarville, 2007; Parry & Johnson, 2007; Rowe, 2006; Samdahl, 2008). There are a number of ways in which Leisure Studies contextualized this study of witchcamps. As an interdisciplinary field, Leisure Studies provides a wide-angled lens through which to examine both reproduction of and resistance to cultural, political, and spiritual existence (Rojek, Shaw & Veal, 2006).

Beginning with Pieper in 1952, students of leisure have shared an academic interest in the study of spiritual practices through concerns regarding the use, meaning, and purpose of free time. Research within the nexus of leisure and spirituality continues to explore religious and spiritual activity beyond the traditional Western perspective (Heintzman & Mannell, 2003; Schmidt & Little, 2007, Stodolska & Livengood, 2008). Witchamps are spiritual gatherings in camp settings, and fit well within the leisure and spirituality lens. The camps do, however, reflect more than spiritual expression. They are constructed as festivals and communities that engage and reflect community, pleasure, alternative politics, and social activism.

Students of leisure have been exploring new and diverse cultural realities (Fox, 1994), and the concept of leisure, once disentangled from conventional assumptions, reveals alternative life practices, politics, and resistances (Mair, 2006) such as those reflected in the witchcamp experience. Mair challenges us to draw attention to the ways in which contested social relationships are played out in leisure settings and practices. Similarly, Parry (2003) and Glover (2007) promote movement into broader areas of social and cultural studies, encouraging us to envision hopeful changes as we critically unpack the normative. Communal leisure practices, within and between cultural groups, have the potential to contribute to both social inclusion and exclusion (Arai & Pedlar, 2003), as well as to resistance and reproduction (Shaw, 2001) of cultural and community norms. Alternative leisure communities such as witchcamps are fertile grounds for examining the social processes and tensions involved in both spirituality and politics.

A third contextualizing factor is the increased interest in conceptualizing leisure as a dynamic force for social and political change (Shaw, 2001; Mair, 2002/03; Sharpe, 2008). Unpacking and developing the construct of resistance, Shaw (1994; 2001) illuminated the potential of leisure as political practice, and endorses the study of both individual and collective acts of resistance that may or may not result in social change. Related is Mair's (2002/2003) notion of civil leisure; that which engages individuals and communities in political and social change through leisure activity such as activism. Pre-figurative festivals are examined by Sharpe (2008) as sites of social change that juxtapose pleasure and

politics. Relevant to this study is the effort to highlight the ways that the witchcamp experience is significant to participants as a vehicle of social change.

Additionally, this research reflects an emerging trend within leisure researchers of using qualitative approaches and reflexivity to look at our own leisure (Axelsen, 2009; Collinson, 2007; Havitz, 2007; Lashua & Fox 2006; MacKellar, 2009; McCarville, 2007; Parry & Johnson, 2007; Rowe, 2006; Samdahl, 2008). Hemingway (1999) suggests that the lack of knowledge about the lived experience of leisure is a result of the distanced, objective way in which we have studied it. Insider research appears to have as many advantages and disadvantages as outsider research (Hammers, 2009; LeGallais, 2008; Meezan & Martin, 2003; Woodward, 2008) and with careful attention to one's place on the insider/outsider continuum, thoughtful reflexivity, and heightened awareness of self, researching our own leisure and related communities offers the potential of rich, deep, and complex knowledge of lived experience. Insider research is further examined in chapter three.

Implications and Contributions of this Study

As part of a contemporary philosophical and spiritual movement that encourages social, political, and environmental activism, and as an understudied phenomenon, witchcamps provide an opportunity to explore the lived intersections of spirituality, community, and activism. I was interested in leisure as a vehicle for social and political change, and I was also interested in spiritually engaged leisure. Across various fields of study, I encountered the assertion that spirituality is a critical factor in how people relate to the earth, as well as being a motivating force in social

justice activism (Ammerman, 1997; Cerny, 2004; Holloway, 2003; Manzo, 2006; Kong, 2001; Shaw, 2004; Van Schyndel Kasper, 2008). It is within this context that I examined the lived intersections of spiritual practice, sense of community, and activism.

A lesser concern of this study was the intent to contribute to efforts to humanize the image of contemporary Witches and Witchcraft. There is a clear disjuncture between the self-characterizations of contemporary Witchcraft practitioners and the way they have been mischaracterized and condemned by the majority of scholars who scrutinize them (Potter, 2001; Rountree, 1997; Sempruch, 2004; Walker, 1985). Parry (2003) encourages us to imagine how things might be different if we turn our efforts to deconstructing cultural stereotypes. In our Western culture, the image of the Witch has been constructed through myth, stereotype, ignorance, and fear. The ‘Halloween Witch,’ flying shadowed in the moonlight, is likely the most common image. The dominant construction of the Witch is evolving from that of ‘a black-clad, pointy-hatted, warty old hag who steals penises and boils babies, to that of a new age, Goddess-worshipping, Pagan suburbanite who eats tofu and grows her own organic vegetables’ (Rountree, 1997, Pp. 211). Generally she is presented as either, shapely and sexy, or as a wrinkled old crone.

My observations of Witches were similar to that of anthropologists Foltz and Griffin (1996); in their investigation into contemporary Witchcraft, they “moved from seeing Witches as kooks to seeing them as women with complex lives, seriously pursuing knowledge and growth” (pg. 309). As noted by Lashua and Fox (2006), “the dark side remains dark when it is not explored, addressed, and heard”

(pg. 280) and this research responds to their challenge to examine a leisure practice that extends beyond the conventional understandings of leisure research in hopes of illuminating what has previously been unseen or mystified.

The Research Purpose

As a founder and organizer of Wild Ginger WitchCamp, and as a leisure researcher, I was interested in understanding how participants experienced and made sense of witchcamps, in the context of the broader social perspective. While I expected complexity and multiplicity in the ways participants framed the witchcamp experience, I was curious as to whether there were common themes. The three primary elements of my examination were *how participants situated the experience in their lives, how they constructed meaning from the experience, and whether they linked their camp experience to broader social change*. I examined these three elements through the theoretical interests of *leisure, spirituality, community, and activism*. My purpose with this critical constructionist research was to capture and describe the richness, complexities, and tensions that underlied participants' constructions, and to theorize about the primary elements.

The Research Questions

Guiding my project was an interest in understanding the role and meaning of witchcamps in the lives of participants, and in the broader social context. The research was guided by four primary questions:

1. How did participants situate, experience, and make sense of witchcamps?

2. How did the witchcamp experience generate and transmit meaning about spirituality, community, and activism?
3. To what extent did the experiences and meanings reveal connections with leisure, spirituality, community, and/or activism?
4. What, if any, was the role of witchcamp in sustaining and/or challenging a sense of community, spirituality, and/or activist activities?

Guide to the Study

The following two chapters present my epistemological framework, provide background to the study through a review of the relevant literature, and define my methodology. I begin with a discussion of critical constructionism and its implications for academic inquiry. Given the novelty of the subject, I also provide a brief history and description of witchcamps. The review of the literature focuses first on the relevant conceptual leisure framework, and secondly, on the guiding interests that were the departure point for the study. I locate witchcamps in the leisure literature through a discussion of festivals, resistance, civil leisure, and critically reflexive leisure. The second part of the literature review examines two intersections:

1. leisure, community, and social change, and
2. leisure, spirituality, and social change,

and addresses the scholarly questions that arise out of these interconnections. Chapter three explains my qualitative (critical constructivist) research design. Data collection and analysis are presented along with discussions of participant-observation, interviews and elicited texts. I discuss data management, researcher role, authenticity criteria, and ethical considerations. The next three chapters present the

insights gleaned through this research and provide an account of witchcamps through three primary categories that emerged through the research: The Witches, The Container, and The Transformation. Chapter four, entitled, 'The Witches' reveals whether and how participants see themselves as Witches, and what meaning they made of the term Witch. 'The Container,' presented in chapter five, discusses how participants described and made sense of the witchcamp experience. The Container subsumes themes related to the setting, the activities, sense of community, and the community ethos. In chapter six, 'The Transformation' illuminates themes related to transformation, and examines witchcamp as a container for personal and social transformation. Chapter seven offers a succinct summary of the findings, and presents the overarching theme, entitled, Magical Activism: Providing an antidote to the dominant culture. Chapter seven concludes with a consideration of the role of witchcamps in identity, community and social change, along with a reflection on the implications and limitations of the research.

Chapter Two

THE LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter positions the study within a critical constructionist epistemology, and reviews the literature that situates the project within Leisure Studies. I begin with a discussion of critical constructionism and its implications for academic inquiry. Given the novelty of the subject, I also provide a brief history and description of witchcamps. The review of the literature focuses first on the relevant conceptual leisure framework, and secondly, on the guiding interests that were the departure point for the study. I locate witchcamps in the leisure literature through a discussion of festivals, resistance, civil leisure, and critically reflexive leisure. The second part of the literature review examines two intersections: leisure, community, and social change, and leisure, spirituality, and social change, and addresses the scholarly questions that arise out of these interconnections.

Constructionism

Those adopting a constructionist epistemology reject belief in an objective, universal reality (Crotty, 2003). Truth and meaning only come into existence as we engage with the world and with each other. Schwandt (2001) differentiates weak and strong constructionist perspectives such that strong constructionism reflects the radical or hard view that there is no reality beyond the one that we socially and locally construct. My epistemological perspective can be located closer to the other end of the continuum where there is what I call a softer (rather than ‘weaker’) version that lends focus to examining the organization of experiences as socially constructed and culturally produced. Constructionists do not deny reality in the

ordinary daily experience (Heiner, 2002); for example, poverty may indeed be a social construction, but for those whose lives are touched by poverty, it is a hard reality. The constructionist perspective was introduced to Sociology in 1966 (Berger & Luckmann) and has spread across related disciplines with both on-going appeal and controversy in regard to its paradoxical foundation of providing a discourse on a reality that it says does not exist. In spite of that, social scientists have applied the perspective with remarkable usefulness over the past four decades (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008).

Scholars use the terms constructivism and constructionism interchangeably, and there is no present clarity on the appropriateness of either term (Best, 2008; Gergen & Gergen, 2008; Herrnstein Smith, 2006; Restivo & Croissant, 2008) reflecting perhaps, the constructed and local reality of the scholar using the term. Differentiated by their philosophical meanings and criticality, *constructivism* broadly values all localized realities, while *constructionism* fosters politically engaged, critical reflection (Crotty, 1998; Herrnstein Smith, 2006). Crotty (1998) further differentiates *constructionism* through its stronger focus on the collective generation and transmission of meaning from *constructivism's* focus on individual meaning making. For the purposes of this project, I have used the term constructionism because it reflects both my critical orientation and my focus on the broader social context, as well as being the term of choice by those researching from the constructionist perspective (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008).

Critical Constructionism

Social constructionism is concerned with how social meanings are created (Crotty, 2003). Critical constructionism (Heiner, 2002; Hosking, 2008; Latimer, 2008) is different only in that it highlights the role of privileged interest in the process of meaning creation, and thus attends to political and social forces that privilege certain realities over others (Heiner, 2002). Similarly, Hosking (2008) theorizes power as an on-going social construction that can both open up and close down possibilities. According to Gubrium and Holstein (2008), the critical perspective can enrich and positively affect constructionist research. For the process of academic inquiry, the critical constructionist perspective has a number of implications and the following are sifted from Hosking's (2008) discussion of critical constructionism:

- the researcher approaches her work with a critical orientation and sensitivity to power; and to historical and cultural ways of meaning making;
- she conceptualizes research as both inquiry and intervention;
- she includes, enables, and appreciates multiple realities as different but equal, and approaches research from a power to/with position;
- she inquires and listens in ways that are open and appreciative;
- she cannot claim to know what is and/or what is best for another;
- she recognizes that the activities of research and theorizing are co-constructions and can reproduce and/or intervene in systems of oppression;

- she centers local and multiple realities and recognizes the reciprocal and on-going process of knowledge construction;
- she engages in reflexive assessment of her own participation in power relations;
- she recognizes that care of the other is also care of the (moral) self.

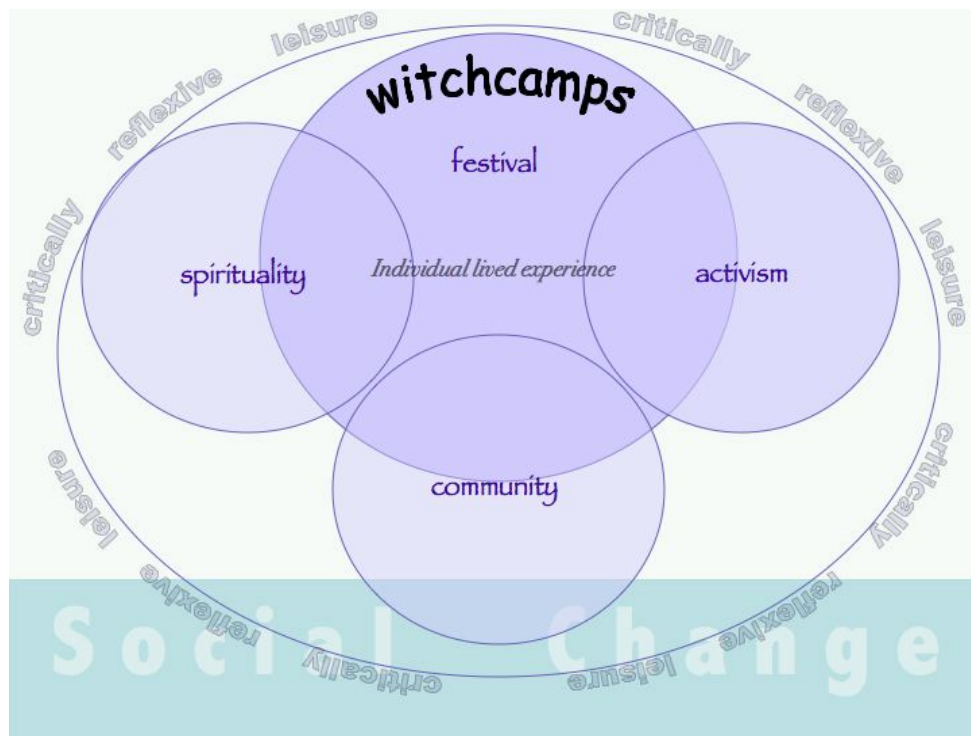
I entered the research with guiding interests (Charmaz, 2006) rather than firm concepts to identify or pursue. Like Blumer's (1969) notion of sensitizing concepts, guiding interests are those concepts and notions that sensitize the researcher to ask particular questions in relation to the research interest. The following section reviews the literature on the interests that initiated this project.

Guiding Interests

The relevance of the literature review has long been both misunderstood and disputed (Charmaz, 2006). Objectivism required delay of the literature review until after data analysis based on a purist belief that the researcher could study the phenomenon without awareness or effect of existing knowledge. The constructionist approach rejects such implausible neutrality and instead acknowledges and exploits the prior knowledge that researchers bring to the research process. Through identification of guiding interests, engaged reflexivity, and rigorous scrutiny of preconceptions, the research is located in time, place, and situation (Charmaz, 2008). As such, this review of the literature reflects the interests and preconceived ideas about the role of witchcamps with which I entered the research.

To set the scene for the reader unfamiliar with witchcamps, I begin with a description and background information about the phenomenon. *Illustration 1* (following) serves as a simple map of the conceived relationships between the framework, interests, notions and concepts developed in the literature review.

Illustration 1



Conceptual illustration of the guiding interests developed in the literature review.

Following is a review of the literature relevant to understanding witchcamps within the conceptual framework of festivals, resistance, civil leisure, spirituality, and community. The concepts of festival (Falassi, 1967; Abrahams, 1967; Turner, 1982), resistance (Shaw, 1994; 2001), and critically reflexive leisure (Mair, Sumner & Rotteau, 2008) are introduced as a conceptual framework in which I position

witchcamps in the field of Leisure Studies. Secondly, I address intersections of spirituality and community with social change. Each section addresses conceptualizations, definitions, and gaps in the literature. In the final section, I review studies that informed this project, before moving on to the methodology.

Witchcraft and Witchcamps

Given the popular mystification and misconceptions in regard to Witchcraft, I offer a brief introduction to the event and the culture. The following excerpt is adapted from the website of the WitchCamps Council:

Witchamps are intensive retreats for the study of Magic and ritual, and are offered to women, men, and families, at all levels of experience. Within a mythological and historical framework of the Goddess Tradition, newcomers can learn the basic skills of Magic and ritual, and learn to bend the elements of earth, air, fire, and water. Advanced paths (workshops) offer teachings to apply ritual tools (trance work, drumming, dancing, chanting, storytelling, guided visualization, energy work) to personal healing and empowerment, or to applying the craft to healing issues surrounding power and leadership in the world through public ritual and smaller learning groups. Reclaiming Witchcraft values diversity and each Witchcamp has its own policies, structures, and culture. Transparency is encouraged and valued, as is a questioning attitude. (witchcamp.org)

Witchcamps can be located within what Hume (1997) describes as Paganism/Wicca/Witchcraft, a philosophical and decentralized movement that

synthesizes ecology, spirituality, and science. Within Western cultures, Witchcraft is growing and flourishing (Berger, 2005) and appears to be multiplying exponentially among teens and young adults (DeSouza, 2003; Cush, 2007). Witchcamps originated in San Francisco in 1985 (Magliocco, 2004) as a contrivance of the Reclaiming Tradition of Witchcraft, a tradition referred to as an ‘accidental institution’ (Starhawk, 2011, pp. 262). The tradition has a strong commitment to the natural world, to social justice, and to political activism (Berger, 2005). Reclaiming is a decentralized group with origins in the highly creative 1970’s explorations of feminist spirituality, consciousness shifting, and new age mentality (Starhawk, 2011). The first witchcamp outside of California took place in British Columbia in 1987. According to Starhawk (2011), the goal with the first camps was to seed magical communities locally, and to teach and empower local leadership.

As a conscious political act, Reclaiming has ‘reclaimed’ the Earth, its elements and cycles, the body/mind/spirit, diverse sexuality and spirituality, and basic life energy as sacred. Such sacralization has the goal of protecting the earth and the diversity of inhabitants (Starhawk, 1989). The notion of ‘reclaiming’ is central to the tradition on a number of levels. The practitioners hold an intention to reclaim an image of the divine as female, honouring Goddesses as well as Gods. Each individual is encouraged to reclaim their own spiritual authority, as there is no intermediary role between the person and the divine. Recognizing the ‘gynocide’ or ‘the burning times’ of historical witch-hunts as an outcome of patriarchy and misogyny, the tradition encourages public and proud practice of magic (Willow, 1999).

There are, depending on the year, fifteen to twenty witchcamps scattered throughout the U.S., Canada, Western Europe, and most recently, Australia. Through the cyber-powered social network of Reclaiming, along with a brief tenure of one year as a representative to the global witchcamp council, I learned that various camps tend to focus less or more on spirit, environment, or politics.

Witchcamps are annual events and depending on the autonomous preferences of the local organizing group, each one incorporates a theme, story, or myth as a vehicle for creative consciousness-raising about particular social, environmental, or political problems and celebrations of life. Most are held in a rustic camp setting, operate collectively, and work to be environmentally friendly. During camps, individuals primarily live communally, and are intensely immersed in pathwork and rituals that explore the Reclaiming Tradition beliefs and practices (Berger, 2005).

Witchcamps might be considered an emergent form of leisure (Rojek, Shaw & Veal, 2006) demonstrated by their novelty and in their existence as sites and practice of not only opposition to hegemonic codes of behaviour, but also in their attempts to envision environmental and cultural change. Having a long history of leadership with one witchcamp, my practice might aptly be described as serious leisure (Stebbins, 1992). As part of the shared leadership of a witchcamp, I can attest to the efforts and tensions that arise around planning camps that are environmentally friendly, feminist, affordable, welcoming to all cultures, traditions, genders and sexualities, have developmentally appropriate events for children and teens, and provide a full range of alternative diet options.

Witchcamp culture includes special ritual wear, similar, I suppose, to dressing for Church. While it is not expected, and some prefer not to engage in costuming, it is widespread, and in the spirit of reclaiming the image of the Witch, some appear at ritual in the garb of the common Witch stereotype complete with pointy hat, black cloak, and broom. Generally, however, the attire of ritual is a fantastic collection of various hats and cloaks that involve a range of high-tech outdoor gear, wildly colourful fabrics, and playful body décor. Please see Appendix E for a complete listing and locations of witchcamp events.

Most witchcamps are not defined by camp organizers as festivals, *per se*; however I have situated them as such due to the similarities and common structures of camps with festivals in general. The following overview of the festivals literature clearly locates witchcamps as a form of festival.

Festivals

In order to specifically situate witchcamps in the study of leisure, I introduce the concept of festival and provide an overview of the social framework within which they are understood. I then highlight five studies of festivals that are prefigurative (Breines, 1982) in nature, reflect some element of pleasure-politics (Jordan, 2004), and reflect the festival's potential for social change. Narrowing the framework, I review literature related to Pagan festivals, and finally, I look at the scant literature on witchcamps.

Festivals are a social phenomenon universal to all human cultures, and function primarily to renounce or announce culture, to renew sense of community,

and to affirm the institutions of the community (Falassi, 1967). Likely originating as ancient seasonal occasions of public joy and merriment, festivals provide a break from mundane life, and an opportunity to honour the mystical and spiritual in shared community. In the way that dreams and fantasy are indispensable to mental health, the fantastic culture of festivals is necessary for the social health of a community (Turner, 1982), and is an active force in social change (Waterman, 1998; Zukin, 1995). Festivals play a key role in creating, maintaining, transforming, and transmitting culture (Waterman, 1998).

Western festivals have evolved and fragmented into a multiplicity of forms such as fairs, family feasts, arts, music, and cultural festivals, religious events, parties, and even what we refer to as the 'weekend' (Abrahams, 1982). A primary characteristic of festivals is the creation of spatial, temporal, and social openness, where participants are invited to explore the margins of typical social interaction, and try on personal and social transformation that may or may not be carried back to the real world (Falassi, 1967). Although not all festivals have a stated social change purpose, festivals have commonalities that set them apart from regular normal life. They are therefore positioned in the broader social context such that they do not need to actively promote social change in order to affect it (Sharpe, 2008).

The largest witchcamps draw only about 100 to 125 people, paltry compared to the thousands that attend some cultural or music festivals. Regardless of size, witchcamps can be located within this framework in that, like other festivals, they provide an occasion for the community to gather outside of normal life to publicly display, explore, affirm, and transform itself (Abrahams, 1982; Falassi, 1967).

Different from most festivals, witchcamps require registration well in advance of the event.

Reflecting the conceptualizations of Falassi (1967) and Abrahams (1982), a number of studies have looked at festivals that share characteristics of being for and by marginalized communities based on gender (Eder, Staggenborg, & Sudderth, 1995; Morris, 2005), race and culture (Jackson, 1992), sexual orientation (Browne, 2007), or political viewpoint (Sharpe, 2008). Each studied festival is understood as creating space and time for alternative social interaction and transformation. The collective literature indicates empirical evidence for festivals as spaces of resistance to, and/or reproduction of, cultural norms, and as events that blend pleasure with politics. While not all of the festivals are understood as prefigurative, they each reflect some element of utopian vision. Spirituality in the festival setting is noted only by Morris (2005).

In her case study of Hillside Music Festival, Sharpe (2008) investigated how the leisure context of a political music festival shaped its organizational approach, its experiential character, and its social change efficacy. She found that the leisure context impacted the festival such that politics were organizationally enacted, or pre-figured, rather than espoused, had a positive and celebratory spin, and resulted in an experience of pleasure-politics for patrons. Her study confirms the potential for festivals, within the leisure context, to expand the potential for social and political change.

Similarly, Jackson's (1992) study examined the political significance of Caribana Street Festivals. While he does not focus specifically on the pleasure

aspect of the festival, pleasure is apparent in his descriptions of the party that is Caribana. He found that the broader political contexts of multiculturalism, racism, access to funding, and policing strategies limit cultural expression and political potential such that the festivals evolved to symbolize a form of yearly ritualized resistance to dominant norms.

Browne (2007) explored the places and performances of pleasure in the politics and commodification of Pride Parades. Based on her study of lesbians who attended the Pride events, she theorized that the party or pleasure aspect is central to the experience alongside the politics and consumerism.

Two studies examine women's music festivals. The National Women's Music Festival was examined by Eder, Staggenborg, and Sudderth (1995) with the sociological purpose of exploring the tensions inherent in lesbian feminist community building within a diverse music festival constituency. The researchers found that the prefigurative aspect of the festival was very appealing to patrons in that it was an opportunity to temporarily experience a positive feminist community. They also found evidence of dominant antithetic values such as racism and exclusion enacted within the festival. The second study (Morris, 2005) relating to women's music festivals is a long-term, descriptive documentation of festival culture throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and summarizes women's music festivals as utopias of lesbian culture. From sexuality and feminist politics, to racism, classism and transgenderism, the festivals reflected both the pleasure and the politics of festival potential. Beyond pleasure and politics, spirituality is noted as central to the women's music festivals.

These studies highlight prefigurative festivals that reflect both pleasure and politics, and create leisure space where culture is transformed, through both resistance and reproduction. Having looked at festivals in general, we now turn to a discussion of Pagan festivals and studies of Pagan and Reclaiming Tradition communities.

Pagan Festivals

Pike (2001), a religious studies scholar, undertook an ethnographic study of Pagan festivals over a period of five years. She attended festivals and rituals, interviewed organizers and participants, distributed questionnaires, and examined publications and electronic data. Her study focused on the ways that Pagans create rituals, tell stories about themselves, and enact their religion through music, dance, and creating sacred space. She situated Pagan festivals within what she called the American historical tradition of blending religion and leisure. She likened Pagan festivals to outdoor revivals and spiritualist conventions in their aim to transform the mind and the spirit through new and radical experiences, and how they simultaneously function as vacation retreats. Pike notes that Pagan festivals tend to contest accepted cultural norms by supporting alternative values. As a result, they are powerful places of meaning making for those whose interests lie outside the dominant norms. She noted their attraction for those interested in GLBT rights (gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgendered), female leadership, nudity, BDSM (bondage-domination-sado-masochism), and spiritualism. Her study primarily reveals the tensions between self-realization and community; between self-expression and

community regulation; between personal autonomy and commitment to community; and finally, between utopian ideals and daily reality.

In her introduction to a collection of essays that examine contemporary Witchcraft and Magic, Berger (2005), a sociologist, describes Pagan festivals as summer camps for adults. She theorizes that Pagans attend festivals to gain a sense of spiritual community with those who share a similar worldview, and to participate in a temporary prefigurative community. Witchcamps are differentiated from other Pagan festivals by their specific expression of the Reclaiming Tradition of Witchcraft's feminist, non-hierarchical leadership and their shared focus on the political, personal, and spiritual. She also distinguishes witchcamps by their nurturance of natural rather than chemically-induced altered states of consciousness and by their rejection of polarity based on gender (a heteronormative belief that male = masculine/God and female = feminine/Goddess, therefore deep Magic, spirituality, and creation are only possible when there is a balance of men and women) and that both are a necessity for ritual Magic. A final distinction is that witchcamps prioritize honouring the earth through Magical and environmental activism.

Salomensen (2002), a Norwegian feminist theologian undertook an in-depth, participant-observer ethnography of the San Francisco Reclaiming Community over a period of ten years, from 1988 to 1998, providing a theological portrait of one era in the evolution of Reclaiming. Classifying the Reclaiming Tradition as a spiritual path rather than a religion, her goal was to examine how the community built religious agency and identity from the position of 'Witch'. Salomensen identified witchcamps as the social structure through which Reclaiming beliefs and traditions

are communicated and developed. She said that the ideology behind the camp is to teach spiritual practices rather than theological dogma, based on the belief that spiritual authority is within the individual, not from an external expert. She also observed that communities tend to grow up around camps, and over time, camps become central anchors for communities. She summarized camps as sites of healing from alienation through spirituality in community, as well as places where Witches learn to ‘bend’ or transform human consciousness and develop personally.

Finally, in her ethnography of NeoPaganism in America, Magliocco (2004), an anthropologist and folklorist, explored how American NeoPagans used folklore to establish identity and create religious culture. She described witchcamps as set in isolated natural spaces, with daily Magical teaching, and large community rituals that are focused around a folktale or myth. While of minor note in her study, she summarized witchcamps as rites of passage that helped to transform individuals from non-Witch to Witch.

This review of the literature highlights festivals as cauldrons of cultural transformation and community building, where both individuals and communities can be said to resist, renounce, and/or reproduce the dominant culture. Not surprisingly, Pike (2001) and Morris (2005) reported some of the tensions that can arise in such a cauldron, where the individual intersects with community, and utopian vision intersects with present culture. Witchcamp then, might be understood as a particular type of Pagan festival that blends pleasure-politics with spirituality, community, and social change. Following Pike (2001) and Morris (2005), deeper understanding might also be developed through an exploration of the tensions that

arise in such a blend. Browne (2007) identified the continuing need to examine the pleasures associated with marginalized lifestyles to balance the plethora of research that tends to focus on politics, discrimination, violence, and oppression. Pike (2001) recognized the need to delve deeper into two aspects of festivals that have not been examined: what it means to say that a space is sacred; and the tensions of creating and negotiating boundaries between normal life and festival life.

With the intent to further academic understanding of witchcamps, this study pioneers an examination of witchcamps to explore the extent to which they blend pleasure-politics with spirituality, community, and social change. The next section highlights the relevant literature in order to situate this study as an exploration of critically reflexive leisure practice.

Resistance, Civil Leisure, and Critically Reflexive Practice

Within the field of Leisure Studies, the notion of resistance illuminates the political nature and potential of leisure as a space of social change (Shaw, 2001). Shaw argues that leisure, defined as a situation of choice, control, individual agency, and self-determination, provides opportunity for marginalized or oppressed groups or individuals to reproduce, or resist, proscribed roles, expectations, and behaviours. She further proposes that resistance to oppression varies on axes of intent and outcome, and can be individual and/or collective acts. In the example of Witches, one might expect that Witches are both collectively and individually resisting and /or reproducing patriarchal spirituality through honouring Goddesses. Some Witches clearly share intention to create social change through dismantling patriarchy.

Others may not share that intent, or even be conscious of the possible outcome. Successful resistance, however, is not dependent on the intent of the resister, but on the act itself. Exploring the notion further, Du (2008) found that Taiwanese folk dancers sometimes expressed reproduction or resistance through presentation and definition of the act, or ‘negotiation strategies,’ rather than through the act itself, illuminating Shaw’s (2001) axis of individual intention as resistance. This study of witchcamps responds to Shaw’s recommendation to document types of leisure activities that resist oppression, contexts of resistance, and specific types of oppression and constraint that are being challenged or resisted.

Related to *intentional resistance* is Mair’s construct of *civil leisure* (2002/03), a notion rooted in Hemingway’s (1999) conceptualization of leisure as a context for social justice and human emancipation. Involving a sense of individual or collective duty to the greater public good, civil leisure references intentional social and political activities that resist and reconstruct hegemonic cultural narratives. The civil leisure concept highlights freely chosen leisure activities such as activism, civil disobedience, public protest, and politically-oriented festivals; all public activities with a social change message. The idea of *civil leisure* places emphasis on the political nature of leisure (Shaw, 2006). The studied activities that reflect the notion of civil leisure include examinations of volunteers (Arai, 2000), community gardens (Glover, Shiner, & Parry, 2005), civil disobedience (Lashua, 2005), public protest (Mair, 2002/03), and a politically engaged music festival (Sharpe, 2008). Mair, Sumner and Rotteau (2008) further refine intentional resistance through the development of the notion of *critically reflexive leisure*. Critically reflexive leisure

refers to politically oriented leisure where reflection, resistance, and articulation of an alternative vision are informed by pleasure, activism, and empowerment.

Civil leisure and critically reflexive leisure are radical constructs in Leisure Studies, and development is in the early stages with only a few studies (Mair, 2002/03; Mair, *et al.*, 2008; Sharpe, 2008) documenting leisure with a political or social change agenda. Mair calls on leisure researchers to continue to probe these resistance-related notions and the conceptualization of leisure as an agent of broad social change. Unexplored in leisure's social change agency is the role of spirituality and community. This study probes the role of community and spirituality as factors in the notion of critically reflexive leisure.

The following sections unpack the literature that is relevant to discussions of leisure, community, and spirituality. I begin with separate examinations of each construct as it relates to social change, provide a working definition, and highlight gaps in our knowledge as relevant to this study. The discussion concludes with an assessment of the links between leisure, community, and spirituality, and the ensuing questions that arise.

Leisure, Community, and Social Change

Affirming the notion of civil leisure discussed in the previous section, the understanding of community within Leisure Studies is evolving as the field inches away from a focus on individualism and consumption (Pedlar & Haworth, 2006) towards a contemporary examination of the links between leisure, social justice, and the common good. Rejecting the simple notion of community as a solely

geographical or 'membership' concept, Arai and Pedlar (2003) propose the communitarian perspective as a frame through which leisure researchers might explore the centrality of leisure to community responsibility for broader social, political and environmental concerns. Furthering the communitarian perspective that community is multidimensional and includes such dimensions as shared values or concerns, appreciative focal practices, sense of place, and/or mutual regard for differences, they highlight examples such as festivals, hobbies, the arts, environmental concerns, religions, and music. In her study of Hillside Music Festival, Sharpe (2008), found that the leisure experience of participating in Hillside was central in the building and experience of community for Hillside patrons.

People come together in communal leisure with the primary goal of celebrating and furthering their unity in such a way that the shared leisure is, in effect, the realization of the common good (Arai & Pedlar, 2003). Social cohesion, openness, and acceptance of difference are actualized through such shared meaning and communal practices. This perspective enables us to look at how leisure can unify marginalized groups rather than just exclude them. Related to this is Mair's (2006) conceptualization of community as one that provides the space for celebrating diversity. Community leisure has a particular capacity for social resistance and social change (Shaw, 2001; Mair, 2006) and leisure potentially contributes to creating new forms of community that are inclusive, diverse, open, welcoming, and civically engaged (Arai & Pedlar, 2003).

There are a plethora of definitions of community within the leisure literature, and Pedlar and Haworth (2006) attribute the bewildering array of definitions to the

historical lack of attention paid to leisure and community connections, as well as to the challenges inherent in defining the construct. As a general conceptualization, they offer a definition where membership is multi-threaded, fluid, and overlapping, may be based on values, activity, or mutual regard, and can be understood as physical, emotional, psychological, and social. The definition embraces leisure communities, beyond sports teams and volunteer groups, to include those based on spirituality, religion, sense of place, politics, environmental concerns, and social activism.

Given the Pagan and spiritual nature of the witchcamp communities, my understanding of community is informed by two further studies, and by openness to the ‘underbelly,’ or dark side of community. Brehm’s (2007) study examined the complex nature of the natural environment as a dimension of community attachment. She found that sense of community has an element of emotional attachment to the natural environment. Whether the attachment to the natural environment is a shared interest (focal practice) or inherent in the sense of community is not clear and she recommends considering the natural environment when investigating sense of community. Similarly, Van Schyndel Kasper (2008) investigated the practical means by which ecovillages institute and reinforce an alternative lifestyle paradigm. She examined eight ecovillages and found an expanded notion of community that includes other species and the natural bioregion. Finally, like any human construct, community has the potential to be a site where oppressive systems can be reproduced as well as resisted, and for many, is a source of social exclusion and oppression rather than inclusion (Arai & Pedlar, 2003; Lebonite, 2004; Smale, 2006).

To summarize, and as the research presented below makes clear, this project identified witchcamps as leisure-based communities engaged in social change on both individual and collective levels. In their offering of intentional social and political activities, witchcamps are a form of civil leisure, and more specifically reflect critically reflexive leisure through the aspects of pleasure, empowerment, and activism, and in the stated articulation of an alternative vision. The communitarian perspective highlights the multidimensional definition of community that includes shared values and focal practices, exemplified by large community rituals and the emphasis on social and environmental activism. I entered the research process with a definition of community that was broad enough to capture the earth-based spirituality of witchcampers, and an awareness that some participants may or may not relate to the natural environment as ‘community’. Recognizing that community can be a source of reproduction as well as resistance, and exclusion as well as inclusion, my exploration of this intersection was open to negative and positive experiences of community.

Sharpe (2005) recommends further exploration of the processes and experiences of community making in the leisure sphere. The related gap to be explored in the proposed study is the intersection of sense of community and spirituality within the witchcamp study. The following section examines spirituality and social change before questioning the multiple intersections of spirituality, community, and activism.

Leisure, Spirituality, and Social Change

The leisure literature is home to a range of “philosophical assumptions, optimistic intentions, and theoretical efforts” that “demonstrate, suggest, and infer” (Schmidt & Little, 2007, p. 225) the connection between leisure and spirituality. Schmidt and Little (2007) built on the work of Heintzman and Mannell (2003) to provide the field of Leisure Studies with a thorough review of the connections between leisure and spirituality. Their synopsis evidences the strong correlation between the two constructs, establishing a foundation in regard to the benefits of spiritual leisure including empowerment, attitude change, new behaviour development, spiritual growth, and existential reflection.

A number of projects have contributed to our understanding of spirituality in the leisure context. Schmidt and Little’s (2007) synopsis clearly links spirituality to nature and wilderness, self-actualization, identity, tourism and travel, sports, gender, and general well-being. Other research suggests that leisure can be used as a strategy to avoid spirituality (Heintzman & Mannell, 2003) and that artistic expression and play can be spiritual activities (Lashua, 1999). One recent study explored the intersection of religion, spirituality, and leisure. Finding that the leisure behaviour of Muslim immigrants was affected by unique factors, Stodolska and Livengood (2006) suggest that existing Western / Christian-oriented theoretical frameworks may limit our understanding and analyses.

The problems of using a limited cultural lens have been noted by a number of researchers (Heintzman, 2006; Karlis, Grafanski, & Abbas, 2002; Macdonald & Schreyer, 1991; Stodolska & Livengood, 2006). The field lacks depth in

understanding spirituality in the leisure context and we are just beginning to move beyond the Christian / Western lens. The spiritual and cultural beliefs of marginalized groups, understudied in general, deserve special attention (Stodolska & Livengood, 2006) and will help us broaden our perspective, in turn, helping us develop the language to express and analyze diverse phenomena (Heintzman, 2006).

Given the highly subjective nature of spirituality, and the diversity of humanity, a definitive meaning, in any discipline, is bound to be elusive, and our field is no exception. In the majority of leisure and spirituality studies, researchers have let participants self-define it (Heintzman, 2003), and while a number of definitions have been proposed, two reflect openness, inclusiveness, and recognition of diversity. Macdonald and Schreyer (1991) defined spirituality as the most fundamental of human experiences, and in attempting to clarify a non-secular definition, they simplified spirituality to the idea of a relationship between the self and a divine other, whatever that may be. Unruh and Hutchinson (2008) offer a similarly accessible definition that includes experiences of transcendence, connectedness, integration, meaning, and purpose while concerned with belief in whatever is held to be sacred, divine, or ultimate. These definitions are useful in that they are broad enough to provide for a wide range of cultural and individual definitions.

Although no previous studies have examined directly the connections between leisure, spirituality, and social change, there has been strong interest in pursuing such links (Hammit, Backland, & Bixler, 2006; Heintzman, 2006; Heintzman & Mannell, 2003; Heintzman & Van Andel, 1995; Karlis, Grafanski, &

Abbas, 2002; Macdonald & Schreyer, 1991; Schmidt & Little, 2007; Stodolska & Livengood, 2006; Unruh & Hutchinson, 2008). Lamenting the lack of empirical evidence to support the connection, Schmidt and Little (2007) note that the study of leisure and spirituality is underdeveloped in a number of ways. Definitions of spirituality, diversity of researchers, research foci and methodology, and the limited perspective on the dimensions of the sacred all require expansion. This study offers an examination of the relationship between spirituality and social change, through understanding resistance and critically reflexive leisure as spiritual, as well as political pursuits.

As leisure-based, festival-style communities built on an assumption of shared Pagan spirituality, community, and a politic that promotes activism, witchcamps provide a rare opportunity to explore the claim that spirituality is a motivating force in social justice activism as suggested by a range of authors (Ammerman, 1997; Cerny, 2004; Holloway, 2003; Manzo, 2006; Kong, 2001; Shaw, 2004; Van Schyndel Kasper, 2008). As an ecological spirituality, Witchcraft and Paganism include the natural environment in the definition of community, and uphold that community as sacred (Rountree, 2006). Other researchers suggests that those who include the earth in their understandings of community and spirituality are more likely to act in accordance with those values, treat their environments gently (Van Schyndel Kasper, 2008) and are more likely to take a protective stance (Shaw, 2004). Yet other scholars suggest that people are motivated to engage in action and activism when they have an affective or spiritual bond to a place that is meaningful to them (Manzo, 2006; Kong, 2001). In Pargament's (2008) review of the literature on the

sacred character of community life, he highlights the evidence (Mahoney *et al.*, 1999; Mahoney *et al.*, 2005; Maton & Wells, 1995) that people are motivated and persistent in regard to protecting and preserving that which they hold sacred. According to Ammerman (1997), religious and spiritual communities are often the social spaces where people learn civic skills and practices that are then carried into other areas of life (Ammerman, 1997). These space issue claims are unsubstantiated by empirical evidence (Kong, 2001) and this study probed the links. According to Charmaz (2005), we need to attend to concepts, not only as they are lived, but also as they are understood. This study explored participants' understandings and perceptions of the links between witchcamps, spirituality, community, and activism.

To summarize, the previous chapter presented the epistemological framework of critical constructionism, and reviewed literature relevant to situating witchcamps as festivals that can be understood through ideas of resistance, civil leisure, and critically reflexive leisure. The second part of the literature review established the guiding theoretical interests as leisure, spirituality, community, and activism. The purpose of the research, as stated, was to examine *how participants situated the experience in their lives, how they constructed meaning from the experience, and whether they linked their camp experience to broader social change*. I examined these three elements through the theoretical interests of *leisure, spirituality, community, and activism*. My purpose with this critical constructionist research was to capture and describe the richness, complexities, and tensions that underlie participants' constructions, and to theorize about the primary elements.

Chapter three explains my qualitative methodology. The discussion includes comments on insider research, participant observation, power, reflexivity as well as data collection and analysis. The chapter concludes with discussion of research role, authenticity criteria, and ethical considerations.

For ease of readership and elegance of presentation, I have made minor grammatical adjustments. Participant quotations are clearly identified by italics and where blended into the surrounding framework, are preceded by a colon (:). Where more than one quote is presented, participants are identified with square brackets. I have removed interjections such as ‘uh,’ ‘like,’ ‘you know?,’ and ‘eh?’. My personal observations and experiences are preceded and followed by three asterisks (***), and presented with an alternate font.

Chapter Three

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I outline my qualitative methodology within a critical constructionist perspective and highlight its relevance for this study. I present five principles that guided my research practice, and reflect on the concepts of power, reflexivity, and insider researcher as they pertain to the project. Data collection and analysis are presented along with an account of sampling, participant-observation, interviews and elicited electronic texts, data management, researcher role, authenticity criteria, and ethical considerations.

Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative methods of data collection, such as interviewing and participant observation are often included under the umbrella term of ethnographic methods (Kawulich, 2005). Similarly, while using a qualitative methodology, this study relied primarily on the ethnographic methods of participant observation (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002) and intensive interviews (Charmaz, 2006; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) as well as elicited electronic text (Charmaz, 2006). As a critical constructionist study, this research sought to describe, understand, and interpret the activities and experience of witchcamps within the interest of social change.

Guiding Principles

The methodology for this research project reflects Charmaz's (2008) four principles for sound research practice:

- Treat the research process itself as a social construction (research is multiple, processual, and constructed)
- Scrutinize research decisions and directions with reflexivity (the research process emerges from interaction)
- Collect sufficient data to discern and document how research participants construct their lives and worlds (both the researcher and the participants are socially positioned)
- Improvise methodological and analytic strategies throughout the research process (pp. 403).

Based on Hosking (2008), I added a fifth principle to reflect the critical lens:

- Approach the research with sensitivity to power, and to historical and cultural ways of sense making, in both self and other.

These principles informed the research design and were considered and reflected on throughout the data collection and data analyses.

Insider Research

Insider research is the term used to describe research that involves both a professional research interest and a personal interest. It is generally carried out in one's own 'backyard' (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) such as a community, workplace, family, or area of personal interest. The number of insider social science research projects is increasing exponentially (Chavez, 2008; Wallis, 2004), and according to Davy (2007), in the area of Pagan-related research, most scholars are Pagans. My

social location as an organizer of Wild Ginger WitchCamp provided me with an insider position from which to pursue this study. My location inside the culture of Reclaiming Witchcraft and witchcamps provided me with access, trust, and perspective that have enriched the study. My location and long-term involvement also enabled me to establish particularly close relationships with some witchcampers. As I was aware of these connections, I recruited participants outside of my immediate circle of friendship in order to lessen potential or perceived complications. The following discussion examines the notion of insider research, the related strengths and limitations of the approach, and its relationship to reflexivity.

There can be credibility challenges in regard to insider studies, however many researchers agree that the insider/outsider dichotomy is an illusion or false dichotomy (Chavez, 2008; Ezzy, 2004; Ganiel, 2006; Griffin, 2004; Hammers, 2009; Hellawell, 2006; LeGallais, 2008; Naples, 1996; Wallis, 2004; Woodward, 2008) and accuracy can be established through the use of many credibility strategies (Creswell, 2003). According to Chavez (2008), the limitations of insider research are theoretical and not supported by empirical evidence, and she proposes that it may actually be not only more trustworthy, but also more effective.

The primary argument in support of insider research is that all researchers and participants have multiple selves, identities, positionalities, and social locations that have an impact on the process regardless of where the researcher is positioned. Aside from where we are located on the insider/outsider continuum, we have to contend with methodological issues in regard to positionality, sense of self, and situated knowledge (Chavez, 2008). Our location on the continuum flows and shifts

in degrees based on our various perceived and real social identities at play in each moment, in each interaction, and over time throughout the study (Chavez, 2008, pp. 477). The impossibility of *objective outsider* status is further highlighted by complex relational, political, and environmental contexts (Ganiel, 2006), embodied positionalities such as race, ethnicity, gender, ability, and class (Naples, 1996; Woodward, 2008) and by moral positionalities such as attitudes, values, and beliefs (Le Gallais, 2008). Regardless of the degree to which one is an insider or an outsider to the community under study, one has to negotiate the effects of social location and relational positionality.

Many scholars who have studied Witches (Berger, 2005; Greenwood, 2000; Chan, 2003; Salomensen, 2002) have grappled with the challenges of engaging authentically in a community of Witches and of establishing trust while maintaining some academic distance. Both Hume (1997) and Greenwood (2000) approached the study of Witches from the perspective of academic, but not personal, insiders, gaining access to the communities through negotiating agreements whereby they actively involved themselves in the craft as a way to gain trust and acceptance. As noted by Salomensen (2002), there are few Witch communities who will open up to researchers who are not willing to engage in the belief system, and join the activities. Establishing any authenticity of interpretation is almost impossible without prolonged engagement in a community (Manning, 1997) and as a result, there are a number of researchers who have become aligned with Witches through their research. Both insider and outsider researchers share the goal of truly understanding the participants' lived experiences. The challenge for the outsider is to develop

strategies to move closer to the experience (from a stranger to a native perspective), and the challenge for the insider is to step back and create space for the participants' viewpoint (i.e., from a 'native' perspective closer to a stranger perspective) (Hockey, 1993).

The table on the next page summarizes the advantages and complications of insider researcher and is followed by a discussion of strategies intended to mediate potential complications. In regard to this study, my insider status created a number of the advantages referred to in the table, most notably simple access, attunement to nuances and subtleties of the culture, engaging trust with participants, and insider-informed research questions. As noted in the introduction to this section, it was my intention to strengthen the perceived credibility of this study by limiting participation to witchcampers outside of my circle of close friendships. Social location is not static, and my social location within the witchcamp communities changes shape around a number of factors including skin colour, age, sexual orientation, leadership, teacher status, nationality, class, experience with the craft, personal power, home camp, and researcher status; all of which impacted each interaction differently depending on the social locations of the participant. Like outsider research, both advantages and disadvantages have to be either strengthened or mediated through appropriate strategies, and later I discuss my use of reflexivity as a strategy to mitigate potential insider complications.

Table 1: Advantages and Complications of Insider Research

Advantages	Complications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • -nuanced and unique insight especially for under-represented groups • -rich and complex knowledge • -access to past and present contextual histories • -attuned to nuances and idioms of shared language and collective identity • -increased credibility • -attuned to subtleties, cues, and complexities that outsiders sometimes miss • -formulation of research questions that outsiders may not consider • -greater knowledge of setting • -participants may be more open to engaging in the research and may be more honest in reporting • -knowledge of how group is organized 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • -rose-coloured glasses or insider blindness through being overly positive or overly negligent in noticing the ordinary • -need for conscious awareness and attention to detachment • -taken for granted assumptions due to familiar milieu • -wrong assumptions of shared knowledge • -failure to notice the obvious and familiar • -loss of all objectivity • -participant response bias due to pleasing, self-protection, fears about lack of anonymity

(Chavez, 2008; Le Gallais, 2008; Meezan & Martin, 2003; Palys & Atchinson, 2008)

Reflexivity

In an ontological sense, reflexivity refers to the fact that research does not simply represent some aspect of the world, but is unavoidably involved in that world (Schwandt, 2001). Once the researcher engages the research lens, she is no longer located outside of the phenomenon, but is actively inside of it, affecting and being affected by the event or process under study. Intimate familiarity with the studied phenomenon is a prerequisite for deep reflexivity (Charmaz, 2006), and as an insider, my familiarity with the world of witchcamps provided the opportunity for rich reflexivity.

In the methodological sense, reflexivity refers to both the process of critical self-inspection, and to a similarly sound examination of the whole research process.

In this way, reflexivity is an important procedure for establishing the trustworthiness (Schwandt, 2001) of this proposed research, my decisions and my interpretations (Charmaz, 2006).

As noted in Table 1, insider researcher presents complications such as rose-coloured glasses; taken for granted, or wrong assumptions; and participant response bias. Taking a reflexive stance means reflecting on the self, and the research process, particularly in regard to interests, positions, and assumptions of power and privilege. For Leisure Studies' researchers, Dupuis (1999) suggests additional ways to apply methodological reflexivity, such as ensuring a collaborative approach that establishes trust in the researcher-participant relationship. Such trust can be developed by providing participants, where possible, the opportunity to provide feedback on the interpretations made.

Similarly, Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) state that reflexivity is at the heart of qualitative inquiry and they operationalize the construct by offering some practical guidelines for use in interviewing:

- be sensitive to the situational dynamics between the researcher and the participants;
- use an open-ended interview style;
- be open to, and probe for, attitudes and feelings as well as facts;
- listen to what is not being said;
- be mindful of own research agenda;
- be mindful of hunches, feelings, and responses, as well as attitudes, biases, values, judgments, and discomforts.

A crucial consideration for both insider and outsider research is mediation and negotiation of the factors that impact credibility and trustworthiness. Le Gallais (2008) proposes reflexivity as the primary tool to mediate complications of insider research and recommends the use of a reflexive research journal. As suggested by LeGallais, I used such a journal to build on the reflexivity established through my autoethnographical examination of witchcamps (Calley Jones, 2010). The journal includes a brief autobiographical account of my experiences, values, beliefs, social locations, and attitudes that I brought to this research project. The intent of the journal was to continue to heighten my self-awareness about issues that might have an impact. The journal also served as an on-going reflection on my personal actions, interactions, decisions, and interpretations as I navigated the research process.

Having established the benefits of reflexivity as a methodological tool to this insider qualitative study, I now move forward to outline the data collection and analysis.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection included participant-observations on the experience and activities of witchcamp. Semi-structured, intensive, individual interviews with present and past witchcamp participants were audio-taped (with consent), used open-ended questions about the meanings of camp, and evolved to more focused questions to elicit narratives about the individual, the community, and their relationship with witchcamp. Elicited electronic text and participant-observation were also used as collection strategies. The participant sample included a range of participants

recruited through invitation, snowball and purposive sampling. Data analysis followed a constant-comparative method, and employed memo writing, thematic, and focused coding. The data collection and analysis was undertaken over the course of six months, as outlined in Appendix E. Following is a more in-depth discussion of the research methods.

Sample

Participants for this study were people who had participated in three or more witchcamps. In order to gather data rich in detail, I recruited participants with longer-term involvement with camps, some of whom had attended camps for ten to twenty years. Based on my personal experience, I knew that there were camp participants who had attended various camps regularly over the past two decades. While there are no recorded demographics, it was believed by campers and organizers with whom I have spoken, that the primary population of witchcampers are adult women, with a small but growing segment of men and children. Again, from personal experience I was aware of a range of involvement with regard to camp planning, organizing, teaching, and participation. My sample included a range of both newer (at least 3 witchcamps) and seasoned campers (4 to 20+ witchcamps), and as expected, the sample was primarily female, with a minority of male participants. I did not include children in my sample due to the adult nature of the notions being studied.

While the number of witchcamps changes each year (Please see Appendix D for the witchcamp schedule for 2010-2011), there were twenty camps with which

participants in this study were connected. Two camps were located in Canada, twelve in the United States, two in Great Britain, and three in Europe. The sample was drawn primarily from a variety of camps. I collected extensive participant observation data at Dreamweaving WitchCamp in Missouri, and Wild Ginger WitchCamp in Ontario. My sample included participants who had attended a variety of witchcamps, both North American and European.

For qualitative inquiry, sampling relies not on numbers of units, but rather on relevance to the research question (Schwandt, 2001). Through purposive and snowball sampling (Neuman & Robson, 2009), I included participants who had attended a range of camps, over a number of years. Using personal connections and E-mail invitations (Appendix A) to various witchcamp community E-lists, I recruited with snowball sampling and shifted to purposive sampling to clarify data as themes emerged in the analysis. The sample provided enough data to ensure theoretical depth.

Data Collection

Within a constructionist epistemology, the research interview can be considered a site of knowledge production (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) based on the idea that knowledge is constructed socially. Contrary to the notion of the researcher as a miner of data, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) propose that the research interviewer be considered a traveler, not in the sense of tourist, but in the sense of pilgrim. The pilgrim engages in travel as a sacred journey of deep wisdom and knowledge construction, contrary to the miner who extracts gems, or the tourist who

collects hollow artifacts. In the spirit of a wandering pilgrim, I engaged the interview method in this study, through application of intensive individual interviews (Charmaz, 2006; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Seidman, 2006) and elicited texts (Charmaz, 2006), along with participant-observation at two camps. Guiding interests, sensitizing concepts, and disciplinary perspectives informed data collection (Charmaz, 2008) and while this study was informed by the guiding interests of leisure, spirituality, community, and activism that were outlined in the second chapter, the analysis of data revealed additional, alternate themes.

As specific themes were constructed through the analysis of the data, some initial interests and concepts were discarded where they proved to be irrelevant. On-going data collection was to illuminate the categories, dimensions, and categorical relationships that were revealed in preliminary data analysis (Charmaz, 2008). Data collection began with the initial interview. The following section examines the individual interview, which is followed by discussion of the use of elicited texts and participant-observation.

Recruitment

Access to participants was facilitated through my personal connections using both snowball and purposive sampling, as well as through the electronic lists that network the larger witchcamp community. The Internet is a primary means of communication for the witchcamps communities (Cowan, 2005), and numerous electronic list-serves provided simple access. An invitation to participate in an interview was distributed to a range of witchcamp E-lists, along with representatives

of the WitchCamps Council, an organizational body made up of representatives of member witchcamps. My sampling strategy was purposive in that it was my intention to interview people connected to a range of camps and who had attended at least three camps. As expected, the majority of my initial intensive interview participants came from the camps in which I participated, in response to my invitations. Elicited electronic texts enabled participation by witchcampers connected to camps from North America and Europe.

Semi-structured Intensive Individual Interviews

The use of face-to-face interviews for qualitative research is a well-established research method (Seidman, 2006). Interviews can be tightly structured, with preset standardized, closed questions, or open-ended, unstructured, friendly conversations, and of course, a range in between (Seidman, 2006). For the purpose of this research, I engaged the *intensive interviewing* approach (Charmaz, 2006; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) because it permitted an in-depth exploration of the experience of witchcamp. Both the methodological approach guiding this study and the intensive interview are geared toward a comprehensive exploration of a particular experience (Lofland & Lofland, 1984). In the critical constructionist framework, the product of the interview reflects four factors:

- a highly skilled craft of practice, judgments, and decisions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009);
- the social production of knowledge (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Charmaz, 2006);

- the asymmetrical power of a social practice embedded in a historical and social context (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009);
- and, social consequences in the revelation of the personal private self of the participant (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Beginning with a few broad open-ended questions, the interview moved the interchange into a deep exploration of the topic. I engaged the following guidelines (Charmaz, 2006) for conducting intensive interviews:

- Go beneath the surface of the described experience(s)
- Stop to explore a statement or topic
- Request more detail or explanation
- Ask about the participant's thoughts, feelings, and actions
- Keep the participant on the subject
- Come back to an earlier point
- Restate the participant's point to check for accuracy
- Slow or quicken the pace
- Shift the immediate topic
- Validate the participant's humanity, perspective, or action
- Use observational and social skills to further the discussion
- Respect the participant and express appreciation for participating (pp 26).

Charmaz's (2006) 'snapshot of an interview' informed the design of the intensive interview process, however, there are few standard rules or conventions to the craft, or 'art' (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) of interviewing, and so methodological decisions were sometimes made in the moment.

Once the participant was settled and comfortable in the interview process, I reviewed the purpose of the study, provided relevant information, and talked about confidentiality and consent, before proceeding through the interview questions. As a Social Worker and a clinical psychotherapist, I am familiar with both the therapeutic interview and the clinical assessment interview. It is hoped that my strong interview skills add credibility to the study, and to the ethical accountability inherent in the use of the research interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). I came to the role well equipped to effectively navigate the complexities of probing into personal and private lives (Seidman, 2006). Such an approach involved facilitating ‘a delicate balance between [my] research interests and ethical respect for the integrity and dignity of the participant’ (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, pp. 16).

I was, however, forewarned by Seidman (2006) that while therapeutic interviews and research interviews are similar in structure and process in that both involve intense sessions, primarily unidirectional revealing of personal information, boundary and termination management, they are critically different in their goals (de Laine, 2000; Kahn & Cannell, 1960; Kvale, 1996; Weiss, 1994). My goal as a researcher was to learn and to gather information, rather than ‘treat’ the participant. Other differences are that the research participant does not seek out the interview, is not a patient/client, and does not pay for the interview. Like therapeutic interviews, the goals of a research interview may include empowerment, compassion, and witnessing pain, but such goals are secondary to the gathering of data (Seidman, 2006). Other aspects of the interview relationship that are different include the duration of the relationship (the research interview being a one-time event) and the

clarity of the termination (the therapeutic interview generally requires a full interview session to discuss closure); in this study, the interview relationships were one time events, and as such the relationship did not exist over time, and the structure provided only for brief closure. A final aspect that I attended to was the power differential. As both a clinician and a researcher, I hold a position of power in the interview relationship and so have an ethical responsibility to pay attention to, and respect the vulnerabilities of the participant or client.

As a research interviewer, I initially requested information in regard to gender, age, witchcamps that the participant has attended and felt connected to, the number of camps they had attended, and whether they had been involved in specific roles in any camps. I established rapport by making friendly eye contact, maintaining a positive facial expression, nodding, actively listening and using humour. I demonstrated respect by being polite, acknowledging comments and listening with authentic curiosity about the participant's experience and expertise about the topic. To mitigate the potentially negative impact of my insider status, I acknowledged it and invited the participant to express any questions or concerns that she or he might have. No one expressed concerns, although a few participants asked about anonymity. A surprising number of participants expressed the opinion that they were not adequate or 'good' participants I offered assurances that I was open to a wide range of positive and negative experiences, and offered the opportunity to provide further information through elicited text (discussed in the next sub-section).

My method followed a semi-structured interview to enable data to emerge organically (Charmaz, 2006). I began with broad, neutral, open-ended questions

that invited description and detailed reflection on the witchcamp experience. Using prompts and probes, I encouraged participants to articulate their meanings. Requests for detail and reflecting back content were used to invite deeper exploration of feelings, thoughts, and actions about the role of witchcamps, and the meanings that it held. Based on Charmaz (2006), I entered the initial set of interviews for this study with general questions and probes as outlined in Appendix C.

Open-ended questions enabled unanticipated statements and stories to emerge, and this was important in the initial phase of research. As themes began to materialize, I developed more focused questions to explore the emerging concepts (Charmaz, 2006), and either returned to participants electronically, or explored the questions with new participants. Along with the recording and transcribing of interview data, I recorded notes during and after the interviews, all of which were coded in the coding process. As the collection and analysis evolved, the range of interview topics narrowed as categories and themes were fully narrated. Additional electronic interviews were used to clarify or gather further data to fully understand a theme. As stated earlier, the number of interviews required was not known ahead of time and I stopped collecting data when it became apparent that themes were well understood and detailed (Charmaz, 2006). I completed a total of 40 initial interviews and 11 follow up interviews. I conducted 21, 2–3 hour intensive interviews (7 at Dreamweaving, 7 at Wild Ginger, 7 outside of the camp setting), and I collected 19 elicited electronic text submissions. As needed, during data analysis, I initiated 11 shorter focused interviews to collect further data to establish fully understood themes.

Elicited Texts

Elicited texts involved inviting the participants to construct written data in response to written open-ended questions (Charmaz, 2006), and this method enabled access to a wider range of participants. The Internet is a common medium for soliciting such texts, and provided a number of benefits to this study:

- collection of data from participants that were geographically distant
- increased anonymity
- enabled a range of authentic responses beyond personal interviews
- enabled a range of methods to meet a range of styles
- increased trustworthiness through multiple methods (Charmaz, 2006).

Through verbal announcements at Dreamweaving and Wild Ginger, and electronic announcements through E-lists connected to witchcamp and Reclaiming communities, I invited participants to request participation via E-mail. As noted above, 19 people returned written text, responding to the same questions used in the intensive interviews. According to Murphy and Dingwall (2003) elicited texts generate data that resemble interview data, particularly when the participants have a stake in the topic, relevant experience, and perceive the questions to be relevant. In this study, responses were varied with some participants writing short answers to the questions and others writing many pages. While both the intensive interview participants and the elicited text participants provided a range of responses, from brief to verbose, overall, the more detailed responses came from the live interviews, where probes and prompts could be used in the moment.

The limits of elicited texts include some challenges to clarifying details or encouraging responses in the moment (Murphy & Dingwall, 2003), and this proved true in this study as well. In a few cases, I E-mailed participants and asked for clarification about their responses and while some were eager to continue their participation, others didn't respond, or declined further participation. I encouraged intensive interview participants to send further thoughts about their witchcamp experience through elicited text, however none chose to do so.

Participant-Observation

Considered a staple qualitative data collection method, especially in ethnographic studies, participant observation has been used for over a century (Kawulich, 2005). Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942), considered to be one of the most influential ethnographers of the 20th century, pioneered and developed participant-observation as a critical aspect of research (Hammersley, 1998). Participant observation is a method that moves the researcher closer to the subjects of the research and allows more intimate familiarity with the group under study. Participating in the culture shifts the gaze of the researcher from that of the disengaged observer to one of lived engagement in the details of everyday life.

Participant observation has been defined as the process of learning through involvement in the day-to-day activities of participants in the research setting (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999). It is a process that enables researchers to study activity the natural setting through observing and participating in those activities (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002).

In this study, participant-observation was employed in order to attend to the settings and general culture of two camps. My focus as a researcher/participant was to observe and record observations relevant to community, spirituality, and activism, as they unfolded within the witchcamp setting. As a method, participant-observation worked well alongside the interview and elicited text methods used in this study. It fit well with this insider research (Creswell, 2007; Jorgensen, 1989) as it also strengthened the advantage of access to the 'backstage culture' (deMunck & Sobo, 1998, p.43). As an insider and participant observer in the witchcamp setting, I was afforded layers of rich detailed description through both observation and participant report.

Both research site witchcamps took place in the spring of 2011 and I had about a week at home between camps. As a participant-observer at both Dreamweaving and Wild Ginger, I participated in all aspects of the camp experiences. Dreamweaving organizers had set up an E-list for the camp participants weeks before camp started and invited us to get to know each other on-line. A few participants introduced themselves and I took the opportunity to introduce myself, and my research. There was little activity on the E-list and no one responded to my invitation. Wild Ginger maintains an E-list year around for anyone and everyone who has ever been to camp, and my invitation to that list elicited some interest. At both camps, I requested time at the orientation meeting to talk about my research and invited participation to be interviewed. I let the campers know that I would be observing and taking notes, but was also a fully participating camper. I had promised organizers of both camps that I would be careful to not disrupt the camp experience and so announced a one-time open invitation for people to approach me if they were willing to engage in an intensive interview during the course

of the camp. I also provided assurance in regard to confidentiality for both interview participants and general observations. At both camps, I was welcomed, and even embraced as a researcher. One woman came to me and requested personal assurance about confidentiality as she was in hiding from a violent ex-partner, which of course I gave. I have not otherwise mentioned her in this research. Many campers expressed enthusiasm for the research and seemed excited to know that the experience was to be recorded.

I carried my research journal with me at all times and left my MacBook laptop plugged into the cabins in which I stayed. It is not uncommon to journal at camp as many campers carry personal journals and record both personal growth insights and new magical learning. As such, I was able to record unobtrusively. I used a pen and paper journal to record observations while actively participating in the camp activities, and visited my cabin several times through each day and recorded thoughts and observations on my electronic journal as well. As this was only my second major research project, I recorded as much as I could, rather than trying to set any limits based on guiding interests. Of course, I was attuned to spirituality, community, and activism, and my notes reflect that.

In summary, data were collected through intensive individual interviews, elicited texts, and participant-observation. The next section reports on access to and recruitment of research participants.

Data Analysis

Data was constructed through audio-recorded and transcribed interview material, observations recorded during two witchcamps, and elicited texts submitted electronically. This study blends Creswell's (2003) systematic steps of data analysis and interpretation (pp. 190) with Charmaz's (2006) approach to data analysis using

both methodological tools as well as the tools of self (insight, reflexivity, ingenuity). From the recording and transcription of interview data, journal notes, and observations, through line/segment coding, focused, and theoretical coding, to memo writing, Charmaz (2006) recommends the iterative process of interweaving data analysis and collection. As gaps in the data were identified, and/or concepts and categories were seen to be lacking in thickness, I returned to the field with adjusted questions for refined data collection. By E-mail, I contacted participants who had expressed interest in participating in the research. For example, I contacted Hecate and Muse directly for further details about magical activism, and I solicited richer information about the container metaphor, and about men and children at camp by sending an E-mail to a list of people who had expressed interest in participating in the research. While those solicitations were productive, others weren't. I sought further information from a participant who was one of few women of colour in the camps community but did not receive a response. Similarly, a woman from Spain declined when I contacted her in hopes of having a focused telephone interview. She explained that she was busy organizing a European Goddess Conference in Madrid.

Data included interview and elicited text material, as well as recorded observations. Interview data were initially organized and prepared for analysis through transcription. Once transcribed, I electronically cut and pasted all interview and elicited text data to one word document of 558 pages.

Data coding evolved through two phases (Charmaz, 2006). Phase one applied segment coding, and phase two employed focused coding to 'sort,

synthesize, integrate, and organize' (pp. 46) the enormous towering mountains of data that I collected. A complete reading of the initial transcribed body of data was somewhat overwhelming but provided a general sense of the overall meaning of the data. I then worked through the data, segment-by-segment and coded each segment with such labels as intense immersion, personal responsibility, and magical activism. Through successive readings of individual interviews, E-texts, and journal notes, I began to develop themes and clusters of topics. Using one- or two-word codes to represent the themes, I collected bits of data into 49 initial themes, including the themes of community, making a difference in the world, and personal growth. Community was the largest initial theme as participants had a lot to say about it.

I wrote memos to track the main properties and aspects of categories and concepts and to clarify gaps for further data collection. While memos provided a record of the analysis and research progress, I initially found them less helpful in the analysis than I had anticipated. They worked well to organize the data but did not seem to work well for me overall. In preparing for data analysis, I read extensively and imagined the process to be more straightforward and tidy than it actually was. In actuality, most effective was the strategy of thematic colour coding and ensuring that participants' names were attached to each segment of data. Interview and E-text data was the richest source of thematic material, and participant-observation data primarily provided context and thickened the description and analysis.

As suggested by Charmaz (2006), I used the following considerations for evaluating whether the collection and analysis process was complete:

- sufficient background information for a full portrayal of persons, settings, context, and processes;
- detailed description of a range of views and actions;
- representation of multiple viewpoints;
- development of analytic categories;
- sufficiently detailed data to generate categories and make comparisons. (pp. 18).

In summary, data management and analysis loosely followed the expertise of Charmaz (2006) and Creswell (2003) and employed the methods of audio recording, transcription, journaling, participation/observation recording, coding and memos.

I next discuss my role as the researcher and reflect on criteria for authenticity and trustworthiness.

My Role as the Researcher

Constructionists contend that researchers are not neutral in the *a priori* perspectives that we bring to research (Charmaz, 2006). Both researchers and participants bring assumptions, knowledge, social status, and goals that influence the research. As a critical constructionist researcher, I was obliged to be reflexive about it all, with particular sensitivity to the impact of historical, cultural, and social power (Hosking, 2008). I have dedicated previous sections to discuss both insider research and the strategy of reflexivity to highlight the particular ways in which those factors shaped my role as a researcher. In this section, I review my role through transparency about my biases, values, and personal interests (Creswell, 2003). I

have been engaged with the Reclaiming Tradition of Witchcraft since about 1995. I attended my first witchcamp in Vermont in 1997, and the following year, my friends and I founded our local Wild Ginger WitchCamp. I have remained involved in planning and implementing Wild Ginger since that time, and continued to attend Vermont WitchCamp until 2005. While my role and engagement has lessened over the past few years, I remain moderately active with the Wild Ginger organizing committee. As a result, I entered the research process with a particular fondness for the community and phenomenon under study. I believed that there was a range of political and spiritual beliefs and inclinations within the participant pool, and expected that my personal belief system fit within that range. I have been less involved in political activities than others and had only basic knowledge about the possible range of activities.

I embody the position of a white, middle-aged, middle-class, educated, Canadian woman and mother. I am primarily able-bodied, primarily lesbian, and primarily vegetarian, and I approach life, and research, from an anti-oppressive ethic. My social location within the witchcamp communities changes shape around a number of factors including age, sexual orientation, leadership, teacher/organizer status, nationality, class, experience with the Craft, personal power, home camp, and researcher status. Each position can affect each interaction differently, depending on the social locations of each individual participant. As has been highlighted, reflexivity and scrutiny of the self is central to the methodology (Charmaz, 2008) and I remained cognizant of the noted social locations that I brought to the role of

researcher. For example, when interviewing participants at Wild Ginger, I spent a bit more time establishing rapport with participants who knew my history as a camp organizer, with the goal to avoid the pitfall I discovered in the initial interviews conducted prior to the study camps. I was surprised by the number of participants that assumed my interest was in presenting only a 'pretty picture' of witchcamps. My history as an organizer perhaps suggested a biased standpoint. It became clear that it was important to explain to study participants that I was seeking a balanced range of experiences, including those that might be considered negative. My social location as an educated woman, an academic, a white person, a Canadian, and a queer person were, in the context of different interviews, relevant.

Reflexivity refers not only to the process of critical self-inspection, but also to sound examination on the overall research process. As such, it was an important procedure for establishing trustworthiness (Schwandt, 2001) of this research, decisions, and interpretations (Charmaz, 2006) and contributed to the authenticity of the study, as discussed in the next section.

Power

Issues of power, from the interpersonal to the representational, need to be acknowledged and addressed throughout the research process. Regardless of transparency, authenticity, intent, and collaboration, the researcher has power in the research relationship. We gain power through initiating the research, having authority over the representation, and the potential prestige and power gained

through authorship (Ellis, 2007). Our ethical responsibility to disrupt the status quo, unsettle neutrality, and unearth power and control issues (Madison, 2001) applies to the day-to-day interactions with our participants as well as to representational and activist activities. While it is imperative that we contribute to the creation of emancipatory knowledge and the discourses of social justice (Madison, 2001), it is also important to practice within an ethical framework at each stage of interaction; engaging and representing individuals with respect and compassion.

As a founder and organizer of Wild Ginger WitchCamp, my role as a researcher was overlaid with power and privilege inherent in the organizing role. My insider status was a form of power that I employed in accessing the setting and participants. As a feminist Social Worker and Psychotherapist, I have been privileged with training, skills, and professional experience that have strengthened my in-depth understanding of the human condition, which have provided a critical awareness of the social and political power relationships in the everyday social world. This background was perhaps a form of power that enabled an ease with building rapport, engaging participants, and inviting deep sharing of experience. As a researcher, I made every attempt to remain conscious of my privileged status, a process of self-examination that is referred to as critical consciousness (Freire, 1970).

Authenticity Criteria

Authenticity criteria (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) refer to the quality and trustworthiness of constructionist qualitative inquiry. This study aimed to:

- fairly solicit and represent participants experiences and meanings,
- contribute to participant's positive constructions of self and others,
- and, catalyze empowered action toward the common good.

This was accomplished through applying strategies recommended by Charmaz (2006) and through the use of multiple collection strategies (Creswell, 2003). The crystallization of interview data, elicited text data, and recorded observational data helped to build themes. I periodically checked in with participants and it helped to clarify and confirm my data and to strengthen accuracy. I have presented rich, thick description that is grounded in the data to convey the participants' experiences with authorial integrity and responsibility. Reflexivity has been discussed throughout this chapter and contributes to authenticity of research through transparency of the values and biases that I brought to the interpretation. I attended to and throughout the thesis have presented discrepant information and acknowledged contrary information where such data surfaced. My historical engagement with witchcamps and the related culture ensured an intimate familiarity with context and language. Further, I relied on consulting with my co-advisors to enhance research decisions and analyses. Finally, two external auditors were recruited to my dissertation committee. Solid research is fertilized by reasoned reflections, principled convictions, meaningful conceptualizations, aesthetic merit, and analytic impact (Charmaz, 2006); it was my intention to apply these factors to solidify the credibility of this study.

Ethical Considerations

The project applied a number of strategies (Creswell, 2003), in addition to those already mentioned, to foster strength of ethics throughout the process. Informed consent (Appendix B), a formal ethics review process, and strategies to protect the data were undertaken. Every consideration was given to ensure respectful representation of Witches and Pagans, and this study does not involve deception of any kind. To protect the anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms and changes to identifying characteristics have been made in the quotations from the interviews. The witchcamps communities are small enough that it would be relatively easy to put together details and quotations such that individual identities could be deduced, and as such, personal identifiers have been scrambled.

In order to further protect anonymity in the relatively small community of witchcamps, I have engaged in ‘mindful slippage’ (Medford, 2006; Ellis, 2007) and relational ethics (Ellis, 2007) in presenting my research. These strategies are a literary choice intended to blur and protect the identities of the people in the small witchcamp communities. Participants’ views and voices were not only integral to the analysis, but also to presentation (Charmaz, 2008) and I have mindfully changed identifying details in my representation of them. The use of elicited texts from a wide range of camps, as well as participant-observation at two witchcamps provided some protection of anonymity in the presentation of the research since the data represents wide participation. I discussed my sensitivity to participants’ vulnerabilities and concerns, to contribute to trust and rapport. Similarly, as a researcher, I embraced the responsibility to be sensitive and reflexive in regard to the

impact of power and status both in the interview process and the construction of the process or event.

Summary

The purpose of the research was to examine *how participants situated the experience in their lives, how they constructed meaning from the experience, and whether they linked their camp experience to broader social change*. I examined these three elements through the theoretical interests of *leisure, spirituality, community, and activism*. My purpose with this critical constructionist research was to capture and describe the richness, complexities, and tensions that underlie participants' constructions, and to theorize about the primary elements.

The role of witchcamps in the lives of participants had not been previously examined and this study not only provides ethnographic description but also contributes to our understanding of how witchcamp participants situated the experience in their lives, how they constructed meaning from the experience, and whether they linked their camp experience to broader social change.

Within the field of Leisure Studies, the project offers a qualitative investigation of an alternative leisure practice, highlights leisure's role in social change, and probes the tensions inherent in spiritually and politically engaged leisure within a community. As insider research, it offers a rare glimpse into unconventional leisure practice.

As a critical constructionist researcher, I remain humble to all possibilities, but I am not yet convinced that that Jesus walked on water, Buddha was enlightened,

that Hindu Vibhuti is probable, or that there is anything supernatural about the Magic of Witchcraft. To me the mysteries and wonders of the sacred Earth and nature are magic enough. My choice to be part of the Reclaiming community, and my approach to research are similar in that I believe in multiple and diverse truths. Similarly, as a constructionist, I am committed to the notion of reality as multivoiced, multithemed, plurivocal and polyphonic (Hemingway, 1999). Truth is momentary, reciprocal, interactive, and continually evolving. The presentation of this study can be understood to be the reality of a few Witches, at a particular point in time. With sensitivity to participants, strategies, methods and positionality of self, this research meets Henderson's (1998) recommendation that a group not traditionally researched has found its way into the chronicles of knowledge (Henderson, 1998).

Introduction to the Findings

Camp is different than a social conversation. It's a different container. The people container, the land container, the intention container... without which, it would be a lesser experience. [Pye]

The following chapters present the insights gleaned through this research, through an examination of 'who, what and how, and why'. Within a framework of ethnographic description and analysis, this project offers a glimpse into the ethos of witchcamps. For the purposes of this thesis, ethos is defined as the distinctive character, spirit, attitudes, and values of a people, culture, or movement (Kitayama, et al., 2010). The following three chapters provide an account of witchcamps through the three overarching categories of identity, community, and change, and are presented under the headings: **The Witches**, **The Container**, and **The Transformation**. Chapter four, entitled, 'The Witches' provides a composite first person narrative followed by findings that reveal whether and how participants saw themselves as Witches, and what meaning they made of the term Witch. 'The Container,' presented in chapter five, discusses how participants described and made sense of the witchcamp experience. The Container subsumes themes related to the setting: the activities, sense of community, and the ethos. In chapter six, 'The Transformation' illuminates themes related to transformation, and examines witchcamp as a container for personal, social, and cultural transformation. Chapter seven provides a succinct summary of the findings and presents reflections, implications, and limitations of the research.

Headings to sections are as follows: Themes are bolded, underlined and

capitalized. Aspects of themes are in a smaller font, and are centered above the text related to that aspect of the theme.

For ease of readership and elegance of presentation, I have made minor grammatical adjustments. Participant quotes are clearly identified by italics and where blended into the surrounding framework, are preceded by a colon (:). Where more than one quote is presented, participants are identified with square brackets. I have removed interjections such as ‘uh,’ ‘like,’ ‘you know?,’ and ‘eh?’. My personal observations and experiences are preceded and followed by three asterisks (***), and presented with an alternate font.

Chapter Four

Theme 1

THE WITCHES

I'm a Witch by my sense of what is meaningful in the world and by my skills and by the community that I choose to be part of. It is my sense of the sacred being nature, and of being part of that myself; that there is an energetic flow in the universe and that I can, when I'm listening, when I'm attuned, I can connect with it and work with it. [Hecate]

As introduction and orientation to the findings, I begin by presenting a composite first person narrative or reflective story (Gendlin, 2004). The intention of a reflective story is imaginatively engage the reader in the phenomenon under study through the interpretation of the researcher. The story or composite is grounded in the researchers knowledge of the event and is an accessible portal that invites the reader into the insights gleaned through the research (Torres, 2007). Following other leisure researchers (Johnson and Samdahl, 2005; Mair, 2009), I offer this narrative or story as a fictional but symbolic account of the event. It is intended as an aid to translating the less or misunderstood experience of the individual and the group as well as to illuminate the wider social meaning that underscores the experience (Chase, 2005).

Reflective Story

THURSDAY

Tired of 'arriving tired' each year from the long drive to camp, I had decided this time to honour my aging body, and free myself from the rush and exhaustion of the 10-hour journey. I booked an extra vacation day from my practice and stayed at a bed and breakfast about 5 hours South of camp. Surprised by landscape I had not noticed before, I realized that I had not arrived to camp in daylight, and had only moved through this part of the journey dog-tired, and in the dark! A gentle rain pattered the roof of my dusty Subaru Outback as I wound my way up and down and around the old and familiar hills; the final jaunt of my yearly pilgrimage to Nature's Cauldron WitchCamp.

Anticipation chattered in my belly as I took in the newly presented landscape, a collage of greens and grays, glistening from the brief rain. Over the past few years, my research had taken me to witchcamps far and wide and I was glad for a reprieve from new places, new people, new camps; the familiarity developed over 17 years of organizing and participating in Nature's Cauldron WitchCamp comforted me with a sense of home. Of all the camps I had visited, only one had lacked a spectacular setting, and even though it was mostly fields on the edge of a small woods, by the end of that week of magic and celebration, those fields seemed more mysterious and otherworldly, populated as they were, by the camp story of Faeries and Fey. I was beginning to understand that any natural setting could create a container for witchcamp. Of course, the more beautiful and isolated the setting, the more the land lent itself to the perception of being outside of ordinary life; and inside

the safety of a community of magic. The energy and the magic at each camp were shaped by the landscapes as well as the story and the particular local community of Witches. Mountains, deserts, rivers, forests; Brits, Texans, or Canadians; each camp provided it's own kind of spell where we could dance with the magic of the moon, freed of the constraints of a social fabric that often considers us either flakey or evil.

RITUAL

The opening ritual was delayed just enough to coincide with the moonrise, in the crisp, clear evening left after the rain. The decision was made to accommodate an unusual number of late arrivals, no doubt due to the highway reconstruction along both the major routes, and of course, some of the organizers muttered about why the Thursday night ritual group had planned such an early ritual anyway. The forest around us was dark and the rising moon provided the ritual circle with the kind of glow that Pagans delight in. As the last few stragglers made their way along the forest path, and into the grove, they were gently nudged by a priestess to pass under the arch of twigs and sticks that indicated a portal into the sacred space of the ritual circle. As a camp organizer, I knew that there were about 80 campers this year and I was glad that I didn't have any priestessing responsibilities for this ritual. I relaxed into the gift of the moment and allowed my eyes to wander over the fire, around the moonlit circle; my heart skipped a beat at this gathering of witches that I called 'community', and I felt the familiar release of tension and sense of coming home that brought me back to camp again and again. I allowed myself to purposely release threads of consciousness that connected me to my ordinary life of social

worker/PhD student. For the next four days, I would be 'between the worlds', tuned into the sacred life of nature and spirit, Goddess and love and community. I swatted at the sacred mosquitoes as I turned my attention back to the ritual.

Four priestesses quietly moved forward into the space between the circle of witchcamp participants and the central fire around which we gathered. The priestesses stood silent, dramatic and sentry-like, costumed arms raised to the night sky, facing us, their backs to the fire, each reaching toward one of the sacred directions. The group quieted as people realized that the ritual was beginning. The theme for this years' camp was 'Lilith: First Witch', an exploration of the legendary archetype who is sometimes constructed as the evil first woman of Christianity; she who ran off from the Garden of Eden, into the night. For this camp, the story of Lilith would be viewed with a feminist, Pagan lens. After all, she did walk out of the Garden when she realized that the cost of paradise was to be her freedom.

From my heart to your heart, the circle is cast. Over the next ten or twelve minutes, the words moved around the circle from one witch to the next, hands clasped over hearts, loving eyes locked, casting a sacred circle of magic and community. It was a tender casting and I felt a bit annoyed at the parents who let their kids run, in my opinion, a bit too wild and noisy. There appeared to be only a half-dozen or so kids of noise-making age but I wasn't in the mood to be generous with my patience and I was glad when Wolfe stepped in and shushed them before completing the casting with a solemn and dramatic twirl of what appeared to be a starwars light sabre: The circle is cast with our hearts, our minds, and our spirits;

We are between the worlds and what happens between the worlds, changes all the worlds.

*The sentries remained, stationed around the fire, ready to welcome the directions. Each was garbed to represent an aspect of Lilith. KaliSara, facing the East, fluttered with costume store wings and a somewhat amusingly tattered bird hat. As 'Lilith the BirdWoman', she welcomed the element of Air from the East, with an oft-used invocation direct from Starhawk's book, *The Spiral Dance*, a reference book used by *Reclaiming Witches*. KaliSara/Lilith/Birdwoman invited the community to join her in flapping their pretend wings and making whispery whooshing sounds to welcome the element of Air from the East.*

Fire was invoked from the South by Circe. Her silvery hair was vibrant against her black-cloaked guise of Lilith the Hag. Circe is a gifted orator who might have missed her calling as a Southern TV evangelist. I could tell she was playing it down, perhaps to match KaliSara/Lilith/Birdwoman's gentler energetic presence. As she concluded her invocation to Fire, she tossed something into the central fire, creating a flash of blue heat.

A breath passed before Loki, a short curvy woman who could always be counted on to bring some comic relief to rituals, strode around the Circle, ironically dressed as a sexual dominatrix-vampire, shouting lines from Helen Reddy's, infamous, 'I am Woman' song, carrying a placard on a stick that was hard to read in the dark but had an obvious woman's symbol enclosing a fist. Her invocation was to the West, to Water, and invited us to find inspiration in Lilith as the first feminist. The community smiled at Loki's presentation of Lilith. A babe began to fuss and I

could see Mary, across the fire, walk off into the forest, as the fussing increased in volume.

I recoiled a bit, out of phobic habit as Morgan hissed and slithered an invocation, wearing a big plastic snake around her torso and neck. She had really gone all out for this ritual with a snakeskin-patterned dress, and snake bangles that glittered in the firelight. The community was enthused, hissing a lively welcome to the Earth, and North.

Fairy, in black cat ears and tail, skillfully facilitated the community through a group invocation of lyrical song and movement to the Centre and the Mystery, which culminated in the entire community reaching to the now darkened night sky to welcome the mystery and many dark shapes of Lilith. Hail and Welcome to the Mystery.

As is too often the case, the pithiness of the opening ritual left me on a precipice of disrupted satisfaction. The rest of the ritual was somewhat predictable with storytelling, some light drama, and a few chants to provide an overview and trajectory of this Pagan feminist version of Lilith's story. My heart wasn't really in it, and as the priestesses drummed us around the ritual space in a somewhat chaotic dance of Lilith leaving the Garden, I just tried to hold the space and support the ritual. I understand the rationale for brevity, with folks arriving late, tired from their work week, setting up cabins and tents, parents trying to manage cranky witchlets; but somehow, that reasoning made more sense for the week-long camps where there were 5 or 6 solid rituals between the brief opening and closing rituals. At Nature's

Cauldron, all we had as the 'in-between' was Friday, and Saturday for deeper, longer, trancier rituals.

In this moment though, the energy of the dance heightened as folks repeated the chant: Black moon Lilith; Sister darkest; Black winged Lilith; Brilliant darkness; Primal lust, dark desire; Lilith, Lilith, Queen of Magic. I repeated the chant a few times, but I still wasn't connecting so I drifted to the darkness between the dance and the forest, careful not to disturb the energy of the ritual or the experience of those around me. Certainly, some seemed to have slipped into the trance of the ritual and didn't notice as I melted into the forest, headed for a cup of tea and a chance to catch up with MaeBea, the groundskeeper-by-trade who managed the land, and showed up year after year, to provide soul nourishing vittles for the Witches of Nature's Cauldron WitchCamp.

FRIDAY

Being an early riser, I had the pleasure of a quiet coffee before the campers filled the always too small dining hall and the overflow picnic tables under the shade of some big old Maples. The anticipation on Friday morning is ever-palpable; new folks thumbing through their new camper booklets, trying to come to grips with whatever might be next; and regulars greeting folks with shrieks and hugs, most not seen since last year. All of us, eagerly anticipating breakfast, and the day ahead: pathwork, optional offerings, community meals, and the evening ritual, plus catching up with friends from previous camps, shopping for Goddessy and Witchy artifacts at the vending area, and squeezing in a swim at the beach or a hike along across the local bluffs and caves.

After dinner and before ritual last night, Ginger had facilitated the orientation meeting. It was her first time with the task of orientation and her exuberance of detail provided us with a heft of information that left some of the newer campers discombobulated and confused. Raven, with the confidence and calm of a long-seasoned witchcamper, stood up during breakfast and bellowed that an outline of the Paths and Facilitator/Priestesses was written on the 3rd page of the orientation booklet, that everyone would get their first choice, breakfast was late but would be on the buffet soon, and to not worry because Paths would start later, at 9:15 today. A focused calm only briefly punctuated the cacophony of witchcamp at breakfast, before the hum of eating, chatting, and sorting of the day's details purred on.

PATH

More than one Path was calling to me and as usual, I vacillated between the draws of content and facilitator/priestesses. Nature's Cauldron rarely paid Reclaiming teachers, preferring to rely on and develop insiders to create and teach at camp, but we were flush from some winter fundraising events and so had flown in four outside teachers. We hoped to stir our cauldron of stories and paths, which had become a bit predictable, and 'stir it', we did! Similar to the priestesses of last night's ritual, the various Paths were based on aspects of Lilith, and were facilitated by a mix of organizers and the Reclaiming teachers. I was tempted to follow my inner 'groupie' to Starlight and Doreen's Path but I just wasn't interested in a 'Lilith approach' to spell casting, as my approach to witchcraft was more naturalist than supernaturalist. After much humming and hawing, I decided to go into the dark Lilith shadows with

Birdancer and Justice, in part, because the Path was meeting at the beach, but also because it had been awhile since I had worked with the dark psyche archetypes and the chatter at breakfast suggested that Birdancer was an interesting and gifted teacher, and Justice, an artist, was funny and entertaining. While I was intrigued by their request for us to bring whatever large mirrors could be mustered up from the cabins, I opted to sit and have one more cup of coffee and listen to Gypsy talk about her efforts to protect the wild cats that had been appearing near her farm. Other's had the same idea and began to gather around the table. Gypsy was a bit long winded in her storytelling and being as were short for time, she decided to offer an 'Optional Offering' later in the day so she could share her experience of the conflict between the cats and the farmers.

Over the two mornings of Path, Justice and Birdancer 'priestessed' a sojourn of deep trance, artwork, and movement, shaking loose our internal 'Lilith: She Who Thinks Outside The Garden'. Justice, hilariously repeated that phrase throughout the Path, sometimes with mirth, sometimes with solemn and sincere reverence. We were a small group of 13 - so of course, playfully called ourselves a Coven – and when we resisted being divided into pairs or smaller groups, Justice and Birdancer went with the flow and we spent most of our time in the coven-sized group. Each morning, we created sacred space together, and briefly shared the highs and lows of our camp experience. As told by Soox, some of the parents were disturbed by Loki's bold display of sexuality in the Thursday night ritual, and a lunch discussion table was being organized so that it could be talked over.

Shadow Path turned out to be a transformative experience and reminded me of why folks often refer to witchcamp as 'therapy camp'. In trance work on Friday morning, I came face to face with a Lilith part of myself that felt angry about 'being driven' from the Garden and through a self-portrait exercise on Saturday, using wax and nature's castoffs of bark and blossoms, I was able to reconstruct my inner story into one of empowered preference and choice rather than banishment. That moment of enlightenment was both satiating as well as liberating, and I knew that I would go home spiritually nourished even if the rest of camp was a bust.

OPTIONAL OFFERING

Gypsy's Offering to talk about the cat/farmer conflict was delayed until Saturday at dinner so that she could participate in a drum workshop with Jangles, a music professor who had spent his career studying drum communication around the world. A fascinating man bursting with riveting musical stories, I'd been to his workshop years before, and my heart warmed to see that, at 70, he was still spreading his knowledge through witchcamps.

I was late to Gypsy's talk as I fulfilled my promise to paint flowers on the face of 4 year-old Basil. He looked adorable as he marched off with his moms in search of the big mirror that had been left at the Path location on the beach. The discussion about the cats and the farmers seemed to have unleashed a bit of a tense dialogue about whether 'getting involved' was a responsibility or an option. Gypsy reflected on her choice to live a quiet rural life, free of politics, having 'made her contribution to saving the planet' earlier in her life. She talked about her failure to resist the call of the cats and reluctantly organized a community group to protect

them. Gypsy spoke strongly about how important witchcamp was in her choice to step back in to the political arena and shared how, in spite of the time between camps, this community gave her enough strength and support. In particular, she remembered the year that a wildcat had made an appearance during witchcamp, padding along the ridge of a bluff known locally as SingSong. It was at that camp that she said she first really understood in her body what it meant to live one's beliefs about nature. Her fear (and mine too, as I recall) created a desire to hide, to be safe, to get rid of, to kill. There was a lot of discussion that year about what it meant to live with nature, and how the risks of danger from wildcats was likely less than the risk of danger from toxins in a safe and denaturalized world. But, I digress...

I slipped away from the discussion, feeling distracted with a need to prepare mud for the Sunday ritual. My only role this year was to help facilitate/priestess the Sunday ritual with MaeBea, Moll, and Yaga. I had missed the last conference call, but had a loose grasp of our intention - not that it mattered much; my role was only supportive and I'd begun to think of myself as 'The Keeper of The Mud'. I was to keep the cauldrons of mud warm and flowing with a small fire on the beach. The intention of the ritual was to wear the mud to express whatever had been learned about our inner 'mucky' selves, on both/either the level of the self, and the species. I wasn't confident that we'd pull it off, but just gave it up to the Goddess; it would be what it would be.

MUD

As the ritual unfolded up on the grass, I stood below the group, on the beach, robed in an old tattered gown that I had covered in spattered mud, stirring a large cauldron of the warm aqueous ooze. I was flanked by a couple of young tweenish maidens, who were, even in their perhaps overly dramatic silence, at once both excited and anxious about their role in the ritual.

At about the halfway point, MaeBea cued me as she anointed individuals with a dab of mud and sent them down the grassy slope toward us. It was a warm autumn day and folks littered the beach with dropped sarongs, shoes, and hats, as they prepared to wear the warm mud. We, The Keepers of The Mud, used industrial sized ladles to fill cupped hands and small buckets as people arrived at our station. The drums were loud and what began as a dirge-like chant morphed into a sanguine serenade to Lilith as people slathered the mud over bodies, faces, hair, and each other. It was a site, an experience not enjoyed in an ordinary life and I was bewitched by the animated choreography as the chant and the drums swelled into an energetic cone of muddy blessings.

As the energy of the ritual culminated and cascaded around us, people dropped to the sand, prostrating themselves to the Earth. After a time, Moll stood, covered in the now drying mud, and recited an ode to Lilith, First Witch, Queen of Magic. The circle was devoked with a sweet gentle song by Yaga and the muddy crowd walked, ran, and cavorted to the water to release the mud back to the primal mother.

SUNDAY

The clouds that rolled in over the Saturday night moon sat dark and heavy in the sky on Sunday morning. Breakfast was delayed and folks were encouraged to pack up their tents and belongings before those clouds opened with what promised to be a spectacular downpour, evidenced by the distant thunder and flashes beyond the bluffs. Merlin, Doreen, Starlight, Justice, and Birdancer opted for an indoor ritual and headed off to the old barn to set up. The leaky old barn was not a perfect setting but with the good humour of a community of witches deep in the loving trance of community and magic, it was soon imaginatively reconstructed into mysterious and otherworldly cave, bedecked with colourful sarongs and twinkling fairy lights strung from the rafters.

The ritual was brief and skillfully pulled together all aspects of the Lilith story that had been presented or emerged over the course of rituals and paths. An energetic cauldron was passed around the circle and each of us contributed, by word or movement, something that we had learned. The large cauldron was then carried to the centre, in place of the usual ritual fire, where Merlin and Birdancer filled it with soil. Starlight asked us to consider how, once back in ordinary life, we might take action in the world toward making it a place where Lilith, Eve, Adam, Apples, Figs, and Serpents could live in peace and harmony. As each of us called out a word or a phrase, the priestesses dropped an apple seed in the soil.

As accompaniment to the rain, Merlin played his flute and Birdancer her drum, and we moved into the sweetest spiral dance; the whole community, hand to hand, humming and chirping as we were pulled along by the person in front of us,

weaving around the old barn, each coming face to face with every other member of the camp community. As always, I opened myself to my own authenticity and to the love and acceptance that was reflected in the smiles, tears, and gazes of each face I passed.

The dance came to gentle end and once we threw the energetic thread to the next camp, we said goodbye to Lilith and her many aspects, goodbye to the sacred elements, and devoked the circle. The arched portal of twigs and sticks that we processed through on Thursday night was now decorated with apple blossoms from the neighbouring orchard and I sat with Morgan, Yaga, and Birdancer, on some benches and watched as folks processed through the portal. Justice called an invitation to anyone who wished for help to reground into ordinary consciousness before leaving camp.

The Subaru was packed and ready to go. I had held back only a small bag of things I might need for the post camp meeting of organizers and teachers. The debriefing and deconstructing of camp is a necessary evil for the evolution of witchcamps. I support this notion completely in theory but always rethink it in practice. Five hours later, I was on the road, grateful for the long solitary drive home; and grateful to be sated with the love and affirmation of my community. In my pocket, were a couple of apple seeds, symbolic of the changes I planned to make once back in my regular life.

The purpose of this chapter four is to introduce the study participants and to provide the reader with an understanding of witchcamp participants' sense of

identity. As will be demonstrated, witchcampers are not necessarily ‘Witches’ and they identified their magical practices and identities in various ways. Similar in some ways to queer identity, some participants were ‘out and proud,’ but most hid their spiritual identity from friends, family, and mainstream culture. Participants talked about the experiential and social costs on both sides of ‘the broom closet’ door. For some, ‘coming out’ was considered social activism and an opportunity to raise awareness about Pagans, but others saw disclosure of their identity as a barrier to creating larger social change. Understanding identity is a necessary step toward appreciating the meaning of witchcamps, particularly in their function as an antidote to the dominant culture and a space in which to be safely out of the closet.

While identity was not initially a guiding interest in this study, it emerged as a theme through the analysis. One of the initial questions I asked during data collection was whether participants considered themselves ‘a Witch’. I asked that question as an icebreaker of sorts, naively assuming that most participants would say yes. To my surprise, participants offered a range of terms and meanings when discussing whether they considered themselves to be Witches. Some proudly embraced the term, while others expressed ambivalence, or rejected the label in favour of an alternate tag. Numerous monikers were offered as participants talked about whether they were Witches. Some struggled to articulate how they identified themselves and whether they were a Witch, while others had already thought long and hard about whether to embrace or reject the Witch label. Participants creatively described themselves as Goddess-worshipper, Buddhist-Witch, Pagan, Pagan-Buddhist, HedgeWitch, Animist, JeWitch, Seeker, Unitarian/Pagan, Priestess,

Heathen, polytheist, Shaman, and my favourite, Playgan. Many made reference to their Magical practice as Earth-based spirituality, and some to queer or eco spirituality. Some identified only with the Reclaiming Tradition of Witchcraft, while most described an eclectic combination of spiritual beliefs and practices.

Participants were invited to describe some of their demographic characteristics and were innovative in providing that information. In order to provide a fuller introduction to the participants, the following section describes a select number of people who participated in the research. To protect identities as much as is possible in a small community, identifying details have been altered.

Banshee was a 73-year old medical professional connected to Avalon camp over eight years. She described herself as a hippie who had attended Woodstock, a boomer, a heterosexual, a Caucasian, and a liberal. Banshee was interviewed outside of the camp setting.

At 22 years old, Cepheus was one of the two youngest participants. She described herself as university educated, gender queer, bisexual, and Caucasian of Irish descent. Cepheus worked as an exotic dancer, and struggled with Peace activism as her father was a politician. Over the previous few years, she'd been connected to 4 different witchcamps.

Cruz was 40 years old and described herself as gender queer, white, and American. He said she was born into the upper middle class but worked at a waged job, and did not have health insurance. She lived in New York City and was actively involved in street and graffiti activism, as well as organizing WitchCamp. Cruz was

connected to 3 camps. Cruz participated in an interview, undertaken over two very early morning sessions.

Grace was 20 years old and from Hawaii. She had graduated from the University of Arizona and was traveling around the country. While doing so, she went to Free Activist WitchCamp. She described herself as having a large ecological consciousness and a promoter of sustainability. She was Caucasian, with rural upper class values. She was heterosexual and when not traveling, worked in forestry. She was an eldest child of three, a scientist, a dancer, and was an INTJ (in the Kiersey Temperament Sorter, a psychological profiling tool). Grace participated in the research through electronic text.

Hailey was a 52-year old, white female American who had been to college. She was bisexual and had been involved with witchcamps since 1992. She was on a writer's work exchange retreat at Unicamp for the summer and complained of doing more work than writing.

Hechi was 36 years old and connected to British Columbia WitchCamp. She'd been involved in teaching at various camps, both American and European and had been going to witchcamps since 1999. She was an organizer with witchcamp and involved in planning an international Pagan Studies conference. Hechi described herself as a mother and practitioner of Natural Health Medicines. Hechi participated through electronic text.

Jax was a gender fluid, bisexual person of 32 years, who was, at the time of the study, presenting as female. S/he was a Canadian and connected with

witchcamps over four years. S/he was a musician, videographer, and an urban farmer. Jax was interviewed outside of the camp setting.

Jizak was 58 years old and connected to Wild Ginger WitchCamp. She had been involved with witchcamps for ten years and once helped organized a prison witchcamp in Washington, D.C. She went to antiwar rallies with the Pagan Cluster. She described herself as a white middle class Dutch Canadian heterosexual woman who was a Psychologist and student of life. She said she was an outsider in mainstream culture due to political and religious views. Jizak participated through electronic text.

Karen was 60 years old and female. She had participated in both Michigan and New York camps. She was involved in Goddess spirituality, women's rights, and peace activism. She described herself as a middle class, white, senior, Jewish, American-born Canadian with some formal education. She was a retired midwife who welcomed babies on the East Coast for over 20 years. Karen participated through electronic text.

Lalla was a 52-year old woman from Northern Ontario. She described herself as gender neutral, queer-poly, and white middle class Canadian. She was a child psychiatrist and connected to 2 camps as an organizer and a third camp as a participant. Lalla was interviewed outside of the camp setting.

Meg was 60 years old and female. She was connected to Wild Ginger and had been to four camps, but also to many, many Pagan events over many, many years. She considered herself an advocate for the elderly, for the poor, and for immigrants. She described herself as 2nd generation immigrant, Canadian of Scottish

descent, and working class. She was bisexual and disabled. She was a grandmother of 10, a Shiatsu therapist, an herbalist, and an arborist. Meg participated through electronic text.

Miche was 42 and genderqueer. She was connected to Wild Ginger, Vermont, and California camp. She had been involved with witchcamps since 2000. She described herself as feminist, French Canadian, and had working class roots. She was a teacher in Quebec. Miche was interviewed at Wild Ginger.

Hecate was a 69-year old woman from Alaska. She described herself as a Latina Americana who was acculturated into the upper middle class, having been privately educated and exposed to the symphony and ballet. She was, in her crone years, poor. She came out as a lesbian late in life. Hecate was active with the Unitarians, was an ordained minister, and was connected primarily with one camp as an organizer and with other camps as a participant. She had been attending camps since 1994. Hecate was interviewed at camp.

Bruxa was 30 and First Nation Canadian. She was a middle class, bisexual woman, and described herself as ecofeminist, Ojibway/MicMac, and socialist. She had been attending Wild Ginger for three years and had just decided to stop attending witchcamps. Bruxa was interviewed outside of the camp setting.

Pye was a 43-year old woman who was married and heterosexual. She was connected to Tehas Camp, Vermont, and was planning to attend the new Australian WitchCamp. She was of mixed European descent, middle-class, and was a corporate condominium lawyer. She considered herself a steward of the land, and a rural

organic farmer. She was vegetarian and lived in a more than human world. Pye was interviewed outside of camp.

Rocky was a 42- year old, white, heterosexual man. He was a nurse practitioner and connected primarily to Spiral Heart WitchCamp. He had been attending camps for eight years. Rocky was interviewed during Dreamweaving.

Rosey was 63 years old and female. Her home camp was Wild Ginger. She was a beautician and used her birthday parties to raise awareness for youth and gambling. She did not identify with other labels as she had had many lives and had been many races, classes, and lived in various cultures. She said that she identified by her spiritual path as a Witch. Rosey participated through electronic text.

Sequoia was 50 years old and connected to Dreamweaving and WinterCamp. She'd been to five WitchCamps. She described herself as a bicycle advocate and was involved in neighbourhood environmental improvement activities. She created art as activism and was involved in a movement for local sustainable food. She said she was vaguely middle class, urban, white, Italian American, partnered, and lesbian. Sequoia participated through electronic text.

Shechi was a 48 year old, Jewish woman from New England. She was middle-class, lesbian, and a dancer. While she knew many Reclaiming people, her only witchcamp experience was at Dreamweaving, over six years. Shechi was interviewed outside of camp.

Sig was 31 years old and described herself as white, queer, female, and in a monogamous heterosexual relationship. Her home camp was Winter Camp since 2000 and she had helped to organize it for the past few years. She was a land

surveyor in North Dakota. She said she came from an affluent family on the East Coast but had scarcity issues anyway.

Sub-theme: Witchcampers Are Not Necessarily Witches

Few people identified with the term Wiccan and a number of participants made a specific point to clarify that they were not Wiccan. Some participants said that they did not identify as a Witch, nor use that word to describe themselves. Miche, who primarily attended camp to support her partner, said: *nope, not a Witch. Maybe I will be in the future but I don't feel like I know enough. I'm not against Witches, and I sometimes wonder what other campers would think if they knew I don't identify that way. I kind of assume that most identify as Witches. Or maybe Pagans or Wiccans. I'm not even sure what the difference is let alone where I'd fit.* Sylvie believed that an initiation was required to confirm her commitment to being a Witch and she was: *waiting for the right teacher or set of circumstances to take my commitment that far. I have not been initiated as a Witch. Recently I have been putting more energy into a Shamanic practice with a different, non-Reclaiming group. I would say I practice the craft of the wise, but that does not make me a Witch.*

The following comments reflect how some witchcampers did not identify specifically as Witches, but did identify with their witchcamp communities. Sequoia identified herself as: *a Heathen, or an animist. The witchcamp community is simply the most like-minded, like-hearted spiritual group that I've found. And I'm comfortable with the word Witch and don't take offense to it.* Meg defined herself

as: *an eclectic and a seeker. I like witchcamp and the only other group I ever joined was the Unitarians. Both offer me an open path and open definition of spirituality.* Wind said: *I relate to it through sharing the community values of open-mindedness and concern for the Earth. Witch is really the most accurate description, even if I don't use it for myself.* Although Tree said that she didn't like labels, she acknowledged increased comfort with the term: *I'm more comfortable with Pagan than Witch. More comfortable with Queer too, because Pagan and Queer are broader terms. Pagan means a person of the countryside. That's what I am. I'm very rooted in sense of place, and in my relationship to the Earth.* Reflecting a cultural difference, Hechi noted that in her European witchcamp community, they: *use the word Priestess because Witch makes people lower in energy level.*

Sub-theme: I'm A Witch And Proud Of It

Whether they used 'the W word' or not, the responses of study participants reflected a sense of shared identity, community, spiritual practice, philosophy, values, and beliefs. Violet, an eccentric, fifty-nine year old Unitarian from the American South, did not hesitate in proudly and simply proclaiming her identity: *Yes, absolutely, I'm a Witch!* Similarly, Matty, a sixty-four year old man, was enthusiastic in claiming the title: *I'm a Witch with a capital W. I identify with Goddess spirituality and I love Reclaimings' principles and practices. I feel at home with the people at camp.*

A number of participants expressed a similar certainty in their identities as Witches and expanded on what that meant to them:

Absolutely, I'm a Witch and out of the broom closet to anyone I care about. I practice Witchcraft and I have regular rituals with my coven. I believe in inclusiveness, I celebrate the cycles of nature, I honour living, dying, and composting, and a feminine deity. [Muse]

I have a deep down in the core love of the Earth and nature. Everything is alive and to be honoured and learned from. There are mysteries bumping up against us all the time enchanting the world. I have a soul-felt knowing that I am a Witch. [Edie]

I'm a Witch. I connect spiritually with the Earth, the elements, the energies, the past and the future. Everyone is divine; everyone is a priestess. I am my own spiritual authority. [Lalla]

To me, being a Witch is more about who I am and how I am in the world. It's a mode of consciousness, a way of being aware. [Hailey]

To respect women's knowledge and ways of knowing; honouring of the feminine; knowledge of energies; grounded within myself and nature; I can't zap you or make things levitate or fly a broomstick; although I do have one. I'm lucky because although I work in a university, it's a progressive faculty so there are people who understand and respect ecospirituality. Ecospirituality is what makes me a Witch. I find comfort in nature. [Bruxa]

For Bree and Grace, witchcamps had been significant in helping them feel at ease in describing themselves as Witches:

The witchcamp community is simply the most like-minded and like-hearted spiritual group that I've found, and through this association, I find myself quite comfortable calling myself a Witch. [Bree]

I had some negative experiences with telling others about witchcamp as well as with being Pagan in general. I define myself as a Witch and witchcamp was instrumental in making me feel comfortable with that definition. Sometimes, people assume I'm Wiccan even if I call myself a Witch or Pagan, but I don't consider myself Wiccan. [Grace]

Reflecting the eclecticism and self-authority of witchcampers, people created their own, sometimes playful labels to reflect their unique blend of spiritual practices:

I'm a JeWitch in the Reclaiming Tradition. [Karen]

I refer to myself as a Buddhist Pagan mostly. Sometimes I think of myself as a HedgeWitch because I spend a lot of time in nature and I'm a solitary practitioner and I sort of live on the edges of various communities. [Pye]

I would probably consider myself more of a Pagan than a Witch. Being a Witch is, I think, about spells, rituals, Magic. I'm more into the earth as sacred. I don't think I really understand the word Witch and I'm still inundated by childhood images. [Rocky]

Maybe a Buddhist Witch. Sometimes I use the phrase Earth-based spirituality because it's more accessible to people. [Rosey]

I wish that I could share it a little more broadly. I actually came out to my graduate students last semester for the first time, while naming identities. I didn't

say Witch, but that I'm involved in Wiccan activities. Wiccan sounds a bit better. Sometimes I say Pagan. A Jewish Buddhist Pagan. [Shechi]

Sub-theme: The Broom Closet

As I listened to participant after participant discuss the challenges of disclosing their spiritual orientation in the dominant culture, the parallel to the coming out process in queer culture came into sharper focus. Being a Witch and going to witchcamp is a bit like being queer and going to Pride Day, in the celebration of a sometimes closeted or hidden identity. This section demonstrates how some witchcampers were completely out of the closet and open about their witchcamp experience. Most, however, were closeted and tended to make cautious choices in disclosing information about witchcraft practice and witchcamp. The sense of caution appears to be rooted in the assumption that the consequences of disclosure would be negative, or even dangerous, in spite of very few participants having actually had overtly negative experiences. Many believed that they kept themselves safe by being careful in choosing whom they told, and how much they told. Despite their fears, many study participants shared only positive experiences of coming out about witchcamp.

Disclosure of one's identity as a Witch, or connection with witchcamp is not a straightforward interchange in the dominant culture. There are costs to being closeted and some participants were acutely aware of the negative personal impact. 'Coming out of the broom closet' was a phrase commonly used by study participants

and evoked the language of queer politics/sexuality. It is an apt analogy, as illustrated by Cruz and Bree:

It's kind of like talking about being lesbian; I don't do it unless I have a level of trust or comfort or desire to connect more significantly with whomever I am speaking with. [Bree]

To me the word Witch is a bit like the word queer. In some ways, we're reclaiming a pejorative. Witch is a word that has been thrown around as a way to pin people down in a negative way; the Witches I know don't run around in pointy black hats and they're not easily identifiable and they certainly don't do strange things with newt blood in the woods. [Cruz]

Only three of the study participants were completely out and open to everyone about witchcamp. Hecate said: *I am completely open about being at witchcamp to my family because my brother is a gay Pagan also; my parents were UU (Unitarian Universalists) and they were religious humanists; they don't entirely understand it but think it's fine. I generally tell people that it's like Church camp. It's renewal time. It's going off into the wilderness and community with the trees and the grass and the bugs. It's a time to just be in nature. To people in my closest Pagan community, I've always told them that camp is just incredible and if you can do it, you should and that it's a unique experience; deeply spiritual and fun and exciting. I tell them that it's a community that is trying to live in an ethical way, a spiritual way, and trying to manifest that in reality. Trying it on for a week. And we can realize just how sane it is to live like this. It feels like visiting sanity for a week; that people's values are reflected in reality.* Maya also defined herself: *as a Witch, a*

Magical worker, or someone who is just doing the Work, depending upon who I speak with. I am out of the broom closet at my very uptight office. At this point, being an old foreigner in Europe, why not just push the oddness? Similarly, Sylvie described being: fairly open about my spirituality at work and in my social circles, though some people who have known me a long time might not be aware of it, only because it does not interest them.

Similar in some ways to the queer experience of self-disclosure, the majority of the study participants used caution in disclosing their involvement with witchcamps and Witchcraft, and many, as Tina said: *dance around the term.*

I don't randomly, just automatically, tell people and as a general rule, I don't tell most people. It depends on the person. I don't generally explain it. You don't mention it if it's awkward; yes, mostly I just don't mention camp at all. [Rocky]

After seventeen years of witchcamp, I'm still dancing around the term with lots of people I know. I don't always say it, and sometimes I wear a shirt that says it and sometimes I'll say I go to witchcamp, but I have to be fairly careful and I have to feel okay with it intuitively. I don't share it with everyone. I'm cautious. Because of people not understanding and too much explaining. [Tina]

I've not had negative experiences because I've made good choices about who to tell. And I have sometimes put it in the face of people who are a risk; those who wouldn't understand, but might benefit from the challenge of that. [Stream]

The following excerpt from Shechi demonstrates an oft-heard declaration of being out, followed by a list of exceptions:

Oh yes, I'm out to everyone. Well, it certainly doesn't go on my vitae; it's not listed as a professional organization. Socially, to most of the people I talk to, I say I'm going to witchcamp. Mother-in-law, hmm, well, my ex has never quite told her. There are certain people to whom I will translate it like this - I went to a camp about people who are concerned with making the world better and there's a lot of connections to nature and we create collective energy to help each other think about making the world better - that doesn't sound wrong; it's just not fully right. I didn't say I went to a spa to lose weight; its more accurate than that would be. Going across the border, I say I'm going to Church camp, with a nice simpy little smile. If they see my Jewish Hai, which means life, well, the benefit of being a minority religion is that nobody knows what it is.

Like Shechi, almost everyone had a cover story or translation of the witchcamp experience. Many told their acquaintances and friends that they were going to a spiritual or meditation retreat or just camping in the woods. Others translated the experience using terms like nature camp, workshop, and camping with a group of friends. Like Jax, most had prepared responses for those not in the know: *I have two explanations; one for those who I think are interested and accepting or open to hearing about me being a Witch. I would tell them exactly what it is: a place where Witches gather and we do ritual and we visualize and live the way that we'd like to see the world. I talk about the community aspects, it's a wonderful supportive community, and it's a very creative group of individuals. Sometimes I describe it as art camp, sometimes that we play for a week. For others, for people that are not*

likely to be comfortable, I tell them that I go to a spiritual camp, or I go to a retreat in the woods; to say that is just more acceptable.

Concerns and fears about disclosure were, not surprisingly, based on an assumption that the response would be negative. Pye and Patsy voiced concerns about the personal energy required to explain and defend witchcamp, while Meg expressed a concern about being identified with other traditions of Witchcraft:

I don't want to spend energy defending myself and dealing with people's misinterpretations and projections. [Pye]

After I came out of the broom closet, I would either say I was going to witchcamp, or to a spiritual retreat. I don't actually like this latter term, but sometimes people have reacted negatively to the word Witch, and I get very tired of explaining. [Patsy]

The word Witch is too heavily laden with negative history and as such I do not find it useful in building bridges in the community. There are those who take the word Witch very seriously outside of witchcamp and follow such traditions as Alexandrian or Gardnerian, Odysean etc. I do not want to be associated with those groups and distance myself from declaring that I'm a Witch partly because of that. I would not feel comfortable to declare my participation in witchcamp to others I work with, or in mainstream culture. Therefore there are lost opportunities to network and build support for the causes that are represented. [Meg]

Coming Out To Family. Or Not.

Tina shared the familial challenges that she was facing as she navigated the engagement of her Jewish daughter to a Muslim man: *The likelihood that I'd tell his*

family that we're Witches or Pagans is zero. It would be so hard for them, beyond hard for them. I can't even imagine it. For her to be identified as Jewish, that's how she identifies herself, for them to accept that is a big deal, so this other step further is maybe impossible. It's about them being afraid and just not being open to the idea that we're not evil. We're grappling with how honest we can be with them.

Similarly, Rosey and Banshee expected negative familial consequences if some of their family were to discover their affiliations with witchcamp:

When I told my parents that I was going to witchcamp, they had a big reaction. WitchCamp?! There was some explaining that it's like a nature-based religion and spiritual skill-building with other people, that I'm meeting other people for workshops and I used words like guided meditation rather than trance, and other euphemisms, trying to translate it to something they could understand. Now when I do tell people, I use vague words or translate a lot. My brother doesn't know that I go to witchcamps, and he likely couldn't deal with it. He might not let me see his kids. [Rosey]

Yes, I call myself a Witch. To myself, and a few close friends but not to my family of preachers and missionaries, or people met casually in the community where I live. I am very careful around my fundamentalist Christian brothers. I tell them I'm going to a spiritual retreat with my daughter and they don't ask questions because they are afraid of what that means. They know that I'm not Christian. But they wouldn't want to know I'm a Witch. [Banshee]

Costs On Both Sides of the Closet Door

Bruxa talked about the costs for both herself and her son: *It becomes this kind of weird area with people who aren't witchy; you kind of brush over it, and it's not honouring the experience. I guess I do that because I'm afraid of being judged as crazy. My extended family is Roman Catholic so they don't know, at least I don't think so. My son comes to camp with me. He's eleven. I'm sure he has told his father though I haven't had that conversation with him. If I'm talking to family about it, I tend to play it down. He tells his friends. He has Pagan friends and non-Pagan friends and he's in an alternative school system. Gwin said that she did her best to: minimize familial and social costs by not talking about witchcamp much, and not calling it witchcamp among those who would look askance at such things. I called it a spiritual retreat to my parents, and we've agreed not to talk much more about it. I have told some close friends of my experiences at witchcamp, and taught them some of the things I learned, with positive results.*

The perceived professional costs of being public as a Witch were a concern for many participants. Banshee experienced a conflict between her desire to be authentic and visible, and the reality of working in corporate America with conservative people: *I make an effort to be authentic, wherever I am, and I think I generally succeed. That doesn't mean anyone I work with knows I'm going to witchcamp in June. They think I'm camping in the redwoods. I experience conflict when I'm asked to share about myself, such as in team building activities, and I don't really feel I can share fully about myself. I feel one of the best parts of me, no one I work with knows. Sig said that she doesn't have: a public identity as a Witch. I*

don't want to give anyone a reason to invalidate what I have to say. And being very non-mainstream in a very mainstream-oriented profession is a really good way to get your self labeled as a kook or a charlatan or whatever and I don't need that so early in my career. It could have occupational costs if I didn't manage it appropriately; not sure how much of that is real and how much is in my imagination. I would say that it's real. I mean, when I first started coming here, I was very shy about camp, and wouldn't talk to anyone about what it was – not anyone – just my husband at that time. So I've come a long way. There are people I talk to about it, but still my answer for people who I don't trust with the information is that I'm going camping with some friends in the mountains.

Wind shared a story where she was surprised by positive or neutral responses to her involvement with Witchcraft: *I went through a recent situation with being outed at a birthday party in front of about thirty friends from different aspects of my life. My Witch friends sang the Witches birthday song in front of everyone. No one responded badly, and they didn't even seem surprised. I work with extremely wealthy people and originally when I started, it was clear that they weren't going to put me in a senior position if something like that could be brought up in conversation.*

Parallel to the costs of being out of the broom closet are the costs associated with being closeted. Rosey spoke of the stresses of having what she described as a: *dual identity*. Cruz described how he embodied the discomfort when he translated the experience into generic terms in order to talk about camp without saying exactly what it is: *I notice a tension in my body when I don't use the real word; how that is sort of being closeted. While I try to visibly live my values as a Witch, the non-*

verbal things, the non-explicit, or not-stated things can be discounted. At what point do I need to actually make things explicit or be really direct or in some way challenging or setting boundaries?

Again, perhaps analogous to the coming out experience for some queers, Witches are skilled at navigating and interpreting social safety cues, and making choices about who to tell. Beastie said: *I generally toss out the spiritual retreat and if people are interested and have questions, then I unfold it further. I don't identify it right away; I assess the situation and don't put myself in danger needlessly.* Similarly, Edie gaged it: *by who I'm talking to. I'm not into big confrontation, so if I sense that a person will not understand where I'm coming from with the use of the word Witch, or witchcamp, I'll use something less in their face like Earth-based spirituality.* For Rosey, making a judgment call was important: *I have good judgment about who to share it with. I don't go out of my way to hide it from people but I certainly don't go out of my way to tell people either.* To avoid confrontation, Karen tended to: *focus on the spiritual aspects, the music and ritual, and the learning through story. I explain my need for a feminine divine and a divinity who is not separated from this world. I also often talk about the importance of integrating the political and spiritual aspects of my life. I don't talk about witchcamp when I think it will cause conflict.* Sylvie said that she tended to avoid talking about witchcamp: *except to people who have joined in the London rituals. I am used to being seen as weird, but I don't court abuse unnecessarily!*

A few study participants shared their negative experiences of coming out as a Witch. For some, the experience was sad and painful, and for others, humorous:

I start out with spirituality and say these are the values that I adhere to and this is how it differs from organized religion, and no we do not sacrifice children. It's tough. I've met people who just can't bridge the gap. Not that they are angry or don't want me to have my own spirituality, but they just can't fathom what I'm talking about and so it's impossible to have any constructive relationship with that person. Sometimes it's unpleasant and sometimes I have sidestepped the conversation all together because I know there is no way I'll come out on top.
[Cepheus]

I did frighten a new partner by telling her about witchcamp. She had some Christian misinformation about what being a Witch means and she refused to attend with me. [Zevon]

The word Witch, like the word Pagan, has a lot of negative associations and can bring up a lot of questions. I've been asked if I sacrifice goats in the woods.
[Grace]

Hailey, Sequoia, and Lalla each shared funny stories about coming out as a Witch:

Just being Pagan and describing that to my family has been an interesting challenge. My dad is a strict atheist and my mom a strict agnostic. They are very suspicious of any organized religion and luckily this is a very disorganized religion. I don't think that they are particularly thrilled about that either, really. They are very pragmatic schoolteacher types and leery of anything religious. You're not getting brainwashed there are you? They'd think that about any religion or

spirituality. Actually, they'd be more horrified about a Baptist camp and at least this isn't Christian or, worse, Moslem! [Hailey]

When I remember, I call it a religious retreat. Once I accidentally called it witchcamp to a group of Christian co-workers and that led to several minutes of them grilling me about who Pagans are, what we believe, what we do, etc. This ended with one of my coworkers saying incredulously, Wow. I mean, I've heard of this stuff before, but I didn't think anybody actually did it. [Sequoia]

Everyone says you have to be careful at the border and you don't tell them you're going to witchcamp. I can't lie to save my life so when they asked where I was going, I said to a Pagan retreat. The guy looked at me strangely and asked if I was in a motorcycle gang. I said no, no, no, it's about Earth-based spirituality, communing with nature. Luckily, he said to go ahead! Now I've learned, don't say Pagan at the border but not because of Witches! This past year, I said I was going to a weeklong retreat at an interfaith, organic farm sanctuary. Coming home, I just said I was at a retreat. [Lalla]

Not all coming out stories were negative and many campers shared their positive experiences:

The two times that I told people straight out it's been good. The first time was with a young woman who'd just started at my place of employment. When I said witchcamp, she got so happy, she looked it up on line, and she registered and she came back over the next few years and brought her friends. It's often met with curiosity and delight rather than with fear and running away. [Tina]

Most people are fascinated and say they want to go. I think I choose to tell the people that I think might want to hear about it, or want to go. [Stream]

A Code of Privacy

In another similarity to queer culture, witchcampers shared an expectation that they wouldn't be outed by other campers. An underlying assumption was that one's presence or connection to camp would be private, as well as one's Magical name. Both Shechi and Crystal referred to this code of privacy:

I liked that the organizers explained confidentiality at orientation; don't tell people's Magical names and don't say who was at witchcamp, or that someone is a Witch. [Shechi]

When I describe camp, I give a basic run down of a day at camp, but mostly I talk about the community that is created and what it's like to be there. I never talk about the specific people or the specifics of ritual or our discussions. [Crystal]

In contrast, Patsy expressed concern about privacy outside of camp: *One thing I am concerned about is Magical names. I have one, which I use only at camp. I know that many people are pretty easy with their Magical names and don't mind if they're used in the outside world. The tradition I was raised in treats a Magical name as special, an inner layer of your self. The more people who know and use it, the less power it carries. In my tradition there are three degrees. You have a name you take at dedication, and you add a name at each degree. Only those who have achieved the same degree level are trusted with your name at that degree. This means that if you're in a circle with first-degrees, second-degrees and third-degrees, you use your first-degree name. It's*

the one everyone in the circle is allowed to know. When I joined Wild Ginger, I decided to use my first-degree name, even though I wasn't sure that everybody at camp had been initiated to first degree. I get upset when people use it on my mail. I expect to be able to trust the discretion of fellow Witches, so it distresses and annoys me when my Magical name is used away from camp. I guess what bugs me is the assumption that it's okay, instead of the assumption that we should maintain each other's privacy. Again, this is a result of my tradition, but I didn't realize that others were quite so open with their Magical names, and I certainly didn't expect them to be open with mine. This makes me wary of sharing my other names even with those with whom I might like to do so.

Coming Out as Activism. Or Not.

Participants had a range of thoughts about the necessity or relevance of disclosing their practice as Witches:

I would say that generally with many of the ways I am, I just try to be them and if there is a direct conversation about it, I'll use words and talk about that way of being, but generally I don't lead with them. I would rather just be, and just take the space with that way of being. Sometimes words will trigger reactions in other people that will close doors, but if I just am, without calling it anything, or bringing a lot of attention to it, then it's enough to let it be known more gently, like water. Expansion or shaping of the space, rather than tossing pebbles. It's a seeping approach, rather than a hose. [Cruz]

I define myself as a Witch but I share that information judiciously. Defining myself as a Witch challenges people to re-evaluate their image or knowledge of what

Witch is, which I can find both uncomfortable and helpful. I struggle describing witchcamp to people. I often say it is like Bible camp for Witches. I describe it as a week of ritual and prayer. I sometimes talk about the self-exploration part of witchcamp. I sometimes get quite defensive when trying to describe witchcamp because it is so important to me and it is so hard to explain to outsiders. Talking to people who are not familiar with Reclaiming or Witchcraft or witchcamp feels quite alienating because it emphasizes for me how I am different from others. [Jizak]

I wear that word proudly although judiciously. I don't think the word is that necessary. There is a difference between effective and ineffective; different from the idea of right and wrong. So whereas I might use Witch on an intellectual level, and should, ought use it – it's ineffective sometimes. Witches have been in hiding for hundreds of years, and I believe, with good reason. We want to change things; we are wild and free, not easily influenced, so we are feared. I have chosen to be a Witch, so I have chosen to live with that, and I do. [Banshee]

Sub-theme: Witches Crafting Change

For the majority of the study participants, effecting personal and social change were important aspects of Witchcraft, and regardless of whether they labeled themselves a Witch, they claimed relevant activities. Banshee was a Witch because she worked to apply her will to change the world: *For a long time, I only tried to change myself. Witchcamp helped me see that being a Witch means I have a strong set of ethics and within that framework, I can exert my will to creating change in the world.* Similarly, Sequoia defined her actions as Witch-like in that she was: *a maker*

of Magic, an agent of both preservation and change. Jax also related being a Witch as: *one who crafts, who bends and shapes both his own life and the world around him.*

Publicly identifying as a Witch outside of witchcamps is seldom simple. While Zevon and Maya admitted to sometimes enjoying: *the shock factor*, Cruz considered how pushing people's buttons helped raise social consciousness: *It becomes this really ambiguous space and I like that. It feels edgier to me than Pagan. Pagan can mean a lot of things but the people I know who call themselves Witches are edgier; like an intentional taking up of space that may or may not be present with a Pagan. It pushes peoples buttons a bit and hopefully not in an overly so way; just enough to make them think.*

For Sig, identifying as a Witch was a barrier to her sense of effectiveness in making change in the world: *I guess I am a Witch by virtue of what I believe and do, and how I look at the world, and what I value. But, it's such a divisive word. I want to use my power as a doctor to make change in the world. If I said I was a Witch, well, any power I might have potentially evaporates. Inside, I'm a Witch and that feels deeply ingrained. I have learned to listen and to pay attention. I guess it's sort of a queer spiritual orientation.*

Summary

Whether one proudly called oneself a Witch, or a Pagan, or chose to stay safely in the broom closet, navigating the dominant culture could be tricky. Similar in some ways to queer culture, participants relied on intuition, experience, and

cautious disclosure to make decisions about who to tell and who not to tell. The fears and costs of coming out could be familial, social, and professional. Some too, experienced the costs of being closeted, denying a part of their identity, as well as having to refrain from sharing profound or critical life experiences. Public discussion of the witchcamp experience sometimes provided the thrill of ‘shock factor’; alternatively disclosure could raise social consciousness about alternative spirituality and beliefs. The effort of explaining witchcamp or Witchcraft to outsiders could be tiresome, but overall, study participants had positive responses to disclosure and told stories that were sometimes sad and sometimes humorous but seldom dangerous. Witchcamps not only provided an annual gathering place and community for those who valued social change and shared an Earth-based philosophy, but also inspired meaning and comfort by enabling a space in which to be open about identity, values, beliefs and alternative spiritual practice.

While chapter four responded to the question of ‘who,’ the next chapter addresses questions of ‘what’ and ‘how’. In chapter five, I discuss the term ‘container’ as used within the witchcamps communities, and describe the main facets of the container. Settings, camp activities, sense of community, and community ethos of witchcamps are presented through participants stated experiences as well as ethnographic observations. I remind the reader that my personal observations and experiences are preceded and followed by three asterisks (***), and presented with an alternate font.

Chapter Five

Theme 2

THE CONTAINER

I really like the container, the community of women, and the wisdom. There is an intention to be conscious and self-aware, awareness of being a part of something bigger, and responsibility to that, and reflection and celebration. It's honouring of the container of the element, of connection to the earth, to others, honouring of sexuality. And mystery; there is an honouring of the mystery, and of Goddesses.
[Pye]

Witchcamp was repeatedly depicted by participants as a container; a container that was separate and apart from ordinary life in the dominant culture. As will be described, 'the container' was considered to be multi-dimensional and sacred. The container provided architecture for community and set the stage for transformation. As introduction and context for this chapter, I begin with a discussion of the term container, and present participants' descriptions and explanations of witchcamp in this regard. The main body of this chapter presents in-depth discussion of the key facets of the container: the setting, the activities, the community, and the ethos of the community. First, I outline the extent to which participants valued the sense of containment provided by a private and natural setting. The activities, the camp model and the key players of witchcamps are then described as they provide structure to the container through the daily workings and experiences of the camps. The theme of community reflects two sub-themes: creating community, and community ethos. Community is reflected in the sense of unity and like-mindedness created in the

container of witchcamp, and through the shared community ethos that supports transformation.

Sub-theme: The Notion of a Container

The notion of witchcamp as a container is entrenched in the vernacular of witchcamp culture. The term container was used by participants in a variety of ways, but generally seemed to refer to the creation and delineation of sacred transformative space. 'Container' was utilized to refer to the multi-dimensional entirety of the space including the physical, social, and experiential space, as well as sense of community, and the transformative intention of a particular process such as a ritual, or the overall experience of a witchcamp. In its totality, the notion of container seemed to refer to separate, contained, community space for the process of personal and social transformation.

While no one I spoke with knew its origins in the witchcamps movement, participants provided a variety of meanings for the term container, including psychological boundaries, safe place, experiential process, and cauldron of consciousness. Nanny suggested that container was an architectural metaphor: *Churches and Temples are containers. We choose to live our Magic out of doors, so we create a container of sacred space to help ourselves focus and feel the community within. We don't rely on architecture, rather the power of our intention.* Tree said that: *a container is like casting a circle; creating a container that holds space, time, and intention; Magical intention; shared intention. We create the energetic space of*

witchcamp. The container has a culture, has its own social norms, its own sense of safety, and a sense of containment.

In philosophical parlance, the container metaphor harkens back to Plato, who famously likened the human mind to a holding-pen where the wildlife of human cognition (thoughts and memories) is kept, broadly restrained, but locally elusive (Fernyhough, 2005). Contemporary use of the term surfaced in the study of group psychology in 1961 in Wilfrid Bion's seminal text, *Experiences in Groups*. In 1977, Christopher Alexander adapted the metaphor to architecture, and established the notion of 'pattern language,' which has since been applied to economics, software design, and to the language of social liberation. While it would be impossible to trace the specific origins of the notion of a container in the witchcamps movement, the pattern language of social liberation seems to be a likely link.

In her research with contemporary Pagans, Pike (2001) used the term container in reference to the belief that the constructed sacred space acts as a 'focalizer' (pp. 50) for the divine energy raised during ritual and the practice of Magic. More recently, the term container has re-emerged on a website called Group Pattern Language, focused on group process as a container for empowered, intentional and conscious transformation. Within Group Pattern Language, the container is defined in a way that fits with the witchcamp sensibility:

The container is the psychological or spiritual space within which a group works. Creating a container is how we create a context to manifest our intention by attending to factors such as emotional safety, individual difference, and physical space, etc. A successful

container not only nurtures creativity, but it increases productivity. Creating a container can perhaps best be thought of in terms of spirit, which doesn't lend itself to definition or specificity. To many, it is the embodiment of the intention and the purpose that was set. A large element of creating a container is attending to the psychic and physical conditions within which the group meets. Failure to attend to the creation of the container leaves openings for potentially disruptive, unconscious processes.

(GroupPatternLanguage.org).

As demonstrated in quotations from participants, the language of witchcamp culture has much in common with Group Pattern Process in that they both reference containment notions such as clear intention, deep listening, flow of energy, holding space, co-creation and consensus. The idiom also reflects some of the language of Margo Adair's book, *Working Inside Out: Tools for Change* (2003) and the related website that explores the intersection of personal change, social change, and spirituality. Similar to the witchcamp philosophy about transformation, Adair refers to the notion of reciprocity of change between that inside the container, with that outside of the container, such that changing one elicits change in the other.

For camp participants, the container of witchcamp was considered sacred space, and it was in sacred space that transformation could occur. At witchcamps, sacred space was generally created through the ritual of casting the circle, whereby a geographical, temporal, and psychological container was defined. The initial circle was formally cast at the opening ritual of camp, and deconstructed at the final ritual.

The rituals of circle casting and deconstructing were repeated throughout witchcamp at paths, rituals, and other gatherings. Intentional transformation was reflected in a proclamation often recited during the ritualized invocation or devocation of sacred space: ‘What happens between the worlds changes the worlds’. The statement reflects the belief that with mindful intention, transformation on one plane of existence is mirrored on other planes. For example, transforming energy in sacred space transforms energy in mundane space. Similarly, transformation on a personal level incites transformation on a social and cultural level, and transforming the unconscious, transforms the conscious, and transforms behaviour. Further, since transformative energy is believed to flow in all directions, the direction of change could flow either way. Thus, intention was critical to effecting change both personally and culturally.

I asked participants to define witchcamp. The following section presents their descriptions and explanations and provides introduction and context for the key facets (setting, activities, community, ethos) that are presented in the main body of this chapter.

Witchcamp is Unique

Most participants recognized witchcamp as a unique experience that provided a multidimensional and transformative experience. In trying to categorize or describe witchcamp, participants referred to other events or activities that had some meaningful point of comparison. In their descriptions, participants talked about activities that reflected spirituality, community, personal growth, leisure, and alternative culture. Rooted in, but not limited to the Reclaiming Tradition of

Witchcraft, witchcamp provided an opportunity to deepen spiritual learning and practice. For a group of people who were often isolated in their politics and lifestyle, and closeted in spiritual practice, witchcamp offered prospects for connection and community. Personal and spiritual growth were valued highly by witchcampers, and ‘*therapy camp*’ was an affectionate moniker frequently used in reference to the experience. Many participants lived alternative lifestyles and shared particular values about environmental and social justice issues. They talked of witchcamp as an ‘antidote to the dominant culture’. Some participants described camp as a vacation, noting elements of escape, restoration, and festival.

Lalla said that she didn’t see witchcamp as a vacation, but as: *an intense opportunity to spend time with other Witches; I just think of it as witchcamp. I don’t think I’d put it in a category. It has a different sense of presence that is unique to witchcamps.*

Tina’s experience is representative of many study participants who identified with witchcamp, or the Reclaiming Tradition, but not with any larger Pagan, Wiccan, or New Age identity: *A couple of years ago, I went to a Pagan workshop. I’d never been to one before. I’ve always just been this kind of Witch, I haven’t come at it from a New Age perspective, or from a Lord and Lady thing, or a Gardnerian thing. The workshop was about Magic in a really banal way: to create wealth. I just couldn’t bare it. It was a very narrow perspective and I’m reluctant to identify myself with that; it was stale and strange and British and weird. People who come to witchcamp, whether they call themselves Witches or not, are drawn to the philosophy. At Vermont Camp, I am in the company of people I can relate to. It*

feels deeper to me. It is grounded spirituality. It's practical work in the world. Tree had a similar experience: I went to a Druidic ceremony; it was loud, involved alcohol, and I didn't connect. It was very different from witchcamp. I didn't dislike the ceremony but it was noticeably different from Wild Ginger rituals. Bruxa said that while she hadn't been to many other Pagan events, she had heard about Wiccanfest, a Pagan Festival in Southern Ontario, and known as the longest running Pagan festival in Canada: I wouldn't go there because of the stories that I've heard. I don't think that I could feel comfortable with the men, because of those stories. Before I was involved with Witch stuff, I went to the women's group at a United Church. I didn't actually join the Church or go to services but I really liked the women's group. It was about being a woman and being spiritual and being into social justice issues.

Muse and Wind also reflected on their experience of Church in trying to define witchcamp:

It reminds me a bit of Church, where you have a parable and you look at it and you ask how it applies to your life and the world in general. [Muse]

I wouldn't be here if I wasn't open to learning new things. I'd be in a Church somewhere. [Wind]

For Patsy, witchcamp was: *a combination of community and spiritual retreat. I enjoy working Magically with others, and I love the community and the shared culture of a witchcamp. Shared culture is extremely relaxing when one is used to being the odd one out for one's beliefs.* Similarly, Cayo summarized how witchcamp evolved into community for her, saying that: *witchcamp was a retreat at first and*

then it felt like going home. Hailey described witchcamps as: gateways for people who are interested in exploring Earth-based spirituality at a more intense and deep level. Camps help forge networks for people of like-mind. We're a bunch of Goddess-worshippers getting together for a week to do ritual; it's dancing and singing under the stars. Getting out in nature. We have lectures, and myths, and Tarot, sometimes astrology.

Witchcamp Is Multidimensional

The following collection of comments demonstrates the importance of the multidimensional aspects of the container, including community, personal transformation, spiritual growth, and shared values:

I do some other witchy stuff, but nothing that could replace witchcamp. The learning is missing, the whole experience of camp, of the elders. [Beastie]

It's like group therapy only the Magic really adds a lot of fuel. For some, it is vacation, some, a spiritual retreat, and others, a workshop. When they leave, they all feel community usually. [Maya]

Witchcamp has a particular flavour of community. It's the ecstatic ritual. It's the particular texture, it is its own food group and a particular way of being. It's very much about embodiment of spirit. [Cruz]

It's a place to articulate and name the way we want the world to be. Witchcamp has been a vision of the way the world could be, unencumbered by certain norms. [Shechi]

Some years, camp has been a deeply spiritual experience; that year we worked with the trees was fabulous. Very few years have I felt that I had to just hold the space. [Tree]

For the majority of study participants, witchcamp was a multidimensional experience. Jax described camp as: *a place that really celebrates being a Witch. It's a celebration, a place where Witches gather and practice Magic. It's a little celebration, a little growth, and consciously creating your life and setting out intentions and stepping in to them. We put energy into visualizing the way that we'd like to see the world. It's having that community and the sharing the roles of cooking meals or even just cleaning up from meals. It's a wonderful supportive community and it's a very creative group of individuals. Sometimes it's art camp; sometimes we play for a week; and in a lot of ways, it's a conference in social justice activism.* Matty used the term 'antidote,' saying that witchcamp was a: *spiritual retreat, workshop, and community. It's a relief from the dominant culture.*

Jizak further articulated the multifaceted nature of witchcamp as a: *break from the pressures of the mundane world. I am focused on my own personal work and community. I feel a sense of freedom from the constraints of everyday life that allows me to open up and really look at myself, and my life. I explore who I am and who I want to be. Witchcamp is a vacation in that someone is cooking and taking care of the essentials much of the time. It is a spiritual retreat because I am focused on connecting with the divine and experiencing spirit without the pressures of daily life. It is a workshop because I am picking up valuable Magical skills that I will use outside of camp as well. It is therapeutic because I look at myself and set goals and*

intentions for what I want in my life and what I want to let go of. The singing and dancing feel like a real celebration and energize me.

Tree's comment summarizes the various dimensions of the camp experience, and I offer it in summary to this section: *People come to camp connected to particular aspects or through various portals. Some via an environmental ethic, some via the sacred myths, stories, theatrics, drama, ritual, and others are drawn to therapy camp.*

Having established the notion of the unique and multidimensional container, I next introduce the key facets of the container: the setting, the activities and key players, the sense of community, and the community ethos.

The Setting

This section presents participants' reflections and discussion of the witchcamp setting as a facet of the overall container. Some people expressed attachment to particular settings, but ultimately, any natural setting seemed to suffice as long as it was private and distinct from ordinary life. Contributing to the sense of containment derived from the setting was the particular beauty of the landscape, a sense of privacy, and the experience of camp as a world apart from the dominant culture.

Nature as Container

According to Pye: *the natural container is excruciatingly important. It doesn't have to be this land. It's just that nature is absolutely important. I wouldn't be here if there was no nature. Any nature would do - mountains, desert, hot spring, anywhere that there is a particular energy of the land.* Similarly, while Stream loved the redwoods and ferns of California WitchCamp, she recognized that: *the*

containment of the community is important. Any place would do: an ocean setting, a river setting, a mountain setting. It's the container, the privacy, being in nature. Anything that would interrupt the trance of it would be too jarring. The redwood forest is a perfect container.

Tina shared two experiences that led her to reconsider the importance of the characteristics of a particular setting, recognizing the importance of the experience that occurred in the setting. After many years of participating in Vermont WitchCamp in late summer, Tina went to visit the Quaker camp setting of Vermont WitchCamp during the winter. She was: *astounded at how different it was when there wasn't a witchcamp there.* It was much smaller and very different than she remembered it. Secondly, after many years of attending only Vermont WitchCamp, she went to Wild Ginger. She'd heard that the setting of Wild Ginger was beautiful and magical and she was disappointed in the less than spectacular setting when she arrived. However: *by the end of Wild Ginger, I was totally in love with the place. Oh my Goddess, the Apple Trees were blooming, and the flower petals were sweet, and the water was so magical. It was gorgeous. I realized that it wasn't just the setting; it's what happens in the setting that makes one fall in love with the setting. We bond to the land through the event.* Those experiences helped Tina realize that her bond to the land was to the whole Earth, and that each setting was just part of the container for that particular camp. She further shared a witchcamp experience where she participated in a: *marriage-to-the-land ceremony*, and understood that although the ceremony took place in the Green Mountains: *the commitment was about the bigger land; the earth, not just that hill in Vermont, but to the whole planet.*

Violet reflected on the reason that a natural setting is an important part of the container: *Witchcamp needs to be out in nature and rustic because that's what my spirituality is. My spirituality is nature. The paved streets and always having to get in a car to go somewhere separates me from other people, from nature, from myself. Being in the elements, and not being in charge of everything and not being able to control everything puts you in your place.* Banshee said that the setting had an enormous impact on her experience, and different settings affected her in different ways: *Tejas WitchCamp is about water, a rushing river, often lots of rain, mud, the stark magic of Texas. California Camp is just so mysterious, with those hollowed-out Cypress trees, the water, the fogs, the chill.* Some participants developed relationships with the particular setting of a camp. Shechi noted that her feelings in response to arrival at the Wild Ginger setting: *triggered a sense of community and a feeling of coming home.* Maebon and Grace offered commentary on how the setting enriched their witchcamp experiences:

That forest is magic. Camp would not be as rich an experience in a location that wasn't beautiful in a natural sense. [Maebon]

FAWC (Free Activist WitchCamp) was on the banks of a stunning alpine lake, and ritual was in a mountain meadow. My spirituality is deeply connected to my connection to nature. The beautiful natural setting and the isolation from the distractions of civilization heighten the experience. [Grace]

Three other participants who had been to a variety of different witchcamps in North America and Europe commented on how the setting had an impact on their experience:

We're Witches, nature is important to us, and nature tells us different things, and provides different sorts of energy, depending upon where we are. There is a different kind of wild magic in windswept Wales, on a permaculture-and-art space, than say, at Loreley, which was at a Belgian castle on the river Meus. [Maya]

The location is very important because the seclusion and the natural beauty of the environment are a big part of my spiritual experience. By being in beautiful places with clean water and big trees I can connect with the world as I am meant to. Being in natural surroundings helps me feel grounded and calm and connected to all beings. I remember the importance of appreciating the Earth. Because the setting is so different from my home in the city, I also feel that otherworldly nature of witchcamp, which helps me feel freer. [Jizak]

The natural, private setting contributed to a sense of containment, and to the experience of witchcamp as a world apart from ordinary life in the dominant culture. The next section discusses activities and key players as the facets that provided structure to the container.

Sub-theme: Activities and Key Players: Providing Structure to the Container

The schedule of events common to witchcamps includes both structured and unstructured activities. This section describes the activities and presents participants' reflections on activities that contributed to the sense of containment, and to transformation. Camps tended to follow a common format that included orientation, pathwork, affinity groups, optional offerings, and large group rituals, each of which is described and discussed below. Also included are reflections about

unstructured, informal activities such as music, theatrics, and playfully irreverent pastimes of camps; all of which contributed to an otherworldly atmosphere. This section of the chapter concludes with a discussion about the impact of organizers, teachers, and ritual priestesses on the witchcamp container.

An activity of witchcamps not mentioned on most marketing materials or camp websites is meetings. Grounded in consensus decision-making processes, witchcamps have meetings. Orientation meetings, community meetings, ritual planning meetings, debriefing meetings, not to mention teacher meetings, organizer meetings, substance-anonymous-recovery meetings, conflict resolution meetings, childcare meetings, and camp evaluation meetings. Meetings provide an opportunity for campers to have a say in camp planning and help establish a sense of ownership for the container and the experience. The first official event of camp is generally an all-camper orientation meeting that acquaints campers with the logistics and schedule, introduces the teachers and organizers, and establishes the mood of the community. Witchcamps are a mix of long-term campers and new campers, so community building is an on-going process at each orientation. Tina, the registrar for Vermont Camp, had compared the registration list from the very first camp with the most recent camp. In discussing how the community had transformed over time, she noted that there were only eight people who had continued to be part of the community since the very first camp. As a result, the community-building activities at the orientation meeting continued to be of primary importance to establishing a strong container.

Activities

This section describes the official activities of witchcamp and explains pathwork, optional offerings, affinity groups, and rituals. For the reader, this section provides significant information and context for understanding activity-related comments made by participants throughout the rest of the chapters.

Pathwork

Each year, camp organizers choose a theme, myth, or story to structure and contain the experience of witchcamp. The story provides a container that structures the content and flow of the rituals, and the activities of ‘pathwork’. ‘Paths’ are a blend of small group process, ritual, and Magical skill development, and are created anew each year by teachers, organizers, and/or community members. Path descriptions and path facilitators or teachers are introduced variously on camp websites, on registration information, and finally at the camp orientation meeting. Campers are expected to choose a path and commit to it for the duration of the camp although path facilitators are sometimes flexible enough to accommodate a mid-week change of interest.

Given the low registration at Dreamweaving Camp, the organizers limited the teaching team to three, and Sophie, Marnie, and Taylor had decided to work together and offered just one path. As a result, the community spent a lot of intense time together, in pathwork as well as in ritual, over the 6-day course of the camp. The first morning of pathwork took place at ‘Carter Shay,’ an enchanting grove in the lower woodland of ‘Diana’s Grove,’ a Witch-run nature sanctuary that was hidden deep in the Ozarks. The ritual space provided enough shade to cool us from the Missouri heat wave. Pathwork involved story telling, small group exercises,

and ritual, all of which led us through an exploration of power. We were introduced to Prometheus, Zeus, and Pandora, and invited to open to the energy of each character. In groups of three, we interviewed each other while in the various character roles then discussed power, and the discussion continued once we were reorganized back into the larger group. I found the exercise somewhat superficial and tedious, but participated enough to support the experience of my threesome, and enjoyed getting to know Sig and Katie better.

In pathwork later that week, we explored the story of the Phoenix rising from the ashes. We paired off and I had a lovely trance experience in which I aspected the Phoenix. 'Aspecting' was introduced by the teacher as an exercise in letting go of ego, moving aside the self, and embodying the spirit of the Phoenix. Aspecting was described as Magical 'technology' (technique) that enabled one to experience the presence of a quality, being, or deity in an embodied, physically manifest way. The intention was to learn about and develop a quality of, in this case, the Phoenix, through embodied exploration, as well as to deepen our relationships with the Mysterious Ones (deity). In aspecting the Phoenix, we were encouraged to explore in ourselves the notions of transformation and rising from the ashes, as well as to ask for wisdom. During the introduction to the aspecting exercise, the inevitable psychological/spiritual 'safety measures' were highlighted by the teachers. We were offered guidelines based on our responsibility being first to ourselves, second to the community, and third to the deity being aspected, in this case, the Phoenix. The teacher led us in a grounding exercise both before and after aspecting, and we were paired such that one person could aspect and the other could play the role of 'tender' or 'wrangler'. The wranglers' job was to witness and debrief the aspecter, as well as to scribe expressed words and actions. We were directed not to prostrate ourselves completely to the deity or to the agenda of the deity, and to create a sign that our wrangler could cue us with, should we have become 'lost' in the experience.

As a skeptic, I am always curious about the rationale and evidence for the 'dangers' of aspecting, and I asked the teachers about the worst-case scenario if one was to remain

occupied by the Phoenix. I found the answer to be vague, and an example of the generalized uncritical acceptance of the harmful power of deity that I have seen at witchcamps. I have wondered whether this dynamic was a carry over from campers' histories with Christianity, and the notion of evil and/or a punitive God. In a later discussion with Cruz, he offered his view that the caution was connected to the: *fear about accessing a part of the self that might not be familiar, or even known*. He suggested that: *if we trust ourselves, then we need not be afraid*.

Violet, my wrangler, witnessed and scribed for me while I aspected the Phoenix. The following is an excerpt from the notes that she made for me: *I have been flying a long time and I see the distant mountains getting closer. I feel sadness, and some acceptance, about facing the fire. I feel peace and spaciousness as I settle on the mountainside with my gifts. Tingles of fear and joy as I wait for the transformation. [She stands, poised for flight]. I see waves pulsing with pleasant surprises. Shadows envelope me and I rock with a sense of fullness, tingling, bursting, bursting forth. Orange, life energy, creative fire, spiraling outward, upward. I rise out of the future, embodied joy, vision from flight. I see the crisp greens of spring, new shoots of birth. Trust and faith while I sit on the egg, nurture it, give it shape. I open to grace and ground myself in grace. I am grace. [She flies]. I shower the world, humanity, with my wings, wings of humility. We can all burn, we all become ash. Accept the fire with love. Embrace the moment. [She holds hands like a cup]. Accept the longing and be at peace with desire*. After Violet and I grounded together, I wrangled and scribed for her, before the morning path work was brought to closure.

Pathwork was considered a core experience of witchcamp. Teachers or organizers that are skilled in group process, community building, and/or Magical practice generally facilitated paths. Depending on the particular approach of each camp, path facilitators could be paid Reclaiming teachers, community members, organizers, or some combination of such. Because paths were created from scratch

each year by various facilitators, and inspired by the theme or story of the year, there were infinite possibilities as to how each path was planned. In this study, participants referred to paths they had been in over the years. References were made to paths entitled: *Challenge of the Goddess, Fire Path, Earth Path, Pixie Path, Youth Path, TranceDance, Trickster Path, Food Magic, Sex Path, Poly Path, Death Path, and the ever-popular, Unpath.*

Unpath, an artifact of resistance to the structured experience, may or may not be facilitated and was offered at some camps as an option for those who wanted to delve into the theme without the structure of teachers and facilitation. Meg, Tina, and Jax expressed appreciation for the Unpath option. Meg liked the sense of freedom it offered, while Tina and her partner used it as an opportunity to design and share a path experience as a couple after a challenging year in their lives. Jax said he felt supported and validated in his choice to use Unpath as a path to self-care.

Study participants identified a number of positive aspects of pathwork. Based on her most recent path experience at Wild Ginger, Pye said she felt: *more motivated to do spell-casting and to become more intentional in the energy that she cast.* Sig's pathwork at Dreamweaving explored: *sacred wounds and opened up a new life perspective.* Maebon said that she valued path for: *being exposed to the ideas and practices of others, and by exploring her inner self.* Crystal appreciated the discussions around: *values and beliefs,* and Wind shared how: *path pushes me to go deeper, to allow spirit. It makes me be honest with myself.* Unique to FAWC was pathwork based on a flexible commitment, rooted in the celebration of anarchy. Unlike most other camps, FAWC campers were not committed to one path and could

change their path as they felt called to do so. Grace expressed appreciation for the flexibility of the FAWC model: *I started out on the priestessing path but after several days, feeling a little overdosed on ritual and journeying, I moved to the wildcrafting path.*

Zevon's comments highlight that pathwork could be profound and transformative: *I've had revelations and epiphanies about myself during path work. I trust the community more than many other people in my life because of the intensity of the pathwork, the shared honesty, and the bonds that get built. My life is richer because of the lessons I've learned in pathwork. I return to camp because I am amazed by the caliber of the people who show up, and by the quality of the pathwork.*

Shechi remembered a path during the year that Wild Ginger was focused on a theme called Trees: *I realized that I'd never look at a tree in the same way again. We sang a chant about the roots and the leaves; well I knew that trees had roots since I was two, but did I think about roots that way? Did I think about leaves that way? Did I see them? Did I appreciate them? No! To say that path was like nature study sounds banal, but I can say I understand the physicality of the world differently.*

Bridey also had a profound path experience at Vermont Camp that provided an opportunity to explore death as part of the cycle of life: *I spent the whole week meditating and being in the underworld with Erishkigal, and came to some incredibly spiritual and profound understandings of what it meant to die, and what it meant to go through the veils and what I'd leave behind and what would be most hard to do.* Nanny had a completely unexpected experience in a path that introduced her to Shamanic breath work: *I had an orgasm in that path! We were doing*

Holotropic breathing with the drumbeat and it just happened. It was fabulous.

Another camper, Stream, also had an insightful experience in Food Path: *It was all about food and the idea of food as Magic; preparation of food as spiritual service. You put the Magic into the food. That idea of relating to food with awareness that this is your one and only real body. Can I make a healthy strong body out of this food? It gives you a different relationship to food and I think that path has profoundly impacted my relationship to food.*

At Wild Ginger, I participated in a path called 'The Power in the Heart of a Witch,' facilitated by Nanny and Bridey. The path was initially planned to be in the local caves, but in order to accommodate a camper with a disability, it was moved to a grove located in the forest on the island. This led to some grumbling by path participants who had made their choice of path based in part on the location. Nanny acknowledged the frustration and disappointment and stated that she too loved the caves and would not always be willing to accommodate the request. Paths were populated by the choice of the participants, based on the introduction provided by the facilitators at the orientation meeting. The Power in the Hearth of the Witch path was popular and had about one-third of the camp involved.

The path opened with a recitation of the *Holy Mother Prayer* as narrated by Nanny:

*Holy Mother in whom I live, breathe, and have my being,
From You all things emerge and unto you all things return
Open my heart this blessed day
Touch my body and my mind
Walk with me through the gates of power
In shadow and starlight
In fire meeting earth
In the winds on the oceans
And the kiss of life.
Blessed be my journey.*

We shared a go-round about why we chose this particular path. Participants stated such reasons as: the name of the path was intriguing, wanting to explore power, having to cross a bridge of flowers to get here, the focus on the Charge of the Goddess, the opportunity for meditation and quiet time, and to learn spell-casting. We chanted together for a short time before moving into small groups where we recited the Charge of the Goddess, explored its meaning, and spent time in group-meditation on the images in the Charge. Back in the large group, we had a discussion about the power in the heart of the Witch and what that meant to each of us. The responses reflected personal growth, love of nature, practical acts in the world, and finding wisdom in compassion. We were then sent off to individually commune with nature and open to an intention to manifest in a year and a day. Not surprisingly, from the depths of my soul arose an intention to complete my dissertation within a year and a day. (I failed, but not dismally, having completed a Frankenstein draft within the time frame.) Gathering again, back at the grove, we sang a lively chant:

*Welcome Sacred Ones
We have been waiting for you,
We are so glad to see you.*

Bridey and Nanny invited us to allow the intention to percolate overnight and to remain open to symbols in nature, and to intuitive knowledge about the intention. The following morning, once again in the shady woodland, we each shared our intention with the group. People shared intentions to: *become a warrior of universal love*, to: *meditate with trees and experience the bigness of life*, to: *understand my fear*, to: *be gentle with myself* and to: *express gratitude daily*, to: *delight in the world*, to: *say no to things that pull me from the soul path*, to: *be aware and observe the earth*, to: *listen*, and to: *float and flow with nature*. A few participants still needed to clarify their intention within themselves, and so continued to percolate.

Given the choice to move into small groups or remain in the large group, we chose the large group as the container in which to share a personal gift that is the power in our own Witch

hearts. Just when we were invited to meditate or journal on how the power in our Witch heart intersected with our intention, rain began to pour from the sky. We quickly moved to a large, open-sided tent by the dining hall. Once settled there, the focus shifted to spellcraft, through people sharing their conceptions of what casting a spell actually meant. As the path unfolded, there appeared to be some tension between the facilitators and it seemed like they were working from different agendas. The tension was friendly and they were transparent in sorting out the problem in front of the group, modeling cooperation, tolerance, and compromise, as well as some crone-like crankiness. The discussion of the art of spell casting was informative and people shared techniques such as personal ritual, creating art and dance, being focused and mindful, creating a psychological shield, binding symbolic materials and artifacts, and even dancing the hokey pokey. There was some discussion about the Wall of Magical Activism that had been created by the dining hall. I had earlier helped build the wall with Brookey and random others as they were inspired to join in the build. We used found wood, bamboo and willow stakes, vines, and jute, and the wall was intended to be an artistic framework to collect up symbols of causes that campers were involved with. Over the course of the camp, people clipped, wove, and tied things to the wall. The wall was discussed as a spell, a physical representation of the communities' intentions to affect positive change in the world. Throughout the discussion, people offered warnings and cautions about the dangers of spell casting. Similar to the cautions offered at Dreamweaving in regard to aspecting, I experienced the discussion as fear-mongering, and again wondered if people's fear was rooted in their religious histories where Witchcraft was considered the work of the Devil.

Art and found nature supplies were provided by the facilitators, and the next thirty minutes of path were spent creating spells or prayer flags to manifest our gifts and our intentions. The final hour was an enchanting and sweetly loving time of singing and chanting, with each of us having an opportunity to step into the centre and receive from the larger group this hauntingly gentle song:

*You are whole
You are Holy
I see you in the shadows
I see you in the light.*

As the path was facilitated to closure, participants wandered to the Wall of Activism and clipped their prayer flags and spells to the Wall.

Optional Offerings

Optional Offerings was the term given to informal mini-workshops offered by camp participants. Scheduled into ‘free-time’ spaces in the camp program, optional offerings were as varied and unique as the camp population and included such things as drumming circles, current topic discussion groups, nature hikes, Magical techniques, or personal ceremonies and rituals such as a hand-fastings, cronings, memorials, and other personal transition rituals. Interestingly, study participants didn’t spontaneously talk about optional offerings, suggesting that that camper-led workshops and educational offerings may have been less important to the overall container and experience of witchcamps.

At Dreamweaving, I participated in a number of interesting camper-led Optional Offerings. Along with Sig, Toader, Wilda, Sophie, and Gwin, I attended an optional offering entitled ‘What’s up with the Bees’? Levi, a man of approximately sixty, sporting a long shaggy white beard, shared his knowledge of bees and it was absolutely fascinating. Levi’s grandfather was a beekeeper and Levi grew up with bees, having his first hive when he was about eight years old. Levi talked knowledgeably and conversationally about bee mythology, as well as the known and imagined history of beekeeping. He was funny and entertaining, weaving knowledge with stories. I learned about African bees, and fake honey, colony

collapse, and how locally pollinated honey can help with pollen-based allergies. I didn't know that Rhododendron honey could be toxic. Levi told us how the entomologists and the beekeepers don't agree on a lot of 'bee science,' and how the scientists were finally coming up with evidence for what the beekeepers had always argued; that bees recognized their beekeeper. Levi told us about his 'Bee Road Show' and how he traveled around America, teaching about bees.

Another delightful Offering involved swimming in The Creek. Unlike creeks that I was familiar with, this Missouri creek was knee to hip deep, and lined with large sharp gravel; the kind that required shoes. The hot sunny afternoon was spent amongst naked women floating on the cool creek, anchored in place in the strong current by holding on to the gravel. Those who didn't swim that day attended a special ritual to say good-bye to the land, as Diana's Grove was on the market to be sold. Later, a Women's Mysteries discussion was offered at the Moonlodge Pavilion, an open-sided building set back in a forested area of the land. Wilda, an academic biologist and naturalist welcomed all genders to the informal discussion. The mid-life age of the group members focused the highly affirming discussion on the mysteries of perimenopause.

Affinity Groups

The concept of Affinity Groups is rooted in the Spanish Civil War of the 1930's, and according to Starhawk's Activism webpage, they have been used with 'amazing success over the last thirty years of feminist, anti-nuclear, animal rights, environmental and social justice movements around the world' (Starhawk, 2010). The flexible and destructured organization of affinity groups included shared leadership and consensus decision-making. The glue of affinity groups was generally common ideology, concern, activity, role, or skill. The ultimate intention was some

degree of constructive social change, while being safe and having fun. Within witchcamps, affinity groups seem to have evolved as emotionally safe containers for small group process where participants were encouraged to process the camp experience within an unfacilitated group of intimates whose role was to listen, without commentary, interruption, or feedback. This listening process was often referred to as 'holding space'. At some camps, affinity groups worked together on breadwork tasks, ritual contributions, and in the week-long camps, affinity groups were afforded an evening opportunity to create and engage in their own private ritual.

Community Rituals

Ecstatic community rituals were regarded as the primary activity that made witchcamps unique. Since Witches and Pagans tend to be geographically dispersed, the opportunity to participate in large group rituals of 50 to 100 people was highly valued. Many participants highlighted ritual as fundamental to the witchcamp container. The comments of study participants suggested that rituals had a variety of meanings and functions, including the induction of altered states of consciousness, numinous experiences, building community, developing ritual arts skills, teaching about diversity, and eco/social justice, as well as providing a container for personal and social transformation and community celebration.

The Reclaiming style of ritual used at witchcamps followed a basic pattern that generally began with a purification rite. Negative energies were cleansed through a variety of Magical techniques. At Wild Ginger, one of the rituals had participants slowly and silently process through a multi-sense portal formed by

camper-priestesses who anointed individuals with fragrant oils, and cleansed their energy by fanning peacock feathers, and gently chiming bells. A rite of grounding, or connecting to the Earth in a spiritual and sometimes physical way, followed purification. Similar to mindfulness meditation, grounding techniques encouraged participants to bring their conscious awareness to the present moment by focusing on the body, or the body of the earth as it presented in that moment. Following the grounding was the creation of sacred space through energetically / metaphorically Casting the Circle to define the space. Next were activities to Honour the Sacred Elements/Directions of Earth/North, Air/East, Fire/South, Water/West, Mystery/Centre. Once the sacred container was established, there was an Invocation of Deity where particular Goddesses, Gods, or other deity were invited to the sacred circle.

The teaching aspect of ritual relied on story telling, theatrics, sacred drama, oratory, group trance, and/or guided interactions that explored the theme, myth, or story of the camp. The main work of any ritual was to communally raise energy for the focus or intention of that ritual and to direct that energy to a transformation of the self or the world (related to the story) that the community had identified as desirable. Dancing, chanting, and singing built a communal harmony of movement and sound that was considered to move energy or forces that manifested transformation in the world. That energy was then re-grounded or reconnected to the earth. The elements and deity were thanked and devoked, the circle opened, and the ritual brought to closure.

During my research, I participated in a ritual that I found particularly moving and powerful. The ritual was structured as a 'station ritual,' where participants traveled from station to station within a defined area. Each station was constructed and located in its corresponding sacred direction, and was set up in a way that invited participants to do something such as complete a task, ask or answer a question, meditate with a focus on an issue or artifact, or engage with another participant in an interactive exercise.

The trance and journey began at the station that represented the Centre/Mystery. We milled about the open meadow, moving from station to station as individually inspired. There was a priestess at each station chanting the trance questions as they related to the particular station. Rosey sat in the center, pulsating the Heartbeat of the Mother on her frame drum. In the altered state of the ritual, I found it truly magical: it was beautiful, moving, and powerful. The intention for that particular ritual was set at the East altar to Air, where we asked the Goddess Brigid for her blessing and support for the gifts in our selves and our lives. The meadow at moonrise was an evocative backdrop to the altars set in each of the sacred directions. In the South was an altar to Fire; a place to explore our gifts. The anvil station was in the North, the direction of Earth, and there, we were asked to consider the challenges or barriers that shaped our gifts. In the West, the Water station provided an opportunity to plunge a fire-heated sword into cold water, demonstrating the shape that our gifts took in the world. We were effortlessly facilitated into rotating pairs as we returned to the Centre, and directed to either share appreciation and gratitude for our gifts with each person with whom we came face to face, or to simply listen and offer non-verbal acceptance and witness. The faces of those I came into contact with were faces of love and connection. Some were obviously uncomfortable accepting appreciation, some cried, even sobbed, and others were challenged to find words. The exercise required intense focus, vulnerable openness, and creativity, and it left me pleasantly fatigued, and overflowing with ecstatic love for the community and the world.

The ritual evolved into a Healing Circle as the rotating pairs were called to encircle the Centre altar of Mystery, while chanting a two-layered chant, weaving the phrases, 'Holding the power, tending the fire; Open our heart and receive the flame,' along with 'This is who I am,' a phrase that had spontaneously arisen in an earlier ritual. As each of us took a turn in the centre to publicly proclaim our gifts through dance, private prayer, poetry, or just saying so, the group held hands and sang the chant. Eventually the energy of the rose to support a gentle cone of power that unfolded with lyrical style dancing and eventually culminated in stillness.

Identifying ritual as a central feature of camp, Lupina reported that she loved the large community rituals: *For me, that is the defining aspect of camp being a spiritual experience. In ritual is where I feel connected to the community and to the Earth and the elements and to my better self.* Similarly, Hecate couldn't imagine camp as a spiritual experience without the rituals: *The creation of community is spiritual, communing with nature is spiritual, the rituals and the ecstatic experiences are spiritual. Ritual is pretty integral though; without the rituals, camp would simply be a series of workshops. Without ritual, it wouldn't be witchcamp. Ritual is what gives camp a container, a structure, a specific form.*

Like most witchcampers, Sequoia only participated in large group rituals once a year, during her pilgrimage to witchcamp. For Sequoia: *witchcamp remains constant, and in most years, it is my only chance to experience the rejuvenating power of ecstatic ritual.* The perspectives of Maya, Tina, and Hailey were shared by most study participants, who identified rituals as a fundamental part of the spiritual experience of camp:

My favourite part is probably the big rituals; rituals and trance. Such power! Powerful to plan, powerful to do, powerful to listen to, and powerful to be part of. [Maya]

The reason I come to camp is for the large group rituals; with people that I really trust, no matter what. Whether the ritual works or not, whether it's good or not. I love ritual. [Tina]

The embodied experience of ritual is the essence of Witchcraft. [Hailey]

As articulated by study participants, the large group rituals had a range of meanings. Rituals created a container of sacred space, built community, altered consciousness, provided an embodied experience, taught ritual arts, articulated a conception for transformation, and raised energy for a shared community vision. Regardless of the specific intention of rituals, they enchanted campers and incited anticipation. Miche observed the energy and excitement that rituals created: *Even though they can be heavy or hard, there is lots of energy and excitement at ritual, especially if there is opportunity to participate.*

Rituals induced an altered state of consciousness, either intentionally or through the generally meditative nature of the ritual arts. Violet's comment about 'the beyond' in the following quotation refers to this altered consciousness, or meditative state known as trance: *Ritual is a container, a structure, a specific form; it's a place where I can go into the beyond and shut down the talky brain and go places that I can't necessarily go otherwise.* Sylvie described: *the energy generated at rituals is very spiritual, in that it makes me feel part of a bigger reality than everyday consciousness and daily human experience.*

As noted about path design, ritual structure and content reflected the intention of the ritual team in conjunction with the particular story or theme of camp. An evening ritual at Dreamweaving continued an exploration of power that had begun in the morning pathwork. I found the ritual a bit humdrum, as I had the pathwork, in part perhaps because of the focus on power, a concept that I had explored deeply both professionally and personally. For some reason, I also had trouble staying focused when engaging with Taylor's trances. Something about her voice, and the dirge of that particular trance, left me drifting away. I suspect that the ritual did not unfold as the teachers hoped but the ending was very pleasant and inspirational. Campers were invited to speak from a place of spiritual empowerment and there was much sharing of love, forgiveness, self-care, and personal boundary setting. I noticed a wide continuum of campers experience, awareness, and relationships with power. The trance ended with all participants repeating in layers: *This is who I am*. The repetitions evolved into a lingering polyphony of layered words, sounds, and voices. The ending was indeed a divine experience.

Throughout the data, campers described various types of rituals, including rites of passage, healing, celebratory, honouring the ancestors, listening to the land, story rituals, magical activism, theatrical rituals, and Goddess honouring rituals. Lalla provided a charming description of a healing ritual that continued over a period of hours: *We sang 'Let the river run through you, Feel the healing waters flow'. We sang while each person went into the centre and was held, massaged, touched... whatever they asked for. It was one of those rituals that felt 'so community'; it was beautiful. People just kept singing and moving back and forth between the centre and the circle. It felt like such a beautiful community.*

Rosey, a camper who had been to over twenty witchcamps in the previous fifteen years described a powerful rituals she had participated in: *It was a night of people listening to the land and then speaking the voice of the land in ritual. We raised a cone of power that was tuneless and wordless. I was never one who got into the whole cone of power thing, but that night I felt and heard the most incredible things through my fellow humans, but from the land.* Sylvie shared a number of ritual experiences that were particularly memorable for her: *Most especially, the spiral dances and building the cone of power. Building a cone of power inside the ruined tower on top of Glastonbury Tor, with May Lavender leading the chant, 'If I Touch You I will Know You'. Our affinity group saluting the new moon with the Artemis chant 'Holy Virgin Huntress'. Doing a ritual with three friends in the Chalice Well Gardens. Shape-shifting into a herd of cows as we walked through the village towards Dundon Hill for an affinity group ritual. And another affinity group ritual on Lollover Hill.*

Beastie recalled a women's mysteries ritual: *One night the men and women separated into groups. The priestess lined seventy or eighty women in chronological order, from sixteen to seventy plus years. It was mind blowing to see those women all lined up. The whole range was phenomenal. Some dressed, some skyclad, or half dressed. It was so phenomenal! A women's' mysteries ritual. Very powerful.* Karen described two rituals that were focused on supporting activism: *At one witchcamp there was a ritual to honour a local community activist. At another, there was a powerful ritual in which the activists vented while the rest of us witnessed.*

The tone of rituals differed greatly and participants described them variously as thought provoking, playful and light-hearted; sweet, painful, or hysterical. Many participants described having ritual experiences that were profound, emotionally moving, transformational, deeply spiritual, and even life changing:

I've had big revelations that change how I live my life and do my work. In ritual, the sacred speaks to me through my subconscious, in trance and shamanic journeying. Camp gives me a whole week of relying on my subconscious mind; so I sink into that, and stay there. [Banshee]

Sometimes during ritual I have a deep experience of the marvels of life, of nature, and insights into my personal life. [Muse]

The most experienced ritual priestesses or facilitators knew that, like any group experience, rituals could be unpredictable, and the ecstatic or numinous experience was sometimes illusive. For some participants, it was a rare experience. Ritual was not always profound; sometimes it was experienced as flat or as a performance, less than spiritually engaging. Miche said that she liked the theatrics but found that the drama-style rituals made her more of an observer than a participant. Rocky described himself as hit or miss with ritual. As such, rituals: *aren't a big part of the camp experience. Sometimes I get a lot out of them; sometimes not much at all; I'd miss them if we didn't do them, but path is more important to me.* Similarly, Shechi said: *sometimes the collective energy is very powerful, and then there are times when it just feels like everybody is humming.*

Cepheus shared an unexpected ritual experience that caused her some distress. *We were asked to release our destructive forces before taking in creative*

forces by vocalizing all the destruction within us, all the pain. We were walking around in a circle while two priestesses stood in the middle and embodied the deity that we were working with. People were walking around the circle and just shrieking and howling and screaming. It was an unearthly cavalcade of pain and grief. I didn't know how to protect myself and ended up feeling like I took it all in.

A compelling ritual occurred at Wild Ginger on the second night of camp. Groups of campers had been recruited earlier in the day to call in the dark side of the elements, with the intention to highlight the environmental devastation that affects the Earth, the Air, the Fire, and the Water in the name of progress. It was a powerful invocation and set the stage for the experience that followed. As the ritual priestesses dramatized Amaterasu abandoning the Earth by entering her cave, the campfire tenders, almost invisibly, suddenly doused the huge roaring fire with buckets of water. Poof! The light was gone, the fire pit devastated, and ugly smoke billowed upwards, creating its own cone of devastation. A horrified silence settled on the ritual as participants took in the scene. We were called to gather in small groups and to express our horror and grief about the aquifer, the Gulf oil spill, and other local and global environmental distresses, and to express the feelings through sound and movement. The ritual was brought to closure and campers were left to process the experience over night.

Of course, ritual didn't always provide deep and profound spiritual experiences, and some participants described their disappointment. Muse laughed about her naïve disillusionment during her very first witchcamp: *I was so disappointed that there wasn't an actual raft to take us to Avalon; I guess I hoped for more than just metaphor.* Hecate too: *I was kind of terrified the first time I went to witchcamp because I was a fairly new Witch at that time and thought, what if I go*

there and all these people are able to do real Magic? Jax told how ritual could be: somewhat boring. He conveyed disappointment in the Saturday night Wild Ginger ritual: The ritual was really vibrant and was full of joy and playful flamboyant energy, but wasn't an energy that I was able to connect with. Rocky described: moments of discomfort in ritual; when one has to look at one's shadow. I sometimes see myself in ways that I'm not comfortable with.

Ritual facilitation is an artful skill and witchcamps provided an opportunity for participants to develop their ritual arts. As is highlighted in the statements of Maebon and Grace, rituals sometimes revealed the learning curve of the facilitators:

There have been times where I felt the ritual was done without a lot of intention. There are times when people aren't engaged and it feels sloppy for want of a better word. We are inviting energy and spirits and I like to think someone has a handle on that. [Maebon]

The structural openness of the co-created rituals sometimes had people drawing attention to themselves, and away from the ritual. During one serious ritual during a moment of silence, some people were running around the circle screaming and dancing. I'm all for anarchy but that was distracting. [Grace]

Muse spoke to the inclusive and feminist stance of the Reclaiming tradition that permeated witchcamps: *Ritual is a place where we are all humans on a spiritual journey. We are human beings first. In many religions, women can't have a direct connection to divine energy. Women can't even be priests in many religions and here it doesn't matter if you're straight or gay or male or trans or female. In ritual,*

none of it matters, not sex or gender or straight or queer or skin colour or language. If you have a clear intention and you want to be incorporated into creating the ritual, you are welcomed and empowered.

Maya's comment below suggests an interesting and unfortunate twist on diversity from a European camp whose community was made up of people with a variety of first languages: *Many people here feel that English is their sacred language, simply because so many rituals have been facilitated by English-speaking Reclaiming teachers.* Sylvie's experience of American teachers at European WitchCamps was perhaps less than sacred: *I can't always understand American voices, vocabulary, and cultural references.*

Large group rituals were a place to learn and practice ritual arts and some participants reflected on the facilitation and priestessing of the rituals. Camp is a place that helped Shechi: *think about, honour, and design ritual.* Camps varied in how they put together a teaching team for their camp each year. Some camps hired a team of highly skilled Reclaiming-trained teachers to facilitate rituals and teach pathwork, while other camps supported members of their community in developing their priestess and ritual art skills. Yet other camps brought in one or two teachers to act as resources to their homegrown teaching team. It was not unusual for a camp to have a ritual facilitation team who, prior to camp, may have only met briefly, or talked via the Internet. The particular skill set, talents, and harmony of the facilitation group/teaching team/priestesses affected the ritual container through tone, flow, participation levels, numinous experience, sense of community, and inclusivity. Grace remembered her first witchcamp as similar to a boot camp: *Ten*

days of ritual after ritual after ritual. It made witchcamp a spiritual boot camp in a sense. By the end of camp, I felt very comfortable with public ritual and the basics of ritual structure. However, like boot camp, it was intense and I was exhausted.

At least one camp, Free Cascadia WitchCamp encouraged the unplanned, leaderless co-creation of ritual by whoever showed up. Within the witchcamps movement, a strategy of inter-camp collaboration had been initiated and was colloquially referred to as ‘cross-pollination,’ where skilled resource people were exchanged or seconded between camps. Hailey considered the advantages and disadvantages of using highly skilled Reclaiming teachers or campers in the creation of camp and rituals: *When you’ve got a core group of eight or ten or twelve highly skilled priestesses, you’ve got a wide variety of skills- dancing, drumming, singing, story-telling, trance, large group facilitation. You just know that something fabulous is going to happen and it’s going to be executed impeccably. If the facilitators know each other well, the relationships are more intimate, deeper, more connected. You get to know who the good drummers are, and who sings well; you build up a history of the most effective way to teach a chant and what kinds of chants are most effective for producing certain kinds of numinous experiences in ritual. Over time, the team can learn different trance techniques, and how to shift a ritual from story to movement. The sacrifice is sometimes less community involvement in the planning stages of the ritual.*

Co-creating rituals within a community group, or even in the whole community can bring a lot of competing agendas and different kinds of mishmash styles, and sometimes that works really well, but not always! Sometimes, rituals that

are created by the community end up being more static: we've got this plan, and this is how it will be executed and during the ritual there is little room to be spontaneous. Everyone gets to do their thing, but sometimes there is a loss of flow with the energy of the large group. Muse's comment expands on Hailey's notion and offers a different perspective: It is harder and more time-consuming to include campers in the planning and execution of ritual, but I think it makes camp richer and shares the effort.

Participants shared what they considered the highlights of ritual and mentioned being in nature, having a large fire, the sensuality of the experience, drumming, chanting, dancing, community, the shared leadership model, ecstatic altered states, shared sacred community intention, and humour. Tina articulated her favourite things about ritual: *The best of camp is having ritual together, trance together. It's very bonding. It's definitely the community piece with Magic and ritual and drumming and music and fires; the sensuality of it is incredible. The closing ritual is always so intense; after a week together, there is just so much love in the ritual.*

Whether playful or deeply serious, witchcamp rituals appeared to be the primary attraction for participants, and were considered, overall, as unique, core, and fundamental to the experience of witchcamp. Rituals helped create a sense of community and offered an opportunity for the community to be visible to itself, and to positively affirm itself as distinct from the dominant culture. Rituals also provided a forum for teaching/learning, and acted as a tool for altering consciousness and inviting the ecstatic experience. Further, rituals

provided a container for setting intention for transformation to affect the dominant culture. Through active engagement in the ritual, personal and social transformation was articulated, embodied, affirmed, and celebrated.

Having described the activities that provide the structure to the container of witchcamp, I next present the unplanned and creative activities that embellish and adorn the experience. It was often the music, theatre, play, and irreverence that gave the camp a carnivalesque or mystical distinction, and helped create the important sense of being outside of ordinary life in the dominant culture.

Informal Activities

Perhaps because I am not naturally musically inclined, I didn't ask participants about music in the initial interviews. However, it quickly became clear that the music of witchcamp held special meaning for participants. This shouldn't surprise me since it was at witchcamp in Vermont that I learned to drum. Having never made it past the recorder in public school, learning to drum was an unexpected and transformative experience for me. Like me, and many other campers, Karen and Lalla learned to drum at witchcamp. Karen said that someone showed her: *the basic drum strokes and it was the beginning of a passion for drumming*. Lalla jubilantly proclaimed her love of the music at camp: *I love it I love it I love it! I love the music, the drumming the chants. I started drumming this year. I just happened to sit beside a woman who teaches drumming and she taught me some basics. I loved the chanting and drumming. It's a powerful way to be in community together*.

Drums have played a primary part in shamanic and ecstatic rituals across time and cultures (Eliade, 1964), and witchcamp was no exception. As the following

comments illustrate, drumming, chanting and other musical expression was integral to the witchcamp experience, and many participants talked passionately about how music contributed to building community, to heightening the altered state, and to enhancing the spiritual experience. Lupina said that: *the music, the drumming, the chants are what bring the directions and the elements alive.* Jizak described that: *the singing and dancing feel like a real celebration to me and energize me.* Rocky declared that: *the music and the dancing and the chanting are integral,* saying that it was one of the draws for him. He described a path experience: *In our path today, I really wanted to keep hearing the chant when I was in the middle of the circle. The chanting, the drums, it is a huge gift and makes the experience really special.* Bruxa recalled some particularly memorable moments: *I remember at Wild Ginger, after the Saturday night ritual, we were drumming and singing until two or three in the morning. It was a full moon, and heading back to our cabin, song drunk, was a high point. Another time, we were doing our breakfast breadwork and we decided to have fun, so we sang to people as we dished out the food. I don't sing enough in my regular life and I'm actually quite shy about singing.*

Some of the more skilled and experienced musicians provided a deeper analysis of the music at witchcamps. Midge compared her experience of ritual music to that of the orchestra: *When I was in an orchestra, I sat in the middle and was always surrounded by the sound. In a concerto, there is energy and it goes up and down and up and down and winds and winds to a conclusion; a resolution that often lets the energy out gently, bit by bit until it's finished. When we drum and raise a cone of power in ritual, I can feel the energy rising. It's palpable. It moves and*

moves and moves. Cepheus reported that she had studied anthropology of music: I'm a Jembe teacher and I teach music therapy. The synthesis of music in Pagan culture is something to be noted. African drumming synthesized with a Chinese mandolin and a Celtic Harp! I love the improv that happens; someone on a citar, a tamborine, a vocal, a Rumi poem, a body dance. Nothing moves me the way ritual music does. It helps people be part of the community. It's so accepting; you can do things you wouldn't normally do and it's welcomed. Music is a wonderful facilitator of community.

Also an accomplished classically-trained musician, Rosey told how she had moved from frustration to gratitude as she found her way into the music of camp: *I got to meet drums at camp. I love it and it's been exciting and fun and I'm grateful when I get to drum at camp. At some camps, they really tightly control who gets to drum, and in which context, and I always feel sad and left out and frustrated by that. I have a very soprano baroque sort of voice, and I can't find a space for that at camp. I'm always thrilled when I get to drum a lot or chants work out with my voice so that I get to sing.* In her organizing role at Wild Ginger, Muse said that she spent: *hours and hours finding music that fit the theme. The chants and songs add so much to rituals and it's important that they are appropriate and enrich the experience. Music is my spirituality. The music brings me joy. It's a high, an altered state that you get with the music. I still get an otherworldly sense of wonder and community when we chant together in ritual.* Finally, Jax commented on the highly creative and talented people that he'd met at camps: *I'm a musician and I really love the music at camp. I love to see it, to hear it coming together. We do a lot of drumming and*

chanting, and I wish we could better organize the other talents that we have at Wild Ginger. There is such talent within the community; I love what Vermont does with their Bardic talent night.

Creative arts, sacred drama, theatrics, pageantry, and performance are woven into the tapestry of witchcamp through ritual, pathwork, and sometimes, as noted above, through a bardic or talent show. A vending area is set up where participants who are artisans and crafts people can vend their wares. A raffle or silent auction collects pieces of art and jewelry that might be otherwise found in a high-end gallery or a neighbourhood garage sale. The funds raised are for scholarships that help offset costs for those who are not able to pay the full fee of camp. Registration fees vary from camp to camp, based on length of camp, and costs related to teachers and food/accommodation. A review of witchcamp websites suggested that the all-inclusive fees range from \$225.00 to \$800.00. Most camps provide fee reductions through work exchange, scholarship, or sliding scale. As noted by Matty: *scholarships and work exchange are part of the effort to be inclusive.*

A talent show or bardic-style ritual as mentioned earlier by Jax, sometimes showcased the performance talents of the highly creative communities. For a few short hours the camp was entertained by singers, musicians, stand-up comedians, storytellers, dancers, camp jesters, poets, acrobats, stilt-walkers, and mimes; whatever the particular gifts each camper had to offer. Karen shared some of her: *pleasant snapshot memories. My introduction to poet Lorna Crozier was someone reciting her piece, The Carrots are Fucking the Earth. And a hilarious rendition of The Three Bears was performed by an affinity group. Also hilarious was people*

creating performances based on their partners. Starhawk and Donna Read telling a story. Such creative, funny, poignant talent-show offerings. Having recently returned from California WitchCamp, Stream reflected on the theatrics of camp: It's all very playful and theatrical. I like the theatrics. I love the costumes and the pageantry, the dressing up, the makeup. People from San Francisco go wild with costumes. They took hours dressing for ritual and helped me put on my makeup. You know, camp is so heavy and so big. You process it for such a long time after you leave. The richness of the experience is endless. I still dream it; I am still looking at the artifacts, the clothing, the stuff. It's just a garment, but when I had it on, I was between the worlds. The theatre is so real, the theatre part is profoundly moving.

In line with the theme of camp, Dreamweaving organizers created a gift fair instead of the standard talent night. In a very large, covered, open sided barn of sorts, campers offered alternative healing, tarot card readings, and even knitting lessons. A few craft items were set up in a silent auction and people enthusiastically engaged in bidding wars. A number of people bid on items for others who didn't have the funds to participate. Levi told stories, Sophie danced a sensual belly dance, and Toader showed us how he could transform his double-jointed limbs. Taylor recited Shakespeare, and Andrea appeared in the darkness outside of the barn doing a hypnotic fire-stick dance. Finally, disc jockey Danno provided music for a 'Sweat Your Prayers' style trance dance on the deck of the open-sided barn. I danced for three hours non-stop. It was delightful, but only made possible by the nap taken during the earlier afternoon of repose.

Patsy, a multi-talented painter, silversmith, and weaver, shared her experience of facilitating and weaving a community project over the duration of a

witchcamp. She set up her loom on a grassy slope overlooking a valley, away from the busy areas, but close enough to be inviting: *It was great to have everyone in camp come and weave a few rows into the Magic Carpet. I loved seeing them catch on to how weaving worked, and feel like they were a part of the Magical item we were making together. Weaving is so meditative, especially once you are familiar with the pattern changes; it's easy to fall into a trance state with it. Spinning and weaving Magics are very, very old women's Magics, and I use them often.*

Sequoia expressed her love of: *the pomp and spectacle. Participation in nightly ritual fulfils my longing for a different, more theatrical bent to my spiritual expression. Art as spirituality is very important to me, and the pageantry of camp rituals fills that need.* Miche credited the theatrics of ritual as enabling her to: *feel the power and the energy.* She also noted that while the drama and theatrics contributed to the intensity of it all, she also found herself in ritual as: *more of an observer than a participant.* For Shechi, noticing the theatrics of ritual was something that happened when she was not having a spiritual experience. At those times, she experienced ritual as: *nice, but performance more than anything else.* Bruxa, on the other hand said that she would: *like to see more drama and costume and theatrics and elaborate stuff like that; more performance.* She said that she valued the combination of popular theatre and popular education to: *focus on social justice issues.*

Lupina voiced that the theatrics of ritual contributed to the altered state experience of: *being between the worlds. I adore the costumes and the sense of performance and playfulness that make ritual special. Those things contribute to trance.* Lalla, who was once part of a theatre troupe, noticed variation in the extent

to which different camps dressed for ritual. At Spiral Heart: *people are really into it and people bring a separate tent just for clothes, accessories, and costumes.* At Wild Ginger, she had had what she described as: *the funny and interesting experience of feeling overdressed at ritual.* She said that she loved to: *dress specifically, for an element, or for the ritual theme. It helps me be fully into the experience.*

The creativity and theatrics of ritual, also facilitated transformative personal growth in pathwork, as described by Cayo and Jax:

We used play and sacred drama. It's incredible how much I have learned about myself in a week between the worlds. I love love love the fun, the irreverence, the talent show. I have had more fun at camp than anywhere else. Ever. [Cayo]

Each new Magical tool that I've learned over the past five years has given me tremendous insight into my evolving identity and how to stay balanced. Recently, we used a tool called Theatre of the Oppressed. It helped clarify my work in the world. What are the things that block me, or hold me in place? What are my essential truths and what are illusions and how do I separate the two? Using this tool of theatre allowed me to realize that there is always a value judgment being placed on truth and on illusion. I realized that the truth can hold me back as much as lies. It has helped me to improve the way that I connect to the world and the people around me. [Jax]

Witchcamp people were proud of their ability to be solemnly reverent and delightfully irreverent at one time. Parallel to what happened during witchcamp, irreverence, play, and laughter spontaneously surfaced in many of the interviews,

and some participants talked of sacred clowns and sacred jesters. Tina described how she had sometimes found herself: *hysterical at ritual. I laugh so hard I fall down. I love that we have such a sense of humour about stuff. Both the way we take things deeply, deeply seriously and at the same time, not at all.* Beastie also discussed the irreverence: *witchcamp can be so witchy and irreverent. It brings up play, you laugh at yourself and the rest of the world. Meanwhile, you are doing deep and profound work that enriches your life. At one path, they were walking around crying and sobbing. Our path was laughing and playing all day. It's all about accessing the various levels of consciousness, isn't it? Just learning to let go and have fun; to play.* Similarly, Tree described: *the play at camp is lots of fun. I like that people play at camp. Maybe people are more authentic so give themselves permission to play; permission to go skinny-dipping; permission to express playful sexual energy. Everything becomes intense – play, trance, sexual energy.*

Maebon said that she likely: *couldn't relate if it wasn't for the zany, out-there kind of energy and humour that happens at camp. I just feel like I am with my people at camp; there's nothing like it in my mundane world. I can say what I want to say, be open, freer in myself expression.* Stream told stories of the various ways that she has found witchcamp: *so playful. On my sixtieth birthday, we had a topless fashion show, of which I was the star! We also had a sacred pie fight. And we played a game called Werewolf. It starts late at night, after the last ritual and dessert. There was howling and laughter, and each night I'd say I have to go to bed early, but couldn't do it!*

Hailey described how the fun of witchcamp was related to life's basics: *Camp is such fun. You get to eat yummy food, and hang out at the creek, or the lake, or the pond, or the meadow, and sing and dance and go to ritual. You can have sex with wonderful people. It's all fun. Witchcamp makes these things sacred. Mundane things and fun things become sacred. The things that make life worth living.* Hecate reflected on the playfulness of camp as something sacred: *It's fun. The playfulness, the humourous people, a willingness to try things; to just play; it's a kind of spiritual play, sacred play.* Lalla said that camp invited playfulness: *People are willing to be open and free.* For Edie, camp was a space in which she could express her: *playful, creative, and artistic self. I sign up to play.*

As: *somebody who takes it all very seriously*, Rosey expressed ambivalence about the overlay of irreverence and spirituality: *This is spiritual work, Magical work, and should be integrating. Personal work for me is fun. Sometimes I get a bit annoyed if people are too focused on whoo hoo fun. Camp has a sense of enchantment; we are enchanted with each other, with our activities, with the land, and I find that fun. It's an enlivening kind of enchantment.* Bruxa and Tina also struggled with the juxtaposition of mirth and reverence. Bruxa said that the sense of playfulness both pleased and annoyed her. Tina recalled when: *Ali and I had a big huge fight about people laughing on the sidelines of ritual. I was really pissed off at her. She says that the messing around and laughing is about sacred clowning. I think it's about uncomfortableness, and some sort of unwillingness, and partly about people thinking that they could do ritual better.*

The second element that provides structure to the container is the key players; the organizers, the teachers, and others who offer leadership.

Key Players

WitchCamp Council is an organizational body that emerged in recent years to function as a networking and development vehicle for individual camps. According to their website, the Council is a collection of representatives from member camps, and exists to serve and tend the web of witchcamps through oversight, coordination, and development. The Council supports the evolving diversity and uniqueness of local camps and while it functions to collect and share the knowledge and resources of the camps, it plays a minimal role in local camp policy (WitchCamp.org).

Each witchcamp within the Reclaiming web is autonomous in its organization, format, content, and teacher selection process. As witchcamps germinated and developed locally and organically, each has evolved its own variation of the prototypical model. The local camp model, organizer personalities, and related planning of activities, as reported by participants, had an impact on the container of each camp. Local organizers had a powerful impact on the structure and culture of their camp. Study participants had varying levels of awareness about what was involved in organizing camps, from naïve and unrealistic expectations to positive appreciations. Campers and organizers shared their perspectives on the role of organizers in building community, welcoming campers, and managing tensions that arose during the camp. Organizing a camp is a lot of work and some people got involved in organizing as a service or calling, while for others, it was simply a

strategy to make camp financially affordable by exchanging work for registration costs. Whether the organizing group was small (1 – 3) or large (15 or more), the responsibility of organizing came with power, and campers commented on how this sometimes played out in the community. Overall, there was a tremendous amount of support and appreciation for those who organized witchcamps.

Bree trusted that: *those who are called to create the experiences must be doing things in exactly the way they feel called. If I were called to be involved in the planning or organization, I would have input about some structures. Not having that calling, I appreciate the inspiration and work of those who do.* Both Patsy and Beastie had, at times, been organizers of witchcamps. Recognizing the responsibilities of organizers, Patsy commented on the organizers as part of the container: *the organizers are a huge part of what gives a particular camp its energetic tone. It is they who decide on the story, lay out the arc, create most of the ritual, plan the paths, make the props, do the registration, and make it happen. All of these things set the tone.* Beastie said that: *most camps aren't done professionally; it's all about what people give and you can't fault people for giving as much as they can give. It bothers me when people complain about camp. We're a community putting it together for ourselves and people shouldn't complain. I haven't done any organizing in a long time but I know what it takes. It was phenomenal to me, the things that came up, the issues we were bombarded with. My hat is off to anyone who organizes!*

Lalla shared her disappointing experience of working with a group of teachers and organizers in planning a witchcamp: *The teachers were too full of*

themselves. They thought the camp was so lucky to have them and that the community didn't know anything about ritual. They said they were shocked at how unskilled the campers were. They presented this idea that you aren't really a Witch until you have had whatever training they'd had. It was a weird sort of hierarchy of teachers and I'd not run into that at a witchcamp before. There were a couple of rituals that were just a performance – to show all the tricks that the teachers could perform. I wasn't engaged; I was observing. There was no openness for participation; you were either performing the ritual, or you were watching. It was very disappointing, and I don't think I'll return to that camp.

Given the overall demographic of women, and the celebration of Goddess that camps offered, it was not surprising that most witchcamp organizers were women. A number of campers commented on the importance of the powerful role models that organizers provided through their leadership roles. Shechi observed that: *this is one of the few settings where I am surrounded by strong, smart, powerful women. Feisty, tough and powerful but no one is afraid of them. Powerful women are not seen as bitches; just strong and sometimes really firm. And I love that because it's true power and seen as a positive thing that helps the world go better as opposed to a manipulative tool for aggrandizement or manipulation. And it's usually in the service of people not getting hurt; women exercising power to create a better, safer place.*

Some organizers were aware of and intentional about their role in creating community. As an organizer, Cruz said he tried: *to create community; that is what camp is about. As an organizer, I notice people who are sitting by themselves. If*

they are people I don't know, I'll especially make a point of checking in with them.

Cruz also demonstrated awareness of his organizing role to manage and mediate tensions that arise at camp: *I've seen small frictions and I find those issues useful. It gives everyone a chance to see how they feel and what they value and what they are willing to do to live their values. As an organizer I try to engage in tensions by having conversation. I just dialogue about how it feels different and the same, and encourage campers to be open to the experience together. It's about asking questions and trying to generate curiosity and openness about differences. Offering a tool for exploration.*

At some camps, the growing pains of transforming witchcamps from adult-only summer intensives to all-ages communities were described as explosive, divisive, and painful. Daphne talked about how challenging it was for Vermont Camp to evolve from an adult only intensive camp to an all-ages community camp that included children: *I was an organizer at Vermont when we went through the process of opening the camp to kids. It was traumatic and it was the end of my being an organizer there. Sig said that she had: seen people who don't feel included or aren't participating, or seem to be challenging, or questioning things. Sometimes, maybe they just want someone to rescue them. All kinds of myths can be created about camp. I try not to worry about it and just try to address it as organizers at the beginning. We just say that everyone is responsible for their own experience. Cruz shared how: talking to organizers from other camps has definitely given me a broader perspective. Here's the challenge that we have at our camp and here's how*

we address it and that collective sharing of knowledge was good. Somehow it made our small organizing group bigger.

Being an organizer of witchcamp required commitment, time, energy, and responsibility. The pay off for the organizers I spoke to was service, reduced costs, and a sense of community. Sig, Cruz, Muse, and Tina shared their motivations for organizing:

Witchcamp is somewhere between a retreat and service. This has been my container; my entire circle of friends and support after I separated and moved across the country. There was a time when this was the only consistent thing in my life, so camp played an important role, both with support and growth. That's why I decided to become an organizer. It's a lot of work as an organizer and usually in Winter, when we are planning and preparing, I'm always kicking myself for agreeing to organize. Organizing witchcamp mostly interferes with my regular life. [Sig]

The reason that I became an organizer was because of the personal transformation and higher self work that I gained as a camper. It is the sort of thing that I wanted to steward and to make happen for others, to provide the opportunity to engage that. It's an important resource that needs stewarding. It's different to come to camp as an organizer; I'm certainly participating and contributing, but holding it in a different way. [Cruz]

As an organizer, I have developed consensus-based decision making skills and I've developed ritual skills. Deeper skills. Being an organizer gives me a lot of freedom to develop ritual arts, and knowledge, and leading trances. [Tina]

I choose to be an organizer partly to help defray the cost of camp, but lately, the rituals just feel like a lot of work. The deep Magic that others seem to experience has escaped me. [Muse]

The service, work, and responsibility of organizing witchcamp go hand-in-hand with power, and a few campers expressed either concern, or incredible expectations. Shechi noted: *the sheer number of organizers at Wild Ginger means that they have a lot of power at camp. Shared power, but also unacknowledged power. There are about twenty of them; one-fifth of the camp with various levels of involvement and engagement.* Sequoia found it difficult to find a place for her beliefs at her local camp because: *the overpowering supernaturalistic beliefs of our camp's organizers have created a sort of fundamentalism that I can't reconcile with my own beliefs. It doesn't even seem okay to express my different beliefs.* Similarly, at another camp, Muse noticed that: *some organizers believe that there is one right way for some spiritual practices, such as aspecting, priestessing, and leading a trance. This clash undermines my assurance as a priestess and my self-respect falters under these oppressive conditions. A sense of hierarchy diminishes my sense of personal empowerment. Campers miss opportunities to grow and develop skills because they think that the teachers and organizers have a right way. They are less involved because they don't want to risk looking amateur.* Lupina was not a lone voice in her reference to a camp that had: *one very bossy woman, personality challenged, involved in the organizing of camp. She gets in the way of some people coming to that camp. I worry about a lack of new organizers, resource people, and teachers. Without fresh perspectives, we are at risk of becoming institutionalized and*

our beliefs and structures becoming sacred and dogmatic. Another camper, Stream, also described problems with a: *domineering organizer; someone who was pretty real and gets a lot of stuff projected on her.* As someone who liked to sit back and watch, Miche described herself as *a good observer; I can see who is in and who isn't, and who has power. I don't know if the organizers are conscious of their role and impact sometimes.*

As has been shown, structured and unstructured activities are woven together to shape the container for the witchcamp experience. Orientation, pathwork, affinity groups, and rituals organized the experience, contributed to the structure of the container, and set the stage for potential transformation. Music, theatrics, and play had a role in creating the dramatic and carnivalesque atmosphere, while organizers and teachers had an impact on structure as well as community building.

Thus far, the important elements of the overall container and experience of witchcamp have been identified as the setting, the activities, and the key players. However, the container ultimately provided architecture for community, discussed next, and sets the stage for the transformations highlighted in chapter six. Thus, the next facets of the container to be discussed are the sub-themes of community and community ethos. Community was reflected in the sense of unity and like-mindedness created at camps, and is contained in a shared ethos that supported transformation.

Sub-theme: Creating Community

The experience of community was valued highly by participants and most had a lot to say about it. This section highlights the notion of community as container for relief from the dominant culture and presents the structural and experiential factors related to participants' sense of community at witchcamps. The community ethos that characterized witchcamps and contributed to transformation is described through discussion of the alternative beliefs and values that guided the experience. Shechi stated that: *time building community is never wasted time; it creates a strong container for everything that follows*. She recognized the challenge: *for organizers to create a container for the community*. Muse described the: *community as a container that acts as a shield against the dominant culture*. She went on to say that: *within the containment of ritual and community space, we feel aligned with other campers who share an affinity for the Earth and the Goddess. The container binds us to others, shaping our community, and encloses group awareness and concern for the earth, for life*.

For Pye, witchcamp was: *a place where we are one; we are here for community. For me, that's the best part about this, that feeling of oneness*. Crystal described the community as: *seamless synergy. I have tried my best to be the kind of person I want to have around me and to help change the world. When I came to witchcamp for the first time, it changed everything for me. At camp, we are secluded in a way that it becomes its own world or community*. Cayo had a similar experience: *Camp always felt like I was in the right place; they were my people. This*

was my place. I liked being a part of witchcamp and I think it helps us connect to others, better, sooner, deeper.

Community Through Ritual

Rituals provided a container where community was built and community skills were taught. The following comment by Bridey revealed an instance of how witchcamps used ritual to teach community skills to participants: *At Vermont this year, Alistair did this lovely thing during the first ritual. He talked about how we are all participants in the ritual; none of us are observers. If the ritual isn't working for you, you don't sit back and criticize. You do what you need to do to help the energy along, to make the ritual work. If you can't do that, then you can withdraw quietly and don't interfere with others' experiences.* Cruz and Maya shared their experiences of community in the ritual setting:

The nightly ritual is very celebratory and being able to look around and see a bunch of radiant Witches, fully out and proud; there is something very festive about that. And it's not always like a smiley, happy festival, but like a celebration of being a Witch in spite of the larger culture. [Cruz]

It turned out to be one of the most transformational experiences ever. I felt enormous power and Magic in creating ritual with fifty other people. I saw who my community here in Europe could be. [Maya]

'The Spiral Dance' was a favourite community-building aspect of ritual for witchcampers. Created in 1969 in San Francisco, the spiral dance emphasized community and the cycle of life/death/rebirth, and is thought to raise and focus powerful community energy. It has been part of the Reclaiming tradition almost

since its inception, and in present-day San Francisco, often engages thousands of people. Holding hands, but without completely closing the circle, members of the community followed the dance leader in a widdershins direction (counter-clockwise) using a grapevine or shuffle step. As the leader neared the point of closing the circle, she turned inward, and led the group back along itself, face to face with the rest of the dancers. Continuing in this way, the line of dancers moved along a spiral formation, with each dancer eventually coming face to face with every other dancer. The dance was generally supported by drums and a euphonious chant, and generally involved the whole camp as part of a ritual.

Lalla described her spiral dance experience at Spiral Heart WitchCamp: *Ritual is one of many tools that we use to facilitate ourselves into a spiritual experience. I've had intense experiences in ritual. It's a tool like Tarot cards, walking in nature, or sitting in group-meditation. I've been in rituals where I've felt fully connected to every single person there. I love the spiral dance in ritual. I love when we look in each other's eyes. There are always people who don't make eye contact, or who remain distant, but then I just hold space; I look at them anyway and continue on. At my last camp, at the last ritual, it was such a community-enhancing thing. We were reminded to go slow, so people took the time to really look at each other.* Hailey credited the experience of the spiral dance with provoking her engagement with witchcamps in 1990: *There were two hundred people and I felt like I was high for a week afterwards; the altered state of consciousness was incredible.* Muse credited the spiral dance with the: *intention and affirmation of the energy that is taken from camp and sent out into the world.*

During the closing ritual of Dreamweaving, we stood in a circle in a beautiful grove of trees, bordered by a bubbling brook and encircled by the forest. Only one camper was not familiar with the notion of 'catching the thread,' and the teachers offered only a brief introduction. Catching the thread was a community building activity that connected witchcamps across time and space and was an energetic miming of gathering up threads of community energy and throwing a rope of entwined energetic threads to the next camp. The teachers, all American, were apparently unaware of Wild Ginger, a Canadian camp, being next on the schedule. I spoke up to remind the group about Wild Ginger and had I not done so, the thread would have been thrown directly to California. In terms of my feeling of community, that was a low moment, and very disappointing. I suspect that Reclaiming teachers tend to be aware only of the camps at which they teach. Some camps, like Wild Ginger, don't pay Reclaiming teachers, but instead sourced both the organizing and the teaching locally. As a result, those camps were less visible to the paid teachers, and in turn, to the broader community.

The visualization that day had us each gather into our sacred circle all the Magic and energy generated in the camp, by imagining tendrils of charged energy floating in the ether. As a group of mimes, we pulled in all the tendrils of energy and visualized it weaving itself into a larger thread that could be entwined into the worldwide web of witchcamps energy. Effort and laughter overlapped as we parodied pulling the immense energetic '*thread*' to our circle. Together, in a spirit of community, we gathered up the thread, and swung it like a starbound lariat high overhead, and with a group whoop, we released it back into space toward the next camps on the schedule, in this case, Wild Ginger, California Camps, and whatever future Dreamweaving might rise from. A week later, at the opening ritual of Wild Ginger, I was part of the community that caught the thread from Dreamweaving. Likewise, as part of closing Wild Ginger, we then threw the thread to California Camp during our closing ritual.

Since many campers like Cepheus and Maebon only attended their local camp, throwing and catching the thread was an important symbol that reminded them that they were part of a larger community.

I've had the personal experience of feeling the energy of the worldwide Witch web when we catch and throw out a thread from camp to camp. [Cepheus]

I have not been to other camps but do feel I am connected to the larger Reclaiming Community. Perhaps that is due in part to our drawing in the thread at our first ritual. [Maebon]

Cruz shared his experience of catching and throwing the thread at various camps and political actions: *I usually feel connected to the larger camp community. Catching the thread is one really literal way that happens and because I've caught the thread other places, both at camps and at actions, it connects me to myself in those other times and places and so it's a kind of multiple weaving.*

Experiencing Community

As evident in the following comments, many camp participants had positive but varied experiences of community, each mentioning particular aspects that they valued. For most, witchcamp was an annual pilgrimage of sorts, a rare experience of a counterpublic (Knopp, 2007), contained and protected from the isolation and exclusion of the heteronormative and Christian hegemony. Meg said she liked the: *non-violent and cooperative nature of the group. I like the way all concerns raised, are heard.* Matty was keen in discussing his experience of the witchcamp community: *Witchcamp provides me with the best community experience all year. In*

the beginning years, I would live fifty-one weeks for that one week. Now I have other communities and still it's the best. One reason is that it's a sustained week with lots of contact. Another is that witchcamps are so into hugging, which is a great way to feel connection. It is a big relief to be oneself with so many others. Violet said that: it's definitely a community for me even though I have a fairly strong local community. A group of us have sort of grown up as Witches together. Even the first time I showed up here, I knew this was my community.

Witchcamp helped Crystal connect to other Pagans: *Prior to camp I was not a part of the Pagan community. I didn't know anyone except a few other Wiccans and Witches. Becoming part of this community helped me to establish relationships and to take my spirituality out of the books and into who I am and how I live my life.* Likewise, Stream found connection through witchcamps: *I'm deeply connected to people who come to camp but I don't see them outside that context. I think there is a lot of opportunity to connect with people and a lot of intent that no one be abandoned or left out. Maya said that while she: is oddly, not a Reclaiming Witch, but Feri-identified, it is European WitchCamp that has connected me to greater community. Yes, I am a happily alone Magical person, but witchcamps are wonderful for feeling and making Magic with a lot of diverse others. Lupina, who lived in Alaska, described witchcamp as: the most powerful experience of spiritual community that I get. I am part of a group that began eleven years ago, as an affinity group at camp. We really connected and we've stayed in contact regularly all these years. Witchcamp gives me a sense of community.*

Grace and Sylvie both experienced community during camp but did not develop connections beyond the camp experience. Grace noted that: *there was great community at witchcamp but I have not kept in touch with anyone I met there.* Sylvie described community as: *everyone at camp, while camp lasts,* but said that she loses: *touch with most people after camp disperses.* Miche acknowledged that she felt comfortable, welcomed, and accepted at witchcamp, but qualified it: *I don't really even feel part of this community. I've been to a few camps but didn't really feel like I was part of the community at those other camps either. I don't feel part of any larger Reclaiming community. Its not like I feel self-conscious or an outsider or excluded, just not part of the community.*

For others, the experience of a community that shared spirituality and politics was of utmost importance:

Reclaiming has an overtly social justice political piece, and it's spirituality connected to, and in the service of, the broader vision that I hold. [Shechi]

It's a community with sacred intention. People with spiritual intent and practical intent in the world. [Rocky]

Witchcamp has been an opportunity to reconnect with people who blend spirituality and activism. [Meg]

Not surprisingly, in discussing sense of community, a number of campers referred to the Principles of Unity (of the Reclaiming Tradition of Witchcraft), a summary statement of core values that reflect the philosophy of the tradition. While considering the notion of community, Edie reflected on who was in and who was not and concluded that while all were welcome, people who claimed witchcamp as

community were those who: *assume the Principles of Unity and a certain analysis of power.* Hechi reported that: *no matter why they come, when they leave, they all feel community.* *Anyone is welcome if they can stand to the Reclaiming Principles of Union.* Similarly, Tina noted that: *whether they call themselves Witches or not, they are drawn to the philosophy of Reclaiming and that makes me in the company of people I can relate to.* Matty said that the: *Principles and Practices of Unity make me feel at home with the people.* Hecate described a: *shared vision, the thing that hovers around the Principles of Unity, that sense of what we want to manifest.*

Although not everyone talked specifically about the Principles of Unity, shared values was a common theme in defining the witchcamp community. Wind said that: *it's more about community and not so much about religion; coming together with a community that I can relate to from a values perspective.* *There's an open-mindedness and a concern for the big picture, the earth and the world.* *I got onto this path while living in Scotland and celebrating Beltane in Edinburgh.* *The community was very much spell-based and hierarchical and it was very different.* *I was intrigued by it but didn't feel that it was a community I could belong to.* *The lack of hierarchy is the draw to Reclaiming.* Similarly, Cepheus commented: *Camp is open to people who would not identify themselves as Witches; maybe just as Pagan, or Earth-centered spirituality.* *It's a very open-ended community and experience but with shared values.*

The witchcamp community was made up primarily of people who valued alternative lifestyles and shared beliefs not reflected in the dominant culture. The experience of being in a community of people of like-mind and like-heart, and

understood the world in a similar way was embraced enthusiastically. Maebon described it as an: *opportunity to be around like-minded people; to feel a sense of community. In my heart, I have been a Witch since I was nineteen, yet I have never had anyone to share this experience with until quite recently. To share the commonality of our spiritual practice is life-enriching. I am with my people at camp; there's nothing like it in my mundane world. I can say what I want to say, be open and freer in my self-expression. I relate to the zany, out-there kind of energy and humour of camp.*

Stream and Pye characterized their respective witchcamp communities as their tribes:

It is my tribe. I think everyone has the good of the community at heart in a way that I would love to see in my neighbourhood. It's conscious community and that is the part that makes people tolerant. We learn community processes. [Stream]

There is physical community created by us coming together, but there is an emotional community too. There is still this connection of the sense of the spiderweb, and the invisible connections holding the energy of whatever we've come up with here, in the bigger world. I've been to Spiral Heart and Vermont and I feel a distant connection, though not like part of the Reclaiming community. I feel like I'm part of the Wild Ginger community, and part of the worldwide emergent witchcamp movement. Community is a life-long question for me. I've been searching for my tribe forever and I would say this comes as close as it gets. Not perfect, but close. I have comfort in knowing that I have this bigger connection out there. I take that back to my life. I do feel part of the community and there have been many times

when I have not felt included. I have felt excluded. I don't feel that now, but I think it's me and where I've grown. I often feel like I'm in outer space, the outer most orbit of any community. On the edges, that is where I live. But I enjoy the community here. [Pye]

Patsy said she loved: *the shared culture of witchcamp. When you speak of spiritual or psychic or Magical events in your life, you don't have to explain what you mean, tone down, or skip things.* While Grace had yet to: *form deep bonds,* she valued the: *sense of like-mindedness among the attendees.* Edie said she felt: *community from going to camp. I met others who look at the world in similar ways that I do and thus feel less odd and alone.* Gwin noted that: *certain values were shared by most: honour the Earth, live and let live, and try not to judge people who think differently. I think I most appreciate the think well of others agreement.*

The witchcamp community acted as a mirror for many individuals and participants talked about the ways in which they saw themselves reflected in the community. Wind said that she could see herself: *reflected in people I respect,* and Tina noted that her: *values are very reflected; my beliefs reflected, and my concerns and my hopes and my worries and my grief and my fear and it is all reflected there.* Similarly, Rocky noted that his values were reflected but also he: *reflects the values of the camp. I think it goes both ways. I don't feel like there is some value I have that isn't mirrored back to me.* Cruz also used the term mirror in his discussion of the experience of community: *Camp community is a good mirror. A lot of people are solitary and can't be Witches in the outside world, can't stand as Witches, and they are used to feeling a distance, not seeing*

themselves or their lives reflected in their world. Not being known becomes familiar; it's an assumed distance. The following two comments exemplify what Cruz was talking about. Shechi and Maebon saw themselves mirrored by the community in a way that enabled positive self-image, and a chance to overcome internalized 'witchphobia':

We share values and interests; we are teachers and therapists, maybe that is a little snobby. It all sounds terrible but it makes it easier and safer for me to be a member of community to know that these are not all just weird marginal people. They are people who are living lives similar to mine. [Shechi]

I love that there are many very intelligent and educated people who are at camps. It validates that I'm not a flake. [Maebon]

Participants who had a longer history with witchcamps talked about the importance of contribution in creating community. Wind recognized that she got a lot from the community, and expressed a sense of responsibility to contribute: *I like having this available with someone else doing ritual, someone coordinating the food schedules. Sooner or later I'm going to step into those places, not because I get paid, but out of obligation to the community, to support it.* Lalla also talked about contribution as the basis of community: *We are always holding space for others and that is the basis of community. People feeling safe, contained, and supported. One invests in community, and becomes responsible for the community. Witchcamps have given a lot to me and I've given a lot so that seems like a good system.* Patsy made a point to say that she felt embraced and welcomed: *I feel loved and valued when I go to camp, and I try to return that feeling to those around me.* Pye described

an experience of the give and take of community as very powerful: *This year felt like a good container that allowed people to really be in community. To have that size of group, in two days, create that level of intimacy, vulnerability, and receptivity! We were singing for each other, and receiving the song, but it wasn't just verbal. It was fabulous and magical. That is the best of community, the best of witchcamp.*

Expectations and rules were primarily set by camp organizers, and sometimes by the landowners, and affected the containment and experience of community. While the restricted use of substances was sometimes a controversial rule, it was one of the factors that distinguished witchcamps from other Pagan festivals and gatherings. Matty said that: *every camp has its rules. Clothing optional but not in the dining room or just at the lake. No swimming without the lifeguard on duty. No drugs or alcohol at all. Smoking only in the far off parking lot. No parking on the road. Clean up really well after camp. No sexual harassment. I easily adhere to and support all these rules. The extent to which there's harmony between my goals and the expectations of camp is very high.* Similarly, Bree commented on camp rules: *I love the rule of no drug or alcohol substances and restricted smoking and scents. I love clothing optional options. Mutual respect and trustworthy behavior are the most key expectations but I don't take for granted that any of us have the full capacity for either.* Sylvie too liked: *the ban on alcohol and mood-altering drugs, and the vegetarian food. I like being sky-clad too when the weather permits.*

Lalla and Banshee commented on the role of camp organizers in creating community:

The organizers provide space for people to be present and process. That is where community grows. I love the expectation that we are all going to support each other and allow each other to be in the space and provide lots of love and caring for each other. I like that there is a welcoming to camp, and letting go at the end; a creation of the community and a closing of it. [Lalla]

What matters to me is how healthy the community is and how strong the facilitators are. It's different at different camps. Sometimes the organizers don't know how to sustain themselves, or the community. I'm very committed to sustainability and sustaining leaders. If we don't, we'll have no communities. [Banshee]

Gwin commented on the changed roles that occurred at Dreamweaving, as the organizers shifted their camp model toward more shared leadership, co-created rituals, and flexibility of Magical practice: *The blurry lines between teachers, organizers, and campers was something I really needed at this particular time, and it worked very well for me.* According to one of those organizers, the change was made to accommodate perceived changes in their community: *Most of the campers are influenced by Feri Training and Mystery School, as well as by Reclaiming. We wanted camp to reflect who we are, not just what San Francisco Reclaiming is.* Sig, an organizer, considered the impact of organizers on the community: *We recently realized that a lot of our campers are solitary practitioners and do have a sense of community here; they come here for that. We, as organizers, didn't realize that. Over the past few years, we began to feel like we were the ones carrying all the history of camp from one year to the next and it was heavy and exhausting and we*

didn't know if we were serving any community at all, or just doing this for ourselves. It's interesting that we didn't know that people need the community of camp.

During my fieldwork at Dreamweaving, I attended the opening ritual. As part of the orientation to camp, the teachers talked about the history of the camp, and invited us to share whatever history we could add. While I was brand new to this camp, most of the campers had at least some history, and a few had a long history, adding delightful tidbits of information to the sharing. Not surprisingly, given the ecospirituality of the tradition, people shared their individual histories with the land as well as with the community. Through this community building exercise, the teachers invited campers to share their memories. All the themes of all the previous camps were talked about, triggering shared laughter and stories. They talked about their hopes and expectations over the years, and the evolution of the camp, peaking at about eighty people, down to fifteen or in the previous few years. It seemed that many witchcampers, over the years, had become involved not only with the witchcamp, but also with the dog rescue, and the Mystery School that were hosted on the land. It was very interesting and entertaining, but I found myself feeling a bit left out of the shared sense of community, never having been to this camp, and so not having any history to share.

Creating a Sense of Community

Sense of community was multilayered for campers and sometimes included the community of each camp attended, the larger global community of witchcamps, the community that evolved through connections between camps, and for some, the entire ecocommunity of the planet. Bree commented that witchcamp: *is a transitory community and some relationships feel stronger than others for a time.* Tina

summed up the multidimensional aspects of the community: *Camp does provide an experience of community, both ongoing and in the moment; what I've recognized over time is that there is the community that coalesces while at camp – it's there only for that week – you'll never be with that group again – ever, no way – and then there is an on-going community via E-mail connections of the Noreast Web. And being connected to people energetically, like doing Magic or prayers or energy work across space and time, together. I love that. I have deepened my relationships with people in my own community through camps.*

Cruz considered levels of community from both a camper and organizer perspective: *I've been to more than one witchcamp and talking to organizers from other camps has given me a broader sense because of the collective sharing of knowledge. Working with teachers from other camp communities creates cross-pollination; it connects me to the larger camp community. WinterCamp feels different for me because I'm approaching it more as a camper rather than an organizer. There is more intensity and a collective understanding that in a large group, there is more interpersonal tension and urge to come together but also an urge to disperse. At WinterCamp, it's very lived physically because we are inside in a shared space without a lot of private space. The community there is very crucible-like and that's really positive. It has a different texture than any other camp that I've been to.*

Hecate, like many others, was vaguely aware of the larger witchcamp community and connected in the ways that worked for her: *I have been to camp with people from the British camp. I know teachers who have been to the German camp,*

to England and California and Vancouver so we've heard about them. I didn't know there were so many camps though! I like that I could drop in on any witchcamp and feel a sense of community. I've stayed on the Spider E-list as it is the group who are really interested in the whole network of camps. And I've been to Dandelion Festival where we met people from lots of different camps. It makes it feel like a web. I'm on some other E-lists, and I follow Starhawk's Blog and Thorne's Blog and Facebook with Witch friends of course.

Lalla said that she wanted both a local community in her hometown as well as the witchcamp community. She experimented with traveling to another witchcamp community for a number of years and learned that geography was too big a barrier for her: *Lots of people who go to witchcamp don't have a local community. I want both; I want to be doing things, service, locally, as well as having intense spiritual retreats. I spent a number of years going to Spiral Heart and I love that community, but realized, in the end, that it's not really my community. Just once a year. All the time and energy and thought and process that I have and could continue to put into that community; I could do that but I really want to do that here. I want something to sustain me over time. I feel connected to the larger Reclaiming community mostly because of extending my experience beyond my local camp. It's not like I feel I have a connection to the whole thing, more like a gradual spreading and connecting.* Likewise, geographical distance was a problem for Banshee: *I have a very strong heart connection to people at California Camp and I can't imagine not seeing them at least once each year. Camp is my only connection to Reclaiming. I*

have wanted to become more involved in the Reclaiming community locally, but the drive on any regular basis is just too far.

Matty had also created community beyond his local camp and in contrast to Lalla's and Banshee's experiences, he said that he felt very connected: *I see my community as all the people at each camp I've ever been to. I have been to five different camps, and once to Dandelion Gathering, which had peeps from Reclaiming camps all over the world. I have been occasionally on E-mail lists from other camps. I Facebook with Witches from other camps I used to go to. We support each other with love and Magic for healing. Sometimes we connect by phone. At protest events, shoulder to shoulder. Sometimes I offer support with moola when someone is in need of bucks.* Edie, having traveled to a few distant camps, said that she also felt connected to the larger witchcamps community: *I do get a sense of community and have made some of my deepest and most lasting friendships at camp. I go away feeling I'm part of this far-flung community all across North America and Europe and Australia. I make very deep connections with people at camp that last for years.*

A surprising number of study participants were only vaguely aware of the larger web of witchcamps communities, due in part to their participation only with their local witchcamps. Hailey said that she had only: *a vague foggy notion of the larger Reclaiming community. The vague impression I have is a loose-knit network of people that kind of pooled their resources and put together these series of camps under the umbrella of Reclaiming. I know that there is a lot of internal politics within the Reclaiming community and a lot of people go in and out of that community*

and that a lot of that has to do with personal dynamics as well as different visions and missions and agendas. Meg had: not connected with the Reclaiming community outside of Wild Ginger. It's a good place to experience the Reclaiming path but it is not my chosen path for personal expression of spirituality. I see it as a sampling of the greater community in which I live. It is temporary, transient, and impermanent. Patsy said that it was unlikely that she would ever be involved beyond her local community: Witchcamp gives me community and support. Even when I don't participate in the on-line community, I read the messages and keep up with what's going on. Witchcamp community is my Magical family; some closer than others, some who come and go, but all still dear. All I know of other camps is what I hear. It's not likely that I'll ever be involved at that level.

For Zevon, Wind, and Rocky, their sense of community was also very localized:

Community is a group of people you see regularly, with whom you have something in common, in this case, spirituality. I don't feel connected to other witchcamps. [Zevon]

I don't feel connected to other camps, though I could probably go to any witchcamp and feel like I could blend in to that community. [Wind]

I don't feel connected to the larger witchcamp community. I've had very little exposure to Reclaiming community outside of here. Just once I went to Vermont. [Rocky]

In spite of having attended eleven or twelve camps at a variety of locations, Rosey said: *I don't know if I feel connected to the larger community. I feel like I could walk into a different camp and I'd understand what they are doing and I'd*

connect with people I suppose. The sense of having a community, even if only for a few days a year, was and still is very important. Having the same beliefs is important. I'm a very introverted, hermit-like person in my regular life and so that's usually what community means for me.

When discussing community, a few study participants offered an expanded notion of community, a kind of ecocommunity:

It is a community including people for whom spirit in nature is real. It is a community that acknowledges presence of animal and nature spirits, and spirit allies in our community. [Bree]

Those trees are part of my community. I see them more often than I see a lot of my human friends. I see different pieces of land or park as my community; it's like someone I see everyday and say hi to. [Cruz]

I felt so lonely for that other piece of land. I get attached to the places where we are doing the Magic. I'm really about connecting with the natural processes, the rocks, and the animals. I think that the land is part of my community. [Rosey]

Managing Community Tensions

Like any social construct, community members have the potential to reproduce as well as resist the dominant culture (Arai & Pedlar, 2003; Labonte, 2004; Smale, 2006). As Tina said: *Community is about people agreeing to something for the week, just agreeing to be present together and agreeing to abide by certain things; just agreeing to support each other in this process for a week.* She added that: *It doesn't always work out like that.* While participants discussed community as a positive experience of coming home, openness, like-mindedness, and contribution, they also provided a glimpse into the shadow side of community where tensions arise

around exclusion, power, social pressures, contrasting beliefs, personal drama, men, and children.

Cliques within the communities were mentioned with some regularity and while some campers recognized cliques as an expected part of community, others felt excluded by them. Rosey noted that: *People form close relationships and they come with their friends or their coven and that can feel cliquey. That is an awkward thing about a community that forms for a week; some are new and didn't come with their friends. I have sometimes felt left out. The organizers and the teachers and the seasoned campers can shape that and sometimes it is done intentionally and that really helps.* Miche expressed concern that sometimes the organizers are the problem: *At times, the organizers are kind of cliquey. Sometimes new campers should be embraced more to make them feel comfortable.* Rocky recalled that he had felt excluded at his first witchcamp: *I've had moments at camp where I needed more people to reach out and help me feel included and welcomed. The first camps, I was unsure of the structure and the culture; I would have liked to be more embraced.* Both Wind and Zevon mentioned being perceived as cliquish within their personal groups:

If we stay too cliquey with the people that we circle with, then others sometimes get annoyed by it. It's been said to us that we are too cliquey and elitist.

[Wind]

As with any community, there are squabbles about more petty things like noise after hours and I have encountered some jealousy over perceived cliquishness. Nothing too serious though. [Zevon]

Sequoia shared a story that demonstrates how some individuals created exclusion for themselves: *A woman in my affinity group actively and purposefully held herself at a distance from the experience of camp all week. I began to worry that she was an anthropologist doing a covert study on people who go to witchcamp. While the rest of us spoke of our experiences and the effects they had on us, she used phrases like watching the rest of you have these experiences and seeing the effect camp has on you. I won't go so far as to say that she didn't belong, but I could not understand why a person would make the effort to attend an event so heavily dependent on personal experience and engagement, and then work so hard to avoid experience and engagement at every turn.*

After attending witchcamp for many years, Karen said: *I didn't really find the community I was seeking. I have not experienced it as a community as much as I would have liked. It is disappointing when people with whom I feel an affinity do not feel the same way about me. I very much wanted it to be a community, as I do not have a Goddess spirituality community where I live. My perception is that there are closed groups of people who are either all from one coven and come to witchcamp together, or who come to witchcamp to meet their old friends and are not interested in new ones. There is only one person that I now consider a friend that I met at witchcamp. Several others I feel connected to through various E-lists. I think of Yahoo groups (Spider, LivRiv, community lists) as community. Going to witchcamp lets me put faces to the names on these lists.*

Muse shared that she found it difficult to connect deeply enough with people in the space of a week: *Witchcamp occurs once a year for a short time and I don't*

feel very connected to the other campers other than in ritual or path. I feel I'm part of the organizers community, but that is not a strong bond, nothing like the ties within my coven. Sometimes, the close proximity of a large group of people living together for five days necessitates an enforced community. I experience this community in many different ways: annoying, deeply moving and supportive.

While Meg had not experienced any feelings of exclusion, she shared the story of someone who no longer attended witchcamp: *I have known of one person who did not return and felt she did not belong. She felt that she was not welcomed, not a part of the process and felt distanced from the group.* Similarly, Maebon told how she had initially felt: *invisible and excluded. I did experience some feelings of not belonging in my first few years of camp. There are some prominent personalities at camp who I perceived as somewhat standoffish at first.*

Sequoia described how affinity groups, intended to support inclusion in community, sometimes created problems: *For many years, mandatory, randomly assigned affinity groups were a massive problem both energetically and logistically. People who were uninterested in their affinity group, or in affinity groups in general, would be assigned a group and simply never show up. This year everyone was given the choice to self-select affinity groups, which could be either open or closed, or to be randomly assigned. The attempt wasn't without flaws, since closed self-selected groups had a tendency to be cliquish, but it made allowances for the needs of many different types of campers.*

In my field research, I experienced the failure of affinity groups as a vehicle of connection and inclusion. At Dreamweaving, we were assigned to three person affinity groups by choice of a symbolic artifact. I chose the symbol of 'lightning' and ended up in an affinity group with my cabin mate, Casper, and another camper, Rosey. As they expressed their disinclination to spend time in an affinity group, I laughed out loud at the irony of my situation. I shared my personal history with affinity groups at past witchcamps and how I reluctantly participated for about five years before I finally acknowledged that they didn't work well for me. As an introverted person who warms up to new people slowly, I have sometimes experienced affinity groups as somewhat forced sharing, intent on a high-speed path to emotional intimacy. I came to Dreamweaving with a personal intention to completely dive into my affinity group with openness, determined to have a full experience. I was both disappointed and relieved at the situation. We agreed not to formally engage in an affinity group, and ironically, we immediately developed an organic bond through our shared dislike of affinity groups. At Dreamweaving, the affinity group structure also enabled predetermined groups to deliver particular ritual parts and share breadwork tasks. As such Rosey, Casper, and I worked in the kitchen together during our dishes shift. It was also they that I turned to, when I needed to talk about my fear of the local poisonous snakes and spiders.

Shechi was introspective and ambivalent in considering her place in community: *I somewhat feel connected to Reclaiming community. I've done workshops with Starhawk. I don't have a relationship with my local Reclaiming community; I've never been to any other witchcamp. I wish I were part of a community more regularly. This is a once a year experience for me. There are times when I have felt a sense of belonging, like at the planning meeting yesterday. That*

what I suggested was considered. Yah, that was a sense of belonging, a sense of contributing.

Rosey was one of several people who talked about the challenges of relationship breakdown in a small community: *I started at this camp with a partner and then that relationship ended after he became highly involved in the community. It didn't matter how much other people tried to welcome me or make that okay, or if he tried to give me space to be here, it was just one of those things that was impossible and I had to withdraw for awhile. So that is one downside to really tight community. It can be really difficult to navigate for both people.*

Variations in belief systems created some tensions in the witchcamp communities. Maebon perceived negativity in regard to her beliefs, saying that: *Sometimes there is a feeling that if you don't have a certain set of ideas, you may be frowned upon.* Patsy talked about how disparity in belief affected her experience of community: *There are so few of us from old-style, big-on-secrecy-and-safety traditions. I am sometimes uneasy about the lack of care for safety while working with Magic. In my tradition, I was taught that before we took down the circle, anything and anyone we had called in had to be dismissed. This was for the safety of ourselves and for others who might not be able to deal with otherworldly beings such as elementals. Sometimes, entities are called to ritual but never dismissed.* Bruxa noted that: *there are people from different backgrounds, with diverse perspectives and there is always the opportunity for miscommunication.*

Sequoia shared a painful story of her experience of community when her beliefs weren't in line with the majority of the camp: *WinterCamp seemed*

dominated by a small contingent of strongly vocal devotees of the Norse pantheon, who have kept us locked in Norse mythology stories since the camp's inception in 2003. Even before I was willing to label myself a nondeist, I simply did not have a lot of interest in Norse deities and myths. Things hit a tipping point for me the year it was claimed that Freya had claimed us all as her clam. I didn't ask for Freya, and I certainly hadn't given her permission to conscript me into her clan. The night of the clan ritual, there was a lot of speechifying about sacred obligations, and what an honor and responsibility it was to enter into this clan. The priestesses said something about how you could be willing to step into the clan at that moment, or willing to be willing to step in at some point, or you could just decide that you weren't willing, but that we would all still be equals and no one would judge anyone else's choice, and no one would be excluded. But I will tell you: one of the most starkly real ritual experiences I have ever had was at the moment that those who were willing, or willing to be willing, stepped forward, and those of us who were not stood behind. I could almost see a curtain of gold mesh come down and separate those who were for the clan and those who were not. Inequality, judgment, exclusion. And every one of us who had not stepped forward could feel it: there was now an in-crowd, and we were not part of it.

Jax shared his experience of feeling some tension with what he perceived as hypocrisy: *I want to work in the world in line with my values. For some people, camp is a holiday for the family and they go back to their SUV's and their cable TV.* Similarly, Tree expressed disappointment: *Ninety percent of the Witches that I've met at camp don't seem to have an environmental ethic*

that they really live. Some of the under twenty-five crowd is maybe into eco-activism. There are too few living the enviro-ethic.

Various social dramas sometimes erupted in the intense environment of witchcamps, where even the smallest event could take on dramatic proportions. Shechi shared how the social drama affected her sense of community at camp: *I think that interpersonal drama gets played out here a bit, just like anywhere. There are jealousies, and pecking orders, and there's competitive kind of jockeying for position. I am a singer and song-leader around the world but it became very clear, very quickly that songs, song leading, and song ideas came from one woman only. There was no space for me in that way.* Cepheus and Rosey commented on the tensions that could arise in communities that made decisions by consensus:

The only negative, I would say, is that sometimes because of the consensus process, deciding can take a very long time and meetings can go on for hours and hours and hours. [Cepheus]

I don't have a lot of patience with the consensus process that I've seen operating in Reclaiming. I worked with Quakers for many years and they do consensus a lot better. I find it an annoying group process; mostly I just tolerate it, or remove myself. I don't struggle with it. [Rosey]

During my visit to Dreamweaving, I experienced some of the tensions that arise where witchcamp community meets dog rescue facility. Dreamweaving was hosted at Diana's Grove, a 102-acre nature sanctuary in the Ozarks, encircled by rising hills and a gently flowing creek. Owned and operated by Cynthea and Patricia from 1993 to 2011, Diana's Grove

offered a mystery school, spiritual and personal growth retreats, witchcamp, public Pagan events, and an independent dog rescue facility.

Described on their website as a grass roots dog rescue run by two old ladies who live on Social Security, the facility had a mission to rescue dogs in the locally devastated economy of Missouri. Although the registration process informed me of the dogs on the site, I wasn't really prepared for the experience of sharing the week with the fifty or so dogs that were allowed to roam freely. I love dogs and have three of my own; I am not generally afraid of dogs, but I must admit that at times, it took some courage to navigate them. As an early riser, I was up with the sun most days. My cabin was set at the bottom of a very steep hill and the dining hall was perched on the top. In order to get to the kitchen for coffee, I had to psychologically brace myself and climb through the twenty or so loudly barking dogs, including some pit bulls, scattered across the steep hillside. I slowly wound my way up the path, carrying my laptop like a shield, never completely sure if the barking was a friendly welcome or a murderous warning.

Unfortunately, I didn't know the story of 'the plundering dog,' until I began asking if anyone might have seen my missing tunic. In a downpour that only spring in the Ozarks can produce, my luggage got soaked, and I hung a beautiful white silk ritual tunic from the tree outside of my cabin. Throughout the week, people provided reports of the tunic, being carried by a dog, seen half buried by the creek, and of course, a dastardly hound was spotted wearing a white tunic and the sunglasses lost by another camper.

In general, people seemed at ease with the dogs, and appreciated the efforts being made to find homes for them and at least two campers adopted dogs before leaving. The dog rescue volunteers and the organizers worked hard to round up the dogs before rituals but there were often a few hanging out, watching the Magic. In the harsh heat of the afternoon, the air-conditioned dining hall was littered, wall-to-wall with dogs. Surprisingly few snarled exchanges took place between the dogs, and the camp participants took the labyrinth of canines in stride with patience and humour. Danno, the camp cook, was sometimes heard firmly shooing the dogs out of the cooking kitchen, located below the dining area. Group hikes around the land,

were generally supported by a posse of dogs, who were hoped to keep the poisonous Copperhead snakes at a distance. I grudgingly recognized the donation of my tunic as a fair exchange for such good protection and was relieved to not see one snake while I was there.

Men and Children in Community

One particular community tension that came up repeatedly in this research was in regard to men and children at camp. Through the evolution of witchcamps since 1985, men and children have become increasingly involved, and some camps had gone through a community transformation process whereby they have let go of the adult-only policy, and redefined themselves as ‘All Ages’ camps. Study participants shared experiences and opinions about the dynamics of gender and families within their witchcamps.

Men at Camp

The focus and celebration of Goddesses and the feminine is of course attractive to women and many, but not all, sometimes experienced men at camp as challenging. Participants had a variety of opinions about men at camp and some told stories that challenged the perhaps utopian delusion that all men who go to witchcamp and celebrate Goddesses have shed the negative socialization of patriarchy. Participants talked about inappropriate male behaviour, women longing for men’s involvement, and appreciations for gentle men. Beastie remembered: *The first time I went to camp in the nineties, there were seven men and over one hundred women. The last time I went, it was probably forty percent men. The dynamics were different and I struggled with that.* Meg said that she was: *not as free around the men in some of my actions and speech as I might otherwise be*, and Karen bemoaned

the: *insistence of invoking a God along with the Goddess, which to me is often disruptive male energy; it is not spiritual for me.* Pye, on the other hand, said: *In my ideal world, there would be more men here. I think we need to evolve this way, and we need their energy. Half the planet is men. I want to be around more men like Rocky.* Not aware perhaps of the irony, Cepheus thought that: *If witchcamps were less focused on Goddesses, more men would be interested in it. We don't acknowledge the God as much as the Goddess and I understand that's because originally we were more of a feminist tradition. But I'm an equalist and I wish we could have more male energy.*

Wind expressed a longing to have her partner at witchcamp with her, but recognized that it could be problematic: *My partner is a small town boy who has been exposed to masculine, masculine, masculine and I don't know how to integrate that male masculinity into a Goddess-centric tradition. I might take him to Wiccanfest because at least there would be more men and he'd been in an environment where he'd feel more at ease. He doesn't filter himself and he might say something that might be sexually provocative at witchcamp and that troubles me. He thinks he won't fit in, and he'd upset some women for sure. No filter. Here's all these people fighting for social justice, and he'd make some jackass comment.*

Banshee described herself as a Dianic Witch (exclusively female, feminist tradition) explaining that: *Apart from witchcamp, the groups I'm in are all women. I don't feel safe in Pagan groups that include men because it becomes about sex all too often, and about individual ego. It means a great deal to me that I can enter into sacred space with men at witchcamp, and the boundaries are clear and healthy. I*

can do deep work in circle with men. At one camp I went to though, I did experience a lot of what I perceived to be prejudice against older women, and particularly women who were of a different body type than the mainstream cultural norm. That attitude was fed by some of the young male facilitators, and I found it really abhorrent. I didn't go back there.

Beastie said she'd had: *trouble at camp sometimes when there were men taking up too much space. I would have preferred that camp was women-only. I guess we're all human but there have been instances where men have abused power, or just taken over at camp. At California Camp, Miche noticed that: some of the male teachers were too flirtatious with a lot of the women. I don't mean to be a prude but there was something about it, maybe because of their role as teachers; it seemed like a boundary thing to me; misusing their power in the role of organizers or path leaders. I didn't really like that. Sometimes the roles seem ambiguous; teacher one day, camper the next. I like that all the camp leaders and major roles at Wild Ginger are women.*

Sig opined that: *The men at Dreamweaving are pretty safe men, and there aren't very many of them. If there are single men, especially if single and charismatic, then they get a lot of attention and it inflates them detrimentally. This is what happened to my ex-husband. He's charismatic and attractive and he got to camp and he got so much attention that it got him in trouble. Hecate described an experience from Tejas WitchCamp: There was a guy who was ogling the women in an unpleasant way. He was eventually confronted about it and he left camp. He wasn't told to leave; he was just told that his behaviour had to change. Another*

time, there was a guy who would assume roles at ritual and just step in and take over. He wasn't thrown out, just educated. At a different camp, a guy violated the no alcohol/drug rule and he was told that he would not be welcome again unless he cleaned that up. I don't think he ever came back.

Matty noted that over the years, some camps: went through a stage of awkwardness with men, and sometimes I felt that I didn't belong. I do recall two men who were there just to exploit vulnerable women, and another who could not stop manipulating people, even stealing despite offers of caring help. There was also a guy whose nudeness value was callous to a particular woman who was uncomfortable and fearful. The only rule I've ever enforced as to others breaking it was the one on sexual harassment. Three times.

Lalla's experience of Spiral Heart camp was that: all the men wore skirts most of the time. About forty percent of the camp is men. A lot of male, masculine, strong energy. Also some very feminine men. A mix of sexual orientations. And some trans people. With some sadness, Lalla talked about her son's experience of Susanowa, a character in the myth that Wild Ginger used to structure the teaching at camp: My son felt that there was a lack of male presence. He felt that the God was presented as bad and he felt responsible for it. He got the message that all men and boys are bad and he felt that all men were bad. If it were closer, I'd take him to the camp with more men.

For some campers, the experience of men at witchcamp was one of healing and hope. The first time that Hazel went to a ritual with men was at witchcamp in Michigan: Beforehand, I couldn't imagine it and didn't know how I'd deal with it. I

had to deal with men in skirts and that was new for me. At the evening ritual, we had to cross a stream, over stepping-stones, and there were two men on each side offering support to the people walking across the stones. It was the first time I got it that there might be a supportive and protective role for men. During Wild Ginger, one camper told a story about her experience at another camp: We had a huge healing circle of about one hundred people, and there were layers of circles, some closer to the fire, and some further away, sort of like the rings of a tree. I was beside one of the men in the circle, holding his hand, and I just felt safe and good and it was an unexpected healing moment. For the rest of the ritual, I moved through the circles, from man to man, and at times I had a man holding my hand on each side of me, and it was a most profound healing experience. Muse perceived the men at Wild Ginger to be: role models of gentle caring men, men that have similar beliefs to what I have. I've never felt that kind of predatory, scary man thing here. Though, I've heard lots of stories about predatory men at other camps. Bridey offered her experience of men at various camps. Some didn't know how to share time and air space and wanted to be taken care of. The positive thing is that they are so outnumbered that they kind of get lost. The majority of men are gentle, lovely people.

At her very first camp, Nanny remembered: *noticing something not very healthy going on with one of the male teachers and some of the more vulnerable young women. I was pretty upset and it turned out to be justified. That teacher got asked to take a year off from teaching. He is still a teacher and he pays attention in a different way. I took a path with him later, having never thought I'd do that when I*

first met him. To me, that is such a success story. He is a sweet and wonderful man who was vulnerable to the aura that goes with being a male teacher, and he was unconscious and was brought to consciousness. And he was willing to engage in that growth.

Jax had thought deeply about being a man at witchcamp and had a lot to say about it: *Camp can bring me in contact with my own masculine energies and I'm not always comfortable with the aggressive, strong masculinity in myself. Sometimes the male energy presented in the myths and stories, isn't very nice. Like Chiron, the violent, brawling half man-half creature-centaur who is struck by a poison arrow and goes into a dark cave. That archetype is a very block-headed presence. There have been times I encountered elements of my own Chiron masculinity that scare and terrify me; a predatory element of just being male that I sometimes brush up against. It pains me and I'm reluctant to talk about it. I'm still figuring it out.*

Sometimes camp can be exclusionary towards men and males. There have been times when the guys will look around at each other and go oooohhh, and then sigh. Sometimes I wish that the myth we follow would have fewer men coming out being the villains but I'm not going to knock it. Knowing the history and where it comes from I understand why the villain is generally male. A couple of the young boys at camp this year shared that they had heard some things about males, especially after the limericks at the fire. They wondered why men had to be the butt of the joke all the time. I understand the environment that we are in and I understand the history that we have with gender. Men carry a stigma. I talked to the boys about it, and tried to explain that it's not personal but unfortunately, what

comes with being male in our modern world is an association with the historical issues of what being male-gendered means, particularly with violence against women. Being a man or a boy is not a bad thing but sometimes that is how it feels. Sort of like the difference between one single man and patriarchy. By virtue of our gender, we inherit an association with patriarchy.

Jax went on to talk about another related experience he'd had: *At another camp, I went to a men's path one year. It was about getting in touch with the divine masculine. Over the past few years I've seen and heard more dialogue about how we get more men to become part of this community. I think that it is on the rise. I hope so. I want a future at camp where we hear things about men that we, they can really be proud of. There are all kinds of issues that go with gender at camp that are touchy issues.*

As noted by Matty, it may be that camps go through: *a stage of awkwardness*, as men are integrated into a culture that perhaps provides fewer leniencies toward particular behaviours by men, especially those that are ego-driven, of a predatory sexual nature, or stem from an assumption of importance based on masculinity. Such behaviour could certainly contribute to the resentment of, and opposition to men at camps as expressed by some of the women, although community resistance to such behaviours was clearly stated by both women and men. Appreciation of gentle men and men in skirts suggests further resistance to male stereotypes and behaviours. Interestingly, there was an unquestioned assumption that the majority of men-at-large would have little interest in celebrating Goddesses, perhaps reflecting reproduction of dominant cultural assumptions about gender. Evident also was hope

and healing in regard to gender constructs for boys and for men as shown in Jax's conversation with some of the boys at Wild Ginger, and in Nanny's observation of growth and support for the male teacher.

Kids at Camp

Similarly, including children in the camp community was controversial and people had a variety of opinions in regard to inclusion and exclusion. Both those who were parents at camp and those who were not had varying opinions and experiences of including children. The notion of the future sustainability of camps came up in discussions regarding children, with some participants expressing a hope that the tradition would evolve through family generations, and others challenging these ideas.

Over his many years attending a variety of camps, Matty's observation was that: *some camps went through a stage of awkwardness, even exclusion of children, and therefore not many mothers could come either. For about ten years we had a rule of no children at Vermont and I opposed that. Now we are an all-ages camp.* Daphne was involved with a camp during the transition from being an adult camp to becoming an all ages camp and found the experience to be: *traumatic and controversial*, due to polarization around the issue.

A number of study participants at Wild Ginger were parents who brought their children to camp. Bruxa offered her perspective as: *a camper, an organizer, and a mom. My son at twelve doesn't necessarily have the same interest in ritual at this point and I leave it up to him. I find it very distracting to have little children at ritual, running around, or unsupervised during ritual.* Miche also actively parented

during camp and could see both sides of the issue. Miche wondered if the rituals had become: *so much shorter because of the presence of kids. The kids can be a problem. It's tricky, because how is the tradition going to grow? I think it's important to expose kids at a young age because they are future members. On the other hand, Cecil (Miche's three year old) can be noisy at rituals and yet you want the adults to enjoy their experience.*

Lalla often participated in camp with her whole family, and was also tuned in to both sides of the issue: *Every year there seems to be some grumbling - we include them too much, we don't include them enough, you said they could come, but they don't feel welcome. It would be good to have two camps, one for adults and one for kids. I love having Wyatt there. It's really important to him and it's so beautiful for he and I to be together at camp. I loved bringing Arlo, but at fifteen, he has lost interest. Spiral Heart is adult only, but they have Wild Child, a long weekend, kid-focused camp for kids and adults. People at Spiral Heart really wanted something for their kids, but they didn't want to give up their adult only camp. What I do at Wild Ginger is alternate, one year with the kids, and one year without so that I get to have both experiences. It is different when my kids are there. You have to be more aware of your kids and so that changes the energy of some experiences. At Spiral Heart, people are definitely more open. It's a whole week and there are no kids. At adult camps, everyone is responsible for their own experience, but with kids, every adult is responsible for kids' experiences too, so you've always got some awareness on them.*

Soleil thought that: *it's important to bring children here to see that we can celebrate similarities and celebrate our differences. Whether they are indoctrinated here or there, they are going to be indoctrinated, socially conditioned, somewhere. I want Starry to have this. Having grown up in the Catholic Church where we kids had zero involvement, except the choir, it was such an eye opener at my first camp to see kids welcomed and involved. When kids participate in ritual, they also have personal growth and are part of the community.*

According to Nanny, her daughter received great benefit from participating in Wild Ginger: *Moonbeam was the luckiest kid to meet these fabulous people and to be free in one of the freest places. And to have very intense experiences in a respectful loving environment. I remember the camp when she had a spiritual crisis and the circle of love and support around that girl was something to see. I didn't even need to be there because there were so many other mothers that she was connected to. She was a teenager. She started coming at twelve and had to give it up when she went off to university.*

Tina, a Vermont organizer, talked about how Vermont had integrated all ages: *I like that there are now all ages, with the kids. We started with only babes in arms, but now there are about twenty kids under the age of sixteen. Rocky agreed that: kids at camp is great. I wouldn't want there not to be kids. I understand how it might change the focus for adults, but what a great opportunity for kids to experience this!* Rocky shared his amusement at overhearing three-year old Cecil as he watched the sacred drama unfold during the evening ritual: *He was asking, where is Amaterasu, and when is she coming out of the cave?* Pye said that she'd not been

to Wild Ginger when it was an adult-only camp but was at Vermont camp before they had children at camp: *A bunch of people left because they thought that kids would change their experience, but it was great to have kids at Vermont. It's our responsibility to expose them to this in a respectful way. Though, I'm not sure they need to be at all the rituals. They are a distraction in lots of ways but I look at it as an opportunity to practice my focusing skills.*

Some campers expressed less appreciation for the children at camp. Patsy noted that there: *have been dust-ups over the presence of children at ritual. I wish that children who are old enough to understand would be told that it's important to be quiet and not disruptive during ritual. Parents need to behave responsibly with their kids and not expect that we will all love them and want them around at all times no matter how they behave. A small child who is asking questions about what's going on, and therefore engaged, or who is playing quietly is fine. This is the only time all year when I get to do group ritual. I get annoyed when others aren't considerate, or don't require their children to behave. It seems to me that that's why they invented Sunday school.*

Shechi discussed the impact of children being included in Wild Ginger WitchCamp: *In general, these are people who tend to be not punitive with their kids, but I've seen more angry parents and yelling this year than ever before. That's not really compatible with my witchcamp experience. This whole kid thing has got to be seriously rethought. I don't want to be around angry parents. This year there are twenty kids out of one hundred people and that means there are at least fifteen parents, and since their primary agenda is their kids, they move in and out of*

activities. So, almost half the camp is not fully present to what is happening. Bridey offered her perspective: Without kids, it did mean that rituals could go to deeper places, use deeper trances. Vermont has geography and season on their side, compared to Wild Ginger. It gets dark pretty early in Vermont so the kids are more likely in bed before the evening ritual.

Sustainability and longevity of the beliefs and practices of Witches was a common discussion at witchcamps, and it surfaced in discussions about children at camp, and again, opinions varied between the notion of establishing a spiritual tradition that continues through the generations, and a belief that people will find their way to witchcamp regardless of their childhood experiences with witchcamp. Daphne shared her observations about sustainability and children at camp: *Some think that if we want our tradition to continue through the generations, we need to have children witness our worship. Plus, they'd grow up feeling surrounded by that sense of being in a sacred container. It has meaning and potential for sustainability.* At Dreamweaving, an adult only camp, Cruz considered the decline of the camp as partly driven by: *people moving on to new interests when they had children.* Bruxa questioned why people are so invested in future sustainability of witchcamps, given that so few actually grew up in a Pagan tradition anyway. Midge thought that: *most people change their spiritual practice from the tradition they were raised with. Witches are now being characterized the same way that the media used to characterize Gays, or Jews, or anyone outside of the dominant culture. Our kids hear that kind of stuff, and they need to be included so they have community.*

Hazel expressed her support for sustainability of camps, but not just for the purpose of creating a future for the practice of Witchcraft: *None of us grew up in a Pagan tradition, but none of us grew up in the present culture either. We are inundated with the norms of mainstream culture. Part of our desire for witchcamp is that it brings us an antidote to the dominant culture and kids need that too.* Nanny shared a similar perspective: *In mainstream culture, children are ghettoized. We live in strata and if kids weren't so isolated from the rest of us, they wouldn't be so easily recruited into unhealthy ways to live. We are an antidote to mainstream. To me, it's not about trying to make the religion go forward. It's an opportunity. I am profoundly sorry that there wasn't a way for me to open the door for Declan and Allan. I think it's terrible how we raise our men in the mainstream culture. We would like to more effective at helping them hold all their parts instead of being cutoff and segmented into this little acceptable box. Kids get to have personal development and spiritual growth too.*

As observed by Matty, the integration of children into the witchcamps movement was similar to that of men such that some camps suffered growing pains as the communities made the decisions and the transitions. Including children held a variety of meanings for people and in at least one community, created a rift. While some participants believed that involving children was critical to sustainability of the tradition and movement, others were more interested in exposing children to the alternative culture and providing them with all the perceived benefits of the sacred container, such as a sense of community and an opportunity to see themselves

reflected and loved. There appeared to be community recognition that excluding children meant excluding young mothers.

The challenges of including children seemed primarily related to disruption of spiritual and transformative experience, in rituals, programming, and overall intensity of the experience. As noted, some communities created secondary witchcamp experiences with a primary focus on children, teens, or families. Some campers came up with their own solutions such as to include their families on alternating years, or finding a new camp that better met their particular needs.

Such tensions as social drama, intolerance of diversity of belief, and gender within witchcamps challenged community, and some campers did not return. I didn't seek out participants who had been to witchcamp and rejected it but there were a few participants who had stopped attending for various reasons and chose to respond to participate in the study electronically through elicited text. An example is Cayo, who stated that witchcamp: *challenged my idea of community. I sometimes want more gentleness, less issues, more togetherness. Hence, why I have not gone for a while.*

To allow a deeper understanding of the notion of witchcamp as a container that provides an alternative ethos to the dominant culture, the next section focuses on the final theme of Community Ethos.

Sub-theme: Community Ethos

Ethos refers to the particular guiding beliefs, meanings, and experiences that characterize a social group (Kitayama, *et al.*, 2010). Threaded throughout the

interviews was language that framed the experience of witchcamps as having an ethos that is different from and outside of the dominant culture. This section describes the ethos of witchcamps as manifested in the experience of being outside of ordinary life, of intense immersion in the experience, the shared expectation of authenticity, altered state of consciousness experiences, and shared beliefs and values.

Outside of Ordinary Life

Witchcamp was overwhelmingly understood as different from and not part of ordinary life. Beastie described camp as: *a different reality; a container for the sacred instead of the mundane*. For Gwin, it was: *a different place, a different, culture, a different experience* and similarly, for Crystal, witchcamp was: *a world of its own with new norms. My personal life and my camp life are complete opposites*. Cruz talked about why a different world mattered to him: *It's very spiritual, it's about coming out of the world, out of my usual context so that I can know and be in ways regular life doesn't foster*. Likewise, Shechi described camp as: *a structure for possibility and hopefulness in a realm that is very different from my typical world*.

Intense Immersion

Referring to the history of witchcamps, which originated as intensive workshops aimed at teaching ritual arts in the Reclaiming Tradition, Cepheus noted that: *witchcamp is the affectionate nickname that we give it. Its real name is a summer intensive*. While the name has evolved, the intensity of being immersed in the experience has continued. The sense of intense immersion referred to various layers of the experience and contributed to a sense of otherworldliness. People

referred to immersion and intensity of heightened awareness, beliefs, nature, community, and spirituality. According to Karen: *There is no comparison. It is intense and between the worlds.* Tina described camp as: *extremes of everything.* She said that she goes to witchcamp: *for the deprivation and the immersion.* Wind described it as: *a place where you go below the surface, where you go deeper than you otherwise would and it heightens your openness to see and feel and to be aware.* For Zevon, it was: *complete immersion in Pagan spiritual belief,* and Lalla noted that: *the longer the camp, the more intense and deep it is.* Sequoia reported that: *for years the draw of the people and the land and the intense focus on spiritual development is what drew me back.* Hecate shared her love of: *getting to be immersed in nature.*

Beastie's comment reflects the experience of intense immersion: *It was really intense; total immersion; total and constant. You are totally immersed in a different reality. Things are more real there. I never come home and think it was no big deal. It's an unusually profound experience.* Patsy, Jizak, and Hailey discussed the intensity of being immersed in community in such an intense way:

I love the rule of commitment to the duration of the camp. I don't think there should be exceptions for anything but a medical emergency. It's complete focus and commitment in community. [Patsy]

The energy of camp is intense and mind blowing. The energy can be overwhelming and ecstatic; a wild ride. Adjusting back to life outside camp makes me aware of how open, uninhibited and joyful I feel at camp. The experience is so

intense that I reflect on it throughout the year after and it feeds me year round.

[Jizak]

It's being immersed in a spiritual and social exploration. It's an opportunity to do personal work and it gets really intense. You can't walk away because there is no place to go. [Hailey]

Stream and Grace further detailed the sense of intense intimacy that Hailey talked about:

It's all very intense and intimate; helping people dress for ritual, showering with people, it's all so intimate. Camp is so heavy and so big. It's a rich experience and profoundly moving. It's a bonding experience the way a tragedy might be a bonding experience; only without the tragedy part. It's a very intimate experience.

[Stream]

Witchcamp is intense. There is an intense degree of intimacy coming from deeply emotional and spiritual events and the sense of like-mindedness among the attendees. [Grace]

Intense intimacy in community can, of course, create obstacles and some campers commented on the challenges. Shechi said that: *there is something intensely intimate about it; there are times when it feels kind of unified and cohesive and times when it feels very fragmented.* For Banshee, camp was: *a place of intense growth and change for me and, I believe, many others; though not always comfortable.* There were also challenges in translating the intense experience into one's mundane life. Rosey noted that: *It can feel like you come here and get all jazzed up and committed to things and then you get home and it's really hard to*

integrate. Along the same line, Sig said that: *the work that we do in a week is very intense and doesn't always translate to the rest of your life. It can, but it takes a certain level of understanding and wisdom to do that.* Edie expressed sentiments that are often heard at camp, saying that she often felt: *the need for a vacation after camp.*

The Camp Trance

Another important aspect of the community ethos was the understanding that the witchcamp experience transforms consciousness. This transformation of consciousness through Magic and ritual was an accepted, and often sought after experience and was referred to as 'trance'. According to Turner (1982), the altered state that is induced through ritual is similar to the flow experience first described by Csikszentmihalyi in 1974. Turner (1982) said that ritual in pre-industrial communities such as tribes and clans was likely a primary vehicle for flow, and through social evolution, ritual gave way to 'art, sport, games, and other leisure pastimes' (pp 58) as the work/leisure relationship became increasingly complex. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) described flow as the intense moments of vitality that are experienced by athletes in the zone, mystics in ecstasy, and artists in rapture. Flow offers a total focus experience, a total immersion where 'time is distorted and self-consciousness disappears (pp. 32)'. Flow is a 'shaping of the psychic energy' (pp. 98) and in an ideal situation, a person would be constantly growing while immersed in enjoyment. Sutcliffe (2006) in his examination of popular spiritualities noted that with intention, flow can be directed toward spiritual ends such as peace or opening to spiritual energy. Along with motivating participation, trance can be a magnet for

personal growth, learning (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997), and transformation. The following comments about the witchcamp trance certainly reflect the notion of flow.

For some, the ecstatic experience, the trance, the flow, or the altered state of consciousness, were critical to their motivation for going to camp. Lupina said: *I go for the ecstasy. It feeds me for the whole year.* Similarly, Stream was intentional about opening to trance experiences at witchcamp: *I go to be altered; to live in trance. I go with an intention for a certain transformation in myself. You live in trance for a whole week. Some of the gifts that come out of that are more profound than I would even think to ask for.* Banshee similarly spoke about the transformational impact that she experienced through trance: *It's a week of listening to my subconscious. The sacred speaks to me through my subconscious, in ritual experiences, trance, shamanic journeying, etcetera. At camp I can sink into that, and stay there. I have big revelations that change how I live my life and do my work.* Wind and Hailey both described what the altered state experience was like for them. For Wind, it was a: *heightened sensitivity, both psychically and emotionally; it's a mode of consciousness.* Hailey described her trance experience in ritual as a: *numinous experience. I've been to rituals that left me high for weeks after. That altered state of consciousness is so powerful.* Both Hechi and Zevon referenced the role of the communal nature of witchcamps in heightening the altered state. Hechi described the energy of witchcamps as: *ecstatic, in union.* For Zevon, there was: *a certain power to raised group energy that heightens experience and learning. I have had many revelations and epiphanies about myself during path work.*

While the intentional zeitgeist of witchcamps was one of love and cooperation, Hailey described how the heightened emotional and spiritual sensitivity sometimes brought painful experiences to the surface: *The altered state is part of the experience. During ritual, there is a change in the consciousness of the participants such that after that ritual, they engage the world in a way that manifests the intention that was laid into the subconscious mind during the ritual. In this witchcamp space, sometimes things seem larger than they actually are; a personal interaction with someone may feel like an epic mythological battle because we've been working with myth and patterns that stir the subconscious. A minor annoyance can stir up great emotions. I recall someone saying that her hand was held too strongly at ritual and it felt like rape.*

Edie shared her perspective on trance and how it was sometimes a seemingly random experience. Edie said she often had: *trance images related to my personal issues that are keys to working through blocks. Sometimes, I miss out on the trance completely. I call this falling off the trance bandwagon. That's when everyone else raves about the trance and where they went and how great it was and you didn't go anywhere or didn't get it or went off on your own merry trance that didn't have anything to do with what was offered that night.* Recognizing the altered state from a less positive time in her life, Gwin talked about being cautious in how she reacted to the altered state: *I was walking to path one morning, carrying my journal and had a flashback to all those Christian Church camps I attended as a teenager. Felt kind of like nails on a chalkboard. It did remind me to not go swallowing everything and anything just because I'm at camp and feeling all glowy.*

Trance was not necessarily a sought-after or understood experience for everyone. Tree remembered: *a traveling ritual where people journeyed around the lake. It was so amazing. I was in a canoe in the middle of the lake, representing a lost soul or something. I was likely in a trance, although, trance isn't usually something that works for me. I'm not sure I even know what a trance is really. Maybe an intense focus; being keenly focused. It requires a lot of effort and energy. It's hard to turn off the cognitive brain.*

Energy

Another aspect of the witchcamp ethos highlights the notion of energy. Energy, at witchcamps, refers to the bioenergetic field that is believed to surround and permeate all life. According to Stenger (1999), the prevalent belief in the existence of a life force is ancient, and depending on culture and belief, is variously referred to as *prana* (Hindu), *chi* or *qi* (Chinese), *ki* (Japanese), *psyche* or *pneuma* (ancient Greek), *spiritus* (Roman), and by ninety-five other names, in ninety-five other cultures (Brennen 1988). The notion relates to, and is associated with soul, spirit, and consciousness, and is believed to flow through the environment as well as through all living things. When invited to reflect on the energy of witchcamps, participants talked about the zeitgeist, or overall ambiance of witchcamps. Descriptions varied and participants suggested different factors that affect the tone and substance of the energy.

Hecate compared the energy of camp to that of regular life: *The energy is much more flowing than what we encounter out in the world. People are more aware of their energy and are certainly invited to tend to their energy in positive*

ways and most do. There's an emphasis on encouraging people to take care of themselves, and to know what's going on with their deep self; of course we all have our moments of failing to do that but you get brought back to that more quickly than you might otherwise; there are lots of reminders. While Maya described witchcamp energy as: *big, wild, intense, and transformational*, Shechi noted variations, saying that: *there are times when the energy of camp feels kind of unified and cohesive and times when it feels very fragmented.* Likewise, Karen and Maebon experienced variations in the camp energy:

The energy of witchcamp is usually high and positive, and sometimes confusing. [Karen]

Sometimes the energy of camp hasn't been great. Other times, it's incredible. I guess if I had to choose one word to describe the energy overall, I would say charged. [Maebon]

Patsy stated that: *the energy at camp varies from year to year, depending on the story. I've been at camps where the energy was high and optimistic, even hilarious; others, like the Wild Ginger just passed, was scattered and disrupted. I believe it depends in large part on the story we work with.* Hailey also reflected on factors that contributed to variations in camp energy: *The energy of this camp seems low key and mellow. I've been to camps that seemed really frantic. The size of the group has a big impact on that, and who is on the teaching team, and for example, a camp that Starhawk is at will have a different feel to it than, say, one that has Thorne Coyle or Taylor. And the story. And Deity that we choose to work with.* For Violet, the energy of camp was related to camper intentions and expectations: *People come*

to camp assuming that the energy will be productive and constructive, and that people will be giving their authentic selves. The authenticity provides an energy that is quite unusual from the outside world. My energy during witchcamp is totally wide open and I am likely to say just about anything. It's just a place that where the energy is such that you seriously work on things that in the outside world would just totally destroy you. For Midge, the energy of one particular ritual was like a: group orgasm. She remembered a ritual that took place under the roof of an open-sided tent: It was the greatest energy I can ever remember. It was like an entity in itself. We were trying to contain it and it was uncontainable and eventually it just burst. What we had was like a group orgasm; the energy rose, and went boom. We raise energy. It's the power of a Witch.

The energy, or flow, of camp, both contributes to, and is affected by the container. The story, the size of the group, the teachers and organizers all appear to have an impact on the energy. Further shaping the energy are the particular personalities, both human and storied, at each camp, as well as the openness and authenticity of the participants, and the intentions set by both individuals and the community.

Beliefs and values related to spirituality and politics were integral aspects of the camp ethos. Participants referred to politics and environmental concerns, and shared various aspects of their spirituality as it related to witchcamp. Social justice matters and ecospirituality appeared to be at the heart of the belief system, however participants also shared beliefs about Goddesses and mystical experiences. Longer-term, seasoned campers also attached importance to the diversity and tensions found

in the brew of alternative spiritual beliefs and ecosocial justice politics. Some participants, in the spirit of reclaiming language, talked about *Woo*. ‘Woo-woo’ is an eyebrows-raised, tongue-in-cheek term coined by James Randi (2007), a magician and skeptic who investigated paranormal and supernatural claims. His investigations led him to describe such claims as collective woo-woo.

Social Justice

Participants from Canada, Europe, and the United States saw themselves reflected in witchcamp communities through shared politics in regard to social justice issues. Nanny described witchcampers as: *alternative thinkers, critical of the mainstream, making choices to be outside of that. Not everyone is alternative in the same way, but we all share the impulse and commitment to being outside the mainstream. We have a sense of shared alternative values and beliefs, even though we don't actually know what each other's beliefs are. If Pagans were right-wing, I wouldn't be here. It's the social justice politics that make it unique. We put social justice in the context of a spiritual understanding of who I am and what the world is and how we fit together. It wouldn't be okay without the politics and the feminist mindset. The inclusiveness, even more than feminism.*

Hechi said that she was: *born with the idea of justice in an intense way, and Wind expressed happiness at looking around and seeing: all these people fighting for social justice. Shechi talked about the importance of taking: poverty, racism, violence, injustice, and homophobia out of the world and replacing them with love, peace, harmony, justice, tolerance, and compassion. It's our intention. Witchcamp helps me think about my community work and my social justice work. It has an*

overtly social justice political piece and it's spiritually connected to service in the broader vision. It is a vision of the way the world could be unencumbered by certain norms. I assume everyone is sort of democratic and left-leaning and I'd be surprised if someone here voted conservative or is anti-immigrant or against health care. In the sense of making conscious another possibility, as in another world is possible - in the naming of it, in the articulating of the vision, there is power.

Cruz reflected on how he rejected the dominant culture but continued to feel: *inculcated with mainstream values. I was born and raised in this culture; I'm part of it and critique it at the same time. At camp, we have another value system, and we have to share it, radiate it, shine it back into the mainstream.* Jax described witchcamp as all about social justice: *We talk about what we are doing over dinner, and we trade ideas and I learn how to be a better person from those moments just as much as from a formal ritual that is meant to send energy out into the world, to hopefully affect some change that we'd like to see happen. Compared to Feri gatherings, this is more about personal insights, about my evolving identity and how I translate that to work in changing the world. Not so much discussion about politics and worldly affairs.*

Varied Beliefs

Another critical factor in the ethos of witchcamps was a sense of shared but varied, alternative spiritual beliefs. As identified earlier by Nanny, witchcampers don't share a defined and common set of beliefs, but do share a sense of alternative spirituality. According to Klassen (2011), most Pagans reject dictated norms of belief and practice, enabling an accommodation of a wide range of acceptance of

contradictory beliefs. A number of participants mentioned the importance of witchcamp support for the belief that each person was their own spiritual authority. Gwin was: *drawn to the Craft because it's new enough, as a religion or spiritual practice, that I can pretty much make it up as I go along, and it doesn't require that I believe much of anything really, or worship anything either.* Stream also touted the importance of having: *a personal relationship with the divine and witchcamp supports that. It's not like being at Church. If you're Catholic you believe this, if Lutheran, that. At camp, there is no list of beliefs that you have to have. There is a basis of unity, but no thing that you have to believe in order to be a Witch.* What Tree said she liked about witchcamps is the: *shared spiritual intention, the shared Magic, changing consciousness as a community. Participating in the Magic with a spiritual intention. At camp, I settle into my brain and my body, into a non-mundane space and take the time to connect holistically with earthy energy.*

Some of the study participants shared a comfort with the notion of spirituality as general or undefined. For Shechi, the spirituality or magic of witchcamp was about connecting to: *something bigger than the physical world.* It was about: *creating some sort of collective experience and being collective is important. It's not solitary. Something sacred will happen that intellectually doesn't make sense.* As an intellectual scholar and academic, witchcamp was not always spiritual for Shechi, but slower activities such as: *walking the labyrinth and meditation,* made it more likely. Shechi shared her evolving conceptualization of spirituality, saying that her: *understanding of spirituality has really changed. These days, I believe there is something I would compare to an underground river sort of thing that we can both*

feed and tap into when we need something. There is something bigger, like a collective life force or God or Goddess or spirit or whatever you want to call it. We had a family crisis, and I think my understanding of spirituality shifted significantly at that time. During the crisis, Catholics said a special mass, Jews were folding a thousand cranes, Buddhists were having a prayer circle, there was an Irish prayer chain, Christians were praying, and the Witch and Wiccan communities were working on it too. Somehow, all those prayers go to the same place, the same river; different tributaries. Something is vibrating differently. Even if you're a physicist; how can it not change the vibrations, or change something? Change the river somehow? Likewise, Crystal described how camp had contributed to her spirituality through giving her: a feeling of wholeness and well-being that I cannot entirely explain. I can just be me and connect to the life around me.

Ecospirituality

While few study participants used the term ecospirituality, the witchcamp ethos clearly reflected it. Regardless of what other spiritual beliefs they may or may not have held, study participants valued nature as the core of their spirituality. Based in a fundamental non-dualistic belief in the sacredness of nature and a living Earth, this type of ecospirituality positions humanity as inextricably connected to the rest of the ecosystem. Ecospirituality is the expression of the spiritual connection between humans and nature that highlights the reciprocity between the health and wholeness of humanity and the health and wholeness of the environment (Lincoln, 2000). Most simply, humanity is not separate from the Earth or from nature; we are the earth and we are nature. Nature is sacred and therefore we are sacred. Self-interest is

redefined such that, as individuals, like parts of the whole, our health and well-being is reciprocal with the health and well-being of nature and vice-versa. Ecospirituality is not anthropocentric, but rather, biocentric or ecocentric. The philosophical basis for protecting nature is a belief in the intrinsic value of all life; the worth of nature being independent of humanity and of equal value (Hagvar, 1999). The concept of ecospirituality is present explicitly or implicitly in many disciplines and movements, such as spirituality, bioregionalism, deep ecology, eastern philosophy, ecological philosophy, ecopsychology, ecofeminism and the holographic worldview (Lincoln, 2000).

Rocky said he valued that: *there is an honouring of the mystery of nature. Spirituality is found in the connection between beings and in the honouring of something bigger. It's not just the people thing, it's also respect for every living thing: the land, the trees, water, the bigger picture.* Edie described that: *being a Witch involves a soul-felt knowing that you are one; there is a deep down in the core love of the Earth and Nature. It's a feeling that everything is alive and to be honoured and learned from. And there are mysteries bumping up against us all the time, enchanting the world. Love of nature enriches and infuses camp. We are Nature worshippers after all.*

Magic and spirituality sustained Grace: *on a deep level.* She discussed how she felt: *deeply connected to nature. I don't know if I can put into words the feeling of connection with rock and tree or the silent communion between my self and the moon that I experience. Most people in regular life don't understand, but many at camp seem to share my beliefs about the interconnectedness of us, and the Earth.*

Everything has spiritual elements. Eating meals by the lake, walking through the meadow in the morning, and helping dig latrines are all spiritual. My spiritual beliefs about the interconnectedness of life (which mirror my scientific beliefs about the interconnectedness of life) influence the way I want to live my life, the activism I do, the fact that I recycle, what and how much I buy, etcetera.

Tina conveyed how her: *spirituality is nature and nature is my spirituality.* She explained that she believed: *in deity, and I respond most easily to gendered language about Goddess and God, and I respond to individual names or attributes of the divine. In my bigger broader picture, I believe that the sacred is genderless and nameless and big; it is more than the Earth; it isn't boundaried by the Earth. My most comforting or necessary acts of worship are with the earth. There are plenty of moments at camp when I feel in sync with the earth or actually talking to the elements; I am willing to engage with a cloud, or talk to a rock. To be so immersed, and have everything have the potential for communication with me! A fair bit of each day at camp is spiritual; sitting in the grass; lying in the lake; just looking at the fire. And seeing everybody's beauty is so great. Sometimes I have a hard time accepting that human beings are just as sacred as every other animal and being at camp helps me reconcile that. That we are sacred; we are part of the land.*

Cruz was equally poetic in speaking about his spirituality: *Being around bird sounds and the sounds of the wind in the trees and the frogs; all the noises of nature feel very restorative. Energetically, nature wants to feed us. In the breath cycle, when I exhale, the trees inhale, and the trees exhale, and inhale. There is just this cycle of being part of nature like nature wants us to thrive. At camp, we are*

embraced by nature. I feel very held and nourished. The spiritual level is powerful in shifting the physical. Cruz went on to explain that: the essence of witchiness is being able to see and interact with Magic in the world and nature. Camp has catalyzed that but it's being able to do that in my daily practice that sustains me. In my daily life, I talk to a lot of street trees, the ones planted in the sidewalk, and some I take care of and I see them every day, kind of like friends. Those trees are part of my community. I see them more often than I see a lot of my human friends. I see different pieces of land or park as my community.

Similarly, Rosey articulated how she was: someone who definitely connects to place so I'm very bonded with the land here. I was only at California Camp once, but I still dream of that forest. It was very beautiful and most enchanting. Someone said I always looked in a state of bliss and I knew it was the redwoods. When camp was in Minnesota, we did very powerful Magic with the land and I felt so attached to it. I have an attachment to people and a broader sense of community but I also get attached to the places where we are doing the Magic. Gods, Goddesses, archetypes, they're fine, but I'm really about connecting with the natural processes, the rocks, and the animals. The land is part of my community. Returning to camp has been because I wanted to continue to develop the psychic and spiritual connection with the natural beings. An important element is learning the science and the lore of natural beings and I have learned about that from some of my witchcamp teachers. What Wilda teaches us about the microbial world is fascinating, and I had a teacher who knows lots about the biology of plants and the lore and herbalism and the place of plants in stories. I do a fair amount of listening on my own to trees to the wind to

the water and that pretty much just looks like meditation. I'm not listening for a message, just listening to get to know them. It comes out of love, love, love of the natural world and wanting to know it and to have right relationship with it.

Beastie shared how it was: *easier to feel like a Witch when around nature, and when around others who craft Magic. I like to connect with nature in solitude. Finding a woodpecker nest, sitting by the pond, seeing the snapping turtle. With the sacredness of it all, it makes you remember who you are. Witchcamp has been a lifesaver to me. Being in society can be really isolating; Camp is like having a tribe; it gives me hope and sustains me spiritually. The trance work can change you on a molecular level; you feel the interconnectedness. We're all the same; we're all plants and people, and we're all energy, all living organisms; our lives aren't isolated from each other.*

Shechi waxed on eloquently about her spirituality and spoke of how connection and attachment to: *Mother Earth* had helped to heal her childhood wounds: *It's about communing with nature and being part of something bigger and feeling connection to it. Sometimes, after an intense ritual, I've put head and face down to the dirt – that's pretty primal and it grounds me. One of my issues is not feeling grounded or centered, and not feeling connected. Note to tape recorder: attachment and betrayal issues; early lack of nurturing. That has lead to a lack of grounding, feelings of insecurity, etcetera. I'm joking but I'm not joking, I guess. Earth as Mother; there is a sense of when I have felt, connected, attached to the planet, like my feet are actually solid here. For Lalla, the whole purpose of witchcamp was her: spirituality; to engage fully in things that are spiritual to me, to*

connect with others who share that spirituality, to connect to the Earth, the land, the water. I like to do ritual outside no matter what: rain, sleet, snow, heat, day, night, whatever; ritual outside, in nature.

Aspecting, discussed earlier, is a Magical or spiritual practice used, similarly to meditation, where the practitioner opens herself to divine energy and manifests that particular aspect of divinity, be it Goddess, God, or an element or cycle of Nature. Such aspecting might be expressed in movement, sound, appearance, function, or thought. Banshee talked about a profound experience she had while aspecting nature: *Last year in path, we aspected the elements, and I aspected Earth. It was a very simple experience and I was completely overwhelmed with all the life forms around me, and how much they reached for, valued, life itself. Overwhelmed by the force that makes plants reach for the sun, makes us have children, makes the seed seek just the right place to grow; how much of that force there is, all around us. Camp offers me a life changing experience, in community, and a chance to explore the wild in nature and in myself.*

Maya and Hechi remarked on the ecospirituality of European witchcamps. Maya said: *We're Witches, nature is important to us, and nature tells us different things. Nature provides different sorts of energy depending upon where we are. We have a wholly different kind of wild magic in Wales than at Loreley.* Hechi commented that: *Witchcamp in Europe is a place where we can live in community and share from our integrity, where we can learn to align ourselves and celebrate in body, mind and soul. An opportunity to do personal work, and for the healing of the Earth.*

Goddess

Clearly demonstrated throughout the data is language that reflected the interest in Goddess. In its role as an antidote to the dominant culture, such an interest created a space of resistance to gendered spirituality, where spirituality was rooted in a feminist perspective and a celebration of Goddess. In general, in Western religions, nature and deity are ontologically divorced (Partridge, 2005). Through honouring and celebrating Goddess(es), as well as nature and ecospirituality, witchcamps function as an antidote, and as resistance to traditional, male-led, patriarchally-based religious practice of the dominant culture. As introduced by Shaw (1994; 2001), leisure provides the opportunity for marginalized groups to resist proscribed roles, expectations, and behaviours. Through witchcamps, resistance unfolded both individually and collectively, as well as intentionally and inadvertently. The following comments highlight the meaning and value placed on the notion of a feminine divine as resistance.

While there appeared to be electronic glimmers (on the witchcamp related E-lists) of a movement within Reclaiming toward constructing the divine as genderless, the witchcampers that I spoke with valued the notion of Goddess. For many, the celebration of a feminine divine was of primary importance in their spirituality, and many campers commented on the meaning of celebrating Goddess. Identifying that: *a feminine deity is important* to her, Muse said that: *camp affirms my love for the Goddess*. Karen also identified the importance of Goddess spirituality: *At camp, I focus on the spiritual aspects, the music and ritual, and the story. I identify with and need a feminine divine and a divinity who is not separated from this world. Camp*

helps me connect to Goddess through being outdoors and invoking nature. I find beautiful natural altars and labyrinths and even compost piles spiritual. Jizak noticed: a strong base of similar values in embracing the feminine as well as masculine, and said that: at camp, I find myself asking the big questions like who am I, and what is the meaning of life, and does Goddess exist? Sometimes camp reinforces my spiritual beliefs and other times it challenges my beliefs. I am faced with experiences that make me think about important spiritual questions. Stream was more specific in reflecting on her beliefs about Goddess: There has been so much religious bias that every time I hear the word God, I shudder, and so I've decided that God is her nickname, and then I feel less nauseated. I pray to the Goddess; I don't pray to 'a' Goddess; I'm not a Pagan that believes in all the character aspects of it. I believe in one deity. I'm not that interested in aspects like Freya and Pan and Persephone or all the different names and qualities. Most other religions believe that their purpose is to bring you closer to the divine, but in reality, they separate you from the divine, so that you need religion.

Mystical Experiences

Participants shared experiences related to the witchcamp ethos that might be defined as mystical experiences. Such experiences either happened at witchcamp, or were instrumental in their choice to participate. Each described their experience as life changing and profound. Hailey related how she lost interest in her spiritual practice when she settled into the routines of: *an ordinary life of work, TV, dinner, and sex with her partner*, and began to consider herself an atheist. After a near-death experience that catalyzed a shift in her spiritual perspective from atheism to a

renewed awareness of: *the presence of God and an inspired commitment to ecospirituality*. Jax described: *seeing a cone of energy rise up out of a ritual, at witchcamp, and that the encounter changed his life*. During one camp, Lalla experienced an: *existential moment; an intense sense of wholeness that was powerful and overwhelming, but gave her: insight into her own past and future and changed her life*. Cruz said that he: *literally felt that I'd been hit by lightning, during a ritual in path: It felt like there was an intense energy that came with it. It was at witchcamp, in sacred space, and there was a certain magnification to it. It felt like there was divine energy involved*.

For Wind, the mystical moment was an event: *that is otherwise considered weird; the kind of story that starts with, this is going to sound crazy*. She said that during a ritual, she: *went to the centre and welcomed the mystery, then returned to the circle. I was standing there and it will sound like the craziest thing, but I turned into a wolf and walked back into the middle and looked back at myself. The ritual was still going on and I was watching myself and I kind of swooped back in to myself and then the wolf ran away. What the Hell was that?! That was my first ritual and I wondered if that is what happened for everyone. The wolf was just something that happened, not connected to the theme or anything. On my very first night of my very first camp! I knew immediately that this was something that I had to keep doing. It was a mystical moment. It was a bit of juice that I wanted more of, physically and emotionally*.

Other participants generously shared deeply personal ritual experiences that they considered mystical, Magical, or numinous. Like Nanny, some experienced the

energy of ritual in their bodies; others as colour, movement, or images. Edie reported having: *deep images of divinity and metaphor from the rituals at camp. The power of a large ritual group of people can take me places I don't usually go on my own.* Beastie had a couple of: *wild, mystical type of experiences,* over her years of going to camp. She recalled a witchcamp in Michigan where: *they gathered and did weather work,* with the intention of protecting the camp from a storm: *Just as we were closing the ritual, and releasing the element of Air, this big wind came down from the Center, over the fire; it swirled around and picked up embers. The sky cracked open and the rain poured down. It sent shivers down us. That night, not far away, Kalamazoo got hit by a tornado.*

Weaving the Ethos Web

Some of the longer-term witchcampers provided an multi-dimensional perspective of the witchcamp community ethos. Spirituality, social justice, the environment, and personal growth were all equally important aspects of camp culture. Muse described her Magical or spiritual experience of camp: *Immediate contact with the Elements makes camp more Magical and reminds me to be aware of nature's abundance. The inclusiveness, focus on the natural world, cycles of the year and of living and dying, feminine deity, and sense of personal growth I experience drew me to Witchcraft and keep me involved. Witchcraft is experiential, embodied; I am deeply connected to the natural world, and conscious of my life choices. I try to remember and live by The Witch's Creed: Do as you will and harm none. Living on the land, close to nature: the trails, water, trees, provide endless sources of wonder and joy. Sometimes during ritual I have a deep experience of the marvels of life and*

nature. Camp supports my spirituality by the examples of others who model care for the Earth, respect for each person, and acceptance of diversity. As a lesbian Witch, the proximity and interactions with other queers is nourishing.

Hailey had a lot to say about witchcamp and spirituality: *People are oriented around Earth-based spirituality and pro-nature and environmental issues. Aware and conscious and acting about issues of social justice. Nature has its light side and its dark side. It's not all good and it makes for a good metaphor for human spirituality and the human condition; that we all have a light side and we all have our own shadows, our dark sides. Nature is a mirror for us. And it's more than that too. The connection between my spirituality and activism is a chicken and egg thing. I got into Earth-based spirituality through my politics. I started as an environmental activist with an ecological philosophy, then I got interested in ecological spirituality. Then I found witchcamps, and from ecological spirituality to Goddess spirituality. Feminism is where it all came together for me. It was Starhawk that gave me the feminist piece and the Goddess piece fit into place and then I knew I was home. Now I'm home. It feels like home.* Similarly, Daphne reflected on her journey from feminist to Witch: *In the seventies, we said the personal is political; now the personal is political is spiritual; it's all interwoven. Other spiritual traditions that some of us were raised in, tend to be transcendental; the experience of this lifetime is rewarded in the afterlife. But for us, the prize is right here, right now; it's in the affirmation of the daily experience in the body, mind, heart and we get to experience it in the moment. That is a piece of the embodied nature of Witchcraft.*

Tina and Jizak also expressed layered and integrated perspectives:

My concerns and my hopes and my worries and my grief and my fear; it is all reflected there. I can look around and see someone who works with men who batter, and someone who is saving the forest, and someone who is helping to clean the oil spill, and people are concerned with what is happening to the earth. I can be in this group who share my beliefs, and there is such shared trust. [Tina]

At witchcamp, I get to connect with community, and our shared love of the Earth, and the feminine as well as masculine divine. Being in beautiful places with clean water and big trees, helps me connect with the world as I am meant to. Nature helps me feel grounded and calm and connected to all beings. I remember the importance of appreciating the Earth. I think there is a strong base of similar values in embracing feminine as well as masculine, striving for inclusiveness, and less hierarchy, valuing divinity, and the Earth. [Jizak]

Bridey shared that while service, social and ecological justice, and the politics reflected at witchcamp mattered to her, she valued the particular combination of those things with ecospirituality and spiritual self-authority: *It's the ecospirituality. There are groups of Christians and other religions that focus on social justice and ecological responsibility and service, but I don't want to be there. It's ecospirituality, nature-based spirituality. Also unique here, is an acceptance of that sense that I am my own authority on my spirituality and on what I believe; that is accepted here. No one tells me, no doctrine is being given to me. I can choose to accept things that other people suggest. Or not. We also accept death as part of the cycle; it affects the meaning of life. There aren't a lot of places where we do that in regular life.*

For Hecate, it was important to sift spirituality out of the values and beliefs of the camp ethos: *I think we concern ourselves spiritually with social justice and ethical issues; inevitably those things interconnect because they get worked out in our society through a political process. I think its really engaging to find out what kinds of activism individuals are involved in, or groups within a camp are doing. There is a dimension of spirituality that goes beyond the political though; almost a pure spirit piece of things – above and beyond politics.* Zevon identified how witchcamp spirituality contributed to her daily life activism: *Being a Witch means understanding and respecting nature as being inherent in your spirituality, and changing injustice. Witchcamp reminds me of the sacredness of Nature and creates in me a bigger desire to do environmental work.*

Tensions and the Community Ethos

I entered this research project with an assumption that my evolving ‘woo-begotten’ ☺, naturalist, somewhat atheist, ecofeminist approach to Witchcraft was atypical. I was aware that some people believed more concretely in spirits, Magic, Gods and Goddesses, and some others had a more rigid, fundamentalist approach to it than I do. As evidenced above, witchcampers weighted the values differently; some valued ecospirituality or social justice, while others were more interested in activism, or practical Magical skills. These differences sometimes surfaced as tensions between spirituality and politics, between varying belief systems, and/or simply as fundamentalism.

Sequoia referred to herself as: *a naturalistic Pagan in a supernaturalist's world.* She reflected on the frustration and disappointment in her experience of

marginalization at witchcamp: *Some have made the reconciliation between their own naturalistic Paganism and the supernaturalistic beliefs of the camp organizers, or just go along with the atmosphere of deism and literal Magic. There is an expectation that everyone believes pretty much the same things, spiritually and Magically. My beliefs have undergone radical changes over the past few years and finding my place at camp has become increasingly difficult. My naturalistic beliefs don't integrate with the ardent polytheism of my fellow campers, and I haven't yet figured out how to handle this challenge. Reclaiming talks a good game about Divinity being a mystery beyond form, and we like to claim that we don't tell anyone what to believe, but I'm discovering first-hand that there are definite boundaries to that tolerance. For many years I referred to myself as the sacred pebble in the shoe of community and said that I loved my community enough to challenge it because I wanted my beliefs accommodated. It simply no longer makes sense to me to spend five days in an isolated area with someone else's clan, so to speak. Maybe I've grown tired of the fight and maybe being in a state of constant existential crisis is not good for the camp or myself. At Wild Ginger where the supernaturalists seemed to be in the minority, Patsy reflected on the difference between her beliefs and those of others. She identified that: *I have very clear ideas of what can go wrong using Magic. I am often the only one who expresses concerns about the risks of witchcraft, and it challenges my own ideas about the Craft and its practice.**

Meg, a woman who had explored a range of Pagan practices over many years, did not consider herself a Reclaiming Witch, and said that she practiced ritual and energy work differently. She explained: *I tend toward longer, slower and*

deeper expressions of the building of energy and its use. This is due usually to working with smaller groups or with those with more experience. Shechi said that people have a variety of beliefs at camp and she valued camp as a: place were I can talk freely about woo stuff that I don't talk about outside of this place. Conversations about energy and spirit and things that other people might regard as too weird or woo-woo. Hailey, who referred to herself as an ecophilosopher, considered woo: the dark side of camp. Believing that a Goddess, or Fey are doing things around the property - that's woo. Believing literally is different from believing metaphorically; there's a difference in the concept of truth. There is veritas; the truth of representation, kind of the truth of science. Then there is alatheia, which is metaphorical truth or the underlying or hidden truth about what you're dealing with that is not directly visible. Mistaking alatheia for veritas is what I would call woo. Spirituality belongs in the realm of alathean truth. Spirituality is belief in things that can't be verified. Lots of human concepts can't be verified. There is honour and compassion and love and even numbers. Just human concepts. In contrast, Tree said she didn't: get into the academics of Magic. I'm not interested in learning about specific Goddesses and stories and energies. Sometimes, I think there are just a lot of highly educated white women at camp and so it's overly focused on knowledge about that stuff.

A number of participants commented on the impact of Feri Training on witchcamp spirituality and practices. Feri Training was the teaching vehicle of self-described Pagan, mystic, and activist, T. Thorn Coyle (thorncoyle.com). As an initiate in the Anderson Feri Tradition of Witchcraft, she studied with its founder,

Victor Anderson, in the years before his death. Also, a priestess in the Reclaiming Tradition, many of her 'initiates' were connected to witchcamps. According to the website, her training was not a course for beginners and took place over a period of two to three years. Based on her book, *Evolutionary Witchcraft* (2005), she described the work as dangerous, life changing and extremely potent. As demonstrated in the following comments, there appeared to be some ambivalence about the Magic of Feri having made its way into witchcamps. Bruxa said that she had noticed that people practiced their Witchcraft: *differently than I do. One thing at camp has been which tradition people are following, especially since Feri training. Elements of Feri are coming in to witchcamp and it pushes my comfort level.* Sylvie said that a downside to camp for her was: *The Feri Tradition does not work for me. The camp this year was focused on Feri, so I did not go. I also get annoyed when people go on about angels!* Hazel felt compelled to clarify misconceptions: *There is a general misperception in the Reclaiming community about the two-year trainings. The apprenticeship simply prepared one to begin the journey toward Feri initiation if one chose the path of finding a Feri teacher for intense, long-term work. Thorn no longer presents herself as teaching Feri. Some people had a problem with Thorn being so visible, and with the perception her graduates were 'initiates'.*

For others, the diversity of beliefs and values within the witchcamp ethos was part of the charm. Gwin noted that beliefs were not taught at witchcamp: *We didn't talk much about beliefs at camp, though Wilda and I did on the drive home. She and I determined that our beliefs (or lack thereof) are actually pretty similar. Not that it seemed to matter much. I feel that certain values are shared at least by most at*

witchcamp; honor the Earth, live and let live, and try not to judge people who think differently. Soleil said she was raised Christian and as a child, went to Christian camps every year: I was given a firm and structured concept of God and Christianity, and what every Catholic believed. If anyone fell outside of that belief system, I was lost. At witchcamp, it's more about what we are not being taught. And what we are teaching each other is more latent. Here, there are so many different beliefs, yet we can find parallels and similarities. And we celebrate the differences at the same time.

The Witches' Rede

An aspect of the camp ethos emerged that was likely based in 'The Witches' Rede': a guiding philosophy based in ethical reciprocity that encourages one to take personal responsibility for one's actions (Ventimiglia, 2003). The Rede says, 'Do as you will, may it harm none'. Witchcampers, by and large, seem to have an assumption of personal accountability; for one's personal and spiritual self, for the community, and for the world. According to Muse: *Witchcraft is an experiential practice and requires us to be deeply conscious and responsible for our life choices. I try to remember and live by the Witch's Creed: do as you will and harm none.* Participants expressed this sense of personal accountability as they reflected on service, negative camp experiences and conflict, shadow selves, and 'holding space'.

Intrinsic to the witchcamp ethos were expectations, commitment, and responsibility to supporting others as well as the community as a whole. Wind recognized that participants went to camp: *to receive and also to give.* She reflected on how camp provided: *intense community intimacy and support,* and how important

it was to: *let others know that you are there to support them.* She went on to say that: *if something needs to be done, I'll step up to do it. I get a lot from the community and sooner or later I'm going to be obliged to step into roles that support community.* Wind went on to express appreciation for people at other camps who had modeled this sense of responsibility: *In looking at what some of the crones did at camp in Edmonton, I realize that I have to step up and play a part because I've seen what that looks like, and I like it.*

I invited study participants to talk about the downside of witchcamps, and I heard stories about the more difficult personal camp experiences. Common among the participants was a narrative that reflected a sense of personal responsibility for one's own experiences. Rather than blaming, or identifying a problem with the other campers, organizers, or teachers, many participants conceptualized negative experiences as opportunities for personal growth and learning. According to Cruz: *I don't know that I'd identify experiences as negative; they are learning experiences.* Lalla playfully described the challenges at camp as FOG: *I don't think of them as downside, but just more FOG; more 'fucking opportunities for growth'.* Bruxa described herself as: *a believer in personal responsibility so if there was something not in support of my spirituality at camp, or a need not being met, I'd have to figure that out for myself, and understand how camp could have a different impact on my spiritual experience. I've had negative experiences but in hindsight, I realize that sometimes things just go the way they go. Sometimes it's a reflection of my ability to be self-caring, and I'm getting better at that.*

Like many, Zevon recognized that: *anytime you undertake personal growth work, you take the risk of having to deal with things you don't like. This can be stressing. Camp does challenge my patterns of thinking or believing about myself.* Similarly, Lupina and Cayo both resisted blaming the community for experiences around belonging. Lupina said she had: *sometimes felt like I don't belong at camp, but that's been my own stuff. Whatever barriers were there, were mine, not the community.* Likewise, Cayo had noticed that: *some people have felt non-belonging or excluded but that is part of the experience. I think it is a great opportunity to learn about belonging and exclusion.* In spite of a long list of negative experiences of community, Karen still held to a view of personal accountability: *I have grown in experiences, skills, and knowledge, sometimes not in the ways intended. In one ritual, during which many people had profound experiences in the underworld, I relaxed in the field, looking at the stars. I learned that I don't have to do something just because I'm told to, and that it's important for everyone, participants and leaders, to know the structure of the ritual beforehand. Another example is from a dispute over the content of a Path ritual. The teacher modelled how to listen actively without giving up one's own point of view. I believe that my own actions have led to the experiences I have described in other questions, but am not sure what (or even whether) I could have done things differently.*

Rosey took responsibility for both negative and positive camp experiences: *A lot of my relationships with camp are set up by me and what I'm like. It is really just about what it takes for me to feel comfortable in highly intimate environments like camp. Sometimes it's just the accident of my inner personal chemistry. A lot of that*

is just me in that I have difficulty feeling comfortable and open in groups of strangers. Conflict is an expected part of the experience of community and is considered an opportunity for growth. Cruz saw conflict and friction at camp as useful because: it gives everyone a chance to see how they feel and what they value and what they are willing to do to live their value. Maya said: it's witchcamp; it's full of conflicts. I both adore it and hate it. That's not ambivalence; it's paradox! Learning self-responsibility is the most crucial part of being a human and a Witch. A value of witchcamps is providing as much transformation as you can stand. I want that for myself and to teach it. Similarly, Matty said that: sharing and clashing of beliefs and values is part of the experience. To see who is really out there; to understand that we're all different and all okay. Hechi described conflict as how: we celebrate our differences and where we can meet. Ego things happen and get sorted out. Hailey had more than one romantic relationship break up during a witchcamp, and while she found those experiences difficult, she said that: camp helps it become really clear whether the relationship is going to work or not. It hasn't tainted the experience for me overall; it just means I don't go to witchcamp with a lover anymore!

Not all negative experiences in a community had to be approached as opportunities for growth. Rosey astutely observed that not every uncomfortable exchange had to be a growth opportunity: *I have been in groups at camp with people who were really awful and I never want to recreate that. Some peeps just have no idea what their impact is on other people: interrupting, touching too much, sharing too much of their personal information, taking up too much time*

and space. This might not be entirely fair to them but in some communities there is some consensus that some people are a problem. For Banshee: a part of the camp experience is being uncomfortable. When I've felt I didn't belong, my sense is that I didn't belong with myself. I don't always know myself or I'm uncomfortable with myself, which opens up all kinds of opportunities to project that. I just accept it as part of the experience and ride the wave of it for the week. In related comment about responsibility for the community, she said that: I try to support, rather than be critical.

Service

Related to the ethos of personal responsibility is what Sig considered as: *service with love*. She said that organizing witchcamp was a lot of work but positive: *It would have been nice to take a shower this morning, but instead, I set up the ritual site. I sometimes notice people who might be challenged in some way but I don't rescue them. I try not to worry about it; we address it as organizers at the beginning by saying that everyone is responsible for their own experience. I love the self-responsibility piece.* Lalla also considered responsibility to the community as service, saying: *I want to say something about service. It is a big part of witchcamp. People come to gain things, but also to put things in. There is continuous feedback of putting in and getting out. The whole service part is very important. I'm always happy to do whatever needs to be done for the camp.*

Hailey described a long-term transformative process where she moved from receiving roles to service roles at camps: *At first it was a place for personal, social, and spiritual exploration. I immersed myself in the culture and each year worked on*

developing particular skills such as ritual arts and leadership. Recently, her intention changed: It's not about what kind of experience I am going to get, but what kind of support I can provide for other people to have their experience. It's a huge challenge; a lot of work!

For Cepheus, part of the reason for going to witchcamp was: *to priestess others, to facilitate others in serious personal work*, in part because she appreciated the support from others during her own difficult spiritual experiences: *I don't know that I'd call them negative because in retrospect, they were useful. In retrospect, I learned so much from that experience. I was firmly changed. I will never be the same. That first camp was transformative. It was the camp and the kind of people that were there that just blew my mind. I didn't know we could treat each other that way.* Cepheus said that coming to camp as a participant had a different feel than when she was an organizer: *I don't feel that I'm stewarding the experience in the same way. I'm certainly participating and contributing, but not holding it for others in quite the same way.*

Similar to Cepheus, Cruz said that the reason that he became an organizer was because he found the transformational work that he had done so important for him and wanted to facilitate that for others. He described witchcamp as a: *really important resource that needs stewarding.* As an organizer, Cruz tried to: *be conscious about creating community for others.* Hazel described the production of witchcamps as: *a cultural imperative. Our hunger for witchcamp is that it brings us an antidote to the dominant culture, which desperately needs balancing. It is*

imperative to offer camp culture as an option for those who want it; whether it makes our own experience less easily accessible or not. I think it behooves us to offer it.

Spiritual Authority and Personal Responsibility

Linked to the ethos of personal responsibility was the belief that each person was her own spiritual authority, suggesting that being directly responsible for one's own spiritual experience encourages taking responsibility for social and personal experiences as well. Crystal suggested that: *many new Witches are drawn to Witchcraft because they have the ability to own their spirituality. I would never want to exchange my camp experience, because every experience changes you and helps to shape who you are. I am who I am because I went to camp.* Soleil suggested that: *the distinct lack of an intermediary is what makes camp unique and original. We have teachers and guides and leadership roles, but there is not one defined leader. There is no assumption that one person or role is required for individuals or the community to have a spiritual experience. Each person is responsible for her own experience.* Cepheus reported her personal experience with the divine: *We call divine presences into our circle to work with them so I'm having an interaction with the divine, in a very real, very personal way. Very tangible sense. It is those energies in part that help me to do the work of self-improvement or whatever work that I'm doing in that moment.*

Lalla also described herself as: *my own spiritual authority and I'm responsible for my own spiritual experience. I go to camp to push my edges and sometimes I am pushed into the edges of beauty and sometimes to the edges of shadow and dark. It's all great. It is growth and more connection. When camp*

doesn't resonate with me, then, I'm checking with myself and wondering what doesn't resonate and what can I do. It's my responsibility as a Witch to do what I need to do to create my own affinity group, to walk the labyrinth, to change path, to swim every day, to seek out people I want to hang with, to be in nature. The first few times, you are wowed by all that is going on, but all the opportunities are there; as you go to more camps, you become more aware and are able to take it on yourself. My experience is my responsibility; the organizers have put a lot of time and energy into providing this space for us and I just have to find my own way to do my own work here.

Grace provided a concrete example of how Free Activist WitchCamp expected self-responsibility: *FAWC in particular required participation and self-responsibility. As does life. We had to dig our own latrines! I think FAWC is wonderful and will support FAWC by volunteering in the future.* Rocky observed that witchcamp delivered a message about personal responsibility: *I think there is enough freedom in this camp that we can each make it what we want. There is freedom and choice. You don't have to do anything. Freedom and self-responsibility go together. That is an expectation of camp that I like. If something is wrong, it's up to the participants to change it. There isn't a lot of unclean, victimhood, or criticism, or gossipy stuff.* Hecate also talked about self-responsibility: *There is an emphasis on people taking care of themselves and checking in with themselves. There are lots of reminders. And people tend to add their energy to creating whatever is going on. Everyone contributes energy and this year no one is here to just hang out and watch.*

Personal responsibility was taught both directly and indirectly at camps through the ethos of ‘holding space’ and ‘supporting the intention’. Lalla provided an overview of what it meant to support the intention: *The whole philosophy around witchcamp is that if you’re in a ritual and you’re not going intense or deep, you just hold the space for others. We are always holding space for others; that is the basis of community, always. Holding space, supporting the intention, and being aware of shared space. Holding energy; in perfect love and perfect trust sort of thing; energetically allowing people to feel safe, feel contained and supported; unconditional support for everyone to have whatever experience they’re having. In rituals, if you’re not into it, you can play with energies and pay attention to the group energy and to others and to hold space and energy for the community. We need to be there for the group as well as for ourselves. Community means that one invests in community, and becomes responsible for the community.*

Patsy’s comment suggests that perhaps there was sometimes a need for clarity in regard to the cultural expectation of self-responsibility: *Occasionally I have felt out-of-place at camp. This has always been something interior, and has nothing to do with the way others have treated me. I have never felt unwelcome. Respect for others’ experience of camp is really what it boils down to. I try, where a choice is available to me, to make others’ experience more rather than less pleasant, fulfilling, trusting, rich and communal. I would like to see some things around this made more specific and also enforced.*

The overall ethos of witchcamps was woven from various threads of alternative beliefs and experiences that characterized witchcamp as outside of

ordinary life. Intense immersion in altered states of consciousness, Goddess-focused ecospirituality, and mystical experiences were integrated with the Witches Rede and a sense of responsibility to the community.

Summary: Sense of Community

Witchcamps clearly provided participants with a powerful, multi-dimensional container, built on structural and experiential factors, as well as community experience and ethos. Sense of community appeared to exist on various levels; within local witchcamps, through participation in various camps over time, as well as in the networks that developed locally and electronically between camps. Some campers expressed an imagined sense of welcome and belonging just through their awareness of the larger camps community. Sense of community seemed to develop through agreement and intention, socialization, inclusion, and contribution, as well as through reflection of unique beliefs and values. Sense of community acted as a shield against the dominant culture, for people who did not feel synergy, oneness, or tribal connection in the larger culture. The community also functioned as a mirror that provided a positive reflection for the individual and the group as a whole. While not all individuals experienced all layers of the community, most expressed a connection to some aspect of the overall community. Tensions arose out of the structure, social and ideological diversity, gender and age. Tension and conflict seemed to be accepted as inherent in community and even structures such as affinity groups and shared leadership, intended to support sense of community, sometimes worked to erode it. While witchcamps provided an intense short-term lived

experience of community, and enabled the like-minded to find each other, they appeared to be limited in their ability to provide the daily life-integrated community that many participants desired.

As described in the following chapter, the witchcamp container provided a crucible for personal and social transformation.

Chapter Six

Theme 3

THE TRANSFORMATION

What Happens Between the Worlds, Changes the Worlds. [Invocation]

Described by participants as a container and a resource for change, witchcamp functioned as a crucible for transformation, both personally and culturally. This chapter presents the theme of transformation in two sections; the first focuses on personal change; the second, on social change.

Sub-theme: Transformation of the Person

As reflected throughout this project, personal transformation was a clear intention in the witchcamp community. Growth, supported within the container of community and nature, was valued by many participants. Goals centred on personal and spiritual growth, leadership development, learning ritual arts and exploring Pagan culture. In reference to personal transformation, the term ‘therapy camp’ was used by participants and generally, but not always, was said with affection. This section highlights participants’ experiences of personal transformation as reflected in the notion of therapy camp, through the development of skills and knowledge, and finally, through edgeplay.

Therapy Camp

Cruz characterized witchcamp as a: *container for personal transformation. It’s a time and place for looking at myself and identifying things and trying out new ways of being. It ritualizes the shifting into new ways of being, a chance to be my*

higher self for a continuous stretch of time. Similarly, Lalla said: witchcamp provides a container for powerful personal experiences. It is intense and safe and we are here long enough to go deeper, to have full experiences. It opens up new ways of being. Camp is both a container and a resource. Tina said that she'd never been to formal therapy before going to camp, but grew to rely on camp as a critical opportunity for therapeutic growth and sharing of intense emotion. Tree, who preferred other aspects of camp, said that: the whole idea of therapy camp used to just piss me off. Why do you need to do all that personal growth work in order to do Magic? I continue to struggle with that concept though now I'm softer about it. I have an ecospiritual relationship with the Earth. Camp is about my ecoethic and the Magic is the spiritual extension of my ecoethic. Ecoethics are the base of my spirituality and that relationship is more important to me than therapy camp.

Maya said witchcamp was: *like group therapy, only the Magic adds a lot of fuel. When I realized camp meant being vulnerable around a lot of people, I went out under some trees and sobbed. And then it turned out to be one of the most transformational experiences ever. Camp has lifted me, and shown me a part of myself I would never have known in another way. Yes, I've grown and benefited.* For Sig, witchcamp was: *a reorientation experience to my self, my values, and what's important. I've pretty much been able to do my personal work here. I usually come back feeling informed in different areas in my life in new ways, and I can take things in new directions and get unstuck.* Pye too experienced: *inner personal transformation; it happens through connecting with my deeper inner self and connecting with others and being open to that connection.* Jizak described a:

sense of freedom from the constraints of everyday life that allows me to open up and really look at myself, and my life. I explore who I am and who I want to be. It is therapeutic because I look at myself and set goals and intentions for what I want in my life and what I want to let go of. I benefit by learning new skills for ritual and for living. I've learned communication skills such as determining what is my issue and what is someone else's issue. I feel revitalized at the end of camp and more able to face the world. It helps me to look at myself more honestly and see what I can and should change and what I should appreciate more about myself.

Shechi described camp as a place of both personal and collective growth; a place to move: *further along my own trajectory of becoming the person I want to be. It's a place of authenticity and stretching. I nurture parts of myself that I value. I see parts of myself emerge. Coming here is a place to step back and set that as an intention. What would it look like in my normal life to remember my power? This is a community I trust to mirror me honestly. Witchcamp is a place where I like who I am when I'm here. I think it's somewhat of my better self, my gentler self, my more relaxed self. I have permission to think about a different response to my life.* Through both tears and laughter, Shechi shared a poignant personal growth experience that occurred at Wild Ginger: *I remember my first witchcamp. The story enacted was literally a story about me, and the way I had been abused as a child and in the story the bad man was banished and repudiated and I was embraced. In this community of appreciation and love, I was held and I wept and it was worth about thirty therapy sessions because of the transparency and level of my pain and of the support that I received. It was a primal level experience where my wound was*

visible. I felt totally vulnerable and naked and yet it felt okay. That was the same year I took some leadership and I think it was a lovely overlap of being fully visible. I do lots of leadership around the world, in settings in which I'm allowed to be strong, powerful, smart, and creative, but its not a place for me to be small, vulnerable, seeking, and needy. She laughingly added that: of course they don't pay you three grand to get up there and say I have some issues and I need to be held.

Zevon, Hailey, Rosey, and Banshee reflected on their experiences of developing self-awareness:

Witchcamp is an amazing opportunity to get together with other Pagan people and explore self-discovery in a safe, supportive environment. I return because I am amazed by the caliber of people who show up, by the quality of path work, and by the ability of this camp to allow me room for growth. [Zevon]

It's an opportunity to do intense personal work. The reward is knowing myself. Having revelations, figuring out what was buried subconsciously and letting that become manifest. As a participant, the experience is very introspective and the result is always personal growth. I get to explore and express aspects of myself that I don't experience in my normal life. Just to reflect on who I am and what I stand for and getting to do that in ritual as a numinous experience. It's very intense. [Hailey]

One experience that I've often had is the sense of a feeling that I know myself and that I know my truth and I'm very grounded and I'm going back out in the world and I cannot tolerate not being that person. Personal growth, self-love and self-acceptance, being accepted in my witchy self feels so good. Then I go out in the world and I figure out how to be fully myself and grounded and living my truth and

not foisting it upon others. I guess it's just an essential part of personal growth and a sense of integration and self-acceptance that does carry in to my every day life.

[Rosey]

I can do deep work with others who understand deep work, in community with others of like-mind and approach, and who have strong, healthy boundaries, which is part of what makes the deep work possible. I am with others who are willing to take risks; fearless. I can give myself wholly to my own ecstatic experience and my own relationship with the sacred. Each time, I return with enormous insights and revelations that sustain me, and keep me healthy and honest in my life and work. I get what I come to camp for: a life changing experience, in community. A chance to explore the wild in nature and myself. [Banshee]

Personal growth can be serious and emotionally painful, but it can also be fun, as described by Cayo and Beastie. For Cayo: *it was a week between the worlds to go inside myself and see more about who I am and where I came from. It was therapy, only fun. It was the safest most beautiful, sensual, fun beyond fun place I have ever been. I grew as a person; I gained strength to step into my power. I was nurtured and loved. I found my true sexuality, I made good friends. I loved my body. It changed my life, without being too dramatic. Beastie said that: witchcamp can be so irreverent. It brings up play, you can laugh at yourself, and the rest of the world. You are meanwhile doing deep and profound work that enriches your life.*

Many participants talked about how they had increased their communication skills at camp. Cruz noted that: *it's set up here so that it's easy to communicate with people. Pretty much every one here has non-violent*

communication grounding, so I can get constructive feedback, or give it, or just talk to someone. It's relatively easy here to set patterns about communication and authentically set boundaries. There is a high level of fluency about emotional and personal awareness, and good communication skills. It's like an advanced course and a place to practice, to even just say what you need; a chance to be in your higher self. Miche contrasted witchcamp communication with that of everyday life: People seem to be more conscious to how they listen and how they speak, it's quite a contrast from the real world where people are so unaware about interpersonal stuff. Bree reflected on transferring the communication skills to the real world: Witchcamp has an intention of exploring personal healing, growth, and learning in the context of spiritual community and activity. The first time I came back from camp, my whole life felt like an expanded witchcamp! Luckily I was actually in a setting where I could feel that for an extended time, and where it was relatively safe to function in the open and relational way I had learned at camp. It helped me learn to be more present to my own actual life. Lalla credited affinity groups with teaching her: how to listen. My affinity groups were great; each person had time and space to say whatever they needed to say. Each person speaks and you hold the space, no comments, no advice, no whatever. Affinity groups are a unique space and structure. A place to listen, and be heard. It's most supportive and powerful when it's just about listening and holding space. Rosey had a different response to the communication process of affinity groups: Each person would share their experiences in the confidential listening setting, and then nobody could respond.

That was just really hard for me, to share something and its difficult and nobody says anything. Didn't work for me.

For Wind, camp inspired trust: *When you are surrounded by people with that kind of energy, it heightens your own openness and awareness. There is an expectation to go deeper than you otherwise would. An expectation to be honest with yourself and see yourself reflected in amazing people that you respect.* Matty said that he gained: *validation and love, as well as: challenge in personal growth and service.* The impact of Tina's first camp experience was remembered: *as feeling completely out of my head with love. I came back and went to dinner with my family and it was the first time in many, many years that I could totally view my mother with complete love. It was total love. And she still, fifteen years later, talks about that. It was so meaningful.*

For Jax, camp was a place of: *personal transformation and valuable insights.* *Two years ago, Wild Ginger was like a rebirth for me and it really did feel like a rebirth. I felt like I was coming home and a part of me was being born.* Through witchcamps, Jax had learned to check in with himself daily, on both an emotional and psychological level. He credited camps with teaching him balance, self-acceptance, personal insight, and profound personal transformation: *I am a better person because of witchcamps. I'm healthier and more stable and balanced.* Crystal shared how being at camp gave her a feeling of wholeness and well-being that was: *difficult to explain. Camp and ritual helped set me on the road to overcoming anxiety. I feel so blessed to have been given this opportunity. I carry this experience with me wherever I go and it reminds me that the world I want is possible.* For Tina,

there was always: *tremendous reward. I always benefit and grow somehow. I always come back having faced something in myself.* Tina also reflected on the growth that she and her partner experience as a couple: *I feel incredibly lucky and I know that sharing the camp experience with a partner is kind of rare. So many partners are threatened by camp, or uncomfortable with it. For us, camp is relationship building rather than a stressor.*

Witchcamp was place for pushing personal edges and experiencing extremes. Edie had: *some of my highest highs in my life and some of my lowest lows and betrayals at camp. It has covered a very wide range for me.* Stream described camp as a place: *to live the life you would live if you didn't think you had to do certain things for the sake of others. It's interesting to me that quite a few of the people there are therapists.* Even the most highly skilled priestesses relied on camp for on-going transformation. Hecate said: *as an ordained priestess, this is my renewal place and a place to push my boundaries and edges and deepen and grow. I learn new skills and new things about myself, a lot of personal growth.*

In the language of Jungian psychology, Rocky, Jax, and Cruz talked of how the personal growth experience of camp had included finding and taking responsibility for one's unconscious or repressed 'shadow-self'. For Rocky, there were: *costs, such as when I look at my shadow and see things that I'm not comfortable with. But that's really a good thing.* Jax said that he was: *not always delighted, by what he learned about himself: We can consult with our spiritual selves and not like what we hear. I've seen aspects of myself that were dark and shadowy, and I've felt strongly connected with archetypes that are unappealing and*

frightening. It's all about who you are and what you bring to the experience. Cruz reported that he had: done a lot of shadow-work at camp; I can push my edges, develop capacity. Jizak said she had felt: uncomfortable, like I do not belong at times because there are extroverts who get a lot of attention at witchcamp and I sometimes feel left out. I believe this sense of not belonging is my personal work being brought out at camp and it is an important part of facing my shadows. I think that the positive and negative experiences of belonging are great learning I have done about what community is and how groups work. Camp pushes personal buttons and community does not really exist without conflict, especially when it is less hierarchical and striving to be inclusive. I like that everyone helps out and that people are encouraged to be personally responsible for their experience with help available if someone reaches for it.

Some participants shared their discontent with the personal transformation aspect of camp and Rosey and Karen spoke of being ready to move on from witchcamps. Rosey wished: *for camp experiences where I could really get my edges and skills pushed in a way that doesn't happen so much any more. It really depends on who else is there and who is teaching and how they help shape the Magic and that hasn't happened for me the last few camps.* For Karen, the: *major reward has been getting to know the stories in depth. The stories continue to act as teachers and sources of new personal insight. I'm not sure though, that I will return to camp. I am looking for a more systematic practice.*

Cepheus and Muse noticed the distracting impact of assuming roles of more than just self-responsibility at camp. Being an organizer had its own benefits, as

discussed earlier, but clearly had a cost in terms of focusing inward on personal transformation:

It's a very intense experience where I get a lot of personal work done. It's a chance to learn new skills, practice old ones, and to do some serious self-work. That's really what it's about for me - getting a sense of my internal landscape to sort of refocus and ground. Over the past few years though, it's been working less for me and I think it's because I've been behind the scenes, organizing and stuff. I need to be a camper again. [Cepheus]

I get my rewards from internal processing; spending time looking at my patterns and thoughts helps me develop as a Witch and woman. I benefit from personal reflection on the story or theme. Because I'm an organizer, the deep Magic that others experience seems to have escaped me. Maybe I'm getting witched out. [Muse]

Banshee shared her opinion that witchcamp was not meant for everyone, as some people were not personally ready for the depth and intensity of transformation that could happen: *I've seen many enter into personal work that's too deep for them, too challenging, that throws them too off balance. People who enter into the work who aren't ready for it can really put a strain on the facilitators and the community.* Bruxa playfully summed up our discussion of personal growth at witchcamp: *Sometimes, it's a growth experience, sometimes not. You don't necessarily go and have an epiphany every time. Sometimes you have the big E, sometimes you don't!*

Through witchcamps, Rosey: *became interested in supporting people's psychological work. Camp has had an indirect but big impact on my life. My*

experience at camp helped me get interested in work that supports people's personal growth. At camp, there are so many who have done some personal work and know themselves well and accept themselves and are able to respect others. Strangely, the people in my grad program aren't very self-aware and don't seem curious about the dimensions of the human psyche and that is very frightening. Also because of witchcamp, I see personal work as highly intertwined with spiritual growth. Many people in the mental health field don't.

Given the sense of being closeted in the dominant culture, personal authenticity was highly valued in the witchcamp communities. Camp was a space of authenticity where a Witch could be completely out of the broom closet in her practice, but also in her deepest self. This culture of personal and spiritual authenticity invited, inspired, and catalyzed transformation aimed at expression of a genuine self. According to Sequoia: *to be a Witch means to deal honestly and authentically with every situation in my life, wherever I am.* Tina, at 56, was: *pretty comfortable, with who she was, but still valued camp as a place where she was her: best possible self. That's why I go. I feel authentic. Every messy part that I am, and every great part that I am, is okay. There is lots of permission there.* Violet described herself as: *a rather eccentric and weird person, that did not fit well with mainstream: social niceties. Witchcamp feeds my soul and helps me connect with the self that I hide from the public. It's a place to renew and be authentic and I work on taking that authenticity to the real world. People come to camp assuming that they will express their authentic selves. We expect them to be authentic and this provides a culture that is quite unusual from the outside world.*

Lalla theorized that: *'The Everything is Optional' philosophy, of witchcamp contributed to authenticity. She said: Camp is a place where people can be who they are, in their nature, connected to the earth. You do what works for you and you hold space for others to do what works for them. It's nice to be in a space where you don't have to deny who you are. Jizak credited community acceptance: People are supportive and encouraging, which allows me to open up, to fully explore who I am and who I want to be. I feel accepted at witchcamp in ways that I do not outside of camp. I feel freer and more connected to people.*

For Rocky, it was the lack of judgment, that made a difference: *People like to put you in a box and I get so tired of just one acceptable way to be. All of our institutions are based on heteronormativity and patriarchy. It's so pervasive. There is a freedom from those assumptions here; there is inclusivity and diversity, all those things. People come from their hearts and I don't mean emotions, I mean their hearts. They speak their truth. Authentic. There is a generosity and a willingness to share. People are comfortable with their power and their vulnerability. Not that they are exclusive, but sometimes in our world out there, there is a message that vulnerability is not okay. Pye also didn't like to be: put in a box. I'm full of contradictions and this is just who I am. I don't have to explain myself here. I don't get asked where I live, or how old I am or what I do for a living. Nobody here cares about that stuff. You are who you are. I feel that freedom in my body. I'm not as tense.*

Like Pye, most participants expressed a deep appreciation for being in a space and community where they couldn't fully express any aspect of themselves

without concern for mainstream social consequences. Beastie said that: *things are more real, more authentic*, at witchcamp because of being protected from the outside world. Stream expressed a sense of freedom: *I am free to be who I am*, in part because her role and status as: *one of the elders*, was valued. Similarly, Maebon said: *at this age, I really want to just be me in the world. I am with my people at camp, there's nothing like it in my mundane world. I just say what I want to say, be open, freer in myself expression*. Shechi appreciated that she could be fully authentic such that she doesn't even think about being lesbian or hiding that from anyone. Gwin said she: *felt safe to open up and be myself in a way that I rarely do in the Muggle world*. Being: *seen and accepted in my sexual power*, was important to Maya.

Freedom to express one's self in community did of course, come with challenges. Grace tried to be accepting, but was distracted by people who behaved: *in a way that consistently drew attention to them; acting like prima donnas. Whatever floats your spiritual boat, I guess*. Banshee wondered if some campers were: *desperately trying to cram a whole year of authenticity into one week*. She found it both sad and unhealthy that camp may be the only place of authenticity for some people: *I'm aware that if you have an alternative lifestyle, California is a much easier place to live that out. But as a part of my focus on sustainability, I need to be around people whose lives work for them; who are strong enough to find ways to be their authentic selves everywhere*. Zevon acknowledged that: *it's difficult to go from an open, loving, vulnerable place to one where we must be more guarded about being vulnerable and open*. Alternately, Daphne embraced the challenge: *The work*

is to bring the aligned self, the authentic self out into the world, in a way that the world can meet.

It would appear that the container of witchcamp provided participants with rare freedom from the assumptions of the mainstream culture, and an opportunity to openly connect with and present a self that they kept guarded and closeted in ordinary life. Such liberation enabled a comfort with vulnerability and self-expression. The culture and structure of camp was described as similar to intense group therapy and it facilitated awareness, reflection, and exploration of the deep inner authentic self. The exploration came with the challenges inherent in integration of the shadow self, and not everyone was prepared or ready for such a process. The high level of emotional fluency in the community, along with an abundance of therapists and healers, provided support through the transformation. Pushing personal edges and trying on new ways of being led some participants to profound insights and empowerment. Participants described the rewards of the transformation as rebirth, primal healing, self-love, integrity, and an overall sense of wholeness and well-being. As will be discussed later, such personal transformation is considered both parallel and prerequisite for social transformation, as expressed in the invocation, ‘What happens between the worlds, changes the worlds’.

Individual healing and growth was just one aspect of the personal transformation of witchcamps. The following section presents transformation of the self through the development of knowledge and skills.

Building Knowledge and Skills

In this section, I present participants' reflection on their experiences of transformation through skill development opportunities related to the practice of Magic, community organizing, event management, ritual arts, and magical activism.

At the opening ritual of Dreamweaving, there was some focused and direct teaching about Reclaiming Magic, about the cone of power, and about how energy is Magic. As the week went by, it became clear that the teaching of 'energetic technology,' or Magical practice was woven into all ritual and path work. On the second day of path, we learned that archetypes are original patterns of human behaviour, and working with them enables us to peak into our own psyches. The belief was that if we can tell a story differently, we transform ourselves. We were taught that there are no villains, just reflections of light and dark. Another morning was spent talking about trance technologies, guided visualization, hypnosis, shamanic journeying and meditation. Taylor taught us that the conscious brain could be confused by presenting it with two things to do, and she gave the example of listening to a story and following the drumbeat. The confusion allows the subconscious brain to settle into the trance state. I stood back to back with Jewel and we slowly turned 360 degrees, as we led a 'trance' by both speaking at the same time, through only describing what we saw in front of us. We learned that adding repetition, poetic words, and layering voices could deepen the trance. Taylor described the classic structure of trance, reflected on inductions, entrainment with the drum, pacing of words, tone and rhythm of the voice, and deepening with images and repetitive chants.

Karen said she often experienced witchcamp as a workshop where she had learned a variety of things: *It's a place to learn Magical techniques through*

experience, and to go deeper into the tradition. I love resolving things by consensus and the way this is modelled in all-camp meetings. I love the practice of feedback meetings and how they model respectful interaction. Similarly, for Beastie: it's a place to learn and to study and to experience. Bruxa described herself as: a baby Witch. I'm looking at what people label as their Witch practice. Sometimes I see things that I just do, but hadn't thought of it as Witch practice. Like scrying and dousing and Tarot. I've never thought of those as witchy. Jizak picked up: valuable Magical skills, but also loved that there was: space for my activism and of living consciously. Some campers are less interested in activism and there is room for divergent opinions. I learn how people embrace the feminine as well as masculine, and strive for inclusiveness and less hierarchy, value divinity and the Earth. I have had great discussions with people who had different views on alcohol, sexual freedom and rules restricting sex with teachers, vegetarianism, and some of the discussions were difficult but they were always interesting and educational.

Miche's comment reflects the lack of dogma and tradition-specific teaching of many witchcamps, and wished for more: *I get to learn a little bit more about the whole tradition through what's involved in rituals and path. I'd like to know more about Reclaiming Tradition but I'm likely going to have to do some reading about it, if I can find the time. That will be my way of really absorbing it. I don't think that witchcamp teaches it and I would love to do Reclaiming 101. I still learn lots just by coming to camp. I'm very interested in this form of spirituality but I do nothing outside of camp to learn more about it. I'd like to just sit in on a couple of lectures and get the basics.* Maebon, a woman from a small rural town in Northern Canada

humorously offered a comment on why it was important to learn at camp: *Let's face it, there are not a lot of Witch mentors hanging around my small town.*

Hecate and Stream, both skilled facilitators in their professional lives, talked about learning through observation:

I learn new skills by observing things, things that work, or whatever. I take a lot of notes and sometimes I actually use them afterwards. [Hecate]

I certainly watch and learn. There are people whose leadership skills are so good, so effective. I develop my leadership skills by seeing what is effective. I notice group dynamics and see what the facilitator did and how they handled it. [Stream]

Witchcamps also provided a practical forum for people to develop skills related to leadership. Muse noted that her: *skills as a path leader have increased as I take the chance to co-facilitate path, year after year.* As an organizer, Tina: *developed consensus based decision-making, and I've developed ritual skills and knowledge.* Cruz too talked about ritual skills: *I have greatly increased my priestessing skills because of witchcamp. As an organizer, my skills at reading large groups for energy and holding the priestess awareness, and even the Witch/Priestess/organizer awarenesses simultaneously is definitely something I've gotten better at.* Violet credited witchcamp with supporting her: *in taking on leadership roles. During a time of being president of a local organization, I had many challenges, and I used the skills that I had learned at witchcamp to help me through.*

Developing Ritual Arts and Priestess Skills

Learning and developing skills related to the practice of Magic and ritual arts were valued by camp participants. Gwin: *learned a great deal that will inform my individual practice; about trance work, drumming, stories/myths, aspecting, rituals, and raising power. I learned quite a few new techniques for grounding, centering, getting in my body, and inducing trance, and a lot of new chants as well.* Likewise, Crystal said that: *camp has changed my spiritual practice in that it showed me that circle can be freer flowing.* Lalla focused on: *building trance and energy skills, aspecting and deep witnessing. I have learned how to move energy and watch it, playing with auras and charkas and my own energy and the big energy of the group. I just came back from camp and I can't wait to share what I've learned with my coven and the local Pagan group. And I've learned a ton about facilitation of groups.*

Some of the more seasoned Witches and longer-term campers conveyed their desire for deeper or more advanced learning opportunities. Meg, having been involved in Paganism and Witchcraft for over thirty years said: *I would like more advanced workings for those of us who have been on this path for many years.* Along the same line, Banshee said that she was: *at a point in my own work and practice that I can't find many good teachers; some Reclaiming teachers are still ahead of me in their ability to facilitate a sacred experience. I learn through them, and that means a lot to me, personally, and as a priestess in other groups.* Rosey again spoke of how she was ready to move on from witchcamps: *Although I feel very connected at this camp, with the people, the rituals, the spiritual work we are doing, I am not*

feeling challenged. I am no longer interested in cosmology and Gods and Goddesses and even in doing intentional acting on the world kind of efforts. The only place where I can really grow spiritually right now is in my meditation practice. I'm more interested in the personal practices that change my own energy and consciousness. That's one reason that I might be moving away from being a Witch.

In spite of being involved with: *the Craft*, for over twenty years, Patsy said that she continued to learn at camp: *I come away from every camp with something new; a chant, a story, a way of doing something, a friendship.* She sometimes accepted an apprentice outside of camp but turned some away because: *they just want to be trendy and different, or they are seeking power.* At camp though: *anyone who wants to know something from me can have that knowledge, because it always seems as though they are truly interested and want to learn. It's not freaky or trendy, or power – its just information.*

Sig, a young woman on the cusp of launching a medical career, compared her medical training to her spiritual development. She expressed sadness and some frustration as she talked about the parallels and challenges: *I've dedicated almost as much energy to learning about Witchcraft as I have to learning about medicine. I've had valuable mentors in both, and during my recent graduation, everyone stood up and applauded and I'm initiated in that world now. It seems ridiculous that it's easier to become a fully accredited medical specialist than to find some sort of public recognition, mentorship, and feeling of inclusion for training in my spiritual tradition. I've studied all these years and have all these tools and I know that I can claim my own power and I am my own spiritual authority, but I wish there was some*

sort of recognition or initiation event. Something that says I can teach, I can pass it on to others. I certainly teach it, using other words, to my patients. I'm at a crossroads. I've invested so much in this and there is no one to share it with, except when I come to camp.

Some witchcampers had pursued the transformation from student to Reclaiming teacher. Some taught at witchcamps as an occupation, or at least as serious leisure (Stebbins, 1992). Each witchcamp within the Reclaiming web was autonomous in its organization, format, content, and teacher or student-teacher selection process. While not all camps engaged with this process, the WitchCamp Council provided and maintained a database of teacher biographies, skills and experience so that camp organizers could select teachers to hire or invite to their camp (WitchCamp.org).

Voicing the belief system of Reclaiming, Sequoia lauded the assumption that each individual had a direct connection to divine energy, whether in ritual or not: *What makes witchcamp unique and original is that there is a distinct lack of intermediary. We have teachers and guides and leadership roles, but there is not one defined leader. There is no assumption that one person or role is required for individuals or the community to have a spiritual experience.* Unfortunately, for some teachers, the belief system was perhaps more rhetoric than guiding principle, as was illuminated by some participants. After a few years of participating in, and organizing witchcamps, Oceana pursued the teacher path. She described how teaching was about both learning and service. She understood teaching as continued learning, and believed that luck played a part in her acceptance to her first teaching

team: *Becoming a witchcamp teacher felt like a natural move, the next step in my learning and growth. There are a lot of people applying to teach, so sometimes it really is about luck. One thing that she learned more about was power: I like the Reclaiming model of having two or more teachers to facilitate a path, class or ritual. It provides a lived experience of shared power. Power is certainly something that comes with teaching. I'd be skeptical of anyone who said they weren't at least on some level attracted by the power. There's a lot of visibility, position, authority, and glamour that goes along with teaching. Visibility as a teacher can make you a target for people's projections, and the position can be distancing. In a tradition that claims a non-hierarchical structure, authority is frequently questioned and challenged. Oceana went on to describe how: teaching is also about making a contribution, offering service to the community and giving something back. She playfully added that: the wardrobe required to maintain teacher-glamour makes packing for camp a challenge.*

In Europe, Maya found her way to teaching a path after only one year of camp: *My favourite part of teaching is Path. It might just be the savior thing, the power. Even when things on the organizer and teaching teams are challenging, teaching is an amazing experience. I've student-taught at camps where the full teachers are Jed Hawksley and Elmer and Marn and Benson Matthews and Blu Milton and Mel Davidson and Frank Gannet, amongst others, and that has been, well, awesome just isn't articulate enough. This has lifted me, and shown me a part of myself I would never have known in another way. I've grown and benefited through teaching path.*

Edie wasn't willing to share the details, but said that she had a bad experience when she stepped in to a teacher role: *It involved double standards and trashing of my boundaries. It felt like resistance to an up and coming teacher, like I was trying to take away their teaching job. In the mid-nineties at BC WitchCamp, there were some pretty fierce and covert competitions for teaching roles as the San Francisco teachers were handing the camp leadership over. It got ugly at times and I felt I was not wanted and would never come back. A lot of the early power struggles in camps have been worked out, as well as the over-programmed pace of the earlier years. It's old now, and I don't want to go into it but it wasn't a good experience.*

During a recent first and only time teaching a path, Lalla told how she didn't: *jive with the other path leaders. Four of the path leaders were very stuck in a hierarchy of 'I am teacher, they are students'. They talked about how unskilled their students were and how disappointed and shocked they were that campers didn't know this or that. That didn't resonate with me, so I talked lots about our co-created path and how it was a shared model and I emphasized how much I loved it. Path leaders have a big impact. They had a lot of power and I didn't like that power differential and how they were feeding off of it. They were hiding behind a shield of all-knowing and powerful. They were resonating with an energy of condescension. It's antithetical. There were a lot Feri people at that camp and a lot of high priestess language. To me, High suggests Low, and it fundamentally doesn't resonate with me. There was also a lot of talk about initiation and competition about how far along that path they were, whether someone should be doing trance when they hadn't done rites of passage. The community is not a community I can relate to,*

with all the hierarchy. Part of what I like about being a Witch is that we are all the same, that no one has more official power than others.

Hecate shared a story about her first time student teaching: *It was the October after Nine-Eleven, so it had a lot of energy and a large influx of people from outside of our community. There were problems on the teaching team. Long difficult meetings, hashing out the rituals, making decisions. Problems with how someone aspected and some personal history between two of the teachers. Campers have the illusion that everything is peaches and cream on the teaching teams. Although I've been involved in Church leadership long enough to know that's not true, the whole thing was exhausting and just gave me self-doubt. I didn't feel like I belonged. And it really affected the camp. I later became an organizer and we learned not to pick teachers for their skills but to try to create a group that could work together.*

Sig too identified problems with teachers, power, and hierarchy: *People kind of get caught up in power and hierarchy and the glamour of teaching and qualifications and money and I don't think that as a community of Reclaiming, we have effectively dealt with that. There are people who find themselves in teaching roles and they aren't ready to be teaching. There is a hierarchy of experience and of commitment and so people that are the most committed and experienced should have the most say. I don't think we are all on an even playing field. We are all at different places in our own personal work and experience. When not ready, some actually do harm if in a role of power.*

Along with being: *intrigued by the creation of ritual*, Laia acknowledged that part of her motivation for applying to teach was: *to go to more camps and it is very expensive, so I thought getting in for free and/or being paid would be great!* She said that, in spite of the challenges of teaching through the physical, emotional and Magical intensity of the week-long camp model, she had learned: *so much about ritual planning, being in a team, the morphing of the models, how to work with different personality types on a team, the importance of self care and communication with the team - all kinds of juicy things about the stories we have worked with, connection to different Deity and archetypes. I worked with fabulous organizers and teachers from around the world! And I have been a good mentor, teaching others, sharing my training and experiences, cross-pollinating across camps.*

Personal transformation was reflected in the notion of therapy camp, as well as in the development of knowledge, ritual arts, and priestessing skills. Campers had profound experiences of transforming their internal landscapes. They also learned to make decisions by consensus, and developed group facilitation skills through observation and mentorship of strong powerful women. Some developed skills relevant to living consciously and living in community. While this study did not pursue an in-depth exploration of the role of teachers, it was clear that dominant cultural experiences of power were reproduced in the role, as well as in the expectations.

The next aspect of personal transformation to be discussed is edgeplay, the pursuit of social risk-taking through novel and sensual social experiences.

As noted in the review of the festival literature in chapter two, a core function of festivals is the open invitation to explore the edges of typical social interaction and try on personal and social transformation (Falassi, 1967). The festive, outside-of-normal life (Abrahams, 1982) atmosphere of witchcamps provided the space for campers to venture across the limits of mainstream culture. Based on Lyng's (2005) notion of edgework, I refer to the social, and sometimes playful aspect of this explorative adventure as 'edgeplay' (Calley Jones, 2010). Behaviours and experiences that were accepted and celebrated at witchcamp were outside the norms of mundane existence and provided a prototype for social revolution. Like edgework, the quest for self-actualization was characterized by the pursuit of novel, sensual, and sometimes outrageous experiences, or those that might be considered outrageous in the dominant culture. Involving intense emotion and profound spiritual charge, edgeplay similarly involved voluntary risk-taking on the social level. This section highlights campers' observations in regard to the transformational potential of witchcamp sexuality and nudity.

Hecate, an ordained priestess and spiritual leader in her Texas community, conceived of witchcamp as: *a place to push my boundaries and edges and deepen and grow. Some of it is just that it's fun. I like the playfulness of people, willingness to try things; just play – it's a kind of spiritual play.* Along the same lines, Meg found camp to be: *far more free and edgy than my day-to-day life. I need what camp gives me, and I haven't found anywhere else to get it. There's nothing I know of to replace it.* Banshee said that she valued witchcamp as a place that: *shows me*

another way I might live, another way our world can be. What Jizak said she loved about witchcamp was the: *few-holds barred singing and dancing and having fun.*

One of the normative edges explored at witchcamps was sexuality. Rosey, having been to many different camps over the years, noticed that: *each camp has a different energy. A unique sense of enchantment – with each other, with our activities, with the land. It's a fun and enlivening kind of enchantment; sort of sparkly sexy interactive lovey energy. People tend to be more willing to be the parts of themselves that they can't show in mainstream company. So are more honest about their sexual identity, more openhearted. I enjoy the playful, honest, dance-y energy of camp.* Sylvie said that she loved: *the ecstasy of the cone of power. And I like the fact that we play with gender, and some of the men wear skirts.*

Pye said that she appreciated that there was: *an allowance of sexual energy. I like that it's not cut off or stuffed away, or scolded or glorified, or exaggerated. We have a container for it. That's not easy to find on a day-to-day basis in the world that we live in. I feel very comfortable with the sexual energy at camp. There is a generosity; it is just accepted here; in the rest of the world, it is distorted.* Daphne referenced: *the Iron Pentacle*, a notion that references the importance of developing particular aspects of our consciousness as a step toward embodied social change. She explained that: *In some traditions, spirit is disembodied. Here, what we are saying is that we embody spirit, and that includes the sexual energy of the body; we get into the juicy creative sexual sense of aliveness.*

Lalla was exuberant in expressing her: *love of the sexual energy*, but said she chose not to be sexually involved at camp. She said that she liked: *flirting, playing,*

kissing, but I don't tend to engage in sex. It's just too distracting. It ends up being a powerful and overwhelming experience that leads to a lot of emotional processing. There are so many things happening at camp that sex is just too much on top of that. Sometimes the rituals are over the top with playful sexual energy and some people think it's too much and others think it's mild. Miche offered an example of playful sexual energy being encouraged: At the vulva path this year, they made puppets and that is fun. They're still doing good work about sexuality but in a fun way.

According to Stream: camp is a place to try things that you might not otherwise try. You might consider yourself heterosexual but never have kissed a woman and witchcamp might be a place to do that in a supportive way. That's nice but it's not what I'm looking for, or oh my gosh that is what I'm looking for. It's that kind of place. Sometimes there is a lot of nudity and a lot of in your face sexuality but you can choose to be part of it, or be somewhere else in the camp. I went to a bondage workshop and it was great fun. I liked the edginess of it and it pushed my boundaries. Even though I don't really get it, it was interesting and a growth experience.

In *Playing at the Queer Edges* (Calley Jones, 2010), I explored the notion of witchcamp as a queer space where spirituality, sexuality, family construction, and gender are queerly revisioned. While this research did not specifically pursue this notion, it is certainly reflected in the comments of study participants. Contrary to the perspective of the dominant, heteronormative culture, Cruz's comment (below) highlighted witchcamp culture as 'queer' in its most expansive definition (Browne, 2006; Knopp, 2007; Sandilands, 2001) where queer is not reduced to sexual

orientation, but is considered a fluidly evolving construct that flows in disharmony with heteronormative culture, stretched to include any and all activities, accoutrements, and culture of heterosexuality: *Being queer in either gender or sexual orientation doesn't really tell you anything about me except that I identify with queer people more than with men, or women, or gay, or straight. Being queer means I don't have to choose into any one category that would cut off a part of my being.*

Muse said that she liked: *the respect for each person and acceptance of diversity. As a lesbian Witch, the proximity and interactions with other queers is nourishing.* While witchcamp culture celebrated all that was queer, the community was not immune to queer/homophobia, and the openness particularly challenged those who were new to the culture. Jax, identified himself as: *gender fluid and bisexual*, and observed that queer identities: *can be challenging for people, even in a community like witchcamp. This community is very queer and I love that but I still run into challenges being male, being bisexual; sometimes straight males that come with their female partners have issues about gender and sexuality. I often sense uncertainty because I don't openly identify; people know I'm queer but they don't know what that means exactly. I am trying to stop changing my sense of my gender and sexuality in response to other people's energy. It's hard to unlearn that. It was worse at the Wiccan Church of Canada events though. That freaked the hell out of me; being a queer male. It is very het and it was so oppressive. They're very hierarchical and have a clear gender divide.*

Patsy shared her experience of coming from a: *redneck, backwoods mecca*, of heteronormative culture, to the queer culture of witchcamp. Wild Ginger was her

first exposure to significant numbers of queer people: *It was my first chance to see open affection in same-sex couples, to see gay men and lesbian women as parents. I'm curious about the sexual orientation of people I meet. I'm curious about what they do for a living, too. But the question is now casual, interested, but not one of those things that would make or break an acquaintance. Considering my redneck upbringing, and the backwoods area in which I live, that's significant. Since then, in my home community, I have been able to offer acceptance to a couple that is otherwise closeted.*

During my week at Dreamweaving, as I became familiar with the other campers, I had a better sense of the queer demographic than when I first arrived. Queer culture was not obvious in any way, perhaps so integrated that it was at first invisible. I learned that Cruz sometimes referred to himself as trans and Sig, despite having a monogamous male partner, identified as queer. The couple who owned the land was lesbian, as were some of the campers. While there was no visible polyamory, I learned later in the week that some participants were part of poly community, and the camp had historically had an active poly community.

While I did not conduct a census during this research, I would hazard to guess that, notwithstanding the queer-positive culture, the actual number of traditionally defined 'gay' and 'lesbian' people at witchcamps is small. Nonetheless, Grace said: *As someone who tends towards heterosexual monogamy, I have felt like a minority. But largely I very much appreciate the openness of sexuality at camps. I participated in a self-pleasuring ritual. It was an energetically powerful and*

interesting experience among many powerful and interesting experiences. But even my generally open-minded friends back home really honed in on that one ritual. This seems like part of a general association of Paganism with rampant sexuality. One of the reasons I consider my spiritual beliefs Pagan is because Paganism is sex positive. However, being sex and body positive seems to be frequently misconstrued as unrestrained sexuality or more colloquially, sluttiness. I am sex positive and open about sexuality at witchcamp and in regular life. People often seem to think that I therefore must have lots of casual sexual encounters and that is actually not the case.

Given the exploratory and celebratory nature of sexual energy at witchcamps, it was not surprising that a number of participants commented on their experience of sexual boundary issues, some positive; others less so. Rosey described how camp had helped her become more conscious of her relationship with her own sexuality. She expressed frustration with how tedious it could be to manage sexual boundaries: *Over the years at camp, I've had experiences where I kept needing to say no about people crossing the sexual boundaries, about getting in my space. It can be tiring to go into intimate spiritual work and then feel like I have to always be managing my guard.* Sylvie too remembered a similar event: *At one camp a young woman was feeling harassed by one of the men campers. Another older woman and I gave her support, and were supported in doing this by one of the teachers. She confronted the man and regained her confidence, enjoying the rest of the camp. He apologized and mended his ways.*

Both Lupina and Matty shared disdain for what they considered inappropriate sexual boundary crossing at camps:

I am aware of inappropriate sexual activity; older male teachers being sexually involved with seventeen and eighteen year olds. [Lupina]

One year at camp, a teacher romantically pursued me to the point of sexual harassment. I turned to the community for support and the camp dealt with it. I have also intervened in sexual harassment against others. [Matty]

Jizak and Maya had alternate perspectives:

I have had discussions with people who had different views on sexual freedom and rules restricting sex with teachers; always interesting and educational. I like the no sex between teachers and students rule. This provides me a container with safety that tells me witchcamp still has limits for safety sake. I like that everyone helps out and that people are encouraged to be personally responsible for their experience with help available if someone reaches for it. [Jizak]

Some people come to camp just to get laid! Joke! Sex related issues always come up at camp. The sex issue will turn anyone into a hypocrite anyway, but I've seen campers have romances with teachers and it isn't always damaging. I always feel very seen and accepted in my sexual power. It's a bit confusing as my partner and I do not have an open arrangement. [Maya]

Beastie recalled: *Many years ago, there was a major orgy on the beach; sex is part of life, it's life affirming. Sexuality at camp is celebrated if you want to participate. I love the celebration of the different genders and different orientations and influences; it's all celebrated and accepted. Some witchcamps had more recently created what campers referred to as a Bower or Temple of Love, a private and contained area within the physical camp boundaries that could be utilized for*

sacred sexual activity. Daphne described a bower at one camp as: *a place that was set aside specifically for consensual, sensual or sexual experience between people of any stripes and genders*. Jax reported that he is: *all for sex at camp, done it, love it, it's awesome*. He said that: *a number of American camps in the south have a Temple of Love where people can go and just have sex. There are all kinds of touchy issues around how that happens, where it's located, what is a safe distance, and how to protect the kids from getting close to it. Some people are really uncomfortable with it. And, sometimes I'm uncomfortable; a balance needs to be struck.*

Cruz described camps as: *very body positive and very sex positive, and I don't see that in other faith communities. It's not the centre for me, but it's an important thread. This spirituality is grounded in the body. Sexuality is sacred. At camps that have a bower, there is a safe space that is set aside for sexual activity. And just having that available and visible whether or not anyone uses it, or what they choose to use it for is important. I've been to some great community rituals in a bower. Where it is about asking for what you want in the moment and getting no's and yes's and setting boundaries, and taking the risk of saying no, and also the risk of saying yes, and taking the risk of asking for what you want. I find it fantastic because it's a safer place to practice and explore sexuality, even just energetically, sharing sexual energy with people, and/or communicating about sex, about sexual energy. It's unique.*

Sequoia and Rosey elaborated on the tensions that have surfaced at camp in regard to the Bower, described as: *a space dedicated to acts of love and pleasure*. Sequoia said that: *different people interpret this differently, but one of its primary*

uses is for sex and other acts of sacred sexuality. Several people no longer come to camp because they were not comfortable with the presence of that space. Obviously, in a tradition like Reclaiming, it is very important for healthy sexual expression to have a space, especially where you can't just run off and fuck in the bushes, but it breaks my heart to know that there are people who will never again have this experience because no one was willing to listen to their concerns - because real Witches don't have problems with sex, which, of course, is the biggest load of hogwash. Witches are people first, and people have all sorts of problems with all sorts of things. Rosey said that: it's not that I don't want sexual energy to be there. I've taken a sex path and it was very good and very worthwhile, but it seems like it's becoming very central, well at least at that camp, to the myths of that camp, and its drawing people who come primarily for that reason. It changes the tenure of the whole thing. The camp was attracting a lot of people who are interested in what they call Sex Magic and what I call very horrible boundaries. I don't want to go to camp and then always feel like I have to put up walls and screens because of other peoples much more porous sexual boundaries. In that context, there is less direct communion with the natural world and less talking and teaching and I felt less connected to the spiritual tradition. It's fine, but I don't want to go there.

Banshee and Gwin also commented on the sexual energy at camp, highlighting other tensions that can arise. Gwin pondered the impact of the low sexual energy at Dreamweaving WitchCamp: *Maybe one of the reasons this camp was so low drama was because there didn't seem to be any sex happening outside of established relationships. I could be wrong about that, but I think maybe this*

restraint of sexual energy contributed to the fantastic camp experience. Banshee, an elder in her camp community, focused on the practicalities: My biggest complaint about sex at camp is that people get caught up and bail out of their commitments to breadwork. Even if you're involved in group sex, you should just pull yourself away to do your assigned tasks.

A conversation over the lunch table at Dreamweaving included lively discussion of sexual energy at camps. Two women were very excited to hear about sex positive spaces at other camps, and had not heard of *Bowers*. Lumin, one of the organizers, shared some camp history of having to deal with overly sex-focused men creating problems at camp.

While not an annual occurrence, Mud People was an edgeplay experience that surfaced at witchcamps from time to time. The activity was intended to be primal, sensual, and creative. Midge shared an experience with mud people that she had at her very first witchcamp: *There were mud people traveling around the land, visiting the paths that year. At first I was reluctant to get involved, mostly because there were men there. But it looked kind of fun, and the energy wasn't sexual, so eventually I took off my clothes and covered myself in the mud. It turned out to be a lot of fun. To get the mud off, we had to run down to the lake. There had been some rain, and the road had a big mud puddle, and Jax and I, completely naked, got in a mud throwing fight right there on the road. I didn't even know him and there we were, totally naked except for the mud, playing in a puddle. It felt light hearted and innocent. Until we saw the police car coming up the road! We ran into the woods,*

and of course the police wouldn't have been able to recognize us once we washed the mud off. That was before we knew the road wasn't private.

As described above by Midge, the mud people activity involves nudity, or what campers refer to as being skyclad. Different camps had different rules about if, when, and where campers could be skyclad. According to Lalla: *at some camps, you can be naked all the time, most anywhere. Its very casual and secondary, while at others, it's very restricted.* Participants were generally in favour of having the option to be skyclad if they chose to, with a few varying opinions.

During a particularly hot and humid afternoon, I sat on the porch of our cabin with my cabin mate, Casper. The oppressive heat in Missouri was incredible and unfamiliar; similar to the humidity of Southern Ontario, but much more intense. The sudden downpour was heavy but oh so very welcome. Casper and I sat, skyclad in our lawn chairs, and got soaked. The cooling rain on my skyclad body was absolutely delicious and awesome. Primal. I mused on the distance between humanity and nature, and I wondered what David Abrams had to say about being naked in the rain.

Karen shared: *a warm memory of being welcomed to one camp by a dancing nude who offered to help with bags. He even said he'd put on his skirt for the occasion.* Beastie recalled being skyclad in a downpour: *The rains just came down in torrents, and Farley and I started dancing in the rain and we took off our clothes and we got totally drenched and it was very magical dancing under the trees. We let go of inhibitions. That behaviour isn't encouraged in many places and it was fun.*

Playing like that lets you be who you really are and connect with nature and with each other.

Cayo disclosed how her sense of her body changed at camp: *I don't love my body as much at home as I do at camp. I love that I can be naked at the beach. Bree too valued: clothing optional options. Mutual respect and trustworthy behavior are the most key expectations (but I don't take for granted that any of us have the full capacity for either.)* Muse remembered her initiation to being naked at camp: *The first time I was skyclad at a camp was very unnerving. Now I feel free to connect with the natural world in any way that pleases me at camp. I like the access to a nude beach whether I use it or not. I don't like that clothing options have been restricted at Wild Ginger in the last few years; I relished the option to take off any clothing I wanted.*

Hazel also shared a special moment: *We had a bunch of ten year olds dancing naked around the fire, singing that chant My Body is the Body of the Goddess, a Living Temple of Love. That was a key moment that I will carry forever. Witnessing kids with that experience in their background, about themselves, their sexuality, their bodies. They are learning that their bodies are sacred, that their bodies belong to them, that they can be joyous in their bodies, that their nakedness is nothing to be ashamed of, that it can be joyous, playful and exuberant. It wasn't sexuality; it was just their bodies were okay and wonderful. You can be naked and it's okay and celebratory and wonderful; not creepy or dangerous, or sexualized. It was pure innocence, joyous and physical. Where else would a child ever get that experience?*

Rocky said he appreciated the camp rules about nudity: *The amount of sexuality and nudity is just about right for me here. There's an allowance, a playfulness about it, but its not overt. I like that there is a nude beach where you can go swimming, and there are rules in the camp about nudity. I could probably tolerate more nudity, more playful sexual energy, but mostly I'm quite comfortable with the way it is.*

Like many women at witchcamp, Pye was keenly aware of the objectification of women's bodies that was so prevalent in the dominant culture: *We don't have nudity here, except at Bob's Beach, but I love the nudity, more as an expression than as a subject; to be free to disrobe as much or as little as I want; I think that's important because so much of our world objectifies our bodies. We're an object once we're naked, while here if I'm naked, I'm not an object.* Jax clarified that: *nudity is not innately a sexual thing. I think that there is more sexuality in clothing than there is in nudity.* Similarly, Grace commented on the dominant cultural view of the human body: *Like with sexuality, being skyclad is misconstrued with sluttiness. We are taught to be ashamed of our bodies and then shown unrealistic images of nudity in our culture. It is incredibly refreshing to see real human bodies of people of all ages. Plus who wants to deal with a wet swimsuit!*

I interviewed Cepheus as she tattooed my body with body paints and shared her view of the body as sacrosanct. To Cepheus, the body was sacred: *I love the acceptance of one's body here. Whether you are old, young, large, small, your body is beautiful and sacred. I love accenting that.* By the end of the interview, my body was tattooed with a triple spiral, bright green leaves, and giant orange flowers. On my back was a representation of Kali, as both

creator and destroyer; a skull eating an egg; the cycle of life/death/rebirth. Across my shoulders, more magnificent orange flowers.

The more pragmatic campers appreciated the skyclad option for practical reasons. Maya and Violet both liked the choice even if they didn't use it. For Maya: *being skyclad is a matter of choice and climate. I've got no problem with people being skyclad, even if I don't feel like it myself.* Violet fantasized about her utopian witchcamp: *If I was doing a dream witchcamp, the weather would be mid 70's –no rain, cloudy sometimes, not always sunny and one would not need to worry about clothing – any issues around cultural things which would come up because of lack of clothing could be dealt with rationally.*

Shechi talked solemnly about the importance of having the option to be skyclad at witchcamp: *I like the naked swimming in the lake, the naked part is very important to me here. The shedding of clothes, the safety to be naked. There are few men, not enough to bother me. It's mostly women, a very lesbian space. I love being in the water naked and feeling safe. And other women's bodies; skinny and fat and all, it's all there. No sense of being judged around that stuff which is a pretty big issue for women. And dancing naked around the fire, my body is a living temple of love, you know. Being naked in the lake is spiritual for me. It's about communing with nature and being part of something bigger and feeling connection to it. It feels like I am water, and in water, and of water and I belong to water. It's being with that element in a concrete way that is spiritual. We can't be naked anywhere now; just at Bob's Beach. How sad.*

Eavesdropping sometimes can't be helped in small communities and during a conversation in the dinner line-up at Wild Ginger, one camper expressed appreciation that nudity had become more limited at camp. She said that she was glad that Unicamp has new rules so we don't have to deal with those people who just like to walk around naked, inappropriately. It occurred to me that perhaps Pagans are no different in that we too become more conservative over time.

The accepting and revolutionary climate of witchcamp enabled polyamorous relationships and 'poly' families to be much more visible at witchcamps than in regular life in the dominant culture. Lalla's comment illustrates some of the ways that witchcamp provided a space of social change: *I remember being at camp as a family, with Zak, Bubble, and the kids, and one Witch just watched us for a while, fascinated. Until then, poly was, for her, a theoretical concept. She said she was glad to see people were actually living it in a positive way. Another year, we had an affinity group that was all queer and poly. Everybody gets it and we understand the challenges and the strengths. It's nice to be in a safe place where you can fully be yourself. People aren't always critical but they just don't get it. At camp, it's such a non-issue and it's nice to be in a space where poly is just one of the options. Sometimes there are lots of questions from people who are exploring or curious. At one camp, I even went to a poly path! Tree appreciated the: increased level of acceptance. Maybe because people in the community are used to being closeted in some way, as Witches for example, they get it; we share a commitment to being open*

about alternative lifestyles, even if they aren't the same lifestyles. Witch, poly, queer.

Sig's experience of her husband's discovery of poly relationships at camp was less positive than Lalla's: *I introduced my husband to witchcamp and he loved it. He learned about polyamory at camp and started to pressure me. Eventually, he said that if I wasn't willing to let him have sex and relationships with others, then we couldn't be married any more. We divorced. It wasn't a good marriage and camp provided a catalyst for it to end. I've never seen a poly relationship that didn't break up. I don't think it's a good idea to raise kids in a poly family as it must create confusion for them. I would like to see more emphasis on family values and I don't mean that in the right wing scary way, I just mean how do we live as a family together. What sacrifice does that include and what deep and profound experiences can you get from that? People talk about celibacy as a challenging practice, and poly as a challenging practice, but what about just being monogamous? That's challenging and I find it to be beautiful. We're touching on my sacred wound but I would like to see people bring the same intentionality and respect for monogamy. Sometimes, poly opens the door for men to come to camp and have their way and take advantage. Sexual politics at camp can be a big deal. I believe in live and let live and I would never confront someone about their choice to be poly.* Sig paused in silence: *Mostly, it's my own shit.* Similarly, Jax's observation of the poly community at some witchcamps was that: *sometimes, in camps with a larger poly community, there are little dramas that kick up when people are not as grounded as*

they think they may be. Some of it gets played out at camp over dishes, ritual planning, drumming.

Like quintessential festivals that enable a public space to experiment with social being, and to display, affirm, and transform culture (Abrahams, 1982; Falassi, 1967), witchcamps acted as containers for transformation. Personal transformation was achieved through intense development of the spiritual self, of knowledge and skills, and through exploring social margins. Participants spoke of authenticity, values, self-in-community, and the importance of having a public that provided visibility, appreciation, and acceptance. As noted by a number of participants, personal development was understood as relevant and necessary for larger social change. Transformation of the self was recognized as a prerequisite for transformation of the world.

The next section focuses on social transformation aspect of witchcamps.

Sub-theme: Transformation of the World

Witchcamp was described by participants as an antidote to mainstream culture. Through envisioning and embodying change, deepening values about environmental and social justice, and redefining activism as Magical, camp participants found infinite ways to transform the world. This section presents transformation material that illuminates how witchcampers created such meaning from the experience of witchcamp.

Antidote to Mainstream Culture

Participants talked of witchcamp as an antidote to mainstream culture. Matty described camp as: *a relief from the dominant culture. It is an antidote to Witches being low on the totem pole in the dominant culture. There are things one can't easily do at home; plus the mundane world gets in the way.* Patsy said that she found camp to be a: *refreshing change from daily life. It's so important to me to be in a place where the regular Western lifestyle and mindset does not predominate.* Similarly, Crystal described camp as: *a world of its own, with new norms. My personal life and my camp life are complete opposites.* For Rocky, witchcamp was: *a place where people come together and let go of the things that aren't right in the culture.*

Meg and Violet articulated specific differences between camp and mainstream culture:

It's a chance to live in a more consensual, cooperative community. Mainstream society is not organized this way. There is a big disconnect. Camp is a place to recharge and affirm one's life choices that generally run counter to the mainstream beliefs. [Meg]

Leaving camp feels like going back to the real world. Witchcamp is a unique experience, a community that is trying to live in an ethical way, a spiritual way, and trying to manifest that in reality. Trying on sanity for a week. [Violet]

Nanny illustrated some of the ways that witchcamp acted as an antidote to the dominant culture: *We are an antidote to mainstream; which is all head and distrusts the body and distrusts emotion. We learn to pay attention to ourselves in a whole*

new way. Witchcamp invites me to settle deeply into awareness of my own body sensations and from there, into a sense of connection with nature; the part of nature that is non-human; into connection with other people not just through words, more energetically. At camp, I have a heightened sensitivity to energy of all kinds and part of that sensitivity comes from being willing to dance freely, swim nude, and dress expressively, and relax into trance, so my awareness gets opened up. That is very different from the caution and conformity that life outside camp seems to demand. Instead of starting from a mentality that restricts me from trusting my intentions and actions, witchcamp is more welcoming of me the looser, more open I am. The assumption is that we are naturally a force for good, if we can get out of our own way. If we can truly be guided by our selves as we are when we fully connect with our whole being within the wonder of the universe. Banshee described how the antidotal culture of witchcamp impacted the dominant culture: I appreciate a week of living in community as I wish my communities out in the world were. Camp contributes to my daily life by giving me a deep experience that I continue to explore once I get home. It shows me another way I might live, another way our world might be. It is far more free and edgy than my day-to-day life. It's a chance to practice and carry that back out into the world.

Embodied Change

Many participants mentioned the notion of embodiment as a factor in changing the larger culture. Hailey, a writer and thinker, shared her understanding of how information provided during ecstatic ritual was embodied and encoded in the brain: *The brain has evolved to process embodied experiences; we learn this way,*

just like reading a book, or studying something. To change consciousness can be effectively manifested through ritual, which is an embodied experience. Even if one doesn't believe, the body still has to process it, and it gets encoded into the brain with new patterns of consciousness. The body processes the metaphorical experience at a subconscious level, at an emotional level. The change happens in the basic filters that we use to understand and perceive the world. The brain has to process the experience so it becomes a pattern by which to understand certain aspects of our lives. We begin to see our lives through the myth or story. Even if you don't believe, you still embody, or take in the pattern. You actively connect to certain parts of the story. That is what it means to live a mythic life. To me that is what being a Witch is all about. Ritual changes the consciousness of the participants of that ritual such that after that ritual, they then engage the world in a way that manifests the intention that was laid into the subconscious mind during the ritual. Hailey added that: ritual doesn't have to be understood to be efficacious.

Daphne reflected on how: *the meaning of camp or ritual moves from intention to embodiment. Other spiritual traditions tend to focus on transcendental experiences; the experience of this lifetime is rewarded in the afterlife. But for us, the prize is right here, right now. It's in the affirmation of the daily experience in the body, mind, heart; in the moment. That is a piece of the embodied nature. Heaven is right now. Cruz said that: the goal of my spiritual work is to embody the divine, consciously, all the time, and to make choices from that space and to respond to the world from that space. He compared the collective embodiment of ritual to that of group meditation: Trying to collectively embody the divine, and to see it in each*

other as well as in ourselves, is a spiritual thing. It's similar to meditating in a group. When I meditate by myself it's like one little stream, but in a group, it's many small streams, bunching together into a river, a collective energy. That makes it easier for me to hold my individual energy shape. The nerdy thing that comes to me is like a protein of multiple sub-units like hemoglobin; one binds oxygen and then it's easier for the rest of them to bind oxygen too, some sort of collective energetic embodied change. It's about embodying the earth, embodying love, embodying change. We have this value system, this radiance that we've generated, and shining that light is a form of activism. The embodied result of that is manifesting it physically. We help people empower themselves, it's a huge thing that we can embody and model as a community. The thing I like is that it's not wholly intellectual, the body is cultivated, and there is a huge amount of personal work and self-awareness. I really appreciate witchcamp because it's very much about embodiment. It is spirituality grounded in the body.

In talking about activism, many respondents, whether or not they identified as activists, referred to the idea of creating change in the world by making change in the self, or by living one's life as an enactment of the vision, similar to Mahatma Gandhi's (1869-1948) belief that 'you must be the change that you want to see in the world'. Jax referred to: *the old definition of the word Witch, which is to bend and shape. I like that image of crafting my life and crafting the world around me. I'm intentionally focusing my spiritual energy internally because I want to grow into a person that is healthier and more stable and well-balanced. The Iron Pentacle is about the work that we do to balance ourselves, and how, out of that balance in*

ourselves raises a balance in Pearl Pentacle and that is about the work we do in the world. In doing that, in focusing on myself, I've been able to do more work in the world that is in line with the values that I have. (Iron and Pearl Pentacles are Magical tools or philosophical notions that teach a connection between qualities of the conscious self and the transpersonal realm of community. Together, the Pentacles are said to embody our divine natures).

Sig said that she used Magic to be: *grounded and centred*, in her activism. She said: *It's a really powerful activist thing to do to live your values, at home, not just at camp. Most of the sorting out of personal values happens at witchcamp then I take them home and my activism is trying to embody that. Activism that comes from a place of alignment is going to be more effective. Creating change has the potential for conflict and it's really easy to get into power games and react. If your activism is from a place of self-love and being grounded in your values, aligned within yourself and aligned in your world, you're less likely to get pulled off balance and your activism is going to effective.*

Magical Activism

'What Happens Between the Worlds Changes the Worlds' was a phrase commonly used during ritual invocation and referred to the belief that Witches use the art of Magic in sacred space to create change in the world. By deepening vision and focusing will, Witches empowered themselves and each other to act in the world to make change. The sacred elements of Magic include Earth, Air, Fire, Water and Spirit, and work with Magic relied on intention combined with techniques of visualization, sensing and projecting energy, chanting, trance, creating Magical

space, spellcraft, and structuring rituals (reclaiming.org). According to Starhawk (2010), the term Magical Activism refers to Magic that has a political intention. Magical Activism is engaged spirituality; the blending of earth-based spirituality with action in the world.

While not all study participants were familiar with the Reclaiming term Magical Activism, most were familiar with the notion and described it in various ways. Matty described Magical Activism as: *using spirituality to help encourage social change. Prayer and energetic support without even attending a political demonstration is one way to do this.* Similarly, Lupina described it as: *using energy to feed the web to make change.* Meg said that: *Magical Activism is about using Magic to enact change in society, and in the world.* Edie summed it up as activism that is a spell. Sequoia understood that there are: *two kinds of Magical Activism. The first is performing any activist activity within sacred space, from making a meal entirely with seasonal, local ingredients, to chaining yourself to a building. If it's done within sacred space and with Magical intent, it is Magical Activism. The second is Magic-as-activism, such as when a group of local Reclaiming people buried crystals around the Xcel Energy Center in advance of the Republican National Convention in 2008.* Lalla offered the example of Magical Activism related to the Gulf oil spill of 2010: *Magical Activism requests came around on the E-lists for the Gulf crisis. We were invited to direct healing energy into the water.*

Cruz had been deeply involved in all forms of Magical and street activism and he generously shared his insights. He described Magical Activism as: *engaging in activism, whatever that happens to look like, consciously and in a spiritual*

manner, from the higher self; embodied love. He contrasted it with street actions where: people use declarative sentences and yell; a kind of violent communication, feeding opposition rather than trying to find the solution or ask questions. I don't buy the means of a lot of street activism. It needs to be rethought. Do I want to push against this thing or do I want to build something else. The Magical part is the intentional connection to spirit. Often in marches or rallies, the Magic is what creates connection in the streets and enables the building of collective energy. Creating that connection is Magic. When activism is Magical, it's not limited by space and time. It is activism on a meta level. The spiritual level itself is powerful in shifting the physical. Street activism is useful but it doesn't manifest physically after the fact. To manifest meaningful change, we can form connections, teach skills, transform spaces, listen to stories. Gardening is activism at the earth level, composting, community gardens, reuse of found materials and resources, revisioning what waste is. Teaching youth how to stand up for themselves with non-violent communication. It's a huge thing that we can model as a community because we have that. We radiate and shine that and we should share it. Embodying and shining that light is a form of activism.

The mythical story employed by Wild Ginger highlighted Magical Activism and was inspired in part by concerns about a 'Mega Quarry' being proposed one hour North of Toronto, near Unicamp, the home of Wild Ginger. The environmental concerns related to this Mega Quarry were, and continue to be many for Southern Ontario due to the impact on the aquifer, rivers, farmland and wildlife of the area. As such, the paths and rituals of witchcamp were built around the story of

Amaterasu, a Japanese Sun Goddess, with the intention to educate and inspire the community to take action against the environmental devastation inherent in the quarry plan.

Amaterasu was a beautiful and compassionate Goddess who ruled both the sun and the heavenly fields of rice that fed the people. Her brutish brother Susanowa went on a rampage, slaughtered a sacred horse, smashed the weaving looms, and generally wreaked havoc on the land and the people. Amaterasu became depressed, went into a cave, and refused to come out. Without her, there was no sun, the crops died, and the people were hungry. Much activist-type activity took place outside of the cave but her grief was so great, she could not be moved. Finally, Uzume, Goddess of Laughter, Revelry, and Mirth came up with a plan that involved drumming, ecstatic dancing, a mirror, and flapping of labia. The crowd roared with delight. Amaterasu, curious about the commotion, came out, and got dazzled by seeing her own reflection in the mirror. The crowd blocked the entrance to the cave. Light was restored to the world, the land was once again fertile, Susanowa was banished, and everyone was happy. As can be expected, the story of the Mega Quarry, the Aquifer, and Big Business fit well with the Amaterasu myth. In the opening ritual, the story was introduced through sacred drama and the telling of both stories, highlighting the parallels.

Some participants were willing to share their skepticism or lack of belief in Magic and the magical part of Magical Activism. Hailey laughingly described Magical Activism as Woo: *If there is anything that is going to be effective about dancing around the fire and raising a cone of power or energy to create change, it's going to be changing the consciousness of the participants of that ritual. After that ritual, they then engage the world in a way that manifests the intention that was laid*

into the subconscious mind during the ritual. Hailey suggested that Magical Activism might encompass the idea of doing: *some sort of street action that is framed in a Magical context like a ritual. Sort of a narrative framework for what it is that you've actually done.* Similarly, Gwin expressed reluctance to believe in Magical Activism: *I'm not real sure about Magical Activism. I think that Magic is the art of changing consciousness at will.* As explanation, she offered the phrase: *be the change you wish to see in the world.* Shechi said that she could relate to the term but doesn't use it: *It means that activism is not just about changing the concrete conditions of some situation; it's also about changing peoples hearts and minds. Magic changes my understanding of things.* Miche thought the term Magical Activism was: *a bit of a paradox,* and said that it meant that: *anything is possible.* While she didn't engage in it herself, she said that: *Witches set intentions and create spells to make change.* She referenced the invocation: *What happens between the worlds, changes the worlds.* She wondered aloud if the prayer she said for the fish affected by the Gulf oil spill counted as Magical Activism.

Bree and Cayo shared their beliefs that Magical Activism was a tool to call on the support of spirit allies in other realms to help manifest a vision:

I hardly merit the title activist, but yes, I consider myself an activist. My activism is in quiet, background ways. For me activism is very connected to my spirituality, in that I invoke support, and/or tend the energy around activist spaces or intentions. Magical Activism is calling on the support of spiritual allies in this and other realms, in respectful ways, for the activism that we envision. [Bree]

I work daily in the inner city and am political everyday; an activist for women who work the street. Witchcamp helped me to know others were doing similar things everywhere. Magical Activism is to know there are others in other realms to help us. And it involves, Do Thy Will and Harm None. [Cayo]

Many study participants identified being a Witch and calling oneself a Witch as forms of activism. According to Maebon: *just being involved in an Earth-based religion is activism. It informs my sense of politics and being involved and participatory in the world at large.* Maya said that she used: *Magical Activism every time I rationally defend Witchcraft and Magic, or represent it positively; that is Magical Activism.* Cepheus was adamant that identifying herself as a Witch was activism: *The truth is that the word Witch needs to be reclaimed, and as part of the Reclaiming tradition I see that as my work, my activism work.*

Interestingly, some participants were not familiar with the term Magical Activism, but had ideas about the notion. Crystal admitted that she had not heard the term before and she guessed at the meaning: *I would assume that Magical Activism would involve ritual and ritual elements as political action. Or a ritual where the intention is political.* Sylvie didn't know the term but thought Magical Activism was: *a great and admirable idea. I think it means invoking spirit, whether in the form of Loki the mischief-maker or the Goddess in her various forms, or anything in between; to give strength to political actions such as demonstrations, occupations, guerilla gardening, etcetera.* Pye said that she had heard the term and though she didn't know exactly what it meant, she reflected aloud on the concept: *I consider myself an activist in my everyday choices, in how I live. We live on a farm and we*

grow some of our own food. It's all organic, no chemicals. We eat mostly vegetarian. Practice kindness toward others. Activism is just living day to day with a set of values about how you want the world to be. I'm not very good at the kind of activism that involves getting out and making noise but when something comes up, I will speak my truth, whatever it is. Is an activist someone who sits and meditates and projects love to the planet, vibrationally? Is that an activist? I'd say yes it is. Maybe coming to consciousness and having an intention for change and knowing what it is that I want to change. Is that activism? I would consider myself responsible to the planet. My devotion is to the Goddess and the planet. I'm a spiritual environmentalist. Deep ecologist. John Seed. David Abram. I believe in a more than human world. In street activism, there can be violence, verbal violence, lots of violence. That stops me. Bruxa thought that she might have heard of the term but didn't know what it meant. She guessed that: it means using Magic to make things happen. Do you know that movie, Fierce Light? It's about spiritual activism. It's the point where your passions and your desires come together to further a particular cause.

Reluctant Activism

Like many study participants, Banshee was reluctant to identify herself as an activist: *I don't believe I am an activist in the way most in Reclaiming define activist. I work to change the world by changing my self. I use Magic to enlist the power, energy and support of my subconscious, with the intent to change the world for the better. For a long time, I only worked on changing myself but I didn't feel healthy or experienced enough to exert my will to change the world. Witchcamp made me see*

that differently. Now I create experiences that let others step into growth and change. Likewise, Rosey said: I'm not sure I'd call myself an activist. I have trouble with that really go-get-em radical kind of energy. I'm well acquainted with some of those 'Capital A' Activist Witches and I deeply respect them but it's not the method I choose. I went to an activism-oriented Reclaiming ritual just before a political protest a few years ago. I just did not like the ritual or the energy. It was angry and seemed forced on building a frenzy of opposing energy and I thought that some of the people were taking themselves too seriously. I see what they are trying to accomplish and I hope to support that in other ways. I love and respect that, at camps, people are very serious about wanting to use their personal power and group power and their activities to make the world a more just place. I try to think carefully about what we do at camp and what kind of values I can integrate into my life and I try to model honesty and tolerance and influence other people, and work on what I do with my garbage. I try not to be consumerist or participate in what is destructive and unjust in the culture.

Rocky stated that he is not an activist: *except maybe in how I live my life. Activist makes me think of street activists but I understand that you can redefine it. There is no part of my life that I'm not willing to tell my truth in and that is the extent of my activism. For me, that is enough to change the world. It is a better way than marching downtown.* Similarly, Tree considered herself an activist, but only in that she was: *just living the dream, I guess, by role modeling. I farm the front lawn of my house. I'm not an overt activist though. I teach with an environmental ethic but I don't define that as activism.*

With laughter, then solemn honesty, Violet said that: *activism is something that somebody else does*. She said that she offered energetic and financial support to causes but did not have the courage to participate. Not being a risk-taker, she said she admired the people in World War II who hid Jewish families: *I wonder if I would have that strength if it really came down to a life or death ethical issue. I would hope so, but I'm not sure*. Maebon and Edie both denied being activists. Maebon said that she: *is a person of integrity and tends to see all sides of an issue*. She would: *fight for what she believes in*, but was: *not interested in jumping on any bandwagons*. For Edie, her temperament prevented her from involving herself in activism. Describing herself as: *an introvert*, she said she got: *too overwhelmed by the world to be in a crowd protest and being freaked out probably wouldn't help any cause*. Miche said that she likely had the heart of an activist but didn't go to protests, mostly because she was: *completely overwhelmed with my job and having a child and not having the time*. She added: *I guess that is what lots of people would say. I don't feel right saying that, but that is the truth of it really*. Sylvie said that: *these days, I lack the energy. But such activism as I am involved in is usually with fellow-Reclaimers around environmental or pacifist themes*.

Stream shared a story about starfish as an analogy for her activism: *My definition of activism and Magic is that you see what needs to happen and you find the most effective way to accomplish that. First you have to have the intention, then you have to have the courage to act, and then you have to have luck. That's the Magic part and for that you pray to the Goddess. This is my intent, this is my courage, thy will be done, you know? That is what Magical Activism is. How much*

impact I have on the world, I don't know, but I can certainly have some impact in my little corner of it. On a beach, a lot of starfish were washed up and someone took one and tossed it back in the ocean. Who knows what difference that will make to the starfish population, but it will make a difference to that one starfish.

Some participants who had been engaged in street activism for many years shared how they had come to reject street activism in favour of Magical and environmental activism. After twenty years of street activism and protests, Lalla had: *shifted to a kind of gentle spiritual activism, without anger or negativity. The most powerful thing that I can do is Earth activism. To care and love the Earth and model and educate and keep the energy flowing so people feel empowered to take action. A lot of people think they need anger or fear to make them activate but that doesn't resonate with me. All the negative stuff just pulls us to a dark side.* Flax too had shifted away from street activism. She shared a vision she had about: *trying to turn around an ocean liner with a canoe paddle. That's what we used to try to do with activism. Now we are each in our own backyards building our own canoes. Soon we'll have an army of canoes!* Jax described Magical Activism as: *raising a cone of energy and sending that energy with some positive intention to a political deliberation that is going on at that moment in time.* He provided the example of a local public gathering where people got together on the Solstice to drum energy to send to activists at the G-20 and the G-8. They held an: *intention for cool, calm, positive, peaceful demonstrations, with listening and non-violence.* Jax said that he had stopped attending protests because: *police violence against protestors really pissed me off, and it also pissed me off that protestors in black bandanas smashed*

windows and burned cars. He said that his response to that violence led him to meditate on who he was as a protestor: My spiritual growth, and learning Magical Activism have put me into a centred, grounded place as an activist. I know what I'm willing to do and what I'm not willing to do, what I'm willing to stand for and what I'm not willing to stand for. Ten years ago, I probably would have been the first person at a protest to get thrown down on the ground by the police. I carried an aggressive energy that the wrong people would gravitate toward.

Witchcamps and Activism

Gwin considered the role of witchcamp in her activism: *I am living out the change I want to see in the world, namely a return to sustainable agriculture and to medicine as something practiced by everyone. Witchcamp plays a role in my activism in that it infuses my life with energy to keep on doing what I'm doing. And puts me, for a week, among people who are excited about it and appreciate it.* It was Hecate's opinion that witchcamps are a form of activism: *Radically trying to embody stewardship of the land, and the teaching that happens at places like this, it verges on activism. It's empowering and it pushes you to want to carry that out in other places.* Lupina said that witchcamp prevented her from burning out as an activist: *I am involved locally as an activist and camp feeds my activist soul. I learn new methods and it prevents burnout for me.* Witchcamp provided Edie with: *awareness on political issues through discussion with other campers.* She said that she had seen people: *commit to big actions and causes because of camp.*

Jizak pondered the usefulness of witchcamps being isolated from the mundane world, but said that she valued them as sources of networking and

education: *I sometimes wonder if the experience of camp is valuable outside of the pleasure I get from it while I'm there. Would I be better served focusing on bringing my Magical work into the world in a way less separated from the everyday world? I love that there is space for my value of activism and of living consciously. Some campers are less interested in activism, and there is room for divergent opinions. I am an activist and I have participated in organizing and being at street actions, and I strive to make the world better through challenging some of the current socio-political structures. Witchcamp provides me a place to talk about activism with others openly and freely with a common language. Witchcamp also provides me with skills that help me in my activism, such as grounding, setting clear intentions, singing and dancing as ways of joyfully protesting. And the camp experience is so intense that I reflect on it throughout the year afterwards and it tends to feed my work year round.*

Meg described Magical Activism as: *creating change and transformation through unseen or nonmaterial forces. Belief in the power of women directed energy and deities. Belief in social change.* Although she disagreed with some of the ways that people used activism to enact change in society, she valued witchcamp as an: *opportunity to reconnect with people who blend spirituality and activism. The rituals are well thought out and thought provoking. Camp brings together many people with alternative lifestyles and choices of political process and activism. I benefit to know that there are those who continue the work of challenging the status quo and who have energy and hope for the future. Camp is a place to express the political that is not one of violence. I believe the work done has an effect*

energetically and changes do come about. I consider myself an activist presently working within the system. Witchcamp keeps me in touch with those on the edge. Keeping an open mind and being aware of all the expressions of spirituality and social activism helps me to be open and understanding and reminds me of the many solutions to be expressed.

Zevon defined herself as an activist in that she liked: *to get involved with changing injustice. Witchcamp reminds me of the sacredness of Nature and creates in me a desire to do environmental work.* Karen recalled activism-focused rituals from her witchcamp experiences: *At one witchcamp, there was a ritual to honour a local community activist. At another, there was a powerful ritual in which the activists vented while the rest of us witnessed.* Pye said that Wild Ginger motivated her: *to do some spell casting, to become a little more directional in the energy than I've been raising. I try to keep it simple and just to every day, live my truth. I'm not a street activist.*

As mentioned, a common ritual invocation when creating sacred space, or casting the circle includes the words, *what happens between the worlds, changes all the world*, indicating the belief that the intention or transformation energized in the sacred space of ritual (between the worlds) will also change the everyday, mundane world. Jax and Shechi talked about ritual as a time and place to envision change in the world:

We do ritual and visualize the way that we'd like to see the world. We put into place a formal ritual that is meant to send energy out into the world, to hopefully affect some change that we'd like to see happen. [Jax]

In creating ritual, we make stuff up that we'd like to see happen. It's a place where we get to articulate and name the way we want it to be. [Shechi]

In discussing the California camp, Stream described a workshop on radical activism: *They talked about how large street protesting has become bad theatre. Everybody knows their role; the protestors will have signs, and this is where they will go and this is when the police will arrest them, and bad theatre is boring. The activism idea I have is to wear a black armband, and people would ask what I am mourning. I will tell them I'm mourning the people living in wars.* Rocky thought that all witchcamps are partly activist camps. He shared an experience he had at Vermont WitchCamp: *A woman left part way through camp, saying that this was an activist camp and I'm not an activist. She had a lot to give and that was so unfortunate. Even though I don't identify as an activist, it hasn't stopped me from coming. I understand the history of Reclaiming, the history of activism. I just take what works and leave the rest. Not that activism doesn't work; it's just not for me.* For Crystal, philanthropy was her form of activism: *Philanthropy is an act of charity, an act of goodness for the benefit of others and our world. By performing acts of Philanthropy, we can change the world. By raising awareness, we can change people on some level. I'm involved in a number of charities and that is my activism.* Similarly, Patsy defined her work as an artist as activism: *I consider myself an activist in that I model a way of living, which is not the North American ideal. Art is a subversive act, a personal, interior view of the world brought forth for others to see. I see a lot of political activists at camp, and it seems to me that the work of*

camp does support that for them, even if they are only meeting with other political activists they might not otherwise see.

Nanny said that witchcamp supported the formal and informal activism that she had been doing: *My activism shows up in the way that I'm a therapist. Just the whole political context that I bring to helping people understand their personal angst of the moment. If you are anxious, well, the planet is going to hell in a hand basket so of course you're anxious. Sensitive people carry the anxiety of the culture. I bring a political analysis to all my work. I do that in the way I lead a service for the Unitarians, in the way I'm part of ritual; my activism doesn't have a box.* Shechi also identified as an activist, having been involved for over thirty years in peace activism, Palestinian-Arab issues, women's issues, immigration, and gay and lesbian issues: *At witchcamp, people value activism and you don't have to apologize for going to a demonstration. I'm one of two faculty in the entire university who goes to any kind of political demonstration. I will leave class to attend a rally. Other faculty have made negative comments about that. Witchcamp informs my activism. I bring what I learn here back to my activism.*

Muse described herself as: *an activist with a lengthy activist history. Being informed, of Magical issues, political issues, social, or environmental issues, is the first step in activism. Witchcamp raises issues and informs people of the problems and hopefully prompts people to take some sort of action, be it personal or public.* Soleil credited witchcamps for her activism and involvement in the local food movement. She also said that witchcamps made her more sensitive about how

energy affected groups in street actions. She told a story about a rally to mark the day that the Iraq war began: *I went first to a spiritual vigil and then to the rally. The vigil was very powerful and I liked the energy. The language didn't match my spirituality but it was still about social and eco-responsibility and mourning the lack of social responsibility. There was song and a spiritual kind of energy. Then I went to the ritual. It was all angry slogans being yelled on megaphones. Through camp, I've learned how the energy you put forth changes things. If the rally had singing or some positive note, it would have been more effective. There was too much anger.*

Remarkably, Sequoia said that she: *honestly never contemplated the link between camp and her activism. I see a link between my Reclaiming identity as a whole and my activism, but I don't know that the link is with camp. Camp has an effect on the form of my activism, but not its existence.* For Sequoia, being a Witch was: *to be a maker of Magic, an agent of both preservation and change. There are no observers at Witchcamp. You are a participant and co-creator from the moment you enter the space and this may have led me to more active activism; where I used to be more of a letter-writer and administrative support volunteer, now I'm that chick with the weed wrench pulling up the buckthorn, or making a hat to donate to the local shelter, or riding my bike to make myself an example of its viability as a mode of transportation.*

Redefining Activism

Some participants redefined activism in novel ways. Beastie said that she had raised an orphaned raccoon and for her, that was wild life activism and a profound experience. Cepheus likened her work as an erotic dancer to that of: *the*

Sacred Harlot, an archetype that represents spirituality and enlightenment through embracing and celebrating sexuality. She said that her activism was somewhat unusual in that she used her work as an exotic dancer to: *fight the stereotypes that go along with strippers. My goal is to widen understanding about the women who strip for a living. People think it is an immoral choice made by women who are promiscuous, drugged-out sluts, but that is not the case. There are intelligent beautiful powerful women who make the choice to strip. I'm reclaiming the profession. There's all kind of mythology around the Sacred Harlot; the Goddess as Whore. It is a calling and a priestess position and I'm trying to reclaim that for other women too. I have a degree and I strip.* Stream defined her work as a family planner as activism, saying: *I don't think there is much more Magic that you could do for the planet than prevent an unwanted baby.*

As an elder Witch, Hecate found it challenging to participate in street actions so instead did: *magical support at my own altar*, and sent money to activist friends that were involved on the front lines. She also described: *rolling thunder spells, where people cast the same spell at the same time but in different time zones. So it might start in the East at 8:00pm and then an hour later at 8:00pm in central, and an hour later at 8:00pm mountain, and so on. We envision it rolling across the land like a snowball picking up snow and power as it rolls along.*

Grace was the only participant who spoke specifically of her experiences related to Free Activist WitchCamp (previously known as FAWC and now known as Free Cascadia WitchCamp), a camp with a conscious commitment to the exploration of Magic and political action. In its seventh year, the camp was cost-free to those

who could not donate some amount, and was a co-created, participatory community of shared skills, teaching, and resources. Grace described campers at FAWC as: *anarchist-types and activists and Witches and EarthFirst! people*. She said that while she had been heavily involved in activism in her young life, she struggled with the word activist: *Like Witch, Pagan, and anarchist, it has baggage and can become a cross to bear. The only reason I have ever gone to a street action is because my friends were organizing the event. I don't think street actions create real change or draw positive attention. I would rather plant an organic garden or encourage government support of organic farmers. I would never substitute talk of Magic for facts about pesticide residue. People can look at Magic or Witchcraft from a very biased light, but Magic and spirituality sustain me on a personal and deep level and camps share my spiritual and science beliefs about the interconnectedness of all life.*

Spiritual – Political Tensions

Some participants talked about how spiritual-political tensions sometimes surfaced at witchcamps. Hecate suggested that people were wondering whether: *political activism is a necessary part or if it is optional*. She said there are those: *for whom religion and politics is very different, and yet: others who couldn't imagine separating them*. Hecate shared her analysis that: *religions have to concern themselves with social justice and ethical issues and since those things get worked out in society through a political process, the interconnection is inevitable*. While she thought that it was: *really interesting and cool*, that witchcamps had an activist element, she also believed: *that there is a dimension of spirituality that goes beyond the political. It would be sad to lose that dimension*.

Hailey said she was aware of the spirituality/politics schism, but didn't actually observe much conflict around it: *There are some who say this is all about feeding our activism and then others who say all this activism is draining my spiritual practice. It seems to be the big rift and that might make it more difficult for Reclaiming to maintain a sustainable, deepened community.* Hailey had an epiphany while she pondered aloud about the intentions of politics and spirituality: *Diana's Grove has a split intention. It is a mystery school and witchcamp; camp is the spiritual piece. It's also a dog rescue facility; the activism piece. What a great metaphor! This is the schism that has challenged the Grove. A parallel schism in action; trying to manage both activism and spirituality.*

Violet remembered a witchcamp where: *an activist group tried to impose their activist intention on the camp to achieve their own ends and wanted everyone to be part of the political caucus. Some campers were distraught and said no. The activists held meetings, but so few campers showed up that it didn't become part of the camp agenda.* Violet went on to say that: *the only time I integrate politics and spirituality is when I'm confronted with fundamentalism of any sort; Pagan fundamentalism or any other kind. It has to be confronted and dismantled. One should always be open to possibilities and should listen with an open mind and make up ones own mind. Witchcamps and Unitarians are rabidly open-minded. Anything is possible if it's constructive and productive. Social justice work should not be an opportunity for religious-speak and it shouldn't be overlaid with religious views.* After a silence, she added: *Hmmm, I just realized that I am being very*

fundamentalist about my separation of Church and state! That is ironic and humourous.

Street – Magical Activism Tensions

Tensions in regard to Magical Activism and street activism were highlighted in a particular instance during the course of this study. Wild Ginger was unknowingly scheduled to coincide with a weekend of protests responding to the G-20 Summit of Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors in Toronto meeting to discuss key issues in global economy development. During witchcamp, with the realization of the protests in Toronto, Magical support was raised and sent to the Pagan activists in Toronto. Unaware of the magical support, a post-protest E-mail was sent to the Wild Ginger Community E-list by one of the protestors wondering why the Wild Ginger Community had not shown up at the protest:

Wild Ginger WitchCamp, being held on the summit weekend meant many Pagans were away. Many activists came out and tried to make the best of the day here in Toronto; we have all seen the results of that and what happens when there aren't enough non-violent protestors. Time to rethink our strategies. I'd be interested in getting together with other Witches and Pagans to consider together how we do Magical spiritual activism. We need to think about why someone like Leonard was left there trying to stop the fire, and no one else was there doing the same. If we had not wanted people like Leonard erroneously arrested, and if we had not wanted the evening news dominated with a burning cop car, there might have been a way to do this. Imagine if a group of thirty fairies and sprites had come out of the crowd to dance around the police cars, change the energy, even encircle them

with protective energy. What would the images on TV have been then? What could have happened had our Pagan group decided to enter into a nonviolent direct action, and communicated openly its intention to do so, and to do so nonviolently?

We definitely missed the Pagan element in this G-20 debacle. The rampaging Blac Bloc has become big and visible and the Living River or any other Pagan manifestation was missing. We had the Raging Grannies in the march itself with our signs (for Voice of Women) 'peace through nonviolence'. Our 'peace through nonviolence' is doomed in a world where macho energy feeds of other macho energy and where a prime minister can order up the scene he wants just by telling police to stand down (and leave a few police cars in an intersection) and having his infiltrators in the Blac Bloc. We need to be smarter and more creative and show an expression of Magical energy if we don't want to go down this nasty police state path. More people need to be engaged to keep things non-violent and to de-escalate the violent street actions.

In response to the E-mail, another witchcamper commented during an interview: *There was an E-mail that suggested that we abandoned the protestors. There were few Reclaiming people there and they needed us. It's too bad that we didn't do a better job of communicating our Magical support from camp. Our lack of physical presence was felt as abandonment. We were at camp talking and dancing and they were at the protest doing the dirty work. Maybe the Reclaiming activist community used to be stronger and maybe it's not now.*

As has been expressed by others, Ester suggested that protests in the street did not have the same impact as they used to, and activism had other avenues of

expression: *There are other tools now. Internet. Ideas and beliefs can be communicated to greater numbers of people. It's more effective than protesting in the street. Through street protest, the message is dependent on TV coverage, which is so co-opted that the message that gets out is not our message. I question protest as a form of activism. I sign petitions and send E-mails directly.*

Hazel had a lot to say as she reflected on her history as an activist and how things had evolved and continued to do so: *Looking back over fourteen years of witchcamp, and my own experience of activism, I see how it's been an evolving process. Initially, through camp, my awareness was increased about ecological, political, power issues. Abuse of power, abuse of people, abuse of the environment. I went through a time of doing things like writing letters, going to the street to protest, going to the big meetings. I went to Quebec and to Miami to protest. Yadda yadda. It was all directly related to having been to witchcamp. I'm not doing any of that anymore. Partly, it's reframing for myself what makes a difference. I went to Miami but I don't think it made a wit of difference beyond to me and my own awareness. It didn't feel effective. It felt futile. It was a learning experience to see the cops and the ranks of cop cars and their equipment. To learn that was valuable. That was another stage in the process.*

There was a time when Bridey and I got together once a month and wrote letters. We haven't done that for years though. It has to do with change in the world, more than witchcamp. It's the technology. When I was first activist and online, there were tons of E-mails that I reacted to, and I wanted to respond. And then every time I opened my E-mail, there were three or four or five things that were

really important. And I started to hit delete. I can't take it all in because there is too much. Now, I go stand in solidarity with Women in Black, the women from Palestine and Israel who want peace. You just stand, wearing black, in silence, and hold awareness. I may even stop that though.

I try to be responsible in my own life. I'm conscious of what is going on in the world and so my response to Reclaiming Magic has changed over time. It's an ongoing process and I'm in a very still stage now. Now I'm trying to figure out how to create a sustainable garden; wanting to create a model for how to develop greater food security and greater responsibility about how I am with the earth. Trying to change my own personal relationship with nature.

Daphne summed up the evolution of her activism as being on: multiple levels at once; in the seventies the personal is the political; now the personal is the political is the spiritual is the personal; it's all interwoven. Sometimes, it feels as if we're saying this stuff but what difference does it really make? We've gone from climate change is going to happen in the future to climate change is happening now. And so our response has changed. The reality that we need to be working locally to create local systems that will sustain us as the change comes has become essential. I think that a lot of us that used to go out into the streets ten or twenty years ago are now going into our backyards. Now we're planting lettuce and potatoes. Preparing to meet tomorrow.

Witchcamp had been a lifesaver for Beastie: Being in this type of society can be really isolating. It's like having a tribe. It gives me hope. I look around and see peeps throwing garbage and they don't care. I work in wildlife rehabilitation and

you'd think people would care more, but they don't. I see how humans affect the world; every animal crisis that comes in there is caused by humans. Going to witchcamp helps me believe that there is a possibility of the world changing. And I can connect with people who can help change things.

Pye said that when camp ended: *there is still connection, a sense of a bigger community, the sense of the spider web and the invisible connections holding the energy of whatever vision we've come up with here. I have comfort in knowing that I have a bigger connection out there holding the vision.* Rosey said that something she loves about witchcamp was that: *people are very serious about wanting to use their personal power and collective power and their own activities to make the world a more just place.*

Regardless of whether they defined themselves as street activists, magical activists, or just Witches doing Witch things, study participants appeared to be involved in a variety of environment and social justice issues, both formal and informal. The effort that was historically directed into public protest and street actions, had perhaps been refocused by many witchcampers to other meaningful activities of preservation and change. Witchcampers appeared to be reconsidering activism to include everyday activities related to food production and consumption, relationship to nature, work practice, philanthropy, art, public mourning, and embodiment of values, particularly that of non-violence. For others, Magical Activism through spells and meditation with political intention also contributed to a sense of empowerment in making change. Witchcamp held meaning as a space of sustenance, affirmation, and rejuvenation for those whose lives and values embodied

countercultural ideals. As such, camp was an antidote, providing a sense of community and self-reflection, where one's place in a collective could be positively experienced and harnessed. Also noted was the contribution of witchcampers to bringing peace, playfulness, and groundedness with the intention to offset angry, violent protest. In spite of some woo-based skepticism, witchcampers brought political intention to spirituality, and spirituality to political intention, and out of that cauldron arose some tensions.

Transforming Camps

The witchcamp movement appeared to be in its own transformation process, and study participants commented on its evolution and future sustainability. What began in San Francisco as adult-only summer intensives to teach about the Reclaiming Tradition of Witchcraft had evolved over twenty-two years into an international web of witchcamp communities. While some campers had noticed a decline in registration as well as the closure of some American camps, the tone of the comments from study participants in Europe suggested excitement about a growing community. An Australian group had its first camp in 2011 and had publicly announced plans for more camps. Canadian camps appeared to holding steady and rumours about a camp in Eastern Canada continued.

Study participants mused about the history and future of the movement. Tina, described a: *community that is slowly morphing; always evolving, but it still feels like a community with a history.* Cruz, in theorizing about the end of Dreamweaving noted that although there had been a solid nucleus of returning participants in the early years, it evolved over time to become: *a different constellation every year,*

disrupting the sense of history and continuity. Hailey described a similar experience of: *shifting community, always a different mix, never the same group twice. Coming more than once contributes to camp being a community.* She wondered aloud whether some particular factors heralded the decline of the movement: *Starhawk has moved on to new interests. And the politics within the American camps, the competition for teachers and participants, and the spiritual-political schism.* Hecate worried about: *the economic sustainability of camps. I think that some things may have to change in order to keep camp reasonably affordable.* She supported changing the model of witchcamps to increase: *shared leadership, co-creating rituals,* and lessening the distinctions between: *teachers, organizers, and the campers. It used to be that organizers were not appreciated, rarely got paid at all, and they put in way more hours of work than teachers. And there is a lot less glamour. That is shifting and it's healthy and good. It's difficult to make camp both energetically and economically sustainable. If it's going to survive it needs to find a way to do that.* Edie too reflected on the evolution of the witchcamps model: *Camps are becoming more co-created and camper led. It makes things more transparent.*

Maya expressed enthusiasm in developing the European camps: *I am invested in the newer UK/EU camps attracting new people as well as continuing participants, and want to give value to the campers, in getting as much transformation as you can stand. I certainly will write stories and marketing materials for the EU and UK camps I work with. It's important for the EU and UK not to be dependent upon American teachers but to develop our own, strong, supported teachers.* Hechi described the European camps as being: *in evolution.*

Nothing stays the same, so what needs to change over the time, is legal, and does change.

Along with the factors noted above, there appeared to be a demographic of the witchcamps community that was facing the transformation of aging, at the intersection with nature. As such, the rustic isolated settings were described by some campers as a barrier. Aging was mentioned by half the study participants, worried about health issues, the physicality of the settings, finances, and for some, impatience with so many meetings and the social drama. Meg said: *as I age I have more understanding and compassion for the dramas created but less tolerance to engage with them or to be held hostage at meetings where they are enacted.* Banshee expressed sadness about the inevitable loss: *Each year I think this camp may be my last, and each year I just can't imagine not going.*

In 2010, the Witchcamps website listed twenty-one camps, and in 2011, there were sixteen. Of those sixteen camps, six had transformed into camps for 'all ages', reflecting the transformation from adult-only workshop experience to community experience. One community had started a camp that was for teens only. Throughout the study, participants mused on the future sustainability of camps and some talked about how the movement seemed to be in decline. Theories to explain the decline included the shift toward all-ages camps as well as the challenges of compensating teachers. All-ages camps had fewer registrants paying a full fee putting economic sustainability into peril, and a camp population that included children and parents lessened the experiences of intense immersion and trance. A number of participants wondered about the competing impact of Thorne Coyle's Feri Training and the

increased acceptance of Pagan and ecospirituality in mainstream culture. Community politics and tensions surrounding naturalists and supernaturalists, fundamentalism and atheism, spirituality and activism all took a toll on both individual camps and the broader movement. Power dynamics and challenges in regard to sexual boundaries continued to provide fodder for organizer and teacher development. While Australian and European camps were perhaps over-reliant on American teachers such that some identified English as their ‘sacred language,’ at least one Canadian camp, Wild Ginger, had developed its own model that blurred the lines between teachers, organizers, and community members. There were many factors to influence the future sustainability of witchcamps and as noted by Patsy: *only time will tell.*

Chapter Seven

OVERVIEW, DISCUSSION, AND REFLECTIONS

By all that is above, by all that is below, by all that is in between, the circle is cast.
[Invocation]

This chapter begins with a succinct overview of the findings. I then reflect on the findings by considering the overarching theme of *Magical Activism: An Antidote to the Dominant Culture* through affirming identity (The Witches), building community (The Container), and fostering personal and social change (The Transformation). Within this discussion, I reflect on the literature and examine how this project reinforces, contradicts, or sheds new light on that knowledge. The third part of the chapter includes reflections on insider research and the limitations of the study. Finally, this chapter brings closure to the dissertation with a brief personal reflection on the research.

Overview

This research has shown that witchcamp participants, regardless of whether they identified as Witches or Pagans, naturalists or supernaturalists, are a group of people who shared a strong sense of community. Witchcamps provided relief from the dominant culture by creating a container for alternative community that reflected feminist ecospirituality, concern with social and environmental justice, and envisioned personal and social transformation. As a counterpublic (Knopp, 2007), witchcamp provided an antidote to the invisibility and exclusion experienced in the dominant culture. A deep sense of personal responsibility was supported by a notion

of autonomous, unmediated relationship with the sacred that contributed to a philosophy of change where personal transformation was linked to social transformation.

Parallel to queer culture, witchcampers navigated the dominant cultural challenges of disclosure, through family, work, and daily life. Individuals made considerations and choices about the benefits and costs of coming out or of living a secret identity. While some participants maintained a social image devoid of Witchcraft-related experience and beliefs, others recognized public disclosure as a political act through its potential to raise social consciousness. Regardless of which identity label they used, or on which side of the broom closet door they positioned themselves, the intention to create social change was universal in the study group.

Witchcamps appeared to provide a unique antidote to the dominant culture, and were considered by participants as containers for congregation, reflection of identity, and transformation. Witchcamps were multidimensional spaces that were at once physical, communal, experiential, and sacred. The container was constructed through natural settings, sense of community, structured activities, a sense of shared ethos, and intentional reciprocal transformation – both personal and social. Specific factors critical to the construction of the container included privacy and nature, as well as shared values related to ecospirituality and social justice politics. A sense of intense immersion in the experience, expressed authenticity of self, and altered states of consciousness contributed to a transformative experience, outside of ordinary life.

Community was an important theme, noted through reflections on belonging, contribution, and on the notion of community as a mirror for identity, affirmation,

values, and collective understanding. Sense of community was multi-layered, locally to a particular camp, in one's home community, globally, with the larger witchcamp movement, and electronically through cyber community. For some, their sense of community was 'eco' through inclusion of the planet and all life. Community tensions included those related to leadership, power, and decision-making as well as cohesion, age, inclusion, social drama, and diversity of belief. Two particular gender and age based tensions related to men and children at camp highlight a repressive and exclusionary subtext of community. By and large, tensions were considered positive opportunities for growth and reflection and did not appear to be a barrier to transformation for most study participants. Not captured in this research were those who may have attended, experienced barriers, and did not return.

The activities of witchcamps, both structured and unstructured, contributed to the sense of containment that campers described. Fundamental to the experience, large group ecstatic rituals were identified by many as the primary activity that made witchcamps unique and critical. The rituals provided a smaller, tighter container for the induction of spiritual, numinous, and mystical experiences, and also functioned to build community, develop community and ritual arts skills, and teach about environmental and social justice. Celebration and festivity in camp and in ritual contributed to play and pleasure as well as to sense of community. Creative expression through sacred play, music, ritual theatrics, and irreverence contributed to the perception of being outside of normal life, and contained between the worlds.

The ethos of witchcamps was constructed through Goddess-focused ecospirituality, social justice values, concern for the environment, and the belief that

personal change and social change were interrelated. Personal accountability and responsibility were highly valued, especially in regard to service to the community, personal growth, and service to the planet. Spiritual beliefs ranged from concrete, supernaturalist belief in spirits, Magic, Gods and Goddesses, to a naturalist, earth-as-sacred ecospirituality, as well as from fundamentalist to atheist. Individuals prioritized ecospirituality, social justice, political activism and Magical practice in different ways, and the study highlighted tensions between spirituality and politics, as well as within and between Magical traditions. Witchcamps were experienced by participants as contained, prefigurative communities of transformation and change. People went to witchcamp to transform themselves and the world. The notion of therapy camp highlighted the theme of personal growth, spiritual growth, and self-actualization. Characterized as a container for personal transformation, witchcamp provided a safe community space for exploring the edges of social being, with the goal of deepening personal authenticity. Personal transformation was understood as critical to social transformation through the belief that micro and macro change were interrelated, highlighted in the phrase, 'What happens between the worlds, changes the worlds'. Participants also increased their knowledge about environmental and social issues as well as ecospirituality. Further skills were developed related to ritual arts, group facilitation, community building, and Magical Activism.

Witchcamp contributed to transformation of the world in various ways. Having the characteristics of a festival as described by Waterman (1998) and Zukin (1995), witchcamp provided a contained and prefigurative space of resistance that functioned as an active force in social change. By providing a private, protected

escape from mainstream culture, activists and change makers were afforded a retreat for sustenance, restoration, and affirmation. As a relief or antidote to mainstream culture, witchcamp was an opportunity for participants to experience themselves as the norm, in a like-minded, like-hearted community, without the ugly reflections experienced in the dominant culture. For some, witchcamp was a chance to embody personal and social change by living authentically, with the goal of widening that practice to daily life. Inherent was the belief that the world changes one person at a time, and living the desired change encourages others to do the same. Many participants stated their desire to make a difference in the world and were involved in an impressive array of change organizations.

Through Magical Activism, campers used Magic in sacred ritual space to contribute positive social, political, or environmental change in the world, or alternately, in the consciousness of those involved in the ritual. Magical Activism also referred to ritual and energetic support for others engaged in political action and other forms of practical activism. Some doubted the usefulness of witchcamp and its related Magic in creating change, considering it to be woo, or too isolated from daily life. Many attributed their witchcamp experience to motivating them to make change in the world.

The following section reflects more deeply on the findings, and considers some implications of this research.

Overarching Theme: Magical Activism - Antidote to the Dominant Culture

Witchcamps as an antidote to the dominant culture was an overarching theme braided together by the themes of affirming identity, building community and fostering personal and social transformation. Within the container of witchcamp, participants experienced relief from the norms and expectations of the dominant culture and described a sense of safety and community with the like-minded and like-hearted. Providing a shield from everyday life in the ordinary reality of the mainstream, witchcamp offered spiritual retreat and restoration; enabling resistance to the norms and roles of traditional, patriarchal spirituality. Celebration of nature and Goddess as sacred in a feminist ecospiritual community of affirmation created a space to envision and embody change in line with spiritual and political beliefs.

Affirming Identity

This study builds on the work of other researchers (Murphy, 1999; Salomensen, 2002; Magliocco, 2004) that identified the importance of alternative community for affirming positive individual identity. For study participants, witchcamp provided an antidote to the sense of alienation they experienced in everyday life in mainstream culture. Participants talked about how they hid their spiritual identity from friends, family, and people in general due to the negative judgment and lack of respect they expected and sometimes experienced when they disclosed their identity. Participants worried about being judged as ‘crazy,’ as ‘weird and marginal,’ or as a ‘flake,’ and talked about the perceived risks of rejection in their social, familial, and work lives. As noted in comments about a desire for

authenticity, participants hid what one participant called the best part of her self. Due to the lack of local magical community for most participants, solitary invisibility and distance were more familiar than authentic expression and public celebration. As such, witchcamp acted as a safe and private container for full expression of the self; a place to honour and celebrate magical identity in community.

The antidote to alienation provided by witchcamps was described by some as ‘a mirror’. Participants were able to see their spirituality, values, beliefs, hopes, and concerns reflected in the community, and in other individuals who they, in turn, valued and respected. This ‘mirror’ perhaps provided the antidote to the process of internalizing the negative judgments of mainstream culture. In describing others in the community, participants used adjectives such as intelligent, strong, powerful, beautiful, feisty, tolerant, educated, creative, and authentic. Seeing others in such ways enabled participants to internalize an antidotal and positively validating image.

This thesis lends support to the broader argument that leisure offers an opportunity to develop and support identities (Rojek, 2006); in this case, alternative, countercultural identities. While participants did not necessarily identify as Witches, most did identify with the witchcamp population as an alternative community of the ‘*like-minded and like-hearted*’ [Bree] where peoples’ sexuality, spirituality, politics and family construction, hidden in mainstream, was not only visible, but celebrated. ‘Coming out of the broom closet’ was a figure of speech that alluded to the notion of queer sexuality and likely reflects the integrated presence of queer people in the witchcamps community.

Building Community

The witchcamp communities acted as an antidote to the dominant culture through their function as prefigurative communities (Breines, 1982). Participants talked about camps as manifestations of a shared vision that included a reality different from that of the mainstream. Berger (2005) theorized that Pagans attend festivals to gain a sense of spiritual community with those who share a similar worldview, and to participate in a temporary prefigurative community. As prefigurative communities, witchcamps provided an experience of community that centrally valued such ideals as feminist ecospirituality, a queer range of sexuality and sexual orientation, self-actualization, authenticity, contribution and service, environmental and social justice, activism, and shared power. Camps had both structural and experiential facets that were important for fostering a sense of community. Separation, in community, acted as a shield from the dominant culture, through containment, belonging, contribution, shared ideologies and values, as well as the collective sharing of naturally-induced altered states of consciousness. Camps also taught useful, community-enhancing skills such as tolerance, holding the space/listening, celebration, activism, and service. By intentionally and specifically blending spirituality with nature, community, and politics, participants were encouraged to assume a sense of responsibility to a sacred 'community' that encompassed the entire planet and extended beyond their witchcamp participation into everyday life.

Witchcamp communities played a role in social change by providing relief and an 'antidote' to the negative impact of the dominant culture. As closeted

Witches or Pagans with marginalized political and spiritual perspectives, daily life involved pressures associated with navigating the mainstream from a marginal, secretly resistant identity. According to Murphy (1999), individuals involved in social change movements benefit from communities that provide a break from the loneliness and alienation of holding alternative beliefs and values. Within the physical, philosophical, and communal container of witchcamp, participants felt shielded from the dominant culture to the extent that self-expression felt authentic, and individuals could see themselves positively mirrored in an immediate and visible community, an experience that was difficult to find in daily life. As suggested by Turner (1982), the fantastic culture of festivals is necessary for the social health of a community, in the same way that dreams and fantasy are indispensable to individual mental health.

The sense of being secluded, outside of ordinary reality, and shielded from the dominant culture created a sense of unity, like-mindedness, and like-heartedness that enabled participants to be vulnerable and open, and to celebrate their identities, ethos, and visions. As noted by Crystal, witchcamp helped participants figure out who they were and how they lived their lives. Participants were able to explore spirituality, politics, and relationships without the burdens of exclusion, difference, isolation, and secrecy.

This study builds empirically on Berger (2005), Salomensen (2002), and Magliocco (2004), who identified witchcamps as sites of Pagan community. Berger identified Reclaiming witchcamps as unique within her examination of Pagan Festivals due to their feminist ideology and triple focus on the personal, political, and

spiritual. My research details the sense of community that is developed through the witchcamp experience and highlights how community is part of the antidote to the solitary and sometimes lonely isolation experienced by witchcampers.

Finally, this research builds on the work of Hume (2006) who proposed shared altered states of consciousness as a factor in building sense of community. Her study referenced Turner's *communitas* (1982) and looked at how spiritual community is created through drumming where rhythmic entrainment over an extended period created shared brainwaves and a shared sense of communion leading to a profound change of group consciousness. I would argue that in the same way, the shared trance experience of witchcamps was a factor that contributed to sense of community, and further research might provide a deeper understanding of the process. The social change role of altered states of consciousness is discussed further, following the next section.

Within the field of leisure studies, this study provides empirical evidence of the centrality of leisure to community responsibility for broader social, political and environmental concerns, as theorized by Arai and Pedlar (2003). This research also furthers the perspective of Arai and Pedlar (2003) that community is multidimensional, and has the potential to unify marginalized groups. The findings of this study reflect Mair's (2006) conceptualization of community as one that provides a space for celebration of diversity. Leisure in community has a particular capacity for social resistance and social change (Shaw, 2001; Mair, 2006), and the results of this study establish witchcamps as what Arai and Pedlar (2003) called a form of community; one that promotes inclusivity, diversity, and civic engagement.

The community tensions examined in this study also support previous findings that community can be a site where oppressive systems are reproduced as well as resisted (Arai & Pedlar, 2003; Lebonte, 2004; Smale, 2006, Sharpe, 2008), and for some participants, witchcamps were a source of social exclusion and oppression rather than inclusion.

Fostering Personal and Social Transformation

Through fostering personal and social transformation, witchcamps were an antidote to the dominant culture by providing escape, restoration, and a container within which to pursue personal growth and support for social change work, be it making different choices in ordinary individual life or engagement with activism. Individuals, invisible in mainstream, saw themselves mirrored positively at witchcamps. This sustained them to be able to contribute to social change, by changing themselves and engaging in social change activity. Camps also provided restoration from the hard work of making social change.

A powerful draw for the witchcamp community, personal transformation contributed to social change through self-actualization, development of knowledge and skills, and through edgeplay. Campers actively engaged in therapy camp with the explicit desire for personal transformation. Conceived and launched during the second wave of feminism, witchcamps have evolved around the notion that the personal is political, and participants' comments highlighted a notion of intentional transformation, where individual personal transformation is linked to social

transformation. This approach to social change can be understood through the lenses of fundamental resistance, feminist therapy, and transformational social change.

Psychosocial change as a process for political and cultural change is defined by Murphy (1999) as fundamental resistance. The rituals, myths, and magical or psychotherapeutic techniques provided opportunities for participants to alter their consciousness and embody change with the goal to carry that change back to daily life and contribute to social change. Study participants identified the specific activities that supported fundamental personal change as teaching/learning, spiritual and personal development, restoration and relief from the dominant culture, embodying change, role modeling, trance, and motivation for practical and Magical Activism. Likewise, Finley (1991), in her sociological analysis of activism and feminist spirituality, likened the transformation of self to a catalyst for political action.

As noted by some participants, witchcamps were a magnet for feminist psychotherapists and healers, no doubt because of the transformative philosophy, and the visible leadership by women. Feminist therapy is a field of practice that combines personal healing and development, with political transformation (Evans, Kincade & Seem, 2011). Clients of feminist therapy are empowered to make change, and social action is considered a therapeutic intervention. According to Greenwood (2000), the intersection of contemporary witchcraft with the women's liberation movement was the spark that gave feminist witchcraft its parallel foci of spirituality and politics, and the belief that healing of the self contributes to healing of the planet.

Witchcamps also reflected the transformative approach to social change (TSC) described by Hanna and Robinson (1994). TSC involves self-directed adult learning principles, visioning, consciousness-raising, and alternative views about power that link the personal to the societal. It is most effective as a long-term approach, and like witchcamp, relies on small groups and emphasizes interpersonal bonds, collective decision-making, and social action. TSC also promotes careful consideration of intention, and heightened consciousness of community processes. Lastly, TSC promotes the idea that personal transformation is a prerequisite for social transformation.

Participants identified witchcamp as a source of validation for their beliefs and their desire for change in the wider world. Comments about internalizing principles, learning to exert one's will to change the world, taking personal responsibility, and the sacralization of the earth community contributed to taking action. According to Finley (1991), feminist witchcraft teaches empowerment, personal responsibility, and political efficacy, and is a motivator of social action. Engaging in feminist witchcraft is a political act in itself because it challenges the patriarchal political system (Greenwood, 2000). Similarly, Partridge (2005) described eco-Paganism as spiritual resistance in its rejection of patriarchal religion in favour of Goddess or Earth-based spirituality. Moreover, in cases where religious or spiritual actions are deemed efficacious, that action may become a pattern for the future (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998), such that change is perpetuated.

Highlighted in this study is a differentiation of street activism and backyard activism. In her study of Pagans, Pike (2001) found that while Pagans seemed to be

more environmentally conscious than the general population, few Pagans identified themselves as activists. They preferred to focus on change within their daily lives through such things as using solar power, installing composting toilets, and approaching life, animals, and nature as sacred. Similarly, in the present study, witchcamp participants did not necessarily identify as activist, in spite of their intention to participate in social change.

The witchcampers who participated in this research project might be considered 'border activists'. Citing an emerging body of empirical studies, Bobel (2007) stated that the definition of activist has evolved such that one can 'do activism' without 'being activist' (pp. 148). She reflected on Pardo's (1998) concept of 'border feminists,' those who engage in feminist social change but don't identify as feminist. Pardo suggested that 'border activist' reconciles the contradiction inherent in those who act to make environmental and social change through everyday acts without defining themselves as activists. This expanded notion of activism challenges the dominant negative conception of 'in your face' and 'on the street' activism (pp. 154). Both group membership and having a sense of self as an activist have been shown to motivate activist intentions and behaviour (Fielding, McDonald, & Louis, 2008). Similarly, witchcampers identified the importance of community in supporting and reflecting their intentions and actions.

Finally, the act of organizing and participating in witchcamps could be categorized as 'new activism' (Anderson & Herr, 2007). Within a playful carnivalesque atmosphere, witchcamps offered opportunities for play, laughter, and creative expression of both spirituality and politics, and contributed an element of

pleasure to the politics (Jordan, 2004). While creativity and play have long sustained social movements, the new activism encompasses innovative and creative approaches to social change such as carnival, performance, humour, and outrageous acts. Reciprocally, as new activists, Pagan and witchcamp participants who participated in street activism contributed to re-enchantment of protest. In her study of feminist Pagan activists involved in the politics of globalization, Zwissler (2009) observed the introduction of Pagan ritual and spirituality to the politics. Ritual and whimsy were used to redirect violence, to encourage safety and a positive environment, to create a sense of community, and to diffuse tension through play and humour.

Shaw (2001) argues that leisure provides opportunity for marginalized or oppressed groups or individuals to reproduce, or resist, proscribed roles, expectations, and behaviours. This study of witchcamps responds to Shaw's recommendation to document types of leisure activities that resist oppression, the context of resistance, and the specific types of oppression and constraint that are being challenged or resisted.

Critically reflexive leisure is a radical construct in Leisure Studies, with only a few studies (Mair, 2002/03; Mair, *et al.*, 2008; Sharpe, 2008) documenting leisure with a political or social change agenda. Critically reflexive leisure (Mair, *et al.*, 2008) 'is politically oriented leisure where the central components of reflection, resistance, and the articulation of an alternative vision inform and are informed by the dimensions of pleasure, activism, and empowerment' (pp. 381). Witchcamps are a clear example of critically reflexive leisure. They were politically-oriented through

their focus on environmental and social justice, as well as in their spiritual focus on Goddess and nature. Personal growth and the development of knowledge and skills fostered critical reflection. Resistance and empowerment were demonstrated on a number of levels, most notably through the practice of feminist ecospirituality and leadership provided by ‘feisty’ women. The alternative vision was reflected in the prefigurative community experience. Pleasure was evident in participants’ comments about nature, spirituality, sexuality, altered states of consciousness, and the playful atmosphere encouraged at witchcamps. Activism, discussed above was inherent in the stated intention of social change and practical spirituality. This study adds to the notion of critically reflexive leisure by probing the roles of community, identity, and spirituality.

A final contribution to the leisure research is in regard to leisure and spirituality. This research begins to address a gap in the literature noted by other leisure researchers (Heintzman, 2006; Karlis, Grafanski, & Abbas, 2002; Macdonald & Schreyer, 1991; Stodolska & Livengood, 2006), and offers perspective beyond the standard Christian-based lens, offering a glimpse into the spiritual beliefs of a group that is positioned at the margins. This study highlights the role of spirituality in resistance and social change, and offers new perspective in regard to the links between nature and spirituality; gender and spirituality, as well as the implications of feminism and ecospirituality.

Implications for Future Research

This study contributes to the position of leisure as a dynamic force in social and political change (Shaw, 2001; Mair, 2002/03; Sharpe, 2008). This study also highlights the role of spirituality and community in social change. Through environmental and social justice education, and opportunities for personal transformation, the witchcamp communities raised consciousness and contributed to the political efficacy of the individual participants. By providing relief or an antidote to the negative impact of the dominant culture, communities also contributed to social change through prefigurative vision, but also through affirmation and rejuvenation. Future studies might continue to probe the ways in which communities provide support to individual involvement in social and cultural change. Research might also consider the ways in which communities discourage activism or other social change activities.

This research supports an expanded and complex notion of community that includes an element of attachment to the natural environment. Participants in this study intertwined their sense of community and place, and identified place as a trigger for sense of community, and also identified community as contributing to sense of place. As suggested by Kong (2001) and Manzo (2006), people are motivated to engage in action and activism when they have an effective or spiritual bond to a place that is meaningful to them. This too would be an important and interesting topic for future research.

In 1982, Turner stated that the fantastic culture of festivals is necessary for the social health of a community, in the same way that dreams and fantasy are

indispensable to individual mental health. Certainly, the present study supports that notion. An on-going process of inquiry following from this research might include an exploration of leisure as a vehicle for re-enchanting the world. Like witchcamps, there are many groups that operate on the margins, provide community, and act as an ‘antidote’ to the dominant culture. While not all such communities likely hold an intention for social change, many, as suggested by Sharpe (2008) are linked to social change in spite of themselves.

Finally, as suggested in the present research, activism is expressed through traditional means such as street protest but also through backyard and magical activism. There is room for more research into the everyday activism of both those who identify their social change actions as activism, and those who would be considered ‘border activists’.

Personal Reflections on the Research

Across history and cultures, everyone recognizes the archetype of the Witch (Gaskill, 2010), similar to that described in the introduction to this dissertation, as a warty old hag with a broom and evil intentions. One of my goals with this research was to contribute to disrupting that image, and certainly, the Witches, Pagans and otherwise-identified people that I met during this study were anything but warty and evil. Much like some of the study participants, there was a time when I proudly called myself a Witch, publicly claiming the title in an effort to ‘reclaim’ the image, and make a political statement. During these years of studying Witches, the pointy hat archetype of the Witch has faded into the background such that it hardly seems relevant to contemporary Witchcraft and Paganism. I have been musing on the

parallel to the once popular stereotype of a feminist as an ugly, angry, bra-burning, man-hating lesbian, and how little that particular archetype actually has to do with everyday feminism. I also find myself wondering about the political effort to ‘reclaim’ the word Witch. The archetype is so deeply rooted in the human psyche that I’m inclined to just release the green faced warty old hag to the masses for their Halloween fun. Today, I’m of a mind to call myself an atheist-naturalist-ecofeminist-Playgan. It’s a bit unwieldy, so for now, I guess I’ll just go with Pagan.

The participants in this study were agents of social change who cared deeply about social justice, community, and the Earth as a sacred trust. They were people who were not afraid to turn their gaze inward, to poke around their own shadows, and expose the vulnerability of their humanity. The process of personal change that occurred through therapy camp was perhaps an embodied metaphor for social change. Sometimes the transformation was bumpy, even painful, and those who had the courage to take that journey learned that the benefits of change were worth reaping. I have come to understand that activism does indeed happen in one’s backyard. It is as important to social change as showing up at a demonstration against globalization or to protest a quarry. Both kinds of activism take an incredible amount of energy and passion, and I celebrate witchcamps for providing a celebratory and protected space of reflection, restoration, and inspiration for the change-makers. I also celebrate and honour witchcamp participants for their courage to hold on to their sense of self and their alternative ethos while navigating the dominant culture.

This research has also affirmed my appreciation of witchcampers for their ability to hold the sacred with both mirth and reverence. Had I not laughed so much at my first venture into witchcamp, I likely would not have returned. I suspect that it is mirth that enables witchcampers to keep the slippery slopes of zealotry and fundamentalism at bay. The ability to laugh at one's self implies a wider perspective beyond the self, and perhaps sacred mirth deflates power enough to keep us in touch with our vulnerability. The juxtaposition of mirth and reverence requires insight, authenticity, and confidence, without which, witchcampers would be a much less interesting (to me) bunch of people.

Reflections on Insider Research

My insider status in this research provided both advantages and challenges. Most notably, my involvement as a long-term organizer of Wild Ginger and my history of participation at Vermont WitchCamp provided me with the advantages of simple access, assumed trustworthiness, and authentic engagement. My initial discussions with organizers of Dreamweaving and British Columbia WitchCamp were straightforward. Organizers from all three camps expressed a primary concern as to whether the research might disrupt the experience of the participants. I had conducted earlier autoethnographic research at Wild Ginger so that organizing group was familiar and more comfortable with the experience. From my insider status, I was able to provide reassurance to the camp organizers with full in-depth knowledge of what the experience of witchcamp included. I talked about how I would recruit and conduct interviews from a detailed understanding of the camp model and ethos.

As such, I announced my role and intention at the orientation meeting, invited participation, and waited for participants to approach me. As promised, I conducted interviews during unscheduled time and did not interrupt pathwork or rituals. Disappointingly, I was unable to attend BCWC due to a family health crisis. My cancellation occurred within two weeks of camp, and my insider status was noted as the reason for providing me with a full refund of the registration fee. For that I am grateful.

Participants were genuine and unguarded about their participation in witchcamps, and shared openly about their most vulnerable and private experiences of mystical moments, sexuality, and spirituality. During interviews, my ease and comfort with the language of witchcamps and familiarity with terminology likely enabled more in-depth interviews. I have wondered whether my familiarity also put me at a disadvantage, by perhaps not asking questions that an outsider might have asked, such as questions asked by my advisor when reading the manuscript, i.e. ‘what is an invocation?’

My knowledge of and access to the electronic web of witchcampers allowed me to recruit far and wide; as such my participant pool had representation from over a dozen camps, and all countries except Australia (as their camp was scheduled post-research). To lessen potential complications and perception of bias, I limited in-depth interviews to participants outside of my immediate circle of friends in the witchcamps communities, and was faced with having to decline a number of generous offers. Some were disappointed, but always forgiving.

I engaged my reflexive journal throughout my participant observation activities, as well as around interviews that occurred outside of camps. My background and experience as a social worker/psychotherapist provided me with well-tuned reflexive skills to negotiate the effects of social location, relational positionality, and participant vulnerabilities, as well as to maintain academic distance. During participant observation at Dreamweaving and Wild Ginger, I found the journal helped me to engage my ‘academic-observer’ consciousness, and to hold it as strongly as the participant consciousness.

Insider blindness or ‘rose coloured glasses’ can be a challenge for insider researchers. I have consciously tried to avoid the pitfalls of perceiving and presenting the experience as overly positive by examining the tensions as well as the glory of witchcamps. It is not yet clear to me whether I was negligent by not noticing the ordinary, as my insider familiarity with witchcamps had its own blinders, and perhaps an outsider researcher may have seen what was invisible to me.

Another challenge for insider researchers can be participant response bias. There were certainly times during interviews when I suspected that someone was presenting an overly positive aspect of their experience. As is my style in psychotherapy, I gently confronted the presentation by reminding them that I wanted to understand the complete experience, not just the best parts of it. Some participants began their interviews with qualifiers such as, ‘I’m not sure I’m the person you want to talk to because my experience of witchcamps has not always been positive,’ or ‘because I don’t really believe in the Magic’ or ‘because I’ve been going for many years and you likely want a fresher perspective’. Some expressed

concern about anonymity and others alternatively offered the use of their name without a pseudonym. In spite of such offers of authenticity, I applied pseudonyms and changed identifying details to protect identities consistently.

In regard to power and privilege in the research interview process, I engaged conscious awareness throughout the interviews and again, because of my social work training, my ability to negotiate the impact of power dynamics during interviews was strong. One of my participants was a woman of colour and it was my oversight that I didn't ask her about her experience of being a Witch of colour in a primarily white movement. When I realized my omission, I contacted her by E-mail and asked if she'd be willing to engage further in specific questions about that particular topic. She didn't respond to my E-mail so I was not able to probe that further. Very few of my participants were Reclaiming teachers and I have wondered in what ways power might have played a role in that dynamic. Future witchcamp research might specifically pursue teachers' experiences, in light of participants' comments about power and teachers that emerged in this research.

With intent to engage some collaboration, I provided opportunity to some research participants to provide feedback on my interpretations. I E-mailed or telephoned participants to request elaboration or clarification about the data where necessary, and received useful expansion, correction, or affirmation that thickened and enriched the data.

This project has enabled me to honour the experience of witchcamp in a deep and profound way. Like Ellis (2004), Richardson (1997) and Richardson and St. Pierre (2005), I cannot conceive of trying to understand the other without

understanding myself. I went into this process wanting to have deeper knowledge of the personal and social impact of witchcamps, and I conclude this project with increased depth of understanding about camps, and also about myself. Some of the study participants expressed appreciation for providing them with the opportunity to reflect on their experience. Likewise, I feel gratitude for the opportunity to reflect on the experience of witchcamps, to deepen self-knowledge, and to have developed many new lenses through which to consider my own relationship to witchcamps.

I close with an offering often recited during witchcamp rituals:

Hear the words of the Star Goddess, the dust whose feet are the host of heaven, whose body encircles the universe: I who am the beauty of the green earth and the white moon among the stars and the mysteries of the waters, I call upon your soul to arise and come unto me. For I am the soul of nature that gives life to the universe. From Me all things proceed and unto Me they must return. Let My worship be in the heart that rejoices, for behold, all acts of love and pleasure are My rituals. Let there be beauty and strength, power and compassion, honor and humility, mirth and reverence within you. And you who seek to know Me, know that your seeking and yearning will avail you not, unless you know the Mystery: for if that which you seek, you find not within yourself, you will never find it without. For behold, I have been with you from the beginning, and I am that which is attained at the end of desire.

Exerpt from The Charge of the Goddess by Doreen Valiente

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Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment Invitation

Dear Witches,

I am conducting a research study about witchcamps with the hope of understanding the social change role that camps offer. As a long-term member of the Reclaiming Community, and a founder of Wild Ginger WitchCamp in Canada, I am intimately familiar with the impact that the witchcamp experience can have on a person. When I decided to pursue a PhD, I did so with the clear intention to deepen my insight into how the experience affects campers and what role it plays in our lives. I recently completed and published an autoethnographical study of my personal experience and hope to expand on that by developing clarity about the role and meaning of camps in others' lives. I want to try to capture and describe all the richness, complexity, and tension that underlie the experience of witchcamp.

This letter is my invitation to you to consider participating in this study that I am conducting as part of my PhD degree in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo under the supervision of Dr. Heather Mair and Dr. Sue Shaw. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part.

I am a Social Worker as well as an organizer of witchcamp and a student of Leisure Studies, and this study reflects all of those interests. I am particularly interested in exploring the relationship between spirituality, community, and activism as they intersect in the lives of witchcampers.

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve either an interview of approximately 1.5 hours in length to take place in a mutually agreed upon location, or providing answers to my interview questions via E-mail. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. With your permission, the live interview will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the interview has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish. Similarly, I may contact you about submitted written text to clarify details and ensure that I truly understand your meaning. All the information that you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study, however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. Data collected during this study will be retained for 5 years in a locked cabinet in my office. Only researchers associated with this project will have access. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me,

Cris Calley Jones at ccalleyj@uwaterloo.ca or at 519-837-2838, or you can also contact my supervisors, Dr. Heather Mair at hmair@healthy.uwaterloo.ca or at 519-888-4567 ext. 35917, or Dr. Sue Shaw at sshaw@healthy.uwaterloo.ca or at 519-888-4567 ext. 35019.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. However, the final decision about participation is yours. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Susan Sykes of this office at 519-888-4567 Ext. 36005 or ssykes@uwaterloo.ca.

I hope that the results of my study will be of benefit to those organizations directly involved in the study, other voluntary recreation organizations not directly involved in the study, as well as to the broader research community.

I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Yours Sincerely,

Cris Calley Jones, MSW, RSW, PhD Candidate

Appendix B: Consent Form for Interviews

By signing this consent form, you are not waiving your legal rights or releasing the investigator(s) or involved institution(s) from their legal and professional responsibilities.

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Cris Calley Jones of the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses.

I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous, identified only by a pseudonym.

I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I may contact the Director, Office of Research Ethics at 519-888-4567 ext. 36005.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

YES NO

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

YES NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

YES NO

Participant Name: _____ (Please print)

Participant Signature: _____

Witness Name: _____ (Please print)

Witness Signature: _____

Appendix C: CONSENT FORM for Elicited Text

By signing this consent form, you are not waiving your legal rights or releasing the investigator(s) or involved institution(s) from their legal and professional responsibilities.

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Cris Calley Jones of the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that excerpts from the text that I provide may be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous, identified only by a pseudonym.

I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I may contact the Director, Office of Research Ethics at 519-888-4567 ext. 36005.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

YES NO

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

YES NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

YES NO

Participant Name: _____ (Please print)

Participant Signature: _____

Witness Name: _____ (Please print)

Witness Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D: Interview Guide

Introductory Script:

My name is Cris Calley Jones, and you may know me as *Calley*. As a long-term member of the Reclaiming Community, and a founder of Wild Ginger WitchCamp in Canada, I am intimately familiar with the impact that the witchcamp experience can have on a person. I am a PhD student at the University of Waterloo, and I am conducting a research study about witchcamps with the hope of understanding the social change role that witchcamps offer.

I am collecting information from campers who have participated in at least three witchcamps. I will be arranging interviews in Ontario, Vermont, and British Columbia (dates to be determined). I am also inviting Witches outside of those locations to participate electronically by submitting written responses to the interview questions. Both the interviews and the electronic responses will require approximately 1.5 hours of your time.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you may decline to answer any of the interview questions. All the information that you provide is considered completely confidential and your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study, however, with your permission, anonymous quotations may be used. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo.

Demographic information:

Name:	Camp Affiliations:
Sacred Name:	Number of Camps Attended:
Chosen Pseudonym for Study:	Camp Roles:
Age:	Activist Activities:
Home Camp:	Self-identified Social Location:

Sample Interview Questions and Probes

1. Do you define yourself as a Witch? Why, or why not?

Probes: Does going to witchcamp make you a Witch? Why, or why not? What does it mean to be a Witch? at camp? elsewhere?

2. People experience witchcamp in a variety of ways – Please describe what the experience means for you.

Probes: How do you categorize your witchcamp experience? To what extent does witchcamp feel like a vacation? A spiritual retreat? A workshop? A festival?

3. What are the rewards of going to camp? Best? Worst?

Probes: Experiences? Skills? Knowledge? Other?

4. Are there costs to being involved with witchcamps?

Probes: Personal, social, or familial costs?

5. Please describe how you explain witchcamp to people in your life?

Probes: Positive experiences? Negative experiences?

6. Does the camp location or setting have any importance in your camp experience? Probes: Why? Why not?

7. Please talk about why you have continued to return to witchcamps?

8. To what extent, if any, is witchcamp a spiritual experience for you? Why, or why not?

Probes: Does camp support or challenge your spirituality? In what ways? Positive experiences? Negative experiences? Memorable experiences?

9. To what extent, if any, does witchcamp provide you with an experience of community? In what ways? Why or why not?

Probes: Is witchcamp a community for others? Does camp support or challenge your sense of community? Positive experiences? Negative experiences? Memorable experiences? How familiar are you with the larger witchcamps community? Do you feel connected beyond your local camp/s? To what extent have you developed strong relationships with others in the witchcamp world?

10. Have you ever felt like you don't belong at witchcamp? Describe?

Probes: Have you ever felt left out or excluded in any way? Or seen that happen to someone else?

11. To what extent do you share beliefs and values with other witchcampers?

10. Do you consider yourself an activist? Why, or why not?

Probes: Does witchcamp play a role in your activism? In what ways? For others?

11. Have you ever experienced any internal conflicts or ambivalence about the camp experience?

12. Are there certain expectations or rules at camp?

Probes: Any that you resist? Support? To what extent is there conflict or harmony between your goals and the expectations of camp?

13. Do you ever think that the camps should be doing things differently?

14. To what extent, if any, do you experience conflict between your personal life and the witchcamp life?

Probes: Please describe any contrasts or tensions between witchcamp and regular daily life? How smooth is the transition between regular and camp life?

15. To what extent, if any, have you ever experienced a conflict or ambivalence around having fun at camp and engaging in the camp agenda?

16. How does camp compare, contrast, or contribute to your regular daily life?

17. Do you intend to be involved in the future? Why, or why not?

18. If you had to replace the witchcamp experience in your life, what would you replace it with?

Appendix E: Schedule and Locations of WitchCamps

Camp	Location	Next Scheduled (Ages)
WinterCamp	Wisconsin	February 11-15, 2010 (18+)
European Spring camp	Avila, Spain	12-15 Marzo, 2010 (18+)
Wild Child	Pocahontas State Park, Virginia	May 27-31, 2010 (All)
DreamWeaving	Diana's Grove, Missouri	June 12-18, 2010 (18+)
Teen Earth Magic West	Northern California	June 12-16, 2010 (13-25)
Wild Ginger	Honeywood, Ontario	June 23-27, 2010 (All)
California Witchcamp	Mendocino, California	June 27-July 4, 2010 (18+)
Phoenix-Camp	Central Germany	10-17 Juli 2010 (18+)
Reclaiming Free WitchCamp	Oregon	July 11-17, 2010 (18+)
SpiralHeart	Four Quarters Farm, Penn.	July 24-31, 2010 (18+)
Witchlets in the Woods	California	August, 2010 TBA (All)
Teen Earth Magic East	Vermont	August 14-18, 2010 (13-25)
Vermont WitchCamp	Vermont	August, 2010 TBA (18+)
Avalon	Somerset, England	19 - 22 August, 2010 (18+)
Sunrise Camp	Vale of Glamorgan, Wales	Late August, 2010 TBA (All)
BCWC	Evans Lake, British Columbia	August, 2010 TBA (18+)
Dandelion Gathering	Diana's Grove, Missouri	September 8-12, 2010 (All)
Loreley European WitchCamp	Continental Europe	Tentatively in 2010 (All)
Tejas	Central Texas	TBA (18+)
DreamRoads WitchCamp	North Carolina	TBA (18+)
WitchCamp Australia	Victoria, Australia	TBA (18+)
	Updated March 2, 2010	

Appendix F: Schedule of Research Tasks

Research Proposal Defense: March 12, 2010

Ethics Approval: April, 2010

Data Collection and Data Analysis: June 2010 – February, 2011

Writing of Final Report: March – December, 2011

Final Defense: March 9, 2012

Appendix G: Reclaiming Tradition of Witchcraft - Principles of Unity

The values of the Reclaiming tradition stem from our understanding that the earth is alive and all of life is sacred and interconnected. We see the Goddess as immanent in the earth's cycles of birth, growth, death, decay and regeneration. Our practice arises from a deep, spiritual commitment to the earth, to healing and to the linking of Magic with political action.

Each of us embodies the divine. Our ultimate spiritual authority is within, and we need no other person to interpret the sacred to us. We foster the questioning attitude, and honor intellectual, spiritual and creative freedom.

We are an evolving, dynamic tradition and proudly call ourselves Witches. Honoring both Goddess and God, we work with female and male images of divinity, always remembering that their essence is a mystery, which goes beyond form. Our community rituals are participatory and ecstatic, celebrating the cycles of the seasons and our lives, and raising energy for personal, collective and earth healing.

We know that everyone can do the life-changing, world-renewing work of Magic, the art of changing consciousness at will. We strive to teach and practice in ways that foster personal and collective empowerment, to model shared power and to open leadership roles to all. We make decisions by consensus, and balance individual autonomy with social responsibility.

Our tradition honors the wild, and calls for service to the earth and the community. We value peace and practice non-violence, in keeping with the Rede, "Harm none, and do what you will." We work for all forms of justice: environmental, social, political, racial, gender and economic. Our feminism includes a radical analysis of power, seeing all systems of oppression as interrelated, rooted in structures of domination and control.

We welcome all genders, all races, all ages and sexual orientations and all those differences of life situation, background, and ability that increase our diversity. We strive to make our public rituals and events accessible and safe. We try to balance the need to be justly compensated for our labor with our commitment to make our work available to people of all economic levels.

All living beings are worthy of respect. All are supported by the sacred elements of air, fire, water and earth. We work to create and sustain communities and cultures that embody our values, which can help to heal the wounds of the earth and her peoples, and which can sustain us and nurture future generations.