

The Religion of Tarot

by
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Abstract

While Tarot cards are widely known as a fortune-telling tool, the practice of reading Tarot can also be understood as a spiritual practice. Tarot cards have undergone significant reinterpretations since their origins as a secular parlour game in the fifteenth century. Largely due to the influence of occult and alchemical thinkers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, today Tarot has emerged as a mystical tool for divination, enlightenment, and spiritual self-help. This study seeks to understand the religious dimensions of Tarot for Tarot readers. Drawing upon the five dimensions of religiosity model developed by Rodney Stark and Charles Glock, this thesis reveals the inherent religiosity of Tarot reading for practitioners. However, this thesis also reveals the need for a more nuanced model of religion than that offered by Stark and Glock. The thesis argues that while the Stark and Glock model of religiosity can help reveal some of the spiritual dimensions of Tarot practice, its institutional bias fails to account for other important spiritual dimensions of Tarot religiosity.

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Chapter 1: The importance of Tarot as a Religious Practice

Tarot is a form of religious communication, a practice of self-help, a predictive and meditative tool. A growing number of people from diverse religious backgrounds use Tarot as their religious practice. Tarot was initially developed in Western Europe between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as a game. During the enlightenment (seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), theorists who were interested in occult studies aligned Tarot with a variety of spiritual systems—such as the Qabalah, Christian mysticism, astrology, numerology, and Hermeticism—in an attempt to understand the secrets of early man and to reconnect with God. (Decker, Depaulis and Dummett, 1996; Farley 2009; Waite 1909). The belief that Tarot held the secrets of ancient knowledge developed in the late seventeenth century. Since then, such beliefs and ideologies evolved, through the writings of different occult theorists working with the cards, into the systems that we have today. For many practitioners today, Tarot’s utility in helping to foster a connection to God and inner divinity shapes their relationship to Tarot. Despite Tarot’s various stories of origins, as pointed out by scholars Ronald Decker, Thierry Depaulis and Michael Dummett (1996), there was a conflation of spirituality and Tarot symbolism that occurred in its early history and remains relevant today. The purpose of this research is to understand the religiosity of Tarot practitioners. By examining how they use cards in their daily lives, I will demonstrate the individualistic and dynamic processes of religiosity among Tarot readers.

Despite Tarot’s growing popularity, there are still misunderstandings surrounding Tarot cards and practitioners. An example of the misconceptions that can occur about the

use of Tarot is demonstrated in the case of Mountain Magic, a New Age store in Richlands, Virginia. In 2018, Mark Mullins, a practitioner and store owner, wanted to read Tarot in his store and applied for a town license to do so legally. Mullins' Tarot practice made him a target of various Christian church groups, whose members believed that the act of reading Tarot was a form of devil worship. The town council responded to the pressure brought to bear by these church groups by turning down Mullins' request for a license to read Tarot in his store (according to field notes, February 13, 2018). Almost all of the informants in this study have experienced similar misunderstandings about their Tarot practice, although Mullan's experience is a more extreme example. Fear and misconceptions about Tarot are widespread.¹ While the study of fear and misunderstandings of Tarot is not the topic of my thesis, it is one of the reasons why this study is essential.

Media representations of Tarot practitioners are usually unfavourable. In Canada, a W5 exposé on Tarot practitioners called *Fortune Takers* presented Tarot readers as frauds preying upon people while they are vulnerable. While fraud undoubtedly exists, most practitioners, both those who read Tarot professionally and those who read them privately, indicate that their purpose is to help people, including themselves, find meaning

¹In the Disney film *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), Dr. Facilier is a witch doctor that uses Tarot at the beginning of the movie, demonstrating that Tarot is a link to the world of evil and darkness. The beginning movie sequence depicts a witch doctor using Tarot to see into the heart and desires of Prince Naveen and his royal valet Lawrence. Tarot shows the weakness of these two men, and Dr. Facilier uses that weakness to exploit them. In the television series *Versailles* (2015 – 2018), Madame Agathe is a Tarot reader who is depicted as a satanic coven leader and is a witch. According to “Versailles Wiki,” fan page Madame Agathe is based on the life of the famous French fortune-teller Catherin Monvoisin. As a result, Tarot is linked to the world of ‘evil’ and ‘sin’ (https://versailles-tv.fandom.com/wiki/Madame_Agathe, 2019). Other pop cultural references to Tarot can be found in Emily Augers book *Cartomancy and Tarot in Film: 1940-2010*.

and direction in life. W5 did not present the use of Tarot as a religious practice, nor did it present the querents² who were seeking answers to their life's questions from Tarot readers in any religious context; the presentation was strictly from a secular and skeptical point of view. While discussing the uses of Tarot, the practitioners in this study emphasized the vulnerability of their clients seeking spiritual clarity of Tarot in a hostile climate. The practitioners in this study see themselves as offering insight, clarity and support for clients - a very different perspective from that presented by W5 in *Fortune Takers*.

This thesis will argue that we can uncover the piety implicit in Tarot practice by drawing on the 5 categories of piety outlined by Stark and Glock. The ways that practitioners use Tarot in their daily lives and how they express their own religious individual practices in relationship to Tarot can be successfully illustrated by using the 5 dimensions of religiosity as an organizing schema for discussing Tarot spirituality. While the academic writings of Ronald Decker, Thierry Depaulis and Michael Dummett all question the legitimacy of Tarot as a mystical tool, it is none the less used as such by practitioners. The historical evidence Decker, Depaulis and Dummett present suggests that people are misinformed about Tarot's history or purpose of use. For example, Decker, Depaulis and Dummett point to the influential early writings of Antoine Court de Géblin (1725-1784), an early occultist upon whose many ideas and beliefs about Tarot were founded:

² Querent is defined by the Oxford dictionary as a person who asks or enquires; specifically, a person who consults an astrologer, fortune-teller, medium, etc. For the purpose of this thesis a querent is the person asking the questions in relation to Tarot, regardless if it is the practitioner themselves or someone they are reading for.

Among the more absurd results of Court de Gébelin's method of intuitive insight into origins [of Tarot] is the ground of his inclusion in this book: an essay on the Tarot contained in *Monde primitive*, Volume VIII published in 1781. All his other bizarre speculations have long been forgotten: this one essay continues to be read as having been the fountain-head of the entire occult Tarot mystique (Decker, Depaulis, Dummett 1996, 57).

The academic mockery of occultist/spiritual ways of knowing is not surprising, given the rationalist emphasis of academic scholarship. However, the apparent disdain of Decker, Depaulis and Dummett towards an influential source text for the spiritual interpretation of Tarot reveals the need for a more balanced analysis of Tarot and religion.³ Like the Christian critics of Mark Mullins, academic critics fail to understand the religiosity of Tarot practitioners. Practitioners do not willfully embrace “bizarre” or “satanic” practices: instead, their beliefs are rooted in an identifiable and understandable pattern of religiosity that deserves our attention rather than dismissal.

This thesis will specifically look at how Tarot constitutes a unique, individual, solitary and dynamic religious practice that remains largely unrecognized and under researched by religious, secular and academic analysis. Most of the academics that have written about Tarot have done so from a variety of perspectives, including history (Farley), art and culture (Auger), sociology (Sosteric) and folklore (Woods) rather than religious studies. The view that Tarot cards are a tool used by people who practice religiosity has not been studied. When Tarot is addressed in a religious, academic context,

³The disbelief of belief from an academic point of view is also shared by Juliette Wood, a folklorist, who said: “While these attitudes to the modern Tarot are an interesting innovation, it is equally inescapable that very little is anchored in historical reality” (Wood 1998, 16). Mike Sosteric, a sociology academic, stated in his article “A Sociology of Tarot”: “Tarot was understood and developed as a device for ideological indoctrination that the history of the tarot was so blithely ignored and a new one built” (Sosteric 2014, 373).

it is often included under the broad and ill-defined category of New Age. Though Tarot cards are often associated with New Age, there is something to be learned by looking closer at Tarot practitioners alone to understand the practice more fully and to see how Tarot cards are used religiously. Like other members of New Age communities, Tarot practitioners have a nuanced and complex belief system that can and does vary from person to person, yet also contains a common core to the practice. This thesis will help unpack the religiosity of Tarot practice and can help shed light on a unique element of New Age spirituality.

The study of religion is complex and is shaped by one's culture, religious background, education and upbringing. To examine the religiosity of Tarot in connection to its practice, I will build on Robert Orsi's concept of lived religion (2003), Leonard Primiano's concept of vernacular religion (1995), and most significantly on Rodney Stark and Charles Y. Glock's categories of the five dimensions of religiosity (1968). By considering Tarot from a religious studies perspective that includes lived religion, we gain a more complete and less mocking picture of how Tarot is used by its practitioners. Tarot practitioners share common elements of their practice while at the same time, allowing for the flexibility of personal beliefs to integrate into each person's practice. Whether the practitioner takes a more secular approach or a more spiritual approach, there are elements of religiosity that remain consistent throughout each individual's practice.

Chapter 2: New Age Religion

2.1 Introduction

Tarot cards are commonly associated with New Age religion. This literature review will provide an overview of New Age religion and discuss how Tarot provides insight into the study of the New Age movement in the twenty-first century. Tarot cards and the ways in which practitioners use them can be defined as religious. Academic definitions of religion are constantly changing and adapting to new religious ideas, allowing for a wide-ranging approach to what is considered religious. For example, Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge define religion as “human organizations primarily engaged in providing general compensators based on supernatural assumptions” (Stark and Bainbridge 1985, 8). Nature religion scholar Catherine Albanese defines religion as “a symbolic center and the cluster of beliefs, behaviours, and values that encircles it” (Albanese 1990, 7). As the definition of religion progressively changes, so must our ideas around what we consider to be religious.

Tarot is a deck of symbolic cards, and they encapsulate sacred and transcendent meaning for their practitioners. Tarot is long overdue for a study of its religious dimensions for users. To begin, I will explore two different issues related to the study of Tarot in the context of New Age religion. The first examines whether New Age should be viewed as a religion, and methods of approaching such a diverse phenomenon as the New Age category from within the perspective of religious studies. The works of Stark and Glock (1968), Stark and Bainbridge (1985), Gordon Melton (1992), Antione Faivre

(1995), Robert Orsi (2003, 2004) and Lenard Primiano (1995) will inform this section of my work.

The second area of study, in chapter three, looks at the history of Tarot and the development of the Tarot system. Additionally, it examines the conflicting viewpoints on the origins of Tarot. I will examine the works of Ronald Decker (1996, 2002), Thierry Depaulis (1996), Michael Dummett (1996, 2002) and Helen Farley (2009) to unpack Tarot's historical development and show how Tarot's transformation over time provides a basis for religious ideologies still in use today. A close examination of both these issues will provide a foundation for my analysis section that addresses questions related to the practice of Tarot from the viewpoint of Tarot practitioners.

2.2 Religion and New Age Scholarship

Most definitions of New Age consist of a list of a hotch-potch of activities, beliefs and generalization that do not always fit within the parameters of what scholars would define as religious. For example, religious studies scholar James R. Lewis says the following about New Age:

The vagueness of this subculture is further complicated by the manner in which it tends, particularly at its more diffused extremities, to cross certain taken-for-granted boundaries and 'infiltrate' subcommunities that one might anticipate would be hostile to nontraditional spirituality. There are, for example, many members of mainstream religious denominations who practice yoga and meditation, explore alternative healing practices, follow astrological advice, and even believe in reincarnation. Such people often continue to consider themselves good Methodists, Presbyterians, Catholics or whatever and thus are easy to miss in surveys that classify populations into mutually exclusive categories (Lewis 1992, 5).

Lewis attempts to identify the characteristics of New Age belief and practice by drawing on the insights of scholars such as Robert Ellwood, Catherin Albanese, and Hans

Sebald. Lewis quotes Ellwood's New Age characteristics as saying, "[There is an] emphasis on healing, a desire to be 'modern' and use scientific language, eclecticism and syncretism, a monastic and impersonal ontology, optimism, success orientation, and a tendency to evolutionary views, [and an] emphasis on psychic power (Ellwood 1988, 14-15)" (as quoted by Lewis 1992, 6). Lewis continues to quote Albanese, who compared both New Agers and [Christian] fundamentalists, stating that they share the following qualities:

1. To begin, for both personal transformation and direct spiritual experience are at the heart of one's life project, and, for both, private transformation must find its twin in the transformation of society.
2. Both fundamentalists and New Agers hear voices more than see visions: their mysticism comes clad in a rhetoric of newness that is expressed as ongoing revelation.
3. Both fundamentalists and New Agers stress healing...For both movements, physical health is a sign for blessing, part of the empowerment that comes through close contact with what is sacred. And for both, another sign of blessing is material prosperity.
4. In both fundamentalism and the New Age, a kind of ontological positivism predominates, linking both to the religious materialism they share. [e.g., adherence to biblical literalism and belief in literal reincarnation].
5. The "new voluntarism" of fundamentalism and the New Age is expressed in the popular non-elite, "do-it-yourself" quality that characterizes both (Albanese 1988, 337-351) (as quoted by Lewis 1992, 8).

According to Sebald, New Age can encompass:

1. A sense of belonging – "A large number of persons...unequivocally identify with the [New Age]."
2. Common Values – values that Sebald sums up as living in attunement with the "life forces in and around us," and that leads to such concrete practices as vegetarianism.
3. Goal of the movement – by which he means that New Agers are attempting to create an alternative society that they believe will eventually supplant mainstream society.
4. Common Style – Which Sebald describes as an anti-materialistic simplicity. (This particular characteristic applies to only part of the movement.)
5. Jargon – by what is meant that there exists a certain discourse within the movement which outsiders have difficulty understanding.

6. Mass communication – by which Sebald means that there are a large number of alternative sources of information, such as New Age magazines and the like, which circulate news within the movement and which rarely appeal to people outside of the movement (Lewis 1992, 9).

Lewis presents a list of non-specific traits that may or may not indicate that someone has a New Age religious viewpoint based on these broad categorizations. Although Lewis identifies the various pitfalls of defining New Age so broadly, he does not offer an alternative solution. Instead, Lewis suggests that defining New Age is something scholars need to investigate. For Lewis, New Age religion is more than just a list of a hotch-potch of activities, but he does not clarify what, precisely, a more refined definition might be.

Lewis is one of the only academics to note that the term New Age is being used from an etic perspective (Lewis 1992, 1), thereby flagging the failure of academics to do justice to the insights and conceptual categories of practitioners. He also notes that New Age practitioners avoid sharing their personal spiritual beliefs with outsiders so that they are not ostracized by them (5). The underlying argument to Lewis' exploration is that because these beliefs meet resistance within broader mainstream contexts, people engaged in New Age belief and practice blend them into all areas of their lives to make them look secular (not set apart, or sacred). This argument may no longer hold true as observed within the context of the interviews with Tarot practitioners conducted for this thesis. The tension between what is considered inappropriate or anomalous from within “normal” social contexts and normative spiritual practice has shifted since the 1990s when Lewis published his works, and not only in a New Age context. Religious studies scholar Robert Orsi observed that even the use of the term ‘religion’ has negative connotations today in relation to belief and practice, and there is a widespread rejection of

the 'religion' label in favour of alternative terms such as 'spiritual' or 'wellness' to encompass individual religiosity in today's world (Orsi 2005, 188). In other words, even non-New Agers may be disavowing the idea of religion as something institutionalized and set apart and are instead choosing to stress the integral and fluid nature of spiritual practice in their daily lives. The rejection of labels appears to be widespread and plays a significant role when studying practitioners and their approach to Tarot.

Sociologist Paul Heelas has also criticized how New Age has been explored within academia and points out the limits of previous scholarly approaches to defining such a fluid movement. Heelas writes:

One's initial impression [of New Age] is of an eclectic hotch-potch of beliefs, practices and way of life. Esoteric or mystical Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Taoism enter the picture. So do elements from 'pagan' teaching, including Celtic, Druidic, Mayan and Native American Indian. An exceedingly wide range of practices – Zen meditations, Wiccan rituals, enlightenment intensive seminars, management training, shamanic activities, wilderness events, spiritual therapies, forms of positive thinking – fall under the rubric (Heelas 1996, 1).

Heelas indicates that often New Age religion is used as a catch-all category that includes everything that seems to fall outside of what would be considered a 'traditional' mainstream religion.

Within the hotch-potch scholarly approach to New Age, Tarot cards are often listed along with astrology, elements of Buddhism, paganism, and First Nations' teachings as part of New Age thought and practice. Such listings do little to unpack the ideological similarities and differences of worldview and practice of New Agers. Rather than adopt this hotch-potch approach to New Age, I suggest that we can draw upon the treatment of Tarot by practitioners to shed new light on New Age thought and practice.

In their book *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival and Cult Formation*, sociologists Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge criticize the academic study of religion for its failure to appreciate the fluidity of religiosity and suggest that social scientists in particular have:

focused on predicting the impending triumph of reason over “superstition.” The most illustrious figures in sociology, anthropology, and psychology have unanimously expressed confidence that their children, or surely their grandchildren, would live to see the dawn of a new era in which, to paraphrase Freud, the infantile illusions of religions would be outgrown (Stark and Bainbridge 1985, 1).

They go on to point out that the early theories about religion as primitive or as something that will die out have not proven to be correct, and that in fact, religion is still alive and well in our society. Stark and Bainbridge see the future of religion as a continual process of morphing. Tarot, as this thesis will demonstrate, is a part of this metamorphic process of religious change.

Nevertheless, Stark and Bainbridge, in *The Future of Religion*, struggle to conceptualize the nature of religion outside of institutional contexts. Through the development of their evolutionary study of religion, that sees religion progress from sect, cult and then church, Stark and Bainbridge limit their ability to see the emergent possibilities of religion outside of institutional frameworks. When looking at New Age religiosity there is no authoritative institutional framework to work within, and there are other scholars who recognize this as well.

Swedish sociologist and religious studies scholar Liselotte Frisk confronts the failure of this institutional framework to adequately define New Age. Frisk examines the various issues and challenges of defining New Age religion. Frisk uses a study of Yoga

practitioners in Dalarna to test Stark and Bainbridge's concepts of religion based on belief, organization and practices that emphasize the difference between church, sect and cult (Stark and Bainbridge 1985). While Frisk maintains the problematic academic practice of defining New Age by providing a hotch-potch list of séances, Tarot readings, energy massage, books, crystals, mindfulness, healing, acupuncture and yoga (Frisk 2015, 52-53), her study nonetheless highlights the fluid nature of New Age in contrast to the more limiting institutional model of Stark and Bainbridge. According to Frisk, it is hard to apply the Stark and Bainbridge model to New Age belief, practice and community because of the lack of definition and distinction within New Age contexts of these very dimensions of scholarly inquiry. Frisk further argues that the evolutionary model that Stark and Bainbridge uses does not allow for the complexities and the interchangeability of concepts and modalities within the New Age movement. Far from being a useful model for understanding New Age, Frisk suggests that Stark and Bainbridge's work is an example of the difficulties that bias and a lack of reflexivity can bring to religious studies scholarship. However, not all scholars focused solely on institutions to determine religious practices. For example, Glock and Stark studied people who practiced Christianity to see what constituted religiosity in the daily lives of believers, as opposed to within organizationally defined orthodoxy.

Before Rodney Stark's work with William Sims Bainbridge, Stark worked with sociologist Charles Glock. Stark and Glock together argue that religion can fruitfully be explored by looking at religion through the eyes of the practitioner and not within the boundaries of religious institutions. Stark and Glock's book, *American Piety: Patterns of Religious Commitment*, provides a foundation for understanding what religion can look

like outside of an institutional framework. In addition, their categories of piety can be applied to the approach Tarot practitioners' take in working with their cards.

According to Glock and Stark, understanding piety requires an understanding of an individual's faith commitments across a multifaceted spectrum, both within their own lived religious life, but also in relationship to others in their faith community. They propose that piety, or religiosity, can best be studied through analysis of a complex web of five interrelated concepts, namely: belief, practice, experience, knowledge, and consequences (Stark and Glock 1968, 14). For Stark and Glock, these categories of religiosity are the starting point for analyzing a broad pattern of 'piety' within American culture. To unpack patterns of piety, Stark and Glock start with these broad categories, and through in-depth statistical analyses, explore the interrelationships between categories to reveal the underlying nature of piety for particular denominations and for Americans, generally. The statistical relationships between individual expressions of faith within these categories, and between these categories and particular denominational affiliations, are the focus of their work.

Additional scholars have successfully used the categories proposed by Stark and Glock as a starting point to construct statistical models for understanding piety outside the largely Christian-informed American context. For example, Anthony, Hermans and Sterkens (2007) apply the five categories of religiosity proposed and tested by Stark and Glock to the case of India, where Christian, Muslim, and Hindu communities of faith intermingle. They also modify the categories, however, to emphasize six dimensions of religious practice and two dimensions of moral reasoning that they suggest are implicit, yet underdefined, in the Stark/Glock model. Hassan (2007) similarly uses the Stark and

Glock categories of piety to explore the faith of Muslims from multiple ethnic backgrounds living in Australia, Pakistan and Indonesia. Like the study by Anthony, Hermans, and Sterkens, Hassan suggests that the Stark/Glock model is a useful starting point for exploring religiosity, and for mapping the complex interrelationships between categories and the lived religious lives of Muslims. Hassan goes on to note, however, that statistical models, while very useful for highlighting regional, cultural, and ethnic differences among Muslim patterns of piety, might not be the best approach to fully understand the nuances of Muslim faith, and that the categories might be best understood as one approach among many to understand patterns of faith outside the Christian context.

Scholars James Gibbs and Kelly Crader question whether these additional studies really do support the Stark/Glock assertion that piety is multidimensional. They write, “Thus even the few existing tests of multidimensionality are somewhat contradictory. Further, the content of the scales varies among the studies, and the samples range only from college students to church members” (Gibbs and Crader 1970, 112). One difficulty in applying Glock and Stark’s dimensions of faith and their statistical methodology to other faith communities appears to be that scholars often need to modify and clarify Stark/Glock’s five categories of piety, before being able to successfully apply the model to their own research subjects. Despite this, however, Gibbs and Crader do ultimately conclude that there is enough evidence in these additional studies to “support Glock and Stark’s assumptions – to the extent that the measures are valid” (Gibbs and Crader 1970, 112).

This thesis draws upon the five categories of piety, or religiosity, outlined by Stark and Glock. The thesis is not a statistical analysis of piety among Tarot readers, it is,

however, a qualitative analysis of religiosity among Tarot readers, based on open-ended, semi-structured interviews and fieldwork with Tarot readers. The categories of piety proposed by Stark and Glock will serve as the conceptual categories to approach the idea of Tarot religiosity. Each of these categories, as discussed by Stark and Glock, will be explored more fully below. As with American piety discussed by Stark and Glock, Tarot piety is diffuse and decentralized, and Glock and Stark's conceptualization of the five dimensions of religiosity can help capture the religiosity of Tarot for practitioners. A broader, statistical analysis of Tarot piety exploring the relationships between these categories and between Tarot readers and their broader faith communities may be warranted at a later date, but is currently outside the scope of the present thesis.

Glock and Stark's five dimensions of religiosity are as follows:

1) The belief dimension –the acknowledgement of tenants of truth within the script of what is shared amongst its members. Glock and Stark define this as “expectations that the religious person will hold a certain theological outlook, that he will acknowledge the truth of the tenets of the religion” (Glock and Stark 1968, 14).

2) Religious practice - how people carry out their practice. There are two ways to observe this:

a) Ritual – Glock and Stark refer to these as the formal religious acts, i.e., baptism and communion.

b) Devotion – this is how they apply daily activities, like prayer, to one's religious life.

Glock and Stark define this dimension as “the things people do to carry out their religious commitment” (15).

3) The experience – There is an element of experience where the person feels that they are achieving a sense of contact or understanding of something greater than themselves. As Glock and Stark explain, “the properly religious person will at some time or other achieve a direct, subjective knowledge of ultimate reality; that he will achieve some sense of contact, however fleeting, with a supernatural agency” (15).

4) Knowledge - There is a basic knowledge of tradition and belief that all members are aware of. According to Glock and Stark, “the knowledge dimension refers to the expectation that religious persons will possess some minimum of information about the basic tenets of their faith and its rites, scriptures, and traditions” (16).

5) The consequences – How people live their lives and the direct relationship religion has on enriching or detracting from their lives. As Glock and Stark state, it is “the effects of religious belief, practice, experience, and knowledge in persons’ day-to-day lives” (16).

The way that Glock and Stark describe the consequences of religiosity echoes many of the aspects of “vernacular religion” as proposed by folklorist Leonard Primiano.

Primiano has suggested that understanding religiosity as a personal practice is at the root of something he calls “vernacular religion.” He argues that “vernacular religion challenges religious studies to incorporate the interdisciplinary strengths of

folklore/folklife in the study of the religious individual and the significance of religion as it is lived in the contemporary context” (Primiano 1995, 52). Furthermore, he suggests:

What is often the case is that folklorists have been insufficiently attentive to theoretical reflection and analysis, and religious studies as a discipline have been more interested in the historic process and linguistic products of religious institutionalization while lacking a genuine interest in the way people actually live their religious lives (41).

Primiano wants to blend the strengths of the two academic studies of folklore and religious studies to show that religion can exist outside of the authority of an institution and look at how religion is experienced in the daily lives of practitioners, regardless of the institutional affiliation. Primiano further writes: “To begin such a cross-disciplinary approach to understanding and studying religion, one which removes religion from consideration as only a manifestation of and within institutions, I offer the term ‘vernacular religion’” (Primiano 1995, 41).

Practitioners of Tarot fit this context of vernacular religion as it is lived and offers a perspective of studying religious practice outside of an institutional context, as there is no institutional body that dictates what a practitioner is to do or how to behave. Nevertheless, through discussions about how practitioners use Tarot, the elements of religiosity, as demonstrated by Glock and Stark, are still present. Roland Robertson, a Scottish sociologist, in his review of *American Piety: Patterns of Religious commitment*, suggests that “Glock and Stark perhaps should have probed the significance attached to beliefs and to the degree to which they are internalized” (Robertson, 1969, 282). The internalized significance of belief lies at the core of Primiano’s understandings of vernacular religion. My research into practitioners of Tarot, religion and the

internalization of belief will address how individual beliefs are not only internalized but also reflected with the use of Tarot as a focal point of their everyday lives.

There is no ‘official’ institutional hierarchy for New Age religion. Religious studies scholar Gordon Melton predicted in the 1990s that the New Age movement would die out because of the lack of institutional structure (Melton, 19992, 27). He writes, “But just as certainly as the New Age movement will fade in the 1990s, so the New Age will quietly disappear from the churches’ weekly schedules. New Thought will continue, having absorbed any elements of New Age it finds useful while it discards the rest” (27). Further, Melton also identified the New Age movement’s unstructured form of community as a defining characteristic of New Age; this is relevant as it would indicate that an unstructured community without a form of an institution cannot survive over a long period of time. Lewis shares a similar concern to Melton because of the vagueness of the definition of New Age and the amorphous structure of the movement (Lewis 1992, 1). What both scholars failed to point out was that lack of structure does not mean a lack of religiosity. Within Tarot practitioner communities, there is frequently a lack of structure but not a lack of community. Neither Melton nor Lewis could have anticipated the impact of social media on the New Age movement and, by extension, the Tarot community. Facebook is an example of a social media platform that allows like-minded individuals to come together to share experiences and beliefs. Though Melton and Lewis’ observation of the lack of structure within the broader New Age movement is correct, it does not change the fact that there are still the dimensions of religiosity as defined by Glock and Stark in New Age thought and practice, similar to what we will see among Tarot

practitioners. Therefore, the lack of structure in New Age thought and the community does not mean that there is no religious dimension to Tarot practice.

Adam Possamai, a sociologist and professor at Western Sydney University in New South Wales, builds upon Melton and Lewis's ideas in his study of New Age. Possamai states that "the term 'New Age'" is a "meronymy, i.e. a label bunching together unlike entities" (Possamai 2005, 11). He defines New Age by coining a different term in recognition of members in the New Age community who do not like to refer to themselves as New Agers. Possamai coins the term *Perennism* and bases it on Aldous Huxley's work, where all religions are understood to share a single underlying truth called the *Perennial Philosophy*. Possamai suggests that we can identify markers to separate New Age from the 'mish-mash' conglomerate of activities that usually defines this category. The essential markers of perennism, according to Possamai, are as follows:

- 1) Monism – a single force is underlying all. Possamai defines this as “a paradigm which recognizes a single ultimate principle, being, or force underlying all reality.”
- 2) The Human Potential Ethic – being the best human you can be, or as Possamai states, “the teleology of a better or superhuman being; also referred to as self-development.”
- 3) Spiritual knowledge – the interrelation of universal and self-knowledge.

According to Possamai, it is “a quest for the knowledge of the universe or of the self, the two being sometimes interrelated” (Possamai 2005, 12).

These three markers that Possamai presents are useful categories when analyzing Tarot practitioners and will be addressed in chapter five. One problem with Possamai's work is

his invention of the term *Perennism*, as it is not a common term and would not be used by members of the New Age community themselves. Imposing a label upon practitioners that does not emerge from their emic practice privileges scholarly authority over and above that of the individuals engaged in religiosity, something unacceptable to modern collaborative scholarly practice.⁴ While Paul Heelas does use the term *Perennism*, he contextualizes the term within his research on ‘Self-Spirituality’ or spirituality of the self, a term more familiar to New Age practitioners.

New Age and Tarot belief and practice are not only situated within broader New Age categories but also within the study of esotericism and the occult. For purposes of this thesis, Anton Faivre’s work on the emergence of Western esoteric studies will prove invaluable. Faivre’s work looks at the historical development of Western esoteric groups. The history of Western esotericism is intertwined with modern New Age religious beliefs. In their article “Western Esotericism and the Science of Religions,” Anton Faivre and Karen Claire Voss (1995) identify three ways that practitioners use the term esotericism. The first way the term is used, they suggest, is concerning esoteric as a “‘secret knowledge,’ or a ‘secret science’” (Faivre and Voss 1995, 49). The second way the term

⁴The concept of imposing labels on subjects has been observed Edith Turner who stated, “I began to see how anthropologists have perpetuated an endless series of put-downs about the many spirit events in which they participated – ‘participated’ in a kindly pretense” (Turner 2003, 146). The history of imposing ideologies of scholars onto groups deemed ‘less than worthy’ has been a part of our academic history. Turner further states that “there seems to be a kind of force field between the anthropologist and her or his subject matter, making it impossible for her or him to come close to it, a kind of religious frigidity. We anthropologists need training to see what the Natives see” (150). Patricia A.L. Cochran et al, speak of this idea in their article “Indigenous Ways of Knowing: Implications for Participatory Research and Community.” The issues expressed can be quite damaging for the people involved. Cochran et al writes, “for instance, in the early years of colonization in Australia, research was preoccupied with ‘classifying and labeling’ in an attempt to ‘manage’ Aboriginal people” (Cochran et al. 2008, 22). When looking at alternative religions it is important to see participants as equals, and their contributions to scholarship as valuable.

esoteric is used as “a type of knowledge which emanates from a spiritual ‘center,’ which is attained only after transcending everything” (45). The third usage of the term esoteric is defined as a *form of thought*. Faivre and Voss write:

we use the term ‘esotericism’ in a third sense: i.e. as referring to a diverse group of works, currents, etc., which possess an *air de famille* which must be studied as a part of the history of religions because of the specific form which it has acquired in the West since the Renaissance (Faivre and Voss, 1995 49).

Understanding esotericism as a system of thought can shed light on the way practitioners understand their use of Tarot.

The history of Tarot, as discussed later in this chapter, shows how closely Tarot is intertwined with Western esoteric thought. Faivre and Voss use Faivre’s six fundamental characteristics or components of Western esoteric thought, four of which they define as “intrinsic” (meaning necessary) and two of which they define as “relative” (meaning unnecessary but are often present). The four intrinsic characteristics are:

- 1) Correspondences – messages from a god source exist; however, their meaning needs to be interpreted. These messages come from unexplained sources and are often seen in everyday items or through a meditative process in the imagination. In defining correspondences, Faivre and Voss write, “Symbolic and real correspondences are said to exist among all parts of the universe, both seen and unseen” (60).
- 2) Living nature – nature is multi-leveled (meaning that there can be multiple meanings found in nature); events and experiences help provide information and knowledge. According to Faivre and Voss, “Living Nature [is] Multi-

leveled, rich in potential revelations and meanings of every kind, Nature can be read like a book” (60).

- 3) Imagination and mediation – mediation, “such as rituals, symbolic images, mandalas, intermediary spirits and the like” (61), is vital in receiving correspondences, and it requires the imagination to interpret the messages received. As Faivre and Voss describe, “Implicit in the idea of correspondences, we find a valorization of the imagination considered as an ‘organ of the soul’ enabling access to different levels of reality” (61).
- 4) Experience of transmutation – transmutation is the process that allows knowledge (gnosis) and active imagination to merge to provide illuminated information (Faivre and Voss 1995, 61). They write, “‘Transmutation’ as a metamorphosis implies cooperation between knowledge (in the sense of ‘gnosis’) and active imagination in order for [metal] lead to be changed into silver and silver into gold” (61).

The above list identifies the intrinsic nature found in Western esoteric practice. There is compelling evidence that these core components are integrated into the Tarot through religious syncretism, demonstrated by the work of Eliphas Lévi and the Hermetic Order of the Golden dawn discussed in chapter three. The other characteristics that are often but not always found are Faivre’s two relative characteristics, listed here:

- 1) The praxis of concordance – similarities within different traditions or religions are looked at in an attempt to “obtain a gnosis of superior quality,” in other words, a more profound understanding beyond what one would have now. As Faivre and Voss state, “it is evidenced by a consistent tendency to attempt to

establish common denominators among two or more different traditions, or even among all traditions” (62).

- 2) Transmission – the idea that knowledge can be passed down from one to another – Teacher/Student or Master/Disciple. It is a form of establishing validity to the teaching by those wanting to learn (60-62). As indicated by Faivre and Voss, the “emphasis on transmission implies that an exoteric teaching can or must be transmitted from master to disciple following a pre-established channel and previously marked path” (62).

The intrinsic and relative characteristics described by Faivre and Voss with their research in understanding Western esoteric practice can illuminate Tarot clearly, as we will see in chapter five. Unlike Possamai and Heelas, Faivre uses an already existing term, ‘Western esoteric thought’ when referring to the New Age movement. The term is useful to help situate New Age, and Tarot thought and practice within a more extensive, historic ideological framework. However, Faivre stops short of calling those who share ‘esoteric thought’ religious; instead, he skirts this issue often by referring to the object of his study as esotericism. Faivre and Voss’s reluctance to use the terms religion or religiosity may reflect an unspoken acceptance of the idea that religions require authoritative institutional structure for authenticity. However, their ideas mesh nicely with those of Glock and Stark, Melton, Possamai, Primiano and others who argue that New Age/esoteric thought is fundamentally religious, even without the structural components of mainstream religion.

According to British Sociologist Daren Kemp, in his book *New Age, A guide*, one of the most valuable attempts to define New Age spirituality is found in the work of Wouter Hanegraaff.

Historian of esoteric thought Wouter Hanegraaff defines New Age as follows:

The New Age movement is the cultic milieu having become conscious of itself, in the later 1970s, as constituting a more or less unified 'movement.' All manifestations of this movement are characterised by popular Western culture criticism expressed in terms of a secularised esotericism (Hanegraaff 1996, 522; Kemp 2004, 4).

By secularized, Hanegraaff means 'outside of institutional religious structures,' and as we have seen, something need not be within institutionalized religious structures in order to be considered religious. Taken together, Faivre and Hanegraaff provide a framework for exploring New Age and Western esoteric studies in the context of religion. Unlike the majority of scholars of New Age, who define their field of study from an etic perspective, Faivre and Hanegraaff attempt to incorporate emic concepts and categories into their analysis of esoteric and New Age thought.

2.3 New Age Scholarship and Reflexivity

Scholars of religion should always engage in a reflexivity analysis of their positioning in relation to the people and ideas in this study. David Hufford emphasizes this reflection in his seminal work, "The scholarly Voice and personal Voice: Reflexivity in Belief Studies." He defines the general concept of religion, following Paul Tillich, as peoples' 'ultimate concerns' (Hufford 1995, 60). In Western cultures, he suggests, the scientist often is seen as neutral and objective in the pursuit of knowledge; and this perception has coloured the work of social scientists as well. However, as Hufford notes,

scholars are frequently not self-reflective of this purported assumption of objectivity. According to Hufford, the scientific “objective” approach towards belief demonstrates a hidden bias that privileges Western thought and culture. Hufford points out that, like believers, scholars reflect the society into which they are born. This concept can be seen within the study of religious studies and is commented on by Hanegraaff in his article “Empirical Method in the Study of Esotericism” (Hanegraaff1995, 118-119). Hanegraaff argues that esoteric religious practice is not a form of deviance, as is so often assumed by scholars and non-scholars.⁵ Instead, it is a unique form of religion unto itself that needs to be looked at apart from the lens of institutional religion or ‘objective’ science. When Stark and Bainbridge, and even Glock and Stark, explored their concepts of religion, for example, they started from the unquestioned assumption that Western (Christian) categories of sect, cult, and church, rooted as they are in institutional structures, were integral to religion (instead of being a Western standard against which other cultures and other religions might depart). Once we remove their assumption of the essential nature of institutional frameworks from the study of religion and apply their insights regarding religiosity of individuals to Tarot practitioners, we can begin to see a form of religious practice. Tarot, as a practice, can apply the vernacular religious approach, as described by Primiano, as the very essence of the idea that religion is in the vernacular and “can be defined simply ‘personal, [and] private’”(Primiano 1995, 42). When actions and beliefs

⁵The disbelief of belief from an academic point of view is also shared by Juliette Wood, a folklorist, wrote that: “While these attitudes to the modern Tarot are an interesting innovation, it is equally inescapable that very little is anchored in historical reality” (Wood 1998, 16). Mike Sosteric, a sociology academic, wrote in his article “A Sociology of Tarot”: “Tarot was understood and developed as a device for ideological indoctrination that the history of the Tarot was so blithely ignored and a new one built” (Sosteric 2014, 373).

are personal and private, and we recognize them as such, they are not deviant, and need not conform to mainstream religious categories.

Religious studies scholar Robert Orsi explores the privileging of Western/Christian categories in scholarship in his examination of the World Parliament of Religions (2003). During his study, he noticed that academics see Christianity as the standard to which all other religions are held, which “create[s] a class of world religions identified by enlightenment characteristics and set(s) Christianity up as the highest realization of global religious culture” (Orsi 2003, 171). Orsi then applies his insight that Christianity is being used as the measuring stick for all other religions at the World Parliament of Religions to the very scholarship being produced within the discipline of religious studies itself. Religious studies scholars, he suggests, are guilty of bringing a Christian conceptual bias to the study of non-Christian religion. He writes, “On the international level, the emerging academic discourses about religion were implicated in the politics of colonialism” (170). Orsi further sees this as being directly related to the idea that Christianity is seen as the ideal standard with which to compare every religion. He writes:

World Parliament of Religions, an authoritative and hypostasized “Christianity” – identified by its superior moral teachings – was compared with other essentialized religious entities – “Islam,” “Buddhism,” and so on – both to create a class of world religions identified by enlightenment characteristics and to set Christianity up as the highest realization of global religious culture (171).

To contrast this, Orsi himself argues that religion is “boundary-blurring and border-crossing” (188), arguing that understanding religion is a complicated and dynamic process that requires a thorough understanding of how religion can manifest for

individuals separate from our conventional structural categories. Hanegraaff comments on this observed bias hierarchy in scholarship and sees the complexity of the study of New Age being sandwiched between scholars shaped by Christian ideologies and those shaped by evolutionary/secular ideologies – both being implicitly perceived as superior to esoteric thinking in scholarly analyses (Hanegraaff 1995, 105). Orsi's and Hanegraaff's insights in this regard are examples of reflexive scholarship, wherein one's own preconceptions are identified, and their impact on the object of study is ideally minimized. When discussing Tarot, there is a visible and undeniable connection to the Christian institution that dominated the cultures within which Tarot originated, but this does not mean that Tarot is inferior to, or lacking in the face of, Christian structures and the taken-for-granted assumptions about the nature of religion by scholars informed by the Christian tradition. Instead, the analysis section of the thesis will show how Tarot practitioners reflect “the religious person [...] acting on his or her world in the inherited, improvised, found, constructed ideas of his or her religious culture” (Orsi 2002, 173).

According to Primiano, the kind of individualistic, constructed, eclectic religion rooted in broader religious and cultural understandings but unique to the individual person or community can be called “vernacular religion,” and is defined as “religion as it is lived: as human beings encounter, understand, interpret and practice it” (Primiano 1995, 43). Primiano states that one needs to take an interdisciplinary approach to study the lives of people participating in individual religious practice and indicates that special attention is needed “to the verbal, behavioural, and material expressions of religious belief, and the ultimate object of religious belief”(43). When Primiano discusses the “ultimate object of religious belief,” his work contains the assumption that such ‘ultimate

objects' are the product of individual construction, influenced by cultural and other social forces, and potentially unique in their manifestation. The meaning is that "individual belief does not need to be founded in or based on ideas and practices emanating from a group-oriented and structured religious institution" in order to be considered religious by individuals or scholars (Primiano 1995, 50). The above-discussed scholars all contribute to the broader discussion of New Age and religious studies and provide a foundation for my work with Tarot practitioners, as detailed in the analysis section.

Chapter 3: Tarot: a brief history

3.1 Introduction to Tarot

Today's Tarot decks used for the purpose of divination have a standardized set of 78 cards that are divided into two parts, modelled after the Tarot of Marseilles deck from France. The first part of the Tarot deck consists of twenty-two unique cards numbered from 0 – 21 and is referred to as the major arcana, also known as trump cards. The second part of the Tarot deck consists of fifty-six minor arcana, also known as pip cards. The minor arcana would be most similar to the standard fifty-two card playing deck that is in use today and consists of four suits of wands, swords, pentacles, and cups, with each card being numbered from ace to ten with four court cards, king, queen, page and knight. There are slight variations to this; however, this is the widely accepted set up to the deck. Decks can have up to ninety-seven cards in them. The key distinguishing factor of Tarot from other types of cards is the separation of the major and minor arcana. The current formation was developed and modified over time.

In addition to the influence of the surrounding institutional culture within which Tarot practitioners predominantly practice, Tarot practitioners are also influenced by the history and legends surrounding the origins of Tarot. In 2015, I investigated the Tarot at the archives at Oxford University and the Victoria and Albert Museum. During the course of my research, I examined twenty Tarot decks and found that these extant decks are only a few of the wide variety that has been in use over the centuries. I immediately noticed the wide variety of forms that constitute Tarot. The various decks and cards I viewed were from the late fifteenth century through to the early twentieth century. These cards'

origins were rooted in such disparate countries as Italy, Spain, Germany, France, Denmark and England. Each of these decks featured regional differences.

A few decks that stood out as they did not seem to follow today's formula of what constitutes a Tarot deck. One was the Pack of Minchiate cards, from eighteenth-century Italy that consisted of forty-one major arcana cards and 56 pip cards. This deck is in the archives at the Victoria and Albert Museum. The major arcana stand out because it has a larger number of cards (forty-one vs. twenty-two) and has depictions of various symbols, including the twelve astrological zodiac houses and the four elements.⁶ Another deck was from Denmark that depicted various houses and buildings for the major arcana, demonstrating the secular nature of Tarot cards (according to field notes July 10, 2015). While beautiful and unique, these decks did not go on to form the basis of current esoteric Tarot lore; instead, that was reserved mainly for the Tarot of Marseilles,⁷ consisting of fifty-two major arcana and fifty-six minor arcana.

3.2 History of Tarot

Hobbyists and non-academic historians have done most of the scholarship on the origins and development of Tarot. One such author is Darcy Küntz, who starting in 1996 published many books on the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and has been used as a resource for subsequent Tarot scholars. Another is Barbara G. Walker, a private researcher who wrote *The secrets of Tarot: Origins, History and Symbolism* (1984), who has some interesting ideas; however, she lacks the detail that Küntz brings forth in his

⁶The four elements are earth, air, fire, and water.

⁷Historians are unsure of when the Tarot de Marseilles originated, but was derived from a Milanese prototype (Decker and Dummett, 2002, X).

research. The interest in the academic study of Tarot has grown in recent decades. Helen Farley, a religious studies scholar at the University of Queensland, took a different approach than her non-scholarly predecessors in her book, *A Cultural History of Tarot*, by not only looking at the history of Tarot but looking at how people used it over time. Card archivist and historian Ronald Decker, historian Thierry Depaulis and philosopher Michael Dummett delved into the history of Tarot in their book, *A Wicked Pack of Cards: The Origins of the Occult Tarot*. Both books describe how Tarot was transformed from a household game to a sacred tool.

Farley presents Tarot as a way of blending art, history, culture and practice in *A Cultural History of Tarot*. Farley divides her book into four time periods, but also includes a section in which she identifies the various antecedents to Tarot and traces back the possibilities for their existence in earlier time periods. The four-time periods she explores in depth are 1) Tarot as a game during the Italian Renaissance; 2) the reinterpretation of Tarot to identify a ‘Golden Age’ in France in the eighteenth century; 3) the occult revival in England in the nineteenth century; 4) the present use in the New Age movement from the twentieth century forward. Farley states that “the New Age is an intoxicating mix of East and West, where Buddhist Tantra bumps up against Native American shamanism, crystal healing and past-life regressions,” indicating perhaps that, as with other scholars, Farley associates the New Age movement with lists of discrete spiritual phenomenon (Farley 2009, 151). However, Farley’s argument is mainly keeping in line with the more large-scale complex dynamic forms of religion that Orsi and Primiano discuss, in that she suggests that the study of Tarot needs a multidisciplinary approach (5). She writes, “What once may have seemed irrational and illogical to us as

twenty-first-century observers, become rational when presented within the framework of a fifteenth-century worldview” (5). Farley also looks at the different antecedents of Tarot, both ones that are verifiable and others that are less verifiable, that are a part of the legends of Tarot shared by Tarot communities. Farley, for example, examines the stories, myths, and traditions that Tarot was variously created to heal the mental illness of German King Charles VI; that it was essentially a guidebook to the depiction of medieval iconography in France and a receptacle for the ancient knowledge of Egyptian priests, given in trust to the Gypsies (Farley 2009 19-32). Farley found that most of these origin stories for Tarot are not supported by historical evidence, suggesting that these stories serve a mythic rather than historical function. While Farley herself is scornful of these mysterious and esoteric stories of origins, we can see them as carrying mythic weight for practitioners. Support for this idea comes from Tarot practitioners themselves, for despite familiarity with Farley’s skeptical findings, many Tarot practitioners are reluctant to give up the many different allegorical or mythological accounts of Tarot’s origins, and many still find personal value in the various mysteries that surround the cards. These esoteric stories of origins are something to consider while analyzing the interviews conducted with Tarot practitioners.

Farley’s overt rejection of esoteric meaning for Tarot cards in favour of a more historic, secularized account of the origins of the cards is an example of what Hanegraaff speaks of when he refers to academics wanting to demythologize religious or esoteric ideals, and this scholarly impulse can create issues between the believer and the researcher (Hanegraaff 1995, 105). It will be important in this study of Tarot practitioners to be aware of this tension between emic understandings of Tarot’s origins and the more

scholarly secularized account of the cards' history. That being said, Farley's work in investigating the historical development of Tarot has provided significant insight into the cards and the religiosity that surrounds their development into the divination and reflective tool that is used today. Nevertheless, the details of the historical reconstruction of Tarot's earliest history does not go unchallenged. According to Farley, Tarot's earliest origins are as a card game imported to Italy from the Middle East (Farley 2009, 32). This origin story also appears in the writings of Decker, Depaulis and Dummett in their book *A Wicked Pack of Cards: The Origins of the Occult Tarot*, but the origins of the card game differ between these two sources.

Decker, Depaulis and Dummett explore the development of the Tarot as it transitions from a secular game to a religious tool, by tracing the influential people who helped create this transformative process. As with Farley, Decker et al. are dismissive of the esoteric meaning of Tarot and its mythic stories of origin that are revered in the practice of Tarot today. Their account of origins, however, differs slightly from that put forth by Farley. For example, Farley was able to identify the first known reference to Tarot, as a game, in a letter written by the French-born Duke of Orléans in 1408 (Farley 2009, 13). In contrast, Decker, Depaulis and Dummett suggest that the first reference to Tarot is from Duke Francisco in a letter asking for Tarot from his treasurer in 1450 (Decker, Depaulis and Dummett 1995, 31). Both sources point to the first references of Tarot being used as a game (Farley 2009; Decker, Depaulis and Dummett 1996). Farley suggests that the Tarot card deck was developed by very wealthy members of the Visconti clan and that depictions on the cards are family and community members. Farley's focus on the imagery and art depicted on the cards delves into a pictorial representation of the

Visconti family and their life in Milan, Italy (Farley 2009, 39-45). Decker, Depaulis and Dummett, in contrast to Farley, focus on Tarot's roots in Bologna, Italy and as part of the beginnings of the French occult revival that started in the late eighteenth century (Decker, Depaulis and Dummett 1996 48).

Decker, Depaulis and Dummett point to Antoine Court de Gébelin (1725 –1784) in France as the first documented person to study Tarot as a key to mystical answers from the ancient world. Gébelin's thought was that Tarot originated in ancient Egypt, as a code from Egypt's 'Ancient Ones' (Decker, Depaulis and Dummett 1996, 59). The key to the secrets from the long-forgotten times was locked away within their Egyptian sources, according to Gébelin, and the Tarot cards held the key to the 'Golden Age.'⁸ Court de Gébelin published this information in a prospectus called the *Monde Primitif* (57-59). According to Decker, Depaulis and Dummett, "The entire esoteric Tarot tradition stems ultimately from the work of Antione Court de Gébelin, a Protestant pastor, Freemason and savant" (52).

Court de Gébelin's contributions to the esoteric interpretation of Tarot were later supplemented by the writings of the Comte de Mellet (1727-1804), in his book titled *le livre de Thot*. It is within this book that the initial connection between Tarot and Qabalah⁹ was first suggested, a connection that continues in importance for many Tarot readers today (68). According to Decker, Depaulis and Dummett, the Comte de Mellet's contributions to esoteric Tarot were "considerably more impressive than Court de

⁸The golden age is referring to a period of time at the beginning of humanity where everything was good and perfect.

⁹ I will be using the spelling Qabalah for the purposes of this paper, though this word can be spelt in 24 different ways. This is the accepted spelling in occult and esoteric circles.

Gébelin's own" (66). Explicitly referring to an essay on Tarot, Decker, Depaulis and Dummett argue that Gebelin and Mellet agreed on the Egyptian origins of Tarot, but disagreed on the details of how to interpret trump cards in light of these origins. Despite this disagreement over details of interpretation, these two individuals succeed in contextualizing Tarot within a mystical framework (66). Capitalizing on the emergent interpretation of Tarot as mystically significant, Decker, Depaulis, and Dummett also discuss the role of Jean-Baptiste Alliette (1738–1791) in the popularization of Tarot. Alliette's contribution was different from his predecessors. Rather than propose some unique esoteric origin or meaning to Tarot himself, Alliette focused on using the cards to make money by using them for fortune-telling, and not as a tool for spiritual occult practices (74). Alliette reversed the spelling of his name and marketed his cards under the pseudonym Etteilla. Alliette is often referred to as a wig maker, a claim that has not been substantiated (Decker, Depaulis and Dummett 1996, 77; according to field notes July 10, 2015). Both Alliette as a cartomancer and Etteilla cards were popular in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century.

Alliette is the first documented professional cartomancer, a card reader (Decker, Depaulis and Dummett 1996, 74-99). Alliette used de Mellet's emphasis on Qabalah and applied astrological meaning to each one of the Tarot cards. However, his purpose for adding astrology to Tarot was not to further the occult sciences, as other alchemic magicians did (Decker, Depaulis and Dummett 1996, 39); instead, it was to promote fortune-telling, as astrology was already a popular fortune-telling tool (87). Etteilla's Tarot was popular, and there are different versions of his Tarot decks that exist today in a variety of archives. Yet, despite the popularity of the Etteilla's deck, none of his formats

stood the test of time. Ironically, one of the most significant contributors to today's deck of Tarot cards is Eliphas Lévi, who completely rejected the idea of Tarot as a fortune-telling tool, and instead proposed a deeply mystical interpretation of the cards.

Eliphas Lévi (1810–1875), known as the last magus¹⁰ in the occult arts, condemned Alliette's commercialization of Tarot and ignored most of the work he did in transforming Tarot into a fortune-telling tool (Williams 1975, 88). Williams sees Lévi as the last magus of his kind, in the way he approached the study of Tarot in a solitary fashion (88). Members of the British esoteric group, The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (Golden Dawn), identify Lévi's version and interpretation of Tarot as their linchpin, leading in turn to the current modern presentation of Tarot.

Lévi has been recognized by many academics as a key person in relation to the history of Tarot's sacredness. Farley, Decker et al., and Thomas Williams have all discussed his importance in the development of the cards from their origins as a deck of playing cards to their identification as spiritual objects. Williams' book, *Eliphas Lévi: The Master of Occultism*, is particularly useful in understanding the impact of Lévi on the development of Tarot. Williams divides his biography of Lévi into three time periods. The first period focuses on Lévi's youth, where he was at the Seminary of St. Sulpice, studying to be a priest, and learning about Christian mysticism (Williams 1975). Lévi left the church and did not become ordained. Instead, in the second period of his life, he devoted himself to politics; he married and had one child. During this time period, Lévi was in and out of jail for his political writings. Lévi's life took a turn when his wife left

¹⁰ A magus is someone who studies occult sciences in solitude (Williams 1975).

him, and his child died in 1848 (61). As a result of a very tumultuous political career and other traumatic events in his life, Lévi turned his attention to living a solitary life and dedicated his study to understanding the deeper meaning of the Tarot (61). It was during this third, later part of his life, that he earned the reputation of being a magus as he worked independently to understand the mystic Emmanuel Swedenborg's ideas of a golden age as represented in both the Tarot and the Qabalah (88). The Qabalah that Lévi used was based on the adapted Christian version;¹¹ Lévi added to the works of de Gébelin and de Milliet by spending his time writing about the meanings of Tarot in connection with the Qabalah, forever merging the two materials. Both Dummett and Williams say that Lévi was not fond of the 'fortune-telling' side of Tarot. Lévi felt that there was a deeper, more mystical meaning to the cards, that they, along with the Qabalah, would lead a man to a deeper understanding of God within themselves. Despite his desire to work in private, Lévi attracted attention to himself and ended up travelling to England to earn money in his practice of the occult arts (Williams 1975, 89). It was during his trip to England that he met the founders of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (Golden Dawn).

According to Decker, Depaulis and Dummett, Lévi visited England in 1854 and met with the British occult group Societies Rosicrucian in Anglia, a fringe freemason group (Decker, Depaulis and Dummett 1996, 182), where Samuel Liddell MacGregor

¹¹The Christian Qabalah was based on the interpretations of Giovanni Pico (1463-1504). Pico was introduced to Hebrew Qabalah and tried to reconcile it with Christianity and Neoplatonism. The Qabalah then was studied by a number of esoteric and Christian groups (Decker, and Dummett 2002, 14-22). Lévi's early work in the Catholic church would have exposed him to Christian mysticism, including the Qabalah (Williams 1975).

Mathers (1854–1918), William Wynn Westcott (1848–1925) and William Robert Woodmen (1828–1891) were members. Lévi also met with other people in England and was disappointed in their responses to the mystical side of his teachings. He felt that there was a desire for “spectacular occurrences and marvels” (Williams 1975, 89), and not for the serious study of the occult. He went back to France disappointed and did not realize his profound impact on the founding members of the Golden Dawn: Mathers, Westcott and Woodmen. It was the works of Lévi that dramatically changed Tarot into a well-defined system of occult mysticism, a system adopted by the Golden Dawn as they developed their own secret ritual practice.

The Golden Dawn was one of the most impactful groups to Tarot in Western esotericism. It was founded on March 20, 1888, by Westcott, Liddell, Mathers and Woodman. The Golden Dawn was one of the smaller occult groups during this time period and never had more than 300 members (Farley 2009, 128). It was not necessarily the number of members that were significant, but what the members did once the group disbanded. According to Farley:

The Order was the crowning glory of the occult revival, synthesizing into a coherent whole a vast body of disparate material including Egyptian mythology, kabbalah, Tarot, Enochian magic, alchemy, Rosicrucianism and astrology. Suddenly anything was possible, and everything was knowable; every mundane action and reaction could be reinterpreted in esoteric terms. (Farley 2009, 129)

The order used Tarot as the foundation on which to build their esoteric system. Two highly influential individuals to the development of Tarot in the twentieth century came from this group, Alister Crowley and Arthur E. White.

The Golden Dawn's popularity was also impacted by the success of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky's (1831 – 1891) Theosophical Society, where she lectured on her interpretations of Eastern religious belief and Western Esoteric thoughts (Farley 2009, 124 and Lavoie 2012). According to Jeffery Lavoie, a British Western Esoteric scholar, Blavatsky did not believe in practicing the mystical teachings that she was helping to shape. Blavatsky's vision was to cultivate a philosophy (Lavoie 2012, 231), a way of thinking, and not encourage occult activities or practice. Westcott, who was an active member of the Theosophical Society, nonetheless desired a leadership role in a practicing occult group and was not content with the study of philosophy (Decker and Dummett 2002, 56). Mathers lectured about the Qabalah at the Theosophy Society (Farley 2009, 125), arguing for its significance in occult practice. Mathers, Westcott and Woodmen started the Golden Dawn because of their shared interest and desire to lead a group in occult practice. The Golden Dawn was structured along the same lines as freemason 'fringe' groups; however, unlike other groups, they allowed women to be full and equal practicing members (Butler 2004, 2013). In 1887, Golden Dawn members worked with Lévi's teachings, and an item of unknown origin called the Cypher Manuscript¹² (Decker and Dummett 2002, 76; Farley 2009 130). The Golden Dawn further developed rites and rituals, based on fringe mason rites, allowing members to "progress through the order [as] a symbolic ascent of Kabbalistic tree of life through a series of initiating rituals that had been worked up from the outlines given in the original Cipher Manuscript" (Farley 2009, 131). The Golden Dawn members believed that following processes would allow them to

¹²The Cypher Manuscript is a document that Westcott either discovered, was given to, or created. No one has been able to confirm its origins. (Decker and Dummett 2002, 76-77).

connect to ancient wisdom from the Golden Age. The mystical connection would continue to deepen while progressing through the paths of the Qabalah with help from the Tarot (Farley 2009, 132). Consequently, the Golden Dawn further entrenched Tarot as a sacred religious item. The Golden Dawn doctrine was shared with members as they moved up in rank, including Arthur Edward Waite (1875–1942), Pamela Smith (1878–1951), Aleister Crowley (1875–1947) and Lady Frieda Harris (1877–1962), all of whom would go on to contribute significantly to the look, and interpretation, of contemporary Tarot.

After the Golden Dawn folded in 1903, the various members of the group left to pursue their own interests. Some abandoned occult and esoteric thought and practice completely, others continued to study and practice the teachings of the Golden Dawn; however, four members have had the most significant impact on Tarot today. Arthur Edward Waite and artist Pamela Smith created and published the Rider Waite-Smith deck in 1909, a favourite deck that is considered a beginner deck with most Tarot practitioners today. Waite wrote a companion book to the Rider Waite-Smith deck called *The Pictorial Guide to the Tarot*. This book gives a detailed account of the different symbols in the cards, including how to read them. Waite/Smith's deck was strongly influenced by Lévi's understanding of the mystical underpinnings of Tarot.

Crowley, a self-proclaimed occult master and artist Frieda Harris created the Thoth Tarot that was published after their death in 1969. However, earlier in the twentieth century Crowley went public with many of the Golden Dawn's ritual and mystical secrets. Every member of the Golden Dawn was sworn to secrecy and made an oath not to reveal the group's hidden wisdom; however, Crowley did not keep his promise. After

leaving the group, Crowley published many works that included the secrets of the Golden Dawn. Crowley's act of defiance gave informal permission to Waite to publish his version of Tarot, with help from Pamela Smith (Farley 2009, 145). The success of the Rider Waite-Smith deck led to the publication of Crowley's Thoth deck after his death. The publication of both decks subsequently led to many individuals exploring a spiritual and mystical sense of self through the use of Tarot.

All of these diverse sources, stories and interpretations continue to hold traction in the Tarot reading communities of today. Feminist author Barbara G. Walker, for example, in her book titled *The Secrets of Tarot*, presents an interesting exploration of Tarot that combines myth, legend, fact, historical research, and even fiction to create a personalized exploration of Tarot that carries a notable amount of influence in the Tarot-reading communities I studied. Walker follows the trend common in Tarot reading communities of building upon past knowledge and insights into Tarot to create new methods and modes of use for Tarot to respond to changing individual needs and current spiritual times. For example, Walker integrates traditional information about Tarot with feminist spirituality emphases, creating an interesting insight into Tarot's reflection on the Wiccan truism 'as above, so below' (Walker 1984, 35-44). People use Tarot to find a deeper meaning in their lives, based on the foundations of works from the various occult movements in Europe and the writings of more contemporary spiritual self-help authors such as Walker. The rich history of Tarot creates a foundation for a belief that the symbolism in Tarot can open up new insights into the self in relation to the world around them, a belief often ridiculed by outsiders. The very history of the development of Tarot shows that Tarot has long spoken to those who were not satisfied with the spiritual

answers provided by mainstream sources and sought instead a means by which spiritual insight could be gleaned in connection with a greater spiritual realm. The emphasis on spiritual insight continues to be found among Tarot practitioners today. The dismissiveness towards Tarot as spiritually significant displayed in the writings of Farley, Decker, Depaulis and Dummett is a common view expressed by many scholars of Tarot, yet this dismissiveness overlooks the spiritual value of the cards for Tarot readers both historically and today. The urge to dismiss the esoteric significance of Tarot is part of what Hanegraaff calls a “polemic discourse” in academia that dismisses esoteric ways of knowing. In the analysis part of this thesis, I will briefly discuss how polemic discourse touches the lives of Tarot readers, for very few Tarot readers have been entirely unaffected by the ridicule and scorn of non-believers, including scholarly non-believers. As scholars, it is vital to acknowledge the spiritual power of belief, even if we understand that power to be rooted in a complex tale of secular card games, commercialized fortune-telling, and desires for mystical self-betterment rooted in mythical, rather than literal, stories of origins. Today, Tarot has become a deeply meaningful form of religiosity for many people, and as we will see, it provides a rich body of evidence to explore esoteric spirituality in the modern world.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

Defining religion, as we have seen, is a challenging process for academics, and even more so for non-academics and religious practitioners. For some, as Robert Orsi points out, religion can be understood as a negative term, something to be used as a negative yardstick against which more ‘authentic’ spiritual beliefs and experiences can be measured (Orsi 2005, 188). Within the interviews conducted for this thesis, I found that many Tarot practitioners have negative associations with the word ‘religion,’ understanding religion to be institutional, hierarchical, doctrinally rigid, and often hypocritical (According to field notes February 23, 2018).¹³ The term ‘spiritual,’ in contrast, was preferred by Tarot practitioners as more accurately articulating the essence of their beliefs, experiences and practices. Therefore, while this thesis argues that Tarot is religious for practitioners, it is essential to recognize that practitioners themselves would not necessarily agree with this claim, given their emic understandings of religion as negative. For the purpose of this thesis, and in respect to emic understandings of the terms ‘religion’ and ‘spiritual,’ the term ‘spiritual’ will be used to connote the religiosity of Tarot, while simultaneously arguing that the spiritual dimensions of Tarot meets the criteria for academic definitions of religion, used in chapter two.

¹³Folklorist Kari Sawden did her PhD Dissertation, *Maps of Our Own Making: Practicing Divination in 21st Century Canada*, about how people who are involved with divination arts (including Tarot), are able to interact with the rational world around them. I recommend reading her dissertation for further information on the navigation of practitioners and how they navigate their practice in a rational world.

4.2 Emic and Etic

This thesis uses a primarily qualitative interview process, with some ethnographic research. I attended and observed the Tarot conference in London, England and then sourced interviewees (Tarot practitioners) to participate in semi-structured interviews over Messenger, Skype, and Zoom. Even though most of my study is interview-based, I am a Tarot practitioner, and as a result of my personal position within the study, it is important to acknowledge the impact of insider or in-group research. As sociologist Amanda Coffee writes, “The ethnographic research process is fundamentally about the simultaneous connection and location of people and vocal lives” (Coffey 1999, 9). She suggests that there is simply no way to fully separate the researcher from her research. The job of ethnography is to contextualize for the reader the broader framework within which a person or community experiences the myriad of details that make up their daily lives, and that inform their beliefs and practices; and also to situate the impact of those lives on the researcher herself.

Throughout this thesis, I will attempt to convey both the words and experiences of the Tarot practitioners with whom I worked; and to unpack the worldviews of practitioners that inform their beliefs and practices, and I will also attempt to situate myself within this work. I am ideally situated to research the spiritual dimensions of Tarot, as I am both a Tarot practitioner and a scholar of religion. As noted by social work professor Annemarie Gockel, the behaviour and narratives of informants can change depending upon the person or people with whom their narratives are being shared (Gockel 213, 192). As an insider to this community, I can fully participate in discussions

and practices, and therefore am privileged to be welcomed as someone who ‘gets it’ when Tarot practitioners try to communicate esoteric or numinous ideas using language not necessarily well suited to conventional definitions. Further, as an insider, I have shared some of the ostracization and hostility to which practitioners are subject; therefore, I understand the impact of accusations of deviance on Tarot practitioners’ belief and practice. Additionally, the Tarot practitioners with whom I worked did not need to spend large amounts of time explaining basic details of Tarot history and practice to me, trusting me to know the difference between the major and minor arcana, how to read a card upright vs reverse, the differences between the Rider-Waite and a variety of other decks, for example. This meant that our discussion and interviews could focus on more nuanced topics reasonably early in our interactions. As Amanda Coffey notes, there are benefits to being an emic scholar: insider insights can be “empowering,” can throw “objective foundations of knowledge into doubt,” and can allow the researcher to be “positively present in an empirical study” (Coffey 1999, 12).

Conversely, as an insider to this community, I needed to be careful not to project my own experiences and interpretations onto the words of my interviewees, taking time to double-check my interpretations of their narratives to ensure that I was accurately representing their stories in this work. Using Hufford’s articulation of reflexivity, I am aware that my bias cannot be entirely removed from my academic analyses – while Hufford highlights the impossibility of removing the bias of ‘disbelief’ from the study of religion, it remains equally valid that the bias of belief cannot be entirely removed (Hufford, 1995, 60). As a scholar of religion, I bring to the study of Tarot a familiarity with a variety of religious traditions and academic frameworks. These frameworks are

informed by the works of sociologists, religious studies scholars, folklorists, anthropologists, and other social scientists who have worked to delineate categories for the study of religion that do not privilege or penalize any given religious tradition, and help make sense of religion as a universal human expression within individual, communal, historical, cultural and doctrinal contexts.

As an emic scholar, therefore, I have taken steps to ensure that this study of the spiritual dimensions of Tarot blends the best of both worlds, an insider understanding of the nuances of Tarot practice, with an etic analysis of Tarot practice through the lens of scholarly categories of religion. This dual citizenship, so to speak, has also informed my methodological practice. As a member of my Tarot reading community in St. John's, I chose to focus my study on Tarot readers outside of the St. John's community.¹⁴

Participants were recruited in person at the annual UK Tarot Conference in London, England, and via Facebook through three different Tarot Facebook groups, with the permission of the administrators to ask for volunteers.

4.3 Gathering, Analyzing and Recruiting for Interviews

After participating in the Tarot Conference in London, England, the recruitment focus was to connect with Tarot practitioners worldwide to interview them. There were two reasons why I focused on the international community of Tarot readers. The first reason is that there were attendees worldwide attending the Tarot conference, and the second reason is to expand the pool of available candidates for interviews. The Tarot

¹⁴ One participant from Mount Pearl, a nearby community to St. John's, was accepted into the study, as this participant was not part the Tarot community I was a part of, and applied through one of the Facebook groups on which I had asked for volunteers.

community over the years has increased in size, but it is small in the present vicinity of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Because of the locations of the various interviewees and the lack of funds available to interview everyone in a face to face process, the interviews were completed via Zoom, Skype and Facebook Messenger.

The primary source of participants was from the UK Tarot conference and three Facebook groups.¹⁵ All practitioners volunteered freely by their own will. As people indicated their interest, private messages through Facebook messenger and e-mails were sent to speak with potential participants about the project. Some declined participation, and others did not respond to the messages sent in response to their initial expression of interest. The practitioners that expressed an interest were e-mailed a second time to confirm receipt of a message. No further e-mails or messages were sent to ensure a no-pressure environment. The addendum at the end of this thesis includes the original recruitment request, voluntary consent forms and questions used as part of the study. In keeping with the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research ethic standards, all e-mails that I received a response from were kept for reference in a secure account.

4.4 Collecting of Data

I chose to do a semi-structured interview process to collect the majority of the data. There were prewritten questions to keep focused on the information to gather and to provide a baseline of questions that everyone would be asked. The questions were

¹⁵ The three Facebook groups were, *Tarot Nerds*, *Canadian Tarot and Oracle Readers Club*, and *Tarot Tarot Tarot*.

available to the interviews ahead of time upon request. During the interview, I would ask probing questions in relation to the responses of the interviewees. Salmons, an academic methods researcher, suggests that the semi-structured interview method allows for reflective listening to occur. “With reflective listening and encouragement, the answer will emerge. With it, both the researcher’s and participant’s understanding will grow” (Salmons 2015, 59). After conducting the interview, if there were follow up questions, they were asked through e-mail and messenger communication. The focus of these questions was on the lived experience of the practitioner in relation to Tarot and how Tarot was a part of their lives.

The decision to have a semi-structured interview was two-fold. The first reason was to make sure that there was some structure to the questions so that the information did have some predetermined starting point. The questions were solely focused on Tarot and how they relate to the experiences of the individual. If the interviewee answered a question before it was asked, the question was skipped. The crucial goal of the process was to understand the practice and to have the voice of the participants in relation to their experiences be front and centre.

4.5 Demographics

At the UK Tarot Conference in October 2017, the demographics break down is based solely on observation. The majority of the participants are white, middle-aged, middle-class females. The approximate demographic divide was ninety percent women, and ten percent men in attendance (according to field notes from October 13, 2017). Most of the men tended to congregate in the back of the room and did not participate in the

broader group discussions. The majority of participants were from England, Western Europe and North American countries (according to field notes from October 13, 2017). Examples of where the members were from included: Germany, Denmark, Italy, Australia, Canada and the United States of America. Additionally, there is a Facebook page for the conference that has over eight hundred members, and the conference itself has approximately two hundred participants each year.

In total, thirty-four individuals expressed interest in my study, and a total of eighteen members of the international Tarot community were interviewed. This approach provided insight into how practitioners define their religious perspectives as the members were unknown to each other. The questions were varied and focused on practitioner views and approaches to Tarot (see Appendix A). Once the interviews were completed, the data was analyzed for conceptual and heterodox strategies employed by Tarot readers in their practice. This research will shed light on the beliefs and practices of Tarot readers and how they demonstrate religiosity through their practice.

Nineteen participants in total were interviewed for this study, with one participant requesting to withdraw. The remainder of the eighteen participants reviewed all documentation and received a copy of their recorded interview and written transcripts. Of the eighteen practitioners, there were two men, fifteen women, and one non-binary individual. Two of the women interviewed were of a visible minority; the rest of the practitioners were Caucasian. The countries of residence for the eighteen participants interviewed are as follows: Canada - nine, United States - five, England - two, Switzerland – one, and Australia one.

4.6 Analysis Process

All interviews were voice recorded only. Once the interviews were completed, they were transcribed. A copy of the transcription and their recording was sent back to the participant. Each participant was asked to review the information and provide feedback on the interview itself, and to omit any part of the interview they felt was too personal or private to include in the analysis. It was during this process that one participant decided to drop out of the study. All information relating to them has been destroyed and was not used in any part of the thesis.

Qualitative information was then divided into categories, based on the questions provided and answers received during the interview process, and placed on a spreadsheet to provide an opportunity to see trends and provided some quantitative data. The categories drawn from Stark and Glock's dimensions of religiosity model was then applied to the data.

4.7 Ethics

Ethics is an integral part of any interview process and ethnographic research more broadly. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) at Memorial University. The mandate of the ICEHR for this study has been met. The following processes have been employed to ensure the protection of the participants and their data. All participants have received documentation for resources in relation to mental health assistance in the area of residence, if required. Privacy and confidentiality have been addressed by ensuring all files are kept in a locked

facility. The only personal information collected was the first and last names for connection purposes and is only used if the informant gives permission. All voice recordings and typed transcripts of the interviews are encrypted and are only accessible through password access.

The quality and integrity of the research were protected by developing non-leading, open-ended interview questions (see Appendix A). The questions were developed in order to allow for natural answers concerning Tarot. The patterns observed in this thesis are the result of the interviews in relation to religiosity. Each person interviewed received and signed a consent form ahead of their scheduled appointment. Not all participants were able to fill out the forms and send them back with the appropriate signatures due to technical barriers. Oral approval was received from the individual at the beginning of the interview if technological issues prevented written signatures. A copy of the conversation and a form with my signature was sent back to the participants. The questions were provided in advance to the participants that requested them. This process ensured that all participants were aware of their rights and allowed for their participation even if they did not have the technical means to send signed documents.

Mental health is a concern when conducting interviews. Some of the questions focused on memories of adverse behaviour from others toward the interviewee's practice of Tarot. Though there was nothing significant that came up during the interview process, each interviewee had information related to mental health resources in the jurisdiction in which they were living. This information was not provided to 'fix' their belief, however, it was intended to provide support if the participant required it. The volunteer information

package also included an acknowledgement of the rights of religious freedom from the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, to show that religious beliefs are protected from a UN perspective, regardless of the country they may live in.

To minimize surprises and to ensure the comfort of the practitioners during the interview, they were asked to read the information provided. Also, each practitioner was advised in every interview their right to withdraw from the study by August 31, 2018. There was one interviewee that did make that request, and all records were destroyed. Two participants indicated they were working on written material to be published and were concerned about the impact on copyright. The practitioners were informed that any ideas they presented would be attributed to them and not to myself, nor will I be using their information outside of any educational process; as a result, they will retain all copyrights that applies to their product.

Risk assessment is something to consider as part of the research process for the researcher and participants. The risk involved in my research was minimal to myself and the members of the Tarot community that I interviewed. Every attempt to keep the information of each informant private and confidential will continue to be adhered to and maintained. Following Memorial University's guidelines, any printed logbook and written files are kept locked away. Every practitioner has provided permission to keep the information on file to be used in future research. Provided information by informants has been kept anonymous, by those who requested it; however, there is an understanding that if the stories are unique, the person may be identified as a result. The risk of exposure is minimal as most of the information collected was limited to a regional area, names and age.

Chapter 5: Tarot is a Religious activity

5.1 Introduction

Tarot practice is dynamic, individualistic and lived. Practitioners have complex and multifaceted belief systems and use Tarot in a variety of ways. While some practitioners are involved in fiction or spiritual writing, others use Tarot in their coaching and other business endeavors. Learning about and using Tarot is individualistic. For example, some practitioners have learned from books, others have learned from classes, and some have engaged in self-study directly working with Tarot. As a lived practice, practitioners integrate Tarot into their daily lives in different ways. Like religious identity within mainstream religious traditions, Tarot represents for its practitioners one facet of who they are. Practitioners might use Tarot daily for personal contemplation, to help a friend gain insight into a troubling circumstance, provide insight into a problem or to help reach a decision, or even to gain a glimpse into possible futures. All of these various actions, activities and motivations together make up a lived religion. Each individual practitioner develops a style that is uniquely based on their background, interests and personal belief. Observing the dynamic, individualistic and lived process of Tarot allows us to see religion being demonstrated outside of a hierarchal institutional context.

In chapter four, I explain that my study is an emic interview based study of Tarot practitioners. I interviewed a total of eighteen practitioners of all self-reported levels (beginner to expert), three were male and fifteen females, from the ages of 22 to 66. I met some in person when I attended the 14th Annual Tarot conference in London, England. I then reached out to the attendees of the Tarot Conference via e-mail. I connected with

interviewees through the use of Facebook. I also solicited involvement through e-mail and various posts on Facebook, both on private pages and Tarot groups. With the permission of the Group Administrators, I posted in three Facebook Tarot groups. I engaged with the on-line community for 6 months, during which time I conducted interviews with practitioners from Western Europe, Australia, Canada, and the United States. The Tarot practitioners I interviewed provided the foundation for my observations and analysis of Tarot from a religious studies perspective. This thesis will argue that the religion of Tarot is dynamic, personal, and individualistic; and ideologies are based on the personal experiences of the interviewed practitioners specifically focusing on aspects of belief, culture, education, and religious upbringing.

In chapter two I reviewed the scholarship pertaining to New Age, namely that of Stark and Glock (1968), Stark and Bainbridge (1985), Gordon Melton (1992), Antione Faivre (1995), Robert Orsi (2003, 2004) and Leonard Primiano (1995). In chapter three I discussed the works of Ronald Decker (1996, 2002), Thierry Depaulis (1996), Michael Dummett (1996, 2002) and Helen Farley (2009) in relation to the history and the development of Tarot. Building on the foundation of scholarship in chapter two and three I will be delving further into my analysis based on the categories drawn from Stark and Glock's dimensions of religiosity model where there are five key dimensions of faith: 1) belief; 2) practice; 3) experience; 4) knowledge; and 5) consequences (Stark and Glock 1968, 11-21). These categories will be used to show how Tarot practitioners participate in a religious practice. In the conclusion of this thesis, I will address the concept of lived religion as articulated by Robert Orsi and vernacular religion by Leonard Primiano, as

these ideas are critical to the understanding of Tarot and compliment Stark and Glock's work.

In the present chapter, I will examine what it means to view Tarot from a religious studies perspective. I will first open with an examination of Tarot as categorized by the term "New Age." By examining how New Age is defined, we gain further insight into the self-identification of Tarot practitioners, many of which do not embrace such terminology. I will address the use of Tarot as a dynamic process promoting individualistic religious practices, making the use of Tarot an ideal case study to explore the works of Primiano, Orsi, Stark and Glock as discussed in chapter two. The combination of Stark and Glock's work in relation to Orsi and Primiano will demonstrate not only the religiosity of Tarot but will demonstrate that religion can be looked at from a lived or vernacular perspective, bringing out the dynamic and individual approaches to the practice of Tarot.

5.2 Tarot and its Categorization as New Age Religion

The academic definition of New Age is very broad and includes many different religious concepts and practices like yoga, meditation, astrology and the use of crystals. Gordon Melton, for example, claims that channeling and crystals are the key identifiers of New Age ideology (Melton 1992, 21). Tarot is often seen as part of the New Age conglomerate and, as my analysis shows, practitioners often adopt key components of this New Age methodology such as channeling and the use of crystals. New Age is a complex religious system that includes many different practices and concepts. It is useful to discuss Tarot as an aspect of New Age spiritual belief and practice, establishing Tarot as

one branch of that alternative religion. I will argue that Tarot is more than a footnote within the aspect of New Age religion, it is an ideal demonstration of New Age religion from an academic perspective. Tarot for practitioners is a way of life which provides purpose and meaning.

Unlike academics, Tarot practitioners tend to not place themselves within the New Age context. It is not surprising that Tarot practitioners do not consider themselves as New Age, as there is a stigma attached to the term 'New Age' (Possamai 2005, 1). Tarot practitioners tend to use the term New Age in one of two ways. First, it is used as a catch-all term to refer to shops where Tarot cards and other material products used for meditative, spiritual or self-help purposes can be found. The term New Age, in the shop context does not carry any value judgment regarding the authenticity of spiritual practices or beliefs. For example, Natasha Ferguson, a stay at home mom living in Cambridge Ontario, referred to a New Age store in her interview when recalling where she learned how to read Tarot: "I think if I remember right it was called 'Where Fairies Live.' And they're kind of like a New Age shop. They have like Yoga stuff, meditation stuff, like everything you could imagine" (Natasha Ferguson, interview, June 1, 2018). Ferguson makes the connection between New Age and Tarot in a matter-of-fact manor without judgement on the New Age title.

When the term New Age is used to describe fellow practitioners, it is judgment-laden, as they try to position themselves outside of the New Age label. The concept of New Age is often made fun of by outsiders in popular culture, like the character Phoebe in the 1990's television series *Friends*, who is depicted as an illogical scatterbrained New Ager. In the 1989 film *Jesus of Montreal*, there is a scene where two New Age

individuals and an actor of the passion play engage in an erratic irrational conversation. This scene reiterates the perception of New Age individuals as illogical and irrational people that have lost a sense of reality. Phoebe and the New Age couple from *Jesus of Montreal* are examples of why Tarot practitioners would want to disassociate themselves from New Age, despite engaging in New Age activities. Frequently Tarot practitioners will use the term ‘New Age’ in a trivializing or down-putting manner. For example, Barbara Ford-Pimento, a professional Tarot practitioner who owns a New Age shop in Georgetown, Ontario, recommended the book *The Secrets of the Tarot*, by Barbara G. Walker, “It’s out of print, but it is, by far, the best because she’s a researcher by trade, she’s not a psychic or a New Ager” (Interview Ford-Pimento June 5, 2018). Ford-Pimento’s statement suggests that information coming from a New Age practitioner lacks authority. There are doubts within the Tarot community that a New Age point of view is respectable. Ford-Pimento’s sentiment is no doubt influenced by the general prejudice against New Age. The prejudice that non-practitioners exhibit towards Tarot under the heading of New Age is the reason why Tarot practitioners themselves reject the New Age label.

The rejection of the New Age label by individuals who fit scholarly definitions of New Age practitioners has been observed by Adam Possamai in his study of New Age spiritualities (Possamai 2005, 46). According to Possamai; “The term New Age seems to be like a mirror which reflects only worries, frustrations and pejorative sentiments regarding the unethical practices and beliefs associated with alternative spiritualities” (45). During my interviews, most of the practitioners who used the term “New Age” did so with skepticism. Penny Priddy, a transportation dispatcher from San Antonio, Texas,

was the only interviewee to self-identify as a New Age practitioner, and she was well aware of the issues associated with the New Age label:

Yes, it's interesting 'cause when I first got into, New Age stuff and all that other stuff, I learned very, very, quickly, you're going to meet two kinds of people. You're going to meet these incredibly enlightened, beautiful, amazing, people that just make you go OAAAAHHHH! Then you're going to meet, 'you're fucking looney tunes' (Penny Priddy, interview, June 4, 2018).

Priddy does not separate herself from New Age; however, she does identify the issue that the New Age label is often associated with being crazy. In trivializing the beliefs and practices of the generic New Ager, but not their own beliefs and practices Ford-Pimento, Priddy and other Tarot practitioners exhibit boundary-maintenance behaviors. The behavior of dissociating from labels that are interpreted as unfavorable can be seen in a variety of different groups in relation to pop-culture fandom.

Boundary maintenance is the process of defining group behaviors and beliefs of members by contrasting a distinction against those perceived as 'other', or as an outsider.¹⁶ The concept of boundary maintenance is seen in a study of *Star Trek* fans and the stereotype of Trekkies.¹⁷ In their paper *Dancing with Discrimination: Managing Stigma and Identity* business and marketing professors Maurice Cusack, Gavin Jack, and Donncha Kavanagh found that there was boundary maintenance exhibited by *Star Trek* fans in relation to the stereotype of "Trekkie" and related this back to Foucault's concepts on power in relation to self-discipline and surveillance (Cusack, Jack and Kavanagh 2003). *Star Trek* fans distanced themselves from negative stereotypes associated with the

¹⁶A *Dictionary of Sociology*, 4th ed., s.v. "Boundary Maintenance" [accessed May 15, 2019, DOI: 10.1093/acref/978019953308.001.0001].

¹⁷ Trekkie is a term used to describe fans of the television series and movies from the franchise *Star Trek*. The stereotype suggests that these fans are immature social misfits (Cusack, Jack and Kavanagh 2003, 269).

term Trekkie in popular consciousness by demonstrating that they are rational individuals and exhibit self-control (300). Tarot practitioners exhibit similar behaviour when identifying their own connection with Tarot, New Age, and personal beliefs. Tarot practitioners will acknowledge that Tarot is associated with New Age, in relation to a place to learn or purchase Tarot, but not as a source of spiritual authority. Tarot practitioners recognize the term New Age pejoratively and separated themselves from the illogical, irrational believers that are associated with the term. Tarot practitioners go to great lengths to demonstrate their personal differences from New Agers, and so distance themselves from the superficial, fraudulent, or other negative labels associated with New Age practitioners. Although the religion of Tarot fits well within the label of religion contextualized by studies of New Age, like the label of religion itself, the label of New Age will be limited in my paper out of respect for the members of the Tarot community.

5.3 Using Stark and Glock's Dimensions of Religiosity to Understand Tarot as a Religious Practice

The purpose of Stark and Glock's dimensions of religiosity was to answer three questions: "1. What is the nature of religious commitment? 2. What are the social and psychological sources of religious commitment? 3. What are the social and psychological consequences of religious commitment" (Stark and Glock 1968, 3)? In order to answer their question Stark and Glock looked at the differences between institutional Christian ideals and beliefs, and the actual religious lives of believer's. The social science surveys that were conducted by Stark and Glock revealed that members of church congregations had levels of piety different from what scholars might previously have considered vital doctrinal elements, such as belief in God or other supernatural elements. Stark and Glock

concluded that “conceptions of religiousness are not the same to all men—either in modern complex societies or even in the most homogeneous primitive communities” (Stark and Glock 1968, 12). Stark and Glock’s study concludes that it is not only the doctrines prescribed by the institution that influence religiosity; there are other factors involved. While Stark and Glock focused their study on Christian communities, their dimensions can also be used to study other religious groups.

Stark and Glock’s dimensions of religiosity have been used successfully in a variety of studies outside the Christian context, including those looking at the complexities of belief in Muslim, Jewish and Hindu groups. The flexibility of using the dimensions of religiosity categories as outlined by Stark and Glock in different mainstream religious groups, demonstrates their usefulness of Stark and Glock’s concepts within the broader scope of religious studies. Peri Kedem, a senior lecturer in the department of Psychology at Bar Ilan University used Stark and Glock’s categories of religiosity to answer questions pertaining to the expression of religiosity in modern day Israel. Riaz Hassan found the dimensions of religiosity particularly useful in his study of Muslim Societies. Hassan claims that “the analytical framework used in the Berkeley studies is distinctively sociological and generic and can be applied to the study of religious commitment in other religious contexts” (Hassan 2007, 468). Hassan is quick to point out that Islam is an Abrahamic¹⁸ faith and has a similar theological base to Christianity and that this might be why the categories worked so successfully to study Islamic religiosity. Yet, sociologist Kumari Sinha applied the categories to Yoga, and was

¹⁸The Abrahamic faiths are Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

able to unpack a variety of nuances regarding the lived religious lives of Yoga practitioners as a result (Sinha 1974, 1). Sinha's dissertation answers Hassan's question about the use and flexibility of the dimensions of religiosity being applied to help reveal piety outside of the Abrahamic faiths. Drawing upon the five dimensions of piety outlined by Stark and Glock to help tease out the piety of Tarot practice is therefore a useful way to approach the question of Tarot's religiosity in the lives of Tarot practitioners, despite the difference of the methodological approach taken in my thesis.

Tarot practitioners have a multifaceted approach to their practice that can be understood as religious within Stark and Glock's categories. The demonstration of religiosity differs between one practitioner and another, and between one recognized source of learning Tarot to another because there are many elements that comprise belief. A practitioner's background and belief system will play a part in the relationship they develop with Tarot. As Robert Orsi notes, "The religious person is the one acting on his or her world in the inherited, improvised, found, constructed idioms of his or her religious culture" (Orsi 2002, 173). Tarot practitioners act in accordance to their own "inherited, improvised, found and constructed idiom's" (173), and demonstrate consistent actions within the themes in Stark and Glock's study. Even without a central or governing institution overseeing the instruction and guidance on what 'should' be done or believed in when practicing Tarot, the five dimensions of religiosity categories are useful. As we will see in the next several sections, Tarot practitioners can be analyzed using the dimensions of religiosity categories, firmly situating the practice of Tarot within a religious framework.

5.3.1 Belief

According to Stark and Glock the “belief dimension means that there is a certain expectation that the religious person will hold a certain theological outlook that will acknowledge the truth tenets of the religion” (Stark and Glock 1969, 14). What Stark and Glock mean is that, in any given religion, there are certain core teachings that believers are familiar with and that are central to understanding the tradition with which a person is participating. When Stark and Glock were addressing belief in relation to Christianity they were looking for “belief [as being] a crucial variable in relation to supernatural ideology” (23). Stark and Glock “found empirical justification for giving primary attention to supernaturalism in identifying religious belief” (23). In Christianity this means that Glock and Stark favored ideas about the nature of God, Christ, resurrection and supernatural soul to be central tenets people adhere to. Attention to supernaturalism in a New Age context requires a different approach. It is often difficult to identify supernaturalist ideas within the New Age community as New Age language used to describe these ideas does not always appear as supernatural. In fact, Melton found that New Agers often contextualize their beliefs within the language of naturalism or science, even while articulating beliefs in non-material essences such as “higher powers,” and “souls” (Melton 1992, 19) These supernaturalist beliefs were easy to identify for Glock and Stark, as they are readily accepted and defined as supernatural by believers. For many New Agers acceptance of an outward higher power that is blended with the idea of an inward higher power constitutes a kind of covert supernaturalist faith. The language used to describe these powers differs from one person to the next.

Within the New Age community, supernatural language blends elements from various scientific and religious ideologies¹⁹ in a syncretic process. The terms used by Tarot practitioners in this study's interviews are similar to those on the list provided by Farley in her study: "supernatural connection is often expressed in terms like, Energy, Universe, Universal Truth, Connection, Spirit and/or Animal Guides, Angels, Higher-self or Innaverse and Outerverse," (Farley 2009, 152). For the purposes of this study I am going to use the generic term Spirit", as that is a term that is widely understood as encapsulating the connection of all that is spiritual in nature by my informants. Spirit as energy²⁰ is described by Faiver and Voss as the core belief that some kind of power connects everyone and everything that exists between the seen and unseen. Faivre and Voss call this energy "correspondences."²¹ As Stark and Glock point out "belief is a necessary pre-condition" to religion. The same is true with the use of Tarot, often there is a belief in a correspondence between the physical body, the soul and Spirit. Tarot is the physical tool that practitioners believe provides the symbols to understand the messages provided by Spirit.

There are those who do not use Tarot yet believe that Tarot is an effective tool of guidance, and seek out practitioners to conduct a reading and interpret the cards. The querent,²² whether they are a practitioner or not, are often at a time in their life where they

¹⁹Various religious ideologies include concepts from Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and worldwide Indigenous peoples' beliefs.

²⁰Energy is an example of the different types of concepts used to describe a spiritual self (Gockel 2013, 196). "god, spirit, life force, energy, higher self, and soul." are other examples of terms that are used to denote continued spiritual connection (Gockel 2013, 196).

²¹"Symbolic and real correspondences are said to exist among all part of the universe, both seen and unseen" (Faivre and Voss 1995, 60).

²²Querent is defined by the Oxford dictionary as a person who asks or enquires; specifically, a person who consults an astrologer, fortune-teller, medium, etc. For the purpose of this thesis a querent is the person

need spiritual guidance. By participating in the act of reading Tarot or sitting for a Tarot reading the querent and/or practitioner is able to connect to Spirit and use the information embedded in the cards to reveal guidance. In unpacking the complexity of this concept of Spirit for Tarot practitioners I have identified four key manifestations of this term that constitute the “belief” component of Tarot as religion. These manifestations are as follows:

1. Tarot and the unifying connection with Spirit
2. Tarot in relation to prediction, free will and self-help
3. Tarot and assisting others in reaching full human potential
4. Tarot and deepening “spiritual knowledge.”

Each of these foundations of belief will be investigated further below.

5.3.1.1 Tarot and the Unifying Connection of ‘Spirit’

Tarot is used to identify a unifying connection between the individual and Spirit. According to Adam Possamai, each and every living being is interconnected, and that all religions are connected as an expression of this underlying truth constitutes the core of “monism,” a term he prefers to New Age but which is synonymous (Possamai 2005). Faivre and Voss state that correspondences are “symbolic and...are said to exist among all part of the universe, both seen and unseen” (Faivre and Voss 1995, 60). Tarot users use a variety of terms that refer to ‘something’ beyond their own person, and these terms are rooted in individual experience, custom and belief. This supernatural connection to something beyond individual conscious thought is understood by practitioners to be a

asking the questions in relation to Tarot, regardless if it is the practitioner themselves or someone they are reading for.

connection with all things that is bigger than the individual themselves. As a result, there are many different nuances to the meaning of the term ‘Spirit.’ Just how this concept of Spirit is viewed by practitioners will be explored next.

This monistic conviction can best be seen in the example provided by Justine Gauckler, a stay at home mom in New Jersey. She refers to her experience in the military where she had the opportunity to explore different religious ideologies. Gauckler said:

I did convert to Islam. I converted to Judaism. I was in the military and you’re able to go to different churches and see the different things that they do. All of it fascinated me. Because, everybody’s view of God no matter what religion is the same but different. To me, it’s all the same. And that is why I say the Universe because no matter what you call your god, they control what we are. And so, I literally tried every religion. Except Taoism, but that’s because they [the military] didn’t offer it...I wanna know why they [other religious groups] feel like their god is better than another god, [when] they actually [are] just the same people... He, [God], wants our freedom of loving him. You know how to put it into a book, it doesn’t have to be defined as ‘this is what you have to believe.’ God wants you to believe in him in any way you choose to. So long as you believe. That’s it (Justine Gauckler, interview, March 13, 2018).

The conversation with Gauckler is an example how Tarot practitioners use the language of monism to explain their belief. Gauckler uses Spirit as Universe and God interchangeably throughout the interview. Gauckler’s upbringing was in a Southern Baptist home (Justine Gauckler, interview, March 13, 2018), which may explain why she uses God/He at times when articulating her convictions, but uses Universe/Spirit at other times when speaking more specifically about her Tarot practice. Farley calls this kind of conflation of language a natural process because: “eclecticism and syncretism are integral to the [New Age] movement” (Farley 2009, 152).

The connection between God/Universe/Spirit and Tarot is an example of the correspondences that Faivre and Voss use to identify esoteric practices. Spirit is

understood as the essence that connects everything. For Faivre and Voss the statement: “what is below is just as what is above, what is above is just as what is below” (Faivre and Voss 1995, 60) encapsulates the essence of esoteric thought. Richard Cavendish, a British occult historian, illustrates this in his book *The Tarot*. According to Cavendish the gesture made by the Magus or Magician²³ on the juggler card is used to depict the “magical principle of ‘as above, so below,’ that God is in heaven so man is on earth” (Cavendish 1975, 67). Tarot practitioners see the ‘as above, so below’ metaphor as a way to articulate the connection between Spirit and the physical manifestation of things and experiences in life²⁴. Tarot is a way for practitioners to connect with Spirit to channel messages from a trusted supernatural source to the querent. Channeling is another way that Tarot practitioners demonstrate the belief that all things are connected through Spirit.

According to Farley, “Channeling refers to the belief that psychic mediums are able to serve as a channel for information from a source other than their normal selves” (Farley 2009, 153). In the context of Tarot readings practitioners believe they receive their messages from Spirit, or that Spirit guides them in their interpretation of the cards’ symbols. Practitioners, as previously discussed, avoid the term New Age, they also tend to avoid the term channeling. Likewise, terms such as ‘psychic’ or ‘mediumship’ are noticeably missing from many of the interviews with Tarot practitioners. Instead, Tarot practitioners prefer the term “intuition.” For example, when Barbara Ford-Pimento discussed teaching Tarot she said:

²³In the Rider Waite-Smith deck a man stands at a table he gestures with one hand point upwards and the other hand point downwards.

²⁴Physical things could be a reference to any material items, like a desk, money, house or car, something that you can feel or experience within the existence of the five senses of the physical body.

What I teach is that the cards on their own represent the chaos of the universe; it's all possibilities, right? When you think of a question, you're focusing your mind, you're connecting in with your higher self, or your spirit, and however, you determine it. That part of you that is infinitely wise, and you shuffle the cards, you are subconsciously putting the cards in the correct order, and then you lay them according to a spread, and you read them by position, and that's how you take all of that information that's tied into every single card, and you boil it down, kind of like going through a funnel, into what does it mean, based on this position of the card? And that's how you get your information, and that's how you can read Tarot and be very successful with Tarot, without having to be incredibly intuitive yourself. (Barbara Ford-Pimento, interview, June 5, 2018)

What Ford-Pimento is describing here as “intuitive” is what Farley might call channeling, meaning from a higher power in relation to how to use Tarot. Tarot, for Ford-Pimento, is a tool used to connect with Spirit that is “infinitely wise,” while the individual that is reading the cards is much more limited. The process of reading Tarot symbols is the process of tapping into a higher power, which then guides the reader to a helpful interpretation of the cards. The meaning of the cards is “channeled” through the reader for the benefit of the querent, and is made possible through the monistic nature of the universe in which all things and people are connected.

A practitioner does not need to be a medium or psychic to use Tarot, therefore, all they need to do is to be open to the oneness of the universe in order to interpret the symbols in a meaningful way. Tarot is a way for everyone to have access to Spirit and is used by a practitioner to find their own “spiritual knowledge,” which will be addressed later in the analysis.

5.3.1.2 Tarot: Prediction, Free Will, and Self Help

While understanding the monistic nature of Spirit and self is the key for Tarot readers, it is much less a focus in everyday life than another core facet of the religion of

Tarot: that of being, or becoming, one's own best self. For Tarot readers, Tarot's purpose is to help a person be the best person they can be. Tarot is a way to achieve the full potential of one's identity, through insightful meditation to promote grounding, reflection and use of the predictive nature of Tarot to improve one's life. All of these different approaches help the practitioner to connect with their inner spiritual knowledge. The belief that Tarot can be predictive does not impact free will for Tarot readers, and instead is understood to both empower the individual and to reveal the potential outcomes of existing patterns of behaviour.

Most of the practitioners interviewed indicated that there is a predictive aspect of Tarot. However, practitioners carefully frame how they describe this predictive aspect while rejecting the notion of fortune-telling.²⁵ This is the same process of boundary maintenance that is used in relation to the label of New Age. During the interview process all interviewees were asked "if there was anything you could say about Tarot what would it be?" The most common response was some variation of "It is not a fortune-telling tool." As Marilyn Maddigan, a professional reader from Mount Pearl, Newfoundland and Labrador, explains: "after they [family and friends] understand what I do, then I get referred to as a 'fortune-teller.' I really don't like the term. I think there is a certain stigma or almost a taboo attached to it. I prefer not to be spoken of like that" (Marilyn Maddigan, interview, March 5, 2018). Maddigan further stated that Tarot is "a great tool to be able to

²⁵In the book *Tarot of the Future*, Arthur Rosengarten, a licensed clinical psychologist writes about the concept of fortune-telling and its associating with the supernatural. He argues that the idea of the supernatural is one that has been twisted by the "self-serving purveyors of Hollywood" (Rosengarten 2018, 149). As a result of the twisting of the term 'supernatural' has created a misguided understanding of what Supernatural is and therefore demonstrates the flaw with the use of the term fortune-telling.

dabble a little bit in your past, what's happening now, of course moving forward” (Marilyn Maddigan, interview, March 5, 2018). Maddigan removes the term fortune-telling and focuses on the usefulness of Tarot to help a person meet their potential. The idea of moving forward is a way of indicating that by using the future predictive quality of Tarot along with its ability to symbolized past and present aspects of people's lives, you can meet your full human potential.

Not all practitioners use Tarot in a predictive way. Al Cusack, a full-time student in Fredericton, New Brunswick, whose pronouns are they/them, said, “The thing that I get the most is, ‘so you do fortune-telling?’ That’s not what it is! It’s not fortune-telling! And, people have mixed reactions about that, but it’s mostly based in that false assumption – that it’s fortune-telling” (Al Cusack, interview, June 7, 2018). As Cusack explains, they use Tarot for: “giving words to thoughts or experiences that I’m having, so when I’m dealing with an abstract concept, or a big question, then I can use the Tarot. It’s not really telling me things I don’t already know, but it’s telling me I know them, in a way [I understand]” (Al Cusack, interview, June 7, 2018). Cusack is using Tarot as a way of understanding the world around them and as a way to help them ground. Cusack said: “And, so [using Tarot] has been helpful in terms of grounding, and grounding myself in my thoughts, rather than letting everything just be kind of all over the place” (Al Cusack, interview, June 7, 2018).

Ken Mellor, an Australian author, psychotherapist and spiritual mentor describes grounding as follows: “People are grounded when they are physically aware via their five senses of the people, situations, and events around them, and simultaneously aware of the physical sensations in their bodies (Mellor, 2008, p. 188)” (Mellor 2017, 58). Mellor

suggests that a practitioner can feel the life energy in and around them, helping the person cope with their daily lives. Mellor said: “Grounding actively maintains and powerfully promotes an abundant flow of life energy. Grounding is also the means by which we maintain states of balance, equilibrium, strength, and expanded consciousness” (60).

Grounding is the term that is often used by Tarot practitioners to describe the process of preparing to read Tarot in a way that taps into Spirit while remaining fully aware of their own physical being. Maddigan said: “it helps ground me. And I can really connect to a place outside of myself. And connect to, I guess, my higher self” (Marilyn Maddigan, interview, March 5, 2018). According to Kathleen Hart, a part time customer service employee living in Toronto, Ontario, before she uses Tarot she said: “I usually do some sort of meditation beforehand, at the very least I ground” (Kathleen Hart, interview, March 5, 2018). Gauckler indicated that when she leaves her house she takes Tarot with her for ‘on the go readings.’ Gauckler said: “I would rather talk to spirit, so I can stay grounded. If I start bringing light work in it creates a different energy and it takes my focus away from my root chakra,²⁶ that is my biggest issue. I can’t keep it open. It keeps closing. Because I take on the weight of the world” (Justine Gauckler, interview, March 13, 2018). Each of these practitioners talk about grounding as a way to improve their lives and feel confident in the world around them because it lets them connect one’s inner and outer selves.

²⁶The term root chakra refers to a point of energy within the human body at the tailbone. It is part of the large energy system believed to be enclosed in everyone’s body, rooted in the practice of yoga (Desi 2019). The root chakra is often the focal point for grounding type exercises. In this statement Gauckler is saying she is having a hard time keeping grounded when doing light work.

Once a Tarot reader is grounded, they may attempt to use Tarot as a predictive tool. Kimberly Dawn, a Tarot practitioner from Oregon, said: “I think that if you go [into a Tarot reading] with a purposeful intention to get the answers that you seek, you’re going to get them. But we all have free will. So, just because you get an answer, doesn’t mean that you can’t change your own destiny” (Kimberly Dawn, interview June 6, 2018). For Dawn, using Tarot as a predictive tool immediately brings up the question of human free will, and she is quick to provide reassurance that Tarot does not negate free will. As Dawn points out, Tarot is not in control of the querent’s destiny, the individuals themselves are. Similarly, Ford-Pimento said “I believe our fate is not set in stone. I believe the decisions we make have a significant impact on what’s coming down the road, and, so, when we do the reading, we look at ‘this is where you are, this is most likely where you are going’, and if you don’t like that, then we look at, what can you do to change things” (Barbara Ford-Pimento, interview, June 5, 2018). To Cusack and Maddigan, Tarot is most useful to gain a better understanding of the world around them. Dawn and Ford-Pimento emphasize the predictive nature of Tarot as a way to have control over one’s own destiny. All of these informants see Tarot as a tool to provide insight into possibilities for human spiritual development. Possamai refers to this emphasis as “human potential” and this is a central shared emphasis among Tarot readers.

Even respondents that focused on a more utilitarian side of Tarot reading acknowledge the beneficial role Tarot plays in developing a more balanced, healthy and spiritual self. Rose, a stagehand in Ontario, for example, stated that she believed Tarot is both a predictive and therapeutic tool. According to Rose:

So, I don't know if you've ever been to therapy, but a really common expression is "I need therapy for my therapy...That is what it's [Tarot] for. They're very good for that. I use them a lot predictively, like, "how will my weekend go?", or "how will this event go?", or "should I take this call, or job" (Rose, interview, May 30, 2018)?

The actions described by Rose demonstrate the flexibility of Tarot and shows that Tarot is understood as a therapeutic tool for discovery and growth, not just as a fortune-telling instrument. Mark Mullins, a New Age shop owner, describes his use of Tarot in a similar fashion: "I will always check with the cards if I should do it or not, because I found that's a good practice. Keeps me out of trouble, of making horrible mistakes. I have a stepson and he's made me read the Tarot for him to find out where he should go hunting. Where the animals are going to come from and everything" (Mark Mullins, interview, March 16, 2018). Mullins has created a relationship with his cards and trusts the information he gets from them. During the interview Mullins indicated that he sees Tarot as his 'bible,' and uses it as a guiding factor in making decisions in his life. Mullins believes that he can use Tarot to stay out of trouble and sees that as a major benefit. The predictive quality of Tarot gives him confidence in his decisions.

The predictive nature of Tarot is seen by many as a form of self-help. Cusack and Maddigan, for example, believe that Tarot gives them a clearer understanding of the world around them. Dawn and Ford-Pimento use Tarot to make changes in their lives based on their understanding of the future. Rose and Mullins do not see any inconsistency between understanding Tarot as a self-help guidance tool, and the predictive practices in which they engage with Tarot. There is no indication from the practitioners that this is fortune-telling; instead, it is seen as another form of personal guidance. For these

practitioners, the belief in Tarot's usefulness in a predictive sense is situated within what practitioners would consider a more holistic approach to self-understanding and guidance.

5.3.1.3 Tarot, Personal Development and Helping Others

In addition to understanding Tarot as a means to connect to a higher power, and as a tool for guidance and self-help, most Tarot practitioners in this study also see it as a method of helping others. Tarot practitioners that read for others, especially in a professional capacity, don't read the cards in order to reveal strictly predetermined futures. Rather, Tarot is seen as a way to provide predictive insight into the way life could be for their querents, along with insight into a certain problem(s) they may be experiencing. Tarot is seen as a way to assist a querent to find their own personal truth. Practitioners use Tarot to connect with their own inner self and higher power and then channel the information from Spirit for others to help them find their own best path. For these practitioners, reading Tarot is a subtle way of sharing their own beliefs, in the hopes that doing so will help someone else live a better life and help them connect with their own inner selves.

For professional practitioners, Tarot is serious business.²⁷ Practitioners understand how the message they interpret from the cards can impact people's lives. Gauckler stated that she reads Tarot because "I want to make everybody's life better" (Justine Gauckler, interview, March 13, 2018). When Gauckler is talking about making everybody's life

²⁷To understand the connection with New Age and economics further, I would recommend reading "Negotiating Precarity: Tarot as a Spiritual Entrepreneurialism," by Karen Gregory.

better she is, as Possamai would suggest, referring to helping others meet their own human potential. Gauckler's statement is in line with other practitioners who also want to help others live better lives. Jo Watkins, who manages a chain of New Age shops in Perth, Western Australia, stated that she is in a business that helps people understand where they are in their lives (Jo Watkins, interview, March 7, 2018). In her view, Tarot is seen as way of helping someone heal their emotional wounds. Emotional healing is a large component of the self-help movement. Ford-Pimento, who reads Tarot professionally, states that she sees clients that are in very bad places and estimates that "20% of her client base are suicidal" (Barbara Ford-Pimento, interview, June 5, 2018). In Ford-Pimento's case, she sees Tarot as a way of "helping them find meaning, and value [in life] and a reason to live and get things turned around" (Barbara Ford-Pimento, interview, June 5, 2018). Ford-Pimento helps people refocus from suicidal thoughts by providing a different perspective to the querent about their current situation. Ford-Pimento feels that it is an honour to assist people emotionally and help them on their path. Ford-Pimento's statement further demonstrates the desire to help others to reach their human potential. As Possamai states, the conviction that life is about reaching one's fullest human potential provides an opportunity for healing people's emotions (Possamai 2005, 61). Helping others reach their full potential is an important aspect of Tarot reading for practitioners.

Tarot readers interviewed for this thesis all expressed the conviction that Tarot provides layered insights into past and current situations along with future predictions. Practitioners stressed that Tarot can open querents up to conversations about topics that are normally not shared. Mary Collin, a life/business coach and business owner from

Birmingham, England, said: “You’re not telling people, you’re not doing the ‘I am going to tell you your fortune,’ and that’s it you have no control [instead] you would ask people and engage in a conversation and ask them questions. Then they kind of let you behind the curtain very quickly” (Mary Collin, interview, April 10, 2018). The curtain that Collin is referring to is the part of the person, or their circumstances that often they do not want others to see. Ford-Pimento shared a story (which is detailed in Appendix B) where she saw something in the cards that the querent did not want to see. Ford-Pimento met someone who insisted on a public reading in front of a crowd at a party. She was hesitant but read for him anyway. The cards showed that the querent was having an affair, and his wife was amongst the crowd. She mentioned that he was doing things that he would regret; he was embarrassed and left the room. When he returned, he asked her to redo the reading, she agreed only to have the same response from the cards. The querent was not prepared for what Ford-Pimento would see with the cards, and based on his reactions that Ford-Pimento shared, it revealed what he was attempting to hide (Barbara Ford-Pimento, interview, June 5, 2018). For practitioners, Tarot is a way of revealing what is going on in someone’s life that they may not otherwise admit to or share, in order to encourage change, healing or growth.

The ability to see beyond a person’s mask is a way to contribute to their healing process. Collin suggests that Tarot provides opportunities for a person to make changes in their own lives. Like Ford-Pimento, Collin uses Tarot to help people find meaning in their lives. Collin explains: “Tarot is a snapshot of life...and if you don’t like the card that comes up, you probably know what you need to stop doing or start doing” (Mary Collin, interview, April 10, 2018). Collin’s statement is a reflection of the free will discussed

earlier, and she applies her belief in free will in conversations with her clients when she coaches them to make life changes. A Tarot reading can encourage people to make small or large changes in their life by self-identification of problematic aspects of their lives, in response to the symbols on the cards, and the interpretation of those symbols by the Tarot reader. In this way, Tarot can help individuals to achieve goals, to feel as though there is a purpose to life and to feel empowered over their lives.

5.3.1.4 Tarot: The Connection with Self and Spiritual Knowledge:

Spiritual Knowledge is the ultimate goal for many New Age practitioners and is about uniting the ego conscious self with the spiritual self.²⁸ For New Agers, as Possamai notes: “Spiritual Knowledge connotes knowing the ultimate reality or the secret of everything” (Possamai 2002, 51). Of the eighteen practitioners interviewed, three were interested in discovering the ‘secrets’ that Tarot might have, and all practitioners were interested in learning more about themselves spiritually, mentally and physically. For all the respondents in this study, a major goal of reading Tarot was to gain self-knowledge for the more knowledge they have about themselves, the deeper their spiritual connection. According to Kay Alexander, the search for a greater connection between the self and the divine ultimate Spirit/god within New Age contexts can be traced to the nineteenth century occult fascination with Gnosticism. This emphasis on the union of self with spirit continues to dominate the spiritual dimension of Tarot reading (Alexander 1992, 33).²⁹ As

²⁸ The terms “inner self” and “Spiritual knowledge” are interchangeable and are often found alongside terms like conscious self/subconscious or Self/higher self. Other terms for spiritual knowledge include God, Universe, Universal Spirit, Higher Power, Sources, Good Place, and Energy.

²⁹In the article “Roots of the New Age” by Kay Alexander: “Gnosticism was an important intellectual strand of theosophy” (Alexander 1992, 33). As mentioned in chapter three the influence of Madame Blavatsky on the members of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, cannot be overlooked. The ideas

a result, today's practitioners see Tarot as a way to help find one's inner truth; this knowledge is sought in order to understand the spiritual meaning of one's life.

Tarot practitioners use Tarot to develop their Spiritual Knowledge. Amanda Osborne, a customer service agent in British Columbia states that Tarot "is a tool that can be an extension of yourself, that it can be used to gain a deeper relationship within yourself and your inner world" (Amanda Osborne, interview, June 3, 2018). In Osborne's case, she is looking at her perceptions of the world around her and is using Tarot to look into her own soul. Osborne's belief that Tarot allows one to gain a deeper relationship with one's soul is echoed by Mark Mullins. He stated:

Over the years the Tarot has been the most useful device for spiritual development that there is [but] most people see the Tarot to just tell a fortune with. This is completely untrue. Most of the Tarot decks of the Golden Dawn anyway, were meant for spiritual development. You're supposed to meditate upon these cards to raise your mind to a higher level (Mark Mullins, interview, March 16, 2018).

Mullins suggests that the process of meditation allows a person to slow down their thoughts to allow a spiritual connection to Spirit. Tarot readers focus their thought, through meditation upon the symbols that are on the cards. According to A.E. Waite, the co-creator of the Rider Waite-Smith deck, "Tarot is undertaken in accordance with the higher law of symbolism. The true Tarot is symbolism; it speaks no other language and offers no other signs" (Waite 1910, 4). Meditation does not have a language; it is the mechanism whereby interpretation of what is experienced by the five senses of the physical body becomes possible. For the Tarot readers in this study, it is also the process

that were established in the late nineteenth century by both the Theosophy Society and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, continue to shape the beliefs of Tarot practitioners today.

whereby the individual self makes a connection with the flow of life's Energy.³⁰

Practitioners believe that by focusing on the symbols within Tarot, through meditation, that one can obtain a 'higher' level of consciousness. As Possamai puts it, meditation is "the development of his or her divine spark" (Possamai 2005, 33) and is a central goal of New Age. The connection to Spirit is the foundation of esoteric practices, according to Faivre and Voss:

Imagination and mediation ... are connected and complementary. Implicit in the idea of correspondences³¹ we find a valorization of the imagination considered as an 'organ of the soul' enabling access to different levels of reality... It is this form of imagination which allows the use of these intermediaries, symbols, and images for the purpose of developing a gnosis to penetrate the hieroglyphs of Nature, to put the theory of correspondences into active practice, and to uncover, to see, to know, to experience, the mediating entities which operate between the spheres of Nature and the Divine (Faivre and Voss 1995, 61).

Through Tarot, practitioners are seeking to unite themselves with the divinity both within themselves and without in the universe. The aim is to develop a deeper connection with oneself or as Osborne stated, a way to build a relationship with your inner world which in turn is a connection to the greater universal Spirit (Amanda Osborne, interview, June 3, 2018). These descriptions imply that there is something beyond the physical body, some spiritual essence of the self and the divine that is a major focus of Tarot reading.

The personal nature and experience that a practitioner feels with the deck of cards can be a transformative process and is experienced differently by each individual, Kathleen Hart, described her start with Tarot as a personal spiritual journey. Hart said:

³⁰This is a similar process to grounding as discussed in the previous section.

³¹Correspondences according to Favier are the "symbolic and real correspondences exist among all parts of the universe, both seen and unseen" (Favier and Voss 60).

Well, it's funny cause I never used to believe in anything more. I used to be a complete atheist and then my father passed [away] and I started looking into more spiritual stuff. And, I guess Tarot was one of the first things that helped me. [It] gave me a sort of personal proof that there was something more than just what we can feel or sense physically here, so it was a very personal experience (Kathleen Hart, interview, March 5, 2018).

Using Tarot helped Hart deal with a difficult time in her life, while at the same time allowed her to connect with the something that, as Hart says, "is more than just what we can feel or sense physically [here]" (Kathleen Hart, interview, March 5, 2018). For Hart, Tarot is a bridge to something that transcends the empirical world.

The idea that Tarot provides a deeper connection to the inner spiritual self was also expressed by Michael Bridge-Dickson and Marilyn Maddigan. Bridge-Dickson, a Tarot deck creator and practitioner from Quebec, stated that Tarot "represents, all of the various [aspects of ourselves], we have more going on inside ourselves than in a deck of cards so, whatever comes up it is always going to be relevant. Because it's always going to be an aspect of ourselves" (Michael Bridge-Dickson, interview, March 12, 2018). Bridge-Dickson is claiming that Tarot is a reflection of what we are experiencing in life. Tarot can be understood as the point of connection between what is within and what is outside of ourselves. It is a correspondence between our internal and external spiritual worlds. When discussing why Maddigan likes to use Tarot she said: "I can really connect to a place outside of myself. And connect to my higher self. So, I like to think that I am getting information from a really good place" (Marilyn Maddigan, interview, March 5, 2018). For Maddigan and other Tarot readers, it is important to believe that channeled information comes from a "good place." By connecting the inner self with a universal

spiritual source, Tarot readers are reassured that the knowledge gained from Tarot is reliable, relevant, and spiritually beneficial, a conviction central to the religion of Tarot.

Osborne, Mullins, Hart, Bridge-Dickson and Maddigan all speak of the use of Tarot to deepen the connection between one's self and their spiritual knowledge and the connection between the conscious and subconscious mind. The above accounts demonstrate how practitioners see Tarot as a spiritual tool for personal growth, in alignment with their individual ideologies. Tarot helps them to see the world in connection to the inner self, by providing insights and meaning to life events. Tarot helps practitioners find their own purpose and to make sense of the world around them.

5.3.1.5 Summary:

In conclusion, there is a strong sense among the respondents in this study that Tarot supports the individual in their personal and spiritual growth. Stark and Glock point to the importance of supernatural elements in identifying the belief component of religiosity, and this can be seen with Tarot practitioners. For Tarot readers, the supernatural belief component consists of a) belief that self and the Spirit are the same and can be unified; b) belief that Tarot assists in facilitating free will; c) that pursuing spiritual knowledge of self/Spirit can help a person reach their full human potential and d) that Tarot is a mechanism to communicate with higher self/spirit and helps deepen that knowledge. The terminology used to explain these beliefs is often idiosyncratic, based on a combination of mundane and spiritual references relevant to each informant. For all, however, Tarot is understood to assist the practitioners to deepen their Spiritual connection. Stark and Glock suggest that within any religious system "there is a certain

expectation that the religious person will hold a certain theological outlook that will acknowledge the truth tenets of the religion” (Stark and Glock 1969, 14). The practitioners all shared the same beliefs in relation to the beneficial outcome of the use of Tarot, to create a deep spiritual awareness, to help others and themselves reach their full human potential.

5.3.2 The Experience Dimension and Tarot

Stark and Glock’s second dimension is called the experience dimension, and they state: “that the properly religious person will at some time or other achieve a direct, subjective knowledge of ultimate reality” (Stark and Glock 1968, 15). While Stark and Glock understand this knowledge of ultimate reality as to a connection with a supernatural agency, practitioners of Tarot may or may not conceive of the higher self/higher power as supernatural. Some practitioners will speak of a “supernatural” connection; but for the majority, the connection to the “ultimate reality” comes through the actual practice of reading the cards. One of the important elements of Tarot card reading for practitioners is receiving confirmation of Tarot readings in everyday life when using them in a predictive fashion. Deep meaningful life experiences combined with belief, knowledge and practice create a unique relationship between practitioners and their deck of Tarot. It is through the juxtaposition of impactful life events with predictive Tarot readings that Tarot readers achieve a ‘direct, subjective knowledge of ultimate reality.’ That is, when a Tarot readers’ interpretation of the cards directly correlates to meaningful life events, their belief convictions in the power of Tarot to unite inner self with outer Spiritual truth are confirmed. This connection between practice and belief, as

Stark and Glock suggest, is “a sign of individual religiousness” (Stark and Glock 1969, 15).

5.3.2.1 Major Life changes and Tarot

Through my research I identified two types of life occurrences that define practitioners’ experiences with Tarot. One is through major life changes and decisions that were made in direct connection with the cards. The other is through anecdotal evidence that the predictive practice has meaning. Each will be discussed in turn below.

Every interviewee in this study shared at least one experience where Tarot changed their own or another’s life. These life altering experiences serve as confirmation for readers, that Tarot truly does put them in touch with ultimate Spiritual reality. For example, when Mullins was explaining the importance of Tarot in his life he said:

It saved my life at one time. At one point in my life my mother died. And at the same time, I lost my job that I had for eight years. My boyfriend that was living with me walked out on me at the same time. I was left with nothing. I mean I had nothing in the world and didn’t know what to do. All I had was my Tarot deck. And [I] started studying the Tarot really deeply then. For a year, I lived alone, studying the Tarot with just me and the cards, talking to them, and they changed my life in ways. I don’t think I would have lived without them. (Mark Mullins, interview, March 16, 2018).

Mullins believes that the practice of Tarot saved his life during a very difficult time. Tarot cards provided him something to focus on when he was facing a life altering experience. The combination of studying Tarot and the messages that he received from them impacted his experience and gave him an interpretive framework to understand the life altering events in a new way. For Mullins, Tarot helped reshape these experiences into something of spiritual value, for they lead to a deeper connection to, and understanding of, Tarot, which in turn was revelatory. These experiences, and the increased knowledge

of Tarot that resulted, continue to impact Mullins' understanding, and practice of, Tarot reading to this day.

Mullins is not the only person that had experienced a major life event connected to learning and using Tarot. Watkins had a similar experience with Tarot and making a major life decision. Watkins said:

When the kids were three and five, I had a crossroad and I had to make a huge decision. I had a man that loved me, and he wanted to take me and the kids to move to the other side of the country. You know how big Australia is. He wanted to give me everything a woman needed including love. I couldn't do it. And it was a hard decision. I made that decision within minutes and then I walked into a shop. I was out with him and some friends. In my own mind I made that decision not to go before I told him. And I walked into a store, it was just a lovely New Age store and I went straight to the book section and I even have the first deck I ever bought, and that's what I bought in that shop...I had faith that there was more to life than just a relationship, and having a roof over your head. I truly believed that in life there is so much more than just materialist things. And this is the first deck I bought, it was the picture the little person with the bird setting it free [that I was attracted to]. That's why I bought this deck. Because that's how I felt. I felt free when I saw the deck, and I knew I'd set something free inside me. And I bought the deck, and I put it in my handbag and, I spoke to him that night and I said, "I love you. I always will, I can't do it. I'm really sorry" (Jo Watkins, interview, March 7, 2018).

Watkins' experience was very powerful and coincided with her purchase of the first and only deck she uses. The connection that she has to this deck is strong, personal and meaningful. For Watkins, even her first glimpse of the Tarot deck was transformative, and let her experience a connection to something ultimately true and personally freeing. At this moment, she made a connection to her own ultimate reality that changed the path of her life. One indicator of the significance of this revelatory moment for her can be seen in her request that her Tarot deck will be buried with her when she dies.

Neither Watkins nor Mullins use supernatural language to describe their significant life events in connection to Tarot. However, supernatural agency is presented

in other ways. Mullins clarified how he saw Tarot, stating: “I believe that the wisdom of God is in the Tarot deck and it’s all we need to know. For me it’s like a bible” (Mark Mullins, interview, March 16, 2018). It is in this statement that Mullins demonstrates his connection to Tarot as a “supernatural” or theological dimension. Watkins demonstrates something similar when she described the process of planning her first Tarot classes.

Watkins said: “I prayed to God, I really did and said ‘please help me.’ I have never taught a classroom, I don’t know where to start and I really do believe in prayer” (Jo Watkins, interview, March 7, 2018). In this action, Watkins demonstrates the idea of prayer to a supernatural agency outside of the self. Other informants also mentioned a belief in God or Universal Spirit in connection to their use of Tarot. For these Tarot readers, drawing upon their belief in a higher power outside of themselves allows them to contextualize the meanings they find in the cards in a broader, more universal context. The belief that Tarot cards hold meaning beyond the level of the individual person illustrates the belief dimension of Stark and Glock clearly.

5.3.2.2 Evidence of Belief of Tarot

Stark and Glock write that the experience dimension of religiosity is concerned with the feelings, perceptions and sensations of believers. Practitioners of Tarot illustrate the importance of these aspects when they go to great lengths to affirm the legitimacy of their intuitive feelings, perceptions and sensations experienced when reading the cards. This may be a consequence of what one American philosopher suggests is the dominate Western way of thinking:

In our Western academic philosophy, religious belief is commonly regarded as unreasonable and is viewed with condescension or even contempt. It is said that

religion is a refuge for those who, because of weakness of intellect or character, are unable to confront the stern realities of the world. The objective, mature, strong attitude is to hold beliefs solely on the basis of evidence (Malcolm 1977, 62).

While philosopher Norman Malcolm himself concluded that religious beliefs are (or should be) exempt from rational criticism many New Agers attempt to contextualize their intuitive ways of knowing within a legitimate discourse of reason and evidence.

According to Wouter Hanegraaff: “[Believers’] world view encompasses an empirically perceptible and one or more meta-empirical realms...scholars are dependent on believers expressing their awareness of a meta-empirical reality in empirically perceptible ways (Hanegraaff 1995, 101). The need for empirical proof defines Western culture, and Tarot practitioners are not immune to this emphasis, because they want to demonstrate the veracity of their practice.

Tarot readers and New Agers will use anecdotal evidence to support their experience. They consider personal experiences as proof of the accuracy of Tarot readings and use scientific terms to create a rational context for the belief being demonstrated. Religion does not have to be separate from science. We see an example of how New Age beliefs can exist without conflict with scientific rationalism in the television series *Star Trek Voyager*, where “religion is integrated with the characters’—particularly Chakotay’s—lives and concerns” (Porter 1999, 101-102). Jennifer Porter, a Canadian religious studies scholar, further states that “the spirituality portrayed in *Voyager* is individualist, humanistic, and rationalized” (102). *Star Trek* is considered a scientific based show that does not tend to showcase religion. This is where the *Voyager* series stands out and offers a perspective where “New Age spirituality is compatible with

the scientific and rational humanistic worldview of *Star Trek*”(102). Tarot readers do not see any conflict with science, in fact Tarot is integrated into all aspect of a practitioners’ life, where the look for verifiable evidence to build confidence of their belief.

From the perspective of those interviewed, evidence that Tarot works is collected from personal and shared experiences gleaned from the practice of Tarot. Watkins describes doing a reading for a woman whom she just met. Afterwards the woman said to her: “you’re good” (Jo Watkins, interview, March 7, 2018). The statement though small, signifies that Watkins provided the querent with accurate information through her use of Tarot. These small words of encouragement from others have a profound impact on practitioners and deepens their belief in their ability to interpret Tarot. Other practitioners shared more substantive stories to defend the accuracy of Tarot. Ford-Pimento’s earlier story (see Appendix B) about her reading for the person that had an affair earlier in this chapter is an example of this type of personal testimony.

Another example of reinforcing belief, though anecdotal evidence, comes from Ferguson, who shared the “coolest reading that [she] had ever done,” for a high school friend (Natasha Ferguson, interview, June 1, 2018):

I pulled three cards...They basically suggested that she was pregnant, or she was going to get pregnant right away. And we had no contact what-so-ever, for what I think was about five to six years. I was hesitant about saying it, because you can be totally off base. And, I mentioned it, I said, “is it possible that you’re pregnant?” And she just replied, “why?” And I said, “well because the cards are suggesting that.” And she said “well, I actually am three days late with my period.” I was like, “oh, well I would go take a test.” And so, she came back two days later, and she was pregnant. It definitely was a little bit eerie. It was like an ah-ha moment. Like oh my god, how was I supposed to know that. Right (Natasha Ferguson, interview, June 1, 2018)?

The story that Ferguson shared is an important one as it uses the predictive nature of Tarot to confirm Ferguson's belief. For Ferguson, this story serves as evidence that Tarot reading works – that is, that the meaning intuited by the reader of the Tarot card symbols is in fact true in a rational or empirical way, and the narrative serves as proof that the feelings, perceptions and sensations experienced by the reader are empirically accurate. In this way Ferguson, Watkins, and the other Tarot readers participate in, and provide an alternative to, the rational empirical emphasis of Western secular discourse.

These anecdotal accounts serve to validate religious ways of knowing, by articulating them within the dominant Western rationalist paradigm. Porter, in her article *The Spirit(s) of Science: Paradoxical Positivism as Religious Discourse among Spiritualists*, points to the Baconian model of science where “experiences could count as fact, in which proof of such experiences could be obtained through personal testimony” (Porter 2009, 4). However, as Porter also argues, the Baconian paradigm of science lost out to the now dominant form of empirically based research. Spiritualists rely heavily on testimony from well-known and reputable members of the community as a form of scientific evidence (5).³² Tarot practitioners, similar to Spiritualists, are looking for evidenced based proof; however, Tarot readers are looking for it on an individual and personal basis, not community wide.

The value of feelings, perceptions and sensations for understanding the religiosity of Tarot is also evident through the deep personal connections to Tarot articulated by my

³² Marianna Ruah-Midbar Shapiro observes a similar blending of science into spiritual ideologies. Shapiro writes, “the Creating-Our-Reality motif reflects trends of spiritualization and re-enchantment at the same time with rationalization, secularization, scientification, and dis-enchantment” (Shapiro 2018, 124).

informants. Cusack explained that what they “really appreciate about doing Tarot as a religious practice – is that it can be very personal, and it doesn’t have to be in people’s faces” (Al Cusack, interview, June 7, 2018). For Cusack, one of the most important facets of reading Tarot is benefitting from the cards’ ability to shed light on their own emotional state, Cusack said:

I did a specific reading. I was feeling very called to a certain location, and didn’t entirely have a sense that it was going to be safe. I did a reading just to ask “why is it that I feel unsafe?” and get an opportunity to reflect on those feelings. [Tarot cards provided] more structure through which to contemplate [my feelings] (Al Cusack, interview, June 7, 2018).

For Cusack, these moments of clarity about their own vulnerabilities, their own emotional complexities, are equally as revelatory and important as the anecdotal proof narratives shared to legitimate the predictive and interpretive powers for Tarot when reading for others. The intimate experience with the cards is as profound as the demonstration of the predictive nature of the cards in linking belief with emotions, sensations and experiences.

Another way for practitioners to relate to the experience that Tarot works is through messages received from others. Susan Wands, an actress and author living in Los Angeles, California, shared her first experience of having her cards read by a professional reader. Wands said:

I went to my first Tarot card reading in the Village, in New York City, at a restaurant called Nadine’s. They had this fabulous Tarot reader come, and when she did my card reading she said that I was supposed to do something with Tarot, but not be a Tarot reader, but bring it out into the world. Bring Pamela’s story out to the world. And at the time I thought, ‘I have no idea what she’s talking about.’ I was working at the time part-time at the Tarot readers for events and card readers and all this sort of stuff, but I didn’t know what she was talking about. Then I wrote a play based on Pamela Coleman Smith. I have the help and encouragement of US games systems who own the rights to the Tarot cards to use the images in the play. I really liked that the play was so small in comparison to her huge life story that it really needed to be something bigger.

So about eight years ago I started writing the book³³ (Susan Wands, interview, March 9, 2018).

Wands did not understand what the reader shared with her until much later in life; however, the message stayed with her for many years and inspired Wands to move forward with her research and writing about Pamela Coleman-Smith. In this way, personal experience reinforces her belief in the predictive transformative nature of the cards.

Stark and Glock state: “every religion places at least minimal value on some variety of subjective experience as a sign of individual religiousness” (Stark and Glock 1969, 15). Mullins, Watkins, Ferguson, Cusack and Wands, all have uniquely individual experiences with Tarot. Tarot has helped all practitioners enhance their life in some way and provided each one with “direct and subjective knowledge,” providing impactful experiences that inform each practitioner’s belief (Stark and Glock 1969, 15). These experiences are taken as proof by the practitioners, which they draw upon while they continue their use of Tarot. The experiences of using Tarot offer practitioners confirmation of their belief that Tarot works.

5.3.3 The Practice Dimension of Tarot

The third dimension of religiosity in Stark and Glocks study is practice, which they divide into ritual and devotional categories. According to Stark and Glock, group centered activities, such as rites of passage, are considered rituals, whereas personal and

³³Susan Wands is writing a series of historical fiction books based on Pamela Colman-Smiths life, starting with *Magician and Fool*, and moving though the major arcane. Wands had finished the second book *High Priestess and Empress* and was working on her third book *Emperor and Hierophant* at the time of the interview.

private practices are considered devotional (Stark and Glock 1969, 15). For this study, all interviewees indicated that the rites, rituals and devotional practices all occur on the personal and private side of their practice. Because Tarot is an individualistic practice without calendrical or communally-dictated social gatherings, each practitioner's ritual and devotional practice is unique and based on personal experiences. This section of the thesis will look at Tarot practitioners' ritual and devotional practices and how these activities can be understood as part of the practice dimension of the religiosity category outlined by Stark and Glock.

Devotional and ritual practices allow for practitioners to express their beliefs through action. Tarot practitioners perform devotional and ritual practices in solitary fashion as a way to unite the individual conscious self with the higher self and Spirit. Individualized ritual and devotional practice enhances a readers connection to Tarot, and create a sacred connection between the practitioner, their cards, and the space within which to read the cards. Through ritual, practitioners do demonstrate a reverence for Tarot. Their reverence falls more within what religious studies scholar Ann Taves, calls 'specialness'³⁴ rather than devotion in a more institutionalized context. Taves writes:

The idea of 'specialness' is a broader, more generic net that captures most of what people have in mind when they refer to 'sacred,' 'magical,' 'spiritual,' 'mystical,' or 'religious' and then some. We can consider specialness both behaviorally and substantively, asking if there are behaviors that tend to mark things off as special and if there are particular types or things that are more likely to be considered special than others (Taves 2009, 26).

³⁴Taves demonstrates in *Religious Experience Reconsidered* a different way to look at religion by removing the Western contextual ideals created by the *sui generis* approach that most academics, including myself, have approached religion. It is particularly helpful for understanding religion in a modern context and further provides insight.

Taves' argues the best way to study religion is by looking at ascriptions of generalness and specialness, allowing for academics to step outside of conventional religion. By looking at generalness and specialness, we focus on the actions and behaviors by which humans ascribe status to an object, for example, the Koran, the Bible or Tarot. Observing the way that practitioners use and respond to Tarot as a sacred item highlights Tarot's 'specialness,' and it is through the ritual and devotional process that practitioners further demonstrate the religiousness of the practice of Tarot.

5.3.3.1 Ritual Practice of Tarot

Stark and Glock state that “ritual refers to the set of rites, formal religious acts, and sacred practices” (Stark and Glock 1969, 15). By “formal,” Stark and Glock go on to say that these rituals are expected of the adherents of the religion (15). By stressing the “formal,” “expected” nature of rites and religious acts, Stark and Glock reveal a privileging of institutional religious frameworks in their study of religiosity. This points to a weakness in the study, for Stark and Glock’s expressed goal was to better understand the religiosity of believers separate from the imposed, institutionalized and doctrinal structures of religion. In the case of Tarot, there is no overarching autocratic institutional structure that expects or requires specific ritual action. Instead, Tarot practitioners perform a variety of rituals and devotional practices to connect to Spirit, but these are individually rather than communally defined. Practitioners give themselves time and space to work with Tarot and the ways in which they set this time and space apart provides a ritual structure for their pursuit of a deepening connection of self with Spirit.

Many different religions focus on the creation of sacred spaces as part of their practice. An example that most Westerners are familiar with is the altar as a sacred space found in many Christian churches. Some rituals take longer to prepare than others; however, it is through the preparing of the space that a separation between the generalness and specialness, or between mundane and the sacred can occur. For example, according to Hindu scholar Hillary Peter Rodrigues, one ritual of the DurgāPūjā³⁵ festival in India and the diasporic Hindu community is the Dig Bandhana, the ritual that demarcates the sacred space of the Puja, and prevents intrusions of negative energies into the space of the DurgāPūjā (Rodrigues 2003, 79). Similarly, the creation of sacred space is a practice that most of the Tarot practitioners interviewed for this study have conducted. To create a sacred space, Tarot practitioners utilize: meditation, prayer, grounding, laying out a cloth, the lighting of candles, and the use of crystals. No two practitioners' rituals were identical, but each was performed before reading the cards. Other ritual behaviours were practiced, at the end of the reading, and as they were storing their cards after reading.

Opening rituals are the most common practice Tarot practitioners discussed. Prior to reading Tarot, practitioners have a variety of opening rituals that they engage in. Terms like grounding, clarity and focus are commonly used to describe the preparation process. Hart explains: "I usually do some sort of meditation beforehand, at the very least I ground"³⁶ (Kathleen Hart, interview, March 5, 2018). Hart uses meditation to focus on the

³⁵ DurgāPūjā is an annual Hindu festival that is nine nights long honouring the Great Goddess (Rodrigues 2003, 7).

³⁶Hart explained grounding as "visualizing roots extending from my body into the earth. Sometimes a tunnel of energy, which I'll extend to what I visualize as the earth's core. I might also reach roots into the

question she seeks an answer to as she shuffles her deck to prepare herself to interpret the symbols on the cards:

I typically would call in my guides...I'll usually just hold them [Tarot cards] between my hands and think about what question I have. And then keep thinking about that question while I shuffle. It varies, how I pick the cards. I don't often split the deck. I usually spread the cards out. It's always evolving. (Kathleen Hart, interview, March 5, 2018).

The opening ritual that Hart is engaging in allows her to create a sacred space for her to focus on Tarot answering her question. The space becomes sacred for Hart when her spirit guides (spiritual beings who act as mentors for spiritual growth) are appealed to, in order to ensure an accurate reading of Tarot. This process allows Hart to read Tarot without distraction, for the purpose of further self-understanding.

Other practitioners have similar approaches to creating sacred space in preparation for a reading. For example, Ford-Pimento will “do a little prayer [to Spirit] asking that I make sure the answers are for them [the querent], and not my stuff coming through” (Barbara Ford-Pimento, interview, June 5, 2018). This prayer is to create a metaphorical space for the querent to ensure that the answers given by Tarot are helpful and relevant to them (rather than Ford-Pimento herself). Prayer is also used for focus when a practitioner interprets the cards for themselves. When Gauckler is reading for herself, she said that she reads for “Clarity and focus [about] what I need to meditate on. If it's a huge problem that

earth and they connect to a network with other tree roots all around the world. Also visualizing myself at the earth's core. In a broader sense connecting to Mother Nature. To me it's often when I feel like my energy is erratic. Or I'm anxious. Need to focus. It helps calming and centering” (Kathleen Hart, pers. Comm., July 24, 2019).

I don't know where the energy's³⁷ coming from, I do readings on that for myself. But mostly I just ask God for guidance" (Justine Gauckler, interview, March 13, 2018). Gauckler turns to Tarot to help her understand her emotional response to situations or people, as a way of self-reflection and help. By asking God for guidance, Gauckler sanctifies the space in which she reads Tarot, both the physical space in which she lays out the cards, and the mental space in which she interprets them. Although the approach varies for each practitioner, the use of ritual establishes a sacred space for focused concentration, demonstrating reverence for themselves, the cards, the divine, and/or the querent.

While eleven practitioners spoke of opening rituals, two spoke of a closing ritual. The closing ritual is done at the end of the readings and marks a shutting down of the process. For example, Mullins said: "after every reading I mix up my [Tarot] cards three times with my finger" (Mark Mullins, interview, March 16, 2018). By mixing the cards Mullins is signaling to the querent, and himself that the message has been received and the reading is over. Mullins is now ready to move from the sacred back to the mundane, indirectly preparing the cards for the next reading that will be conducted.

Catherine Bew, a retiree living in Kent, England has a somatic response that indicates to her that her reading is completed. She states: "I just lay the card, [down], wait a few minutes at the end and pick up them up and see what else you want to know. Sometimes, if I am doing a reading, I get a tickle in my throat, and I'll, cough and I can't stop coughing and I know that's enough. Whatever I am saying, stop" (Catherine Bew,

³⁷The energy that Gauckler is referring to is related to understanding why a negative experience is occurring.

interview, March 2, 2018). For Bew, coughing becomes a ritual action, signifying that the reading has come to an end, and the message intended by Spirit for the querent has been communicated. Somatic responses are not common, among Tarot readers, and this particular response is unique to Bew. That practitioners spoke more about their opening rituals than closing rituals, indicates that the initial creation of sacred space has more ritual importance than closing it. However, this may also be due to the fact that the simple act of putting the cards away after a reading serves as an unmarked ritual action shared by all informants.

Storing Tarot cards is important to all practitioners.³⁸ Often practitioners store their Tarot in a special bags or boxes, as a way protecting the cards both physically and spiritually.³⁹ Most practitioners spoke of storing crystals with Tarot cards as a form of spiritual protection, and of cleansing.⁴⁰ Cards are “cleansed” to make sure that the spiritual energy surrounding them is pure and untainted by negativity or bad emotional energy. Watkins said: “I cleanse [my Tarot cards]. I use white sage, I use crystals. I make sure that everything is pure and of white light” (Jo Watkins, interview, March 7, 2018). The idea of using sage and crystals to create a pure and white light energy to surround the cards suggests that there also exists impure and dark energies that are undesirable to have

³⁸The storing of sacred text and materials is not new to religious practices. For example, in Islam the Koran cannot touch the ground. Jews place a mezuzah (Piece of a Torah Scroll placed in a doorframe containing the *Shema*, “telling Jews how to love and worship God” (Segal 1996, 106) in the doorway of their home. In Sikhism, the Guru Granth Sahib is wrapped in a “cloth called the romolla [and] is used to cover the pages of the book when it is not being read” (Helicon 2018). In dealing with the Guru Granth Sahib there is an entire ritual surrounding the veiling and unveiling of a Sikh’s sacred text.

³⁹The practitioners who collect cards tend to have the cards they personally use wrapped in a cloth or held in a box with crystals, with the rest of the collection kept in their original packaging for ease of use.

⁴⁰Cleansing means clearing the cards of the energy used in the current reading. Cleansing creates an energy around the cards so they are ready for the next reading.

around Tarot. Crystals are a key part of helping to protect the cards from such negative energies. By emphasizing the need to protect Tarot cards, practitioners are demonstrating that Tarot requires a sacred space for storage, and creates a need for ritual to make such a sacred space.

All of the practitioners interviewed had more than one Tarot deck. However, each practitioner had decks of cards that they singled out as special. These decks were not kept in their original boxes. For example, Dawn, a practitioner from Oregon, explained how she stored her decks: “Rider Waite’s in a nice box with crystals on top, and the others are still in their [original] boxes and they each have a crystal with them. But, Rider Waite’s in its own wooden box with a crystal on top and it’s my go-to deck. It was my first deck and it’s the prize possession.” (Kimberly Dawn, interview June 6, 2018). Dawn differentiates her preferred deck by storing it in its own wooden box. Storing decks in special boxes is a way of demonstrating a specialness that is attached to her preferred Tarot deck.

The storage of Tarot in a sacred space was also stressed by Maddigan, she said:

I have a very sacred space. Someone told me a long time ago that I should keep them in their own compartment, in their own special little area. And, of course I treat them with the utmost respect. So, I have a box that probably that would look like maybe a jewelry box to some people, but it almost looks like it’s made of stone. There’s nothing on it. It’s very blank, it’s very ordinary, it’s pretty. And, I keep them stored in there and that’s where they stay. Nobody touches them, or does anything to them until we’re about to do our reading (Marilyn Maddigan, interview, March 5, 2018).

For Maddigan, it is important to treat her Tarot with reverent respect and to make sure that the energy surrounding the cards stays positive. She does this by making sure no one other than herself touches her cards. Having other people touch her deck would damage the energy in the deck, thereby affecting the messages received while reading Tarot.

Maddigan, and other Tarot readers interviewed for this study, indicated that Tarot cards are believed to be effected by the “energies” of those who touch them. Protecting the cards from negative energies and cleansing them of a querents’ energy after a reading becomes a key ritual act.

Another example of the sacred storing of Tarot was shared by Amanda Osborne, who is a customer service agent in Chilliwack, British Columbia. When Osborne was talking about keeping her Tarot in a sacred place, she said:

Each [Tarot deck] has a different stone attached to it. I’ll put [the stone] in [with the Tarot] to charge or to cleanse and leave it alone for a little bit. I have a shelf that I have my five most used, [decks] upstairs and then the rest of them stay down here in my sacred space. Sometimes it is not always easy to get away from the upstairs hustle and bustle, so having them in here is really important. The five [decks] that I use actively always get more cleansings and sage baths and more crystal kind of alignment. Sometimes I’ll put my big selenite tower on my shelf just to kind of make sure all the energies are melding. (Amanda Osborne, interview, June 3, 2018)

Osborne is demonstrating the importance of ritual to ensure that her cards are surrounded by good and positive energy. By keeping the cards in a sacred space marked by its separation from the “hustle and bustle,” and signified by the use of crystals, Osborne demonstrates religious practice.

The above examples demonstrate the unique ways that practitioners store their Tarot decks in sacred spaces, creating a ‘specialness’ around them. The ritual process of each practitioner creates a unique individualized sacred space within which to read their Tarot cards. Regardless of which ritual process is used, the consistent message from all practitioners was the need to respect the rituals surrounding Tarot. Each ritual, meditation, prayer, grounding, cleansing, closing and storing of Tarot cards are demonstrations of what Stark and Glock would define as ritual religious practice.

5.3.3.2 Devotional Practice

Stark and Glock's second dimension of religious practice is the devotional practice. Devotion has an individualized formality among Tarot readers unique to each practitioner. There were two types of devotional techniques that the Tarot practitioners spoke of. The first type of devotional practice was cyclical and focused on calendar events where practitioners laid out cards for significant occasions, such as birthdays, a new year, or full moons. The second type of devotional practice was the use of the cards to address challenging decisions that the practitioner may face. The concept of specialness toward Tarot is not limited to the deck itself. Having a devotional practice encourages Tarot practitioners to make time in their busy schedules to practice Tarot.

5.3.3.3 Cyclical Based Devotional Practice

Cyclical based devotion is practiced as a calendrical event. For Tarot practitioners, cyclical devotion means that they will conduct scheduled readings for themselves as a form of self-development. For example, Osborne said that she devotes time to the: "New Age Hipster's...full moon and new moon Tarot spreads" because she finds them "hard hitting and fun. I always get amazing readings from them" (Amanda Osborne, interview, June 3, 2018). For Osborne, readings conducted twice – monthly at the times of the full and new moon are more insightful than readings done at random throughout the month. These readings are more insightful for Osborne in part because they link her Tarot readings with broader, cosmological events. By attuning her readings to the cycles of the moon, Osborne shows her respect, or devotion, to the spiritual forces that govern the universe and that underpin the effectiveness of Tarot. They offer her insights into herself

and provide direction when facing major life decisions. Similarly Collin said that she will do annual Tarot card spreads, one for her birthday and one for the New Year, and then monthly and seasonal (spring, summer etc.) Tarot spreads, that she assesses in comparison with the information gained from the annual readings. Like Osborne, Collin lends weight to her ritual practice by linking it to the cycle of the seasons, and thereby brings her spiritual practice into a broader cosmological framework.

Scheduling time to do devotional practice is important to many practitioners. Rose reads her Tarot on a regular schedule. Rose said: “I mean, every single month, at the beginning of the month...I read the cards for how the month is gonna go, and I read the cards to see how the year is gonna go” (Rose, interview, May 30, 2018). This process allows her to have an idea of what to expect and to prepare for the different events that she will be experiencing during this time. Rose’s use of Tarot in a predictable manner provides Rose comfort, and an ability to be prepared for anything coming up that may be seen as unfavorable. According to many practitioners, calendar spreads are more detailed and require more time to interpret, because they situate the reader in this broader cosmological frame.

Not every practitioner has a regular schedule when using their Tarot. Hart tends to use her Tarot cyclically, but, her use of it is not as scheduled as Rose’s. Hart said:

Maybe once a week if I were to estimate. It varies. Like, I might go through a spurt where I do a reading once every day for a few days but, it’s not daily. [I] probably [use Tarot] around the moon cycles too. Like if I am doing a meditation for a full moon, I might do a reading with it. So, it’s more cyclical than a continuous habitual thing (Kathleen Hart, interview, March 5, 2018).

Either by scheduling a reading for themselves or by doing a reading as part of another process, like a meditation, all of the above practitioners are participating in devotional

practice and involving the use of Tarot. Syncing readings to lunar and yearly schedule events is important for Tarot practitioners as it provides a designated time to create a sacred space allowing the Tarot practitioner to connect self with universal Spirit, temporarily suspending the mundane rhythms of daily life.

5.3.3.4 Non-Cyclical Devotional Practice

Calendar events like full-moons, birthdays, and New Years are not the only days for devotional practices. All of the practitioners interviewed indicated that they will read Tarot for major life events, such as a move or career change, or other urgent issues that can arise in anyone's life. The use of Tarot in these circumstances helps to clear the thought process for the practitioner so that they are able to make better decisions. An example of this was shared by Mullins, a shop owner in Richlands, VA. Mullins has been facing difficulties with the town council to permit the reading of Tarot in his store, and they scheduled a Town hall meeting to discuss the issue. When asked if he did a reading the day of the town hall meeting Mullins said: "The cards told us that day that there would be no decision reached. So, we went into it knowing what was gonna happen" (Mark Mullins, interview, March 16, 2018). The information received from this particular Tarot reading helped shift the expectations of the outcome for both Mullins and his partner. Mullins is not the only practitioner to use the cards to lend insight into major life events.

Other practitioners also spoke of using Tarot as part of the decision making process for life events. According to Wands, for example, Tarot helps her sorting out her frustrations when dealing with daily life. Wands said she will use Tarot:

especially if I am impatient for something to happen or, if I'm anxious, or if I, myself am in conflict with something. It's really great to settle down, and just sort out why I may be reacting the way I am reacting to things. Or sometimes, I will want a result for something, and it's not happened, and I am going Why? Why? Why? And then I do cards and go...It's not going to happen. It's not here today so you just have to let it go. (Susan Wands, interview, March 9, 2018).

These examples show how Wands and Mullins deal with the complexities of their own emotions resulting from anticipated events. Ferguson likewise indicated that she and her husband used the cards to help them deal with their anxieties over a recent move and a job searching process. It was important to Ferguson and her husband that they were comfortable with their decision to move and to make sure they were on the right path.

Another informant, Rashunda Tramble, a marketing professional living in Zurich Switzerland, also demonstrates this turning to Tarot to cope with life altering events.

Tramble said:

There was one situation where a while back I was trying to decide whether to leave my job or not, and I actually did a Tarot spread just to see ok, what are the pros and cons. And no, I didn't say ok Tarot tell me whether I should leave the job or not but, just looking at the images on the cards, helped me do like a pros and a cons section and all. That and help me figure that out, so I use it for that (Rashunda Tramble, interview, March 12, 2018).

These acts are devotional in nature as the practitioners are placing their faith and trust in the process of reading Tarot to connect to the Spirit realm to guide and provide insight on their life. The trust exhibited by Tarot readers is implicit, and the belief that Spirit will show them ways to move forward in life through Tarot is indeed devotional. These ritual and devotional practices of Tarot readers fit into Stark and Glock's practice dimension of religiosity. Although there are no formal practices required for practitioners to follow, there is a pattern of ritual events that each practitioner participates in. Tarot practitioners create sacred spaces for and with their cards to allow them to interpret the symbols there

under the guidance of Spirit and in accordance with the cosmos. Whether a practitioner is doing it as a scheduled ritual or as a way to assist with sporadic life issues, each practitioner devotes time to their practice and through that practice connects to something greater than themselves.

5.3.4 Knowledge

Stark and Glock claim that, within any given religion, there is a basic knowledge that everyone shares. For example, in Christianity, Stark and Glock might suggest that all Christians share knowledge that Jesus is a central and defining figure in their religion, and that his story is told in the New Testament. Stark and Glock write: “the knowledge and belief dimension are clearly related since knowledge of a belief is a necessary precondition for its acceptance” (Stark and Glock 1969, 16). For Tarot practitioners, knowledge plays a very important role. While the extent of knowledge does vary from person to person, every Tarot practitioner shares a common core of knowledge about the symbolic meaning of the cards. Those whose knowledge goes beyond this core also revealed knowledge of other details about the origins, history, or varieties of Tarot. The desire to deepen knowledge of Tarot is a pivotal factor that differentiates Tarot practitioners from querents. The sought-out knowledge comes from many different sources, such as books, classes, personal experience, and informal conversations. Each of these listed sources maintains and nourishes the practitioner’s belief system.

For the practitioners interviewed, knowledge of Tarot both enhances belief and drives the desire to learn more. There are different parts to knowledge in relation to Tarot and are categorized as follows:

1. Knowing the components of Tarot
2. Understanding the systems of Tarot
3. Historical understanding of Tarot
4. Knowing the language of Tarot.

While Stark and Glock found that Christians were not always aware of specific passages in the Bible, they generally shared an awareness that the Bible was a repository of key teachings of their faith. Tarot practitioners,⁴¹ in contrast to the Christians in Stark and Glock's study, do tend to be familiar with the entirety of their "Bible" – that is, within the meaning of the symbols on each card within the Tarot deck. They are also familiar with a variety of systems for reading the cards, and most share a basic knowledge of the history of Tarot as well. Practitioners will discuss intuitively channeling Spirit as a way of further understanding the symbols on the cards so as to not solely rely on rote memory to know the meaning on the cards. Practitioners also seek confirmation of information gleaned from readings through life experiences, to reaffirm their knowledge of the cards. The knowledge dimension of religiosity is very important in the use of Tarot, as strengthening knowledge tends to enhance a practitioner's belief.

5.3.4.1 Components of a Tarot Deck

⁴¹Though querents may or may not know basic Tarot information, they were not included as part of the study as they were not the people that are participating in the full practice of Tarot.

All Tarot practitioners understand what constitutes a Tarot deck. As discussed in the introduction and literature review, a Tarot deck is a deck of cards with four suits,⁴² composing the minor arcana, and a set of 22 individual cards composing the major arcana. This is such basic knowledge for Tarot readers that only one interviewee, Ford-Pimento, described a Tarot deck in detail to me during the interview as most expected me to have this knowledge already. Regarding the Tarot deck she said:

Tarot cards are divided into two smaller decks called Arcanas. The major arcana has cards that are numbered 0 to 21, and what that looks at is the evolution that all humans will go through at some point in your life. [Be]cause you're familiar with it,⁴³ 0, The Fool, represents your infantile beginnings [also known as the Fool's Journey].⁴⁴ Right? And it travels through your human existence. Then we have the minor arcana, which is divided into four suits. Each suit has thirteen cards, and each suit represents a different area of our day-to-day life. The thing with Tarot cards is that it really doesn't matter which deck you have. If it's proper Tarot, they all follow that formula. They all have the same names, or an equivalent. So, pentacles are sometimes called "money" or "coins," but it means the same thing, right? Wands are sometimes "rods." So, with proper Tarot, once you understand the definitions, it doesn't matter what deck you use, because they have that same meaning. The Fool is always The Fool, no matter what. The thing that changes, is the artists' interpretation...So, they may accent it differently, they may bring in different elements, but it will still represent that same infantile beginnings, like when we're looking at The Fool. So technically, if you understand the cards, it doesn't matter what Tarot deck you work with. You have the same definitions (Barbara Ford-Pimento, interview, June 5, 2018).

Because Ford-Pimento is a teacher of Tarot it was important for her to ensure that I understood the basic structure of Tarot, and not simply assume that I did, as other interviewees had done. For Ford-Pimento, having this basic level of knowledge about

⁴²The suits that are commonly found are pentacles/coins, wands/staffs, swords, and cups. This would be similar to a standard playing deck of four suits that are hearts, diamonds, clubs and spades. Further detail of the contents of a Tarot deck is explained in chapter two.

⁴³Ford-Pimento is referring to my personal knowledge of Tarot

⁴⁴ The Fool's Journey will be discussed a bit further in this section.

Tarot is both essential and foundational, before anything else about Tarot can be understood. She then added, “so, anything that doesn’t follow that formula, is considered oracle cards, and those are all standalone⁴⁵ [decks]” (Barbara Ford-Pimento, interview, June 5, 2018). In this way, Ford-Pimento ensured that I shared a key knowledge component – how to distinguish Tarot cards from other oracle card decks⁴⁶. In demonstration and passing on this core knowledge she clearly demonstrates Stark and Glock’s knowledge dimension.

Along with the basic understanding of the components of Tarot decks, most practitioners discussed the Fool’s Journey, which Tarot practitioners believe is the story of every human’s journey from ignorance to enlightenment.⁴⁷ While not every interviewee used the term “Fool’s Journey” most reflected the understanding of this journey in their practice of reading Tarot. The Fool’s Journey is based on the first card in the major arcana, ‘The Fool.’ It is understood by practitioners as an allegory of one’s life and personal growth. A practitioner is to follow the journey of the fool and as he visits each of the major arcana, each person learns something about themselves through encountering each card, thereby creating a deeper understanding of themselves. Once The Fool reaches the last card, The World, she, along with the practitioner, is fully self-aware (Bunning 2007, website). Amanda Elliott, a stay-at-home grandmother living in Hamilton, Ontario, stated that she learned about the succession of the major arcana as the

⁴⁵ Standalone is a term meaning that the deck in question, like oracle decks, do not adhere to any Tarot system. They stand on their own with their own artwork and explanations as to what each card means.

⁴⁶A form of Cartomancy, which is the use of cards, in any form, in relation to prediction meditation or self-reflection.

⁴⁷Mary Greer, author, identified Eden Gray as the person who coined the phrase “a Fool’s Journey” in Gray’s book *A Complete Guide to the Tarot* (Greer 2008, <https://marykgreer.com/2008/03/27/eden-grays-fools-journey> Date Accessed October 3, 2018).

Fool's Journey when she was first learning how to interpret the cards (Amanda Elliott, interview May 28, 2018). Elliott first encountered this knowledge in the book *Tarot 101* by Kim Huggens (2010), and it provided for her a clear understanding of the purpose of the major arcana, (Amanda Elliott, interview May 28, 2018).⁴⁸

One interpretation of this type of personal journey of self-discovery and enlightenment is being explored in a unique way by Susan Wands. Wands is currently writing a series of historical fiction books about the people that could have influenced Pamela Colman-Smith's⁴⁹ life. Pamela Coleman-Smith is the artist who illustrated the Rider Waite deck of Tarot cards. Wands said: "*The Fool* was published by Eye to Eye publishing in England last year. I've written a second book, *High Priestess and Empress* and I am working on the Third book *Emperor and Hierophant*, now" (Susan Wands, interview, March 9, 2018). I observed that the books were following a Tarot theme and she responded: "Absolutely, we're doing the journey of the Majors. And, we're seeing the progress of how each person as a role model and how they might have influenced Pamela" (Susan Wands, interview, March 9, 2018). Even though these books are fictional they are designed to illustrate the Fools Journey and the centrality of that concept for understanding the cards. This common core of knowledge, as demonstrated by Ford-Pimento, Elliott, Wands and other informants constitutes the "minimum information of their faith" as defined by Stark and Glock.

⁴⁸However, it should be noted that the Fool's Journey is just one approach to the process of self-enlightenment and spiritual growth. Not all Tarot practitioners follow the Fool's Journey, but all practitioners do understand Tarot as a tool to help attain full human potential.

⁴⁹Pamela Colman-Smith is the woman who did the artwork seen in the Rider Wait-Smith Tarot deck. This deck will be discussed later in this section.

5.3.4.2 Systems of Tarot

Building upon the knowledge of the core components of a Tarot deck, practitioners further discussed the second area of knowledge central to Tarot practitioners: that of the different systems⁵⁰ of Tarot. The three systems discussed by informants most frequently were the Marseille, Rider Waite-Smith and Thoth. The Marseille Tarot, unlike Rider Waite-Smith and Thoth, does not have a single known creator in the modern sense. Dummett indicates in his book *A History of Games Played with the Tarot Pack*, that Tarot was introduced to France after the French conquest of Milan in 1499. There, years of changes and French influence went into the Tarot de Marseille, the earliest known surviving deck was produced by Jean Noblet of Paris around 1650 (Dummett and McLeod 2004, 15-19). The Rider Waite-Smith deck was created in 1910 by Arthur Waite and illustrated by Pamela Colman-Smith, after they left the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. The Thoth deck Tarot was created by Aleister Crowley and illustrated by Lady Frieda Harris, who were members of the Golden Dawn as well, but the deck was created between 1938 and 1943, and not published until after Crowley's death in 1969. Tarot readers study the "knowledge" related to each deck, including the history of the cards, the biographies of the founders of each system, the meaning attributed to each card's symbology, and the larger esoteric framework within which each founder situated their deck.⁵¹ Furthermore, Tarot readers study astrology,

⁵⁰Systems refers to the trends found in a variety of present-day Tarot that are usually based off of one of the three more popular decks, Marseille, Rider Waite-Smith and Thoth decks.

⁵¹ The Marseille de Tarot was the deck that esoteric occultists believed to have held ancient and sacred information that was only accessible by decoding symbols on the cards. The Marseille de Tarot is a deck from France dates back to the late seventeenth century. The Marseille deck was not created to house symbols as with the decks created today but was used by occult master to decode the symbology in the

numerology, and qabalah as interpretive layers that lend nuance to Tarot and demonstrate the conviction that each system, deck, and occult way of knowing fit together to reveal ancient sacred knowledge. Some Tarot readers go even further in their search for knowledge and study influential occult masters, like Eliphas Lévi who studied the Marseille de Tarot.

Contemporary readers mirror the practices of the early occultists, in that they read the cards by interpreting the symbols. Tarot as a system of occult knowledge, as opposed to a game of chance, is a system created and built upon by early occultists in an attempt to decode the Marseille de Tarot. The result was to provide a foundation upon which modern Tarot cards were created⁵² (Dummett, Decker and Theory 1996, 173). Creating and expanding systems with Tarot is still being done today. For example, Bridge-Dickson emphasized the differences between systems of Tarot when he created the Orbifold⁵³ deck. Bridge-Dickson said:

In working with [the Orbifold Tarot] my aim was to strip away most of the stuff and, just reveal the scaffolding, the basic structure of Tarot. Because of the way I wound up going about the majors it turned into its own system, it's still Tarot but it's own. You have the Marseille style, you have the Rider Waite, you have Thoth and then mine. (Michael Bridge-Dickson, interview, March 12, 2018).

As a result of his process, Bridge-Dickson suggests he has stripped away the esoteric symbols of Tarot, that earlier Tarot systems were embedded within, allowing more

deck, in a sense doing a form of reverse engineering, by applying astrology, numerology and qabalah to the major arcana. Occultist applied these additional meanings in an attempt to decode, what they felt were 'ancient' secrets about the 'golden age' (Decker, Depaulis and Dummett 1995). The goal of these occult masters was to determine the 'truth' and reveal the secrets behind the symbols they saw in the cards.

⁵²The Rider Waite-Smith, by Waite and Coleman-Smith; and the Thoth, by Crowley and Lady Frieda Harris.

⁵³The Orbifold is the name of the Tarot deck that Bridge-Dickson designed.

flexibility for reader to add and apply their own symbolic systems and meanings to the cards. Having a basic knowledge of Tarot, the meanings of the cards and the symbols upon them are fundamental in the use of all the various systems, including the Orbifold.

The most used system, the Rider Waite-Smith deck,⁵⁴ was developed by Arthur Waite and illustrated by Pamela Colman-Smith. The Rider Waite-Smith deck is often considered the standard deck that most modern decks are based on. This is evident with the interviewees themselves as fifteen of the eighteen practitioners discussed the Rider Waite-Smith system. Priddy stated: “The one I use the most is the standard Rider Waite[-Smith]...people [querents] expect the standard Rider Waite[-Smith] because that’s the deck that everybody uses” (Penny Priddy, interview, June 4, 2018). Priddy’s comment articulates the popularity of the Rider Waite-Smith deck. Priddy further explained, “because if you think about it the proliferation of decks is actually a fairly new phenomena, so the majority of these decks have been created within the last twenty years after the prevalence of the internet” (Penny Priddy, interview, June 4, 2018). Priddy has witnessed the increased accessibility to Tarot over her twenty years of experience. Priddy’s observation suggests that the knowledge, learning and variety of Tarot has become more accessible, however the standard is measured against the Rider Waite-Smith.

Although Tarot has a history stretching back over four hundred years, modern practitioners compare all decks, both contemporary and older, to the Rider Waite-Smith deck which was published in 1910. Kathleen Hart, explained her connection to the Rider

⁵⁴The Rider Waite-Smith deck was published in 1910 and was the first deck that was mass marketed for commercial use.

Waite-Smith Tarot: “the Rider Waite, I like how it feels like a foundational deck...like the base deck” (Kathleen Hart, interview, March 5, 2018). A sentiment also shared by Hart when recalling why she uses the Rider Waite-Smith deck: “I like connecting to what feels most authentic. Which is probably an arbitrary thing for me to say, because it is just how I feel about it” (Kathleen Hart, interview, March 5, 2018). Both Priddy and Hart demonstrate common sentiments in relation to the thoughts and feelings towards the Rider Waite-Smith deck. According to Farley, the Rider Waite-Smith deck became the “first commercially available Tarot deck in England and has remained the most popular” (Farley 2009, 145). For many Tarot practitioners, precursors to and the development of the Rider Waite-Smith deck is often considered irrelevant, as the Rider Waite-Smith deck is seen as the authentic embodiment of Tarot. Like the Christians in Glock and Stark’s study who did not necessarily recognize specific biblical passages but knew the Bible contained the core teachings of their faith, some Tarot practitioners are content to know the Rider Wait-Smith deck, without delving into the intricacies of its history or development, or delving into other Tarot systems. Other practitioners love to explore the nuances and histories of multiple Tarot systems. No matter how streamlined or complex the knowledge regarding Tarot, each Tarot practitioner shares the basic knowledge of Tarot to meet the minimal definition of religious knowledge set by Stark and Glock in their dimensions of religiosity.

For those practitioners who do enjoy expanding their knowledge of Tarot beyond the Rider Waite-Smith deck, the Marseille deck holds significant historical importance. This was the deck used in the transformation of the cards from a secular game to a sacred tool. Yet, it is the one deck that most practitioners do not use. Seven of the eighteen

practitioners discussed the Marseille de Tarot, all of whom were readers with 15 years or more experience. As practitioners expand their knowledge, they develop interest in other Tarot systems. The Marseille Tarot, as discussed in the literature review, was the deck most popular in the occult movement between the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries; however, today it has fallen out of favor and its popularity has been replaced by the Rider Waite-Smith deck. While these seven practitioners discussed having the Marseille deck in their possession, it is not the deck that they use for reading with others. Mullins said: “I have the Marseilles but, I hardly ever read with these decks. I always go back to the Waite or Thoth when I am reading” (Mark Mullins, interview, March 16, 2018). Mullins statement reinforces the popularity of the Rider Waite-Smith system, with the Thoth system being a second choice. Ford-Pimento and Bridge-Dickson use the Marseille for themselves, but not when reading for others. Ford-Pimento inherited her Marseille deck from her aunt (Barbara Ford-Pimento, interview June 5, 2018); however, when asked what deck she uses, she said: “I like the Tarot of Marseille, because of the history of it, and because of the sentimental reasons. In my professional readings, I usually just use the RiderWaite[-Smith], because it’s what people are most familiar with” (Barbara Ford-Pimento, interview, June 5, 2018). Ford-Pimento’s thoughts are similar to Bridge-Dickson’s use of the Marseille. Bridge-Dickson said: “And sometimes I work with the Marseille. I am really fascinated by Marseille, [but] I don’t usually use it for readings, but I use it a lot for practice” (Michael Bridge-Dickson, interview, March 12, 2018). The Tarot practitioners that use the Marseille de Tarot are the more advanced individuals and use the Marseille de Tarot as a personal spiritual tool.

The third most common system that most practitioners are familiar with is the Thoth Tarot. The Thoth deck was created by Alister Crowley and illustrated by Lady Frieda Harris. It was published after Aleister Crowley's death in 1969. Crowley was a unique and controversial individual. His deck is generally considered to be the most difficult deck to master. As suggested by practitioners, it requires the most study to use. Most of the practitioners will refer to the Thoth deck as a source for learning, or to demonstrate the advanced skills and knowledge in their practice. It remains the least popular of the three systems among any informants. Collin said:

I bought [the Thoth deck] because I thought the colours were vibrant and [the] hermit card just kind of leapt out at me. Because I had to really look at what is this image. Is [that a] bearded man? What [about] the lantern? And then I would look at them and think 'I don't quite get them.' I felt I wasn't ready for that deck. And then when I felt ready for it, I wanted to explore it further. It was like a serious relationship (Mary Collin, interview, April 10, 2018).

Collin's comment demonstrates that using the Thoth Tarot was about taking her practice to a deeper, more committed level of belief and knowledge. Collin's sentiment was shared by other practitioners as well. Elliott summed up her experience with the Thoth deck saying: "At 15 I purchased my first Tarot deck. It was actually a really advanced one, the Thoth deck" (Amanda Elliott, interview May 28, 2018). It is widely claimed by most practitioners that the Thoth Tarot is not a deck for beginners, that practitioners need further study and knowledge to use it. Tramble, who is in marketing, grew up in the USA and now lives in Zurich, Switzerland said: "Some of my Thoth based decks, when I do readings with those, [they] are a little bit more complicated and I take more time with those" (Rashunda Tramble, interview, March 12, 2018). The use of the Thoth deck is an

example of the advancement of knowledge for Tarot practitioners, further demonstrating that more in-depth knowledge substantiates the basic tenant of the belief that Tarot works.

5.3.4.3 Historical Views of Tarot

Academic historians of Tarot do not understand the religious dimensions of Tarot practitioners', belief, experience, knowledge, or practice. For practitioners these things are rooted in a religious view where in the meaning and importance of Tarot lies in its history as a tool to guide spiritual growth. As historian Wood said: "While these attitudes to the modern Tarot are an interesting innovation, it is equally inescapable that very little is anchored in historical reality" (Wood 1998, 16). Scholars such as Wood, and Dummett, Decker and Depaulis want to argue that Tarot is meaningless as a system of knowledge because the authors of the Rider Waite-Smith, and Thoth decks among others, misunderstood their origin, or that their ways of knowing the meaning of the cards was bizarre or delusional. However, academic ways of knowing about Tarot are largely irrelevant to Tarot readers, except as a curiosity, for academics do not touch upon the spiritual depths of Tarot as a self-help or spiritually therapeutic tool. Most practitioners of Tarot have some knowledge of its secular history, and know that Tarot has morphed from a game into a tool for developing spiritual wisdom. According to Decker, Depaulis and Dummett's research, early occultists ascribed to Tarot cards secrets from the dawn of time and believed that the cards themselves could reveal answers in their search for the 'Truth'⁵⁵ (Decker, Depaulis and Dummett 1996). Practitioners are still in search of this form of 'Truth.'

⁵⁵ This idea of 'Truth' is often vague and is often a concept that cannot be articulated.

For some practitioners, combining an interest in the historical origins of Tarot and their current meanings, allows for a deeper understanding of the symbols in Tarot.

Because of his knowledge of Tarot's secular origins, Bridge-Dickson now sees a dual meaning to The Hanged Man. Bridge-Dickson said:

Knowing the history behind certain cards can be really useful, especially the major arcana. [Understanding] the symbology and how the symbolism kind of developed through the Italian decks, through the Marseille into the Rider-Waite[-Smith]. It can lend a lot of background knowledge. Like The Hanged Man wasn't really about new perspectives and, and all of these kinds of "New Agey" spiritual things that are attached to it [now]. I ascribe to it too, but it was the card of the Traitor (Michael Bridge-Dickson, interview, March 12, 2018).

For Bridge-Dickson, combining his knowledge about modern-day understandings of the cards, with his historical knowledge of the cards gives a deeper meaning to his interpretations of Tarot symbols. For Bridge-Dickson, history is directly connected to understanding the symbols depicted on the cards. His award-winning cards, the Orbifold deck, reflect his in-depth study of both secular and sacred histories of Tarot. However, most of the informants in this study were much less interested in reinterpreting Tarot in light of secular scholarship than they were interested in pursuing a mystical knowledge of Tarot.

Despite misgivings by academics, the belief that Egypt is a source for the information contained in the cards has not gone away. Decker, Depaulis, Dummett, and Farley have all disputed at great length the seventeenth to nineteenth century occultist contention that the origins of Tarot's lie in Egypt. Even though there is reliable academic evidence to suggest that this idea is rooted in the Egyptomania that swept seventeenth Century Europe (Decker, Depaulis and Dummett 1996, 20), some contemporary Tarot readers still hold a desire to prove otherwise. Watkins is one of the practitioners who is

interested in understanding the connection between Tarot and Egypt (Jo Watkins, interview, March 7, 2018).⁵⁶ Establishing a rational, well thought out connection between Egypt and Tarot is vital to Watkins, as she believes it will support her view that there is more to Tarot than we currently know or understand. In her case, pursuing an investigation of this connection demonstrates both her level of belief in the spiritual and mystical dimensions of Tarot, and her desire to pursue knowledge of Tarot not for secular reasons, but spiritual ones. The other practitioner to speak at length about the connection between Egypt and Tarot was Mullins, and he said:

For some reason, the older decks before the Marseille decks, all of these decks the moon card or the star card would just have a woman standing holding a star or some of them have two astrologies under the star. So after the Marseille deck, right there we get the star card being a woman pouring water upon the land and upon, the pool of water, while there is a bird behind her in a bush. Now, interestingly enough, there is an ancient Egyptian legend that says that when your soul dies the goddess will look at you as a bird in a bush as you pour the waters of the now, I mean the waters of life upon the now. And then your soul has to travel through the underworld to the desert, and that's why the next card became the desert card with two dogs (Mark Mullins, interview, March 16, 2018).

Although I have not personally come across the legend that Mullins refers to, it is one he feels is vital for understanding the connection between the Egyptian influences on early Tarot and the cards of today. The legend is the justification required for Mullins' belief that Tarot is connected to Egypt. Theories surrounding the ties between Tarot and Egypt do not impact the way either practitioner uses the cards, nor does it impact their conviction that Tarot 'works,' but it serves as a way to emphasize the 'specialness' or

⁵⁶It is important to note that Watkins' interest in the Egyptian connection comes from her use of her Rider Waite-Smith Tarot deck, which was designed with symbology related to Egypt.

sacredness of the cards and to valorize the pursuit of esoteric knowledge about Tarot in the Tarot reading community.

The importance of personal insight, rather than academic research in relation to how Tarot works is a common theme in the narratives of practitioners. The fact that Tarot started as a secular game⁵⁷ has little significance to how Tarot is used today. For these practitioners, there is no point in analyzing history. Tramble stated “from what I understand about the history of Tarot, [well]... you have so many different histories” (Rashunda Tramble, interview, March 12, 2018). Tramble knows that Tarot originated as a card game; however, she does not dwell on that fact, nor does it stop her from using Tarot for spiritual purposes. Priddy compares her understanding of the history of the Tarot to the Alamo, to demonstrate that history changes over time. Priddy stated: “I’m going to tell you an analogy. The battle of the Alamo happened about three hundred years ago, and scholars are [already] fighting over details. And this was just three hundred years ago” (Penny Priddy, interview, June 4, 2018). Priddy uses her analogy to demonstrate that history is always open to reinterpretation, so why worry about the details? Priddy further indicated that she was not that interested in the history of Tarot as she feels that it did not bring her deeper insights into how the cards worked: “The history of Tarot? I know they’ve been around a few centuries. There’re some stories that the original Tarot was the Christ story. I’ve heard that. But for the most part, I’m like, these suckers [the Tarot cards] have been around you know, for forever. So, the history is buried in antiquity” (Penny Priddy, interview, June 4, 2018). Priddy’s comment demonstrates that she

⁵⁷ As discussed in chapter two.

considers the history of Tarot of little importance in relation to its current meaning and practice.

Priddy is not the only practitioner to question the ‘truth’ of historical accounts of the origin of Tarot. Bew said: “I know that there’s a bit of conflict of when, where it actually originated and when it actually originated, but I believe it started with playing cards” (Catherine Bew, interview, March 2, 2018). She continued, saying “see there is a bit of conflict because, how would you know? The truth, how would you know? I wasn’t around then so I can’t give ya a truthful answer”(Catherine Bew, interview, March 2, 2018). For Priddy and Bew, history does not seem to hold any bearing on the effectiveness, veracity and value of Tarot in its esoteric form. From the perspective of Stark and Glock’s knowledge component of religiosity, it is more important for practitioners to know how to interpret Tarot than to study the secular origins of the cards.

5.3.4.4 Practitioner Learning of a New Language

There is an implicit understanding among Tarot readers that symbols are the basis of Tarot. Arthur Waite states “The true Tarot is symbolism; it speaks no other language and offers no other signs” (Waite 1911, 2). The statement made by Waite is embodied by practitioners. As Hart explained, “it is like a language that can be shared and used to communicate where other methods of communication fail. It’s a gift. A tool” (Personal communication, 2018). According to Wands: “You can do Tarot all around the world, because there aren’t necessarily language issues with them, there’s images of all the four great religions,⁵⁸ there’s all sorts of images going back to the earliest images depicted in

⁵⁸Wands clarified which religious groups she was referring in relation to the Rider Waite-Smith Tarot in a personal communication and stated: “it is a mash-up of inherited symbols, but the major symbols come

art. It's so communicable to me that's why Tarot is timeless" (Susan Wands, interview, March 9, 2018). Wands therefore shares the understanding that Tarot is its own language and adds that each deck requires a different language to learn. She said: "I think once you learn to play the music on those cards [Rider Waite-Smith], it makes the other cards a different language" (Susan Wands, interview, March 9, 2018). She adds: "Tarot is a fabulous tool for personal reflection and guidance; what symbols and meanings mean are unique to each person who takes time to invest in their possibilities" (Susan Wands, pers. comm., July 27, 2018). For Wands, not only does each deck speak its own language, that language can be translated into unique, idiosyncratic meanings by each person who takes the time to learn it. To learn the language of Tarot takes time and commitment from the practitioner. Tarot practitioners believe that symbols can express what verbal human language cannot. The goal for practitioners is to best interpret the symbolic meaning of the cards for their own or their querents' spiritual benefit. The more in-depth the knowledge and the longer the practitioner has been reading Tarot, the more nuanced the practitioner can be in reading the cards. This fosters a stronger connection between themselves, their deck, and their belief in the veracity of Tarot.

The 'bare minimum' level of knowledge of the structure and symbolic meaning of Tarot cards qualifies Tarot practitioners to fit the knowledge dimension of Stark and Glocks dimensions of religiosity. However, as Stark and Glock say:

from Christianity, Hindu, Jewish and Egyptian faiths. Some examples are: World card has a tetramorph of apostles in Christianity, Mathew - Winged Man, Mark - Winged Lion, Luke - Winged Ox and John - Eagle; Wheel of Fortune: Has Egyptian Gods and Jewish symbols in the tetramorph; Chariot - symbol on the front of the shield is Hindu" (Susan Wands, pers. comm., July 27, 2018).

All religious institutions expect their members to know more than doctrine and ritual, they expect a certain amount of comprehension...[and] expect properly committed members to be informed on matters beyond the simplest beliefs and practices, to know something of the history, traditions and in literate societies, the scriptures of the faith (Stark and Glock 1968, 141).

Even though there is no authoritative institution to “expect” more of Tarot readers than the bare minimum, the practitioners in this study surpass the bare minimum to encompass the deeper knowledge demanded by Stark and Glock’s categories. For the practitioner, Tarot is a combination of understanding the components of the deck, the systems, the history and language of Tarot. As practitioners study Tarot over time, both their knowledge of the cards and their belief in the usefulness of Tarot (as a tool for guidance, meditation, etc.) grows, leading in turn to the ritual and devotional behaviors, demonstrated earlier. Belief, experience, practice and knowledge come together to reinforce the religiosity of Tarot for believers.

5.3.5 Consequences of Tarot

The final category in Stark and Glock’s dimensions of religiosity is what they call the “consequences dimension;” which “identifies the effects of religious belief, practices, experiences, and knowledge in persons’ day to day lives” (Stark and Glock 1968, 16). For Stark and Glock, it is not enough to have belief, experience, practice and knowledge of the religion, if these things do not impact the daily life of the believer. According to this way of understanding religiosity, a “Sunday Christian” would not demonstrate religiosity, for their other six days of the week would not be impacted by their lip-service worship. Similarly, a Tarot reader who had memorized the meaning of the cards, but who failed to believe and practice reading the cards to attain union of the conscious self with the higher

self and with spirit, who failed to attempt to deepen their understanding of the cards so as to grow spiritually, would not be religious about Tarot. Fortunately, the impact of reading Tarot can readily be seen in daily lives of practitioners, making this perhaps the easiest dimension of religiosity to demonstrate. Practitioners in this study integrate Tarot into their daily lives through ritual spreads, daily card pulling or reading professionally, to name only a few of the ways. Seventeen of the eighteen practitioners spoke about using the cards regularly throughout their daily lives in response to a wide range of circumstances.

All practitioners expressed the importance of Tarot in their lives whether they read the cards daily or not. Osborne, for example said: “I think if I don’t draw cards every day, I’m thinking about drawing cards, every day. When I haven’t drawn cards for three consecutive days in a row, I definitely feel a little bit of a disconnect from my ‘innervse,’ you know, my inner world” (Amanda Osborne, interview, June 3, 2018). When Dawn was asked how important Tarot was in her daily life, she stated: “Just below extremely important” (Kimberly Dawn, interview June 6, 2018). Rose sees the importance of Tarot in two ways. Rose said: “For me, it’s important in that it brings me extra money when I need it, but, for me personally, I don’t read for myself every day. I just read for myself more like once every few weeks, but it’s important to me that it’s there and that it exists.” (Rose, interview, May 30, 2018). For Rose, just knowing that Tarot is there for her if she needs it brings daily comfort. Cusack said:

I’m trying to do Tarot every day. I’m not super good at it yet, but I’m trying to do it every day at least once. It’s really important for, giving words to thoughts or experiences that I’m having. So, when I’m dealing with a really abstract concept, or a really big question, then I can use the Tarot. [Tarot is] not really

telling me things I don't already know, but it's telling me I know them, in a way (Al Cusack, interview, June 7, 2018).

All of these examples express the importance of Tarot in informants' daily lives. Most practitioners spend hours working with, learning and developing their skill and understanding, and this leads naturally into integrating Tarot into their daily lives.

The interviews conducted for this study all demonstrated the high level of commitment to Tarot by the practitioners, not only using cards daily but through the continual process of learning, experiencing, practicing and believing. Stark and Glock indicate that the consequence of religiosity is that it shapes how "adherents think and act in everyday life" (Stark and Glock 1968, 16). Analyzing the way practitioners use Tarot to help live life to the fullest, to see events from different perspectives, to unite themselves with something greater, to turn unexpected life events into opportunities for spiritual growth, and to help others find and follow the path to their fullest human potential. In these ways, Tarot can clearly be seen as religious for Tarot practitioners within the categories proposed by Stark and Glock.

Chapter 6: Tarot as Religion in a Post-Modern World

Chapter five has demonstrated that Tarot practitioners are religious, according to Stark and Glock's dimensions of religiosity. However, Stark and Glock have also highlighted the privileging of hierarchical institutionalized religion implicit in the study, particularly with regards to the expectation of institutional and doctrinal authority to determine belief, practice, and knowledge. Consequently, while the categories can adequately demonstrate the religious dimensions of Tarot, it does not adequately encompass all of the ways in which Tarot is spiritual or religious for practitioners. The insights of two additional scholars are necessary to show the flexibility of religious practice: Leonard Primiano, a folklorist and religious study professor at Cabrini University, who coined the term "vernacular religion" to emphasize the individualistic nature of contemporary religion, and Robert Orsi, a religious studies scholar at Northwestern University who stresses that religion lies in the ways that believers interpret, reinterpret, contest, embrace and live in relationship with their faith, rather than simply embody or obey institutional orthodoxy. Given the lack of institutional structure for Tarot readers, the insights of both Primiano and Orsi help illuminate the lived religious dimension of individual practitioners, showing that a command or institutional structure is not necessary to highlight the experience and consequences of Tarot.

According to Leonard Primiano's article "Vernacular Religion and Search of Method in Religious Folklife,"

vernacular religion is, by definition, religion as it is lived: as human beings encounter, understand, interpret and practice it...[and] involves an interdisciplinary approach to the study of the religious lives of individuals with special attention to the process of religious belief, the verbal, behavioral, and

material expressions of religious belief, and the ultimate object of religious belief. (Primiano 1995, 44).

Robert Orsi, in his paper “Is the Study of Lived Religion Irrelevant to the World We Live In?” argues that there is an implicit form of religion where “the religious person is the one acting on his or her world in the inherited, improvised, found, constructed idioms of his or her religious culture” (173). Both scholars are attempting to point to the creative acts of individuals who piece together their own unique and idiosyncratic religious lives from the numerous historical, doctrinal, sociological, literary, experiential, and cultural pieces that make up their inner worlds. Religion, for Primiano and Orsi, is always individual, for no two people have the same mix of elements from which to create their own ways of being religious. It is this insight that helps contextualize the religiosity of Tarot readers. Of the eighteen practitioners interviewed for this study, fifteen grew up in a Christian setting; one was raised as an atheist, one was raised in a New Age home, and one did not comment. None grew up reading Tarot cards, yet all of these diverse individuals followed their own unique journeys to find meaning in Tarot.

Tarot practitioners live rich, individualistic religious lives. Bridge-Dickson, for example, is a Yoga teacher who integrates tantric elements gleaned from the practices of yoga, with an awareness of Norse runes learned from his mother, with a personal interest in Buddhism and his extensive knowledge of Tarot.⁵⁹ Bridge-Dickson is a prime example of what Orsi means when he said that religion is a combination of the “inherited, improvised, found, constructed idioms,” that form the basis of individualized belief.

⁵⁹Bridge-Dickson said: “Spirituality is recognizing that there’s a duality, that duality exists, but then also accepting that duality exists and, integrating that duality.” He then goes on to explain: “which is a bit of a Tantric view that it’s all ultimately neutral” (Michael Bridge-Dickson, interview, March 12, 2018).

Priddy presents another example of this bricolage of religious and cultural influences. According to Primiano, “individual belief does not need to be founded in or based on ideas emanating from a group-oriented and structured religious institution” (Primiano 1995, 50), and Priddy illustrates this clearly. According to Priddy, “My parents grew up in this very, very oppressive religious upbringing. So, they decided amongst themselves that they would let us do whatever we wanted. To find religion [on our own]; we find it” (Penny Priddy, interview, June 4, 2018). She adds: “I started to realize that the Christian doctrine just didn’t work for me in any way, shape or form. But I still appreciated and understand the deities that come from Christianity. And I work with them on occasion” (Penny Priddy, interview, June 4, 2018). Priddy was introduced to Tarot when her brother gave her a deck of cards. Priddy’s path to Tarot was different than Bridge-Dickson’s but mirrors the individualistic, constructed form of religiosity expressed by Bridge-Dickson and other participants in this study.

6.1 Tarot and the Role of Religious Institutions

A third example of the diverse, eclectic religious and cultural bricolage evident in the narratives of informants comes from Cusack, who explained:

I started seeing [Tarot] being used by someone who would then become my partner. When I started seeing [my partner], they are a within-person,⁶⁰ and they use Tarot in their religious practices, so at that point, I’ve been thinking about Tarot. I’m seeing this person who uses Tarot, so maybe this is a good time to start learning about it, ’cause I can learn about it in person. They were teaching me about it, and then we went out together, and I got a deck (Al Cusack, interview, June 7, 2018).

⁶⁰During the interview process their partner was describe as introverted, and the term “within” was used in the same context.

Cusack adds: “So, it’s a religious thing, but for me, it’s also, very much a relationship thing, ‘cause it’s something that even though I don’t exclusively do it with my partner anymore, it’s still a big part of how I practice” (Al Cusack, interview, June 7, 2018). This blending of a romantic relationship, Wicca, Tarot, and Cusack’s rejection of their fundamentalist Christian upbringing is an excellent example of lived or vernacular religion.

There is no overarching hierarchical or authoritative governing body that determines ‘orthodoxy’ in belief or practice for Tarot readers. The learning process, as described by practitioners, demonstrates their unique and individual approaches to Tarot. It is how practitioners learn the cards that show just how decentralized Tarot is. No two practitioners learn the same information from the same people in the same way. Out of the eighteen interviewees, ten learned from a wide variety of books by various authors. Many started learning Tarot in their teens while looking for answers about life, including spiritual identity. The flexibility of the learning process demonstrates how dynamic Tarot is, as each practitioner learned from the sources that the practitioners had access to.

Wands speaks of her experience with learning Tarot:

There was a Robert Place’s book; I can’t remember what it’s called, “the B Bible,” “the first,” it was an easy card book to read. Then I started buying Encyclopedias that Stewart Kaplan had put together about the history of Tarot. I [then] took a beginner’s class at F.I.T., The Fashion Institute of Technology in New York, and then I just started reading everything I could about Tarot interpretation. I started following the people in the Tarot community, Mary Greer, Rachel Pollack and Sasha Graham (Susan Wands, interview, March 9, 2018).

Wands demonstrates the many different sources and ways that she learned about Tarot. Her approach to learning contrasts that of Elliott, who is relatively new to Tarot. Elliott said:

[I am] self-taught. Reading books, reading online, talking with other Tarot readers. I got this one book from the library called Tarot 101 by Kim Huggins. The first chapter of the book was about the major arcana and the Fool's Journey. So, I read that and then everything that I had read over the years all of a sudden just kind of came together. It's like oh, that's it. And then I started advancing more (Amanda Elliott, interview May 28, 2018).

Elliott did not learn in a class setting but instead has been learning through a combination of reading books and participating in online conversations on Facebook with other Tarot practitioners. These two practitioners show how knowledge about Tarot comes from various sources. The experiences of Wands and Elliott underscore how learning to read Tarot, and coming to experience, believe, practice and know Tarot in their daily lives, transcends or obviates the need for institutional structures in religion, and can exist outside of any institution. In place of an authoritative institutional structure, Tarot readers often draw insights on how, when and why to read cards from other forms of organizations such as conferences, books, online forms, workshops, etc. While non-authoritative, these forms of community provide some sense of communal 'correctness' to individual patterns of Tarot belief and practice.

Tarot practitioners do not form a cohesive group. Each practitioner interviewed had different religious backgrounds and experiences. Each one of these backgrounds and belief systems flavoured the way that the practitioner understood the cards. For example, Rose sees the cards as just pieces of cardboard with no magic attached to them and yet,

reading them for Rose is a spiritual act. Rose grew up in a dual religious home of Judaism and Christianity. She describes how she felt about her experience growing up:

Yeah, my parents are of a mixed marriage, and their two religions fight a lot, and there are wars. So I never wanted to choose one, 'cause they're mutually exclusive. Obviously, 'cause you have to pick a side and, to me, it's bullshit. I'm not baptized, but I had to convert into Judaism, and it's the same God. I'm a little rejected on both sides, so clearly that is not the religion for me...I still needed something to fulfill, this little having a spirituality thing...which I didn't realize at the time, but I discovered Tarot cards when I was fourteen because I was super into medieval and renaissance art... I discovered you can own it, and definitely needed to have it (Rose, interview, May 30, 2018).

As a teenager, Rose found a way of coping with competing religious ideologies in her home through her practice of Tarot. Tarot offered unique insights that captured Roses' interest from both a spiritual and secular perspective. Rose developed her Tarot skills and fleshed out her own belief system while learning to use Tarot. Now Rose describes herself as spiritual (Rose, pers. comm., August 28, 2018). In Rose's case, she did not feel as though she fit into either religious group that she had grown up with, and this created an uncomfortable experience for her. Rose turned to Tarot, because she needed spirituality in her life; she just didn't need the institutionalized and culturally based religions within which she was raised.

For some practitioners interviewed, Christianity had a profound influence on their views. For example, Bew was baptized as Protestant. Despite being raised Protestant, different experiences throughout her life influenced and changed her belief system. She now defines herself as 'spiritual,' though she retains a strong Christian ideology about her concept of God. During the interview, Bew shared a question that she had been pondering while working with Tarot practitioners and others who believe in angels.

It gets me a little bit because a lot of people who use Tarot say they don't believe in God. I believe in Angels; I think if you don't believe in God, how can you believe in Angels? I believe there is a great spirit. It's all about nature. It's all about everything that's around, which has always been there (Catherine Bew, interview, March 2, 2018).

When Bew uses Tarot, she feels that there is a connection to the 'Great Spirit.' Bew blends her beliefs that she learned as a Protestant with the new concepts she found in spiritual groups, including various Tarot groups. Her foundational beliefs are still grounded in the Christian ideology of God; however, these have been expanded to fit her experiences and use of Tarot.

Collin uses Tarot as part of her business. Collin calls herself, "...a Christian. I'm a Catholic in the sense of what the word really means – 'universal' but not so much as a Roman Catholic" (Mary Collin, pers. Comm., July 25, 2018). At the end of our interview, Collin shared her journey to find meaning with both her spirituality and Catholic identity concerning the institution of the Roman Catholic Church. Tarot has become part of the broader definition of her religious identity. Collin rejected Tarot for many years, believing it to be incompatible with the doctrine of Catholic beliefs. She had to redefine her identity before allowing Tarot to become such a massive part of her life. Collin suggests that her journey to find meaning as a Catholic person was a precursor to her being open to all religious beliefs. Collin accepted the 'label' of being Catholic but changed the way she perceived the meaning of the Catholic label. The shift allowed Collin to open herself up to learning Tarot a few years later (Mary Collin, interview, April 10, 2018). Collin's negotiation of belief in the context of Tarot and Catholicism again illustrates the creative amalgamation that individuals create to find a spiritual system that works for them independently of any institutional structure. Today, she uses

Tarot by doing readings for clients as part of her coaching business along with personal readings outside of her business context. Tarot allows Collin to blend the different facets of her life, including both the religious and secular.

6.2 Spiritual but not Religious

Orsi argues that lived religion is a complex system (Orsi 2003, 173) and that complexity is expressed in the term ‘spiritual.’ Seven of the eighteen practitioners described themselves this way. Even with the spiritual label, however, many practitioners provided distinct explanations as to what that term means to them personally. The practitioners often separated their beliefs from external ideologies. The idea of being spiritual often comes with the expectations that there are connections with a supernatural or magical element, although not all who see themselves as spiritual believe that they have supernatural or magical connections. In all cases, the practitioners that I interviewed understood that the Tarot cards were pieces of paper or cardboard. Yet, at the same time, they regarded Tarot as a tool that was able to reveal significant personal insights and connectedness to something greater than the everyday self. Tarot practitioners were not always concerned with connecting to spirits or entities outside of themselves; instead, it was about having access to the cards. Most Tarot practitioners use Tarot and incorporate their beliefs from a multitude of sources, demonstrating the complexity of lived religion.

Orsi, in his chapter, “Snakes Alive: Religious Studies between Heaven and Earth Observed,” suggested that there is a distinction between the terms ‘religious’ and ‘spiritual.’ Orsi suggests that people used the label ‘spiritual’ to describe a good or ‘true religion’ and as a way of practicing one’s religiosity, because being religious in the

context of institutional devotion is considered harmful or destructive (Orsi 2005, 188). The Tarot practitioners I interviewed defined the term ‘spiritual’ as a way of fleshing out their own ‘true’ religious ideologies. For example, Tramble explained what ‘spiritual’ means to her. Tramble grew up in a dual Christian home comprised of Southern Baptists and Methodists. Today she rejects both versions of the Christian religion. She believes that being ‘spiritual’ is part of being human and equates ‘spirituality’ with existence. Tramble said: “I use to say I was a spiritual person, but I don’t really say spiritual anymore because I think, spirituality is part of being human. And I think if you say you are spiritual...It’s like part of being human anyway, so why are you pointing that out?” (Rashunda Tramble, interview, March 12, 2018). Tramble, who grew up in the United States, thinks that living in Europe has offered her an opportunity to see things in relation to how she defines her religiosity, including the openness to her use of Tarot.

6.3 Conclusion: Tarot as Religion

The five categories of religiosity proposed by Stark and Glock are useful. While Tarot has previously been lumped into a discussion of New Age spirituality, it is usually listed alongside a variety of practices (from yoga to crystal-healing) that are not often considered as stand-alone religions. The dimensions of religiosity proposed by Stark and Glock, emphasizing belief, experience, practice, knowledge, and impact, have allowed us to realize that Tarot constitutes a religion in its own right, even if practitioners would prefer the label Spiritual. The dimensions, however, are also flawed in that it privileges institutional religious frameworks implicitly, making the categories an awkward fit at times for the non-creedal religion of Tarot. Instead, the insights of Primiano and Orsi

helped illuminate aspects of the religiosity of Tarot missed with the Stark and Glock categories. The bricolage undertaken by Tarot practitioners to create their own unique, personal Spiritualities is a highlight of the religion of Tarot, and would have gone unnoticed without Primiano and Orsi's insights.

In the end, Tarot practice is dynamic, individualistic and lived. Tarot practitioners engage with Tarot while bringing with them their rich, diverse and dynamic belief systems and use Tarot in a variety of ways. This thesis has demonstrated how practitioners integrate their dynamic and individual beliefs into their Tarot practice. It has also demonstrated how Tarot pulls these diverse elements together with the beliefs, experiences, practices, knowledge and impact of Tarot in the lived religious lives of Tarot readers. Practitioners use Tarot to help and assist with making decisions and providing insights into problems. They also use Tarot to link them to something greater than themselves and to let them delve into the deepest parts of their inner self. Seeing how practitioners use Tarot within the context of the categories established by Stark and Glock's study of the five-dimensions of religiosity, and in conjunction with their complex, multi-faceted religious, cultural, social and familial relationships allow us to see Tarot as a lived, fluid, non-institutional religion.

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Appendix A

The Religion of Tarot Interview Questions

1. Tell me a bit about yourself? Who you are and what you do for a living?
2. As you know I am interested specifically about your use of Tarot cards. Can you share with me how you got involved in their use? How did you learn to read? Do you teach anyone else?
3. How important would you consider Tarot to be in your own daily life?
4. What deck do you use and why?
5. How many decks do you own, do you treat each deck differently?
6. What history do you know about Tarot cards?
7. How often to you talk about Tarot cards with other people?
8. How do others react when they find out you read Tarot?
9. Can you recall any particularly memorable case where someone was critical of Tarot? How did you respond?
10. How do you store them/use them?
11. What do you do when you use them (do you have a special method, time or place to deal with them?)
12. How often do you use them?
13. In what situations do you use them?
14. If there was one thing you would like people to know about Tarot, what would it be?
15. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Appendix B

Barbara Ford-Pimento: Early on, when I was first started doing readings publicly, I felt, as most readers do, that I had something to prove, right? Prove to myself, and to prove to others, I can do this, this is legitimate, and all that. I was down in Virginia in the Bible Belt. Which, as you can imagine, is not an over accepting place of this sort of stuff. I was at a party, and there was a youth minister there.

He said: “Oh, I heard you can read Tarot.”

I said: “Yeah, I do.”

He says: “Well, I want you to give me a reading.”

I’m, like: “Ok, well, I have some time tomorrow afternoon.”

He’s, like: “No, no. Do it right here in front of everybody.”

And, again, like I said, at the time, I felt like I had something to prove. So I agreed, and went and got my cards. I decided on a spread. I had him shuffle the card. I laid the cards out, and at that time, maybe 6 or 7 people at the party were hanging around the table, wanting to see what’s going on. All of a sudden in the cards I could see that he was cheating on his wife, who was standing at the table.

Jessica: (*laughs*) They reveal everything!

Barbara: Don’t they, though?

So, I’m, like: “Oh ... no.”

I’m not one for drama, and for scenes, and I don’t really know these people.

I’m thinking: “Oh, my God. I’ve gotten myself into a big mess now – what am I gonna do?”

So, I just look at the cards, and I look at him, and I look at this wife. So, I look back at him, pointed to a card, that I knew he would know what this is about.

I said to him: “You’re doing stuff that has the potential to wreck your life the way you have it.”

And I looked at him, and I let it pause for a second.

I said: “That’s all I’m gonna say about that, ‘cause you know what I mean.”

He went beet-red in the face, left the room, comes back a few seconds later and,

Says: “Well, that’s a pure fluke.”

He said, “Shuffle the cards. Do it again.”

So, I handed him the cards, he shuffled them again, and I laid them in the exact same 7-card scheme, out in the exact same order, and, uh, and that was that. A mental note to myself, that is the last time I am reading cards in front of a group of people, and I have kept to that, so when I do my readings, I like them private, I don’t do a show. I have a private room with a door that shuts, and a box of Kleenex for those that cry. The only exceptions to that has ever been when they need a translator in the room, or they’re very insistent, they want, like, a couple reading or something like that. But, otherwise we keep it private, and then I can be a little bit more straightforward, um, with things. Good lesson for me...and for him (Barbara Ford-Pimento, interview, June 5, 2018).

Appendix C

Recruitment E-mail

Hello (Name of Informant),

My name is Jessica Williams; I had the opportunity to meet you in London at the Tarot conference. I am a masters student in the religious studies department at the Memorial University of Newfoundland and conducting a research project called The Religion of Tarot for my master's degree under the supervision of Dr. Porter. As you know, I am researching activities about Tarot cards and how they play a part of our daily lives. I am interested in how you use your Tarot and what they mean to you. As a religious studies scholar, I am interested in your personal beliefs around the cards and any knowledge that you would want share.

I am contacting you to invite you to participate in an interview in which you will be asked to discuss and sharing your viewpoint on Tarot cards. Would you be willing to participate in my research project? Interviews will be recorded using a digital audio recorder and be approximately 30-60 minutes in length via telephone, skype or zoom etc. Before the interview process begins, you will be fully informed of your rights as a participant and asked to sign an informed consent form acknowledging that I have informed you of your rights, explained the project and its objectives, and what will be done with data collected from you during the interview process.

It is entirely up to you to decide whether to take part in this research. If you choose not to participate or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you, now or in the future.

If you are interested in participating in this study or know someone else who may be interested in participating in this study, please feel free send me a message via e-mail at jcw450@mun.ca.

I look forward to hearing from you, and if you have any questions about my project, the research process, or what your participation would entail, please feel free to contact me at jcw450@mun.ca or 00-1-403-815-2729.

Thank you,

Jessica Williams

The proposal for this study has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to comply with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 00-1-709-864-2528.

Appendix D



MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND RELIGIOUS STUDIES MASTERS STUDENT RESEARCH INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title: "The Religion of Tarot"
Researcher: Jessica Williams, Masters Student
Memorial University of Newfoundland
AA5033, 230 Elizabeth Avenue, St. John's, NL
Ph: 00-1-403-815-2729
E-mail: jcw450@mun.ca

Supervisor: Dr Jennifer Porter, Associate Professor
Memorial University of Newfoundland
AA5009, 230 Elizabeth Avenue, St. John's NL
Ph: (709) 864-2469
E-mail: jporter@mun.ca

You have been invited to participate in a research project entitled "The Religion of Tarot."

This form is part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. It also describes your right to withdraw from the study. In order to decide whether you wish to participate in this research study, you should understand enough about its risks and benefits to be able to make an informed decision. This is the informed consent process. Take time to read this carefully and to understand the information given to you. Please contact the researcher, Jessica Williams, if you have any questions about the study or would like more information before you consent.

It is entirely up to you to decide whether to take part in this research. If you choose not to take part in this research or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you, now or in the future.

Introduction: My name is Jessica Williams and I am a Masters Student with the religious studies department at Memorial University of Newfoundland. As part of my Master's thesis, I am conducting research under the supervision of Dr Jennifer Porter.

Purpose of the Study: As part of my course work, I am researching the religious nature of Tarot and how people use it in their daily lives. Specifically, I am interested in the use of Tarot about personal spiritual practice.

What You Will Do in this Study: Participation will be based on an interview process. The questions will be about your personal beliefs and how you integrate Tarot into your life.

Length of Time: Interviews will be approximately 30 – 60 minutes in length, there may be a request for follow-up interviews.

Withdrawal from the Study: You may choose to end your participation in the project at any time while data collection is ongoing. If you decide to withdraw, anything collected from you, including field notes, audio recordings of interviews, transcripts, tape logs, photographs, and any other materials will be destroyed. There will be no consequences if you choose to withdraw. After November 30, 2018, you will be unable to, as the data will not be able to be removed from the project.

Possible Benefits: The benefits will be to help recognise Tarot in a religious context. Also, sharing your story can be an enjoyable experience.

Possible Risks: There may be some moments of emotional feelings recalling of experiences. If this does occur and at any point, you do not feel comfortable answering question you may choose not to. Should you feel the need to contact additional emotional support you can call the Samaritans at 116 123 (UK) or NHS Direct 111 to help locate support close to you.

Confidentiality: The ethical duty of confidentiality includes safeguarding participants' identities, personal information, and data from unauthorized access, use, or disclosure. Any materials and information collected including field notes, audio-recordings, interview transcripts, tape logs, and photographs, will be accessible to only the research with the project is ongoing.

Privacy and Anonymity: Anonymity refers to protecting participants' identifying characteristics, such as name or description of physical appearance. All participants have the right to remain anonymous. A pseudonym may be requested to help remain anonymous. The use of the pseudonym will allow for protection of your identity as much as possible. However, if you share a unique experience that inadvertently identifies you the pseudonym may not be entirely effective. Every reasonable effort will be made to ensure your anonymity. You will not be identified in publications without your explicit permission.

Recording of Data: The interview will be recorded with a digital audio-recorder and saved as an electronic file with your permission. I will send a copy of the interview to you. Any Photographs taken will only be with your express permission.

Storage of Data: I will be encrypting and storing the data on a laptop computer that is only accessible by a password. According to Memorial University's policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research, as a researcher, I must retain all data for a minimum of five years.

Reporting and Sharing of Results: Interview notes, audio-recordings, transcripts, and photographs made while conducting my research may be used in class papers, and future publications. Should I use any direct quotations from the interview in the thesis, I will send a draft copy of the thesis and/or publications. Copies of the researcher's thesis will be made publically available. Upon completion, my thesis will be available at Memorial University's Queen Elizabeth II library, and can be accessed online at: <http://collections.mun.ca/cdm/search/collection/theses>.

Questions: You are welcome to ask questions at any time during your participation in this research. If you would like more information about this study, please contact: The Student researcher, Jessica Williams 001-403-815-2729 or via e-mail jcw450@mun.ca; The graduate supervisor, Dr. Jennifer Porter via phone 001-709-864-2469 or e-mail jporter@mun.ca; or The head of the department of religious studies, Dr. Patricia Dold, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, NL, A1B 3X8. Via phone 001-709-864-4538 or via e-mail: pdold@mun.ca.

I, _____ (participant) allow Jessica Williams (student researcher) to use the voluntarily recorded materials described below for research towards the completion of their research in relation to their thesis and class work as part of their studies in the department of religious studies, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada.

I agree to be audio-recorded	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No
I agree to be video-recorded	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No
I agree to be photographed	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No
I agree to the use of direct quotations	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No
I allow my name to be identified in any publications resulting from this study, if No: I wish to be identified as _____ (pseudonym).	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No

As the participant, I understand that the uses of this research may include thesis, articles, class papers and in-class presentations. I give the student researcher permission to use these materials at his / her discretion for all academic purposes. (Please initial)

Yes: ____ No: ____ Yes, with the following exceptions:

As the participant, I want the researcher to (choose one and initial):
_____ destroy the materials after the completion of thesis, at minimum five year waiting period.
_____ keep the materials for future research use.

CONSENT: Your signature on this form means that (please initial and sign form):
_____ You have read the information about the research.
_____ You have been able to ask questions about this study.
_____ You are satisfied with the answers to all of your questions.
_____ You understand what the study is about and what you will be doing.
_____ You understand that you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason, and that doing so will not affect you now or in the future.

If you sign this form, you do not give up your legal rights and do not release the researchers from their professional responsibilities.

Participants Signature:

- I have read what this study is about and understood the risks and benefits. I have had _____ adequate time to think about this and had the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered.
- I agree to participate in the research project understanding the risks and contributions of my participation, that my participation is voluntary, and that I may end my participation.
- A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

If there are any ethical concerns I have concerning the research which cannot be resolved by the student researcher, I know I can contact the following individuals to discuss my concerns: graduate supervisor, Dr. Jennifer Porter (Phone) 001-709- 864-2469 (E-mail) jporter@mun.ca; or the head of the department of religious studies, Dr. Patricia Dold, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, NL, A1B 3X8. Phone: 001-709-864-4538; E-mail: pdold@mun.ca.

Signature of Participant

Date

Student Researcher's Signature:

I have explained this study to the best of my ability. I invited questions and gave answers. I believe that the participant fully understands what is involved in being in the study, any potential risks of the study and that he or she has freely chosen to be in the study.

Signature of Principle Investigator

Date

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.