Pagan Community Online: Social Media Affordances and Limitations in Religio-Political Sociality

by

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<u>Author's Declaration</u>

       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 by my examiners. I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

Ultra-conservative and social justice politics in North America have imbued political meaning into ideas of race and religion. Norse Pagans (i.e., Heathens) are factionalizing and contesting the significances of race and gender in their religious mythology, systems of magic, and communal belonging via the Internet. This thesis focuses on the role of digital platforms in shaping the religio-political sociality of Heathens and in forming "a community in practice" that stretches across several social media platforms and individuals' offline lives. I draw on survey data, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation in a digital ethnography of The Asatru Community (TAC), an anti-racist Heathen religious group. I approach social media and the Internet as overlapping with the offline, resulting in a multi-sited social arena in which discourses of religious and political significance occur and are inherently intertwined. I also rethink existing definitions of community online. My study takes place primarily across Facebook and Discord, where most community activity occurs. I show how sentiments of community and individual identity are religiously and politically mediated via users' bodies and speech across multiple Social Networking Sites and forms of interaction within each site. Thus, social media facilitates the creation of aesthetic styles and obscures geographic boundaries, a process that supports a unified sense of community and identity, while also challenging the division between online and offline.

Acknowledgements

Land Acknowledgment

The University of Waterloo is situated on the Haldimand Tract, which is land that was promised to the Haudenosaunee of the Six Nations of the Grand River, and is within the territory of the Neutral, Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee people. As a student of this institution, I work and study on the land that was promised to these groups on October 25th, 1784. Recognizing that the eventual secession of land by these groups was non-consensual and fraudulent only begins to describe the wrong doings of settlers and the enduring colonial forces still present today. It is important to acknowledge this fact, as injustices that Indigenous Peoples of Canada face should no longer be historicized, but, rather, recognized as contemporary issues that must be continuously addressed. Coloniality is an ongoing process, and this statement alone is not sufficient action to redress this fact. With this, I would like to take the opportunity to commit myself to the fight against long established systems of oppression that have taken away Indigenous Peoples of Canada's land, identity and right to self-governance.

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Introduction

Religion is recognized as a primary motivator for the conservative right and far-right in the political instability that has led up to and surrounded the presidency of Donald Trump (Wilcox 2011; McVicar 2016; Margolis 2020). This phenomenon is not exclusive to Judeo-Christian expressions of religion, however. New Religious Movements (NRMs) like Paganism, and its many denominations, are joining public political discourse. The *#MagicResistance* movement protested the presidency of Donald Trump in 2017. The "resistance witches" totaled over 13,000 participants who took advantage of Twitter and Facebook to organize the casting of spells designed to bind Trump and prevent him and his administration from causing harm (Burton 2017). The *#MagicResistance* movement utilized Twitter to engage political opponents indirectly and empower protestors politically through Pagan religious dialogue (Fine 2019, 69). News surrounding the event depicts Pagans as ex-Christians leaving their former sexually and socially repressive religion for a more empowering and progressive one, implying politically motivated conversion. This is only one instance among many in which the news demonstrates the political impact on Paganism and its effect on contemporary politics.

Heathenry, or Ásatrú, is commonly cited in news media as affiliated with or coopted by white nationalists and the American Alt-Right. *Rolling Stone* has written about the appropriation of Norse and Heathen religious symbols being used by Neo-Fascists to support traditional European conceptions of masculinity and whiteness, carried on banners, or worn as tattoos by figures like the January 6th White House insurrectionist, Jake Angeli (Kelly 2021). This same

year, the Conservative Political Action Conference made headlines after the design of the stage was said to resemble a Norse rune well known for its use by the Nazis and classified by the Anti-Defamation League as a hate symbol (Peiser 2021). The same symbol and others were seen at the Charlottesville, Ohio riot of 2017 where 20-year-old James Alex Fields drove a vehicle into a crowd of counter-protestors, killing 32-year-old Heather Heyer and wounding 19 others (Keneally 2018). The *Washington Post* highlights the purchase and use of a derelict church by the *Asatru Folk Assembly* as a battle over the First Amendment, classifying Heathenry as a white supremacist hate group according to extremism and religion experts (Bellware 2020).

Heathen Pagans have denounced the appropriation of their religious symbols by hate movements across the globe, as anti-racist Heathen organizations have mobilized to counter-protest (Edwards 2017). Moreover, rather than just denounce racism, Heathens have recognized the necessity for their growing religious movement to become more engaged in public political discourse. To quote *The Atlantic* (Samuel 2017):

> *"We often say that we are a world-affirming religion, so maybe it's time that we turn to the world and address the issues that face us today," [Karl Seigfried, an adjunct professor at Illinois Institute of Technology who is also a* goði *(priest) of an inclusive Ásatrú group in Chicago] said. "What do heathens think about reproductive rights? The role of government? Climate change? Gender identity? ... We will never be included in the greater public discussion if we don't first step forward and put our ideas on the table."*

Following news media, academic discourses on Heathenry depict it as rooted in histories of racism and white supremacy since before the Second World War (Gardell 2013, 18-28). Scholarly discussions of the diversity of political factions in Heathenry have focused explicitly

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on racist figureheads and movements as the basis for understanding ideological positions within the religion (Snook 2015; Snook et. al. 2017). Although limited, however, research has demonstrated that racist Heathen groups make up only a minority of Heathen-identifying Pagans (Berger 2019, 145). Scholarly preoccupations on racist Heathenry paint a negative picture that contributes to the difficulties that Pagans of all kinds experience in identifying themselves publicly (Reid 2007, 130). Academic and popular identifications of Paganism with hate movements may be influencing how many Pagans identify as "solitary practitioners," i.e., practicing their religion alone (Berger 2019).

As I evidence in my thesis, Heathen religious organizations, like the Pagans behind *#MagicResistance*, also use social media in order to participate in political discourse, engage political opponents, and construct their own models of community. Considering this, special attention needs to be given to the role played by digital media (and specifically its affordances and limitations) in shaping the relationship between religion and politics in the case of anti-racist Heathens. How do Heathen groups mobilize and utilize Internet spaces to develop community and engage with the broader public? In considering this question, this thesis aims to foreground the publicly marginalized voices of Heathenry through digital ethnography and a collaborative Public Issues Anthropology approach. Such an approach, I argue, allows for a better understanding of the communities researched, and challenges academic assumptions of what constitutes a religious community within online and offline social networks.

Highlighting Voices in a Digital Public Issues Anthropology

Who the public issues anthropologists are or what they do is not a predetermined fact. The definition of this field title and its goals are historically controversial and in flux, described with labels that range between applied, engaged, collaborative, public, and emerging epithets (Hedican 2016, 36-66). For example, Nancy Scheper-Hughes identifies the Public Issues Anthropologist as a "negative worker," resisting the demands of the academia (Scheper-Hughes 1995, 420). A "Public Issues Anthropology" thus dictates itself on what it owes its interlocutors, positioning the researcher in the role of social critic and witness rather than a spectator (Scheper-Hughes 1995, 418-419). In a critique of Scheper-Hughes, Steven Robins claims that her example as a militant anthropology does not pay attention to "local understandings and power relations" (Robins and Scheper-Hughes 1996, 343). Alternatively, James B. Waldram (2010, 230) defines "applied" anthropology as contributing to theory and ethnographic data with the aim to inform social discourse rather than control it (Waldram 2010, 231). Joshua J. Smith's account of "action anthropology" breaks from applied anthropology's evolutionary theories and divests the researcher from positions of power via the academic institution in a relational ethic (Smith 2015, 446-447).

Thus, as Edward Hedican (2016, 65) notes, it is impossible to define "public" or public issues anthropology, and its meanings and applications are obscure. However, Hedican doesn't consider such obscurity as a failure and instead remarks, "it is not so much what public anthropology is that counts, but what anthropologists do that matters. In other words, this is a term that can be best defined by the research activities that occur under its rubric, as opposed to some objective criteria" (2016, 66). We must then orient our definitions around the demands of the specific contexts on and in which we study.

I look to Hedican in understanding Public Issues anthropology as inherently subjective and context-bound, and that decisions regarding which publics are discussed and through which methodologies are engaged, draw form from the researchers' own biases (2016, 14). Elisabeth Tauber and Dorothy Zinn (2015, 12-14) echo this understanding in illustrating how a "Public Anthropology" addresses *public issues* in as many ways as there are practicing anthropologists. However, an "ethic of action" must be shared amongst these anthropologies as participatory and collaborative, accessible outside of academia, and directed at policy making (Tauber & Zinn 2015, 11). In Hedican's words, "[t]he question today is no longer whether or not anthropologists should become involved in the local affairs of their fieldwork settings; the question concerns what form this involvement ought to take" (2016, 27).

In the context of my own study, Public Issues Anthropology must consider the methodological implications of ethnography online. Digital anthropologists recognize the online space as real and lived in (Miller 2012, 156; Miller et. al. 2016, 7), overlapping with our offline lives (Berg 2012), with religious, political, and otherwise culturally significant impacts (Campbell et. al. 2010; Coleman 2010, Eisenlohr 2012). Academic and non-academic fields alike embrace ethnographic methods in order to research digital technology's impacts on a variety of publics (Miller 2018). A digitally minded Public Issues Anthropology thus must consider how social media impacts and bridges diverse socialities online and offline. An applied digital anthropology strengthens the field's voice in international affairs and public debate in media policy, international law, communication rights, migration, media diversity, and democracy (Cohen & Salazar 2005, 5). In addition, we must consider how these same technologies can allow the field of anthropology as a whole to better connect with the studied communities and the greater public. For instance, I meet my interlocutors online. I consider how social media

contributes to a sense of community mediated by a political discourse of religious inclusivity versus bigotry, and how the organization attempts to relate to the greater secular public.

My own identification as a Heathen and my membership in The Asatru Community (TAC) raise the issue of whether the anthropologist is required to be a neutral party (Hedican 2016, 204-205). I understand Public Issues Anthropology as an ethical project aiming to include researched groups in the anthropological work (Smith 2015). I thus utilize my position as an insider to include Heathenry as a religious community in the anthropological discourse for their benefit and to avoid othering those studied. I take seriously the voices of my own minority religious community and aim to balance academic and insider perspectives. I acknowledge my own personal and academic biases as a member of both communities in what Hedican (2016, 44) describes as a "universal global society." As such, I consider my roles neither fully as "insider" nor fully as "outsider" and seek to give equal weight to both voices. I perform my research under the rubric of Public Issues Anthropology in considering the mutual obligations shared between researcher and interlocutor. Thus, I analyze key issues identified by participants while also balancing commitments to academic interests.

Venue for Publication

My venue of choice is the journal *Religions*. This publication aligns with the Public Issues Anthropology philosophy, being open access and distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY). Published by MDPI, the journal is multi-disciplinary and international in scope. I hope that the journal's accessibility will allow my work to reach wider audiences and to provoke future research on the subject of Heathenry and political

representation, whether online or offline. The publishers furthermore emphasize diversity, equity, and inclusion in their mission statement, values that are consistent with my own values and those of the community researched. Supporting the Coalition for Diversity & Inclusion in Scholarly Communications (C4DISC), MDPI aims to eliminate barriers to participation. I believe that considering these values, *Religions* would be an ideal publication for my work.

Finally, I will share this article with interlocutors who have formally requested the material once the study has been published. As such, the study will be open to The Asatru Community for without their support I would not have been able to perform this study. I hope that the material will provide a lens with which the community can better understand themselves and the issues that they deal with.

Chapter Two

2.1 Introduction

Scholars often study processes of community building and engagement among religious groups in their physical sites, where members interact in person. However, such processes occur in the digital space for contemporary Pagans and other religious minority groups. Wiccans organizing the *#MagicResistance* movement against the presidency of Donald Trump took advantage of Twitter to safely engage conservative opponents in online rituals and empower themselves through framing political discourse in the language of American Witchcraft and leftist politics (Fine 2019). Yezidi immigrants in Germany manipulate Facebook to create analogues of offline spaces in digital shrines, linking them to family, friends, and holy sites in Iraq (Hosseini 2017). Social media encourages community engagement by erasing spatio-temporal divides between members and sacred spaces, mediating counter-cultural and political messages. Taking these phenomena as a starting point, this thesis examines how the online space facilitates the mediation of "community" for Heathens in North America through religio-political socialities in social media sites.[1]

Heathenry is a contemporary Pagan New Religious Movement (NRM) originating in 19th century Europe, also known as Ásatrú (anglicized as Asatru and meaning "true to the Aesir," a tribe of gods which includes Odin, Thor, and Baldr). Heathens recognize a pantheon of Gods consisting of tribes called the Aesir, and the Vanir (e.g., Freyja, Freyr, and Njord). Some consider them as real, and others think of them as cultural or psychological archetypes like Odin, the god of war, poetry, and magic, as a wise warrior and wizard, or Freyja as an archetype of

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[1] "Heathen" is a reclaimed label considered by many Pagans to be a derogatory term used by Christians during historical periods of conversion to essentially mean "non-Christian."

love, beauty, and female sexuality.[2] Heathens base their identities and worldviews on those of ancient Germanic and Norse cultures and draw on mythological and historical sources, including the Roman Tacitus, the historian monk Snorri Sturluson's Poetic and Prose Eddas, and the Icelandic sagas to inform their religious practice. However, members' interpretations of these texts vary, as Heathenry is inherently nondogmatic. Some use this material and archaeological texts on Northern European cultures to reconstruct methods of prayer, magic, and ritual. Others may find such texts informative but use them to create a contemporary practice. In such a case, a Heathen living in an apartment in Toronto today might ritually sacrifice clay effigies of animals they made at home with material from a craft store rather than actual animals, as they don't have access to livestock or the necessary training, space, and tools to practice ethical animal slaughter. Members may also recognize the influence of ancestor, land, and home spirits in their lives. The importance of elements like history and ancestry can however become problematic.

Heathenry struggles with Far-Right political appropriations of symbols like the runes, a pre-Christian alphabet used by the Norse cultures and believed by Heathens to have been revealed by Odin and thus useful for magic and divination. The runes have appeared in events including the "Unite the Right" riot in Charlottesville in 2017, and the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in March 2021. In such cases, media has referred to the symbols as Nazi runes, alluding to their use by the SS (Peiser 2021). Groups like the Asatru Folk Assembly (AFA) use these symbols with claims to ethnic heritage, and that Heathenry must aim to preserve the white race and folk soul (Snook 2015, 15-16). Anti-racist Heathens identify such groups as a

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[2] Odin is also the progenitor of humanity with his brothers Vili and Ve.

vocal and violent minority which threaten the status of Heathenry as a religious movement and its ability to organize as a community.

The Asatru Community Inc. (TAC) is an anti-racist Heathen organization and the focus of this study. TAC operates primarily online via social media and has struggled with religious representation due to cultural appropriation by hate movements. For example, on one occasion, Instagram took down TAC's account for sharing images of the runes. The account has since been recreated and all images contain a disclaimer which at the time of this writing reads, "TAC in no way condones or supports the use of these runes for hate speech or any other harmful purposes." To understand the distinct forms of sociality enabled and limited by TAC's strictly online presence, I conducted a digital ethnography including participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and a survey.

I found that social media, or the Social Networking Site (SNS), becomes a material place where members construct embodied Heathen identities and interact with a community that is geographically inaccessible for most members. Scholars have considered the role of SNS in shaping Pagan identities as a site of information and identity experimentation in an open-source religious marketplace that is complicated by cultural appropriation of other religious traditions and contests of legitimacy (Cowan 2004; Eisenlohr 2012; Campbell 2012; Berger 2019). For Heathens, the Internet has been conceived as a place of social networking and contemporary value making, marred in hostile ideological discourse while facilitating global community and ideas of displaced European "indigenous peoples" (Snook 2015, 2017). The role of the Internet in community-making is a topic of debate for scholarship regarding other religious traditions as well (Bloom & Daymon 2018; Borowik 2018; Bunt 2018; Golan 2015; Hosseini, 2017; Stazio 2016). However, the tendency has been to consider the Internet as an *extension of*, rather than

central to social networks in media studies. I follow Daniel Miller in acknowledging SNS as a unique lived reality which overlaps with the offline (2012, 155-156; Miller et. al. 2016, 7), where traditional senses of sociality are reclaimed (Miller 2012, 148), and where many in the world today spend a significant part of their lives (Miller 2016, 21; Miller et. al. 2016, 7). This thesis understands the distinction between online and offline as blurred by embodied religio-political mediations in TAC Heathen practice in SNS.

Within this study I refer to "online" to describe realities that relate to digital networks, spaces, and the Internet broadly. I refer to "offline" to indicate organic and non-digital realities. In making this distinction, I do not aim to reproduce the binary between the "virtual" and "real" common to previous discussions of digital space. Rather, I highlight that digital relationships are just as real as nondigital ones, and that digital socialities are based in the same cultural behaviours that we have historically practiced offline (Miller et. al. 2016, 7). TAC thus demonstrates a community developed through the sharing of information and community engagement in online ritual and construction of embodied identities within and between SNS platforms and offline space. I contextualize this behaviour through a discussion of social media affordances, or what the user can do within the technology of SNS (Nardi 2015, 19). I define "community" by exploring definitions of a "community of practice" via Angela Coco (2008), and the "aesthetic formation" via Birgit Meyer (2009).

2.3 Literature Review

Coco (2008, 512) problematizes "community" as both descriptive and ideologically loaded, as existing definitions support dualisms between "virtual/real," and "online/offline" while obscuring their inter-relations. Coco (2008, 514) analyzes an online Pagan community in Australia using Etienne Wenger's model of "communities of practice," or CP, because both "are not circumscribed by fixed symbolic or geographic boundaries, stable memberships, singular identities, or unchangeable rules and dogma." The CP is sustained through ongoing performances of identity creation and community building which generate for members a sense of belonging, manifesting through (1) *mutual engagement*, (2) *joint enterprise,* and (3) *shared repertoires of meaning* (Coco 2008, 514). Respectively, these can be conceived as (1) a shared definition of community between members supported by their active involvement in promoting group harmony and managing of conflict; (2) modes of accountability, in which the rules become implicit, values become common knowledge, figures of authority and derision are established and obvious; and (3) a shared history of the outcomes of mutual engagement which informs ongoing practices (Coco 2008, 514-515).

Coco (2008, 513) sees the body as the key to tracking continuity between online and offline spaces through experiences and memory as, "[t]hrough the body, meaning, and therefore identity and community, can be made/unmade through interacting both online and offline. In practice, bodies connect many places." This embodiment modifies how members engage in a community, hold one another accountable, and develop and share meanings and histories through aesthetic and sensorially engaging means. Considering aesthetic styles and products designed by members for use online, which affect and are affected by their bodies, we can see how current social media affordances influence religious and political sociality and a sense of community.

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Aesthetic styles take shape through texts and images in profiles and content that connect members to one another and a sense of the transcendental. Birgit Meyer (2009, 6-11) argues that religion connects individuals through shared sacralised aesthetic styles (e.g., language, dress, forms of practice), obscuring media (i.e., the Internet and SNS). These styles demonstrate an "aesthetic formation," that is an ongoing and performative sense of community based in aesthetic products and their ability to unite individuals. Meyer (2009, 6) defines "aesthetic" as rooted in Aristotle's *aesthesis*, "our total sensory experience of the world and our sensitive knowledge of it." Formations refer to both "a *social entity* (as in social formation)–thus designating a community–and to *processes of forming*," which "mold particular subjects through shared imaginations that materialize… through embodied aesthetic forms" (Meyer 2009, 7). I adopt this framework to emphasize the importance of the sensory experience in building communities of practice in online platforms.

Heathens demonstrate their unique religious traditions in what can be understood as *sensational forms*, or a "condensation of practices, attitudes, and ideas that structure religious experiences," thus dictating appropriate religious beliefs, doctrines, and symbols through approved mediation practices that bind believers together (Meyer 2009, 13). The content rather than the platform itself is of significance here (Miller et. al. 2016, 1), as *sensational forms* reveal how members manipulate media affordances and limitations to promote a sense of community. Members' relationships with one another are sustained through the production and consumption of media that defines the community and its membership. These relationships are considered real when taking on sensorially and emotionally engaging qualities. One's relationship with the SNS can equally contribute to the maintenance of a community within a sense of place, e.g., in

consideration of whether to host community via Facebook versus Discord. This relationship can be analyzed through SNS affordances and limitations, as will be discussed later in the analysis.

Scholarly critiques on mediation in studies of community argue that a focus on relationships reveals unique social realities. Constance Furey (2012) recognizes an academic fixation in religious studies on the body as shaped by societal forces like religious community, and a disinterest in subjectivity. In a similar vein, Ashley Lebner (2021, 1296) argues that the material medium dissolves in the interpersonal and conceptual relationships of Brazilian cordels as "it becomes impossible to identify what or whom is mediating what or whom" when everything is understood via relationships with and between God and the devil. I acknowledge the importance of analyzing intimate relationships and argue that such a study benefits from first analyzing the material space where those relationships occur and how that may influence them.

Martin Berg (2012) discusses how locative technologies (i.e., always online smartphones and social media apps) enhance social networks through publicizing one's identity, integrating mobile communication into everyday life. Interaction artifacts (e.g., social media posts) make real the behaviour of, and relationships between members. By posting and responding, members participate in an act of "witnessing" in which the event and its experience are made real through confirmation by others. "Witnessing" as such creates a "moral being" that reflects the shared meanings and values which inform the community of practice (Miller 2012, 158). Members overlap the online and offline by applying community values learned in SNS in their daily lives and by sharing those experiences with the digital community. This multidirectional engagement validates their experience and reinforces religio-political socialities. In my own study, the material is located in religious objects (e.g., altar photos), individual's bodies (e.g., selfies) and the SNS as an infrastructure (e.g., social media posts and web pages). Relationships that are

enacted in the digital space are supported by these media and emphasize, rather than dissolve, their materiality. I next look to the history and scholarly debates around Heathenry to contextualize the merging of religious and political sociality.

Heathenry consists of several political factions, each with distinct qualifications about who can practice Heathenry based on race, ethnicity, and culture (Snook 2013). Folkish Heathens sometimes identifying as Odinists, are often affiliated with white supremacist movements (Gardell 2003).[3] They differ from Ethnicist or Tribalist Heathens who see Heathenry as an ethnic folkway similar to Native American religion for Indigenous peoples (Snook 2013, 2015). Universalist Heathens alternatively see Norse mythology as supporting the inclusion of racial and sexual minority groups without any barriers to religious membership (Bell 2021, 2). Norse myth is reinterpreted in an active ideological discourse rooted in the political biases of its readers (Cole 2020; Meylan and Rösli 2020).

Debates about race and the religion's position in a multicultural world confirm that the "Heathen" religious identity is inherently political (Snook 2013, 2015). However, scholarship has been preoccupied with Heathenry's origins in Germanic racist movements and subsequent ties with white nationalism in the West (Kaplan 1997; Gardell 2003; Snook 2015; Schnurbein 2016; Snook et. al. 2017; Calico 2018; Junginger 2020). The Internet has been considered as facilitating the international reach and growth of the religion (Schnurbein 2016, 5), although it is reduced to a site of toxic ideological discourse unsuitable to replace offline communities (Snook

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[3] See Gardell (2003) for a detailed history of Heathenry's emergence in 19th century Europe and its arrival in the United States.

2015, 98-104). A digital ethnography of Heathen groups in SNS can reveal how the Internet functions as a primary site of community development, mobilized to alternative political ends.

Studying the Internet as a lived cultural site that overlaps with the offline requires an anthropological perspective and its attentiveness, via ethnographic research methods, to the holistic contextualization of how social media influences people's religious, political, and social behaviour (Miller et. al. 2016). Such a perspective allows me to show that interlocutors are not just Heathens but embody racialized, sexualized, and otherwise categorized identities which in turn affect their engagement with Heathenry and/in social media. Anthropological methodologies and theory are thus uniquely suited to studying the continuum of community across these multi-sited contexts (Wilson & Peterson 2002, 456-457).

2.2 Methodology

I employ digital ethnographic and conventional anthropological research methods including literature review, participant observation, semi-structured interview, and a survey. The official website forum,[4] Facebook, and Discord became key sites of investigation for participant observation with verified TAC membership. The digital fieldsite was multi-sited and can be qualified as simultaneously online and offline as it included both live feed video and my own sensory experiences of audio-visual content (Pink et al., 2016).

Pink et. al. (2016, 1, 8) define "digital ethnography" as "doing ethnography in a contemporary world," inviting researchers to consider "how we live and research in a digital,

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[4] theasatrucommunity.org

material and sensory environment" that is "always unique to the research question and challenges to which it is responding." This definition informs my understanding of the digital fieldsite as embodied and overlapping offline space. If the fieldsite is "an assemblage of actors, places, practices, and artifacts that can be physical, virtual, or a combination of both" (Boellstorff 2012, 60), digital ethnography considers the relationships between individuals through which they inhabit the world, online and offline (Horst and Miller 2012). In his study of *Second Life*,[5] Tom Boellstorff (Boellstorff et. al., 2012, 61) studied "how physical world cultures affected the virtual world culture he was exploring." I follow this logic and additionally consider how online cultures influence those offline. However, the online space in my research context differs from Boellstorff's "virtual world." Although the SNS as a "networked environment" can be thought of as a *place* (e.g., a Discord chat "room"), they lack a sense of *worldness* that can be explored synchronously with others in an embodied form such as an avatar that can be controlled and manipulated like in a video game (Boellstorff et. al. 2012, 7).

I have been a member of TAC since 2017 and have practiced Heathenry since 2016. As an insider, I had already developed key linguistic and cognitive competencies. I am familiar with essential Heathen texts, and discourses concerning racist and anti-racist Heathenry. My insider status enabled easier access to community groups, many of which I was already a member. My familiarity with the SNS environment enabled access to shared common knowledge in those spaces. I had never volunteered within the community before and held no position of authority. My own understandings of SNS use, community discourse, and my interlocutors' "embodied

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[5] "Second Life" is an application through which people create an avatar for themselves and have a virtual second life.

practices, sensations [and] emotions" inform my conclusions described in the analysis section of this thesis (Pink and Morgan 2013, 356).

I monitored TAC SNS pages, participating in discussions and events over four months. Conversations with members allowed me access to other Heathen religious groups which were not affiliated with TAC, but ideologically associated as anti-racist organizations. I did not study these groups but took note of the diverse communities which one could join and why one might affiliate with multiple groups. I released one 25-question survey, active between May and June, collecting 131 responses (see Appendix A). Data reveals demographic information, how participants were introduced to Heathenry, whether they practiced alone or in groups, political dispositions and activity, and the influence that Paganism has had on their worldviews. Questions were designed to understand TAC membership's racial/sexual/economic realities as well as trends in political and religious activity. However, I acknowledge that the survey is not representative of the whole membership of TAC or Heathenry broadly, and so cannot be used to generalize an image of the community and its membership. The survey thus reveals only surface-level patterns in demographic data and elements of interest to guide participant observation and 10 semi-structured interviews.

Interviewees included five males, three females, one gender non-binary person, and one gender-fluid person, between the ages of 26 and 49. Interlocutors have diverse life experiences from the physically disabled or ill who work from home, to veterans, academics, engineers, copywriters, and funeral home assistants. I attempted to have my interview pool reflect the sex, age, and racial demographic data in my survey, however I was unable to find a consenting racialized (i.e., non-white) candidate. Interviews were conversational and hosted through Zoom. Participants were given the chance to ask questions and engage in conversations of their

choosing which contributed to reflexive opportunities, considering my own status as a practicing Heathen and insider to TAC.

2.4 Context

TAC was founded by Seth Chagi, a 26-year-old administrative assistant for a funeral home, and project director at World of Paleoanthropology, in 2011. The organization began as a blog before becoming an official religious non-profit organization and charity with a strictly online presence in 2015. TAC is decentralized, with one hand-built temple site located in Friendship, Illinois, and reports over 6000 members across the United States, Canada, Europe, and Australia (see Table 8 in Appendix A), who congregate across several social media platforms including Facebook, Discord, Twitter, Instagram, and TAC's primary website. The organization is run entirely by volunteers and an elected board of directors. TAC's political stance is demonstrated through community initiatives like *#SHIELDWALL*, an anti-bigotry online activism group and social media handle.

TAC's largest presence is on Facebook, divided across several group pages for registered charter members and the public. The primary page includes over 20,000 followers, both official members and those unaffiliated, allowing for social networking, learning about community services, and finding TAC-affiliated vendors. Members discuss current events and source material related to mythology, magic practice, ritual, Heathen fashion, altar pieces, and Norse culture. Private Facebook pages, including the *TAC Charter Club*, are open to members only and

allow members to organize events, both online and offline. Pages like *Heirs of the Bifrost*,[6]

Heathen Gamers of TAC, and the *TAC Rune and Magic Study Group*, serve as specialist pages

for specific interests and concerns. Members join for free, and official documentation is mailed

to successful applicants regarding acceptance. The document details access to member exclusive

groups and is printed on official letterhead with an embossed seal. New members frequently

introduce themselves with images of the letter, altars, and selfies, demonstrating how

membership is confirmed through physical embodiments.

The TAC Discord channel has over 700 members at the time of this writing, all of which

are registered members. The Discord community emulates much of the functions of the

Facebook group by allowing for regional groups and chat threads designed for specific topics.

Discord stands apart from Facebook in that conversation threads are typically more synchronous.

Interlocutors also identify that the platform allows for greater privacy with respect to user data

collection.

The official TAC website shares resources and information on the organization as well as

Heathen religious practice and community news. The forum, hosted on the website, is not as

active in usership as the previously mentioned platforms.[7] Interlocutors attribute reduced activity

to a lack of awareness of the forum space, as well as limitations in the forum architecture.

Gordon Lewis, a muscular, bearded 30-year-old senior network engineer, refers to the site as

reminiscent of the 2000's Internet, and suggests that traditional forums are no longer popular

since new SNS platforms introduced advanced features. Unlike Facebook and Discord, the

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[6] "Bifrost" is the rainbow bridge that connects Asgard, the realm of the gods, with Midgard, the human world. TAC draws on the rainbow imagery to illustrate a safe place for members who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, pansexual and/or any other sexual orientation/gender expression, including straight allies.

[7] An approximate count of forum members was not publicly available.

community forum lacks affordances for video call and instant messaging and thus has greater limitations in connecting users.

The majority of TAC members who participated in my survey identified as solitary practitioners (78.57%), versus group practitioners (18.25%), indicating a significant degree of geographic isolation between members (see Appendix A, Table 12). Heathens may practice in formalized groups called "kindreds," or as solitary practitioners if groups cannot be found. Kindreds may be comprised of friends and families, and gather locally or via the Internet, creating a sense of community in which members support one another throughout their lives, e.g., babysitting one another's kids, offering financial or emotional support, or sharing in holidays and group ritual. Solitary practitioners may use the Internet to join Heathen communities without being part of a kindred. They may use social networking sites to find study groups or new source material to advance their individual practices, or join other Pagan groups, such as Wiccans, to find a sense of community. Alternatively, a solitary practitioner may not regularly participate in a community of practice whether online or offline, practicing alone.

I argue that what matters most in terms of the significance of the Internet is how TAC Heathens socialize to religious and political ends after joining. The form of sociality enacted in the online space coincides with but also diverges from how scholars have emphasized elements of social solidarity, cohesion, and control in religious contexts à la Durkheim (2008). We see not the collectivity of physical bodies in a physical site of worship, but *social networks* established between solitary practitioners in the digital space. Users are embodied through SNS affordances that allow for self-presentation (Berg 2012, 176-177), serving to obscure physical divisions between solitary members (see Tables 12, 16, 17, & 18 in Appendix A). This isolation is regarded by interlocutors as one of the key reasons to join online Heathen and Pagan groups.

Mental and physical illness, and disability are also barriers to offline participation. Freyalise, a 47-year-old former computer programmer, has identified as Pagan since 1990, and Heathen since 2016. Recovering from shingles, Freyalise reports that her interactions with others are limited, however SNS affordances allow her to connect with speech-to-text software: "*I could speak and then just go back and fix the errors in what the voice to text did, so I use the voice to text on my tablet and on my phone. As I got my hands back it became a habit for me, it's easier. I'm not very fast... I do one finger typing and it's just easier to speak.*"

Online social networks provide the solitary practitioner with a sense of community that is global. SNS affordances allow users to interact with others in a spatiotemporal disconnect, creating a space that has different and less taxing demands on the user. Although TAC Heathens claimed to prioritize offline interpersonal relationships and modes of communication in interviews, the SNS serves as the primary site of community activity and sociality in their daily practice. In what follows, I show how offline socialities are innovatively practiced online, as members manipulate SNS affordances to adapt religious practice and engage in identity creation vis-à-vis racial, sexual, and other categories.

2.5 Analysis: Mutual Engagement in the Community of Practice as Aesthetic Formation

Community online is inherently constructed through the manipulation of affordances and limitations of social media infrastructure. For example, TAC members embody themselves in social media profiles which connect online and offline identities to support community engagement (Nardi 2015). They comment, like, and share each other's posts using text and emoji together to substitute for offline, in-person communication (Danesi 2017, 22-23). Members innovate ritual practice by negotiating how practitioners can obscure the online and offline

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barrier to facilitate spiritually meaningful participation between geographically separated

individuals (Campbell 2010, 2012). The distinction between online and offline blurs as members

converge religious practices and identity making between spaces, erasing spatiotemporal gaps,

and supporting religious and personal relationships. Throughout this analysis I will refer back to

the three core elements of the CP, (1) *mutual engagement*, (2) the *joint enterprise*, and (3) *shared

repertoires of meaning*, to demonstrate how TAC's behaviour as a community reflects this model

while enhancing it through a consideration of the *aesthetic formation* and its relation to SNS use.

Mutual engagement is facilitated through interaction artifacts, which contribute to mutual

engagement and shared repertoires of meaning (Coco 2008, 515). Members interact with posts

via emotes to quickly display emotional responses through images like a smiley face, or

symbolic references to Thor's Hammer to denote religious significance. Within Discord,

religious symbols are playfully incorporated in traditional emotes, e.g., the Facebook blue

thumbs-up edited to hold Thor's hammer, Mjolnir, or a drinking horn with a celebratory caption

of "Skål" (see Figure 1). This demonstrates a *shared repertoire of meaning* through linguistic

competence, as members mutually agree on the discursive functions of the emote while

incorporating religious references into everyday text. This process creates a feeling of casual

religious engagement and helps to set the Discord chat group apart from others as distinctly

Heathen. Emoji add a "visual tone," creating a style of writing which assumes the functions of

face-to-face communication by conveying visual cues that provide tone to messages and portray

the writer's state of mind (Danesi 2017, 10). Discord particularly benefits from the use of emoji,

as users' sense of embodiment in the space is limited to a small profile icon not even reaching an

inch in diameter (see Figure 2). Although members can engage in video and audio chat, several

active users in the room make live calls difficult to manage and carry greater social expectations than simply communicating via writing. Despite this, embodiment in the SNS space is possible.
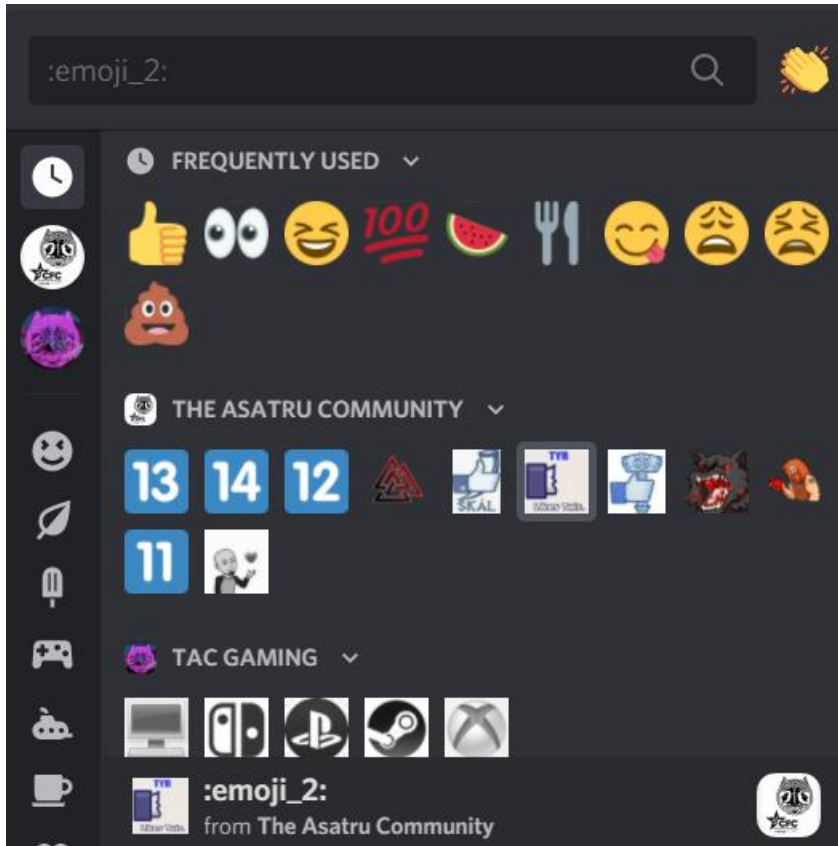

Figure 1 - Commonly used emotes in the TAC Discord community include religiously inspired renditions of popular emotes.
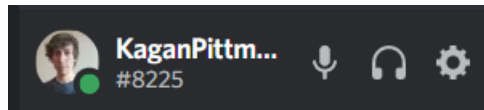

Figure 2 - User profile icons are small and limited in their ability to embody users.

Social media now facilitates live video streaming and users engage in identity sharing through the taking of selfies which allows members to be more embodied online than ever. TAC members on Facebook and Discord commonly use profile images to construct a Heathen identity. Members wear Norse themed clothing comprised of fur garments, wool tunics and dresses, show off rune tattoos, and wear sacred jewelry such as a Mjolnir pendant, depicting Thor's hammer which he uses to slay giants and protect the Gods and humanity. In this way, they demonstrate their religious identity in a manner parallel to how a Christian may wear a cross. Profile images are sometimes overlayed with captions of "Proud Heathen," or watermarked with other symbols like the Valknut[8] or Vegvísir.[9] "Freyja Friday" encourages members to show off selfies, sharing Norse makeup, tattoos, and hair styles. Across the community forum, Facebook, and Discord, "avatars" and profile pictures often reflect and embody the identity of the poster (i.e., their offline body, feelings, interests, affiliations, and beliefs). The avatar as a linguistic system illustrates "political, gendered, racial, geographical, ethnic, and class- and age-based presumptive normative dispositions" in LGBTQ+ rainbow frames and selfies in elaborate Viking costume (Nardi 2015, 24).[10] These elements demonstrate a shared aesthetic style, and an essential element of a CP as it demonstrates the ongoing and active process of engagement.

Meyer (2009, 3-6) discusses Benedict Anderson's "imagined community" as imagined *and* mediated, forming out of the use of shared cultural forms. This emphasizes consideration for language, bodies, the senses, and media through which the imagined becomes tangible in the creation, binding, and bonding of communities as "aesthetic formations." Images, sounds, and

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[8] An image of three interlinking triangles, often associated with Odin.
[9] A "rune compass," used as a magical charm to not get lost when sailing or travelling.
[10] Certain self-constructions may be more common to particular age groups and other demographics.

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texts wield an affective power over their consumers, and produce "shared sentiments, inducing

modes, and moods, of feeling together" or a sense of belonging (Meyer 2009, 9). This remains

true in online social media spaces as TAC members share Norse themed music from bands like

Wardruna, YouTube videos of popular Norse scholars like Dr. Stephen Crawford, Heathen

edutainment personalities like Ocean Keltoi, and images and videos of themselves as described

above. One primary aesthetic style which binds TAC Heathens together are the forms of dress

that evoke a sense of oneself as a "Viking," described earlier, and thus connected to ancient

Norse culture. However, whiteness is not a necessary component of this identity construction in

the *sensational form* of inclusive Heathenry.

Ethnic heritage is important for some interlocutors, citing an exploration of their own

ancestry as part of their experience in coming into Heathenry. For example, Thorson, a 27-year-

old working in logistics said, "*I believe I'm from Northern Europe, probably Scandinavia back*

in the day, but definitely would have been of the Germanic tribes… I don't think you need to be

Northern European to follow Asatru, however I personally feel like if you are Heathen, you

should follow the faith of where you came from… Now, does that apply to everyone? No… I just

personally feel like I should get in touch with the religion that my ancestors would have."[11]

Thorson struggles with ideas that access to the religion is not dependent on this ethnic

background, emphasized by his hesitancy in saying that this rule does not apply to everyone.

Other interlocutors, however, like Wilson Buck-Wilson, a non-binary 34-year-old

copywriter, and Gordon, describe ancestry as more related to deeds. Wilson says, "*The ancestors*

are people who came before you who are idealized people, or someone who you can learn from

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[11] I remind the reader of the historical definition of the term "Heathen" as referring to non-Christians, with respect to Thorson's use of the term.

or look up to." Gordon adds, "*I very distinctly recall in one of the many sagas, the Danish and the Swedes arriving in Ireland. The Swedes were described as lily white, whereas the Danes are described as black, or it might have been the other way around, because one of them had been raiding the coasts of Morocco. So, you've got a bunch of mixed ethnicity children who were born free, grew up and went out Viking like their dads did. Those people clearly did not give a shit that they were Brown… so why would you?*"

Ethnic heritage is thus only a *possible* motivation for an individual to seek the religion. More importantly, members must demonstrate an honest adoption of Heathen practices and cosmological understandings, consistent with their CP. Likewise, texts and ritual serve as possible sources for connection and bonding within the community through shared ideas, understandings, and practices. The distinction between "inclusive" and "racist" Heathenry, however, stands in those ideas, understandings, and practices, which manifest in worldviews that combine theology with politics into unique cosmologies. Heathenry thus manifests as an inherently political religious system, not too dissimilar from Christianity, Islam, and Judaism.

Countering racialist associations, TAC message boards occasionally depict images of non-white Heathens to promote a sense of inclusivity, representing minority groups and contributing to a shared sense of belonging. The *Heathen BIPoC/PoC of TAC*[12] webpage depicts a woman of African descent in Norse Viking garb with a sword, illustrating a distinctly PoC Heathen identity. This demonstrates the significance of cultural practice over genetic heritage or racial appearance. The wearing of "Viking" clothing is what makes the individual a "Viking" as members enforce an aesthetic style based not upon what one is, but how one constructs and

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[12] BIPoC: "Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour"

performs themselves. Viking clothing becomes an aesthetic style that supports the *sensational form* of inclusive Heathenry by legitimizing connections between members and the transcendental through associations of deeds or cultural behaviour rather than racial or genetic links. TAC Heathens who share religiously motivated images of themselves online practice a kind of embodiment that blurs the boundary between the online and offline as separate spaces of religious practice. Live streams and recorded videos of ritual illustrate this process to a greater extent by engaging one's senses beyond the visual.

2.6 Analysis: Sensorial Engagement, Online Ritual, and Shared Repertoires of Meaning

TAC members share definitions of community derived from Norse mythological and historical literature, discussing concepts including *innangardh* ("inner-yard" or inner circle of close friends and family), *utangardh* ("outer-yard," consisting of strangers and acquaintances), *ørlög* (ancestral ties and history), *wyrd* (essentially the luck of an individual or group based on their past actions, those of their ancestors, and their current behaviour, dictating their possible futures), and *frith* (peace between people). How individual members interpret and describe these concepts reflect their sense of what sustains community practices and belonging online and offline in a *shared repertoire of meaning*, also rooted in the understanding of the outcomes of *mutual engagement* (Coco 2008, 514).

Religious concepts like those I describe above contribute directly to how Heathens interpret the function of ritual, as being practiced with one's *innangardh*, for the purpose of creating *ørlög* and *frith* by tying together the *wyrd* of those involved. Heathen ritual practice is facilitated around the notion of a sacred gifting cycle, in which a gift is given with the

expectation of a gift received. One thus makes offerings to Gods with the anticipation that the Gods will somehow bless the practitioner. Community members exchange gifts to strengthen bonds and encourage mutual support. Additionally, ritual practice can occur indoors or outdoors, sometimes varying depending on the ritual being performed or the perspective of the practitioner(s). Participants use ritual tools including mead, an alcoholic honey beverage, or substitutes like apple juice if dietary restrictions are an issue. Ritual may also include incense, food offerings, the banging of a drum or blowing of a horn, and so on. Heathens may adopt period dress to strengthen feelings of kinship with ancestors. Ritual is thus inherently sensorial and the strength of its impact and effect is in the shared experience that it creates. However, rituals between groups and solitary practitioners may appear as quite different. A solitary practitioner might only give offerings to the Gods and spirits as they are unable to participate in communal rituals, but will still make use of the same tools, practices, and texts, to build a relationship with the transcendental.

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged the assumption that proper practice of ritual can only occur offline, and thus challenged TAC's *shared repertoire of meaning*. TAC leadership began to hold ritual broadcast via SNS after significant deliberation (see Appendix B, Quote 1). Community reception has been positive according to TAC leadership, but many interlocutors claim that this is not an ideal model for everyone. Significant elements of what make ritual effective on a spiritual level are complicated by physical separation between practitioners and the transition of energy from one location to another through the Internet. Jeddar Felix, a 49-year-old cancer survivor, "Exvangelical,"[13] and current High Drighten[14] of TAC explains: "*The biggest*

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[13] As in ex-Evangelical.
[14] A Drighten can be defined as a chief, however the role of High Drighten in TAC is to act as an intermediary between the Board of Directors and the membership.

difference is that when you actually are doing it all together in one place, you feel the energy a

lot more. You feel the oneness. You feel the power of the Gods coming down and actually visiting

where you are, while you're in that space."

Jeddar suggests that an embodied experience of spiritual "energy" is felt between ritual

practitioners and the divine. This energy seems geographically fixed, felt in oneself as well as in

the ritual space. However, as Courtney Bender (2010, 116-117) illustrates in her work with

spiritual practitioners in Cambridge, Massachusetts, how the self is broken down in its relations

with others as a *universal* energy engulfs the energetic self, *connecting one with all others and*

things. This would possibly suggest that it is irrelevant where one is if this energy is universal.

These two perspectives seem to be at odds (i.e., energy as geographically fixed versus

universally accessible), until we consider the process of energy work as facilitated through the

adoption of and participation in aesthetic styles and active sensorial engagement.

Those online are unable to participate directly in offline ritual, such as a sumble.

Typically, a drinking horn is passed between participants who sip from the same horn in at least

one round of drinks while boasts, prayers, and other statements are made publicly. Online ritual

participants are limited in their experience of ritual through the online medium of video,

removing taste and touch from the sensory experience in addition to physical interaction. The

element of synchronicity and presence of mind, space, and spirit, assist in meaning-making,

evoking emotional depth, and developing a stronger sense of community or frith. Terra, a

middle-aged secretary who identifies as a witch and lives in Newfoundland, describes that the

significance of online ritual participation is in actively adopting ritual practice on their end of the

Internet connection. Online participants engage in ritual effectively by following ritual cues,

adopting actions like drumming, drinking, chanting, and cheering alongside the live recording to

harmonize with those conducting the ritual and to deepen the experience of the energy generated. In Terra's words, "*It can't be something passive, you have to actually focus your attention to the right energy level for it to be a proper ritual*." As users adopt ritual practice in their own offline setting, they bridge the spatial gap through the Internet and engage their senses with matching ritual tools and shared aesthetic styles in what Heidi Campbell (2012, 76-80) calls "a convergent practice."

Campbell (2010)[15] recognizes the online practice of religion as "intimately connected to offline religious engagement, serving as a supplement and complement to the ways many people engage religion offline." TAC Heathens' engagement in online ritual behaviour is illustrative of a cultural shift towards the globalized religious community in which members are geographically distant from one another but united culturally and brought together via the Internet. TAC Heathens engage in a convergent practice by importing their religious rituals into the online space, reimagining where ritual can appropriately occur and challenging assumptions that the Internet is not a suitable space for religious practice. The Internet and SNS thus become "implicit religion" as religious language and actions are transposed upon it, and social media affordances provide new possibilities for Heathen practice (Campbell 2012, 79). TAC members' previously established meaning of Heathen ritual practice as a social event that connects participants with one another and with the transcendental in a geographically bounded site, is thus reconfigured.

Community members transcend spatiotemporal gaps via SNS to connect and build new relationships. However, not all members participate in or are convinced of the effectiveness of online ritual. Members *engaging* in this negotiation demonstrate CP qualities of *imagination* in

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[15] https://tif.ssrc.org/2010/03/16/new-media-and-the-reshaping-of-religious-practice/

the debate of SNS (Coco 2008, 514-515), with regard to the practices and ideas which make up the *sensational form* of inclusive Heathenry. In this way, TAC members negotiate online ritual as a valid form of religious expression for members within their *shared repertoire of meaning*.

Shared aesthetic styles, in the form of language, dress, tattoos, and the communal practice of online ritual contribute to a sense of belonging and erase geographic and temporal boundaries. Users manipulate and negotiate the significances of social media affordances to reimagine shared practices and definitions of community. The live broadcast of ritual space blurs the line between online and offline by demonstrating a "multisite reality" in which religious practice online is influenced by offline beliefs and behaviours (Campbell 2012, 80-83). As members innovate religious practice and develop new theologies of mediation, the distinction between online and offline space will continue to break down. TAC as a *joint enterprise* seeks to support these negotiations and prevent them from devolving into infighting.

2.7 Analysis: The Joint Enterprise, Community Policing, and Moral Witnessing

Modes of accountability are expressed in community guidelines and codes of conduct as well as in community policing. Members discuss shared concerns regarding poverty, racism, LGBTQ+ acceptance, and other human rights issues in the West. Members participate in mutually understood rules to avoid discussions from escalating into political debates, in accordance with community codes of conduct as the sensitivity of political issues could threaten TAC's charity status (See Appendix C). Figures of authority within TAC serve as volunteers after completing a training program (e.g., TAC Clergy). Those who break community laws are often swiftly banned without much of an event, except under the occasion of a significant and

well-known personality being first publicly discredited, as evidenced later in this section. TAC's *joint enterprise* is structured to support the *sensational form* of inclusive Heathenry, as proper Heathen practice is not dictated in how one conducts ritual, but in political interpretations of mythology and definitions of who can embody the community. TAC-approved kindreds are expected to welcome all peoples regardless of sexuality, gender, or racial identification.

Members weaponize their support or denouncement of specific individuals and organizations. Interlocutors describe engaging in a process of vetting potential organizations and key members when seeking membership. Public social media accounts provide a degree of accountability that may not be present in offline spaces, where a quick history check is not possible without going online. Wilson describes how they have previously investigated profiles of individuals when researching groups, reviewing their history of posts to determine their authenticity and stance on key social issues: "*It makes it a little easier, honestly, meeting most of the people I know online, because it's a little easier to go back and research them. Like their posts and groups they're part of to sort of see where their leanings are. Whereas in person, you're right there with them and they might lie to you.*" However, vetting doesn't always reveal everything. Multiple interlocutors describe their experience of being unsure of who is or isn't a racist online. TAC members manipulate social media affordances to hold one another accountable. Members take screenshots of explosive discussions to document individuals' behaviour, which are later shared between members and TAC leadership as evidence. Members publicly discuss the removal of certain members or encourage each other to avoid unfavourable outside sources, groups, or individuals.

During the study, TAC had a prominent personality, who I will refer to as "Forager," in the organization revealed as racist after making inappropriate messages against South American

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Heathens. The exchange resulted in screenshots of the discussion circulating online which destroyed their association with TAC. Her previously held positions within the community, and rumours about affiliation with the founder and president damaged the organization's reputation. TAC distanced itself from her, denouncing her and cancelling existing shared projects, including the publishing of a book. TAC's response to the crisis was to take advantage of the same social media affordances which allowed for the spread of misinformation, by releasing a video featuring TAC's president, Topher Henry, issuing a statement of apology, and clarifying the context of the event. Written statements were also issued across social media platforms to address the controversy. Community leadership thus engage in manipulating social media affordances to maintain stability and convergence of shared purpose and identification within TAC's established networks to preserve a sense of belonging in members.

Relationships between Seth, TAC's founder, and Forager stretched across perceived online and offline barriers and had effects on extended relations originating in SNS as well as in person. Seth describes: "*… in 2018, my spouse and I actually flew her down to where we are to marry us. There was nothing strange about it… And I woke up* [the morning of the incident] *and someone who I never talked to had messaged me and said, I think you should see this one... and we immediately cut ties with her*" (See Appendix B, Quote 2). Personal ties between TAC leadership and Forager resulted in some members leaving TAC as discourse about the organization's dedication to inclusivity was questioned. Other pro-inclusive Heathen organizations also became involved in the discourse, making public statements in support or against TAC's involvement with Forager, and allowing spaces for ex-members and critics to speak out, according to Marigold, a 33-year-old office manager and stepmother, who left as a result of the event (See Appendix B, Quote 3). Criticism over the incident resulted in members

questioning other administrative choices around TAC's efforts to support inclusivity. Marigold describes: "[Forager] *was part of* [TAC]*, and now they have a BIPOC-only group which means the only possible meaning is they were trying to segregate people. So, I see where they're coming from, like, I see how it can be taken that way*."

Forager's action in the digital space had direct effects on the offline through not only the cancelling of community projects that had a physical outcome but the breaking down of relationships or social networks that originated across online and offline space. As Berg (2012, 181) notes, "what happens in digital space does certainly not stay digital but on the contrary materialise, penetrate and act on processes and events in physical space." The relationships between Seth, Forager, and TAC thus exist in a multi-site reality, both online and offline, demonstrating TAC's qualities as a "communications hybrid" (Coco 2012, 126). In such a social network, local and global relationships overlap, and community members must innovate in how to sustain and terminate relationships within a broadening and more complicated social network. Members can strengthen relationships through regularly organizing online events or discussing their experiences.

The SHIELDWALL group organized a book club to educate membership on issues related to racism and other forms of bigotry and encourage them to implement lessons in their lives. *How to be an Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi was the first book reviewed, however a discussion of its contents never occurred due to what appeared to be a lack of volunteer and member coordination. Despite or maybe because of this lack of organization, interlocutors find that the impact of SHIELDWALL does not reach into their own lives without taking it upon themselves to embody its values. Wilson demonstrated these values when confronted by a hostile vendor at their place of work who inappropriately took their chance interaction as an opportunity

to proselytize. Wilson went through the proper channels of their workplace to complain about the incident and how it made them feel unsafe:

"*So, it was slightly terrifying because Missouri is where I live. And it's not a state that has protection for employment, and much, especially in the way of sexual orientation or gender identity. So technically, I could be fired for being trans or queer… But I did it anyway, because it would have hurt me in my spirit more if I hadn't.*"

Wilson shared the experience online with their Heathen peers, asking what other members had done in the spirit of the SHIELDWALL initiative. Comments and reactions on Wilson's Facebook post were overwhelmingly positive and supportive. Other members shared some of their own experiences in promoting equality. Members discuss organizing public events and initiatives as well as speaking out against bigotry that they have witnessed, even in communities where they may be targeted for their advocacy. Wilson's case demonstrates how social media affordances in interaction artifacts allowed users to engage in a process of witnessing Wilson's experiences and actions. Wilson became a "moral being," demonstrating an ethic and behaviour which reinforced the religio-political discourse of inclusive Heathenry by combatting discrimination where they found it. Although Wilson's example did not depict them combatting such discrimination against someone other than themselves, it encouraged conversation about doing so and supporting victims within and outside of TAC. The SHIELDWALL group furthermore allows for a sensitive political discourse that demonstrates an acute awareness of *cognitive and communicative competencies* regarding TAC bylaws and COC, in which members demonstrate a *shared differentiation* from other Heathen groups that they would label as bigoted (Lundby 2011, 1221). However, most significantly for the purposes of my argument, Wilson's sharing of their story demonstrates how political sociality overlaps between

the online and offline space to create a moral being that is not strictly situated in one or the other context. Member identities persist in the TAC social media groups and extend to their offline lives as they not only hold each other accountable, but also assume responsibility in the face of their community.

2.8 Conclusion

Scholarly research in Pagan studies has reduced the Internet's role to a place of online bullying and organization of events for Heathenry (Snook 2015, 98-104). However, my study has demonstrated that individuals can engage in traditional socialities of religious practice, political engagement, and community-making primarily in the online space. Furthermore, those socialities occur between the online and offline in a multi-sited reality. In exploring the formation of the CP through case examples such as TAC, we can move beyond limited interpretations of community as being reduced to feelings of "belonging" (Lundby 2011). As Meyer (2009) highlights in her conceptualization of aesthetic formations, it is through the media of language, bodies, the senses, and material culture (including images, sounds, and texts in social media on the Internet) that the imagined becomes tangible in the creation, binding, and bonding of communities.

My findings have likewise revealed that embodiment online, facilitated through sensorial engagement with the offline setting reflect religious and political sentiments as inherently intertwined in the categorized identities of TAC Heathens. I have challenged conventional ideas of community to consider the material context in which they are found. In the case of SNS, social media affordances and negotiations concerning them directly influence definitions of community by its participants, requiring us to revise how we imagine community and the

distinctions between online and offline space in scholarship. Indeed, "when online

communication is no longer confined to the security of domestic spaces but rather ubiquitous and

intensely used in conjunction with urban life, the imagined boundary between physical and

digital spaces increasingly appears to be implausible" (Berg 2012, 178).

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Appendix A – Survey Data

Survey results show the majority of members between the age of 30-49.[16] The smaller size of the younger cohort suggests a slower growth between generations within TAC's membership. The majority of respondents identify as male (see Table 1 in Appendix A), confirming Heathenry as predominantly male-dominated (Berger 2019; Schnurbein, 2016). However, a high response rate identifying with LGBTQ+ labels (see Table 1 & 2 in Appendix A) is inconsistent with previous Pagan demographic research (Berger 2019, 27-29). These numbers reflect the progressive attitude toward non-standard sexual and gender identities in TAC. However, this level of inclusivity is not demonstrated in the racial representation (See Table 4 in Appendix A).

Respondents identifying as non-white collectively amount to only 5.55 percent of survey respondents. Those who chose to self-identify predominantly describe themselves as bi-racial, or use alternative labels to describe white ethnicity, including "Anglo Norman," or more ambiguous terms like "American." The latter terms of identification suggest the importance of ethnic heritage for some, consistent with Heathenry's identification as an ethnic European religion (Schnurbein, 2016). Interlocutors occasionally cite an exploration of their own ancestry as part of their experience in coming into Heathenry, despite expressing ideas that access to the religion is not dependent on this ethnic background. Racial or ethnic heritage is recontextualized as only *a* possible motivation for an individual to seek out interest in the religion. Instead, members must demonstrate an honest adoption of Heathen practices and cosmological understandings, as without these practices and beliefs one could not claim to be Heathen legitimately.

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[16] See Table 1 in Appendix

Interview participants discuss stories of searching for information about Heathenry not only in books, but through the Internet (See Table 12 in Appendix A). Participants describe approaching several online Heathen groups in order to find one or more that align with their personal political opinions and desired approach to what Heathenry is. For example, multiple respondents detailed actively avoiding groups that demonstrated racist or non-inclusive philosophies and theologies in a process of vetting, i.e., researching particular groups and their reputations as well as messaging existing members in order to get an insider's perspective. In several interviews, TAC's pro-LGBTQ+ & BIPoC stances were credited as a key reason for participants to join the group. However, TAC itself as an organization is never regarded as the entry point into Paganism or Heathenry for my interview participants.

Although the Internet is the primary site of member interaction and political engagement, it has not necessarily been the main media through which survey and interview participants were introduced to Paganism in their own accounts. Only 17.46 percent of the survey participants and less than half of my interview participants cited the Internet as their primary introduction to Heathenry, instead citing sources of entertainment or educational material and family or friends that they have encountered in the Christian and Jewish households where they grew up. Alternatively, relatives who have immigrated from European countries like Norway contributed to their interest in Heathenry. Other Heathens describe being raised in households more accommodating to religious pluralism, with opportunities to explore different religious perspectives in academic and cultural (e.g., fantasy and mythology) material. Religious tolerance in participant's childhood households carried forward to their adult lives, as multiple interview participants reported not sharing their religious disposition with life partners and immediate

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family. Many describe currently living in multi-religious households, typically with other kinds

of Pagans, agnostics, or atheists.

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How old are you?	Percentile of Respondents
18-29	33.33%
30-49	54.76%
50-69	11.90%
70+	0%

How do you prefer to identify your gender?	Percentile of Respondents
Female	29.60%
Male	58.40%
Transgender	4.80%
Intersex	0.00%
Prefer to self identify†	6.40%
Prefer not to answer	0.80%

†Prefer to Self Identify:

1. Non-Binary
2. Genderfluid
3. Non-binary
4. Male who is transgender
5. Transmasculine non-binary
6. Genderfluid/Nonbinary
7. Agender
8. Genderqueer

Table 3

How would you define your sexual orientation?	Percentile of Respondents
Heterosexual	61.11%
Homosexual	8.73%
Bisexual	16.67%
Prefer to self-identify†	12.70%
Prefer not to answer	0.79%

†Prefer to Self Identify:

1. Queer
2. Polysexual
3. Pansexual
4. Pansexual
5. Asexual
6. Pansexual
7. Asexual spectrum (mostly demi)
8. Pansexual
9. Pansexual
10. Grey-asexual/Pansexual
11. Asexual
12. Pansexual
13. Pansexual
14. demisexual/asexual spectrum
15. queer
16. Queer

Table 4

How would you best describe yourself?	Percentile of Respondents
African American/African/Black/Caribbean	1.59%
Asian	0.79%
Pacific Islander	0.00%
Caucasian/White/European/Euro-American	88.10%
Hispanic/Latino	2.38%
Indigenous	0.79%
Prefer to self identify†	5.56%
Prefer not to answer	0.79%

†Prefer to Self Identify:

1. America
2. Bi-Racial Black/Caucasian
3. Bi racial
4. Anglo Norman
5. half-Asian, half-white
6. Metis
7. Hispanic-Caucasian

Table 5

How would you best describe your occupation?	Percentile of Respondents
Business Professional	3.97%
Clerical Secretary Support	2.38%
Customer Service	6.35%
Educator	6.35%
Government/Civil Services	10.32%
Home Maker	5.56%
Hospitality	3.17%
Laborer	4.76%
Manager/Supervisor	1.59%
Medical/Healthcare Professional	5.56%
Retired	3.97%
Sales	4.76%
Self-Employed/Business Owner	7.14%
Social Service	2.38%
Student	6.35%
Technology/Engineering	5.56%
Transportation	1.59%
Prefer not to answer	1.59%
Other†	16.67%

†Other:

1. Interaction Designer
2. E-Commerce Web Content and Logistics
3. welder
4. Active Duty Military
5. Legal Secretary
6. Builder renovation home repair
7. I'm a licensed veterinary technician in the veterinary field.
8. Current homemaker but usual hospitality worker
9. Legal
10. Military.
11. Sound Tech
12. Disabled
13. Food delivery
14. currently unemployed
15. Disabled
16. Stay at home parent
17. Military
18. Disabled
19. Safety Professional
20. Unemployed
21. Gardener

Table 6

Please describe your level of education	Percentile of Respondents
Less than High School	3.97%
High School Diploma	35.71%
College Diploma	11.11%
Technical/Associate's	14.29%
Bachelor's	21.43%
Master's	9.52%
Doctoral/Law	3.17%
Prefer not to Answer	0.79%

Table 7

Please describe your level of income	Percentile of Respondents
$10,000 annually or less	18.25%
$10,001-$40,000	34.92%
$40,001-$70,000	23.81%
Above $70,000 annually	13.49%
Prefer not to answer	9.52%

Table 8

In which region do you live?	Percentile of Respondents
Africa	0%
Asia	1.59%
Australia	3.17%
Europe	12.70%
North America (CA)	6.35%
North America (US)	75.40%
South America	0%
Prefer not to answer	0.79%

Table 9

How would you describe the community in which you live?	Percentile of Respondents
Secluded	1.59%
Rural Community	20.63%
Small Town	23.81%
Large Town	20.63%
City	33.33
Prefer not to answer	0%

Table 10

How do you religiously identify?	Percentile of Respondents
Pagan	19.05%
Heathen	32.54%
Asatru/Asatruer	36.51%
Odinist	0%
Folkish	0%
Universalist	0.79%
Eclectic	3.97%
Prefer not to Answer	0.79%
Other†	6.35%

†Other:

1. Vanirtru; Asatru. I cleave to the Vanir
2. Still learning so not sure how to answer this one. Pagan/ heathen would be my best guess
3. Animist
4. Norse Druidry
5. Heathen and Asatru
6. Norse-leaning Eclectic Pagan
7. Polytheist Pagan and Unitarian Universalist
8. Heathen/forn sed

Table 11

How were you introduced to Paganism?	Percentile of Respondents
Friend	20.63%
Co-worker	0.79%
Partner	1.59%
Relative	8.73%
Website	17.46%
Book	17.46%
Television/Movies	3.97%
Flyer/Poster	0.79%
Student Group	0%
In Prison	1.59%
Prefer not to answer	1.59%
Other†	25.40%

†Other:

1. School project
2. I was drawn to the Vanir spiritually.
3. Not sure just always followed this path
4. Through Christian church
5. Parents i grew up asatru
6. Kinda funny. Enjoyed reading about norse gods when I was younger. When I got older Vikings came out and certain YouTube accounts kept popping up and I started reading again. It made more sense and was more believable than Christianity.
7. Military 1977
8. Just kinda figured out it was an option.
9. The runes led me
10. Self research through many outlets, online, texts, people
11. I've always been on the fringe of religious beliefs because nothing "fit" but after the death of my father I was pulled into the Asatru/heathen religion when I was looking for answers and comfort .
12. No single book, I found the occult section of my high school library.
13. Just the calling.
14. Been Pagan all my life found it myself
15. Spiritual Revelation
16. Social media – twitter
17. Ex
18. Spiritual inspiration
19. The Myths
20. Study of world history
21. Grew up pastor's son, researched it myself
22. myself i was playing skyrim the gods in that game are based on the Norse gods so i decided to research them more out of curiosity and i found the beliefs and culture around it closely resembled my own personal beliefs and virtues it was like it called to me
23. Self realization
24. Self exploration
25. Video games\Facebook\army
26. Divination and Runes
27. Pretty much on my own
28. I felt akin to the Vanir most of my life
29. It started by watching the TV shows Vikings, and The Last Kingdom. Then I found myself researching Paganism more extensively and discovered Asatru shortly after.
30. research
31. Just followed my own path
32. Don't even remember

Table 12

In what social context do you practice Paganism?	Percentile of Respondents
Solitary	78.57%
Group	18.25%
Prefer not to answer	3.17%

Table 13

How were you initiated into Paganism?	Percentile of Respondents
Self Initiated	64.29%
Initiated by a group	5.56%
Raised Pagan	5.56%
Not initiated	23.81%
Prefer not to answer	0.79%

Table 14

How open are you with others about your religious beliefs?	Percentile of Respondents
Completely open, I tell everyone	38.10%
Somewhat open, I tell most people	30.95%
Selectively open, I tell only those I trust	28.57%
Secretive, I tell no one other than fellow Pagans	1.59%
Prefer not to answer	0.79%

Table 15

Do you share your religion/spiritual path with your partner?	Percentile of Respondents
Yes	46.03%
No	27.78%
Not applicable	25.40%
Prefer not to answer	0.79%

Table 16

How often do you meet with other Pagans online or offline for religious/spiritual/ritual purposes?	Percentile of Respondents
Daily or almost daily	10.32%
Weekly	8.73%
Monthly	18.25%
Yearly	11.11%
Never or nearly never	50%
Prefer not to answer	1.59%

Table 17

How often do you meet with other Pagans online or offline for social/organizational/nonspiritual purposes?	Percentile of Respondents
Daily or almost daily	29.37%
Weekly	12.70%
Monthly	22.22%
Yearly	3.17%
Never or nearly never	31.75%
Prefer not to answer	0.79%

Table 18

How often do you attend Pagan festivals, moots, open circles, or other large events?	Percentile of Respondents
Frequently, multiple times a year	6.35%
Regularly, at least once a year	12.70%
Irregularly, once every other year	15.08%
Rarely, one every few years	22.22%
Never	42.06%
Prefer not to answer	1.59%

Table 19

How many friends of yours also identify as Pagan?	Percentile of Respondents
All or almost all	4.76%
More than half	17.46%
Less than half	53.97%
None that I know of	22.22%
Prefer not to answer	1.59%

Table 20

Please describe your typical voting habits	Percentile of Respondents
I vote both nationally and locally	78.57%
I vote nationally, but not locally	9.52%
I vote locally, but not nationally	0.79%
I do note vote	8.73%
Prefer not to answer	2.38%

Table 21

Please describe your political affiliations	Percentile of Respondents
Nonpolitical	7.14%
Socialist	14.29%
Left-Liberal	19.05%
Green	3.17%
Independent	16.67%
Right-Conservative	4.76%
Libertarian	15.08%
Far Right	0.79%
Prefer not to answer	3.97%
Other†	15.08%

†Other:

1. European Centrist
2. Democratic Socialist
3. Fiscally conservative, socially liberal.
4. Monarchist
5. Social Libertarian
6. Dead smack in the middle
7. Normally ndp
8. Pro-Government Libertarianism with a strong environmental bent
9. Social-Democrat
10. Moderate
11. Moderate left
12. I do not identify with any particular party – rather their platforms, practices, ethics.
13. Further Left than "liberal"
14. I don't like choosing sides. Whoever aligns with my beliefs gets my vote
15. i vote for the person who is best for the job but based on resent event im never voting for a republican
16. Socialist and Green
17. all over the places on various subjects
18. None
19. Alienated

Table 22

How often do you engage in political activities, like signing petitions, voting, participating in political events, and reaching out to your local officials?	Percentile of Respondents
Frequently, I am consistently politically engaged	28.57%
Sometimes, I follow one or two issues closely	32.54%
Occasionally, I vote and donate or sign petitions only when asked	24.60%
Never, I pay no attention to politics or political movements	12.70%
Prefer not to answer	1.59%

Table 23

Do you participate in or identify with any of the following social/political movements?	Percentile of Respondents
Environmentalism	52.42%
Feminism	35.48%
Gay Rights Activism	47.58%
Human Rights Activism	54.03%
Animal Rights Activism	37.10%
None	17.74%
Prefer not to answer	7.26%
Other†	11.29%

†Other:

1. Gun rights
2. I am not an activist, I do support several of the above within certain parameters.
3. Disability Rights Activism
4. All I guess. I prefer to be left alone and everyone is allowed to make choices for themselves as long as nobody is hurt in the process. More freedoms for the individual.
5. Marijuana legalization
6. Gun Rights
7. Religious Freedom
8. I'm an environmentalist but also a hardcore doomer and want to EMP the Earth and near Earth orbit immediately. But I don't hold out much hope at all, even for environmentalism.
9. Mental Health
10. Peace Activism
11. Transgender Rights Activism
12. Reproductive Rights, Housing First Activism and Initiatives
13. This survey is badly done; this should be a check all that apply.[17]
14. White Nationalist

[17] When the survey was first released, the question was designed for respondents to select one option. After user feedback, the question was redesigned to allow for multiple selections.

Table 24

What are your attitudes toward Neo-Nazis and Racialists?	Percentile of Respondents
Extremely Negative	84.13%
Negative	14.29%
Neutral	0.79%
Positive	0.79%
Extremely Positive	0%
Prefer not to answer	0%

Table 25

How do you feel your political perspectives have changed as a result of practicing Paganism?	Percentile of Respondents
Ver significantly, Paganism has completely changed my worldview	11.90%
Significantly, Paganism has influenced my political beliefs very much	10.32%
A little, Paganism has made me realize the importance of some things	30.16%
Not at all, my beliefs have not changed since I began identifying as Pagan	34.13%
I am not sure	4.76%
I have always been Pagan, so I can't say	6.35%
Prefer not to answer	2.38%

Appendix B – Long-form Quotes

Quote 1 – Seth Chagi:

"So, a virtual blot, I mean, when we first came up with them, because they were not

being done before, a lot of people made fun of us for coming up with virtual blots. We had a lot

of ridicule for it. I'll be honest, I didn't like the idea either. I did not think it would be enough to

really even provide a glimpse of what it's like to be in an actual blot. But after seeing a few

conducted and helping a few myself, a lot goes into the preparation of writing these, you know,

these prayers and offerings and things like that, and you can really get the community to

participate. You can get people commenting, '*oh, hail this person for blah, blah, blah, hail this

person,*' and you know, you can really get people involved. I was really shocked at how these

people were responding so well to these virtual events. And it was great practice for COVID. So

many other organizations, I think, really suffered during the pandemic because of that. But [TAC

is] all online already, and all our systems were designed to operate with virtual events. And I'm

very happy now that we did that. But I think, after seeing its effect on people and experiencing a

few on my own, you definitely can feel that connection with the divine and with the people there,

it's, I think it's a personal thing. I personally do not feel as connected as I would in person, but

other people I have seen absolutely just be overwhelmed by the experience of having an online

ritual, especially the ones where you can actually get live feed of someone doing it, and then you

can participate. Because I mean, I think we might be talking about two different types of live

rituals, or online rituals here. And there's the ones that are completely written out. And it's just

text, and then there's actually someone doing a blot, and people watching and commenting. And

those, I think those are newer, and those are great. Like people love those and they're huge

successes. The earlier ones that we were doing where it was all text was a lot of reading, people had to come up with things to say on their own, it just was a little harder. But um, virtual blots these days are very effective. And especially now you know, you put music on you can it's just so much a virtual blot is very effective, or any ritual can be very effective in an online environment, I think."

Quote 2 – Seth Chagi:

"So, [Forager] was a very important person to me. She became involved in TAC about five years ago. She said a lot of things like that she was a Gythia from the Troth, and things like that. She sounded really legit. She had books, she seemed super nice. She got involved as an admin, and as ambassador, she was doing great work, and eventually became our DORA. And she served there for a little bit and then actually became our Vice President when I was still president, after Sage Nelson passed away. And people say there were signs. And as someone who was there, you know, it's harder to see. Looking back, I'd seen the signs, and I see where I took missteps, and where we should have settled things with her earlier or gotten things out publicly earlier, but I never saw anything that was giving off that impression. And then in fact, in 2018, my spouse and I actually flew her down to where we are to marry us. So, she was our wedding officiant, and we had a great time. There was nothing strange about it, and then, you know, I've always known she has a terrible temper. And she has various mental health challenges. And that's, you know, I do too, some people do, that's more than okay. But I never expected it to be expressed this way. And I woke up that morning and someone who I never talked to had messaged me and like said, I think you should see this one, and I'm like don't messaged me on Facebook. But then I looked at it. And I'm like, Topher, we have a problem.

And we immediately cut complete ties with her. There was not anyone on the board who

disagreed. I think she was supposed to have an event at her place. And there were a lot of TAC

board members going in a lot of other people, and you had to pay to go and a lot of people

bought plane tickets, and it was this whole thing that people were going to go do. And then after

this happened, every single board member agreed, even if they had paid all that money to go, that

we could have nothing to do with her. Absolutely nothing. And you know, I know Topher views

it like she can be redeemed. But in my eyes, there is no redemption from what she said you don't

say those things unless you think them deep down. It's kind of one of those situations where it's

like, how do you act when no one's looking? Like there's only two ways that this went down. She

either meant it and she's a terrible person because of the way she thinks about it, or she was so

screwed up on drugs or something that she was out of her mind, which is a whole other problem.

And I think her actions are absolutely inexcusable. I, you know, I told her after I thought that I

see your true colors now. And I don't want you to ever contact me again. And I blocked her. And

within five minutes, I had three emails from her going on with that how horrible TAC was, and

how horrible I was and how horrible and everything is, and it's all my fault, blah, blah, blah. And

how I betrayed my friend and like, like, no, [Forager] you did this yourself like no…”

Quote 3 – Marigold:

“Um, I did not hear it from TAC to begin with. I heard it from Heathen Underground,

which is a page, and I was part of Heathen Underground's group. And I think I still am, I just

have them muted on Facebook right now. But I was not terribly familiar with [Forager] and more

than just a "oh, she was a contributor to like the beginnings of TAC," and their... I know, she had

some affiliation with like their clergy training program. And she was listed as some affiliated

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clergy, and I'd seen her maybe make some posts on some of their pages every now and then. So,

the name was familiar, but like I didn't realize how, how influential she was within TAC,

especially with their board. But like it was, it was shocking. And then I took some screenshots,

and I sent them to TAC directly, like I messaged them on Facebook. And then within an hour,

they had released a statement, and I was cool with that. But then, Heathen Underground I started

seeing a lot of comments from people who had actually previously left TAC. For some other

reasons, like, for example, people had been sending Seth, and then Topher messages saying that

she was a racist and they, they refused to do anything about it. And Seth even addressed it on his

own page, that he sided with a friend rather than dealing with unsubstantiated evidence. And I'm

a bit torn on that. Because on the one hand, I firmly believe that anyone who's a victim of abuse

you always believe them, you always believe the person that's claiming, like, it's like with the

#MeToo movement and always believe, you know, victims of rape until they're, you know,

proven otherwise, and, and things like that. But at the same time, our justice system that we're

instilled in, you know, was instilled in us from the time we're children that everyone's innocent

until proven guilty, so I'm torn on it. Of course, now we know what kind of person [Forager]

really is. But TAC's response over the long term to it, with the people having made claims and

then not even doing further investigation on it, just dismissing it out of hand, from what I

understand, is kind of less acceptable to me."

Appendix C – TAC COC

The Asatru Community Inc. Social Network Codes of Conduct

The Codes of Conduct hereby stated, or the rules in which The Asatru Community Inc. and all of her members must abide by to retain membership within our various social networks. These Codes of Conduct will hereby be referred to as C.O.C or COC. These COC may be added to or changed at any time by discretion of The Board. Any violation of one or more of these COC, on a three-strike system, will result in removal.

1. Zero-Tolerance Policy on discrimination of *any* kind toward any group, party, or individual.

2. Zero-Tolerance Policy on Cyber Bullying and Cyber Stalking.

3. The blocking of an admin will result in being banned.

4. Topics only pertaining to the wide breath of heathenry.

5. No 14/88 or racist discussions or topics of any kind.

6. All group links must have admin permission.

7. All advertisements must be done on the designated advertisement days and be relevant.

8. No posting of screen shots from within TAC, into another group or with an individual outside of TAC, without permission.

9. No pictures may be posted showing the use of drugs, distasteful nudity, or explicit violence.

10. We take sexual harassment very seriously. Zero tolerance.

11. Everyone's ideas are valid, and to be respected and not put down.

12. UPG is to be presented as such, not as fact.

13. There is no "right way" to do something in TAC. Everyone's method, save extreme situations, is valid.

14. Multiple pictures should be posted within their own album; feel free to create one.

15. Personal conflicts should remain personal and not within our groups' comment sections for all to see. Take it to private message.

16. Profanity should be kept to a *minimum.* We realize we're all adults, and strong language is sometimes useful. However, it should be kept to a minimum to the admins' discretion.

17. No personal information should be made public aside from your own, up to your discretion.

18. Sexual topics should be kept clean and tasteful within the confines on Norse practices and cultural history. Please, there are families.

19. No PDFs, documents, or other written content should be shared without express permission from the owner.

Banned Topics:

1. Politics not relating *directly* to heathenry in some way.

2. Racial discussions that support the idea that not all peoples are equal.

3. We are not a rant board; please do not just rant about your day. Please stay relevant.

4. Anything pertaining to any illegal activities, so told in the state laws of California.

where TAC is incorporated.

The Asatru Community Official Stance on Racism, Hate, & Internet Violations of Human Rights

This statement will be added as an addendum to our By-Laws.

"TAC does not endorse or tolerate white supremacy, racism, or hate in any form against any person or group of people. To that end, we will not now, or in the future, be admitting into membership or ordaining anyone who is found to be a current or former member of a racist group or organization. Should we discover any individual(s) who have misrepresented themselves in order to subvert membership, entrance into any of our programs, or ordination process, we will remove them immediately upon discovery, and a thorough investigation will be conducted if the Board of Directors finds it warranted. This includes but is not limited to hiding an arrest history or convictions, federal charges or convictions, past or present hate group affiliation. This extends not only to our members but to our board members, as well. Threats against, persecution without proof or evidence, hate campaigns against a charter member, a board member, or against our organization will not be tolerated. This statement also covers social media behaviors and conduct. We will not tolerate harassment of our charter members, threats, cyber stalking, and/or cyber bullying."