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Never Alone: A "Look" At Imaginal Companions

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NEVER ALONE: A “LOOK” AT IMAGINAL COMPANIONS

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Of the Requirements for the Degree
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By
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NEVER ALONE: A "LOOK" AT IMAGINAL COMPANIONS

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American culture tends to consider imaginary friends (or imaginal companions, as I refer to them) as a folk belief belonging in the realm of childhood. If an adult believes in imaginal companions, they are potentially subject to the social stigma of psychological labeling. The mass media reflects this perception of reality and influences social interactions regarding experiences and beliefs in imaginal companions.

Fear of this social stigma limits folk group size, which potentially creates an issue with informant group size. I gathered my informants from a group of friends, whom I interviewed over a one-year period. Although there is a danger of overgeneralizing when dealing with a small informant group, I reached many useful conclusions pertaining to the belief in imaginal companions as a “hidden tradition” expressed through narratives in small groups.

Social relationships clearly exist between imaginal companions and believers of imaginal companions. The formation of a dyadic folk group begins with the initial appearance of the imaginal companion and communication with the believer. The believer perceives their imaginal companion or companions by manipulating the
influence of the culture and society around them. However, there are other folk groups to consider in relation to this phenomenon as well.

Through storytelling in safe environments, folk groups of varying sizes emerge, ranging from other dyads to slightly larger groups. Although a believer may create these groups through cautious social interaction, they may also be born into a safe environment such as a family of believers. These groups tend to revolve around storytelling. Investigations of these social interactions, as expressed in narrative form, suggest American cultural influences on personal perceptions of reality.
Introduction: Relationships with Imaginal Companions

[...] we do not have to become magicians in order to explore the world of the supernaturals, though it does help to have a flexible imagination that is prepared to follow dreams, listen to traveller’s tales and explore the ways in which we can encounter these magical creatures for ourselves.


Imaginary friends (or imaginal companions, as I shall refer to them) are typically perceived as a child’s playmate; a companion that is only visible to the child’s eye; a companion that can only be heard by the child’s ear; a companion who only exists in the mind of the child. When the child gets “too old,” this imaginal companion (which “never existed” in the first place) simply disappears. By contemporary American social standards, it is unacceptable for an adult to maintain such social relationships with imaginal companions. In fact, this stigma leads others to label adults who believe in and choose to maintain social relationships with imaginal companions as schizophrenics, for example, and send them to a psychiatrist, who attempts to “cure” them. Yet there are still American adults who choose to reach outside the contemporary American cultural realm of expectations for their beliefs.

It is not a folklorist’s job to determine whether these imaginal companions truly exist in the culturally defined perception of reality. Certainly, I do not intend to attempt this here. Nonetheless, adults who maintain social relationships with imaginal companions, in order to interact with them, apparently believe them to exist in their
personal perception of reality. This social interaction forms a dyadic folk group of the adult and the imaginal companion, if only to the senses of the individual in question. However, there are other folk groups to consider in relation to this phenomenon as well.

Throughout the discipline of folklore, the definition of the “folk” and “folklore” is a constant debate. Alan Dundes defined the “folk” as “any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor” (1965: 2). One of the most acceptable contemporary academic definitions of “folklore” came six years later from Dan Ben-Amos: “artistic communication in small groups” (1971: 13). These definitions are useful regarding the topic of imaginal companions because neither Dundes nor Ben-Amos specifies a minimum number of participants necessary to form a folk group. Numerically, the flexibility within these two definitions allows a dyad or even a group with three or four members for legitimate consideration as a folk group. In the case of folk groups relating to imaginal companions, various participants must be considered.

Aside from the dyad of believer and imaginal companion, believers speak to each other about the exploits of their individual companions in a folk group. Another social interaction occurs here in a “safer” environment where labels of psychological diseases need not apply. In this case, the believer voices the narrative aloud and to an audience that is tangible by anyone’s perception. Situations such as these are examples of storytelling events or performances within a folk group made up of believers in imaginal companions.

Believers in imaginal companions may not openly share their beliefs on a regular basis but. on occasion, they may tell stories to other believers about their imaginal
companions. It is my contention that, in certain circumstances, an adult or adults may believe in the existence of imaginal companions, as perceived by the believer, and create a legitimate dyadic folk group. It is also my observation that storytelling occurs between believers in imaginal companions, creating yet another legitimate folk group through social interaction. These subtle yet complex forms of social interaction offer examples of folk groups in a numerically minimal size. The belief in imaginal companions, as well as the folk groups and ensuing social interactions, offer examples of an individual’s reaction to cultural and social influences as reflected in their perception of reality and narratives regarding those beliefs.

What is an Imaginal Companion?

As with social relationships with imaginal companions, I discovered the terminology might also carry a certain stigma. I originally referred to these phenomena as “imaginary friends.” The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines imaginary as “existing only in the imagination.” The same dictionary defines imagination as “the act or power of forming a mental image of something not present to the senses or not previously known or experienced” (2004). According to the dictionary, these terms suggest a sense of nonexistence outside one’s mind, and they can certainly never be accessible to our senses, as the definition clearly states. However, my informants disagree. Aside from assorted pranks their imaginal companions pull on humans that may or may not know of
or believe in them, the believers may also sense their presence when they “brush up against you […], like a cat” (L. Adee and Rose 2006).

In Western culture, the notion of imagination tends to carry with it connotations implying falseness and an association with particular age groups. In my experience, the term “imaginary friends” tends to evoke either skepticism or an account of the listener’s imaginary friend from their long since abandoned childhood. Wishing to avoid the notion of lack of physical sensibility and containment within one’s mind as well as the stigmas of falseness and strict childhood age limits, I sought another term. The term “imaginal” is defined as “of or having to do with the imagination or mental images” (2004). Although imaginal still relates to the imagination it does not immediately evoke the same reaction as imaginary.

The second element of the phrase “imaginary friend” is not satisfactory either. Imaginal companions are not necessarily friendly. My informants tell me their imaginal companions hold many roles, including guardians, simple acquaintances, and both malevolent and non-malevolent pranksters. In the friendlier sense, for example, both Lilah Adee and Leia Rose related tales of how a shared imaginal companion, Alyssa, has protected them during multiple car accidents (L. Adee and Rose 2006). Other imaginal companions, such as some of Celia Adee’s fairies, may simply come around “just to listen to tunes” or “because they like hearing people talk,” rather than because of concern or care for the believer (C. Adee 2006). Finally, Lilah and Leia discussed how some people have imaginal companions they referred to as “imps” who “think they are funny

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1 I use pseudonyms for my all my informants throughout my thesis. I retain recorded interviews in my personal research archives. I obtained informed consent for all recorded and unrecorded material.
and do practical jokes that are not quite funny. They are destructive.” They confirmed that the few pranks their personal companions tend to pull are generally non-malevolent (L. Adee and Rose 2006). In light of the experiences of my informants (as well as the fact that the entire phrase “imaginary friends” seems to carry the same stigma as the single word imaginary), the term “friends” did not seem to cover the breadth of this phenomena. “Companion,” defined by The Merriam-Webster Dictionary as “an intimate friend or associate” (2004). seemed a more appropriate substitute.

According to the dictionary definition, an “imaginal companion” is an intimate friend or associate of the imagination. So, what is an imaginal companion in a less literal, more interpretive sense? There is a wide range of answers to this question, particularly in an individual’s perception of their individual companion or companions. Beyond a literal definition, any interpretive definition of an imaginal companion becomes a matter of the individual perception of the believer where one might only offer a few general statements supplemented with examples.

A well-known phrase in American society, particularly when dealing with issues of belief is “seeing is believing.” What if what you see is only in your mind’s eye? To complicate the matter, what if you do not see so much as perceive through the perspective of your mind? Believers do not perceive their imaginal companions to be strictly contained within their own minds. They are as real as any other creature in the shared cultural perception of reality. Nonetheless, believers seem to acknowledge that others are not able to see or perceive their imaginal companions. Therefore, when describing their
imaginal companions my informants often employed comparisons using culturally familiar examples when necessary.

Lilah has imaginal companions, which she perceives as dragons. Although one might imagine describing dragons as an easy task, different cultures perceive dragons in many different forms. She describes her dragons as “kind of cartoony-looking” and further elaborates by comparing it to a children’s cartoon featuring dragons. However, Lilah mentions her dragons are also “kind of like the pictures you see out in different stores and stuff. [...] They’re like a mixture of the two” (L. Adee 2006a). As in this case, the task of describing an imaginal companion is always simpler when the imaginal companion maintains a single form.

Lilah’s sister, Celia, interacts with fairies on a regular basis. She mentions being familiar with approximately two hundred of them, which might explain why, when asked whether she had seen her fairies, she replied, “Not yet, but I’m working on it.” She actually perceives most of them as colors “out of the corner of [her] eye.” She also identifies them as:

[...] shape shifters. [...] You can see them, but sometimes you can’t. You can tell because once you look around somewhere, and you think there’s a really cute flower, and you turn around, then you turn back around again, and it’s gone. It’s basically shape shifters. (C. Adee 2006)

Other perceptions of imaginal companions are less mystical, so to speak, and more familiar creatures. Lilah and Leia share what they refer to as “mutual pets,” though they tend to prefer one particular person to another. There are a large number of these

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companions, including Marcos the crab, Alyssa the fox, Clarissa the elephant, Loaller the whale, and Dolly the dolphin. However, Lilah and Leia do not perceive these creatures as the “everyday” animals that exist in the shared cultural perception of reality. For example, Lilah described Clarissa as “a mini, mini elephant. You know how big the mini-elephants are? She’s like a baby one of those.” Otherwise, she looks “exactly like an elephant. Just like Marcos. He looks like a crab.” Leia describes Marcos as looking kind of like a “Chesapeake Bay-type crab. But, he likes to get into flowers and he sometimes gets into paint. He makes himself different colors whenever he likes to.” These companions can also speak and communicate in very human ways, such as American Sign Language, when and if they so choose (L. Adee and Rose 2006).

Aside from speaking, the imaginal companions fulfill typical human roles in the lives of these believers. Though Leia and Lilah called them “pets” throughout the interview, they seem to be more than that. Through the time that they have known their imaginal companions their relationships have grown stronger. Lilah compares it to “having a friend who is very blunt,” while Leia describes it as “a permanent friend who is always there. You are never alone. You never feel truly lonesome.” They both agree that the strength in the relationship is built similarly to a human friendship (i.e. communication, shared likes and dislikes). They also affirm that although their imaginal companions have personalities of their own, they somewhat reflect Lilah and Leia’s personalities (L. Adee and Rose 2006).

In “The Witch’s Familiar and the Fairy in Early Modern England and Scotland” Emma Wilby suggests a human can determine the personality of a spirit they encounter.
She elaborates, “It was the moral position of the spirit’s user, rather than that of the spirit itself, which determined the spirit’s moral status at any given time” (2000: 299). Lilah and Leia related stories regarding how their imaginal companions express their dislike for friends or significant others with whom Lilah and Leia associate. This includes pranks that range from hiding car keys and disconnecting a phone call to causing messes at work or misplacing a cashbox, which has led to the loss of employment. While these examples occurred both during favorable and unfavorable times in the relationships (the pranks grew more severe as the relationship became less favorable for the believer), neither Leia nor Lilah suggested to their companions that they specifically perform such actions (L. Adee and Rose 2006).  

According to Leia, the companions generally plan these pranks independently of their adults, and then sometimes report to them what they can expect to occur (L. Adee and Rose 2006). In some cases, the companions may be extremely surreptitious when questioned about where they are going or how a certain person is doing, particularly when a relationship with that person is strained and there is a possibility the companion may be pulling such a prank on them (Rose 2007). Despite the fact that the companion’s attitude may reflect the attitude of the believer at times, it is not always the same and the pranks are not always upon request. This is not to suggest that imaginal companions do not grant favors.

Wilby also refers to another portion of historical relationships with “spirits” (or “familiars”) in her article - a contractual agreement. This agreement includes the promise

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3 For a further comparison of spirits, familiars, and imaginal companions, see Chapter 3: Perceived Realities, pp. 49-50.
of something, such as wealth or power, from the “familiar” in exchange for something from the encountering human (2000: 289-90). Lilah’s dragons perform favors for her but they have never asked for anything in return, which she attributes to the fact that they take things, such as coins, from her. She feels she is not obligated to take care of them, although there is an unspoken agreement that they look after her and her friends (L. Adee 2006a).

On the other hand, Celia’s fairies do favors for her because she will:

give them something in return. [...] There’s pieces of bread or honey and milk. You just give them little treats. Or else you can [...] pull out an ‘old little something’ you don’t like, and say, ‘Here, you can take this. I don’t want it. It’s a gift for you.’ (C. Adee 2006)

This sort of relationship is more akin to the one Wilby describes, particularly regarding the food.4 By calling her offerings to the fairies “treats,” Celia seemed to imply this was not a requirement of a contractual agreement but rather a friendly exchange. She does mention that she has “placed” fairies with a few friends and family members to “keep in touch” and generally look after them (C. Adee 2006).

Despite the negative connotations the term itself may carry, imaginal companions seem to be an existential matter of individual perception. To describe every imaginal companion revealed is a rather daunting task. Believers perceive these imaginal companions to exist independently of themselves and their minds. They have their own personalities and are able to build relationships, which grow stronger as time passes.

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4 Wilby describes various types of food as a common appeasement for the “English animal familiar,” and fairies (2000: 296-7). Leia and Lilah never mention giving any type of food to the imaginal companions that they perceive as animals (Adee, L., and Rose 2006).
This relationship is much like any other social relationship, including roles such as guardian, friend, and even as casual as acquaintance.

**Not-so-imaginal Folk Groups**

Due to the stigma surrounding imaginal companions in contemporary American culture, finding informants might have been a difficulty. When studying dyads, Regina Bendix suggests a researcher should work with groups they are “close to” (1987: 190). Three of my friends have imaginal companions and they are very open with me about them. They agreed to become my informants. This was particularly fortuitous since the sensitivity of the topic of imaginal companions limits the size of my informant group size, which places a researcher at risk of making overgeneralizations. A combination of the topic sensitivity and potential social stigma led me to use pseudonyms in order to protect the anonymity of my informants. This protects the safe environment where my informants socially interact in their folk groups.

Eliot Oring defines a dyad as “a more or less enduring interaction between two individuals who primarily relate to one another as persons rather than as occupants of social statuses” (1984: 19). In this case, the two interacting individuals are a human adult and their imaginal companion. Though Oring specifically uses the term “person,” none of my informants describes their imaginal companions as such. This is not to say a believer does not perceive their imaginal companion to be a person, simply that my informants perceive their imaginal companions to be fairies, dragons, or some type of animal (C. Adee 2006; L. Adee and Rose 2006). For example, Lilah and Leia described
the relationship they share with their imaginal companions as similar to a human bond (L. Adee and Rose 2006). Despite his use of the specific term “person,” I see no reason why Oring’s definition of a dyad should not apply. In fact, Oring’s use of the term “person” is perhaps ideal due to the many anthropomorphic qualities imaginal companions seem to have.

One of the most significant aspects of a dyad is the inherent growth of intimacy. The intimacy will grow through knowledge and change in traditions because by definition the group cannot grow (Oring 1984: 24). Bendix points out that the idioculture of such a small group results in “restricted codes” that allow the achievement of such intimacy. Although this is information that is typically “not shared with anyone outside the dyad,” she acknowledges that some members may pass on select pieces of the idioculture by choice. The restricted codes within this idioculture also allow for a revealing of one’s more “personal identity.” This includes “physical and mental aspects of human behavior that one has been taught to keep to oneself” (1987: 174, 181–2).

The simple shared knowledge of existence of imaginal companions may be enough to initiate intimacy in a dyad because of social stigma. A believer and their imaginal companion may share other intimate secrets but I see the perception of existence as the primary shared knowledge. If a believer chooses to speak to others about interactions with their imaginal companion (as Bendix suggests might occur) there is potential for a new dyad or even a new and larger folk group that may share similar idiocultures.

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5 Leia informed me she and Alyssa the fox share intimate secrets, but did not elaborate on specific details (Rose 2007).
Lilah and Leia, for example, share “mutual pets,” which extends the dyad to a larger folk group. Alyssa the fox began in a dyadic relationship with a friend of theirs, and then extended the relationship to Leia and Lilah. Eventually, Alyssa terminated her initial relationship (L. Adee and Rose 2006). Lilah and Leia themselves are an example of a so-called tangible dyad. In order to reach that point they broke the restricted codes of the dyadic relationship shared with their respective imaginal companions. This disregards the “acceptable” standards of American society. “Regular violation of normal propriety” is another quality of dyadic folk groups that maintains the intimacy and sincerity of a dyad (Oring 1984: 26). This violation refers not only one to American social standards but also to Bendix’s rules of intimacy in a dyadic relationship. Therefore, it is more than a quality of the individual dyads – perhaps even a requirement - at least in the case of imaginal companions.

A final aspect of a dyadic group as identified by Oring is that of “humor and play” (1984: 26). Play is what allows for the personalized intimacy in a relationship to function, according to Bendix. It is a matter of communication and takes place within what she refers to as an “‘as if’ frame,” which allows an individual to safely express their feelings in a dyadic relationship. This play enables an environment to safely express emotions and ideas which would not otherwise be deemed acceptable due to “the demands and responsibilities” outside of that environment (1987: 186, 188). Gregory Bateson elaborates on this play frame by calling it “an evolution of communication.” He explains this communication by using the analogy of an animal’s “nip.” A “playful nip denotes the bite, but it does not denote what would be denoted by the bite” (1972: 180-1).
In an “as if” frame, both participants understand that a “nip” represents a “bite” but does not contain the same connotations as a “bite.” Bendix notes that this play frame allows for a wide range of “communicative possibilities,” which can be fully explored due to the intimacy of the dyad (1987: 190).

Jay Mechling elaborates on the concept of play frames in his article, “‘Banana Cannon’ and Other Folk Traditions Between Human and Nonhuman Animals,” which explores the possibility of the human/pet dyad as a legitimate folkloric relationship. One of his arguments for this legitimacy is what he refers to as a “functional fallacy” of folklore. It refers to the notion that folklore must perform some “useful social and psychological functions.” Mechling sees a possibility of entertainment as a sole result from certain play frames within certain dyads. In this case, Mechling’s dyads refer specifically to humans and pets. However, he briefly pushes the boundaries by suggesting relationships with inanimate objects, “imaginary others,” and even with one’s self (1989: 320-2). Even Lilah and Leia have discussed games they play with their imaginal companions.

Leia described one such game with Alyssa as throwing “a word or a mental picture to each other, then we answer it back.” Leia also mentioned that aside from entertainment, this is also how they “communicate some things” (i.e. the use of a play frame in communication). Lilah interrupted with a laugh. According to Lilah, Leia sometimes accidentally sends the mental pictures to her instead of Alyssa (L. Adee and Rose 2006). The intimacy of the folk group allows participants to understand the difference between a meaningful mental image and one sent for sheer play.
The characteristics of dyadic relationships seem to apply to the larger folk groups of believers as well, particularly that of intimacy. Perhaps this is because of the social stigma associated with imaginal companions. The other folk groups my informants revealed to me are also typically close-knit groups. Of course, there are the multiple imaginal companions that interact with both Leia and Lilah, sometimes simultaneously. There are also close human friends, though Lilah and Leia did not reveal whether they immediately shared their belief in imaginal companions. Lilah mentioned the women in her family interact with fairies (Celia is her sister), though they do not discuss it with or around the men, who do not believe (L. Adee and Rose 2006).

American society tends to associate close friends and family with a sense of intimacy and certain play frames, though perhaps not to the extent that Bendix and Oring describe. Nonetheless, when believers gather to discuss the exploits of their imaginal companions these characteristics seem to transfer from the initial dyad of imaginal companion and believer to the larger folk group, perhaps because of a violation of the expectations of American society.

_Separating the Scholarly Voice: Studying Imaginal Companions_

David Hufford addresses an issue of methodology regarding reflexivity in the study of belief. He believes that academics must separate their “personal voices from [their] scholarly voices.” He also advocates investigating our personal beliefs in an effort to understand the rationale behind the beliefs of those we study. We must remember to approach beliefs we may not share from the perception of those that do believe rather
than trying to judge whether these beliefs are ontologically valid (1995a: 65, 71-3). I agree with Hufford. It is not a folklorist’s job to judge whether imaginal companions truly exist in the culturally defined perception of reality.

In order to get different perspectives on how my informants might tell their stories in different contexts I conducted two different types of interviews. The majority of the interviews were one-to-one interviews. I also managed to arrange a group interview with two informants on October 8, 2006. However, this very action violates “the dyadic ‘rule:’” transgressing the intimacy of the dyad by sharing knowledge with an outsider, specifically, a researcher (1987: 174). Entitlement and tellability become issues here.

Since my informants were friends, there was a pre-existing trust and knowledge of their personal experiences and beliefs. This established relationship had its advantages and disadvantages. By already being familiar with their personal beliefs and experiences, I was able to explore certain relationships I knew about in depth. However, the double role of friend and folklorist is not an easy one to play, particularly when the “folklorist” voice (the “scholarly” voice) must work compliantly with the “friend” voice (the “personal” voice) but still maintain control. For example, interviews remained casual and friendly yet directed by my scholarly voice. My informants seemed to understand the double role I held and entrusted the scholarly voice with their personal narratives and stories.

Amy Shuman questions whether “the academic pursuit of knowledge” is a sufficient claim for entitlement of untellable tales. She warns of the dangers of misrepresentation and misuse (2005: 162). In this case, I refer back to Hufford’s
suggestion of attempting to separate the personal voice from the scholarly voice: “If believers should be reflexive and careful about the distinction between their personal and scholarly voices, and they should, so should their audience” (1995a: 66). Nonetheless, much like cultural influence, there is inevitably individual influence in academic writing, including the scholarly, fieldwork, and popular works used in my research.

Perceived Realities

Beliefs are a perception of the so-called reality in which we exist. They assist in making sense of our world. This includes our cultural, social, and individual worlds. As anthropologist John L. Caughey states:

Reality is culturally constituted and relative. All societies are based on beliefs about what is true, possible, real, and perceivable. Experiences outside those boundaries will generally be seen as “false.” (1984:198)

An interpretation of a particular society’s established “reality” may be a matter of cultural perception, or it may be an individual perception. Nonetheless, it is a matter of perception. Hence, from the individual’s point of view, their interpretation of reality is completely valid, despite what a psychiatry or society might declare (1984: 198-99). Imaginal companions are subject to these beliefs and tend to fall outside American society’s established reality. This is not to say that American culture does not potentially influence the perception of these realities.

Brian Sutton-Smith explores the roles of reality in play. He briefly discusses “mundane reality” and “virtual reality.” The mundane reality is “everyday” actions and virtual reality is models, mimics, or mocks these actions. He concedes that “human
cultures” are constructed from a combination of these two worlds (1997: 195). Western culture views play as “nonproductive,” distinct from work, and typically occurring in the mind (Sutton-Smith 1997: 189). Nevertheless, play reflects the broader cultural rules of American society. Even in a dyadic folk group that appears to exist somewhat outside the general American culture, the dyad still reflects the culture to some extent. For example, Lilah felt the need to refer to an American children’s cartoon when she described her dragons (L. Adee 2006a). There is also the formation of beliefs to consider, in which cultural influence is evident as well.

David Hufford’s experiential source theory allows for the formation of “core beliefs,” which may develop independently from cultural expectations. The person holding such beliefs must be competent and in a rational state of mind at the time of their experience upon which they base this belief. In this discussion, he defines belief as “the certainty that something is true.” In a broader explanation of this definition, Hufford includes knowledge as a “justified true belief” (1995b: 19, 28-30).

Epistemologist Bernard Lonergan suggests a sensory or cognitive experiential process is necessary in order to reach this type of knowledge. This process includes gathering “interior” and “external data,” understanding the data, and finally judging the data. Though Lonergan claims belief depends on someone else’s judgment, he also acknowledges that perception of the “real” world is a combination of both knowledge and belief (Dunne 1985: 14-17, 20, 22-24).

Belief is potentially a deeply stigmatized area concerning adult believers and their imaginal companions. What one person perceives as real is not necessarily the same
perception that their society or culture holds as “reality.” The same can be said for what a believer knows to be real in their perception of their individual world. This leads to an area with even greater potential for stigma: socially narrating stories about one’s imaginal companions or even communicating with them in public.

Cautious Words in Social Worlds

Communication in society requires a certain level of culturally instilled understanding. This applies not only to general social interactions but to dyadic relationships as well. Various types of play frames as well as other frames structure these levels of understanding in social interaction. These frames allow for “safe environments” in which a believer can discuss delicate topics such as imaginal companions.

Erving Goffman refers to the need for such safe environments in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. He discusses the idea of each person developing a “social front” (1959: 29). Goffman also views society as being broken down into two main regions: the “front region” and the “back region.” The front region is the region that all of society views and the back region is a region exclusive to a specific group (1959: 107-8, 112-113). Goffman metaphorically applies these notions of front and back regions to society. I metaphorically apply Goffman’s notions to an individual’s social identity. There is the identity that a person allows the public to see: their essential “front region;” and there is their personal, more private identity, which a person may or may not hide away: their essential “back region.”
In relation to Bendix’s “as if” play frame, aspects of this back region identity are more likely to emerge in the play frames she describes in the intimacy of a folk group of believers. In the case of a slightly larger group (or even a group of strangers or acquaintances), Goffman offers the suggestion of “front region control” and “audience segregation.” A “performer” controls who is in the audience so that an individual may maintain an appropriate social front (1959: 137). On an even grander scale, Goffman’s suggestion of front region control allows believers to conceal this particular aspect of their back region identity from an inappropriate audience. Bendix’s “as if” play frame serves the function of testing out an audience for tellability of their narrative.

Amy Shuman points out, “Stories are tellable only if the teller is willing to live with existing categories for interpreting the experience.” In an attempt to fit into one of these imposed cultural categories, the original experience is liable to manipulation as the tale travels from the original storyteller. The relationship and responsibilities between storyteller and listener are vital aspects of the narrative experience as well. Shuman notes there is potential for a breach in responsibilities of both storyteller and listener when inappropriate entitlement, or ownership of an experience is claimed, as entitlement includes not only who has the right to tell the story, but also who has the right to hear the story (2005: 7-8). Believers of imaginal companions must contend with these issues of tellability and entitlement, especially in a socially unfamiliar realm. Goffman’s notion of front region control and Bendix’s “as if” play frame are merely two methods to assess these issues.
Relating narratives within the relatively safe environment of the back region for believers of imaginal companions is perhaps a much easier audience to control than that of American society. Once outside that safe environment believers must maintain their social front. In order to do this they have assorted potential devices, such as play frames and front region control, to assess the potential tellability of their personal narratives to a particular audience.

Imaginal companions, no matter what form they take, are an existential phenomenon perceived by the believer to be independent of their own mind. This creates a simple dyad of imaginal companion and believer. Other dyads or even larger groups are formed between believers, and sometimes believers and multiple imaginal companions such as in the case of Lilah, Leia, and their shared companions. Nonetheless, the qualities of the initial dyad, including intimacy and the play frames, permeate the larger folk groups as well. These folk groups are examples of subtle yet complex forms of social interaction. They also offer an example of an individual’s reaction to their influencing culture and society as reflected in their perception of reality and narratives regarding those beliefs.
Chapter 2: Separating the Scholarly Voice: Studying Imaginal Companions

Certainty is a direction, not a goal. Uncertainty, and the political importance of knowledge, require reflexivity as a check on the natural tendency for tacit interests to exploit ambiguity; that is, reflexivity helps to control hidden bias.


The study of folk belief is a delicate area, as there is rarely anything visible or tangible to examine. A second-hand personal experience from informants is typically all a folklorist may expect. Because of potential social stigma, studying imaginal companions is more delicate still, leaving me with a potential lack of credible informants. Hence, forming a viable methodology for this study was a difficult task indeed.

When studying dyadic relationships such as imaginal companions and believers, Regina Bendix suggests a researcher should study groups close to them, since one should report the “nature” of dyadic communication and activities rather than simply observe it (1987: 190). I am fortunate enough to have three friends with imaginal companions who were willing to act as informants in my study. However, due to the potential social stigma of psychological labeling, I gave them pseudonyms in order to protect their anonymity. This relationship with my informants proved to have both advantages and disadvantages in my research.

Aside from informants, there were other issues in creating a methodology. For example, I found issues with terminology because of loaded phrases, such as “imaginary friends.” Once settling on the relatively viable term “imaginal companions,” I found difficulty in defining imaginal companions when there was such diversity in the
descriptions from my informants. I also initially had issues in finding supporting scholarship on this topic. A keyword search relating to imaginal companions resulted in psychological articles in regards to studies involving children or schizophrenics. This is a folkloric study on adults with a belief in imaginal companions. Since I am not a psychiatrist, I am not in a position to judge their state of mind; this scholarship did not suit my purpose. I broke down my search into smaller, simpler concepts such as personal narratives, dyads, various aspects of belief, and so on. Aside from these simpler searches and textual inspirations from classes, I found scholarship suggestions from classmates, professors, and other folklorists. Two of my three fictional, cultural examples of imaginal companions – *Harvey* (1950) and *Puff The Magic Dragon* (Lipton and Yarrow 1963) – were even inspired from conversations with friends of mine who do not have imaginal companions yet believe in them and some who believed in them as children. The lack of relevant scholarship, however, was not the greatest issue in my research.

As in any study, personal bias is always a potential issue with which to contend. In belief studies, this may include setting aside personal beliefs for the sake of a study or at least that is the traditional method. David J. Hufford suggests setting aside this "personal voice" in order to attempt objectivity in belief studies leads to "an asymmetrical political relationship between scholars and those they study." Instead, he suggests the personal voice of a scholar can lead to valuable insight if we can "distinguish our personal voices from our scholarly voices" (1995a: 61-5). Other scholars such as Marjorie Bard and John L. Caughey have attempted this method by reflexively inserting themselves in their work. This particular aspect of maintaining a
personal voice of sorts while still speaking with a scholarly voice became an extremely important aspect of my methodology.

Issues of Approach

John L. Caughey affirms that society dictates an “acceptable” perception of reality to which it expects its members to conform. This reality is “based on beliefs about what is true, possible, real, and perceivable.” An individual with experiences that do not fit into this acceptable “reality” is prone to facing potential stigma such as psychological labeling. However, Caughey also notes that each individual perception of reality is completely valid in the mind of that individual. He states:

From this perspective, therapy is a system of social control. It involves procedures designed to remove deviants from society and/or to bring deviants back into conformity with the current beliefs and perceptions of society. (Caughey 1984: 199)

Caughey’s mention of over 5,000 research papers “on mental illness in general and schizophrenia in particular” between 1920 and 1984 (the year of publication for Caughey’s work), all of which focus on psychiatric beliefs rather than those of the patients support this perspective (1984: 198-99). This “perspective” seems to influence the American perception of reality.

In the American perception of reality, it is unacceptable and “not normal” for an adult to maintain a social relationship with an imaginal companion. To do so risks the chance of being labeled with a psychological disorder of some sort, such as schizophrenia. Although Caughey acknowledges there is a significant difference
between "normal and schizophrenic" imaginal social relationships, he suggests there is
greater potential damage in the negative experience of psychological labeling by society

This was precisely the stigma I did not wish to impose upon my informants
neither from myself during interviews or in the course of my writing. In this respect,
speaking and thinking with my scholarly voice became necessary. Hufford maintains
scholarly and personal reasons may simultaneously support any number of beliefs and
actions. Therefore, no scholar – folklorist, psychiatrist, or otherwise – is justified in
passing judgment on the ontological validity of the belief of another, whether or not we
share their perceptions (1995a: 72-3).

This potential social stigma also led to a limited number of informants with which
to work. When there is social risk involved, people seem less likely to discuss the notion
of a serious belief in imaginal companions, except perhaps as a memorate from
childhood. Although I do have a small handful of other friends that speak to me about
their imaginal companions, there was rationale behind specifically choosing Celia Adee,
Lilah Adee, and Leia Rose. These three are open about their imaginal companions with
me, including communicating with them right in front of me. Celia and Lilah are sisters,
which provided a potential benefit of a familial tradition. Leia and Lilah share an
extremely long and close friendship dating back to high school. This provided another
potential benefit as I could explore the growth of their beliefs in imaginal companions.

Aside from close friendships and a previously established trust, I speak with all
three of them on a regular basis despite living in different states so there was no concern
of losing contact. The distance meant two phone interviews, one with Lilah and one with Leia. I conducted one recorded group interview with Lilah and Leia in October 2006, which allowed me to observe as well as somewhat participate in a social interaction between two believers relating narratives regarding their imaginal companions. There was a constant fact checking regarding details about their mutual imaginal companions, even on some of the names!

Even though my informant group is small, the multiple, different types of interviews still allow me to make certain interpretations about believers in imaginal companions as a whole. Although I do acknowledge the danger in overgeneralizing, part of the purpose of conducting different types of interviews (group, one-to-one, recorded, unrecorded, face-to-face, and phone) was partially in an attempt to find a comfort level. My informants are my friends and trusted me with their beliefs but this time they knew I was collecting their personal experiences for this paper. The result was hearing many stories and descriptions I had heard before as well as new details and experiences never before shared with me. This was one of the advantages of the existing relationship with my informants. However, some of these new details and descriptions raised an issue of credibility – theirs and my own. This was one of the disadvantages of the relationship.

In March 2006, I interviewed Celia about her fairies. When asked if she knew anyone else with imaginal companions (for the sake of the recording, I asked some questions I already knew the answers to) she told me about her sister, Lilah, who had dragons. Then, Celia proceeded to tell me about how Lilah had an orange fairy (“unless

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6 The phone interviews were unrecorded and, therefore, paraphrased in this work. I obtained informed consent for the use of this material.
it turned purple, because they like to change colors depending on their mood”), which
was traded for a dragon for bonding purposes when Lilah moved out of their parent’s
house (C. Adee 2006). Approximately six and a half months later, when I mentioned the
fairies to Lilah during the group interview, she asserted that all women in the Adee
family (Celia, herself, an anonymous sister, and their mother) believed in fairies and
could interact with them, except herself. In fact, Lilah does not even like fairies because
they are “devious. It’s all about themselves first.” She even implied she had only seen
pictures of them rather than visually perceiving them as she does her dragons (L. Adee
and Rose 2006).

These contrasting narratives are one example of a question of the credibility of
my informants. There is, of course, a time span of six and a half months between these
interviews, which is plenty of time for an individual perception of reality to alter, if only
in regards to a relationship with an imaginal companion. There is also the possibility
Lilah perceives fairies differently from Celia as Celia’s primary imaginal companions
seem to be fairies (C. Adee 2006) and Lilah’s are dragons (L. Adee 2006a). Indeed,
contradicting details regarding a single topic, particularly a perception-based belief,
potentially emerge when interviewing any group of family members or friends. It was
Lilah’s changing perspective that led me to question her credibility.

Setting aside the personal voice in my head that might ignore a contradictory
detail in a similar narrative told by two friends for the scholarly voice that causes me to
question everything an informant says was a difficult task indeed. The scholarly voice
reminded me that both Lilah and Celia were recalling their experiences in these
interviews. As unfortunately occurs, individuals sometimes forget or even reinterpret details when remembering personal experiences. This is yet another possibility in the differing perception of fairies between Lilah and Celia, as well as the contradicting details. The important theme throughout the interviews is consistent belief in imaginal companions. This never faltered despite contradicting details. This was yet another point of which my scholarly voice reminded me. Nevertheless, there were other times I found it necessary to set aside my personal voice in favor of my scholarly voice while maintaining an awareness of it at the same time, which was more difficult still.

While I may have questioned the credibility of my informants at the time, there was a good possibility that they questioned my credibility as well. The research began with a close friendship and an established trust, which we maintained. Nonetheless, as casual as I attempted to make the interviews, we all knew it was research and I played a double role of friend and folklorist. Although Bendix suggests sharing knowledge restricted to a dyadic relationship, such as that of an imaginal companion and believer, with a researcher violates the “dyadic ‘rule’” of intimacy and "closedness" (1987: 174), perhaps this was not so much an issue as I already belonged to the group. This “rule” had been broken for me before, during, and after I conducted these interviews, and I do not doubt it will be broken again in the future. Nonetheless, there is the issue of entitlement of these personal narratives.

Amy Shuman suggests personal experiences have the potential to travel beyond their owner the moment the initial owner chooses to relate their experience. However, an experience is only tellable “if the teller is willing to live with the existing categories for
interpreting the experience.” In some cases, the initial owner of an experience chooses not to relate their experience because they feel it does not fit the culturally imposed categories, but this is not always the case. When a teller does choose to tell their tale, it travels, potentially acquires new meanings, contexts, and categories (“reframing” of the narrative), and may even influence the perception of the experience by the initial owner. At this point, entitlement becomes an issue (2005: 7-8).

Entitlement is the ownership of a story. It is not only who has the right to tell a story but also who has the right to hear the story. Taking undue entitlement of a personal narrative violates the responsibilities between storyteller and listener and can result in misunderstandings and mistrust. Shuman even questions “the academic pursuit of knowledge” as a sufficient entitlement claim by citing assorted past misappropriations of ethnographies. (2005: 7-8, 162). Even as a friend, I am still a researcher. Why should Celia, Lilah, and Leia trust me with their personal narratives? Why believe that I would not take undue entitlement or reframe their personal narratives inappropriately? There is no way of knowing for sure. Perhaps it is because they are already familiar with my personal voice. Even if I attempt to separate it from my scholarly voice in my thoughts, my informants know of my personal beliefs.

One of the benefits of a previously established close friendship with my informants is that they knew I shared and supported their belief in imaginal companions. However, this led to issues when reflexively questioning my own credibility as a researcher. Could I separate my personal voice enough to legitimately study imaginal companions? Hufford states that traditional methodology in belief studies calls for
impartiality of a researcher and, therefore, competent scholars cannot believe in the traditions they study. However, Hufford does not agree with this perspective. In fact, he sees this “increased objectivity” as placing the believer at risk due to the “cultural authority of scholars,” which he defines as the “permission to define reality for others” (1995a: 60-62). Essentially, Hufford warns scholars of the same thing Shuman does, simply in different terminology and with slightly different concepts. Hufford writes of beliefs and Shuman writes about narratives but both refer to entitlement and tellability of personal experiences and narratives.

Both Hufford and Shuman acknowledge that individuals perceive and experience the world in their own way, and they both warn scholars against disrespecting the researcher-informant relationship, although Shuman seems to imply the misuse of ethnographic materials occurs once it is out of the ethnographer’s hands (2005: 162). However, Hufford actively advocates for a change in methodology throughout his article, “The Scholarly Voice and the Personal Voice: Reflexivity in Belief Studies.”

Hufford suggests reflexivity on the part of the scholar for the sake of scholars, informants, and belief studies, in general. His notion of scholarly reflexivity does not necessarily require a researcher to insert themselves in their own work, simply to consider the basis for their own beliefs when examining the beliefs of others. He believes academia has confused scholarship with “justified knowledge” and maintains, “The scholarly community is made up of scholars with different beliefs.” This is precisely why he declares this methodological shift is necessary accompanied with an epistemological discussion between scholars to give reason for their beliefs. This is not
an attempt to find a consensus in personal or belief studies. He is merely advocating movement towards justifying beliefs strictly on scholarly grounds while feeling open to voice personal beliefs without confusing them with authority (1995a: 57-9, 66-7, 71-4).

Hufford states, “Hidden bias is controlled by having many points of view and many kinds of interest within the inquiring community” (1995a: 66). In this regard, I attempted to be aware of and control my personal voice and bias through discussing my research with classmates, assorted folklorists, and other friends who were not participating in it. At the same time, my personal voice never left my mind and it emerged during interviews to broach certain subjects and provoke certain stories and experiences from my informants; it was occasionally they, not I who brought up my personal beliefs. As Hufford reminds scholars, “If believers should be reflexive and careful about the distinction between their personal and scholarly voices, and they should, so should their audience” (1995a: 66).

The Approach of Others

Although Hufford feels scholars have not used reflexivity to its greatest extent in their scholarly works, there are those who have applied this method in their fieldwork, such as Caughey and Marjorie Bard. They usefully and seemingly successfully applied their personal experiences in their methodology, which assisted me in creating a viable methodology.

Caughey’s discussion of academic literature in the discipline of psychiatry privileging the perception of the psychiatrist over the patient includes a single exception:
Bert Kaplan’s *The Inner World of Mental Illness* (1964). This book focuses on “autobiographical accounts of people who have experienced so-called mental illness,” accompanied with commentary. In the introduction, Kaplan acknowledges that the psychiatrist pays no attention to the patient’s perception of reality on the chance that this might reinforce it. The patient has not lost their grip on reality, so to speak, simply experienced a “shift in reality” which needs to be destroyed and corrected. Essentially, the mentally ill patient is operating in a manipulated American cultural perception of reality. They have chosen this reality as well as chosen to give up social relationships. Caughey disagrees with the viewpoint that the patient has given up social relationships but agrees with the notion that there is a culturally influenced individual perception of reality in which the patient exists (1984: 198-201).

In discussing his own methodology for *Imaginary Social Worlds: A Cultural Approach*, Caughey acknowledges that objective laboratory methods are out of the question. Instead, he had his informants use “introspection,” which is not considered scientifically legitimate because of the lack of reliability in laboratory measurement and is generally not considered a viable method of study in psychiatry or the social sciences. Introspection requires “direct self-report,” which makes it ideal for studies of the imagination because no one can truly report images of the imagination, such as dreams, except one’s self. Introspection includes recording the memory of one’s own experience immediately after it has occurred. A researcher requiring informants to do this repeatedly, regarding the same experience, can compare and fact check introspective reports against each other. Caughey recorded his own experiences and checked his
introspections against other informants. This revealed a better sense of reliability and insight into informants as well as the notion that “deliberate distortion is less of a problem than lack of recall” (1984: 23-6).

Caughey found it much more important to understand the imaginary experiences of his informants from the inside perspective, which is a general rule for anthropology, than to merely observe and collect introspections. He took it to the extent of making himself an informant in his own study. Although his methodology was not generally accepted, his own notions of individual perception found use for it. I did not use introspections, as I did not have as many informants as Caughey. Since my informants were previously established friends, I believe that previously established forms of communication were the best forms of collection.

As far as fact checking is concerned, my informants seemed to do that for me in successive interviews. By asking questions regarding information from previous interviews, my informants either corroborated or denied this information. One example is the perception of the Adee family, and Lilah’s and Celia’s different perceptions of fairies (C. Adee 2006; L. Adee and Rose 2006). This contradiction emerged due to fact checking but Lilah provoked the question because she offered commentary on her family’s perception of fairies during the interview (L. Adee and Rose 2006). This is not to say introspections would not have been useful. Indeed, no one can truly know what occurs in idionarration or pseudo-idionarration with an imaginal companion except one’s self.
Before an individual shares a personal experience with anyone else, the individual narrates it in his or her own mind in the form of idionarration. Some are untellable tales, perhaps too traumatic or unusual to relate in the grander social realm and, therefore, remain only idionarrated tales (Bard 1994: 77-8). Believers do not perceive imaginal companions as contained strictly within their own minds. However, a great deal of communication seems to occur in this manner, which is one reason why I refer to this as pseudo-idionarration. Bard collected otherwise untellable idionarrated personal narratives from the homeless using methodology involving herself and her own personal experiences.

Bard began her work in 1978, collecting the narratives of women who were homeless because of abusive husbands: “women like [her].” When she realized she had discovered a neglected social problem, she expanded her informants to include other homeless people “who were not dependent on missions or settled in or near ‘Skid Rows;’” this included the homeless people who did not appear homeless at first. She would sit down next to them and start a casual conversation. With patience came stories of personal experiences, including “sources of homelessness” and even potential “solutions to specific societal problems” (1994: 78-9).

Repeatedly idionarrating a negative experience to one’s self allows for self-acceptance of the situation and eventually sharing of the story in social interaction. According to Bard, “telling another person is the first step toward social change” (1992:68-70). She proves this through the example of the Santa Monica Pier, in Santa Monica, California. The city was going to demolish the pier much to the dismay of
many, including the homeless who still used it as a haven. Through sharing life
experiences and memorates involving the pier, the people of Santa Monica saved and

Regarding social activism, research, and narration Bard has compiled a list of five
principles necessary to fieldwork in homelessness. First, one must consistently
remember the individual is the primary source of knowledge when “articulating the
causes of (and possible solutions to)” problems. Second, “methods need to be
appropriate to the task.” One must “be flexible and patient.” For example, Bard
employed open-ended narrating sessions when interviewing, which could last for hours
on end. Third, personal narratives can often diagnose social ills, “be a tactic or strategy
of intervention and change in interpersonal relations as well as in social policy.” Fourth,
Bard views the process of idionarration to social interaction as “the most promising
method” of persuasion through planning. Finally, Bard advocates folklorists to become
activists rather than simply documenters or observers. She suggests that those trained in
folklore studies have the skills to not only elicit people’s stories and listen closely but
also take these stories seriously and present them well to others. Folklorists have the
ability to become activists for social change by using “narrating as a problem-solving
strategy” (1994: 89).

Bard used her own personal experiences to inspire fieldwork and inform her
methodology. She was patient and allowed her informants to tell their stories. Her
experiences in the field led her to a greater political cause. In Shuman’s eyes, this might
raise issues of entitlement, except that many of the suggestions are from informants as
they are the authority on the matter. Imaginal companions are not a social issue by any means, except to the extent that the American cultural perception of reality does not consider it acceptable for adults to believe in them. I am not attempting to advocate for a change in social perception, for my informants certainly did not call for such a thing nor did I suggest it; I merely let them tell their stories. However, they did suggest a certain amount of discomfort in speaking about their beliefs outside their safe environment (L. Adee 2006b; L. Adee and Rose 2006).

Scholars, scholarly training, and personal experience informed my methodology. My informants were close friends with whom I already had an established trust. This proved to have advantages such as familiarity with their personal beliefs, experiences, and relationships, and access to a restricted folk group. There were also disadvantages such as playing the roles of both folklorist and friend. I attempted to research in a scholarly voice while effectively making use of my personal voice.

During research, contrasting details revealed during successive interviews led my scholarly voice to conflict with my personal voice. Although the personal credibility of our friendship was never at risk, I forcibly questioned informant credibility at times. Fortunately, changing perceptions and the notion of differing yet valid perceptions of reality led me to reassert credibility in my informants. My personal voice also conflicted with my scholarly voice almost constantly over the issue of my personal beliefs. Through Hufford’s call for reflexivity as well as Caughey’s and Bard’s works I found
reassurance in my own methodology and use for my personal beliefs while maintaining a scholarly voice.

As for the issues of tellability and entitlement, I believe my informants have entrusted me with their personal experiences because they do not believe I will misappropriate or misuse them. The benefit of having informants who are previously established close friends is that they are already familiar with my personal beliefs, which they happen to share. The pseudonyms protect their anonymity from potential social stigma, which has also limited my informant group size. Another one of the benefits I have from a group I am so familiar with is a greater insight. Of course, there is a danger of overgeneralizing and imposing my conclusions on the larger group of believers I am not so familiar with or have not even met yet.

Nonetheless, my informants have entrusted me to hear as well as tell their stories and pass them on. I can only attempt to avoid the dangers of imposing my own bias too greatly by reflexively writing in a scholarly voice and justifying my analysis through scholarly rather than personal means. However, much like cultural influence, there is inevitably individual influence in all writing, including the scholarly and popular works I used in my research.
Chapter 3: Perceived Realities

*What is a true belief or a valid perception in terms of one set of rules may be a delusion or hallucination in terms of another.*


Beliefs make sense of what we experience in our everyday lives, or at least what we perceive. Various scholars suggest personal experiences or sometimes the experiences of others assist in forming individual beliefs and belief systems. These same scholars, such as David Hufford, also suggest the values and beliefs of the cultures and societies to which a person belongs influence some of these seemingly personal experiences. In certain areas, people disagree with cultural beliefs. One example of this in American culture is imaginal companions.

When the beliefs of an individual differ from that of their culture or society, the culture or society may not support an individual’s personal experience. Epistemologist Bernard Lonergan formulated a sensory or cognitive experiential process to reach personal justification that essentially solidifies an experience as knowledge (Dunne 1985:14-17). This “knowledge” then becomes part of one’s personal perception of reality.

Of course, any personal perception of reality itself will differ from the culturally formed perception of reality to a certain extent. For example, imaginal companions may reside in some of these personally perceived realities. In *Imaginary Social Worlds: A Cultural Approach*, anthropologist John L. Caughey acknowledges that all realities are culturally constructed. Individuals create personal realities based on interpretations of
socially established realities. In answering the existential question of whose reality is "more real" is simply a matter of perception (1984: 198-9).

Multiple Realities

The multiple realities of a person's everyday existence necessarily interact and overlap to create a single interpretation of a personally perceived "reality." Others may share some aspects of personally perceived realities, such as imaginal companions, and folk groups may form in a smaller scale scenario. On a larger scale, culture and society use beliefs to make sense of the world and establish an authoritative reality for those belonging to said culture or society, though not everyone necessarily subscribes to all aspects of this established cultural reality.

Culturally constructed realities are typically considered the "accepted reality" in the eyes of the general public and academia. To step outside these boundaries threatens this accepted reality but may also support it. As Caughey points out, an experience or belief falling outside the culturally acceptable boundaries is generally considered a "false" one. He also includes that these "rules" of reality are based solely on perception, whether cultural or individual. He notes that the same applies for variations on these rules (1984: 29-30, 198-9). Even though America is an amalgamation of many cultures, there seems to be a general cultural perception of reality. The variations on "rules" of reality allow smaller groups to personalize their perception while still embracing this general American culture. These variations allow individuals to perceive reality in the
same manner, simply in a singular and more personal way. Imaginal companions are merely one example of this.

In *Imaginary Social Worlds: A Cultural Approach* (1984), Caughey discusses various types of social relationships that exist in potential assorted realities of Americans. These include physical and imagined relationships and realities. A range of objects, dreams, or even figures in the media inspires these relationships but they are all still individual interpretations of the American cultural reality. However, Caughey bases his notion of imaginal social relationships and realities on the idea that they are contained strictly within a person’s own mind.

Though none of my informants has been able to tell me where her companions come from, the very description of their companions (not to mention their interaction) conforms to American cultural standards. For example, Lilah and Leia perceive the majority of their companions to be animals familiar to them, such as a fox. Leia even describes Marcos as a “Chesapeake Bay-type crab” (2006). Both Lilah and Leia are from New York State. It should not be surprising that they perceive their imaginal companions as animals either native to that area or that they may have seen in the area. Of course, Alyssa the fox apparently does not look exactly like a red fox in that her tail is brighter in color, and Marcos the crab can change colors. Lilah and Leia also referred to their companions as “pets” despite the fact that these animals are typically not considered as such in American culture (L. Adee and Rose 2006). These are manipulations of a cultural as well as a biological reality to fit personal perceptions of reality.
Brian Sutton-Smith expounds on perceptions of reality from the perspective of play. Although he agrees with Caughey that reality is culturally constructed, Sutton-Smith views this construction in a different manner. He describes a dichotomy of a "mundane reality" and a "virtual reality." The mundane reality consists of typical everyday actions such as a mother looking after her baby. The virtual reality is a world of play that partially models, mimics, or mocks everyday actions. For example, in virtual reality one would play a mother with a doll in place of a baby. The actions within a virtual reality communicate a play frame. According to Sutton-Smith, mundane and virtual realities hold equal and valuable roles in creating "human cultures" (1997: 195).

Sutton-Smith maintains that the play frame of virtual reality serves another function in culture, not necessarily representing everyday events but it is more vivid for dealing with complex issues. His initial statement regarding this relates to children. He also compares Roger Abrahams's comments on adult festivals as similar to children's play (1997: 158-9). On a cultural level, mundane and virtual realities are not typically favored one over the other (Sutton-Smith 1997: 195). On a personal level, an individual may prefer a virtual or mundane reality based on personal experience as they create their own interpretation of the culturally established reality. It is merely a matter of what a person perceives or chooses to perceive as reality. There are diverse ways to express perceptions of reality such as through literature, which can metaphorically reflect culture and society in the form of play (Sutton-Smith 1997: 142-3). Through literature, an author

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7 Though children’s play is also a valuable aspect of the virtual reality in American culture, my focus is on adults and their imaginal companions. Therefore, I shall not discuss children’s play at great length.
can playfully represent dissenting aspects to the cultural and social perceptions of reality as well.

Philip Pullman created many worlds with parallel yet varying realities in his fictional *His Dark Materials* trilogy. *The Golden Compass*, book one of the trilogy, opens in the world of twelve-year-old Lyra, where all humans and witches (though there are other peoples as well) have visible, tangible daemons. Daemons essentially reflect a spiritual part of the person to which they belong. People in Lyra’s world perceive their daemons as animals that can morph until the individual grows up, at which time the daemon “settles” into a single animal form. Within the cultures of her world, it is taboo to touch the daemon of another person (1995).

As the trilogy progresses, Lyra experiences other worlds in which she discovers the perception of daemons and reality differs from her own. She meets twelve-year-old Will who is from what Pullman describes in a brief opening to the second book, *The Subtle Knife*, as “our world” (1997: n.p.). Will perceives daemons differently from Lyra in that he does not perceive them at all. Lyra determines, however, that Will’s daemon (along with others in his world) is merely “inside” him (1997). In the final installment of the trilogy, *The Amber Spyglass*, after interacting with many different cultures and experiencing many different realities, Will’s daemon tangibly and visibly manifests itself (2000).

Even though it is a fictional work, Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* trilogy very clearly depicts cultural influence on reality perceptions. Throughout the trilogy, Lyra is insistent that Will has a daemon because of her culture’s perception of reality. Will
develops his own perception of reality differing from that of his culture's perception, involving the knowledge of daemons and parallel worlds. He cannot discuss his perception of reality, particularly relating to his daemon, in his world due to potential social stigma. When Serafina Pekkala (a witch from Lyra's world) teaches Dr. Mary Malone (a former nun from Will's world) to see her daemon, she informs her that no one else can see her or Will's daemons unless they are taught to do so (Pullman 2000: 453). Similar to imaginal companions, the daemons essentially belong to the individually perceived realities of Mary and Will.

Daemons are comparable to imaginal companions in many other ways. For example, daemons tend to reflect the personality of their person while maintaining a personality of their own. They behave much like any human beings and certainly in accordance with cultural expectations. Lilah and Leia contend their imaginal companions do not reflect their personalities but instead inspire the development of aspects of their personality they cannot express in certain social situations such as acting out aggression toward an ex-boyfriend (L. Adee and Rose 2006).

In the context of Sutton-Smith's mundane reality, Leia's gentle nature would never allow her to express the anger she felt towards an ex-boyfriend. In the play frame of a virtual reality, she can act out her emotional pain with Alyssa the fox. The independent personality of these imaginal companions has inspired them to exact revenge on those that have hurt their human companions, much as a tangible, human friend might. In the case of Leia's ex-boyfriend, Alyssa caused problems for him at work that Leia believes led to the termination of his job (L. Adee and Rose 2006). To this extent, the
imaginal companions do seem to reflect the personalities of their human companions while also maintaining a somewhat independent personality. The dyadic relationship between imaginal companion and human appears very similar to a human friendship.

The dyadic relationship between daemon and human in Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* trilogy is difficult to describe simply. However, Mary refers to St. Paul’s notion of spirit, soul, and body as the three parts of human nature in her attempt to understand daemons (2000: 392). Because daemons and humans are interdependent on each other for survival, they share an incredibly intimate bond yet also have a certain degree of independence; it is conceivable to call this relationship a spiritual one. Leia and Lilah believe they share a spiritual bond with their imaginal companions, though not as closely linked as human and daemon.

The relationship between imaginal companion and human, as Leia describes, allows for expression and enhancement of spirituality, which she distinguishes from religion. In fact, Leia and Lilah refer to their own spirituality to an “aura.” More specifically, Leia believes their aura is “of a giving, loving spirituality that’s kind of relaxed; that seems more approachable to other people.” Though other people may not see their imaginal companions Leia and Lilah believe others can essentially sense the imaginal companions through the enhancement of spirituality expressed in the aura (L. Adee and Rose 2006). However, imaginal companions are entirely independent entities from humans, unlike daemons. They do not rely on each other for survival but still maintain an extremely intimate bond, which Leia believes “grows stronger everyday.”
fact, she now sees Alyssa as being a part of her, if only in a figurative sense (Rose 2007). As with any social relationships, personal experiences encourage the growth of this bond.

When Will returned to his world in *The Amber Spyglass*, his personal experiences left him in the position of living with co-existing perceptions of reality: the cultural perception of his world and his individual perception involving daemons and parallel worlds. Mary acknowledges she and Will share a similar perception of reality due to similar experiences. Unfortunately, this is outside the cultural perception in their world and, therefore, they have only each other with which to discuss their perceptions of reality (Pullman 2000: 452). In American culture, adults perceiving reality to include imaginal companions are in a similar situation.

Sutton-Smith suggests literature can act as play or even contain play, including the use of metaphor relating to a group’s identity. He allows for variability within the metaphors of literature and, hence, various interpretations (1997: 142-3). If we approach Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* trilogy in respect to daemons and imaginal companions a metaphor emerges relating to perception of reality and growing up (Pullman 1995). This literary metaphor represents a sense of permanence and an end to play which Western culture considers a “nonproductive” child’s activity that typically occurs within the mind (Sutton-Smith 1997: 189). Personal experiences may result in an individually perceived reality that diverts from the culturally acceptable version. In some cases, that personal experience may include social interaction with entities not contained within one’s own mind, such as imaginal companions.
Experiencing Imaginal Companions

Personal experiences and beliefs are mutually dependent on each other. As they influence one another, culture also has the potential to influence both personal experience and beliefs. David Hufford’s cultural-source hypothesis characterizes the assumption that an out-of-the-ordinary personal experience occurs because of culture, especially concerning the supernatural (1982: 12-16). He suggests, however, that accepting cultural authority is not necessarily a basis for so-called “false” or “true” beliefs; it is a matter of accepting an “expert” opinion over personal, empirical judgment (1995b: 18).

Media is one of many “cultural authorities” that influence American society. It certainly tends to reflect the “culturally sanctioned values and attitudes” which Hufford claim to “exert a powerful influence on beliefs” (1995b: 24). Peter, Paul, and Mary’s popular song, Puff the Magic Dragon is an example of this media influence. Jackie Paper’s imaginal companion, Puff, takes him on adventures until Jackie grows “too old” for an imaginal companion. At that point, Puff “sadly slipped into his cave” (Lipton and Yarrow 1963). As Sutton-Smith discusses, literature playfully reflects cultural values and attitudes (1997: 142-3). This song illustrates that it is inappropriate for American adults to believe in imaginal companions as Jackie has sacrificed Puff in order to grow up. How do you explain beliefs and personal experiences that lie outside the cultural perception of reality? Hufford allows for this in his experiential source theory.

The concept of “core experiences” is the basis for Hufford’s experiential source theory. These experiences “occur independently of a subject’s prior beliefs, knowledge, or intention.” The person who is experiencing them must be competent and in a rational
state of mind. Hufford refers to the beliefs that may arise from such experiences as “core beliefs.” Core experiences and core beliefs should “not logically conflict with each other or with established scientific knowledge.” This approach also serves to challenge the skeptical perspective that “spiritual experiences” are merely misinterpretations of “ordinary experiences” (1995b: 28-30).

Leia’s, Lilah’s, and Celia’s experiences with their imaginal companions are core experiences based on Hufford’s standards. To begin with, these experiences were unplanned and unexpected. In fact, my informants are still uncertain where their imaginal companions originated (C. Adee 2006; Adee, L, and Rose 2006). There is also the relationship between believer and imaginal companion to consider. This relationship includes an enhanced spiritual “aura” that encourages strangers to speak openly with Lilah or Leia about their lives and “know that [they] won’t judge them” (L. Adee and Rose 2006).

Hufford acknowledges that a certain degree of cultural influence is inevitable in any belief. Though American cultural standards do not condone imaginal companions in adulthood, what if someone’s family raises them with this belief? This is the case with Celia and her fairies.

The Adee family consists of mother, father, three daughters, and a son, of which Celia and Lilah are relevant to this study. Only the women of the family can interact with fairies and they do not discuss these experiences around the men of the family because they do not believe. Although Lilah believes in fairies, she calls them “devious.” She is

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8 Although Hufford’s experiential source theory draws on supernatural experiences, he refers to them as “spiritual” (meaning “sentient beings not requiring bodies in order to live) experiences because he views “supernatural” as a loaded term (1995b: 15-16).
the only woman in the family that does not interact with fairies because “they like to steal things” and “it’s all about themselves first” (L. Adee and Rose 2006). Celia, on the other hand, paints an entirely different picture of her fairies.

Celia is familiar with approximately two hundred fairies. Though they are shy and appear only when they choose, she knows where to find them and how to call to them. They enjoy nature, music, hearing people talk, and receiving “little treats,” such as “pieces of bread or honey and milk.” She does admit to the existence of mean fairies who like to pinch her as well as friendlier fairies that permit her favors. These favors include cheering her up when she is lonely, making her feel better when she is sick, singing to her, or even staying with her geographically distant friends to help them “keep in touch” with her. According to Celia, fairies perform these favors in return for the “little treats” of small objects or certain foods she leaves them (C. Adee 2006). Celia’s description of fairies is similar to the British cultural belief in fairies and familiars.

In “The Witch’s Familiar and the Fairy in Early Modern England and Scotland,” Emma Wilby discusses characteristics British culture believed fairies and familiars held, including habitat, communication, feeding habits, magical abilities, and contractual agreements. Both could be found either living near humans in a house or out in the country and enjoy communicating with humans. They have the ability to shape shift or simply appear in assorted colors. Wilby notes encounters tend to occur when an individual is alone, though few people believe they had actually seen a fairy. Fairies could be called to or simply appear on their own. Families commonly pass down familiars (as Wilby seeks to make a distinction in her article) to different family
members. Both fairies and familiars could fulfill great promises through contractual agreements, which sometimes included human blood but also ordinary food, such as bread and milk, though the contract did not always include food (2000: 285-9, 296-7).

Although Celia’s description of her experiences with her fairies is similar to that of the British tradition (at least based on Wilby’s brief article), she has lived her entire life in New York State. This is not to say she could not have learned about the tradition. She is the youngest of the three Adee sisters and lived in a household where experiences with fairies abound. Celia claims she cannot even remember when she first saw her fairies. They have been around “pretty much as long as [she] can remember” (C. Adee 2006).

Despite a potential for a higher degree of influence from a cultural authority (in this case, a parental influence), the vast distinction between Celia’s positive perception of fairies and Lilah’s negative perception of fairies still leads me to classify Celia’s experiences as a core experience, though with a bit more hesitation than Leia’s and Lilah’s experiences with their imaginal companions. Admittedly, the abundance of fairies depicted in American popular culture contributes to my hesitation. Nonetheless, for the purposes of this paper, Celia and her fairies still represent an individually held belief that stands apart from the culturally perceived notion of reality.

Hufford’s experiential source theory requires core experiences, which lead to core beliefs. Through unplanned and unexpected appearances and different perceptions, despite growing up with the same values (as in the case with Lilah and Celia), these
experiences have formed core beliefs. Celia, Lilah, and Leia participate in a shared belief system involving the existence of imaginal companions based on their personal experiences. However, since their beliefs conflict with the cultural perception of reality, how do they know what they experience is real? Lonergan suggests a process for just such a purpose.

**Knowing Imaginal Companions**

Hufford’s use of the term “belief” includes knowledge as a type of belief. While he defines belief as “the certainty that something is true,” he defines knowledge as a “justified true belief” (1995b: 19). Lonergan offers a sensory or cognitive experiential process in attaining knowledge.

In order to attain knowledge, according to Lonergan, one must go through a process of experience, understanding, and judgment. The five senses – sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch – conceivably gather the “external data” that partakes in experience. Lonergan also acknowledges that unnamed senses (i.e. process of the mind, such as imagination) gather “interior data,” which is also a vital portion of experience. In discovering the relation of this gathered data to make sense of experience, we have undergone the process of understanding and achieved “insight.” Deciding the validity of this understanding of an experience is the process of judgment. According to Lonergan, once we have completed this series of processes, we can claim knowledge (Dunne 1985: 14-17). However, Lonergan claims that belief works in the opposite direction of knowledge, and depends upon our judgment on someone else’s beliefs (Dunne 1985: 20).
Nonetheless, he also asserts that our perception of reality and the “real” world is a combination of both knowledge and belief (Dunne 1985: 22-24).

Lonergan maintains belief is a vital part of our perception of what is real. In acknowledging human nature, he affirms the data of sense (the “external data” gathered by the five senses) and the data of consciousness (the “interior data” gathered by the mind, which includes the imagination) inherently and necessarily works together in drawing conclusions about our perceptions. In fact, he even acknowledges the paradox of doubting the data of consciousness “would amount to doubting that we could even doubt.” Lonergan concludes that we cannot perceive reality without the data of sense, but we could not understand the data of sense without the data of consciousness either. Therefore, there is an equal amount of value in both the five external senses as well as the processes of the mind (Dunne 1985: 27-28).

Ultimately, Lonergan confirms the notion that reality as a combination of knowledge and belief is a matter of perception formed from rational, personal experiences. Lilah, Leia, and Celia have apparently undergone this process. They have gone through core experiences with their imaginal companions, gathering external and internal data. They made sense of this data and affirmed that it must be “true.” Lonergan’s process tends to take place within the mind of a single individual and is not necessarily a conscious process. Therefore, there is no certainty in when, why, or how Celia, Lilah, and Leia reached the point of knowledge of imaginal companions.

It is arguable that some of the same characteristics that qualify their personal experiences as core experiences contribute to their conclusion of knowledge in imaginal
companions, such as the initial and successive unexpected and unplanned appearances. Perhaps a single experience may not have been convincing, and the strengthening bond with the imaginal companions contributed to the judgment in their validity of their experiences. There is even the possibility that the acts of the imaginal companions influenced the process.

Examples of this influence include various car accidents over the years in which Lilah and Leia believe Alyssa have protected them, even when the car was totaled. These accidents have occurred with deer, other cars, and guardrails. Both Lilah and Leia have walked away from all these accidents relatively unscathed which they attribute to Alyssa the fox (L. Adee and Rose 2006). Perhaps these acts of protection swayed Lonergan’s process in justifying Lilah’s and Leia’s personal experiences by simply believing they had a personal guardian.

It is not my place to judge whether my informant’s beliefs are ontologically valid nor can I firmly assert how Lonergan’s process of attaining knowledge progressed in their minds. All I can truly attain from a researcher’s perspective is that since my informants continue to interact with their imaginal companions on a regular basis they have judged their personal experiences as “true,” accepted the imaginal companions into their individual perceptions of reality, and consistently reaffirm their knowledge through an ongoing process.

Many aspects of individual perceptions of reality do not correspond with the culturally formed perception of reality, one of these aspects being belief. In The
Ambiguity of Play. Sutton-Smith discusses the philosophy of historical phenomenologist H.G. Gadamer, who suggests the player does not play the game; the game plays the player. Despite what we think, there is a lack of freedom in a player’s reactions in the experience of playing a game that makes them more reflexive rather than voluntary actions (1997: 182-3). This is applicable to the influence of culture on beliefs as well as the formation of beliefs themselves.

The maintenance of an individual reality as well as personal beliefs depends upon personal experiences. However, culture and society inevitably influence these experiences and beliefs. In our everyday “mundane reality,” cultural values and attitudes surround us as representations in the media and literature. They dictate what culture and society thinks we should believe. An individual may form their own interpretation of this reality but their “virtual reality” cannot escape it completely if only in reflections.

The most obvious example of a social reflection is Celia’s fairies. After growing up in household where imaginal companions in the form of fairies were encouraged, she undoubtedly believes in them and believes she interacts with them (C. Adee 2006). Her sister, Lilah, holds a different perception of them despite growing up in the same household (L. Adee and Rose 2006). Not all “spiritual” experiences have such a strong cultural or social influence. While Lilah and Celia were raised in essentially the same social atmosphere, Leia’s parents did not influence her one way or the other regarding imaginal companions. Any influence for Leia regarding adults and imaginal companions extends from friends and American culture (Rose 2007).
The core experiences of Lilah, Leia, and Celia eventually formed core beliefs. In order to incorporate these beliefs into their individually perceived realities, Lilah, Leia, and Celia inherently underwent a process to affirm their beliefs as knowledge, according to Lonergan. The core experiences served as gathering the external and internal data. They achieved insight by making sense of the data and believing in it. Finally, they judged the data as real, at which point they incorporated their experiences into their individual realities.

It seems repetitious to assert that Lilah, Leia, and Celia firmly believe what they apparently know to be true. Nonetheless, their imaginal companions exist within their individual realities. Lilah, Leia, and Celia speak of them as they would of any tangible, human companion - that is, when they do speak of their imaginal companions. All three of my informants are cautious with their words and wary of their audiences because of the potential stigma that their beliefs carry in American society. It is yet another case of the game playing the player.
Chapter 4: Cautious Words in Social Worlds

Different individuals and groups have somewhat different personal base-lines from which to measure risk and opportunity: a way of life involving much risk may cause the individual to give little weight to a risk that someone else might find forbidding.


Each day we move through our lives interacting with the people around us and experiencing the world. We gather these experiences in our mind in the form of personal narratives. We retell these personal narratives to ourselves; some of them we eventually retell to those people we socially interact with in our everyday lives. However, there are personal narratives that are difficult to relate due to cultural and social attitudes, belief systems, and expectations. These influences dictate which personal narratives we choose to share, who we share them with, and even how we word them.

As Erving Goffman points out in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, society dictates the very structure of an individual’s self-presentation, in a manner of speaking. Each public appearance is a performance of sorts (whether words are spoken or not) in which we present a “social front, which conforms to fit certain “routines” and audiences (1959: 29-30). The audience is of particular concern in relation to imaginal companions.

There are ways to “practice” and “test out” an audience. Before we share our personal narratives with anyone, we share them with ourselves. Idionarration (essentially, relating a story to one’s self within one’s own mind) acts as practice for social interaction (Bard 1992: 61. 66). Although believers perceive imaginal companions
as separate entities, sometimes believers communicate with imaginal companions through their mind. This dyadic relationship also seems to serve as a sort of practice for some social interactions. This practice allows preservation of the social front for an audience though the audience may influence storytelling during the performance as well.

Goffman’s notion of “face” is a personality maintained during social interactions through the process of “face-work.” This includes adhering to an unspoken, generally unrealized code (1967: 12-13). A person applies face-work in social situations to test out an audience in order to discuss a particular topic such as imaginal companions. Due to the potential social stigma involved, face-work is a vital and necessary tool waged against the amount of risk a believer is willing to take with their experiences and social front.

*Structuring a Social Individual*

Society consists of two main regions: the front region and the back region. This is the region that all society views, the region in which standards are set by society’s established perception of reality (Goffman 1959: 107-8). Somewhat in opposition to the front region, stands the back region.

The back region is exclusive to a specific group, occasionally strictly one’s self. This is a private region where hidden aspects of the social front exist; that is, aspects somewhat hidden from society on a larger scale. Goffman compares it to the “backstage” of a performance, separated from the audience by a partition. Practice for social interaction and play frames typically occur in this region. An individual may “behave out of character” in the back region as it is an exclusive region and hypothetically more
controlled than the front region (1959: 111-13). Different social groups in America have different standards regarding front and back regions. Nonetheless, there seems to be a general set of standards by which American culture influences the standards of these smaller groups, similar to the American cultural influence on perceptions of reality.

While Goffman applies the front and back regions in a metaphorically spatial context, I find use in metaphorically applying these concepts to an individual’s social identity as well. Essentially, society views the “front region identity” and the “back region identity” maintains a personal, more private identity, which an individual generally hides from the metaphorically spatial front region. This is a particularly useful application due to sensitive social topics, such as imaginal companions.

A narrative can influence what is normal and what is not in society. This is evident, for example, in the structure and even events of a narrative. When a personal narrative does not fit into culturally imposed categories of storytelling, the teller may alter their story or simply resist relating their experience altogether. Even if the stories do travel, they may take on new meaning or new contexts (Shuman 2005: 12-17).

In American society, adult believers tend to resist relating their personal experiences in the front region because, as Lilah states, “I don’t want to get looked at like I’m a weirdo” (L. Adee 2006b). According to Goffman, when preparing for a performance we keep social values in mind. We also apply those standards when critiquing the performances of others (1959: 55). Believing in imaginal companions as an adult is inappropriate in American society. A personal belief that stands in opposition to an established “appropriate” carries potential social stigma. In the case of imaginal
companions, the potential stigma is that the believer may suffer from a psychopathology. For this reason, the back region serves as an environment in which believers can safely discuss the topic of imaginal companions. The notion of a back region identity serves as an “environment” where an adult can safely conceal their belief in imaginal companions.

Although the back region identity has potential to conceal a socially unacceptable belief, I do not mean to imply that all people necessarily wish to do this. The characteristics of a dyadic relationship, specifically the intimacy of the idioculture allows for the revealing of the more personal back region identity in a spatial back region. Regina Bendix notes that even though individuals may share similar social or cultural backgrounds, their personal identities inevitably differ (1987: 181). These differences tend to exist in the back region identity. The dyadic relationship requires participating individuals can safely lower their “barriers” in order to develop intimacy. Through playful responses to the differences in back region identities dyadic folklore develops (Bendix 1987: 182). These “safe environments” of dyadic relationships not only include human relationships but also those of believers and their imaginal companions.

The intimacy of dyadic relationships develops over time and through communication; it is a relationship based on trust. As Leia points out:

Before we really knew who they were exactly, and how to communicate, they were just presences that we felt, and knew they were with us at all times; that made us feel secure. As we got to know them even more, we’ve gotten closer. (L. Adee and Rose 2006)

A believer learns how to communicate with their imaginal companion over time as they become more familiar with each other. Lilah describes it as a “strength thing. The longer
they’re around, the more acquainted you become with what their thought process is.”

Sometimes this requires someone from outside the dyad assisting in the development by providing information on how to communicate with a particular imaginal companion (L. Adee and Rose 2006). This does not necessarily break the code of dyadic intimacy since members are prone to sharing some aspects of the idioculture (Bendix 1987: 174).

Sharing of the idioculture of a dyad creates potential for another back region for believers. For example, during my interview with Leia and Lilah, Alyssa the fox attempted to communicate with me but I did not acknowledge her because I was unaware of this attempt. Leia informed me of Alyssa’s presence and attempted communication as well as the fact that if I had not submitted to her desires (Alyssa was trying to get me to move my bag) she might have caused me to suffer a migraine. Similarly, when Leia plays the game with Alyssa that involves throwing mental images to each other’s minds, the images occasionally end up in Lilah’s mind by mistake. When this occurs, Lilah acknowledges Alyssa’s presence and the game to both Leia and Alyssa (L. Adee and Rose 2006). Leia’s breach of dyadic intimacy with Alyssa does not necessarily endanger her relationship. Instead, it extends her dyad and back region. Since Leia and Lilah share some imaginal companions, they inherently share the idioculture involving the imaginal companions with each other. However, by introducing other believers into their intimate group or even risking revealing their beliefs to outsiders, Leia and Lilah must contend with potentially intermingling their front and back region identities.

“Audience segregation” is a method of “front region control” to maintain appropriate front and back regions identities for appropriate audiences. By applying
these methods, an individual effectively maintains and separates their front and back region identities by only allowing certain audiences to view certain social performances and roles. Should these identities or audiences intermingle, either the “performer” or the audience must adapt (Goffman 1959: 137-40). In some cases, the back region extends to a group larger than a dyad such as Lilah’s and Celia’s family. They still consider this a safe environment even though this region excludes the Adee men, and the imaginal companions of the Adee family, with the exception of Lilah’s, are strictly fairies (L. Adee and Rose 2006). However, in the larger social realm the audience is not quite so easy to segregate and control.

In the front region of society, Leia and Lilah note that their imaginal companions assist in identifying which audience members are “safe.” This may include the imaginal companions making initial contact or simply communicating that “they like this person” or “you have to talk to this person” (L. Adee and Rose 2006). The intimacy and strong communicative ties of the dyadic relationship is useful for revealing back region identities in a front region scenario and, in some situations, potentially extending the dyad or expanding the safe environment of the back region. The intimacy between imaginal companion and believer potentially protects the believer against social stigma, presuming the imaginal companion is correct about the “newcomer.” Of course, this is assuming the believer chooses to take the suggestion of their imaginal companion. Ultimately, any risk in social front is on the part of the believer because imaginal companions only appear when they so choose and to whom they so choose (C. Adee 2006; L. Adee 2006a; L. Adee and Rose 2006).
Social interactions occur in both the front and back regions of society. However, society dictates what the front region expects from a social front, or front region identity. Therefore, much more is at risk in this region. The back region is a safer environment where individuals may reveal elements of their back region identity such as beliefs that do not cohere to the socially established perception of reality. On the chance that an individual chooses to reveal their back region identity in a front region (hence, placing their social front at risk), there are methods of control to contend with the potential social stigma they risk, particularly in the case of belief in imaginal companions. I have already mentioned the methods of front region control and audience segregation. Goffman points out activities in the back region also include practice for social interactions (1959: 112). This practice is another method of front region control, which typically takes place in the metaphorical back region of the mind of an individual.

_practicing for performance_

The process of storytelling begins in one’s mind when the individual self-narrates a personal experience. Idionarrating occurs before the individual shares the personal experience with anyone else. Bard views idionarration as a dyadic relationship contained within one’s own mind, consisting of “self-as-storyteller” and a “self-as-story-listener.” This process in storytelling acts as practice for social interaction as well as a form of therapy for individuals with personal experiences that do not fit comfortably in their front region (1992: 63, 66-8). Although believers do not perceive that imaginal companions
are contained strictly within their own minds, common methods of communication and the intimate dyadic relationships allow idionarrative methods to apply.

In “Relating Intrapersonal Storying (Idionarrating) and Interpersonal Communicating,” Bard identifies and examines three areas of storytelling: performance, scenario, and strategy. Performance lays out the internal dyadic split necessary for idionarration. Here she acknowledges potential for social influence in the “silent self” who can act as the “dissenting voice in society.” Honesty and openness about ideas and beliefs are potentially at a greater level because there is no threat of intimidation. She also notes idionarration is different from interacting with others for several other reasons. For example, she points out that criticism from oneself can be as harsh as that from others but at least “self is on self’s side.” In addition, there is no need to digress during the storytelling since self already knows the beginning through the end of any story (1992: 63-5).

Scenario depends on who is willing to listen to the story, which is, of course, not a difficulty within one’s mind, as there is always an available and willing audience. This is not the only issue with the scenario aspect of idionarration. In idionarration, an individual has already weighed and decided what content is important enough to pass along in social interaction. Bard does acknowledge physical audiences as well as the “silent” mental audience of idionarration sways content in storytelling events (1992: 66-7). As social situations and audiences change, so must the story. Thus is the tellability of personal narratives (Shuman 2005: 12-17).
Finally, Bard discusses the strategic use of idionarrated stories in social context. Her fieldwork revealed traumatic personal experiences were often idionarrated to a point where they were finally able to share their stories with others in group therapy sessions. The stories even became methods for social change in some cases, such as the preservation of the Santa Monica pier in the early 1980s. Idionarrated stories are persuasive tools for swaying an audience to share a perception with the storyteller (1992: 69-70).

To an extent, the imaginal companions conform to many of the concepts of idionarration. There is the strong dyadic relationship between believer and imaginal companion. Granted, this level does not likely come close to an individual idionarrative level. However, Bard does suggest that even social and cultural influences affect the judgments we make in and on our own thoughts (1992: 64). Of course, imaginal companions seem to prefer mental communication (C. Adee 2006; L. Adee 2006a; L. Adee and Rose 2006; Rose 2007). Again, believers do not perceive imaginal companions as contained strictly within their own minds. Nonetheless, the concepts of idionarration do conceivably apply though perhaps not as precisely as if imaginal companions were contained strictly within the believers mind. Based on the separate entities perception perhaps Lilah stated it best: “It’s kind of like having a friend that is very blunt.” Leia confirms imaginal companions are “like a permanent friend that never go away” (L. Adee and Rose 2006).

An individual does not need to nurture or build the idionarrative dyadic relationship over time; it naturally occurs within the mind. In contrast, the dyad between
imaginal companion and believer begins slowly, similar to any other human relationship or friendship. As each participant earns trust and credibility so does the relationship. While Lilah describes her dragons as “maybe a part of me, but not really” (L. Adee 2006b) Leia affirms that Alyssa has definitely become part of her and their relationship grows stronger every day because of it (Rose 2007). When Alyssa does not like something Leia is doing, she will communicate this to her or simply give Leia a migraine (L. Adee and Rose 2006).

In the same sense, when Alyssa (or any of the imaginal companions) does not like someone Lilah or Leia socialize with, they will let them know by either harassing the person or simply communicating this to Lilah and Leia. This is particularly relevant with romantic relationships as is evident in cases of ex-boyfriends (L. Adee and Rose 2006). One might argue the imaginal companions act not quite as a “dissenting voice of society,” as Bard would call it (1992: 64), but instead a moral conscience or even a dissenting parental voice. Nonetheless, the imaginal companions act as a critical voice that Lilah and Leia confidently know is still on their side.

In retrospect, Leia admitted these ex-boyfriends were not good for her and she is now happily married to a man of whom Alyssa approves (L. Adee and Rose 2006). Aside from ex-boyfriends, the imaginal companions seem almost omniscient in another sense. Lilah acknowledges her dragons “give [her] idea of stuff that might happen” (L. Adee 2006b). The intimacy of the dyad is so intense the imaginal companions can give knowledgeable advice on relationships, for example, as well as some insight into the future. To this extent, when believers are sharing a personal experience there is no need
to digress when telling a story to an imaginal companion for it is likely they already know it. Although Lilah and Leia insist their imaginal companions do not necessarily know *everything* that is going on in their lives, they seem to know much more than the average human friend knows and are able to advise on future events as well as social interactions (L. Adee and Rose 2006).

Imaginal companions are always a willing audience, especially when the story involves them. In fact, during the interview with Lilah and Leia, Leia informed me Alyssa was sitting on my jacket and wanted me to move my bag. After accommodating her, Alyssa apparently thanked me. When I turned off the recorder, I was informed she and a few others were around because they enjoyed hearing stories about themselves (L. Adee and Rose 2006). Some imaginal companions are also willing to listen to other personal narratives the believer wishes to relate. These stories include mundane, everyday experiences as well as difficult personal tales that may not escape the back region identity of the believer except for the imaginal companion (Rose 2007). The intimacy and restricted codes of the dyadic relationship allow for communication of personal experiences such as these. Bard did acknowledge that her fieldwork revealed repeated idionarration of difficult personal experiences led to strategic therapeutic use in a more open social realm (1992: 68).

My informants did not specifically mention any discussions of difficult personal experiences with imaginal companions potentially leading to relating these same personal experiences to anyone else. However, the fact that Lilah, Leia, and Celia have accepted imaginal companions as part of their back region identity and they talk to them on a
regular basis allows for the possibility of bringing their beliefs to their front region identity on a limited basis, which they seem to do anyway. After all, they trust others with their personal experiences based on advice from their imaginal companions as well as established groups of believers. To quote Bard: “Telling another person is the first step towards social change” (1992: 70).

**Risking the Social Front**

Intermingling back and front region identities is a risky venture for any individual. Society may disapprove of the beliefs, values, and attitudes one may normally conceal in the back region identity. As society tends to dictate the front region, the back region is the safest environment for some beliefs. For American adults these beliefs include imaginal companions.

American society and the discipline of psychiatry dictate that imaginal companions belong in the realm of childhood. Even in this respect, it is only because they hold a place in society for children who “are either first-born children or have no siblings near their own age.” These two institutions also view children as “‘more imaginative’ than adults” but not engaged enough in American culture to distinguish “between imagination and reality.” Therefore, psychiatry viewed children with imaginal companions negatively until the late 1970s when psychiatrists discovered that these children were actually happier, more cooperative, less aggressive, and more advanced. In fact, American society changed their view on imaginal companions, at least in relation to children (Caughey 1984: 213-17).
John L. Caughey points out quite “normal” American adults are able to maintain imaginary relationships while keeping a firm grasp on reality. Although he acknowledges some adults with legitimate psychological problems such as schizophrenia have negative imaginary relationships, the difficulty in maintaining a grasp on reality may not come from the psychological dysfunction itself. He suggests the psychological labeling is a traumatic experience for the individual (1984: 217-19). I am not a psychiatrist and it is not within my training or skills to analyze the psychological state of mind of an individual. Caughey clearly has a point as the potential stigma of psychological labeling intimidates my informants. As previously stated, Lilah generally does not discuss her beliefs outside her established back region because she “does not want to get looked at like [she’s] a weirdo” (L. Adee 2006b).

As academia influences the front region of American society, the mass media reflects the values and attitudes of this front region. A popular example of this is the 1950 feature film *Harvey*. Elwood P. Dowd (played by James Stewart) believes he has an imaginal companion: a six-foot tall invisible rabbit named Harvey. His sister is convinced he is crazy and tries to get him committed to a mental institution. It seems Elwood has a firmer grasp on reality than many of the other characters throughout the film. His sister and even the head psychiatrist at the institution speak of seeing Harvey yet Elwood is the only one that remains calm and composed in Harvey’s presence. The social stigma that an adult who maintains a relationship with an imaginal companion is psychologically dysfunctional is quite evident in this film. Although Elwood is quite
open about Harvey, other believers are more cautious with their words and their social front.

In *Interaction Ritual*, Goffman is concerned with the issue of “face,” which is, essentially, a personality that a person wishes to maintain based on varying social situations (1967: 6-7). This is somewhat similar to the social front described in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Goffman 1959: 29). The difference is that “face” must be maintained during social interaction through “face-work.” This includes adhering to an unspoken, generally unrealized code (1967: 12-13).

There are two different types of face-work: “the avoidance process” and “the corrective process.” The avoidance process includes avoiding sensitive topics until participants understand the code. If the code is broken, the offending individual must openly acknowledge the event in a non-threatening manner. If a person loses control during an event, hiding or concealing activities is another form of avoidance to “save face.” When participants cannot overlook an event, the corrective process is necessary. In this case, ritual behavior is necessary. For example, an individual can pass off an occurrence as a joke. Goffman explains this ritual as a simple process he refers to as “challenge, offering, acceptance, and thanks.” (1967: 15-23).

This notion of maintaining face may apply to the dyadic folk group. It also applies on a grander scale to believers in a general social situation. Logically, based on the American perception of reality, they may choose not to speak of their beliefs at all. If a believer does choose to attempt to speak of their beliefs, they might use the avoidance process. If someone else brings up personal experiences with an imaginal companion,
participants reach an understanding, establish a code, and a safe environment. In the
same process, should the believer be mistaken about their audience, they can pass off
their narrative as a joke if only to save face and preserve their social front.

Lilah and Leia do not always make use of this method of front region control.
There are situations when they choose not to reveal their belief in imaginal companions at
all. They believe what they refer to as their spiritual "auras" are enhanced by their
imaginal companions and draw people to them as well as let these strangers know they
can open up to Lilah and Leia without judgment. For example, Lilah and Leia were
sitting in a diner and a stranger sitting in the booth behind them asked to join them for a
cup of coffee. She sat down, told them all about her life, and asked for advice. Although
Lilah and Leia attribute this to their auras and imaginal companions, they did not reveal
this to the stranger (L. Adee and Rose 2006). This woman seemed to reveal her back
region identity to Lilah and Leia simply based on what they refer to as their spirituality
and auras. Yet, they chose to save face by keeping this a secret. On the other hand,
perhaps it was a version of the avoidance process in that they never reached an
established code and the sensitive topic of imaginal companions was not one for
discussion at that time.

Lilah and Leia do not openly reveal their back region identity regarding imaginal
companions to random strangers. When they do seek to intermingle their front and back
region identities, they take the advice of their imaginal companions but they also rely on
their own instincts. Leia expresses it as someone to which they feel "a strong connection.
That you feel close enough in yourself that you can talk about it and still be accepted
without being judged and without them being judged.” According to Lilah, this leads to asking these people certain questions, though she could not think of the specific questions; “They just come to you at the last minute.” If the newcomer gives them odd looks or does not seem to understand, the newcomer may simply walk away. Sometimes Lilah or Leia may change the subject or just walk away in reaction to odd looks or an apparent misunderstanding, should the newcomer stay (L. Adee and Rose 2006). One might consider this process as face-work. The questions act as a form of the avoidance process in an attempt at establishing a code. Walking away or changing the subject matter is certainly the corrective process. Whether they are successful, this sort of process is what allows for the opportunity for other believers to share personal narratives about their imaginal companions.

Not all believers necessarily have a safe environment in which to share their personal narratives. Culturally imposed categories or potentially misappropriated entitlement may restrain them from sharing their stories beyond idionarration or perhaps beyond pseudo-idionarration with their imaginal companion. There is also the potential social stigma of psychological labeling. However, once someone breaches a sensitive topic such as imaginal companions, a potential safe environment is established. James Stewart discovered this when he played Elwood in Harvey (1950). In an introductory audio commentary to the film, Stewart discusses the real-life consequences of playing a character with an imaginal companion:
I’ve had letters. They’ve said, ‘One of the reasons I liked the picture so much is because I have a friend like that, that I sort of turn to when I need advice and when I need encouragement. I don’t know whether mine is a rabbit or not, but he’s a friend.’ (Stewart 1990)

Culture and society influence our everyday lives, including the way we express ourselves in public. The front region sees and hears only part of what we experience while entitlement to so much more of our personal experiences belongs to the back region. This is partially because of potential social stigma. In the case of imaginal companions, this social stigma is typically psychological labeling. American society and the discipline of psychiatry dictate imaginal companions belong in the realm of childhood so adult believers tend to conceal those beliefs in their back region identities.

There is a more sympathetic audience in the back region, particularly within the dyadic idionarration and pseudo-idionarration between imaginal companion and believer. Although social influence and criticism exists, there is a single side, so to speak. Due to the intense intimacy of the dyadic relationship, there is not much concern for entitlement or tellability. The back region is a safe environment. However, in the front region a believer must make an effort to protect their social front if they wish to speak of their imaginal companions at all.

It is possible to find safe environments in the front region of society through face-work. Once codes are established, a believer can expand familiar groups. This may occur through advice of an imaginal companion, instinct of the believer, or even an imaginary kinship with a film character. It is the first step towards social change. For
many years psychiatry believed imaginal companions had a negative impact on children. Once they discovered differently American society changed its attitude. Perhaps if enough adult believers find enough safe environments in the front region they can affect significant social change as well.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

In contemporary American society, it is only acceptable for children to maintain social relationships with imaginal companions. An adult who maintains such a belief or relationship risks social stigma such as psychological labeling, which would potentially damage their social front. The mass media reflects this cultural perception of reality, including fictional examples of the progress of childhood such as in *Puff The Magic Dragon* (Lipton and Yarrow 1963), and representations of adult imaginal companions such as in *Harvey* (1950). Through published research and academic studies, the discipline of psychiatry seems to support the American cultural perception of reality regarding imaginal companions as well as the social stigma of psychological labeling. Despite this potentially damaging social stigma, there are still American adults who choose to acknowledge their personal experiences and beliefs regarding imaginal companions and accept them into their individual perception of reality.

American culture is an amalgamation of many different cultures and folk groups. These groups hold different standards, values, and beliefs in their perceptions of reality, including the notion of what constitutes front and back regions. Despite these varying perspectives there seems to be a basic set of expectations in American society, which different groups as well as individuals manipulate to fit personalized perceptions of reality. One example of this is attitudes towards imaginal companions.

American culture seems to influence all aspects of the belief in imaginal companions, including the description of the companions themselves. For example, Lilah
and Leia manipulate American cultural perceptions of certain animals, as reflected in the mass media and terminology (L. Adee and Rose 2006), in order to conform these cultural attitudes and ideas to the aspects of their personal perceptions of reality relating to imaginal companions. Through successive personal experiences and ever-strengthening spiritual bonds Celia, Lilah, and Leia have all seemed to accept imaginal companions as part of their individual perceptions of reality accompanied by a wide range of cultural and social influences. Within the dyadic relationship of Lilah and Leia or even within other safe environments, such as the women of the Adee family, sharing these ideas and beliefs does not endanger their social fronts. The metaphorical front region of society and potential social stigma influences believers in regards to the tellability of their personal narratives relating to imaginal companions in that larger arena.

The safest environment for personal narratives regarding imaginal companions is idionarration, where a more sympathetic audience is available than in social interaction with others (Bard 1992: 64-5). There is not much concern for entitlement or tellability as intimacy and restricted codes of any dyadic relationship is at its most intense in idionarration. The same characteristics of the dyadic split within one’s own mind, as well as mental communication being the primary form of communication, apply to pseudo-idionarration. Although there is intense intimacy within this dyad as well as a seemingly stronger communicative bond than in a human dyads, believers perceive imaginal companions as separate entities not contained within their own minds, which distinguishes the social interaction in this back region from idionarration.
On occasion, Lilah and Leia attempt to intermingle their back region identities with their front region identities in efforts to expand their safe environments. They use a combination of face-work, including questioning and changing topics, and the advice of their imaginal companions (L. Adee and Rose 2006). Other believers have found safe environments through creating imaginary relationships with actors who play certain characters in plays or films. James Stewart points this out in an introductory voiceover to the DVD release of the feature film *Harvey* (1950) when he comments about letters he received from fans mentioning their imaginal companions (Stewart 1990). Even though Elwood P. Dowd is a fictional character, believers in imaginal companions felt a kinship with him and, therefore, felt safe in revealing this aspect of their back region identities to Stewart. These were imaginary relationships since it is safe to presume most, if not all of these people did not personally know James Stewart or Elwood P. Dowd. It is also another example of a safe environment for personal narratives.

Because not all American adults believe in imaginal companions, the social stigma of psychological labeling potentially restricts the narratives of the ones that do believe; my informants expressed this concern to me many times. For a researcher, the potential restriction on believers leads to a potential limitation of informants. I worked with a group size of only three informants, which has its advantages and disadvantages. Although there is a more intimate and casual environment in the interviewing process, there is also a danger of making overgeneralizations in my conclusions.

Social relationships clearly exist between imaginal companions and believers of imaginal companions. The formation of a dyadic folk group begins with the initial
appearance of the imaginal companion and communication with the believer. The believer perceives their imaginal companion or companions by manipulating the influence of the culture and society around them. Through storytelling in safe environments, other legitimate folk groups of varying sizes emerge. Although believers may create these groups through face-work, some believers are born into them, as is the case with the women of the Adee family. Nonetheless, it appears to me that the folk groups remain small, quite likely due to the influence of the American cultural perception of reality and, hence, the potential social stigma of psychological labeling.

While I was developing my research, I discussed my progress with some of my friends who were not involved in the study. These friends often responded to the concept of imaginal companions with skepticism or memorates of imaginal companions from their long-abandoned childhoods. These conversations not only served to support my notion of the influence of the American cultural attitudes towards belief in imaginal companions, but also provided me with an idea in how a folklorist researching this belief might find informants.

I was fortunate to have friends who believed in imaginal companions and were willing to entrust me, in the role of a researcher, with their personal narratives regarding this belief. The social stigma that might restrict other researchers still limited my informant group size numerically but it did not present difficulty in initially finding informants. Marjorie Bard states that before an individual shares a personal experience with anyone else they idionarrate it to themselves (1994: 77). In the case of sensitive or traumatic personal experiences, the individual may continue to idionarrate the experience
based on the preconceived notion of the audience’s reaction (1992: 68). Due to the potential social stigma, a believer may consider imaginal companions to be one such sensitive topic. Bard also believes folklorists have the training to elicit these sensitive, idionarrated tales because of their listening skills, ability to take people’s stories seriously, and “because folklore is symbolic. It engages people, evoking strong emotions, visual imagery, and physical responses” (1994: 87-89).

In my aforementioned conversations with my friends, their memories seemed quite clear regarding imaginal companions from their childhoods, as if these were stories they had idionarrated to themselves that were simply waiting for an appropriate audience. It seems like an obvious statement but sensitive topics, such as belief, require sensitive discussion in finding informants. In finding a common ground with something as simple as having an imaginal companion in childhood or discussing a mass media representation of imaginal companions may broach the topic for an adult believer and potential informant.

Flexibility, patience, and respecting the informant as the “primary source of knowledge” are other essential methodological principles Bard suggests regarding narrating and advocacy (1994: 89). While I am not necessarily advocating social change, as Bard is. I find these principles useful in eliciting narratives regarding sensitive topics such as imaginal companions. I conducted five interviews during the course of my fieldwork. I was already familiar with many of the narratives I heard, some of which related to me because I share personal beliefs with my informants. As suggested by David J. Hufford (1995a), I attempted to maintain a scholarly voice while being aware of
my personal voice. Although both my informants and I were aware of my personal beliefs and experiences, I maintained my informants as the knowledgeable ones regarding imaginal companions. My personal voice emerged only to elicit certain narratives from my informants.

I found that I applied Bard’s methodological suggestions of flexibility, patience, and respect for the informant a great deal in combination with my own personal beliefs and experiences, as well as Hufford’s suggestion of reflexively including the personal voice while distinguishing it from the scholarly voice. However, I realize not every researcher has a base of friends who believe in imaginal companions or a basis to form trust for such a sensitive topic. I think a researcher in this situation is able to use American culture. As long as the researcher respects the informant’s knowledge and beliefs, trust and a safe environment can form through a discussion of a mass media representation of imaginal companions such as Harvey (1950). These are the skills of eliciting, listening, and taking people’s stories seriously that folklorists apply in fieldwork (Bard 1994: 89).

Belief in imaginal companions is a hidden tradition with many aspects to examine, some of which I researched in this study. Aside from the limitations resulting from potential social stigma (e.g. my small informant group size), I was also limited by relevant scholarship. The lack of scholarship is another reason I refer to this belief as a hidden tradition. There is a wealth of unexplored or barely researched territory, which folklorists may examine in regards to imaginal companions.
My informants included two sisters, Celia and Lilah Adee, but their other sister and mother also believe in imaginal companions. Lilah also has a one-year-old son whom she believes has an imaginal companion (L. Adee and Rose 2006). I did not have the opportunity to interview these members of the Adee family hence missing the opportunity to examine the familial tradition in a generational sense.

I focused on adults with imaginal companions in this study, but neglected adults with memorates of imaginal companions. Although I included a chapter discussing narratives, I did not examine different forms of narratives, such as memorates. Of course, there is the children’s belief in imaginal companions, which could relate to a study of memorates as well as a generational study of imaginal companions.

Religion, diversity of culture, and gender are other possibilities for further research. Celia’s relationship with her fairies is somewhat similar to a witch’s relationship with her familiar, as Emma Wilby describes in her article, “The Witch’s Familiar and the Fairy in Early Modern England and Scotland” (2000). While I only touched on the contractual aspect of this relationship (and not in regards to religion), perhaps modern manifestations of the familiar relate to imaginal companions in New Age religions. This article is the closest cross-cultural perspective I introduced into my research since my focus was on American culture and my informants were limited to American women. There is potential for a cross-cultural perspective but also a more gender-inclusive study.

As suggested by fan letters written to James Stewart, individuals may form imaginary relationships with actors. In fact, John L. Caughey’s *Imaginary Social*
Worlds: A Cultural Approach (1984) discusses imaginary relationships with celebrities as well as many other types of imaginary relationships. The relationships Caughey discusses are not always identical to relationships with imaginal companions but this book acts as a starting place for further work on an area that deserves more academic attention. I have only presented a few examples of the many possible directions for further research. This study has only breached the surface of a tradition hidden due to American cultural influence and the ensuing potential social stigma of psychological labeling.

Further research in imaginal companions can contribute to folklore as well as other disciplines, including psychiatry and psychology. The dyad of believer and imaginal companion is a non-traditional folk group in that it is smaller than folklorists typically study and it contains a participant that essentially cannot speak for itself, even though the believer perceives social interaction. A few folklorists, such as Jay Mechling, have argued for the legitimacy of this type of dyad but in other forms, such as humans and pets (see Mechling 1984). Through applying the folkloristic fieldwork skills of eliciting idionarrated stories regarding sensitive topics (Bard 1994: 89) we can assist psychiatry and psychology in studying idionarration and imaginal companions. Even though psychiatry and psychology has already achieved a great deal in this realm, the discipline of folklore a fresh perspective that takes into account both belief and traditional discourse in small groups.
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