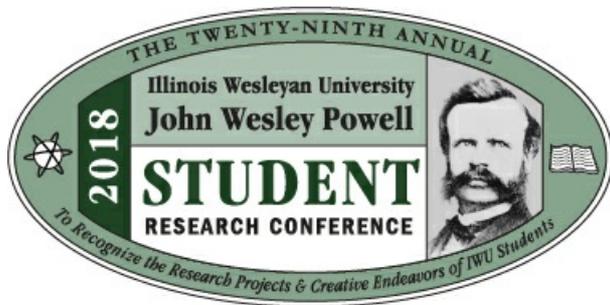


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Mother Goddesses and Subversive Witches: Competing Narratives of Gender Essentialism, Heteronormativity, and Queerness in Wiccan Ritual and Theology

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Graduation Year

2017

Location

Room E101, Center for Natural Sciences, Illinois Wesleyan University

Start Date

8-4-2017 10:00 AM

End Date

8-4-2017 11:00 AM

Description

Wicca is typically recognized as a feminist and queer-friendly religion embraced by many women and LGBTQ+ people. While women are undoubtedly emphasized positively, however, I argue that much of the focus is in fact a form of benevolent sexism, coming out of an essentialist understanding of women's nature being nurturing, intuitive, and emotional. The resulting heteronormativity and its procreative focus can create an exclusionary environment for gay men and women as well as for transgender and genderfluid or non-binary individuals. My research utilizes ethnographic participant observation of a local Wiccan coven and semi-structured qualitative interviews with Wiccans and Pagans from across the United States and England in order to explore the consequences and limitations of emphasizing Wicca as a fertility religion, where women's power is theoretically restricted to their potential for motherhood. In doing so, I am able to gauge Wiccan practitioners' attitudes related to gender and sexuality and explore the ways in which Wiccans are modifying their practices in order to be more inclusive.

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Initial gender essentialist and heteronormative assumptions have been challenged by the increasing visibility of the GLBT community. Both rituals seek union between the divine masculine and the divine feminine as represented by a priest and priestess, but Gardner emphasized that the purpose of the Great Rite was physical and spiritual fertility; he connected the practice to an agricultural liturgical year in a way that Crowley did not (Bogdan 2009, pp. 99–100). Joanne Pearson's discussion of the Great Rite and Wiccan ritual in *Wicca and the Christian Heritage* (2007) voices skepticism about the genuine transgressiveness of these practices, however. Can Wicca and other fertility-based faiths be reconciled with queer and non-binary identities? I looked into Dianic Wicca as well, thinking that since it has less emphasis on the God and Goddess duality, I might be able to relate to it more. I found the heavy focus on feminism appealing, but that lasted about a minute until the movement's ugly history of gender essentialism (the mentality that women are A, men are B, and nothing outside of those ideas exists) and

transmisogyny (that nasty combination of transphobia and misogyny directed at trans women) revealed itself. 2001. coming out narratives: realities of intersectionality - accepted for inclusion in sociology dissertations by an authorized administrator of scholarworks @ georgia state university. for more information, please contact scholarworks@gsu. recommended citation brown, marni a., "coming out narratives: realities of intersectionality." dissertation, georgia state university, 2011. mother goddesses and subversive witches: competing - competing narratives of gender essentialism, heteronormativity, feminism, and queerness and patriarchal religions, and. women especially have been