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# **Rite or Wrong: A Comparison of the Presence and Social Significance of Body Modifications in Different Religious Groups in Minnesota**

Emily Peterson

Different religious groups keep distinct perceptions of body modifications of their members. Though body modifications can be found in every religion, the purpose, significance and acceptance (or lack of) vary greatly from one religion to another (Clarke, 1999. p. 196). This research examined how body modifications are perceived within Catholic and Pagan communities in Minnesota. Though some religions are more accepting and promoting of body modifications than others, the common connection is the level of power they possess over their loyal followers and their bodies (Burton, 2001. p. 35).

Typically speaking, Catholicism has a history nearly always rejecting tattoos while Paganism has a history of embracing tattoos and more specifically, piercings (Jones, 2007. p. 1). Christians have long held the opinion that the body is sacred and vanity should be suppressed. For most of the religion's history, the act of body modification was seen as an act of vanity or making the body less pure (Woodard, 1998. p. 4). There is also a strong pressure in Catholic groups that human bodies should remain the way they were designed by a higher power. According to the religion, to make the body unlike it was meant to be by a higher power is a sign of disregard to the higher power (Ellis, 2008. p. 82).

Anthropologists theorize increasing popularity of body modifications reflects society's turn to Paganism (Woodard, 1998. p. 4). The act of embracing body modifications has a long history in Paganism, but body decorations have been traced back thousands of years and are used as indicators of the earliest examples of modern human behavior (Fullagar, 2005. p. 70-71). This has also given the Catholic religion reason to avoid these actions (Woodard, 1998. p. 4).

## **Methodological Orientation**

Body modifications in the most general term can include everything from tattoos and piercings to branding to haircuts or body painting (Woodard, 1998. p. 3). The purpose of this research was to

view body modification through the lens of sociology of religion. For that reason, modifications most commonly associated to religious practices such as rituals and festivals as well as demonstrations of sacrifice were of main interest. These modifications include those in which the flesh must be penetrated or damaged. Specifically, these modifications include tattoos, piercings, brandings and scarification.

For religious individuals who receive body modifications, the reasoning for receiving these modifications vary depending on the religion and how well the individual follows the social pressure of their respective religions to obtain or refrain from modifications (Douglas, 1966. p. 97). Through personal interviews, individuals have been able to address their religions and the impact their religious teachings have had on their decision to be modified or refrain from modification. Questions centered on what types of modifications seemed too extreme for the individual as well as what types of themes or meanings modifications have or future modifications could include.

In addition to those who receive body modifications, it was important to talk to those who perform body modifications. More recently, tattoo parlors have been practicing types of scarification and branding in addition to the more traditional services. Where there were one or two tattoo parlors in large cities ten years ago, there are now dozens. (Woodard, 1998. p. 4). One particular establishment in St. Cloud, Minnesota offered three artists to speak to about their observations of the significance of body modifications in religious groups.

As members of the subculture that includes modified individuals, they were familiar with the criticisms and praise modification receives from society, particularly religious society. For the purpose of this research, artists with a long history of modifying individuals were sought out. More time spent in the industry meant the artists had a larger pool of observations to draw from when answering questions concerning the impact of religion on a persons choice to get a body modification and which type of body modification. Artists were often asked about the size of tattoos, location of tattoos and piercings and how these items changed if the person receiving modifications declared themselves members of Paganism, Catholicism or neither.

When possible, leaders or elders of the Pagan and Catholic community were sought. In the Pagan religion, there is no higher leader because the religion is largely founded on the individual's chosen path of religion. However, a Catholic Deacon and other leaders within the Catholic community were interviewed. In terms of Pagans, those who have been involved in the religion for a longer period of time and those regarded as experts within the community were interviewed.

These religious leaders also provided valuable insight into the history of different religions as it

relates to the acceptance level of body modifications. This historical analysis was very important to help determine the levels of acceptance body modifications have been associated with within different religious groups over the years. Again, individuals with long personal history with their respected religious groups were of main interest. Not only did these individuals have the academic knowledge of such changes in history, but also they could personally attest to the changes they've observed in their time as a religious follower and leader.

In addition to religious leaders, members of congregations, and places of religious practice were interviewed. These people make up the collective society of such religious groups and thus, extensive interviews were necessary in order to better understand the pressures imposed on the collective group. Individuals were asked about their thoughts on body modifications, their opinion of how their religious community perceives the modifications, whether or not they had any body modifications and whether or not they planned to receive any in the future.

The purpose of this research was to discover and analyze how body modifications are perceived in different religious groups, why they are perceived that way and the significance they carry. The specific topic of body modifications represents a theme within the sociology of religion regarding the strength of the collective group over individuals.

While some religions frown upon body modifications, such actions are necessary in order to participate in the collective in other religions (Burton, p. 35). In either case, receiving body modifications or not may seem like the choice of the individual; however, the pressures of religious societies can have an impact and deep influence on these perceived individual choices. A large part of the religious experience relies on a collective group praising and denouncing the same items. The ability to do so shows the strength of the group so much so that it can be argued that the primary function of religious theology is to control the body (Burton, 2001. p. 35). To have a wide range of perceptions of body modifications in the same religious group demonstrates the group is less of a collective unit, the opposite goal according to Burton and also Durkheim (Durkheim, 1912. p. 297).

The goal of this research was to discover the impact of body modification on the collective group, the state of the collective group and the consequences of that level of cohesion. Using plenty of personal interviews with the modified, the modifiers, religious leaders and religious followers to enhance academic literature, this research explored the current state of group cohesion and how it arrived at such a level. The findings of this specific topic research can be used in broader terms to address the state of sociology of religion and the impact of that state on the broader group and more

general goals the group must maintain.

## **Theories**

Understanding how and why body modifications such as tattoos and piercings are perceived and what they represent in different religious groups means understanding the history of the religions studied and the interactions and opinions of those who follow those particular religions. The theorist that best accomplished this and thus introduced valuable theories into the study of religion in sociology is Emile Durkheim. While Durkheim's strengths regarding the topic are important, the specific topic of this research begs for using theoretical frameworks established by Erving Goffman as well as Norbert Elias.

### **Establishment of Durkheim**

Largely centering on religion as a form of social cohesion, Durkheim's theories noted the importance of religion as a form of social interaction and one that needed to be obeyed by the general society of a certain religious group. He theorized that religion's ability to excite and entice followers meant that their true desires could be directed at a vision or concept about life that is larger and more important than individual lives.

Specifically important to Durkheim's research was the observation and understanding of rituals and the power rituals have in diverting excitement and energy in a direction that is perceived to be more rational and important to the group. Interestingly enough, a large part of all religious rituals at one time or another involved body modifications. This is just the beginning of a research topic rather similar in theory and approach to the type of research Durkheim performed nearly a century ago.

Durkheim's research largely centered on the specific group of Aborigines of Australia but his findings were used in relation to all forms of religions (Durkheim, p. 47-48). Like Durkheim's the research of this study aims to be pliable to religion as a whole rather than the specific religions being analyzed, compared and contrasted. Paganism and Catholicism, while very different from one another, were chosen simply to demonstrate differences mean little when it comes to the social control religions possess. The big picture of Durkheim's research was one based off the desire to survive. In order to have a sense of survival, Durkheim argued individuals in a group must feel a level of cohesion. This means that individuals must form a collective idea of which operations of daily life are important and rational and which are not.

To the Aborigines, rituals and rites were important and rational (Durkheim, 1912. p. 292). It is in this discussion that Durkheim mentions the different specific ritual practices. Along with mourning and funeral rites, what is of larger concern is Durkheim's description and acknowledgement of the types of body modification that take place during these rituals. He goes as far as to state that no religious ceremony where blood does not have a part to play (Clarke, 1999. p. 5). Durkheim specifically mentions that body modifications in religious groups serve several purposes. In these contexts, the act of modifying one's body proved that the general collection of individuals assigned value to the same forms of expression and practice.

In one example, the marking of the flesh carries the ability to mark a person as sacred, for anything marked with a specific symbol is protected as a holy or sacred item (Durkheim, 1912. p. 95). It is the marking of a person as sacred that is the most important demonstration of devotion (Durkheim, 1912. p. 95). In another example, individuals would cut or pierce their own bodies as a symbol of their mourning for a deceased community member (Durkheim, 1912. p. 293). In some extreme cases, individuals themselves would die from the severity of the injuries they inflicted upon themselves, Ironically, Durkheim theorized that these examples of public body modification displayed cohesion in the resistance against death (Durkheim, 1912. p. 303).

In the first example, the mark of a body being sacred meant that it was protected from ills, specifically death, disease and drought. By marking a body sacred, it attributed to the body the same right to virtue that other sacred items possessed. In the second example, the body was scared as a demonstration of mourning. This shows to the group that death will not be tolerated passively (Durkheim, 1912. p. 297). More so, it is understood by the group that death is a form of deviance, mostly because it results in a lesser ability to provide for the sustainability of the group as a whole. What is particularly interesting about Durkheim's theory of body modification in the setting of religious rites or rituals, is the bond it creates metaphorically and physically. Perhaps in the largest demonstration of keeping the collective group alive and well, group members will gather physically close to one another when body modifications are being performed. They will damage their bodies along other damaged bodies as proof that their collectiveness is a virtue in that the more that stand together, the more that will be able to provide for the safety and survival of the group as a whole.

Durkheim concentrated more on how social norms within religious groups can affect those specific followers. However, it is this understanding of interactions within religious groups that concerns the research about body modifications. It can be understood how religious groups can

influence what religious individuals do to their bodies. However, it is a longer reach to theorize that one particular religion can control what other religions' followers and the secular individuals do to their bodies. In this area, Erving Goffman and Norbert Elias are particularly valuable.

### **Stigma of stigma**

Goffman's work regarding the presentation of self as well as theories surrounding stigmas seems like obvious applications to the study of body modifications in different religious groups. Considering that most of the individuals carry body modifications are seen as anti-social and deviant, it is apparent how Goffman's theories are at work here. Those who carry stigmas are not considered part of the norm. As will be discussed, this interaction can shape a group's place in society or lack thereof. It is also important to consider how such stigmas, though they may seem small, can challenge perceptions of normal behavior and decide consequences for the individuals who do not obey such norms.

Goffman's research has also been used negatively in past research regarding body modifications. It seems that far too often, the concept of body modification as deviant behavior has stunted the applications that can be made in sociological frameworks. While little research exists regarding modifications and religion, plenty of research exists regarding body modifications among youth, suicidal individuals, gangs, crime, deviance, mental illness and other immature behavior. In these examples, though relevant, it is understood how the the notion of deviance has dominated research regarding body modifications.

Not only do these body modifications carry stigmas that are important to understanding in order to discuss the perceptions they generate, the way they are used to indicate role in various groups, especially religious groups are of deep significance. Using Goffman's theories, it has been stated that those who choose to engage in body modifications, gamble with their social roles and ranks. This is especially true in religious communities where some elders are asked to mark themselves as a sign of their higher rank.

### **Elias on Behavior and Interaction**

Elias' work in power and behavior in terms of social interaction is also of importance regarding this paper. His work is especially important to this topic when considering the ways interactions within the same group can contribute to similar ways of thinking among the individuals. In terms of body modifications, these theories can be applied based on the religious group the individuals align with and

what the group's understanding of body modifications are. Despite whether the views toward body modifications are favorable or not, it can be understood that in either case, the collective opinion of the group has had an input on the outcomes.

Elias' concept of communal control in social figurations also relates to this topic. It seems that there are obvious trends in regards to body modifications depending on the religious community. Similar to Durkheim's views about the importance of social control, Elias' theories regarding the importance of such control can shed light on to how individuals within a community can be controlled and what the outcome of such control is.

## **Research Methods**

Though all religions take a position on the practice of body modifications, none have take the same position for the same reasons. This research looked at how body modifications such as piercings and tattoos are perceived within different religious groups and what their impacts are. In order to have many elements to compare and contrast, largely different religious groups needed to be studied. Thus, this research centers on Paganism and Catholicism. This research was largely inspired by Emile Durkheim's theories and approaches to studying religious individuals and their interactions with others. Based on his research, this specific research question was born from a larger hypothesis that while religions may change, they have control over individuals' bodies, what is done with their bodies and why. Goffman's theories on stigmas and presentation of the self were also key components to deciding how to proceed with the research methods.

The study of religion in terms of sociology begs for observational study. Questioning the impact of body modifications in different religious groups means doing nothing short of qualitative, in-depth interviews. The combination of these two forms of research, along with analyzing available texts, kept the crucial foundation of sociology as a science close to heart while maintaining the importance of the individual experience within a phenomenon. Specifically, this research is concerned with conducting very personal, individualized interviews in order to understand the full impact of religion as a social phenomenon on an individual. Capturing how religious individuals interact and react to body modifications of one another could only be done with the two methods discussed leading the forefront off the research. While methods such as surveying could have led to a higher amount of individual data, the quality lost in doing so would have led to an incomplete study as far as this specific research is

concerned.

Attention was paid to make sure the largest possible group of religious individuals could be observed at once. The numbers varied greatly depending on the religion. The largest Pagan group available to be observed in the area, The Coffee Cauldron, consisted of five people while dozens of Catholics were able to be observed before and after Sunday Mass at a local church. With that, the setting of these meanings had to be taken into account.

While the Catholic group met and interacted in a church with the intent to worship, the Coffee Cauldron members met at a local coffee shop to discuss what everyday life means for those who identify as Pagans. Since these differences could not be controlled for several reasons, the only way to balance them was to keep them in mind when conducting interviews and continuing with research. It is not practical to think that various religious groups gather in the same way, with the same numbers, and for the same reasons. To keep observation practices as constant as possible, no participation was included in any of the observation sessions.

Due to the nature of the question being asked, observing the way members of the same religious group interact is very important. Though the research is very specific, the overall themes of religious interaction prompted an observational element of the research. While most of the observation did not include any mentioning of body modifications, the data collected was used to determine various interview questions for individuals. For example, it was apparent that religious members generally interacted differently to other members differently than they interacted with religious leaders. This led to questions about expectations of other members and how they were perceived to vary or remain similar to expectations of religious leaders.

Observational sessions were important to the understanding of interactions of individuals in different religious groups and the formation of individual in-depth interviews, the holy grail of research data. In order to get the most useful information out of these interviews, data had to be collected in advance in order to adapt questions to individual religions and observations. This adaption process created an opportunity to ask different questions depending on what was already observed and mentioned by the individual being interviewed. Most importantly, it allowed for participants to explain themselves better than they could have using other methods of questioning. Given the time to speak freely about individuals' experiences, they were able to mention items that may not have been asked otherwise during the interview.

The adaption process provides an opportunity for individuals to discuss why they answered the

way they did. While surveys as a research method have their value in some studies and could have certainly been used in this one, the adaption of questions for individuals could not be done. Surveys and polls are generally short and provide little room to determine varying reasons and thoughts individuals have for answering the way they do. While surveys would allow for more individuals to answer the questions, the results would be virtually useless to this research without the ability to ask additional questions based on the answers and how those answers were formed.

When deciding which research methods to utilize, the research spoke for itself. The methods chosen for this study were the ones that met the needs of the research. No other methods would have allowed for the efficient gathering of useful data that observations and in-depth interviews did. Using observations and interviews created the opportunity to learn the most about interactions of religious individuals and their perceptions of each other and their religious groups. To allow different methods of research to take the lead in this research would have meant allowing a method of less ability and efficiency to generate information that could have been misunderstood, virtually useless, or both.

## **Field Research and Results**

The reaction toward the topic of body modifications and their significance and perception in different religious communities carried greatly depending on the religious group. For that reason, the field research and results from Pagans and Catholics will be discussed separately and compared at the end of the analytical sections. During the Pagan portion, the process of getting body modifications within the group will be discussed, along with the cited motivations for receiving body modifications as well as the role the entire community plays in the process. During the Catholic portion, the reaction to body modifications and the lack of discussion that takes place within the community will be detailed.

Followers of different religions have varying views on body modifications. For Catholics, the act has a history of being unacceptable, though modifications are slowly become more popular. The reason for the lack of Catholics with body modifications is largely rooted in the history of Pagans practicing such modifications (Gardyn, 2001. p. 3). However, the differences between these two religions are linked to the same goal: control of the individual body (Burton, 2001. p. 35). Burton argues religion controls the body of followers, no matter what the religion may be. Generally, Catholics are taught socially to avoid body modifications while the Pagan community embraces them. The connection is that members of both religions learn what is acceptable in terms of the body modifications based on their interactions with others in the religious group (Turner, 1999. p. 15).

## **Body Modifications in the Pagan Community**

Based on seven interviews, the Pagan community exhibits multiple reasons for getting body modifications such as tattoos, piercings, implants and brands and scars (Myers, 1997. p. 287-96). The reasons cited echo what early social theorists stated about the use of body modifications in groups. In addition to basic adornment, people within the Pagan community receive modifications as a symbol of their devotion to the religion, personal beliefs and may be pressured by their peers to get modifications based on their rank in the Pagan community (Bingsly. Nov. 3, 2010).

### **Personal Adornment**

The first motivation discussed is personal adornment. This is the act of receiving a body modification because it is aesthetically pleasing to the beholder. Other than the perception of beauty, there is no other listed rationale for receiving these types of body modification. The most popular of which would be pierced ear lobes. This motivation is the least popular in Pagan communities (Woodard, 1998. p. 3). In fact, out of the religions studied, Pagans take the “far more extreme and violent attitude toward the domination of the body” than the average person (Woodard, 1998. p.3). In addition to being more violent and extreme, modifications found in the Pagan community are typically more visible and more closely associated with tribal practices (Woodard, 1998. p. 4). As such, it is not uncommon for members in the Pagan community to give advice regarding potential body modifications.

Pagans interviewed, such as Daisy Otter and Nels Linde, stated that some Pagans do get tattooed and pierced for purely adornment purposes. As Linde explained, the personal attachment someone may have with their body modification makes it almost impossible to know whether a Pagan received a modification for aesthetic reasons without speaking to them specifically (Linde). Neither Otter nor Linde said they had any body modifications for adornment purposes.

Throughout the series of interviews conducted with members of the Pagan community, Teisha Magee was the only one with modifications she classified as being done for adornment purposes. Her modifications, pierced ear lobes, were the only modification she had (Magee. Sept. 18, 2010). As the executive director for the Sacred Paths Center, a store and meeting place catered to Pagans in the Twin Cities area, Magee said she's seen her share of body modifications and the discussions that surround them. She noted that Pagans looking to get some sort of body modification often consult other Pagans

for ideas and information on artists who can perform the modifications they seek.

### **'It Becomes a Ritual'**

The Sacred Paths Center provides an environment perfect for sharing in these discussions. The back part of the story, easily two thirds of the space, is devoted to a large alter and often used as an open room for members of the Pagan community to meet and talk throughout the day. Downstairs, Christmas lights and a single lamp light a stage used to practice belly dances on Wednesday evenings. While one of Magee's daughters is old enough to participate in the dances, the younger daughter runs the CD player and watches. Both children, in addition to their younger brother, are accustomed to seeing body modifications and the reaction they get from the community (Magee, Sept. 18, 2010).

In the main store front of the Sacred Paths Center, Magee runs a store selling locally made pottery, soaps and gems used with alters. Books of symbols are also popular. It is these books, Magee said, that process some of the most common tattooed symbols Pagans receive. She said since few Pagans have body modifications for adornment purposes, most are rooted in personal history and beliefs of those receiving modifications (Magee, Sept. 18, 2010, Woodard, 1998. p. 4). The most popular symbols include the pentacle, a five-pointed star commonly associated with Pagan rituals, dragons and fairies (Magee, Sept. 18, 2010, Linde).

### **Role of Personal History and Beliefs**

Magee and another Pagan, Lu Bingsly, said the two most popular motivations for body modifications in the Pagan community are personal history and beliefs. Arnold Van Gennep wrote in most human societies significant transitions in the life cycle are publicly recognized and culturally controlled by ritual activity. This is very true for most members of the Pagan community, and not surprising when considering Elias' theory that social interactions within the same groups create similar ways of thinking (Elias, 1996. p. 56) and Goffman's understanding that certain actions can be learned and reinforced via interdependencies of individuals within the same group (Goffman as cited in Atkinson, 2004. p. 8)

Transitions in personal life and growth within the religion are often marked by body modifications (April Jackson, Nov. 3, 2010). For Ann Jackson and her husband "Gizmo", the act of marriage was worthy of matching tattoos. On their upper right shoulders, both have an identical tattoo of a unicorn. These tattoos, highly visible and recognizable within their social groups, was more of a

symbol of their marriage than traditional wedding rings (Gizmo Jackson, Nov. 3, 2010).

Bingsly said she used tattoos in a way to mark her discovery of Paganism. The 60-year-old was raised Catholic but said her beliefs did not coincide with the religion's teachings. Instead, she turned to Paganism after experimenting with several types of religions. Upon discovering Paganism, Bingsly went on to tattoo her shoulders with Japanese symbols for “love” and joy”. She said these tattoos symbolize her personal beliefs combined with Paganism (Bingsly, Nov. 3, 2010). She noted the symbol for love is tattooed on her right side, her dominant side. The symbol for joy is tattooed on her left side. To Bingsly, the specific placement of these tattoos represents her personal philosophy and religious views. The combination, according to Bingsly, reminds her to give love and receive joy.

### **Role of Religious Practices**

Religious practices themselves are the final reason for receiving body modifications. Paganism is a religion largely based on the freedom of the individual to choose which religious path they want to take. Because of this, tattoos and other body modifications often symbolize the personal path an individual has chosen. For Bingsly and Otter, their personal paths into Paganism are represented with the tattoos they have received (Otter. Nov. 3, 2010). Otter said she believes these types of body modification are similar to the religion of Paganism itself. She argues Paganism teaches individuality and curses “cookie-cutter” people and their actions. She said she finds that personal tattoos are an example of the ways Pagans portray their individuality.

When all of these motives for receiving body modification are added up, the sum is a large portion of the Pagan community with body modifications. Linde, an editor for an online publication geared toward Pagans, says the vast majority of Pagans have some form of body modification. In fact, Linde said in a hypothetical situation where he would be wanted by the police, his description would say he is the only Pagan without tattoos (Linde. Oct. 17, 2010).

While this is obviously a dramatic statement, the concept is well presented. Linde theorizes a large portion of Pagans receive body modifications because they are the same personality type that values freedom and individuality. Thus is why they became followers of the religion in the first place (Linde. Oct. 17, 2010). Magee agrees with this assessment She said people that become followers of Paganism often feel like they don't belong anywhere else. Magee argues the general population with body modifications often feel that they are also marginalized by mainstream society. She said hateful tattoos would be the only scenario in which a Pagan's body modifications would come under judgement

from other Pagans (Magee. Oct. 17, 2010). In the end, she said, people are after the opportunity to transform themselves.

In addition to acceptance of individuality, Magee said Paganism is also very accepting of nudity (Magee. Oct. 17, 2010). She said the religion embraces nudity and acceptance of the human body. Because of this, she said Pagans often feel very comfortable in their own body and are more prone to decorate it as they see fit. Linde agreed with these statements. He also added that outside the immediate GLBT (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender) community, the Pagan community is the most accepting religious group in terms of transgendered individuals (Linde, Oct. 17, 2010). In many ways, Linde argued, transcending genders and sexes is the most radical of all body modifications. As he stated, since the Pagan community is largely accepting of these actions, tattoos and piercings are not typically a debated issue among the community.

### **Social Forces**

Though it is obvious the Pagan community embraces body modification, there are ways the community pushes for followers to receive modifications. As stated earlier, Magee noticed most Pagans put a lot of time and consideration into their ideas for modifications. During this time, she said, it is common to see discussions taking place that operate as brainstorming sessions where other members of the Pagan community contribute ideas and opinions to a person who is looking to receive a body modification. The act itself, she said, often resembles a sort of ritual (Magee. Oct. 17, 2010).

Similarly, the opportunity for body modification is often obvious within the Pagan community. The Pagan community puts a lot of effort into hosting Pagan festivals that act as large gatherings for Pagans. It is very common for tattoo artists and professional piercers to be brought to these festivals so those who attend can receive body modification (Linde. Oct. 17, 2010). The presence of tattoos and piercings are also used to promote these festivals, Linde said he has seen posters for festivals that depict body modifications. At the festival, it becomes a game for the attendees to search the festival grounds for the people with those modifications (Linde. Oct. 17, 2010). Linde also said that he has seen Pagan festivals advertised based on the opportunity for body modifications that will be present at them (Linde. Oct. 17, 2010). It was at a similar festival that Linde had his nipples pierced. Though his piercings were not part of a ritual, several Pagans at the same festival were pierced as part of a ritual (Linde. Oct. 17, 2010).

Piercings and tattoos that are done as part of rituals are largely accepted as a public display of

devotion to a particular religion or god (Durkheim, p. 95). Another display of devotion can be asked of people with long histories in the Pagan community (Bingsly. Nov. 3, 2010). Though it occurs only in some smaller Pagan communities, it is not uncommon for Pagan elders to be asked to show their devotion to the religion and their personal growth by receiving some sort of body modification (Bingsly. Nov. 3, 2010). While no Pagan interviewed personally agreed with those practices, they said there are some groups who do. However, they also noted that situations often don't progress to that point because most Pagans receive some sort of body modification before they are asked to do so (Otter. Nov. 3, 2010).

Though the Pagan religion may offer followers more freedom than other religions, there are a few examples of the social pressure the religion can put upon followers in relation to body modifications. Pagans interviewed said they felt modifications are about individual choice more than anything, however, there are some examples that show the religion itself has certain expectations about followers and their ownership of body modifications. These pressures do not seem to be as great as the pressures Durkheim noted in his study of Australian tribes. However, the findings show what Burton had predicted in terms of all types of religions having some control over the bodies of their followers.

### **People on the Fringe**

Throughout the interviews conducted in the Pagan community, there was an underlying theme of the Pagan community being one “on the fringe”, that is, a group with behaviors and beliefs largely outside of norms. Magee said individuals come to Paganism because they feel they don't belong anywhere else (Magee, Oct. 17, 2010). This perception was commonly repeated in the personal stories of many individuals. Gizmo Jackson came from a Catholic background and was training to be a priest before he was kicked out of the program. After participating with several other religions, he found his way to Paganism (Gizmo Jackson, Nov. 3, 2010). Other interview participants had similar stories of experimenting with other religions before becoming Pagan. Otter was raised to be Jewish, a very restrictive religion in her opinion (Otter, Nov. 3, 2010) and April Jackson was raised in a Roman Catholic household (April Jackson, Nov. 3, 2010). As Magee stated, individuals turn to Paganism because they want to transcend themselves, and sometimes body modifications become part of that process. She argued that Paganism is more largely about that transcendence than most other religions (Magee, Oct. 17, 2010).

Though not implicitly stated, the items in Magee's store reflect the theme of Pagans as a people

on the fringe. In Pagan teachings, every natural item such as rivers, trees and stones have souls. Often times, stones are used a source of power or comfort to Pagans. In Pagan teachings, certain stones have certain meanings and powers (Lasor, Dec. 1, 2010). The most common type of stone found in Magee's store is that of amethyst, a purple or pink crystal. In Pagan teachings, this stone represents sobriety, a theme that repeated several times throughout Magee's store. There are self-help books and flyers in the back common room searching for fellow recovering alcoholics and addicts to start a Pagan support group for people recovering from addictions. Though it cannot be implied that more Pagans suffer from addiction when compared to the general population, these symbols show that Pagans can and do turn to one other for comfort when it comes to topics often frowned upon by society. As Magee stated, the group forms a camaraderie. Of the topics largely frowned upon by society, their religion is the most common part of their lives they share.

It is impossible to ignore the fringe component often associated with individuals who chose to receive body modifications. In society, tattoos and body piercings carry a stigma, that is, these items are often used as a basis to evaluate a person negatively (Goffman, 1963. p. 327). It is obvious how these perceptions dominate social research regarding body modifications (Atkinson, 2004. p. 2). DeMello points out that sociologists often discuss body modifications in terms of social deviance (Copes and Forsyth, 1993. p. 83-89). Social psychologists state people with body modifications cannot conform their behavior to social norms (Williams, p. 94-96). Most other reports regarding body modifications surround themes of irrational youth and gang activity (Armstrong. p. 8-9, Armstrong and McConnel p. 22-24, Grief and Hewitt, p. 26-31, Houghton, Durkin, Parry, Turbelt and Odgers, p. 420-425, Bazan, Harris and Lorentze, p. 3-4 and Martin, p. 860-861). In addition to youth-related issues, tattoos are often written about in terms of substance abuse, sex, suicide and self-harm (Brouthwade, Arriola and Robilland, p. 5-16, Terry and Finkel, 2002. p. 1-8, Roberts and Ryan, p 1058-1063, Colleen and Rivardo, 2010. p. 6, Stim and Andrea, 2008. p. 1-5, Koch, Roberts, Armstrong and Owen, 2004. p.1 and Kom, p. 85-100).

These articles are examples of themes discussed by theorists and other researchers. The act of body modification alone is cited by Myers as the most radical, non-mainstream actions possible (Myers, 1992. p. 31). This is largely because inflicting pain to leave a permanent mark is often associated with anti-social behavior (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990. p. 27 and Loimer and Werner, 1992. p. 167-174). Not surprisingly, body modifications are becoming most popular in subcultures (Klesse, 1999. p. 36 and Maseia-Lees and Sharpe, 1992. p. 187) as these actions indicate social

membership (Douglas, 1966. p. 53). However, committing to these body modifications obviously create a basis for alienation, the increasing feeling of people from their role in a culture perceived as cohesive and substantial (Friedman, 1996 p. 81) of the individual. This type of alienation of body modifications has a long history of marking social outcasts. Slaves and low-class miners have been marked by tattoos to the forehead (Gustafason, 1997. p. 221).

Though body modifications such as tattoos and piercings are becoming more popular, they are far from being accepted as mainstream behavior. In fact, body modifications are most popular in terms of fashion. As such, it is argued that tattooing and other modifications are the most extreme form of anti-fashion (Pothemus, 1995. p 6 and Pthemus and Proctor, 1978. p. 16). Curry also argues that tattoos will never be true examples of fashion, because an individual must be committed to these permanent markings. Unlike other forms of fashion, they cannot be changed as seasons and trends change (Curry, 1993. p. 69-82). John Gloning, a tattoo artist in St. Cloud, Minnesota, denounces the claim that body modifications are fashion. He also stated that he believes Christians remain the most judgmental group of people, religious or not, when it comes to body modifications. However, within the body modification community, Gloning mentioned that Pagans are the least ridiculed for their modifications (Gloning, Sept. 28, 2010).

Body modifications continue to be a form of self-expression and decoration considered mostly anti-social and popular among Pagans, a group of religious individuals considered to live on the fringe of society themselves. It is no surprise these modifications continue to be popular and play a significant role in Pagan communities as ways to connect with other Pagans. It is also apparent that the very religious teachings and culture of Pagans are accepting of such modifications.

### **Social Significance of Body Modifications in the Catholic Community**

The fringe element of body modifications is no surprise to the 15 individuals of the Catholic community interviewed for research. The following section will demonstrate the understanding of body modifications expressed in the Catholic community and testimonies regarding the lack of discussion about the topic. In addition to a high degree of importance placed on the location and size of body modifications, many interview participants from the Catholic community admitted the topic of body modifications goes undiscussed in their churches and social circles.

### **Re-emergence of the Fringe Element**

Throughout interviews with the Catholic community, it became very clear that those with body modifications were perceived to be outside of the norm regarding the Catholic community. As Jones states, in the mainstream often views body modifications as a sign of rebellion (Jones, 2007. p. 2), something that would be devastating to the group system (Durkheim, 1912. p. 295-300). Atkinson also states that tattooing is considered anti-social in the Catholic community because the religion, as a whole, defines the body as a sacred place (Atkinson, 2003. p. 7). In these ways, body modifications are considered to be an act of deviance, something people with strong religious backgrounds and beliefs are less likely to engage in (Brown, Parks, Zimmerman and Philips, 2001. p. 696-705).

The one exception would be pierced earlobes on a woman. Throughout interviews with four female Catholics in their teens and twenties, all of them had pierced earlobes. However, none of them had other piercings or tattoos. Robert Michaels, a Catholic who was visiting St. Mary's Cathedral for a Sunday evening mass said the community is most accepting of pierced earlobes on a woman and least accepting of tattoos (Michaels, Dec. 12, 2010).

St. Mary Cathedral Deacon Richard Scheierl made it clear he was no stranger to the fringe element of body modifications. Though he stated he found that body modifications were most common among younger people, he stated he felt fewer and fewer Catholics were getting body modifications compared to ten years ago. Though he felt there were fewer examples of body modification in the Catholic community, he mentioned the act had become gender-neutral compared to ten years ago (Scheierl, Dec. 8, 2010). This is also acknowledged by Stweetman who found that tattooing and other body modifications are no longer divided among sexes nor social classes as compared to 30 years ago (Sweetman, p. 72-74) and Shilling who said tattooing is now an act carried out by people in all types of social roles, statuses and occupations (Shilling, 1993. 57). Still, it was found 20 percent of survey respondents said their religion prohibited them from getting a tattoo (Gardyn and Whelan, 2001. p. 3).

The topic of modification as a deviant behavior was discussed with St. Cloud tattoo artist Scott Munser, the owner of a tattoo studio. He said it was very apparent from examples such as church services and school uniforms that religions in general find strength in the whole rather than the individuals (Munser, Sept. 18, 2010). In the Catholic community specifically, Munser said he could understand how getting tattooed could be associated with anarchism from the group, something he admitted any strong, cohesive group would want to avoid (Munser, Sept. 18, 2010).

## **Factor of Extreme**

Though interview participants agreed that body modifications can be viewed as a form of deviance and are surely outside the norm of the community, they had mixed reactions to the significance of body modifications in regard to their religious beliefs. Unlike the Pagan community whose views on body modifications did not vary greatly, some Catholics found body modifications to be largely unacceptable, such as Michaels, while others, such as fellow Catholics Ellen Hemmers and Marci Lokowski, were far more understanding of the practices.

This divide in perceptions is something that has been echoed in Catholic communities within discussions of the body since the Bible was written (Synott, 1992. p. 4). Because several “contributors” are said to have written different parts of the bible, there are some examples of disagreements between writers in regards to the purpose of the body. Ultimately, this creates a divide in the view of the body in terms of “ascetics” and “moderates” (Synott, 1992. p. 5). While Paul wrote about having a deep respect for the body as an extension of Christ's body, Jesus Christ's account varies. Though Christ does discuss taking care of the physical body at length, he also argues a leg or arm should be cut off if they, for some reason, make the beholder lose their faith (Synott, 1992, p. 2). In these cases, there are varying degrees of importance placed on actual body parts and the significance they carry.

Though ancient, this divide is one that exists currently, especially in regard to body modifications. However, research suggests a new way of measuring the likelihood that modifications will be accepted in the Catholic community. The system depends on how extreme the body modifications are. As suggested by Michaels, some modifications are more likely to be accepted because they are considered less extreme (Michaels, Dec. 12, 2010). This is a belief echoed by Scheierl who said he believes the human body is perfect as created by God and does not need to be altered in any way. However, he said he would be more accepting of a small tattoo that is “tasteful” rather than a large tattoo or series of tattoos (Scheierl, Dec. 8, 2010).

Ben Caduff of the Newman Center, a Catholic church situated near the St. Cloud State University campus agreed with these assessments. He said larger tattoos would most likely receive a bigger reaction from other Catholics (Caduff, Dec. 9, 2010). The students who frequent the Newman Center agreed with Caduff. Of the seven student Catholics, the four women were the only to have body modifications. Their only modifications were pierced earlobes. McKayla Fredricksen said tattoos are less accepted the more obscene they become (Fredricksen, Dec. 9, 2010). Lindsey Schmidt and Sean Anders agreed with this statement, but they stressed the Catholic teaching to not judge others (Schmidt, Dec. 9, 2010 and Anders, Dec. 9, 2010). Anders said while people may come to church with obscene

imagery, the perception would be that they are trying to change their lives for the better and attending church has become part of that process (Anders, Dec. 9, 2010).

Student Catholic interviewees said they all came from Catholic backgrounds and most came from small communities where body modifications were very uncommon. Some said this helped to shape their understanding of what body modifications were considered extreme and why. Angie Sanderman said body piercings to the tongue, naval, genitals or nipples would receive the most opposition because they appear to promote sexual behavior (Sanderman, Dec. 9, 2010). Schmidt, who comes from a small town, said she didn't know anyone with tattoos or body piercings outside the earlobes until she came to St. Cloud State University. Though she stated she was far more used to modifications now, talking about piercings in the back of the neck and cartilage of the ear caused her to laugh because they seemed "so extreme." In comparison, such piercings, especially those to the cartilage of the ear, would be considered rather normal in the Pagan community.

Another Catholic student, Andy Kummrow, said that body modifications such as brandings and scarification would be deemed the most extreme and thus foster the most reactions and attention. He said people with brandings or scarification would be perceived as mentally un-well in the Catholic community (Kummrow, Dec. 9, 2010). Andrea Kolshiol agreed with this assessment saying the common reaction from the community would be that an individual with brandings or scarification would be an individual badly in need of help from the community (Kolshiol, Dec. 9, 2010). The only person of the group to have witnessed branding or scarification was Frie who said he had seen U.S. Marines brand their dog tags on themselves when he was in the military (Frie, Dec. 9, 2010). This was a topic he seemed to shrug off when he compared them African cultures where scarification is perceived to be a normal form of decoration and initiation (Frie, Dec. 9, 2010).

Andrew Ziggler, a body piercer in St. Cloud, Minnesota disagrees with Kummrow. As a body piercer, he said he is sometimes hired outside of his work at the studio he works at to brand people or perform scarification. He also noted he is an ordained minister despite his lack of religious affiliation and has been called upon to perform marriages in the St. Cloud area (Ziggler, Sept. 18, 2010). And even though Ziggler has done extensive piercings, he said they're only going to get "weirder." He points to a rising trend in the piercing community: the hybrid human. Ziggler said he has seen several examples of people implanting small computer screen in their forearms and incorporating other digital material in their body modifications. While these examples are rare and usually experimental, he said they prove that body modifications have a tendency to push the envelope and get even more extreme

than previously thought (Ziggler, Sept. 18, 2010 and Pitts, 2004. p. 1-7).

## **Content**

In addition to the relative level of extremeness associated with body modifications in the Catholic community, the content was also often considered when discussing the likely reactions from the Catholic community. Scheierl noted that in recent days, he had spoken to a young woman who had gotten four biblical verses tattooed on her upper arm. Though he said he did not like the tattoos, he was pleased with her excitement and found the tattoos were a way for the young woman to declare her faith (Scheierl, Dec. 8, 2010). This finding coincides with Albin's theory that body modifications incorporate individual elements as choices that are influenced by cultures (Albin, 2006. p. 1).

For Hemmers, working in the local prison ministries has exposed her to the many different types of content that can be incorporated into tattoos (Hemmers, Dec. 12, 2010). She said many of the inmates she works with have tattoos and many incorporate religion into them. Because of her work in the prisons, she feels that tattoos are often wrongly associated with crime and believes humans have no right to judge others based on their appearance (Hemmers, Dec. 12, 2010).

Sanderman also believes the content of the body modification matters. She was the only Catholic interviewed who mentioned she would like to receive a tattoo in the future. However, any tattoos she received, she said, would have to relate to her family or her faith (Sanderman, Dec. 9, 2010). Sanderman's interview is an example of Jones' findings that for some Catholics, tattoos are a way for individuals to make their identities in the world visible Featherstone also found that tattoos can be a way for individuals to make their identities known (Featherstone, 1999. p. 1), and Keel found that tattoos can be common ways of declaring something to the world (Keel, 2007. p. 17). In Sanderman's example, she would accept her future potential tattoos because they would mark her as a member of a family or church.

As Gloning pointed out, the location of a tattoo plays an important role in some religious groups (Gloning, Sept. 18, 2010). In his six years of experience, Gloning said he has noticed many people who consider themselves Christian or Catholic receive tattoos that can be well-covered by clothing. Caduff agreed with this. He said, in his opinion, the two most likely reasons why people get tattoos in places they can be hidden are employment and judgement (Caduff, Dec. 9, 2010). He said not only are people afraid of being judged by their family, community and peers, but they are also afraid visible tattoos will prevent them from finding stable employment (Caduff, Dec. 9, 2010).

## **Lessons**

As mentioned before, biblical teachings relating to the body vary depending on the section of the bible a reading is coming from. There is also some debate of whether or not the bible clearly discusses body modifications such as tattoos and piercings. Though some argue Leviticus 19:28 states “You shall not make any gashes on your flesh for the dead or tattoo any marks upon you. I am the LORD,” (Jones, 2007. p. 1 and Keel, 2007. p. 2), some argue the translation is incorrect. Both Caduff and Scheierl said they are unaware of any biblical text that directly discusses tattoos and body piercings (Caduff, Dec. 9, 2010 and Scheierl, Dec. 8, 2010).

What is certain is the Catholic community has a long history of accepting and forbidding body modifications. Though for the majority of its existence, the Catholic church has rejected tattooing (Jones, 2007. p. 8), pilgrimages to Jerusalem have traditionally been marked by a tattoo (Ellis, 2008. p. 81). This exception, old and translated, defies other rules regarding body modifications throughout the history of the Catholic church. Goodall points out that the Catholic belief system is ultimately one that preaches the practice of keeping the body pure (Goodall, 1999. p. 4).

This fundamental teaching, according to Catholics interviewed, is what keeps most Catholics from obtaining some sort of body modification. Schmidt points out that from very young ages, Catholics are taught the body is their temple and something they need to take care of (Schmidt, Dec. 9, 2010). Beyond this general teaching though, many interviewees said the topic of body modification never comes up in their church. Don Peterson said the topic is just something that never rises to the surface and that he never really thought about it despite the fact he has one tattoo (Peterson, Dec. 12, 2010). Ann and Mark Toner agreed with this assessment, saying body modifications are never talked about in church and are never brought up in social circles made up of Catholics (Ann Toner, Dec. 12, 2010 and Mark Toner, Dec. 12, 2010).

## **Comparison of Religious Communities**

The lack of discussion is the first and most apparent difference between the Catholic community of St. Cloud, Minnesota and the Pagan community based in the Twin Cities area. While the Pagan community often discusses body modifications, especially when a member mentions they plan on receiving one (Magee, Oct. 17, 2010 and Turner, 1999. p. 3-5), members of the Catholic community never discuss such topics and seemed surprised when related questions were brought up in the

interviewing process.

While the Catholic community has some sort basic teachings that are perceived to be anti-body modification, the Pagan community has no such teachings. This is largely because no grand text or teaching dominates the Pagan community. In fact, it is a largely eclectic religion where people chose their own religious path and religious texts are written by ordinary Pagans based on their personal beliefs (Bingsly, Nov. 3, 2010 and Otter, Nov. 3, 2010). Though the level to which Catholics are taught about body modifications is debatable, it is apparent that they do receive some basic education on the importance of the body.

One similarity between the two groups stems from the content of their tattoos. In both religious communities, when tattoos do exist, they are largely linked to religion or family. Though tattoos are far more popular in the Pagan community, it is uneducated to say no Catholics receive tattoos. Of those that do, topics such as their devotion to religion and their family are popular themes (Scheierl, Dec. 8, 2010). In the Pagan community, personal history and faith are also important topics. In the Pagan community, it is mostly rare to have modifications for adornment purposes because most modifications are done in devotion to the religion (Magee, Oct. 17, 2010).

The most significant and obvious similarity between the two religious groups is the ability of the religion and the community that surrounds it to have an impact on what an individual chooses to do with their body. While it is obvious the Catholic community does not foster body modifications and the Pagan community does, the ability for both religious groups to have social power over the individual is the same. As Elias notes, control over actions of the individual is crucial to the survival of a social figuration (Elias, 1983. p. 1). In this way, we can see how the promotion of body modifications in the Pagan community as well as the Catholic community denounces them promotes bonds (Klesse, 1999. p. 15-38, Myers, 1997. p. 2, Adler, 1997. p. 516-532, Mifflin, 1997, p. 8, Rosenbalt, 1997. p. 287-334 and Atkinson, 2002. p. 219-235).

## **Conclusion**

Using frameworks and theories established by Emile Durkheim, Norbert Elias and Erving Goffman, this research aimed to look at the ways in which body modifications are perceived and watch significance they carry in Catholic communities and Pagan communities. Though the two religions are vastly different, the initial theory going into the research was confirmed. This research argues that despite their differences, Catholic communities and Pagan communities within Minnesota possess a

certain level of control over what their followers do with their bodies.

It is apparent that there are several differences between the religions such as the level of acceptance of body modifications, the history of acceptance (or lack thereof), discussions and teachings that surround the topic of body modifications and how many of each religion's followers have received body modifications, to what extent and why. However, all of these differences can be explained using similar theories regarding group interaction, stigmas and behavior.

To reach such conclusions, much energy was put into gathering academic research, articles and theories. Some of these articles supplied historical and trend analysis while others aimed to propose theories and find deeper meanings. This amount of research was complimented through several exhaustive, in-depth interviews.

Of those interviewed, those who affiliate with either Paganism or Catholicism were in the majority. Since much of the research was concerned with the significance of body modification to the average follower of these religions, such interviews were of deep concern. In addition to interviews with religious followers, religious leaders were interviewed when possible. Those who perform body modifications were also interviewed an effort to get a outsider perspective on body modifications within religious groups.

The outcomes of these attempts to research are generally what was expected, as is the conclusion of the research efforts. However, there remain questions that arose during the research process that could be answered in order to understand broader themes in the sociology of religion as well as the impact of body modification on society as a whole.

An obvious extension of this research would include a further analysis of how members of different religious groups react to the findings and how their potential reactions could be explained. To some extent, it must be understood that several types of groups exhibit control over the individuals that are part of that group. Religious groups should also be included despite the intentions and goals of these groups.

Information and further interviews regarding whether or not members within the religious groups agree with the results of this research could be added to make the topic more well-understood. Opposition to the findings could press to further research and analysis which would eventually create a stronger, more established argument.

During the interview process, it was observed that zero persons belonging to ethnic minority groups were present during church services and Pagan discussions. Further research into this topic

could determine any reasons for such observations. Other than race, there were no examples of misrepresentation within both Pagans and Catholics in Minnesota. The numbers were evenly distributed along lines of gender, education, age and social status. Finding that race is the exception to this observation provides an interesting topic for further analysis.

Though initially disregarded as useful, this research could have benefited from including surveys in addition to in-depth interviews and academic research. Though only basic questions could have been answered, a larger pool of data could have been collected. This larger pool could have indicated any trends in responses that could have been used within the interview and research processes. Any way of contributing to the understanding of communities and gaining insight to the perceptions that exist within the religious communities should have been considered as a potentially useful method.

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#### Interview Participants

Bingsly, Lu: Pagan

Race: White

Gender: Woman

Age: 61

Interview on: Nov. 3, 2010.

Caduff, Ben: Director of Campus Ministry and Social Concerns Coordinator for the Newman Center, a Catholic Church near St. Cloud State University in St. Cloud, Minnesota.

Race: White

Gender: Man

Age: 41

Interviewed on: Dec. 9, 2010.

Fredricksen, McKayla: St. Cloud State University Student and Catholic practicing at the Newman Center, a Catholic Church near St. Cloud State University in St. Cloud, Minnesota.

Race: White

Gender: Woman

Age: 20

Interviewed on: Dec. 9, 2010.

Frie, Brant: St. Cloud State University Student and Catholic practicing at the Newman Center, a Catholic Church near St. Cloud State University in St. Cloud, Minnesota.

Race: White

Gender: Man

Age: 23

Interviewed on: Dec. 9, 2010.

Gloing, John: Professional tattoo artist at Olde Town Tattoo in St. Cloud, Minnesota.

Race: White

Gender: Man

Age: 27

Interviewed on: Sept. 18, 2010.

Hemmers, Ellen: Catholic practicing at St. Mary's Cathedral in St. Cloud, Minnesota and volunteer prison minister.

Race: White

Gender: Woman  
Age: 56  
Interviewed on: Dec. 12, 2010

Jackson, April: Pagan  
Race: White  
Gender: Woman  
Age: 50  
Interviewed on: Nov. 3, 2010.

Kolshiol, Andrea: St. Cloud State University Student and Catholic practicing at the Newman Center, a Catholic Church near St. Cloud State University in St. Cloud, Minnesota.  
Race: White  
Gender: Woman  
Age: 21  
Interviewed on: Dec. 9, 2010.

Kummrow, Andy: St. Cloud State University Student and Catholic practicing at the Newman Center, a Catholic Church near St. Cloud State University in St. Cloud, Minnesota.  
Race: White  
Gender: Man  
Age: 24  
Interviewed on: Dec. 9, 2010.

Jackson, Gizmo: Pagan  
Race: White  
Gender: Man  
Age: 55  
Interviewed on: Nov. 3, 2010.

Lasor, Karen: Pagan  
Race: White  
Gender: Woman  
Age: 37  
Interviewed on: Dec. 1, 2010.

Linde, Nels: Editor of online Pagan publication.  
Race: White  
Gender: Man  
Age: 47  
Interviewed: Oct. 17, 2010.

Lokowski, Marci: Catholic practicing at St. Mary's Cathedral in St. Cloud, Minnesota.  
Race: White  
Gender: Woman  
Age: 81

Interviewed: Dec. 9, 2010.

Magee, Tiesha: Executive director of Sacred Paths Center, a community center and Pagan information center in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Race: White

Gender: Woman

Age: 38

Interviewed on: Oct. 17, 2010 and Nov. 3, 2010.

Michaels, Robert: Catholic practicing at St. Mary's Cathedral in St. Cloud, Minnesota.

Race: White

Gender: Man

Age: 47

Interviewed on: Dec. 12, 2010.

Munser, Scott: Owner of Olde Town Tattoo studio in St. Cloud, Minnesota and professional tattoo artist.

Race: White

Gender: Man

Age: 43

Interviewed on: Sept. 18, 2010.

Otter, Daisy: Pagan

Race: White

Gender: Woman

Age: 43

Interviewed on: Nov. 3, 2010.

Peterson, Don: Catholic practicing at St. Mary's Cathedral in St. Cloud, Minnesota and volunteer at St. Mary's Cathedral.

Race: White

Gender: Man

Age: 52

Interviewed on: Dec. 12, 2010.

Sanderman, Angie: St. Cloud State University Student and Catholic practicing at the Newman Center, a Catholic Church near St. Cloud State University in St. Cloud, Minnesota.

Race: White

Gender: Woman

Age: 19

Interviewed: Dec. 9, 2010.

Scheierl, Richard: Rev. Deacon of St. Mary's Cathedral, a Catholic church in St. Cloud, Minnesota.

Race: White

Gender: Man

Age: 66

Interviewed on: Dec. 8, 2010.

Schmidt, Lindsey: St. Cloud State University Student and Catholic practicing at the Newman Center, a Catholic Church near St. Cloud State University in St. Cloud, Minnesota.

Race: White

Gender: Woman

Age: 22

Interviewed on: Dec. 9, 2010.

Toner, Ann: Catholic practicing at St. Mary's Cathedral in St. Cloud, Minnesota.

Race: White

Gender: Woman

Age: 47

Interviewed on: Dec. 12, 2010.

Toner, Mark: Catholic practicing at St. Mary's Cathedral in St. Cloud, Minnesota.

Race: White

Gender: Man

Age: 53

Interviewed on: Dec. 12, 2010

Ziggler, Andrew: Professional body piercer at Olde Town Tattoo in St. Cloud, Minnesota

Race: White

Gender: Man

Age: 32

Interviewed on: Sept. 18, 2010.