

# Making Space for Pagan and Heathen Kids

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Who are we?

# What is Ethnographic Research?

- based on the work of Pierre Bordieu and Loic Wacant
  - “go native, but go native *armed*”
- respondents are from our networks
- we consider ourselves part of this community

# Our Respondents

- 14 respondents from 11 households
- Heathen-identifying and pagan-identifying adult men and women
- all parents
- between 1 and 4 children in the home
- all white Euro-American (one respondents also claims Native heritage)
- all respondents ages 25-45
- a spectrum of family structures

# Our Questions

- Can we mask your identity, or do you want to be entirely anonymous?
- What is your (parents') religious background?
- How did you come to paganism/heathenry/polytheism?
- What do you identify as now?
- Tell us about your immediate family.
- Do you practice as part of a group? Are the kids involved?
- Do you practice in the home? Are the kids involved?

# Our Questions

- What values are important to you? How are you teaching them to your kids?
- What does authority look like in your group?
- What does authority look like in your home?
- Holidays?
- Do you have resources to share?
- What are your hopes and dreams for religious community?

# How do our respondents identify? (in their own words)

- heathen ++
- pagan ++
- eclectic pagan
- heathen polytheist
- animistic polytheist
- Norse pagan / heathen
- pagan in general. depending on how the room reads, heathen.
- modern Wiccan / Gaelic, spiritually connected to the land and the moon, goddess-based / nature-based
- Pan-Germanic, pan-pagan, mainly Frankish and Anglo-Saxon with Cherokee and Taoist
- Yazdani
- Fyrnsidu / pagan or polytheist
- eclectic heathen, mostly Norse, but other stuff as well
- post-Christian / post-Evangelical / pagan-ish

# Our respondents' religious backgrounds

- Catholic x 8
- Baptist x 5 (in 3 cases with Pentecostal influences)
- Methodist x 2
- Jehovah's Witness
- Mormon
- only two respondents had a pagan-leaning / witchy parent



# How did our respondents come to paganism and heathenism?

- felt queer leanings
- turned off by Christian stances on gender equality, LGBTQ+ issues ++
- interested in Wicca ++
- took a world religion class
- friends from other religions ++
- Christianity just didn't feel right. ++
  - It was “not vibing with who I am as a person”
  - “Is this all there is?”

# Our respondents' religious groups

## Values and authority

- Only some of our respondents perform religious practice within with a group
  - most religious practice occurs within the home
- inclusivity
- authority loose

# Our respondents' home lives

## Authority

- egalitarian marriages
- rejection of authoritarianism
- “gentle parenting”

# Our respondents' home lives

## Values (in their own words)

- care for community and family (broadly-defined)
- being kind to people / being kind ++
- be a good person, treat everyone with respect
- don't shit on people and they won't shit on you
- “do unto others”
- embrace people, regardless of religion
- kindness and empathy
- helping people / charity / “an ethic of charity and responsibility”

# Our respondents' home lives

## Values (in their own words)

- nature and care for our world ++
- ANARCHY (“earn your authority”)
- hospitality (offering food and drink, giving gifts, asking others to respect house rules)
- respect for others' boundaries / setting good boundaries for oneself
- preservation of historic sites
- wildness and joy / being in the moment
- balance (screen time vs outside time, strict schedule vs doing things as you will)
- importance of time as a family
- social justice work

# Holidays

- Every respondent makes an effort to celebrate pagan holidays in their homes.
- Yule and Ostara are popular!
- Many respondents celebrate Yule first and then do Christmas with extended family.
- In most cases, Yule and Ostara take precedence over Christmas and Easter, respectively.

# Some Broad Generalizations

- Heathen and Pagan parents generally come from authoritarian religious backgrounds.
- Our children participate in rituals, both at home and in our groups, as they feel led.
- In general, we value open-mindedness and kindness.
- In our homes, we try to balance authority between parents.
- Children have authority to the extent possible.
- We favor gentle parenting, natural consequences, and open dialogue between parents and children.

# Our Hopes for Community

- regularly meeting
- weekly meeting
- “Be Nice or Leave”
- explicit inclusive stance
- kids involved in rituals
- sense of community
- dedicated community space
- class for the kids, ritual for adults
- full inclusion of children in ritual
- life-cycle events
- potlucks
- playdates
- friendships / hangouts



# Our Hopes for Community

“I would like for pagan and heathen community to be something to raise our children in, a pagan mirror of [Christian] church...community to get together, worship, but also to support each other in crises, to be emotional support. Society is secular, and also Christian. We [pagans] need to be able to come together and support each others' metaphysical experiences. We don't always have that in paganism. It isolates us. And the more isolated we are, the more likely we are to doubt our experiences. We need to be able to support each other on our religious journeys.”

# Life Cycle Events

- New baby
- coming of age
- marriage or partnership
- pregnancies
- new home
- illnesses
- “crowning”
- dying and death
- birthdays
- first and last days of school

**Let's  
Talk  
About  
It!**

# What's next - further research?

- widen the circle - more data
- focus groups with group leaders and community stakeholders
- mindful inclusion of children in religious ritual
- create materials for children

# Resources

## TV shows and movies

- Hilda ++
- Avatar: The Last Airbender
- Moana
- Frozen

# Resources

## Podcasts & Websites

- National Geographic “Greeking Out” podcast
- Nordic mythology podcast
- Circle Round podcast
- Ozark Pagan Mama’s blog
- Jennifer Hartman’s website and Instagram

# Resources

## Books

- Astrid Lindgren *The Tomten & The Tomten and the Fox*
- Neil Gaiman *Norse Mythology* (especially the audio edition)
- all the Jennifer Hartman books
- d'Aulaire's *Book of Norse Myths* and *Book of Greek Myths* (skip the Christian bits)
- Brigid Ashwood *The Earth Child's Handbook*
- Starhawk, Diane Baker, and Anne Hill *Circle Round: Raising Children in Goddess Traditions*
- Elisa Kleven *Sun Bread*
- Wendy Pfeffer *The Shortest Day*
- Tara Luebbe *Ronan the Librarian*
- Adam Auerbach *Little Valkyrie's First Day at School*
- Monica Furlong *Wise Child: A Spellbinding Story of Magic, Healing, and Wisdom*
- Phoebe Wahl *Little Witch Hazel*
- Mathias Nordvig *Norse Mythology for Kids*

Thank you to our respondents!

And thank you for coming to our presentation!

## ERICKSON'S PSYCHOSOCIAL STAGES

<i>Stages</i>	<i>Crisis</i>	<i>Favorable Outcome</i>	<i>Unfavorable Outcome</i>
<b>Childhood</b>			
<b>1<sup>st</sup> year of life</b>	<i>Trust vs. Mistrust</i>	Faith in the environment and future events	Suspicion, fear of future events
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> year</b>	<i>Autonomy vs. Doubt</i>	A sense of self-control and adequacy	Feelings of shame and self-doubt
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> years</b>	<i>Initiative vs. Guilt</i>	Ability to be a "self-starter," to initiate one's own activities.	A sense of guilt and inadequacy to be on one's own
<b>6<sup>th</sup> year to puberty</b>	<i>Industry vs. Inferiority</i>	Ability to learn how things work, to understand and organize.	A sense of inferiority at understanding and organizing.
<b>Transition years</b>			
<b>Adolescence</b>	<i>Identity vs. confusion</i>	Seeing oneself as a unique and integrated person.	Confusion over who and what one really is.
<b>Adulthood</b>			
<b>Early adulthood</b>	<i>Intimacy vs. isolation</i>	Ability to make commitments to others, to love.	Inability to form affectionate relationship.
<b>Middle age</b>	<i>Generativity vs. self-absorption</i>	Concern for family and society in general.	Concern only for self— one's own well-being and prosperity.
<b>Aging years</b>	<i>Integrity vs. despair</i>	A sense of integrity and fulfillment; willingness to face death.	Dissatisfaction with life; despair over prospect of death.



### Fowler's Stages of Faith

Stage	Age	Characteristics
Pre-Stage: <i>Undifferentiated faith</i>	Infant	Trust, hope, and love compete with environmental inconsistencies or threats of abandonment
Stage 1: <i>Intuitive-projective faith</i>	Toddler-preschooler	Imitates parental behaviors and attitudes about religion and spirituality Has no real understanding of spiritual concepts
Stage 2: <i>Mythical-literal faith</i>	School-aged child	Accepts existence of a deity Religious and moral beliefs are symbolized by stories Appreciates others' viewpoints Accepts concept of reciprocal fairness
Stage 3: <i>Synthetic-conventional faith</i>	Adolescent	Questions values and religious beliefs in an attempt to form own identity
Stage 4: <i>Individuative-reflective faith</i>	Late adolescent and young adult	Assumes responsibility for own attitudes and beliefs
Stage 5: <i>Conjunctive faith</i>	Adult	Integrates other perspectives about faith into own definition of truth
Stage 6: <i>Universalizing faith</i>	Adult	Makes concepts of love and justice tangible

(Data from Fowler, J. W. [1981]. *Stages of faith: The psychology of human development and the quest for meaning*. New York: Harper & Row, Johnson, B. S. [1996]. *Psychiatric-mental health nursing: Adaptation and growth* [4th ed.]. Philadelphia: Lippincott.)