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Reflecting on Studying Wicca from within the Academy and the Craft: An Autobiographical Perspective

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14 I am honored to be invited to reflect on my academic biography
15 and its intersection with Pagan studies, particularly to discuss my
16 experience of the relationship between Pagan studies and Wicca,
17 and to talk about the interactions between scholar and practitio-
18 ner. This aim for reflexivity is a useful common ground within the
19 wide transdisciplinary field that has come to embody the contem-
20 porary study of Paganism (an umbrella term for Pagan religiosity).
21 Such reflexivity allows scrutiny for researcher effects, and rejects the
22 assumption that it is possible to study human behavior and belief
23 as an objective observer, particularly when studying one's own cul-
24 ture. It attempts to account for the individual researcher, how they
25 affect their research, and how their research affects them. In my case
26 this discussion leads into the insider/outsider debate; the interface
27 of Pagan studies with other fields; and theory and methodology in
28 the study of Paganisms (a specific term emphasizing the diverse reli-
29 gions and ideologies that form Paganism). I will start with a potted
30 biography.

31

An Academic Biography

32 British state education in the 1970s was not good. I went to a junior
33 school with four hundred children, no learning objectives, and no

34 1. Melissa Harrington is a senior visiting lecturer at the University of Cumbria.
35 She teaches research methods and fundamentals of clinical and cognitive behavioral
36 psychology

1 internal walls. My secondary school was an ex “secondary modern,”
2 which on the abolition of the grammar-school system had been
3 deemed “comprehensive,” without changing its staff or limited cur-
4 riculum. Everything conformed to the intellectual culture of the
5 lowest academic levels. It didn’t have a sixth form, so at sixteen I
6 commuted fifteen miles to the nearest one, which neither encour-
7 aged nor promoted university. I left school to work with horses,
8 taught English in Spain, and then became a temporary secretary in
9 London before working my way up in marketing at L’Oreal; this
10 was an enjoyable environment with excellent benefits, but then I dis-
11 covered Wicca.

12 Wicca opened a new intellectual world to me. As a child I read
13 the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* from cover to cover and requested the
14 *Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology* by my ninth birthday, but the
15 drab utilitarianism of school had extinguished any thought of further
16 education. Wicca strongly re-awakened this thirst for knowledge,
17 with new concepts in religion and a path into history, philosophy,
18 comparative and alternative religion, magic, feminism, ritual, spiri-
19 tuality, ecology, personal development and psychology. After trying
20 to balance work and study, I gave up my career with its financial
21 security and incentives, and applied to Royal Holloway University
22 to study psychology as I approached my thirtieth birthday.

23 I enjoyed the cognitive and clinically focused BSc while read-
24 ing for pleasure in the philosophy, classics, and religious libraries.
25 I intensively explored the magical milieu, including sojourns
26 in magical communities and initiation into ceremonial and West-
27 ern Mystery traditions. I did my dissertation on a cognitive model
28 for magical consciousness and a research project on conversion to
29 Wicca. I intended to become an occupational psychologist, combin-
30 ing academic qualifications with prior experience and connections.

31 However, Professor Peter Clarke, head of the Centre for the Study
32 of New Religious Movements within the Theology and Religious
33 Studies department at King’s College, London liked my undergrad-
34 uate work and invited me to extend my research project into a PhD
35 supervised by him and Vivianne Crowley, who lectured there on the
36 psychology of religion. I was delighted to accept and join students on
37 the MA in the Sociology and Anthropology of Religion, and explore
38 new religious movements while reading up on gender and feminist
39 scholarship. I also visited the British Museum, enjoying the reading
40 rooms of the old British Library, reading widely on anything related to
41 Wiccan history. I was also in two Enochian groups; district manager,

1 open-sabbats co-ordinator and media officer for the Pagan Federation
2 London; running my own coven; secretary and an initiating officer in
3 Shemesh Lodge OTO; and running the London OTO.

4 By then I was considering becoming a full-time academic, but life
5 presented a greater challenge. I was married, thirty-five years old,
6 and it was time to start a family. We did, and then moved 240 miles
7 home to Cumbria, also reducing my Pagan/magical commitments
8 to one coven, generic Thelema, and district manager for the Pagan
9 Federation North West. Professor Clarke has my gratitude for keep-
10 ing me on track throughout the two maternity leaves, part-time affil-
11 iation, and the several suspensions of research that followed, but
12 nevertheless both he and Vivianne had retired from King's by the
13 time I came to do my viva.

14 After a significant break to nurture and enjoy my young family,
15 renovate houses, and to help develop my husband's business, I
16 sought relevant academic teaching experience by offering my local
17 adult education body courses on sociology, psychology, and psy-
18 chology of religion, wherewith they also offered me extra training in
19 adult education, which I used as a springboard to become a visiting
20 lecturer at the University of Cumbria, on postgraduate courses in
21 cognitive behavioral psychotherapy. This fitted well with my family
22 commitments and I intend to continue with this work-life balance
23 while eventually publishing from my PhD, a number of books on
24 conversion and Wicca, and possibly to re-engage in research on
25 cognitive and cultural aspects of religious conversion. I would also
26 like to publish on aspects of the courses I teach at the University of
27 Cumbria.

28 I now do *ad hoc* magic with groups of friends, and enjoy the role
29 of matriarch to my "downline" in Wicca. I organize conferences for
30 the Pagan Federation, including academics as speakers. I also am
31 invited to give international workshops and lectures. So it seems
32 that a chance meeting with a Tarot reader many years ago has led me
33 to the role of senior lecturer and consultant Witch.

34 *Pagan Studies*

35 Pagan studies has so far been an umbrella term for the study of
36 Paganism from many different academic fields, leading to a collab-
37 orative interdisciplinary research base rather than any one over-
38 all "monotheory." This has facilitated building a polyvocal body
39 of work engaged with multiple forms of religious belonging and

1 multiple approaches to research of Pagan religion and its place in
 2 the modern world, as outlined in the goals of the Contemporary
 3 Pagan Studies Consultation of the American Academy of Religion.
 4 This was established in 2005 stating a two-fold mission: 1. Foster
 5 the development of new research and new methods in the study of
 6 Paganism 2. Create an environment that helps to foster critical in-
 7 depth evaluation of current research.

8 Pagan studies started by mapping Paganism as it has developed,
 9 with research also reflecting its demography as it has grown. Wicca,
 10 as the largest path, has had the widest interest, and its constant diver-
 11 sification and denomination means there is much descriptive work
 12 left to be done. Pagans talk about “Wiccanate privilege,” whereby
 13 interest in Wicca overshadows the development of other Paganisms
 14 to the extent that outsiders see Paganism in terms of a generic sort
 15 of Wicca; this can be seen in general accounts from religious stud-
 16 ies.² Pagan studies scholars’ work has helped to build a much more
 17 nuanced academic understanding of contemporary Paganisms in all
 18 their forms and functions, and is developing a global interest with
 19 research now beginning to take place in the Australia, post-Soviet
 20 states and the Middle East.

21 *Fostering the Development of New Research*

22 Paganism is a religion that is as much an expression of contempo-
 23 rary culture as it is a rebirth of polytheistic mystery religion.³ In
 24 researching Pagans, even if identifying as an “outsider”, researchers
 25 have been studying their own race, culture and class, some of whom
 26 are more educated than the researcher. They are keen to assist, and
 27 to absorb, reflect and critique academic accounts. This has led to
 28 the concept of dialogue with researched communities, and criticism
 29 of the “colonialist” narrative of classical anthropology and of the
 30 “reductionist outsider” stance. It has also led to inter-field discus-
 31 sion of how researching Paganisms might help to avoid the normal
 32 research perils of affecting data by presence, or skewing analysis by
 33 consciously or unconsciously favoring theory, methodology, agen-
 34 das, religious viewpoints, ideology, and individual beliefs. Thus one
 35 of the key identifying features within the study of Paganisms is a

36 2. Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution* (Oxford: Black-
 37 well, 2005).

38 3. Christopher Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West, Vol. 1: Alternative*
 39 *Spiritualities, Sacrilization, Popular Culture and Occulture* (London: Continuum, 2004).

1 high level of reflexivity, allied to discussion of how best to engage in
 2 the dynamic process of studying evolving religions within our own
 3 culture, and how to apply that to wider research communities.⁴

4 *Fostering the Development of New Methodologies*

5 Studying Paganism's manifestation of spirituality, religion, ideology
 6 and identity in the twenty-first century is helping to develop appro-
 7 priate methodologies and tools for contemporary religions that can
 8 then be used for studying wider religion.⁵

9 As an undergraduate psychologist I realized that psychological
 10 conversion literature did not reflect the common Wiccan experi-
 11 ence of an internal shift in "coming home," but placed more empha-
 12 sis on adopting religion due to outside agency. In my final research
 13 project I created a scale to measure "recognition" as a conversion
 14 motif alongside Lofland and Skonovd's existing motifs of intellec-
 15 tual, mystical, revivalist, affectional, and coercive conversion, which
 16 I then applied to Wiccans.⁶ The recognition motif scored highest for
 17 all participants as their key conversion motif; I ascribed this to pre-
 18 existing cognitive factors.⁷ In a later assessment of the rise of Pagan-
 19 ism in Britain I have attributed these factors as ones which have led
 20 to a quiet religious revolution with Paganism becoming the largest
 21 "other" religion in Britain today.⁸

22 I explored this process in my PhD and ascribed such conversion
 23 to a process of "schematic integration," whereby a religion fits with
 24 previously constructed cognitive schema or templates. I have real-
 25 ized since that this "recognition" is a description of the process of
 26 cognitive consistency, the opposite of cognitive dissonance, which
 27 engenders that feeling of homecoming. I think this could be applied
 28 to young Muslims converting to extremist Islamic groups, as a more

29 4. Graham Harvey, "Pagan Studies or the Study of Paganisms? A Case Study
 30 in the Study of Religions," in *Researching Paganisms*, ed. Jenny Blain, Douglas Ezzy,
 31 and Graham Harvey (Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press, 2004), 241-55.

32 5. Michael York, *The Emerging Network, A Sociology of the New Age and Neo-*
 33 *Pagan Movements* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995); Jone Salomonsen,
 34 *Enchanted Feminism. Ritual, Gender and Divinity among the Reclaiming Witches of San*
 35 *Francisco* (London: Routledge, 2002).

36 6. John Lofland and Norman Skonovd, "Conversion Motifs," *Journal for the Sci-*
 37 *entific Study of Religion* 20, no. 4 (1981): 373-85.

38 7. Melissa Harrington, "Conversion to Wicca?" DISKUS, 2000, [http://www.](http://www.uni.marburg.de/religionswissenschaft/journal/diskus/harrington.html)
 39 [uni.marburg.de/religionswissenschaft/journal/diskus/harrington.html](http://www.uni.marburg.de/religionswissenschaft/journal/diskus/harrington.html)

40 8. Melissa Harrington, "The Popularity of Paganism: Making Sense of the
 41 Census," *BSA Sociology of Religion Study Group, Study Day 2013: "Making Sense of the*
 42 *Census, The SocRel Response,*" 2013.

1 useful model for understanding Western jihadism than the current
 2 “grooming” hypothesis favored by the media, which leans towards
 3 “brainwashing” theory discredited by sociologists such as Eileen
 4 Barker. Looking at schema theory and conversion I see that “hate-
 5 preachers” provide a revivalist element to jihadist conversion, but
 6 the problem of Britons supporting Daesh is arguably far more deeply
 7 seated in the generation who have grown up in an adopted country
 8 during the Bush/Blair years.

9 *Going Native in Reverse: An Initiatory Process*

10 Becoming Wiccan was an integral part of my becoming an academic.
 11 Jo Pearson developed the term “going native in reverse,”⁹ and I find
 12 it apt for my experience, though without the negative connotations
 13 that are implicit in the original anthropological concept. I would like
 14 to build upon Pearson’s discussion and say that this was a result
 15 of a successful initiation into the Academy. Academia has degrees
 16 of initiation, each with its own liminalities and learning processes,
 17 ordeals, expectations, rituals, and robes that define one’s status and
 18 experience. Their achievement implies and ensures increasing levels
 19 of enculturation. I found the viva voce and trial by critic to be greater
 20 ordeals than any esoteric initiation. I see my own determination to
 21 stay involved as proof that once one has invested so much energy
 22 and belief into something one is likely to value it, identify with it,
 23 and believe in its ideology, culture and norms.

24 *Interpretative Drift*

25 This is similar to Tania Luhrmann’s (process of “interpretive drift,”
 26 which I find viable as a descriptor of enculturation but problematical
 27 in its suggestion of cognitive dissonance as a causative force in the
 28 adoption of magical belief systems.¹⁰ I think she describes a general
 29 process of organizational socialization that is not sufficient to explain
 30 magical beliefs, particularly as many people join magical societies
 31 *because* they have already had magical/mystical experience.

32 9. Joanne E. Pearson, “‘Going Native in Reverse’: The Insider as Researcher in
 33 British Wicca,” in *Theorizing Faith: The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Ritual*,
 34 ed. Elizabeth Arweckand Martin D. Stringer (Birmingham: University of Birming-
 35 ham Press), 97–113.

36 10. Tanya M. Luhrmann, *Persuasions of the Witches’ Craft: Ritual Magic in Con-*
 37 *temporary England* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).

1 As I worked magic with many of the people Luhrmann did, I
2 know there are various accounts of magical belief systems that she
3 was exposed to but did not include in her write-up. This may have
4 been a conscious choice as they didn't fit with her theory, or uncon-
5 scious avoidance due to the "cognitive contamination" of the over-
6 arching plausibility structure of the academic rite of passage which
7 was the key driving force in her magical training.¹¹

8 In psychology one would not set out to prove rather than test
9 a hypothesis, as Luhrmann does, nor ignore a prevalent narrative
10 such as "coming home" to magical *communitas*, which is resonant
11 with cognitive consistency rather than its opposite cognitive disso-
12 nance, to which Luhrmann attributes magical affiliation. From a psy-
13 chological research framework, her study is a single case study of
14 Luhrmann, rather than her environment. It is the story of one girl's
15 struggle with cognitive dissonance created by her research param-
16 eters, rather than an impartial examination of belief adoption, such as
17 Eileen Barker's *The Making of a Moonie*.¹²

18 What Luhrmann finds in herself, she projects onto her respon-
19 dents, creating a cognitive model based on her own dissonant cog-
20 nitions, initiated "as if" she was a Witch but never participating in
21 ritual or *communitas* within the same cognitive space. It is interest-
22 ing to wonder what Luhrmann would have written had she done her
23 research ten years later, in a different institution, using something
24 other than anthropology, or if supervised by any of the senior schol-
25 ars who write reflexively in *Researching Paganisms*, which discusses
26 these issues in depth. What stands out in Luhrmann's study is her
27 very honest account of her struggle, an early independent attempt at
28 the reflexivity that has come to typify Pagan studies, from within an
29 institution with an extremely conservative academic ethos. *Persua-*
30 *sions of the Witches' Craft* has thus come to be a litmus test in insider/
31 outsider debate related to studying Paganisms, and it is only due to
32 Luhrmann's honesty in providing this data about her own struggle
33 that so many subsequent scholars have been able to use the book to
34 determine their own stance.

35 If interpretive drift is a robust theory it should be applicable to
36 other accounts of coming into magical belief/practice, but so far
37 this does not seem to be the case. Equally if the theory is robust it

38 11. Peter Berger, *A Far Glory: The Quest for Faith in an Age of Credulity* (Chicago:
39 University of Chicago Press, 1992).

40 12. Eileen Barker, *The Making of a Moonie* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984).

1 could be applicable to other forms of initiation and enculturation.
 2 One might then expect cognitive dissonance to be part of my own
 3 journey from “irrational” Wicca into rational academia. However I
 4 found no cognitive dissonance from my initiation into academia,
 5 in contrast it offered me tools to understand and continue my own
 6 spiritual journey.

7 *Knowledge Transfer and Exchange, Reflexivity and Reactivity*

8 Most Pagans want to learn more about Paganism. The successes of
 9 Vivianne Crowley’s Jungian analysis of Wicca and of Ronald Hut-
 10 ton’s academic histories illustrate this. It is interesting to note that
 11 the textual emphasis of academia could lead to the assumption Hut-
 12 ton’s work was not popular among Pagans, as three Pagan critiques
 13 of Hutton led to a response from him and articles by Peg Aloï and
 14 Caroline Tully.¹³ However Ronald Hutton is the invited keynote
 15 speaker at many Pagan conferences. The Doreen Valiente Trust and
 16 Centre for Pagan Studies have put on special “Days for” celebrat-
 17 ing the contribution and life of founders of Wicca. These have so far
 18 included Doreen Valiente, Gerald Gardner, Patricia Crowther, and
 19 Ronald Hutton. There could not be a much higher accolade from the
 20 community than this.

21 I speak at Pagan conferences, where academic contributions are
 22 warmly received. This has the dual benefit of providing a knowl-
 23 edgeable audience who can offer specific constructive feedback,
 24 and bringing academic tools into the Paganism. I see this as a valu-
 25 able process of basic knowledge transfer and exchange. Knowledge
 26 transfer is usually seen in terms of business or industry uptake
 27 and application rather than religion, but it may be relevant in this
 28 domain. It takes research out of the ivory tower and into an applied
 29 capacity. This concept of course opens into a debate about reactiv-
 30 ity, how can researchers achieve an open dialogue but not affect
 31 or contaminate their own data, which is a key discussion point in
 32 Pagan Studies. Clear research methodologies, conscious reflexivity
 33 and collaboration seem to be the best way to negotiate this. Lowell
 34 Livezey’s epilogue in Arweck and Stringer discusses the formalized

35 13. Peg Aloï, “Review of *Trials of the Moon*,” *Pomegranate: The International Jour-*
 36 *nal of Pagan Studies* 12 no. 2 (2010): 263–69; Caroline Jane Tulley, “Researching the
 37 Past is a Foreign Country: Cognitive Dissonance as a Response by Practitioner
 38 Pagans to Academic Research on the History of Pagan Religions,” *Pomegranate: The*
 39 *International Journal of Pagan Studies* 13, no. 1 (2011): 98–105.

1 sharing procedures used by the Religion in Urban America Program
 2 that do not confer veto or control, but enable critical evaluation by
 3 the researched community.¹⁴ This research program also creates re-
 4 search teams of people who are of diverse gender, race, and religions
 5 to work together.

6 Other concepts that are highlighted in literature on “knowledge
 7 transfer,” which are relevant to Pagan studies, are knowledge as
 8 power: what is the knowledge, where is it located/embedded, how
 9 can it be shared, what are the ethics of how it is shared, who has
 10 the knowledge, and how do they share it? This is already discussed
 11 in Pagan studies, but could be usefully allied with extant theory
 12 from this area of social science, particularly in terms of how knowl-
 13 edge as power is seen and transmitted in Paganism, and how the
 14 academy interacts with, treats, and portrays practitioners, and the
 15 knowledge they share.

16 *A View from “Inside”*

17 When discussing the insider/outsider debate I recommend Kim
 18 Knott’s discussion of the evolution of different approaches, and
 19 their positive and negative effects.¹⁵ Ann Taves provides eloquent
 20 reflection, and Arweck and Stringer a multidisciplinary perspective.
 21 *Researching Paganisms* gives a detailed Pagan specific view, as does
 22 Barbara Davy’s *Introduction to Pagan Studies*.¹⁶

23 *Researching Paganisms* has various detailed accounts of how
 24 Pagan scholars negotiate the boundaries within and between Pagan-
 25 ism and the academy. How one negotiates walking between these
 26 worlds is ultimately due to each setting their own criteria and ethics
 27 in conjunction with academic ethos. I ask, as in practical magic, “to
 28 what end?” This encompasses such questions as “Why would I do
 29 that work, who will it benefit, who might it hurt, what could be the
 30 result, what do I hope to gain from it, what problems might it create,
 31 can it be a success, and what is the best way to go about it?” I try

32 14. Lowell W. Livezey, “Epilogue: The Ethnographer and the Quests for Mean-
 33 ing,” in *Theorizing Faith: The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Ritual*, ed. Eliza-
 34 beth Arwick and Martin D. Stringer (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press,
 35 2002), 155–65.

36 15. Kim Knott, “Insider/Outsider Perspectives,” in *The Routledge Companion to*
 37 *the Study of Religion*, ed. John R. Hinnels (London: Routledge, 2005), 230–70.

38 16. Barbara Jane Davy, *Introduction to Pagan Studies* (Lanham, Md.: AltaMira
 39 Press, 2007).

1 to observe boundaries that practitioners expect academics to pre-
2 serve while using academic practice to elicit or convey information
3 that is useful to both communities. This question is not dissimilar to
4 that posed by Ann Taves: “*What we are trying to make?*” She suggests
5 shifting self reflexively between detachment and engagement, using
6 the metaphor of researcher role rather than researcher place. This
7 resonates with the discussions in *Researching Paganisms*.¹⁷

8 However, even if we follow Taves’ recommendation to shift into
9 role rather than place, we can still be affected by the roles we choose
10 and thus affect our research. It is easier to control for academic bias
11 and researcher effects with research methodologies than it is to control
12 for overzealous application of such controls due to personal
13 insecurity as an insider, which I now think is a common feature of
14 both mine and Luhrmann’s research. Jo Pearson once bemoaned to
15 me her criteria, set by herself, as to what she can and cannot research
16 within Wicca. I now wonder if my concern to create valid research
17 in my own limited studies, to stand up to judgment, has been to the
18 detriment of what I could have contributed to the bigger picture.

19 When I did my undergraduate project on conversion to Wicca, it
20 was as a training exercise to create a psychological research tool within
21 the overall framework of a quantitative experiment. I sent the ques-
22 tionnaire to a set of respondents that could easily be replicated, from
23 a popular, then well-published, gathering. Anyone of any religion or
24 background could replicate my study. I carried on in my PhD with
25 the same ethos, using snowballing from an open source and standard-
26 ized qualitative interviews, so the work could be tested, replicated,
27 or used in a meta-analysis of similar studies within or between reli-
28 gions. I never used my personal contacts, though they were those of
29 a key gatekeeper and I was using them at the time to help journalists,
30 authors, academics, and seekers. Instead I created careful studies that
31 had my elderly Witch friends somewhat amused, and Doreen Valiente
32 gave me her press cuttings in case they would help. On reflection it
33 is possible that all the time and effort I have spent engaged in aca-
34 demia has directly contributed to a loss rather than a gain in knowl-
35 edge about Paganism, as I could have preserved so much knowledge,
36 wisdom and information from Gardner’s high priestesses, instead of
37 setting up studies of A.N. Other Wiccan group that could be repli-
38 cated by A.N. Other researcher.

39 17. Ann Taves, “Negotiating the Boundaries in Theological and Religious Stud-
40 ies,” www.religion.ucsb.edu/Faculty/taves/GTU-FinalLecture.pdf.

1 *Porous Boundaries Between In and Outside*

2 Pagan scholars use various terms to describe joint insidership of the
 3 academy and Paganism, and how they site themselves within both.
 4 Neither category is solely exclusive, with many levels of in/outsid-
 5 ership in both. I see a constant interaction of academia and Pagan-
 6 ism that is invisible to Pagans, and raises ethical questions about
 7 covert research. One Witchfest International I spoke at included
 8 three eminent professors in the audience. The last people at the
 9 Pagan Federation fortieth anniversary conference in London, apart
 10 from myself and the after-party organizer with whom I was staying,
 11 were two Scandinavian academics. This raises the old joke “How
 12 many Witches does it take to change a light bulb?” with the answer
 13 “None – the anthropologist will do it.”

14 Markus Davidsen writes emphatically against insider research, but
 15 has spent time in the Pagan milieu, with Wiccan gatekeepers assist-
 16 ing him, including promoting and attending (and thereby endorsing)
 17 a symposium on Paganism run by him.¹⁸ He was given insider priv-
 18 ileges, which he has never acknowledged. These gatekeepers were
 19 astonished to read his attack on academic Wiccans, and see it as a
 20 manifestation of him being more of a Pagan outsider than an impar-
 21 tial outsider looking at Paganism (pers comm).

22 *Inside, Outside and Upside Down*

23 Understandably there are Witches in academia who are not “out.”
 24 However, I struggled with a paper a neophyte initiate wrote that is
 25 complicated by their claim to be a complete outsider. The group they
 26 joined has demanded the community accepts its neophytes on equal
 27 terms with others’ first degrees, and thus I dispute their avowed out-
 28 sidership. They may have taken a Luhrmann-oath, “as if” they were
 29 an initiate, but it still gives them full access to the community. Does
 30 their personal statement that they are an outsider mean I can “out”
 31 them in the interest of critical evaluation? Or am I bound by my own
 32 oaths to protect their identity? I feel that that this inverts the ethics,
 33 principles and practice of research. If the dichotomous insider/out-
 34 sider paradigm has caused this behaviour it is proof that it is inap-
 35 propriate for Pagan studies.

36 18. Markus Davidsen, “What is Wrong with Pagan Studies?” *Method and Theory*
 37 *in the Study of Religion* 24 (2012): 183–99.

1 *Questionable "Critical Analysis" and its Negative Effect*

2 Some of the arguments against insider research seem to seek "power
3 over," rather than share "power with." They presume that the out-
4 sider is right just because they are a (rational, pure, unbiased knowl-
5 edgeable) outsider, as opposed to an (irrational, contaminated, biased
6 naive native) insider, even if the insiders are established research-
7 ers and the outsider is a novice academic. Davidsen and Leon van
8 Gulik both published "critical analyses" that appear to be driven by
9 personal assumptions and emotions and which aimed to strengthen
10 claims of personal detachment and reason. I have already commented
11 on Davidsen in notes put on academia.edu for discussion at the Pagan
12 Studies session at the American Academy of Religion 2013, which
13 forms the draft of a future paper, and to which any constructive criti-
14 cism is welcome.¹⁹

15 The tone and nature of Van Gulik's article reflect a misun-
16 derstanding during his field work. He assumed a request to not
17 attend a workshop was due to the intention of blocking his "out-
18 sider" research, rather than about attendees not having given per-
19 mission, nor expecting, their personal experience of bereavement
20 to be used as research data. This raises the question as to how
21 much academics respect the consent of the community studied,
22 and how much they assume from having once completed forms
23 for their university ethics committee. This feeds back into my
24 earlier discussion about the relationship between academia and
25 Wicca. Who has the authority to demand what? Why should an
26 academic, particularly a self identified outsider to the community,
27 assume that the purposes of their personal project should take
28 priority over the individual and group purposes of practitioners?
29 His paper also raises the issue of how a researcher responds to
30 others who say "no." There will always be disappointments, and
31 moments when research participants are not able to offer academ-
32 ics what they desire. This brings us back to the applicability of the
33 concept Graham Harvey has developed of "guesthood,"²⁰ with its
34 recommendation of a mutual effort of respect, care, and a genuine
35 attempt to understand.

36 19. Available at www.academia.edu/5163312/Academia_edu_davidsen.

37 20. Harvey, Graham. "Guesthood as Ethical Decolonising Research Method,"
38 *Numen* 50, no. 2 (2003): 125-46.

1 *Looking Forward*

2 We live in very interesting times and are privileged to be working in
 3 a fascinating field. I am grateful to both Paganism and academia for
 4 enriching my life and giving me incredible tools for looking at the
 5 world around me and my place within it; these have led to my inter-
 6 est in much wider debate, in politics, policy and global humanity. I
 7 left school to try to make it as a show-jumper, looking at the world
 8 from between a horse's ears. I never thought I'd become a Witch, let
 9 alone a university lecturer, much less be invited to contribute to an
 10 edition like this. For me it is a journey that continues, and I know not
 11 where that will take me. I do not solely identify as a Wiccan – my life
 12 is wider than that – and it is only part of my identity and religious
 13 path; however, it is the one thing that everyone, from my neighbors
 14 to the academy, seems to want to hear about. I think the study of
 15 contemporary Pagan Witchcraft has only just scraped the surface of
 16 what it could be, and that academia can work in a very effective dia-
 17 logue with scholars and practitioners. I hope that as Pagan studies
 18 progresses it will continue to strive for honesty and reflexivity, with
 19 all Pagans out of the broom closet, as their human right, and part
 20 of a wider ranging scholarly necessity. What I do know is that as
 21 Pagan studies grows it will continue to provide a vital view of con-
 22 temporary religion, community, identity, and belief, and remain at
 23 the forefront of developing new resources for studying humanity
 24 and its dilemmas, drives and dreams in the twenty-first century; and
 25 I am be proud to be a part of this.

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