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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CHRISTIANS TO WICCANS AND PAGANS

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Science

by

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Pittsburg, Kansas

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I would like to thank Dr. Hoyer, Dr. Hurford, and Dr. Viney for the open-mindedness to tackle this project.

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CHRISTIANS TO WICCANS AND PAGANS

An Abstract of the Thesis by
Lynda Diane Curtis

Levels of affect were assessed in twenty-five Christian participants and twenty-four Wiccan and Pagan participants. Zucherman and Lubin's Multiple Affect Adjective Checklist-Revised (1985) was utilized to measure levels of anxiety, depression, hostility, sensation seeking and positive affect. It was hypothesized that Christians would rate higher in levels of anxiety, depression, and hostility. None of these hypotheses were supported, and there was no significant difference between Christian and Pagan levels of positive affect. There was however, a significant difference between the two groups in the area of sensation seeking- Pagan scores rating higher than did Christian scores. Possible explanations for this difference could be that Christians are more satisfied with mundane experiences, whereas Wiccans and Pagans seek "extra-sensory" experiences, or it could be that Wiccans and Pagans have a more epicurean mentality than do Christians. Recommendations are also made for future research.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to compare the affective differences (if any) between self-identified Christians and self-identified Wiccans and Pagans. Any religion may contribute to a person's temporary emotional state, as well as to more stable emotional traits of the personality in general. A person's faith can provide pleasure and comfort to the individual, it could be a source of anxiety, guilt, or depression, or a strange combination of both (Richards, 1991). This study compared general affective traits (as opposed to temporary states) of Christians to those of Wiccans and Pagans. By assessing the emotional traits of the two groups and comparing them, one could perhaps understand some of the influences of religion on the individual, or possibly the attraction of certain people to certain types of religion. Since Christianity, for example, seems to place some emphasis on people "sinning" and Wicca and Paganism do not, this researcher hypothesized that Christians would have higher incidences of negative affect (such as anxiety and depression) than would the other group.

In this study, an affective self-rating instrument was given to the two different groups. Participants were generated from sampling individuals who participated in religious gatherings at churches and circles, and also from those who choose to worship alone. The solitaries were reached through networking through Christian and New Age bookstores and publications, as well as from a Renaissance Festival located outside a midwest urban area.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to make comparisons of the affective traits of Christians to Wiccans and Pagans, it is necessary to first have a clear understanding of the groups to be studied. Most people in the United States today have some idea of what Christianity is all about. Essentially Christianity is a monotheistic religion which teaches the worship of a personal deity who created and manages the universe. Though this God is believed to be a single deity, He is manifested in three "persons"--God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (Macquarrie, 1966). This "trinity" is said to be a revealed truth and these beliefs are widely accepted by Christians, though there is much disagreement among different sects as to the specifics of this theology. The name "Christianity" comes from an historical figure called Jesus of Nazareth who Christians believe to be the Christ, the "God the Son" incarnate in the body of a man (Macquarrie, 1966; 1991). Christ's teachings are believed to be the teachings of God. If someone identifies herself or himself as a Christian, then most others usually understand her or his

basic religious faith to include these elements. After all, most people in this country have a belief in this faith whether they practice this by attending a church or not.

However, most people have no idea what a Wiccan or Pagan is. Wicca is a term for the religion of Witchcraft (Adler, 1986). The very words "paganism" and "witchcraft" can dredge up images of wicked gluttony, promiscuity, Satanism and bloody sacrifice (Adler, 1986; Cabot, 1989; Cunningham, 1992;). Certainly people who practice such atrocities do exist, but they are not generally part of the contemporary religious movements of Witchcraft and Paganism (Cunningham, 1992). It is not particularly suprising that these misconceptions exist. After all, they have been reinforced repeatedly by television, motion pictures, literature, and countless malevolent sermons given by Christian clergy over a period of hundreds of years (Cabot, 1989; Cunningham, 1992; Starhawk, 1989).

In defining the terms "Wiccan" and "Pagan" it should be understood that Pagan is the more inclusive of the two. Wiccans would be considered a sub-group of Pagans, thus all Wiccans are Pagans, but not all Pagans are Wiccans. In old Anglo-Saxon, the words "wych" (Cabot, 1989), "wicca" and "wicce" (masculine and feminine, respectively), were terms which meant "to bend or to shape" (Adler, 1986; Starhawk, 1989). These words were also part of a

constellation of words (in the origins of many languages) that meant "wise" or "wise ones" (Cabot, 1989; Conway, 1990).

The late Scott Cunningham, a leading author, teacher, and researcher on the subject (who was also a practicing Wiccan) defined Wicca as: "A contemporary Pagan religion with spiritual roots in Shamanism and the earliest expressions of reverence of nature. Among its major motifs are: reverence for the Goddess and the God; reincarnation; magic; ritual observances of the Full Moon, astronomical and agricultural phenomena; spheroid temples, created with Personal Power, in which rituals occur" (1990). Another fundamental tenet of Wiccan belief is to "harm none" (Cabot, 1989, Cunningham, 1992; Ludeke, 1989). In fact, many Wiccans (but certainly not all) are vegetarians because of a belief in this tenet.

Cunningham also defined "Pagan" in the following way: "From the Latin 'paganus', meaning country dweller. Today it is used as a general term for followers of Wicca and other magical and polytheistic religions. It is also used to refer to pre-Christian religious and magical systems. Naturally, Christians have their own negative definition of this word" (1992).

Margot Adler, journalist, practicing Wiccan, and granddaughter of renowned psychiatrist Alfred Adler, defines "Pagan" as a member of a polytheistic nature religion such

as the ancient Greek, Roman, and Egyptian religions (1986).

Cunningham's definition does a concise job of touching on the basics of Wicca and Paganism, while leaving details for the serious student to find within the texts of his many practical, "do-it-yourself" books on Wicca and magical practice. Most of the terms in the above definitions seem to be self-explanatory, except perhaps for the word "magic". It is not easily defined, as every practitioner may have her or his own concept. However, magic is not about turning people into toads and the like, so it may be useful to include some of the most popular conceptualizations here:

- 1) Magic is the ability to alter one's state of consciousness at will in order to effect some change in the world (Cabot, 1992; Conway, 1991; Orion, 1990);
- 2) Magic is taking energy from another plane of existence and weaving that energy by specific thoughts, words and practices into a desired physical result (Conway, 1991);
- 3) Magic is the art of shaping the unseen, subtle forces that flow through the world and of awakening deeper levels of consciousness (Starhawk, 1989);
- 4) Magic is the projection of natural energy to create a needed change. Energy exists in ourselves, plants, stones, colors -- in all things. Magic is the process of rousing this energy, giving it a purpose, and releasing it (Cunningham, 1992). Rousing this energy can consist of many things, such as meditation, reading tarot cards, or making a pouch filled

with herbs and stones to carry for good luck. One thing that most everyone agrees on in practicing magic however, is the Threefold Law. This means that whatever is changed by magical means must be for the good of all and harm to none. This is because whatever actions are taken--both good and bad-- return to the doer threefold (Cabot, 1992; Conway, 1991; Cunningham, 1992; Ludeke, 1989).

It is important here to stress that Witchcraft and Paganism have absolutely nothing to do with Satanism. Witches and Pagans do not even believe in Satan, stating that this being is a purely Christian invention (Cunningham, 1992; Cabot, 1989).

Having established a rudimentary outline of Wicca and Paganism it may be helpful to discuss the importance of including this obscure group in an empirical study. It may seem that the number of people involved in this religious movement would be very insignificant, since very few people are aware that it even exists. However, this form of spirituality merits scholarly study because the number of people involved is not insignificant. Conservative estimates suggest the existence of between 100,000 and 200,000 individuals in the United States alone, with more people in Europe, concentrated mostly in Great Britain (Adler, 1986; Farrar, 1991; Murphy, 1991; Orion, 1990).

The obscurity of this religious group is due to hundreds of years of persecution by Christians. The need

for secrecy during the Burning Times (1450-1750) was crucial if the Pagans did not want to be tortured and killed. Ankles were broken, breasts cut off, eyes gouged out, sulphur poured into hair on the head and other parts of the body and set on fire, red-hot needles thrust beneath fingernails and toenails, thumbs crushed in thumb-screws, and these are just a few of the methods. Nine million is the highest estimate of those killed during the witch craze, and 85 percent of that amount is believed to be women (Robbins, 1959). Pagans were frightened into silence, which in turn allowed all of the misconceptions to continue (Cabot, 1989).

Still today Wiccans are harassed by police, employers, ministers, so-called well meaning Christians, and a multitude of others. People refuse to believe that Witchcraft and Paganism are not evil or Devil worship. This may be due to a lack of education, or in some cases, simple prejudice. But whatever the reasons, it appears clear that much persecution and misunderstanding still remain (Cabot, 1989).

This misunderstanding extends into academics with many scholars being put off by words like "Witchcraft", "Religion" or "Occultism", which may be seen as weakening rationality. Yet these same scholars many times maintain a great openness about artists, visionaries and poets who seem "mad" when compared to today's rational standards (Adler, 1986). It seems entirely possible that if Paganism

was presented as an artistic or intellectual movement, then scholars such as Jungian psychologists might flock to study Paganism's use of ancient archetypes and love of ancient lore (Adler, 1986; Cabot, 1989).

It is hoped then, that this study can provide some unbiased, empirical data that will shed light on any affective differences that may exist between the two types of religions.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Participants

Subjects participating in this study were twenty-five self-identified Christians and twenty-four self-identified Wiccans and Pagans of all ages and of both sexes. They were selected from various religious groups from three small midwestern towns, as well as from a Renaissance Festival in a larger midwestern urban area.

Design

A 2 (group) x 5 (affect) mixed design was used.

Materials

The Multiple Affect Adjective Checklist--Revised (Zuckerman and Lubin, 1985) was used. This instrument consists of 132 adjectives that are alphabetically arranged in three columns on one side of a single sheet of paper. There are two forms--State and Trait. The State Form requires participants to answer the items according to how they feel today, and the Trait Form requires subjects to answer according to how they generally feel. The Trait Form

is the form utilized for this study. The instrument takes approximately five minutes to complete and appears to have acceptable reliability and construct validity. Attached to each form is a questionnaire asking for personal information about the subject such as age, gender, and religious affiliation.

Procedure

Subjects completed the Checklist in a variety of settings such as churches, homes, and an outdoor Renaissance Festival. They were told that the experimenter was conducting research on religion for completion of a Master's Thesis. Participants were asked to fill out the questionnaire anonymously and then to complete the checklist according to how they generally feel. It was stated that if they had any questions, the experimenter would gladly answer them. After the participants had completed the task, they were asked if they had any questions and were thanked for their participation.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The scores from the Multiple Affect Adjective Checklist--Revised were entered into a 2 (group) x 5 (affect) repeated measures analysis of variance with repeated means on affect (anxiety, hostility, depression, positive affect and sensation seeking).

There were no significant differences on anxiety, depression, hostility, or positive affect (all p's .05). There were significant differences on sensation seeking in which the Wiccans and Pagans scored significantly higher (56.5 vs. 47.6, respectively).

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study was somewhat limited in that the number of participants was relatively small. A larger sample would have been more representative of the Pagan and Christian population in general. Also, a random sample from a larger geographical area would have been beneficial to this study, as there may be differences among Pagans and among Christians from different areas of the country.

It is interesting to note that the majority of Christians as well as the majority of Pagans endorsed more positive adjectives than negative adjectives. This could be because the participants actually do feel more positive affect than negative affect, or it could be because of a simple reluctance to reveal negative feelings. It would be interesting to compare subjects' MAACL-R negative affect scores to comparable scores on other instruments such as the MMPI to perhaps determine differences between perceived and endorsed affect.

It was hypothesized that Christians would rate higher in levels of depression, anxiety, and hostility than would Pagans. None of these hypotheses were supported however.

There were also no significant differences between groups in the area of positive affect. There was a significant difference among sensation seeking scores. Pagans were significantly higher than were Christians in the area of sensation seeking. A reason for this could be that Pagans have a magical belief system, which involves the sensation of shifting consciousness. Perhaps people who would already score higher on this scale are attracted to the Pagan religion due to this emphasis on magical, "extra-sensory" experience. Or, it could be that these individuals' interest in this experience is nurtured by Pagan religion. Another reason could be that Christians are simply satisfied with more mundane sensory experiences, or that they are fearful of them due to the fact that there are numerous references in the Christian Bible which condemn witchcraft and divination.

In the future it may be worthwhile to further inquire on exactly what it means to seek sensation. Perhaps sensation seeking involves a more epicurean mentality, or perhaps it is not focused on abstract mentality at all, but rather more an emphasis on concrete behavioral practices. It may also be beneficial to include a participant self-rating scale which measures level of religiosity. There could be differences among subjects of the same religion due to how strongly religious they perceive themselves to be.

Another study that would be interesting would involve using the State form of the MAACL-R. The researchers could administer the Checklist to Christians and Pagans before their respective gatherings, and then again after the gathering is over. Then differences could be compared within groups to reveal any affective changes due to religious practice. Means could also be compared between groups to reveal any differences in the affective influence the respective gatherings may have on the two groups. However one would have to understand whether a practice effect might apply here to possibly bias this type of study.

Also it could be worthwhile to include atheists in a study such as this. This group could act as a kind of control by comparing scores of non-religious people to those of the different religions.

It seems that in this particular study there is little difference in affective traits of Pagans and Christians, with the exception of sensation seeking. This could suggest that no one religion is more psychologically detrimental or more psychologically "healthy" than the other.

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APPENDIX

Please complete the following information:

Gender

☐ Male ☐ Female

Age

Religion

☐ Christian
☐ Catholic
☐ Protestant

☐ Other:

☐ Pagan
☐ Wiccan
☐ Native/Shamanistic

☐ Other:

Political Ideology

☐ Liberal ☐ None
☐ Conservative ☐ Other:

Education

<input type="checkbox"/> Elementary School	<input type="checkbox"/> College Graduate
<input type="checkbox"/> Some High School	<input type="checkbox"/> Some Graduate Study
<input type="checkbox"/> High School Graduate	<input type="checkbox"/> Graduate Degree
<input type="checkbox"/> Some College	

Occupation

A

D

H

PA

SS

- 1 ☐ active
- 2 ☐ adventurous
- 3 ☐ affectionate
- 4 ☐ afraid
- 5 ☐ agitated
- 6 ☐ agreeable
- 7 ☐ aggressive
- 8 ☐ alive
- 9 ☐ alone
- 10 ☐ amiable
- 11 ☐ amused
- 12 ☐ angry
- 13 ☐ annoyed
- 14 ☐ awful
- 15 ☐ bashful
- 16 ☐ bitter
- 17 ☐ blue
- 18 ☐ bored
- 19 ☐ calm
- 20 ☐ cautious
- 21 ☐ cheerful
- 22 ☐ clean
- 23 ☐ complaining
- 24 ☐ contented
- 25 ☐ contrary
- 26 ☐ cool
- 27 ☐ cooperative
- 28 ☐ critical
- 29 ☐ cross
- 30 ☐ cruel
- 31 ☐ daring
- 32 ☐ desperate
- 33 ☐ destroyed
- 34 ☐ devoted
- 35 ☐ disagreeable
- 36 ☐ discontented
- 37 ☐ discouraged
- 38 ☐ disgusted
- 39 ☐ displeased
- 40 ☐ energetic
- 41 ☐ enraged
- 42 ☐ enthusiastic
- 43 ☐ fearful

- 45 ☐ fit
- 46 ☐ forlorn
- 47 ☐ frank
- 48 ☐ free
- 49 ☐ friendly
- 50 ☐ frightened
- 51 ☐ furious
- 52 ☐ lively
- 53 ☐ gentle
- 54 ☐ glad
- 55 ☐ gloomy
- 56 ☐ good
- 57 ☐ good-natured
- 58 ☐ grim
- 59 ☐ happy
- 60 ☐ healthy
- 61 ☐ hopeless
- 62 ☐ hostile
- 63 ☐ impatient
- 64 ☐ incensed
- 65 ☐ indignant
- 66 ☐ inspired
- 67 ☐ interested
- 68 ☐ irritated
- 69 ☐ jealous
- 70 ☐ joyful
- 71 ☐ kindly
- 72 ☐ lonely
- 73 ☐ lost
- 74 ☐ loving
- 75 ☐ low
- 76 ☐ lucky
- 77 ☐ mad
- 78 ☐ mean
- 79 ☐ meek
- 80 ☐ merry
- 81 ☐ mild
- 82 ☐ miserable
- 83 ☐ nervous
- 84 ☐ obliging
- 85 ☐ offended
- 86 ☐ outraged
- 87 ☐ panicky

- 89 ☐ peaceful
- 90 ☐ pleased
- 91 ☐ pleasant
- 92 ☐ polite
- 93 ☐ powerful
- 94 ☐ quiet
- 95 ☐ reckless
- 96 ☐ rejected
- 97 ☐ rough
- 98 ☐ sad
- 99 ☐ safe
- 100 ☐ satisfied
- 101 ☐ secure
- 102 ☐ shaky
- 103 ☐ shy
- 104 ☐ soothed
- 105 ☐ steady
- 106 ☐ stubborn
- 107 ☐ stormy
- 108 ☐ strong
- 109 ☐ suffering
- 110 ☐ sullen
- 111 ☐ sunk
- 112 ☐ sympathetic
- 113 ☐ tame
- 114 ☐ tender
- 115 ☐ tense
- 116 ☐ terrible
- 117 ☐ terrified
- 118 ☐ thoughtful
- 119 ☐ timid
- 120 ☐ tormented
- 121 ☐ understanding
- 122 ☐ unhappy
- 123 ☐ unsociable
- 124 ☐ upset
- 125 ☐ vexed
- 126 ☐ warm
- 127 ☐ whole
- 128 ☐ wild
- 129 ☐ willful
- 130 ☐ wilted
- 131 ☐ worrying

