'Doing Belief': British Quakers in the Twenty-First-Century Workplace
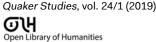
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Abstract

This article draws on data acquired for doctoral research into how Quakers live out their religious claims in the twenty-first-century workplace. It depicts Quaker everyday practice in the work setting based on the accounts of 20 interviewees. These Quakers tended to be drawn to the movement in adulthood, attracted by its heterodox, post-Christian (Dandelion 1996) claims of religious engagement with the everyday. The research participants also espoused an impulse to improve the world through their workaday participation and, in these ambitious terms, Quakers in the work organisation are framed as 'doing belief' (Day 2011: 191). 'Doing belief' in the everyday, however, was depicted by the research participants as more than a simple process of engagement co-equivalent to their claims. Indeed, 'doing belief' in the workaday was not viewed by the cohort in 'dichotomous' religious or secular terms (Collins 2008b: 143). Quakers saw their aspirations to improve the world as harmonious with the espoused intentions of their work organisations. The work organisation, however, set out and policed the terms upon which the research participants' ambitions were pursued, shaping how the contemporary Quaker tradition was expedited in the workaday setting.

The Quaker Context

This article is based on a qualitative study of how 20 Quaker participants perceive their religious perspectives in the context of their working lives. As a qualitative research project, claims that my findings are representative of the Quaker tradition must be limited (Bryman 2008: 367). However, the outcomes of the study, in

terms of the nature of the contemporary tradition in Britain, echo those of earlier studies. The research revealed that the Quaker interviewees were adult incomers into the tradition, a finding mirrored in the British Quaker Survey of 2013 (British Quaker Survey 2013). Quakers in the study also postulated a liberating, personal and fluid view of religious faith (Dandelion 1996; 2007; 2008; Collins 2008a; Collins and Dandelion 2014). Additionally, the research also accords with studies which suggest that Quakers tend to work in white collar occupations, often in professional, managerial or administrative roles (Freeman 2013).

Originally a protest movement against the perceived apostasy of the established English church, the Quaker tradition was born in the tempestuous milieu of the seventeenth century (Moore 2013). What has counted as 'Quaker' has diversified and been contested since this time and now incorporates a wide geographical span, across the Americas and Africa, and a variety of forms: 'the range of styles and types of Quakerism is huge' (Dandelion and Angell 2013: 3). In British terms, the contemporary Quaker tradition has been depicted as a pluralistic and liberal movement 'in which experience forms the basis of authority' (Dandelion 1996: 140). Within the liberal tradition, religious worldviews 'exist beyond Christianity' (Dandelion and Angell 2013: 3), and the existence of God is now regarded as an open question. This liberality has been termed 'post-Christian', insofar as Quaker claims expressed in Christian language have declined (Dandelion 2008: 25), and 'post-modern', as its theology is individualised and therefore variegated (Collins 2008a: 38). Quakers are united by a view that theological truth cannot be finally known and, optimistically, that there is in everyone 'that of God' (Dandelion 1996; 2007; 2008). In these theological terms, the contemporary liberal Quaker tradition sees itself as not only different from, but also heterodox in relation to, other religious worldviews (Dandelion 2007; 2008). These Quaker claims, alternatively positioned to the Christian mainstream, frame this investigation into how the contemporary tradition is lived out in the world of work.

Today, the liberal and pluralistic Quaker tradition makes an accompanying claim to radicalism in the social sphere in line with earlier versions of the faith (Barbour 2004: 19). However, while the Quaker religious tradition claims to have been active within the worldly realm since its inception, on the other hand, its modern-day, liberal reimagination has tended towards social orthodoxy. No longer theologically counter-cultural in relation to social mores, the worldly practice of its membership echoes lifestyle choices related to broader cultural norms rather than a religiously inspired aspiration towards a radically alternate social ordering (Pilgrim 2008).

Throughout the movement's existence, Quaker essays into the world of work have been depicted in generous terms. In terms of its relationship to the workplace, the contemporary tradition has drawn on the claims of myriad individual Quakers as well as the corporate entity (Burns Windsor 1980; Walvin 1997; Freeman 2013). Quakers have been depicted as assiduous, trustworthy and economically successful in the work context (Burns Windsor 1980; Freeman 2013). *Quaker Faith*

and Practice, the movement's corporate 'attempt to express Truth through the vital personal and corporate experience of Friends' (2018: Introduction) also paints a benign picture of Quakers and their engagement with the work enterprise. It promotes a benevolent view that 'service not private gain should be the motive of all work' (*Quaker Faith and Practice* 2018: 23.16). Furthermore, the 'Work and Economic Affairs' section equates Quaker workaday engagement more widely with 'the big thrill of parenthood' (*Quaker Faith and Practice* 2018: 23.63), as well as suggesting that Quaker work should seek to improve the lot of 'poor people' (*Quaker Faith and Practice* 2018: 23.46). In this article, I analyse the interviewees' perspectives in a critical appraisal of this benign view of the Quaker tradition in the working world.

Research Methodology

In this research, I adopted a broadly constructivist approach whereby 'Truth and meaning do not exist in some external world, but are created by the subject's interactions with the world. Meaning is constructed not discovered' (Gray 2014: 20). I assumed that multiple interpretations of any given circumstance are possible (Gergen 2009) and that religion, in particular, is an intuited category which 'human beings apply to a wide variety of phenomena, most of which have to do with notions of ultimate meaning or value' (Beckford 2003: 4). Objectivity in terms of social enquiry is viewed as elusive and truths are contingent on the interplay of shifting human perspectives (Gergen 2009). All research processes are seen as predicated upon socially contingent conceptualisations and are thus open to ongoing, alternative and critical contestation. Conceptualisations of what counts as real are, from the constructionist perspective, formed within and by the collective human context (Berger and Luckmann 1967). In this sense, the research composes a picture of how the interviewees saw the contemporary Quaker tradition and how it was lived out within the work setting. From this point of view, my research was an exercise in theory generation about Quakers' lived experience in the work setting rather than an attempt to uncover empirically testable fundamentals about 'religion' and/or 'work' and their inter-relationships, which are always and forever 'out there' (Bryman 2008: 366).

I chose opportunistic, or convenience, sampling methods primarily for pragmatic reasons: when conducting research part-time there are, typically, considerable constraints on the time and resources of the researcher (Bryman 2008). An opportunistic approach to gathering participants might sacrifice a degree of representativeness (Koeber and McMichael 2008). However, participants' everyday and taken-for-granted perceptions of the social world (Hancock and Tyler 2008) produced a vivid picture of how Quaker claims are lived out in the twenty-first-century work process. Additionally, opportunistic approaches to gathering participants can obviate problems of access in cases where numbers of interviewees are less predictable (Gerring 2007). Indeed, gaining access to Quaker

participants via the Clerk of the meetings was not always successful. Several local Quaker meetings, when approached, either declined to take part in the research or did not respond to requests at all. As a consequence, the geographical reach of the study expanded in scope so that, eventually, interviewees were drawn opportunistically from across England.

In terms of choosing a research method, I did not want to presuppose the kind of valuable data which might be revealed by the interviewees (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000). Religious perspectives are characterised by ambiguity and to capture this faithfully is the challenge of the researcher (Beckford 2003). Moreover, the contemporary liberal Quaker worldview has few fixed theological boundaries (Collins and Dandelion 2014). Instead, the liberal Quaker tradition is grounded in the experience of its individual participants (Dandelion 2008). I chose, therefore, not to gather information via questionnaires, which might have funnelled interviewees' perceptions and expectations of the study and its outcomes (Alvesson 2011). Instead, data was gathered through semi-structured interviews. This method was chosen as I wanted to be as open as possible to the potential variety and depth of Quaker perspectives and narratives. Furthermore, the semi-structured interview is an open-ended method of research which gives interviewees an opportunity to fully and reflexively develop their personal perspectives (Alvesson and Karreman 2011). Thus, it was deemed the most appropriate way for Quakers to disclose details about their religious perspectives and working lives intimately and openly.

In the following section, participants have been allocated pseudonyms chosen randomly. The gender of some participants has been changed. Interviewees' occupations have also been identified as far as possible in generalised terms in order to retain participatory anonymity.

Findings and Analysis

Quaker Conversion

The Quaker participants in this research were typically adult incomers into the tradition. Of the 20 interviewees, 17 related no association with the Quaker tradition prior to adulthood. Three had attended Quaker Meetings for Worship as children; of these, two had left and since returned, while only one had been involved 'since day one'.

The participants' contact with the Quaker movement tended to start with a chance discovery of the tradition. A conversation with a friend or relative, the reading of literature or a sighting of a Quaker Meeting House had provoked the interviewees' curiosity, which was followed up by a visit to the Meeting House premises. Frank said,

> I was talking through some feelings with a friend and he said, 'Oh, you sound like a bloody Quaker.' I was like, 'What's that?' And I remember there was one in my school. There was a Meeting House where I come from; there was an adult

reading programme. So, I popped in to the Meeting House, had a good session with the warden, and that was me.

The interviewees arrived at the Quaker fold claiming a variety of Christian backgrounds. They had typically had first-hand experience of a Christian church, most commonly self-identifying as, at various points, Anglican, Methodist and Catholic; less typically, some also referred to their experience of other, non-Christian worldviews, such as Buddhism and Humanism. Arrival at the Quaker station was often the latest step on their winding religious path. Monty, for example, described attending Church of England services as well as being in 'the spiritual wilderness for a decade', while, along the way, encountering 'more esoteric stuff', which he left unnamed.

For these research participants, the Quaker apple had not fallen far from the Christian tree. The interviewees' understanding of Christianity framed their religious enterprise and was applied to explain their eventual Quaker affiliation. Tom stated:

> I am not a Christian but that is what mattered. I didn't want to buy into sort of having to adopt a set of beliefs that belonged to a different culture. And so, although I am not sort identifying myself as straight Christian either, I did come to the realisation, that was what mattered; start from where I was already embedded.

While interviewees' perspectives were typically depicted in relation to Christianity, their understanding of the Christian tradition was framed as a peculiar, unconventional version of the faith. Although early Quakers had experienced a 'thaumaturgical' reorientating of the spirit within (Greaves 1997: 382; Bailey 2004: 66) whereby they identified 'an acute and painful death of self' (Gwyn 2004: 144), a similar Damascene sea-change in religious worldview was not expressed by the research interviewees. As 'converts', they indicated no sudden change of perspective, nor was their root reality fundamentally altered (Snow and Machelek 1983). Instead, these adult incomers into the Quaker tradition framed their religious prospect as consistent and persisting across time and social contexts. Dinah said,

> There is continuity in that I still believe in the same God, inspired by Jesus Christ and his teachings. The bit that changes is the approach and the dogma of Catholicism. So there is continuity in the fundamentals and the belief, but the approach really is very different; and I am much more comfortable with the approach we have now.

Arrival in the Quaker fold was also often framed by the interviewees as a home-coming in which they felt their individual perspectives were well-matched with those espoused by the corporate body. In this sense, the interviewees in my study were 'alternators' (Carrothers 2007:134), actively comparing the situational benefits of the religious collective to their personal circumstances and converting to the tradition on these terms.

The interviewees' ambulatory religious enterprise, and their eventual arrival in the Quaker 'home', was framed as liberating, especially in relation to other forms of organised religion. Quakers affiliated to the tradition explicitly in preference to other, mainstream religious institutions. They were opposed to what they saw as the over-prescriptive and oppressive tendencies of mainstream church practices. Traditional Christianity was framed as theologically dogmatic, selling religious truth as fixed and forever settled. Not only was Christian truth seen as a bureaucratic product of these institutions but the research participants also believed that mainstream Christianity was antithetical to the authentic religious enterprise. From the Quaker perspective, this tendency of mainstream traditions to fix and settle truth on behalf of churchgoers overwhelmed a fundamental individual impulse to continually seek out new religious insights. Colin stated,

> It's one of the things I like most about Quakers, is that explicit freedom. Some years ago, I had this realisation that with regard to spirituality, you can't really do it wrongly; you can't understand God wrongly; you only have your own perspective. I think Quakers are searching. Quakers is appealing because you don't have to leave the tent to have a look along a different drive; I am most closely aligned with the non-theist view. I joined the society because I realised I am Quaker; it's not like I became female, I am female. I try to match my life to my god space, my deepest most essential space; I am sure I was like that before I joined the Society; but patterns of relationships within the society encourage more awareness of that.

The research participants suggested that Quaker affiliation opened up opportunities for the authentic exploration, and expedition, of religious truth. Liberated from oppressive mainstream Christian traditions, they claimed anew the capacity to explore and improve their spiritual lives, especially in the everyday context. From this perspective, the true path to religious liberation lay not in sacred spaces, times or ritual but in whether and how Quakers engaged with the worldly realm. As Monty said,

> I always felt other branches of Christianity were too certain; far too big to be certain about; Sunday mornings, standing up, kneeling down, what has that got to do with God? Churchgoers seem to live their lives in a selfish way, but I will also live as I like all week, as long as I go on Sunday, it's all right. Not so much stress on walking the walk as talking the talk; here's what we believe, sign up to it.

Through their Quaker affiliation, the interviewees aspired to realise coherence between their religious horizons and their social practice, unfettered by the ossifying interference of church bureaucracies. Quaker affiliation was framed as an alternative and authentic platform which supported their religious 'vision quest' (Pilgrim 2008: 61). Given this analysis of liberal Quaker perspectives, especially in terms of their everyday claims, in the rest of this article I explore the interviewees' claims to live out their religious enterprise within the contemporary work setting.

Quaker Workplaces

How Quakers live out their religious claims in the workaday context can be partially captured in occupational and industrial terms. Quakers as a group have been categorised as middle-class, professional and engaged typically in 'teaching, academia and social work' (Freeman 2013, 429). This view of the contemporary tradition is backed up by my research insofar as its participants worked in 'white collar' jobs in the service sector. Of the 20 interviewees in the study, 19 were in administrative, professional and managerial jobs as defined by the Office for National Statistics (ONS SOC2010 Manual 2018), mostly within finance, engineering, health, education and public administration. Additionally, in terms of industrial classifications, Quakers worked in market (profit-seeking) and non-market (not profit-seeking) sectors. The enterprises with which they were engaged can also be categorised as government-funded, public organisations or private companies not funded directly by government activities (ONS 3.1 Classifying institutional units 2018). This pattern of Quaker engagement with work by industry and occupation is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Quaker occupations by industry and occupation

	Public	**Private**
Market	Public corporations (n=0)	Private corporations (n=4)
		Manufacturing (n=1)
		Finance (n=2)
		Language services (n=1)
Non-market	General government (n=12)	Households or NPISHs[1] (n=4)
	Public administration (n=3)	Charities (n=4)
	Medical emergency (n=2)	
	Education (n=7)	

1 Non-profit institutions serving households

As Table 1 reveals, the interviewees had jobs within the market/non-market and publicly/privately funded sectors. Notwithstanding the four Quakers who were working in private, profit-seeking enterprises, there appears to be a trend among the research participants to be engaged in non-market, publicly funded organisations. Overall, 16 out of 20 research participants worked in non-market organisations such as for health and medical concerns. This finding might accord with a simple delineation of Quaker work as 'service rather than private gain' (*Quaker Faith and Practice* 2018: 23.16). These economic categorisations of the research participants' employment, however, are insufficient in terms of explaining the contemporary Quaker tradition as it is lived out in the everyday. They do not account for the fluidity of the work process or the repurposing of organisational

ends identifiable in, for example, educational institutions (Parker 2014). Neither, from this perspective, is there weight attached to individual meaning-making wherein 'everyday life presents itself as a reality interpreted by men and subjectively meaningful to them as a coherent world' (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 33).

In order to explore the religious claims of the interviewees' accounts in relation to the everyday of work, I have borrowed the term 'doing belief' (Day 2011: 191). 'Doing belief', in my thesis, is framed as a Quaker workaday enterprise, a joining with the work process aspirationally in order to move the world towards a better horizon. This horizon is depicted by the interviewees in terms that are highly individualised and resistant to prescription by religious collectives. Moreover, 'doing belief', in this sense, is not neutral in the context of the work organisation. It is, rather, 'relational' (Day 2011: 202) and 'political' (Day 2011: 194) insofar as individual aspirations are tied in their exposition to the shifting everyday particulars of the work process (Parker 2000). These aspirations to move the world to a better horizon, negotiated in the workaday setting, are now analysed in this article in terms of Quakers 'doing belief'.

'Doing Belief': An Individualised Everyday Enterprise

Quakers, since the inception of the movement, have followed an impetus in the everyday to 'make better the world' (Johns 2007: 121). In this historical sense, Quakers have seen themselves as 'co-agents with God over and against "the world"' (Dandelion 2007: 6). In my research, although the Quakers framed participation in the workaday world as meaningful, as 'making a difference', they did not frame their everyday engagement as a co-operative venture with God or with the corporate Quaker movement. Rather, the interviewees approached their workaday engagement from an individualised and pragmatic point of view.

The work enterprise was viewed pragmatically by the interviewees as a way of bringing about a better world in the here and now, while, in a marriage of convenience, also meeting their material needs. Tom, an administrator, asserted that 'work magnifies what you can do in your life as an individual. You have to earn money; you might as well make a difference at the same time, ideally'; while Pippa, a charity worker, stated,

> I don't go to work for the money. If I did, I would probably not enjoy it for very long. So, it's not that driver. It's a vehicle to help me do things in the world really. I mean most of my life has been working in, you could say, humanitarian-type work: medicine, charity and stuff like this.

In practice, the 'liquid' nature of the contemporary liberal Quaker tradition (Collins and Dandelion 2014) helped to facilitate 'doing belief'. The fluid and individualised Quaker tradition, where 'belief is cast as marginal' in favour of 'behavioural codes and values' (Collins and Dandelion 2014: 287) allowed the research participants a significant measure of latitude to make decisions in the

particular unencumbered by dogmatically prescribed religious schemata. Within the organisational setting, the interviewees interpreted and pursued individually 'the best way forward' by weighing 'what seems right' (Scully 2008: 191) according to the fluid particulars of their work context.

Negotiation and compromise with the workaday, rather than inflexible religious dogmatism, was seen as coherent with Quaker claims. Thus, even within finance sector organisations, which, interviewees working in those fields suggested, promoted private gain and monetary acquisition, research participants were able to make sense of their workaday engagement along Quaker lines. Dinah, working in finance, suggested,

> Business puts pressure on you, challenge to truth and integrity. I haven't found a perfect answer; life and business is, so many shades of grey. You struggle for solutions but don't always find them. You may come to a wrong conclusion in someone else's view, which is equally valid; which is why you have got to continue searching and re-challenging; because you never know whether you have got to the right answer.

'Doing Belief' in Financial Services: Pragmatism and Coherence

Annie had been working in an 'intense', 'ruthless' and 'aggressive' organisation in the financial services industry where money-making was the 'moral code' and the 'micro-management' and 'bullying' of staff tended to be the everyday norm. Lately, however, Annie had found a new role within another company which lacked the selfish 'monsters' of her previous organisation. In her current job, Annie could select the organisations with which she was prepared to work, didn't have to witness staff being treated in a degrading manner and, without compromising her position, could decline to co-operate with any parties she found professionally distasteful. Her current workplace espoused ambitions which she saw as more aligned with her own and she was 'massively more happy' as a result of her move.

'Doing belief' in her current organisation, however, was not merely an unproblematic exposition of aspirations held in common with her work organisation. Despite being less compromising, working in her current job also necessitated a reimagination of the company's ends in terms coherent with her ambitions to improve the world. Annie recounted how she had been seconded to work in a country where corrupt elites had rapaciously plundered national assets. Her work in financial services in this context was depicted by her as a humanitarian enterprise, restoring monetary order and business integrity among 'sensationally corrupt' financial institutions. She described this enterprise as a humanitarian project which had helped to restore financial order on behalf of a downtrodden and dispossessed populace.

'Doing belief' was not depicted by Annie as a dutiful Quaker exercise, framed in theological terms: coherence between her religious claims and her social

practice was, instead, a highly individualised negotiation of the workaday. Annie described how she had facilitated international finance for businesspeople who had been accused of large-scale corruption, extortion and even murder. In a spirit of functional forgiveness, Annie had agreed to work with these apparently dangerous concerns but reimagined her project as a worldly compromise coherent with her personal views. She said,

> I would have thought a lot of Friends (Quakers) would say: well, look, someone is accused of murdering someone; then you should never do business with them. I have found that a hard one. I have found that one a tricky one to deal with. And I have taken a view on it that: this is what it is guys, not a black and white decision as to whether we think these things were done in a very different era. We can forget and forgive, not forgive, but we can move on with life. I have taken the view that I am not going to throw up my hands and say I'm not personally dealing with this person.

Annie framed her engagement with the workaday as coherent with her Quaker claims and, optimistically, as 'economics correcting behaviours', where corrupt organisations 'have to play by a certain set of rules'. Access to markets and financial capital based on a functional form of integrity was portrayed as helping to modify morally dubious business practices. The provision of banking services was seen as a way of mollifying an ethically contorted international business culture. In this sense, Annie was 'doing belief' within the work organisation in a manner coherent with her Quaker claims. She was providing a humanitarian service while profit-making, serving the materially better off but also, equally, improving the lot of the economically dispossessed and socially less fortunate.

'Doing Belief': A Joint Enterprise

The research participants' ambition to improve the world was not only depicted as an individualised and pragmatic Quaker enterprise, however. The research participants also depicted workaday participation as a worldly project undertaken jointly with the work organisation. For the research participants, 'doing belief' was facilitated and upheld in practice by the similar intentions of the work organisation: together, the workplace and the Quaker individual co-operated to improve the world. Pippa, for example, had previously worked in the NHS in order to 'save the world' and was later employed by a charity in a role she occupied at the time of the interview. 'Charity work fits with Quaker ideals', she said, 'but also in terms of how it manages its staff and treats people.' The interviewees asserted that their work organisations shared and typically supported their intentions to make better the world, so that 'doing belief' was, from their perspective, equated as both work and Quaker. Dinah reiterated, 'So, very definitely, Quaker faith has a place in business; it influences what you do, how you treat people, employees as well as clients. Everything is so intertwined and one thing affects one aspect of your life and then impinges back on something else.'

In this sense, 'doing belief' was also doing work and doing work was also 'doing belief'. They were, in terms of their workaday exposition, almost without differentiation in the Quaker mind. Frank, a health adviser, remarked,

> I feel like I am being given the opportunity to express my faith, being able to offer that kind of support and be supportive; and all the concepts of sufferings and looking after each other; very Christian ideals about treating people as you wish to be treated. I have never had a job before where I could do that. It's very hard to find a place where you can work where you can use who you are inside; and project it out into what you are doing.

In this assimilated sense, what counted as 'doing belief' and what counted as work were conflated by the research participants. The interviewees believed that they were improving the world together with the work organisation and that 'doing belief' from a Quaker perspective was integrated fundamentally within the work process. Frank stated that, 'I absolutely love it [his job]. It's very compatible with myself. It's, you know, the word they use in person-centred therapy is congruent. It's a really wonderfully [slight pause], matches Quaker concepts very perfectly. It's such a good match.'

Furthermore, the research participants found it difficult to specify how they participated at work in discretely Quaker terms. Identifiable categories of 'Quaker' or 'work' that might differentiate 'doing belief' in practical terms were confused in the view of the research participants. Rather, the interviewees framed their everyday practice as non-dichotomous and distinctions between 'individual/ society and religion/secularity' (Collins 2008b: 143) were not evinced by these Quakers. 'You don't use labels', said Patsy, who worked in education, 'you just behave'. Although what counted as Quaker ruled theologically, helping to give form to the interviewees' religious claims, in the workaday setting it was the individual purview—*sans* Quaker—which overwhelmingly tended to reign. So, while the individual experience was pre-eminent in framing Quakers' theological perspectives (Dandelion 2007), the interviewees framed the primary influence on their workaday participation in highly individualised terms.

Martin, for example, who worked in public services, had spoken up for colleagues who were reluctant to articulate opinions to their managers in meetings. He was reluctant to depict his actions in stepping forward to voice concerns on behalf of his co-workers in explicitly Quaker terms, however. He said, 'I just voice my opinions more than most people at work; loud-mouthed bolshy git [sic]. So, it's perhaps my heart is saying I'd like that to be Martin-the-Quaker, but, really, my head's saying, "No, not really, Martin; it's just Martin."' Similarly, Monty, an education advisor, stressed,

> [It's] difficult to disentangle the Quaker and non-Quaker really, I don't think I can disentangle which bits are Monty, and which bits are Quaker, and which bits are the person who does this job, because they are all part of the person who goes out and does this job everyday. So there are instances where I am particularly aware

of it. I might be asked why I did that and I will say because I believe in the truth or equality, but a lot of the time I am not very conscious of it. Being Quaker is part of how I process the world. I don't have to say this is the Quaker way. I don't believe in conflict, but I am not sure I did before I became a Quaker.

Roger, a charity administrator, also commented,

I was the person who put on the silly red nose and raised money for Comic Relief: but was that because I was a Quaker? I was the person who pushed disability issues, but was that particularly because I was a Quaker, or was that me? I don't know; I try to not just deal with people as just colleagues, having a proper relationship, having a genuine sort of interest; I probably work nearer full time on part time pay; now is that because I am a Quaker?; I am not sure how much of this is going to help you, but I am not sure how much of it is because I am a Quaker; indeed how much of the way I relate to people is because I am a Quaker generally.

My research found, however, that 'doing belief', despite being depicted by the research participants in non-dichotomous terms, was not neutral in the work context. The workaday setting also lent definition to how 'doing belief' was expedited by the research participants. This can be observed in the exceptional work contexts uncovered in the study where the intentions of the interviewees and those of the organisation, as perceived by the interviewees, were not regarded by the participants as a good fit. In these disharmonious circum-stances, the interviewees' engagement was viewed as contingent in relation to the organisational context and 'doing belief' was more explicitly negotiated in the everyday. The presumed compact to improve the world, in these extraneous situations, revealed a more nuanced and more contradictory depiction of 'doing belief', identifying a co-relationship between 'doing belief' and the workaday context.

The research participants' claims to make better the world were not expedited autonomously in the work organisation independently of their context. 'Doing belief' was also dependent on the perceived support of the organisation. Indeed, without this support, in discordant contexts, 'doing belief' and the espoused aspirations of the workplace were difficult to reconcile in the Quaker mind.

The inter-dependency of Quaker practice and organisational context was highlighted in the data of participants employed in public sector jobs affected by exceptionally astringent economic conditions. In 2010, the new UK Coalition government began to implement an austerity-driven programme of financial reforms. As a result of the banking crisis of 2008/09, a policy of cutting public expenditure was undertaken. Local government funding was particularly subject to cutbacks and its effects were related by interviewees taking part in the research. The cuts in public spending were not, however, perceived similarly by all the research participants.

'Doing Belief' in the Supportive Work Context

Donna worked in a local government planning department. Her office had, over the years, achieved 'fantastic things', including winning 'international awards'. In her initial interview, however, she anticipated redundancies in her organisational locale as a result of local government cutbacks. 'I just feel an enormous amount of grief', she said, 'that the thing is going to close'. Donna stated that resistance had fomented in her office to the closure of the department and that she had initially influenced this drive to save jobs. Her colleagues were similarly enthusiastic to find alternatives to redundancies, researching substitutes to closure and receiving explicit managerial encouragement in their endeavour. Staff volunteered in their own time to draw up detailed new business plans while management, valuing their efforts, allocated job numbers so that these ideas could be worked on officially during the working day. Donna reported that there was a feeling that the whole office was 'coming together' and, with regard to management in particular, 'there is some real good feeling there, a real resistance to making anyone redundant. I don't think that's cost. I think that's good management.'

For Donna, the attempts to save the department had also been personally transformational. Even in extreme organisational adversity and uncertainty, she had felt supported by colleagues and managers. The ambitions of the organisation were still understood to be aligned with her own aspirations and, she said, 'it felt as if my faith and Quaker practice were coming into all that.' She had developed a new self-awareness as a result of the redundancy process. Although 'it does feel as if we have been battered', Donna said, she felt a new insight into the work process and her role within it, focussed anew on the relationships with her colleagues in ways she described as 'profound'.

> I think it has changed into a realisation of how I might have antagonised people … . I could be quite antagonistic; a realisation of people's weaknesses, a change of focus from work to the person. Whereas before it would be the work, just get this done, not really bothered if I offend anybody … . I've got to start thinking about them as individuals rather than me flipping getting the work done.

In contrast to Donna's experience, however, was that of Patsy. She worked in education and also witnessed the effects of government austerity cuts. But, without perceived support in the everyday, 'doing belief' on terms set out by the organisation was, she related pessimistically, 'for happier economic times, when you can afford to do that'. Patsy's work organisation was seen by her as a block to, not a supportive enhancer of, her ambition to make better the world. Her experience of workplace disharmony underscored her view that Quaker ambitions in the work context rest ultimately on propitious everyday means.

'Doing Belief' in the Unsupportive Work Context

Patsy's perspective on her work had evolved during the redundancy process. During her initial research interview, she had stated that she could 'happily

work' under a public service ethos whose aims she saw as undifferentiated from her own. 'I don't see any dividing lines there', she said, 'the connections blur'. But, since the redundancy process had commenced, her views on this compact with the work organisation had fundamentally altered. The once collaborative setting of mutually shared intention was now dissipated, in her view, because of management's lack of concern for their employees' interests. 'As educationalists, we are meant to be caring about these sorts of issues; respect and motivation and all this sort of thing', she said. 'But we couldn't organise those sorts of values for ourselves.' 'Doing belief' in these discordant circumstances left Patsy feeling a 'simmering impotence' with regard to the work process as well as a substantial loss of faith in the contemporary relevance of the Quaker tradition.

Patsy recalled local government cutbacks leading to redundancies in her office, where, ultimately, 'all this wonderful work of supporting schools counts for nothing.' Managers were seen by her as wilfully neglectful of employees, who were 'treated as a number that needs to be wiped off the payroll; surplus to requirements'. Patsy stated that managers involved in the redundancy process 'don't want to listen'. The atmosphere in her office had become 'toxic', with colleagues in late middle age, 'heads down', powerless to prevent careers being 'wiped out', while their poor prospects for similar employment after redundancy left those with mortgages in 'severe financial difficulties'.

Moreover, Patsy was also perturbed by the 'enthusiasm' with which managers had implemented financial austerity. For Patsy, the compact between the work organisation and her aspirations to improve the world had been plundered by unprincipled managerial opportunists. 'Rampant capitalism at its worst', she said, 'And this was in a local authority.' The current liberal Quaker tradition, suggested Patsy, had no practical answers. Rather, 'doing belief' had been stymied by managers bent on disingenuously changing the terms of her workaday engagement to suit an impersonal, remote and purely fiscal agenda. She opined,

> I think that because of the way that things have panned out with work, nice liberal values are out of the window. The way in which the whole process was carried out was totally appalling. On our last day, nobody said goodbye. There were no presentations. There were no senior managers around. You hung around and then you buggered off. And that was the end of a lifetime's career. So, nice liberal, balanced Quaker views: sorry. out of the window, I'm afraid … . I'm not sure Quakerism has an answer to this, if I'm honest.

Donna and Patsy's accounts suggest that 'doing belief' appears not to be neutral in the work setting. It is subject to the influence of the shifting particulars of the workaday world and the vagaries of managerially implemented, organisational decision-making. The organisation's authority to set out and to police the terms upon which the research participants were 'doing belief' shaped its exposition and the interviewees' aspirations to improve the world.

'Doing Belief' in the Oppositional Work Context

Jojo was an outlier in the cohort. He also recounted a discordant work context, but his experience of work was untypical of the rest of the cohort and further suggests that the organisational setting shapes 'doing belief' in the everyday. He worked not in a professional, managerial or service role but in a skilled occupation on the shopfloor of a manufacturing company. He related no compact with his work organisation to make better the world and 'doing belief' in this context appeared to be routinely frustrated in the everyday. 'The guys I work with', Jojo remarked, 'are just … a lot of it is just beyond forgiveness, beyond redemption.' Jojo, a Christo-centric Quaker—'I carry my cross every day'—depicted a disharmonious work setting where the intentions of the company owner contradicted significantly his own aspirations. 'It was always to do with money', Jojo said, 'if you cost him (the boss) money, he'd be up in arms; he were not the nicest person to work for.'

In Jojo's workplace, managers and colleagues carved out a narrow and self-interested working life where trust and friendship were not taken for granted. Although his relationships with co-workers were generally cordial, Jojo recalled feeling marginalised within the workaday process. He stated: 'I feel so out of place sometimes at work, I do. When they are just talking about their usual banal stuff; about the girls they have slept with; or how good they are at fighting. It just doesn't, I can't really relate to people, you know.' Jojo described a work environment of pernicious shopfloor banter, of thievery, misogyny, racism and systemic greed. He felt spiritually isolated within the factory and just wanted 'to work for somebody who appreciates how hard I work'. Such mundane aspirations, though, were not easily achieved in this capricious environment.

Jojo's colleague, Zamzam, had been coming into work on a short-term basis, despite suffering from debilitating 'problems with his liver and his legs swole [sic] up to twice their size'. Zamzam was paid by the hour on a four-week contract, and, in this company, 'you don't get paid if you are off sick.' Overhearing that the owner had called Zamzam a 'fat, dying bastard' and told him that 'if you can't f-ing do this, I'll get someone who f-ing can', Jojo approached the management to voice some long-standing concerns about the company. However, instead of listening to his complaints sympathetically, Jojo was accused by management of being 'brainwashed by the Quakers'. He was consequently asked to work under new conditions of employment that included reduced hours and a demeaning pay offer. Rejecting their terms, Jojo resigned from the company. However, despite acquiring other employment, Jojo concluded, with regard to his next job:

> You might be working in Manchester for a while, and then you'd be working in Liverpool, Glasgow; Belgium; Portugal. I've had enough of it really. The hours are terrible. I am working seven to half five, Monday to Friday. So I am getting up at a quarter to five, getting home at six. I've got to start doing my tea. It's all work and no play. When I first started there, I was doing every weekend. I've not even mentioned the Quakers because I have never worked with a bigger bunch of

piss-taking bastards in my life. Honest to God, they are relentless if you tell them
anything. The last firm was a picnic compared to this firm.

The company's ends and organisational structures were depicted by Jojo as
fundamentally inimical to his aspirations to make better the world. Management
were seen as at best implicitly unsupportive of Jojo's circumstances and alternative
perspectives were viewed as oppositional to organisational ends. Articulating
difference was disallowed.

> Now I just ignore it [racism]; try not to say anything. I don't want to stand out too
> much. I don't want to start saying, you are out of order. I am a bit of a coward,
> for not just … you're not going to change those guys. No, all I'm going to do is
> make it harder for myself. The guys I work with are just a lot of … it is just beyond
> forgiveness, beyond redemption. But like I say, that's the way I deal with it.

For Jojo, re-imagining the workaday in Quaker terms in order to move the
world to better horizons was almost absurd. Organisational support was never lost,
as it had never in the first place been granted. As a result, Jojo felt marginalised
within the work setting, while 'doing belief' was perceived by an implacably
oppressive organisation as threatening to the work process. 'So I just smile and
say, "All right, yeah". I try not to take offence, try to ignore it; and think there
but for the grace of God go I.'

Conclusions

The pluralistic (Dandelion 1996; 2007; 2008), variegated (Collins 2008a) and fluid
(Collins and Dandelion 2014) contemporary Quaker tradition is identifiable in the
research participants' accounts of the contemporary workaday world. However,
suggestions that the liberal Quaker tradition is lived out in the twenty-first-
century workplace ought to be qualified.

These Quakers aspired to improve the world through their everyday partici-
pation in the work process. But any suggestion that 'doing belief' was simply the
expediting of a Quaker claim to improve the world from within the work context
belies reductionist tendencies. 'Doing belief' is a nuanced, everyday engagement
which is contoured by the interviewees to the fluid and contested work process,
and how it was expedited in the workaday can be better understood in relation to
the perceived harmony between the work process, its claims and everyday organi-
sation, and the Quaker interviewees' aspirations to make better the world. 'Doing
belief' is revealed in this analysis to be highly contingent upon the particulars
of the work setting, which variously enhance or circumscribe their aspiration to
promote a highly individualised better world *sans* religious prescription.

This process can be observed more clearly in disharmonious organisational
contexts where 'doing belief' became a matter of negotiation for the research
participants. In this circumstances, 'doing belief' was shaped by the fluid
workaday—in particular, when the organisation authored and imposed anew

alternative terms on which the research participants were required to pursue their ambitions. For the Quaker research participants, 'doing belief' in the contemporary work setting was a function of the fluid, negotiated and contested organisational process and not simply an outcome of liberal Quaker claims to make better the world. Thus, 'doing belief' did not transcend the work context but was mirrored in the particulars of the organisational processes and their perceived support of liberal Quaker ends in the workaday.

Interestingly, too, the research also revealed that the interviewees were reluctant to identify 'doing belief' in the workaday in the dichotomous terms of 'Quaker' or 'work'. Instead, 'Quaker' and 'work' can be explained as subsets of a different category: the intention to improve a sub-optimum world through participation in the contemporary work process. 'Doing belief', in this sense, was conflated with another category of participation in the workaday, unvoiced but implied in the research participants' accounts: 'doing unbelief'. In other words, the religious grounds for 'doing belief' were not considered important by the interviewees so much as participation in the collective effort to mend the world. For these research participants, the individual rather than ascribed religious categories or worldviews were primary in shaping workaday participation. What counts as Quaker is marginal relative to remaking a better world in the workaday.

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