Fighting Friends:
Mitigated Stigma in the Religious Society of Friends

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Abstract

In this study of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in the United States, I use interview and observational data to demonstrate that 'non-peaceful' or 'fighting' Friends experience mitigated stigma within the group. I argue that the use of a variety of meanings of important symbols in the group helps to produce mitigated stigma. At the theoretical level, mitigated stigma is differentiated from full stigma by its often contested nature, its focus on concealable heterodoxy or hetero-praxis, the ambivalence people feel towards it and the group's attenuated power to enforce it.

Keywords

stigma, sociology, peace testimony, identity, solidarity, deviance.

The Problem of a Fighting Friend

It is not generally expected that Quakers fight even without outward weapons, and Quakers themselves share this expectation. (Robson 2008: 143)

It can be assumed that the possession of a discreditable secret failing takes on a deeper meaning when the persons to whom the individual has not yet revealed himself are not strangers to him but friends. (Goffman 1963: 65)

The fall of 2002 was a troubling time for the liberal, unprogrammed Quakers I was observing in southern California. As one of the historic peace churches, George W. Bush's pushing his case for war against Iraq, both in front of the United Nations and to the United States, had many concerned, talking and worrying about the possibility of a new conflict in the so-called 'war on terror'.

In the midst of this growing concern, one Sunday morning during the meeting's silent worship, Mark[1] stood to give his verbal message.

> As Friends, we are supposed to listen to the voice of God wherever it may take us. Our history is full of Quakers doing unpopular things as they listen to the voice of Spirit. In this contentious time, I believe that we have a leader who does just that. That leader is President Bush.

Mark's implied endorsement of Bush's plan to disarm Saddam Hussein did not sit well with the assembled Friends. A senior Friend stood up almost immediately after Mark sat down and encouraged Friends to calm down and to not rush to judgment in these difficult times. Others sighed audibly, as if to show their labouring with this troublesome ministry of Mark's.

This incident marked the beginning of a change in Mark's evaluation by the group. Previously, Mark was largely seen to be in good standing within the meeting. Prior to his controversial ministry, his application for membership was headed for meeting approval, but in the following months Mark retracted his application in the face of growing concern over his suitability for membership. Some members were clearly concerned about Mark as a result of his statement in meeting for worship, while a good number of others still supported him despite it. To this first group Mark presented a symbol of self that was deeply problematic and, ultimately, socially spoiling. To the latter group, many of whom did not agree with Mark on the specifics of the Iraq war, this identity that Mark revealed was troubling, but also understandable. Mark continued his participation as an attender in the meeting after the difficulties with his membership application.

The meeting was deeply split over what to make of Mark. On the one hand, he was discredited. He had publicly admitted a most troublesome moral and political position and disposition, and his standing in the group had become problematic. Some Friends gossiped about him and expressed their incredulity that he could believe such a thing and still consider himself a Quaker. On the other hand, however, he was not fully discredited. In most respects he continued in his participation as he had before. He served on committees, participated in monthly business meetings (where group decisions are made) and regularly attended weekly worship. For most Friends in the meeting community he was the odd (and rather) troubling Quaker who supported the invasion of Iraq. However, Mark was not a solitary enigma for the study of stigma. Further research revealed that other dissenters on questions of peace, whom I call fighting Friends, are similarly *both* tolerated *and* stigmatised by the group. Despite this ambiguity, many are active in their meeting's life for many years. In their ambiguous position, facing both some social discrediting and some social acceptance, these fighting Friends have a semi-spoiled identity and experience what I call mitigated stigma, a form of stigma as a matter of degree.

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1   All names are pseudonyms.

How are we to understand this curious identity position and mitigated stigma experienced by fighting Friends within this 'peace loving' religious community? In 1963 Erving Goffman noted the ancient roots of stigma, yet added that 'shifts have occurred in the kinds of disgrace that arouse concern' (1963: 2) since ancient times. In that same work, he contends 'that a necessary condition for human life is the sharing of a single normative expectation by all participants' (1963: 27). Much has changed in the nearly 50 years since Goffman's observation was made. Certainly, in these times of high modernity (Giddens 1990) Goffman's assertion of the necessity of a single normative order has been greatly challenged by the empirical reality of competing normative orders. People in a wide variety of social contexts enjoy much greater freedom to speak or act in ways that push at group norms than was possible at the time of Goffman's writing. In the contemporary world, which gives much power to individuals to interpret social reality, the spoiling of identity is not as clear and complete as it once was. How do contemporary Quaker struggles with identity discrepancies reveal how spoiled identity can be mitigated? This paper seeks to theoretically elaborate mitigated stigma and analyse its production within a Quaker meeting. Better understanding these social processes will help scholars better understand the role of the peace testimony and deviance with respect to it for contemporary Friends.

Interpretive Authority and Spoiled Identities

Investigations of changing religious identities do not focus on stigma, per se. Rather, they focus on the claiming of problematic religious identities enabled by greater interpretive authority for the faithful. Many scholars note that Americans live in an age of great individual liberty to interpret and appropriate religious traditions as they see fit. The sociology of religion discusses this greater religious interpretive autonomy for individuals in a variety of ways. Robert Wuthnow (1998) discusses a broad increase in freedom and choice in American religion in recent decades, while Phillip Hammond (1992) analyses the growth of 'personal autonomy' as a religious/cultural value that is key to the growth in interest in religion of an individual-expressive variety. Both bricolage (Luckmann 1979) and 'the new voluntarism' (Roof and McKinney 1987) refer to the ability of the faithful to choose selectively from the offerings of religious tradition to assemble an individual religious practice and understanding. In the broad American religious context there is clearly a great degree of individual interpretive authority in play in American religion contemporaneously.

A consequence of this greater interpretive authority is that, within religious groups, people may have widely ranging understandings of the meaning of important group symbols that may be of central importance for group identity. Patrick McNamara (1992), for instance, extensively documents the facility with which young Catholics follow the dictates of their consciences rather than official church teachings. Michelle Dillon (1999) explains how heterodox Catholics on

divisive issues such as women's ordination and abortion creatively argue that they still maintain a Catholic identity. Lynn Davidman (1991) describes how young Jews appropriate orthodox community and teachings to respond to their very modern needs and desires. Stephen Hart (1992) notes that common building blocks of Christian faith are creatively assembled to support a wide variety of disparate political positions on economic issues.

Quaker scholarship reveals that the peace testimony has been debated and renegotiated throughout the Religious Society of Friends' history (Brock 1968; 1990; Reay 1985; Weddle 2001). Liberal British Friends in the early twentieth century reaffirmed the centrality of the peace testimony (Kennedy 2001). Pink Dandelion has described contemporary British Friends as consisting of a double culture of a liberal belief, in which Friends have a wide latitude of acceptable religious beliefs, and a conformist and conservative behavioural creed, which controls form or religious practice within the group (1996; Dandelion and Collins 2008). Given a culture of silence, 'changes in belief content remain hidden' (Dandelion and Collins 2008: 32). In other words, heterodoxy is masked by orthopraxy. Dandelion focusses on theological beliefs in making this apt distinction, and also helpfully conceptualises the problematic nature of Quaker epistemology with the paradoxical 'Absolute Perhaps'. For Liberal Friends, ultimate Truth is unknowable, seeking is prioritised over finding, revelation is ongoing (Dandelion and Collins 2008: chapter 1). With respect to the peace testimony, Dandelion characterises it as the best known of the Quaker testimonies (1993: 181), which is the foundation for collective pacifism among British Friends; yet he also describes decreasing levels of individual pacifism. Conflicting attitudes toward pacifism during the Gulf War period were explained by the Quaker double-culture. Conformity is the rule at the collective level of the behavioural creed, yet individuals variously interpret the content of the peace testimony as a belief.

I believe that Dandelion's account of the peace testimony in terms of the Quaker double-culture is convincing at a general level, but much remains to be known. The importance of peace – however understood – for Liberal Friends' identity makes it fundamentally different from theological ideas that have become less important in this branch of the Religious Society of Friends. In addition, in my interviews with Friends on the peace testimony the understandings of the Peace Testimony range broadly and defy an easy categorisation into either belief or form, which is crucial to the explanatory power of the double-culture. For American Friends, revealing dissenting views on peace tends to be problematic, both anecdotally and in the data from this study. The tension in the negotiating of identity for fighting Friends seems to be rather fraught. Finally, we do not understand the theoretical implications of the religiously committed claiming a partially stigmatised religious identity. This study uses the case of fighting Friends to argue that a new theoretical category of mitigated stigma will help us better understand complicated contemporary Liberal Quaker identity. How do these

Friends discursively manage deviance from this central part of Quaker identity? This research clarifies how Friends negotiate this occasional uncomfortable encounter with Friends who fight.

Research Methods

Before beginning my interviews, I participated and observed in the public life of a Quaker meeting in the greater Los Angeles area. This observation period led me to develop sensitising questions on Friends and peace that structured my interviews in the formal part of this study. To further explore my questions about Friends and the peace testimony, I conducted semi-structured interviews. In the interviews I asked 20 Friends what they think about peace, what they know about others' thinking about peace and about their experience in managing differences on peace in the context of a Quaker community. The interviews were conducted in person, recorded and transcribed. They lasted an average of approximately an hour and a half, with the shortest lasting approximately 45 minutes and the longest over two and half hours. I solicited interviewees by making verbal announcements after the end of meeting for worship, putting written requests in the meetings' newsletters and asking respondents for suggestions of whom I should ask for interviews. After transcription, the interviews were coded and analysed using MAXQDA software, using a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

Multiple Meanings of Peace

In the symbolic interactionist tradition, Goffman argues that people present and interpret symbols of self that have social implications. Status or prestige symbols help to 'establish a special claim to prestige, honour, or desirable class position' (1963: 43), while stigma symbols draw attention to a 'debasing identity discrepancy' (1963: 43–44) and are worthy of social shame. As an ideal type, a fully status-worthy Friend is peaceful, while a fully stigmatised Friend is non-peaceful. To understand how Quakers produce a semi-spoiled identity between these two poles, we must first understand the distinct levels of peace that Friends understand as relevant to thinking about peace and then understand how those distinct levels and their concomitant meanings of peace interact in discourse. In my interviews I was also able to discover that Friends commonly differentiate three levels of peace: inner peace, interpersonal peace and political or public peace. Each of these group-created meanings of peace conveyed information to the rest of the group about what kind of peace was being practised and what kind of Friend you are (or are not). Most importantly, these meanings of peace at different levels interacted in discourse so as to reflect the unresolved tensions necessary to create mitigated stigma in the group.

Each of the distinct levels and meanings of peace can convey important information to aid in social classification by the members of a group. If a member

of a group is labelled with the right symbols at all levels to others she is likely to be accepted as a non-discredited member with a fully non-stigmatised identity and the status symbol of peaceful Friend. If she is judged to be non-peaceful at some level or levels, her identity can be sullied with the symbolic stain of stigma. In the Quakers' case, a semi-spoiled identity arises from the admixture of meanings of peace that attenuate the stigma that might otherwise come to a non-peaceable Friend.

Inner Peace

Inner peace is particularly important given Friends' commitment to silent listening to God as a principal foundation of a good Quaker life. This was put most succinctly by Eve, who defined peace as 'just living in the Spirit'. For many Friends, working towards inner peace is the centre of Quaker spirituality. It is what is practised in weekly meetings for worship and encouraged in individual religious practice during the rest of the week. In order to listen to the pressing messages of God in worship, one necessarily must be internally peaceful, ready to receive the message. In so doing, one is connected to God and can be guided by a wisdom far greater than one's own. Friends take leadings and their sometimes surprising instructions very seriously. They are very respectful of new leadings, ever mindful that someone's leading, however so initially odd or uncomfortable, might be just the next instantiation of a divine push towards a better world. Inner peace is seen as absolutely necessary to discern leadings properly.

Often, inner peace is seen as the foundation for other levels of peace by Friends. When I ask Tim what makes for a good Quaker, he answers: 'well, first a person of peace, though not necessarily just a person of outer peace, but rather that comes from a place of inner peace.' He goes on to explain:

> To be a witness in the world, you have to first be at peace with yourself. If one is really doing that, it actually compels me even more so to do the next right thing as far as being in the world. It's a natural outgrowth, I find it difficult to believe that you can be a person of peace without manifesting in the real world. Political activity, working for social justice, working for good causes, stuff like that can become addictive if I don't first establish the peace and the connection with the Light, with the Holy Spirit inside myself.

Without that real, elusive quality of intrapersonal peace, one is not connected to God or the Spirit and can be motivated by selfish rather than altruistic reasons. Furthermore, others know whether you really are operating from a solid foundation of inner peace and grounding in the divine.

Interpersonal Peace

But keeping one's peace inside or between you and God is not all there is to being a peaceful Friend. There is also the interpersonal peace between you and the people you meet, both strange and familiar. Friends value this type of peace in their lives and work to convey this symbol of peacefulness to others. A common

theme was being peaceful with one's intimate relations. In describing how he incorporates the peace testimony into his life, Elliot responded 'Again, I think it's important to live with each other, in our families and in our families with love and respect and speaking with each other in non-violent ways.'

Many mentioned being particularly appreciative of the ways Friends treat each other. Matt focussed on this aspect of Quaker peace, fondly detailing what he liked about meeting: 'The respect that every voice be heard and considered, looking toward unity which is much different than a democratic or hierarchical system where the majority wins, the care for the minority as well as the majority.' Matt was very happy to find this respect for diversity of views within the meeting community. As discussed earlier, interviewees valued the high degree of respect for dissent within the meeting and treasured the care meetings extend to those in the minority. Many Quakers find meeting and especially worship in meeting a welcoming, accepting place where many of the familiar divisions of social life disappear. Many friends experience the meeting community as a place of *communitas*, which is 'rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated' (Turner 1969: 96), compared with highly structured society. In Quaker terms, meeting is treasured as a place of unity.

Political Peace

Being perceived as politically peaceful is also very important within Friends meetings. Many older Quakers came to meetings originally in the 1960s and 1970s as part of their opposition to the Vietnam War. The attacks of 9/11 and the build-up to the Iraq War occurred during the time of my observations of the meeting and the war continued during the time of my interviews. During these times, many individual Friends announced marches, protests and other political calls to action to oppose the war. Friends were very often enjoined by other Friends to make a strong public showing of Quaker opposition to violent foreign policy decisions. Quakers protested, wrote letters and witnessed in any number of forms for peace. For Friends, these activities also answer the important questions relating to identity and culture of 'who are we?' and 'how do we do things here?' (Becker 1999). Consequently, being seen as politically non-peaceful is particularly problematic to Friends. Being politically peaceful is often the most public way that Friends demonstrate to others their commitment to peace. To be publicly non-peaceful is the most problematic level at which Friends may be prone to fighting.

In my interviews, the importance and obviousness of being seen as a publicly peaceful Friend was largely presumed. Elliot described working towards the peace testimony as 'doing what we can to rid the world of war machines and I think it means supporting people who witness against war'. On the importance of Friends' public peacefulness, Zoe declared: 'It's the thing that's been most valuable for the world. The way that Quakers have engaged around prison reform, slavery, hunger, all of those things, that's our gift to the world.'

Producing Mitigated Stigma

The various levels of peace and their meanings help guide social categorisation. On the one hand, this categorisation is relatively straightforward. One can be classified as neither a peaceful nor a fighting Friend at any one of the distinct levels of peace. Peaceful Quakers successfully present themselves as peaceful at any or all of the three levels and are worthy of social praise, while stigmatised Friends are described as non-peaceful at one or more of the three levels of peacefulness. But, on the other hand, the diverse (and potentially conflicting) meanings of the three levels of peacefulness also complicate social categorisation, making it more difficult and vexing to the group. In particular, because of the high value Friends place on inner peace and interpersonal peace, they have difficulty fully stigmatising those who are publicly non-peaceful. The multiple meanings of the distinct levels of peace limit social categorisation in such a way as to produce mitigated stigma towards those with a semi-spoiled identity, an identity that is not clearly categorised as either spoiled or not spoiled. Let us now consider how conflicting meanings of peace vex social categorisation.

Inner Peace Revisited: Leadings
As we have seen, inner peace allows one to listen to the messages of God, which in Quaker parlance are known as 'leadings'. Leadings are presumed to be the source of all Quaker ideas, concerns and practices, and are very important to Friends because they are the embodiment of the continuing revelation of God in the world. If you want to know what God wants from the world today, better listen well to your own, as well as, other people's leadings in the meeting. The difficulty with leadings is that they are individual (at least at first) and can be very idiosyncratic. How is one to decide which leadings are legitimate and which are not? A number of my interviewees were very reluctant or unwilling to challenge even the most contentious of leadings. I spoke with Christina about the Quakers who fought in the Second World War.

> *Is that okay that someone's sense of a leading would lead them there? Is that a problem to you? It doesn't sound like it is.*
>
> I think that … it would concern me, but at the same time – I feel very strongly about it – I have to respect someone else's leading. And I can't make a judgment on what someone else's leading is.

Christina's respect for another's leading, even if it seems clearly wrong, is based in deep respect for others as well as the potentially surprising power of God to reveal strange, unexpected plans for humanity. Yet, this deep respect for the other still leaves her with the dilemma of adjudicating between her own understanding of the right way to be peaceful in the world and this potentially revolutionary way embedded in a controversial leading. Christina's struggles to be critical, yet open to the leadings of others, was consistent with other Friends' struggles to be seen

as not judging other's leadings, to take them seriously, even when they were very challenging. A principal consequence of the interaction of the meanings of inner peace and outer peace is that Friends are very reluctant to judge other's dissent on issues of public peace. This, of course, is entirely consistent with their general cultural value of tolerance as well.

Interpersonal Peace Interacting with Public Peace
We have also seen how the meaning of interpersonal peace is particularly valued because it is closely associated with the special *communitas* and unity that Friends appreciate so much in their meeting community. Friends do not like to challenge the bonds of the imagined meeting community, so when another Quaker presents himself as being either in word or deed publicly non-peaceful, they are caught in a particularly bothersome dilemma. Should we socially shame this troublesome dissenter and vigorously maintain our treasured identities as peaceful Friends or do we preserve the sacred bonds of interpersonal peace and let the offensive dissenter off the hook? In Goffman's terms, do we stigmatise or overlook their transgression? In practice, Friends try to negotiate their way through this difficult dilemma, taking neither end of its horns. Instead they do the difficult, only partial liminal, work of creating and maintaining mitigated stigma.

What is Mitigated Stigma?

In this section, I elaborate the characteristics of mitigated stigma. In Goffman's seminal work we can detect a stark dichotomous binary between the stigmatised and the non-stigmatised. One has either a spoiled identity or a non-spoiled one. But my research reveals that fighting Friends are evaluated by the group as having neither a fully spoiled identity nor a completely unsullied one. Rather than face no stigma or 'full blown' stigma, they can encounter mitigated stigma. A person who endures mitigated stigma manages a semi-spoiled identity, a hybrid identity combining some elements of a spoiled identity and others of a nonspoiled identity. The 'semi-spoiled' are neither simply discredited nor discreditable; rather, they are partially discredited, in a liminal space (Turner 1969) between the symbolically pure and the polluted. Their credibility is complicated and variable, rather than dichotomous and constant. Some people may know of their stigma, while others may not. They may choose opportune and safe moments to 'come out' with their positions, which nevertheless may hurt their standing within the community. They may face social consequences as a result of taking their position, but that social shaming may not last. As such, they are certainly suspicious, but they are not clearly in possession of either status or stigma. They exist in a social limbo of vexed social categorisation, wherein they are both devalued and accepted (at times begrudgingly) by the group.

Mitigated stigma has several key characteristics worthy of further elaboration. First, it concerns an aspect of identity that is relatively contested in a group

by its own members. That is, the group is divided (to a degree) over whether or not the relevant criteria for social categorisation is negotiable in terms of social identity. Second, it is concerned with markers of in-group heterodoxy or hetero-praxis (incorrect belief or practice), rather than symbols of out-group membership. Third, it is a stigma made possible by deep in-group ambivalence over judging, over the very process of assigning a discredited identity to members of one's group. Finally, mitigated stigma occurs in situations where the power to stigmatise is attenuated.

Mitigated Stigma: Contested, In-group
The contested nature of stigma between stigmatised groups and the stigmatising dominant society is known. For example, Abdi Kusow (2004) demonstrates how Canadian Somali immigrants impose their own stigma on whites who try to stigmatise them according to the Canadian racialised colour hierarchy. What remains understudied is how stigma can be contested within a single group.

Whether or not a fighting Friend is acceptable within the group is up for debate and subject to substantial disagreement. Some of those observed and interviewed believe that such an identity is absolutely unacceptable, others argue they are loath to discriminate against it, while still others, both in speech and in deed, are not sure. This is in stark contrast to the cases of stigma (Goffman 1963; Riessman 2000; Rothman 1971), which were marked by notable public consensus and a certainty that stigma marked clearly spoiled identities.

Friends disagree on this because they disagree about the precise role the peace testimony plays in Quaker identity. The peace testimony is central to a Quaker identity, but it remains unclear just how central it is: is it primary or secondary? Mary's comments were typical of those that saw the peace testimony as depending on a more central element of Quakerism, the theological belief that there is that of God in everyone:

> The peace testimony itself isn't the priority; it's the spiritual connection or the spiritual truth that it expresses. The idea that there is that of God in me, in you, in Osama Bin Laden … it [the peace testimony] has to do with treating everyone and everything with respect, not taking more than we need, not wasting. And for me, the peace testimony comes out of that.

Other Friends understand the peace testimony as the starting point of Quakerism rather than as a consequence of it. Typical of this sort of thought is Lisa's comment on the centrality of the testimony to Quakerism: 'If you interpret the peace testimony broadly, it's the centre and the whole. It's all of it.' Another Friend alluded to a similar understanding in response to my specific inquiry about how one identifies Quakers. 'Well, I think the easiest and quickest answer that works is a Quaker is someone who genuinely believes that peace is the first priority, that it is possible to have a peaceful resolution of conflict.' While they differ on whether or not the peace testimony is of primary or secondary importance for Friends, both of these positions maintain its centrality.

In my interviews, holding the belief that the peace testimony is secondary to some other primary thing in Quakerism appears to lead logically to a greater willingness to hold or tolerate unorthodox views on the peace testimony. This allows openness to fighting Friends. In privileging simplicity, understood as listening to God's voice, Kyle implicitly left open the possibility of God's will condoning or permitting violence under certain circumstances. Similarly, Mary, in basing her understanding of the peace testimony as a consequence of concern for 'that of God' in others was able to talk about how life sometimes presents problems when we may encounter risks to others that could require a violent response. She mentioned Dietrich Bonhoffer, the German priest and one-time pacifist who was executed for participation in a plot to kill Hitler, as an example of the potentially difficult decisions one might have to face in life.

Believing the peace testimony to be absolutely primary to Quakerism, however, is likely to lead to a more orthodox understanding and a very negative evaluation of fighting Friends. Indeed, a few were quite adamant about the identity between Quakers and the peace testimony. Lisa, who identified the peace testimony as the centre and whole of Quakerism, further explained.

> I can't imagine someone identifying as a Quaker who didn't believe in the peace testimony. I don't know why they'd be part of a Quaker meeting. There are plenty of other churches they could go to that believe in just wars or whatever.

For those who thought about it in this manner, loyalty language regarding the peace testimony demonstrated the particular danger of betrayal of the peace testimony.

With a fully spoiled identity there is relatively little contestation as to a person's status loss. Why is this different for Friends? In most studies, stigma symbols are applied to negatively evaluated out-groups. People are stigmatised because it is revealed that they are members of a group – such as, for example, the diseased, disabled or gay – belonging to which is debasing to identity in a separate group, be it good girls, respectable church attenders or responsible business professionals. In the case of Quakers, the stigma symbol of being a fighting or non-peaceful Friend is used to label contested and negatively evaluated in-group attributes. They point not to negatively evaluated out-groups but to negatively evaluated characteristics of the group itself. Despite these important in-group differences, there are other attributes that remain shared and valued. This makes full stigmatisation difficult. Some Friends would like to keep fighters out of the group, but, as we have seen, in practice they cannot do this. They are torn by their respect for their coreligionists' attempts to listen to divine leadings despite their disagreement over the content of the leading. The individual who finds himself feeling the group's mitigated stigma remains in a liminal position, operating betwixt and between (Turner 1969) the identities of peaceful Friend and discredited non-peaceful one. They are 'liminal creatures' (Jackson 2005) that can remind Quakers of the group's highly contested moral boundaries, even within their own social group.

Additionally, the contested quality of mitigated stigma has implications for how silencing operates. With a fully spoiled identity, silence tends toward the absolute. Speaking of one's debasing identity discrepancy is practically banned, as any revelation will be deeply disruptive to identity continuity. For example, Arlene Stein (2009) found Holocaust survivors completely silenced by post–war America. Silencing with a semi-spoiled identity is not nearly so total. You can, to a degree, pick possibly sympathetic group members and present your stigma symbol to them. One is selectively silent rather than absolutely so.

Daniel was quite clear about his reservations about the peace testimony in our interview. Additionally, he was reluctant to express his support of the invasion of Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks in some of the public discussions the meeting held shortly afterwards.

> Yes, I think I have felt just a little hesitation to really say what I really feel about it. I have.

> *Do you mind talking just a little bit about that with me?*

> Well, I guess it's because the peace testimony has defined Quakers for so long and so many people's identities are so wrapped up in it that to bring up another … . If I sense that that's the case, I … you know it's very hard to challenge someone's identity.

Daniel held back most of the time, not ready to reveal to all a possible sign of being non-peaceful. Over time, though, he decided to have a substantial discussion of his opinions with two Friends to whom he was close. Daniel had the difficult conversation in private that he had avoided publicly, choosing his audience carefully and taking care to maintain those relationships. He reported that he was still close to these two people. A sense of relief was palpable in him while talking about this episode, and he also expressed a desire to be more open in general. Unlike Michael, who was not selective in breaking his silence, Daniel carefully chose his 'confessors' and thereby who was wise to him. When you break your silence with trusted confidants and show your semi-spoiled identity you make them 'wise' to you. But this is a different variety of the wise than those Goffman elaborated. Goffman delineates only two types of the 'wise': those who work with the stigmatised and those who are related through the social structure (specifically by familial relations) to the stigmatised. These two types are wise because they are structurally able to 'see' the stigma that is normally invisible to the unwise. Family members are privy to private stigma, while the professionals can spot ambiguous stigma missed by the lay person. In the case of a semi-spoiled identity, the wise do not see the stigma by themselves; rather, they are privy to the revelation of it by its bearer. This gives the bearer much more control over who knows about it. Some may choose to present the stigma to many, as Michael did, while others, like Daniel, reveal their 'secret' to a few trusted confidants. Daniel was stigmatised in that he was closeted with respect to full disclosure of his non-peacefulness. He

feared revealing to all his support for the US invasion of Afghanistan because of the assumed reaction of others in meeting who may not be as open-minded as his chosen 'confessors'. He is silenced by this fear of stigmatisation.

Mitigated Stigma: Concealable Marks of Orthodoxy or Orthopraxy
My study of semi-spoiled identity among Friends suggests that mitigated stigma may be focussed on either linguistic or behavioural marks of rather low visibility, a dimension along which most marks can vary dramatically (Crocker and Steele 1998). This variability in visibility is crucial to information control relative to personal identity (for examples of the importance of visibility in stigma see Ablon [1995] and Knudson-Cooper [1981]). However, with a semi-spoiled identity 'known-about-ness' (Goffman 1963: 48–49) or concealability (Jones et al. 1984) is central, precisely because its marks are of such low visibility. Only through presenting him or herself as believing or acting improperly with respect to peace does a fighting Friend become visible. Effectively this gives fighting Friends a great ability to conceal their semi-spoiled identity as such and increases their ability to pass. This means that it is seldom obvious to others without the symbol consciously or accidentally being disclosed by its bearer. With a fully spoiled identity, the stigmatised often have far less control over a highly visible stigma.

To illustrate fighting Friends' ease of passing, consider the stories I heard during my interviews of Quakers doing 'war work'. War work is any sort of work that supports, directly or indirectly, institutionalised violence. The Friends I interviewed were generally highly educated and lived close to major universities, so opportunities to work in support of war making institutions, particularly in research and engineering capacities, were surprisingly common. Dave and I spoke at length on his participation in war work.

> I wasn't the only person doing war work. We didn't talk about it much, partly, I guess largely, my own psychology. I had a lot of guiltiness at the time. I had trouble disentangling my generic guilt with guilt from not following the peace testimony.

> *With the guilt, did you feel like you had a little secret?*

> I wasn't trying to keep it secret, but at the same time I maintained the habit of simply not talking about my work. It was compartmentalised.

Dave simply did not reveal his line of work to many other Friends. After years of quietly continuing in the same professional line, this member of the Religious Society of Friends decided to change career course. I asked if the decision was made with Friends. 'I really made it privately. I didn't share it much with them. It might have helped to do that.'

At a different meeting from Dave's, Bill was shocked to find that a member of his previous meeting was doing war work. 'When I found out about it, I was astounded. I mean, I've always really avoided doing stuff like that.' The Friend doing the war work was an active member of the meeting. Bill did not find out

about this until after he moved away from the meeting. 'You know people do stuff, but you don't know quite what they do.' It is possible to control knowledge about one's war work precisely because it is not visible.

If a symbol of being prone to fighting was too visible it could easily fully spoil a Quaker's identity. I heard from several of my interviewees the story of the gun-carrying policeman who wanted to join meeting. His application ran into major problems and was ultimately denied after a contentious process. Unlike Mark, however, afterwards this applicant stopped participating altogether in meeting life. He was not able to maintain a semi-spoiled identity as a Friend. Jackie agreed with the decision that being a member of the police force was inconsistent with being a Friend: 'We had a difficulty with that, because he would be using arms to maintain order.' The stories I heard all focussed on the gun more than the general granting of the police the right to use violence to uphold order. The gun appeared to have been too visible as a symbol of hetero-praxis to allow the applicant to experience only mitigated stigma; his identity was fully spoiled, effectively excluding him from the group. All of the respondents who discussed this particular situation saw this applicant's professional possession of a gun as a dangerous and deeply problematic potential to resort to violence. It was a symbol that was too visible to be hidden from Friends' view.

Mitigated Stigma: High Ambivalence
Strong ambivalence toward fighting Friends is the third central feature of mitigated stigma. Emotionally, Friends have difficulty in knowing how to feel about their non-peaceful coreligionists. On the one hand, many have a deep, enduring commitment to non-violence and a visceral reaction against violence, so evidence of a Friend's openness to violence at any level is deeply disconcerting and upsetting. On the other hand, they are mostly very loathe to be understood as judging other Friends and are actively encouraged to be nurturing and tolerant of other Friends in support of the larger meeting community. This ambivalence is probably captured most succinctly in Barb's answer to my question about whether the peace testimony is negotiable: 'I think, if you really come to terms with Christianity you have to accept the peace testimony. Whether … [long pause] … I'm not saying anyone who doesn't really come to terms with it isn't leading a good life.' Barb starts her comment strongly arguing that Christianity necessarily includes accepting the peace testimony, but quickly reconsiders with a caveat that she is not prepared to say that those who do not are not living a good life. Assuming living a peaceful Christian life is central to living a good life, we can see Barb's ambivalence towards those who dissent. Barb has a difficult time bridging these disparate attitudes.

This ambivalence about the fighting Friend can be better understood by considering how some Friends imagine whether others approve or disapprove of them. Shame is the emotion corresponding to perceived (or imagined) social disapprobation, while pride results from approbation. We can gain some insight

by considering how Friends anticipate social disapproval even when they do not necessarily get it. This experience of shame is remarkably different from the unambiguous shame that Scheff (2006) theoretically elaborates. In Scheff's view, shame seems quite obvious to all parties in situations of social stigma and its accompanying social disapproval. Scheff also understands shame as operating very similarly in the stigmatised (or possibly stigmatised) and in their audience. But in my observations and interviews Friends anticipate shame in revealing their misgivings about the peace testimony, but, in practice, once their allegedly discrediting reservations are known, they find people are mostly accepting and do not 'shame' or 'disapprove of' them. Zoe, who expressed deep misgivings about revealing to other Friends her support of violent intervention to protect innocents, also spoke of the way that Friends impose this burden on themselves while not extending it to others: 'Everyone is applying this intense internal pressure, [but] in reality everyone is quite forgiving. I found that I'm often internally punishing myself in some way and actually when I talk with other Quakers they think nothing of it and they are very gentle with me.' This individual response reveals how some Friends feel the social weight of the expectation to be peaceful and do not wish to reveal themselves to be otherwise. Should their secret be revealed, they may well not encounter stigma from some Friends, as the group is generally ambivalent on the issue and will not fully stigmatise them. Other Friends may not give them this pass, however. This uncertainty is fundamental to mitigated stigma.

This finding also points toward another factor at variance with Scheff's claims that shame is increasingly taboo in contemporary life (2006: chapter 4), claiming that shame is going *sub rosa*, underground, beneath the level of consciousness. My study, however, suggests that shame is squeezed out of public display but remains strongly felt within individuals. Those with semi-spoiled identities feel its threat quite strongly and clearly, while other group members (as we have seen) feel it ambivalently and are apparently quite reluctant to express it publicly. The fear of these respondents is not delusional; they know that they are breaking social mores and are surprised by the group's reluctance to actually enforce them. The tone of these interviews was often confessional, reflecting the hesitancy and guilt that some felt deeply. Others expressed their gratitude for being able to talk at length to a sympathetic listener. All of this strongly suggests that my respondents' fear of social judgment is strong. Rather than being pushed out of conscious awareness, it is only pushed out of public expression, while still being privately perceptible and influential.

Mitigated Stigma: The Weak Power of Groups
Lastly, mitigated stigma occurs under conditions of mitigated power. On the necessity of strong power for stigma to occur Link and Phelan are unambiguous, claiming that stigma is 'entirely dependent on social, economic, and political power' (2001: 375). And they are right, to a degree. They are undoubtedly correct

in locating the ability to fuel the components of stigma in macro-level power differentials. Yet it is also true that power works in more subtle and local ways as well. In addition to these macro sources of power, there are also meso-level ones that can be of serious consequence for a group's ability to stigmatise. Consider first institutional power, wherein established practices and routines are of considerable consequence for a group's ability to label, stereotype, separate, reduce status and discriminate (the component parts of stigma identified by Link and Phelan) in terms of its own members. Furthermore, groups have distinctive cultural power too. The answers to the cultural questions concerning 'who we are' and 'how we do things here' (Becker 1999) are sources of local power as well. To be sure, these may be relatively weak varieties of power compared with the macro-level ones, but they are sources of power nonetheless. Indeed, the weak power of groups is an important aspect of mitigated stigma as practised by the Friends I observed and interviewed. As we shall see below, I argue that Friends' weak power in the clearness process is largely the result of the group's cultural commitment to tolerance.

Institutionally, the membership application process illustrates the relative weakness of Quakers' ability to separate those with heterodox positions on peace from full membership. The membership clearness committee could function as an effective separator of fighting Friends from full membership, but it does not. The process does not always address the issue of peace testimony orthodoxy nor bring private lack of orthodoxy on the peace testimony to the fore. When this happens, many people with unorthodox positions become members. The most common story I heard was that the peace testimony did not come up for substantial discussion in the membership process, for either committee members or potential members:

> I have not been on a clearness committee where the peace testimony has been exhaustively examined. I don't remember ever, an application for membership being quizzed on what they really believed. More commonly what is asked is how do these testimonies sit with you? Do any of them make you feel uncomfortable? I do remember, no names, but I do remember one in particular that said he felt that he had his own qualifications to the peace testimony, but I would have said that myself, I guess … and they were somewhat along my lines, but we didn't go very deeply into it.

This respondent, like many others detailed above, was aware that her 'qualifications' to the peace testimony were potentially problematic for her social reputation with the Religious Society. As a veteran of clearness committees for membership, she reports that only one other applicant offered any qualifications similar to her own. The fact that the disclosure of them in clearness processes is rare demonstrates (as argued above) that these are fairly easily hidden from public disclosure and that the membership process is not used generally as a screen to keep the non-peaceful out. Nevertheless, even knowing that, this respondent (and many others) was not

comfortable disclosing these qualifications, as they presumed that such disclosures were at least potentially discrediting. The membership process clearly also gave applicants opportunities to cover their deviant beliefs or practices; I heard a couple of stories of Friends applying for membership bringing it up as a potential problem for them. Most of these admissions of problems did not negatively affect the application for membership, but in one case a Friend did recount a membership applicant being asked, point-blank, if he would remain true to non-violence. There seemed to be an obvious and correct answer to the question. He answered in the affirmative even as he related to me in the interview that he had his doubts. As practised, the membership clearness process has only weak institutional power. Only mitigated, rather than full, stigma is possible under these conditions.

Culturally, the Friends' high valuation on and long history of tolerance seriously vitiates their ability to label, stereotype and separate (Link and Phelan 2001) Friends who present themselves as non-peaceful. Most often, this was expressed by my respondents as a lack of willingness to be seen as judging others. Quakers are deeply stymied by striving not to be judgmental. I asked a respondent to describe a good Friend and she answered this way:

> Well, I don't know that I could tell you what a good Quaker is. I mean, we're a community and there's lots of different folks in our meeting (laughs) and, and … I don't know, I don't know that I feel … when I get to that point where I start saying, 'gee that's not very Quakerly,' I better centre myself and say 'who am I to judge that?' You know, I mean, I don't know, I would say right off the bat that I'm not a very good Quaker.

Though apparently competent to judge oneself, this Friend was painfully shy of being perceived as judging others. Such a cultural reluctance to label Friends as non-peaceful deeply undercuts the group's ability to label others as heterodox with respect to peace. Indeed, I should remind the reader that the labels 'fighting' or 'non-peaceful' are my terms. I heard no common label applied to those I call non-peaceful. Usually the language focussed on someone's specific action: for example, people would describe Mark's ministry or talk about doing war work. Apparently, Friends struggled so much with labelling that they did not even have a common label.

Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that there is a need for a new theoretical category to account for the attenuated stigma that I have studied among Friends. I have detailed the production and characteristics of a semi-spoiled identity. Considering extending the concept of mitigated stigma to other groups raises the issue of variability and flexibility in the concept itself. My elaboration of the character-istics of mediated stigma particularly reflects the specific interactional culture of California Quakers. Only further study will be able to confirm or refute the

dimensions of mitigated stigma I detail. Other salient characteristics may also be discovered.

The concept of mitigated stigma might be quite usefully applied to other religious groups that find themselves dealing with semi-spoiled identities over important religious beliefs and practices. The vocal presence of loyal dissenters within religious groups – such as pro-choice Catholics or gay marriage-friendly Evangelicals – may be usefully analysed using this concept. Group efforts at maintaining and redefining their religious identity while to some degree tolerating dissent suggest that the phenomenon of semi-spoiled identities and the accompanying mitigated stigma may be a common one. Mitigated stigma should be a flexible, nimble concept able to account for a wide variety of variation with its constituent components across the full stigmatic spectrum of a surprisingly lively grey area between a fully spoiled identity and a fully unsullied one.

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