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# Quaker Interpretation: The Role of Communication and Identity in the Production of Quaker Values

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# Quaker Interpretation

The Role of Communication and Identity in the Production of
Quaker Values

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**Abstract**

In this thesis, I examine the shift in Quaker language use over time, focusing on the formation of group identity, the accessibility of Quaker language, and legacy and silence in a history of racial discrimination. These aspects of Quaker practice are crucial in addressing concerns about inclusivity and justice work, providing the potential for greater metalinguistic intentionality. My research analyzes language's role in shaping such attitudes, beliefs, and action. I examine seventeenth century Quakers' use of Quaker Plain Speech (QPS), observing that the progression towards modern Quaker language is uneven among these three areas of focus. I claim that these new uses of language need to be comprehensively studied and understood in order to encourage communal reflection in Quaker spaces.

## Acknowledgements

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# Chapter 1. Introduction

In this thesis I explore how Quakers express spirituality and identify belonging in a community through language, particularly language used in Quaker spaces as well as those that define systems and theology. To do this I conducted interviews and a participant observation of a Meeting for Business. Among the questions I ask are how language is used to articulate one's conceptions of 'being Quaker', along with the Quaker values and testimonies they resonate with most. I contextualize this among historical and present day settings, to examine the American Quaker legacy and language uses and understandings. Furthermore, I focus on frameworks for discussing Quaker spirituality and practice in concern for the accessibility of such for the purpose of welcoming and nurturing members of the community. Finally, I analyze the conflicts that arise from a contrast between the interpretation and assertion of certain values and the actual practice and action by the community. Through this thesis I argue that Quakers' use of language has shifted unevenly, as some aspects of Quakerism become less defined and influenced by language use, and in other cases language has maintained or expanded the capacity for shaping meaning.

In chapter 2 I establish the primary vehicles for the modern day formation of Quaker group identity to be self-identification and communal recognition. For these, speech practices reaffirm such designations, but community integration requires more actions and resonance with Quaker values than simply adopting a manner of speech. This is largely in contrast to one of the uses of Quaker Plain Speech by seventeenth century Quakers as an intentional linguistic barrier that demonstrated membership and commitment to the faith that I discuss in chapter 3. Here, I also examine the core aspects of Quaker Plain Speech that remain in present day Quaker language, which I divide between system-based and spirituality-based words, and analyze how Quakers

remain aware of the importance of word choice and speech in creating welcoming spaces and effectively communicating. Finally, in chapter 4 I point to what is not said, but should be in regards to the Quaker history with racial discrimination. As Quakerism is a religion centered in silence, it is important to recall that the practice of silence was a means toward listening and learning, rather than stepping back and being passive. Through this chapter I challenge the now normalized pattern of ignorance and inaction, and identify the problematic areas such as our whitewashed historical education and the too simple SPICES as core Quaker values.

## 1.1 Introduction to the Religious Society of Friends (1600-Present)

The Religious Society of Friends, or "Quakerism" as it is more widely known, was founded by George Fox in England in the mid-1600s. Seventeenth century England was in a constant state of religion-based conflict, and those who did not adhere to the strict rules and religious practices of the Church of England were harshly persecuted by Parliament (Gritz 2019). In contrast to the formal and ceremonial religious practices of the Puritans and the Church of England, Fox and his followers believed in a personal and direct spiritual experience and access to God, and that salvation could be found within oneself rather than through a structured service and being preached to (Gritz 2019). Already persecuted for not following the Church of England, Quakers were even more singled out by the government and social elite for their opposition to authority– they refused to use the respectful "you", or to remove their hats to those in authority, or economically/socially superior positions, and as pacifists, refused to bear arms in conflict (Gritz 2019). Furthermore, their plain dress and belief that men and women were equal under God– by which meant that everyone could worship in the same manner and women could take the same leadership roles as men, which was unheard of at the time– was seen as an assault on

the social system. Due to this, Quakers were often jailed during the religion's first forty years, as "some historians estimate that 15,000 had been imprisoned by 1689, when the Act of Tolerance finally was passed" (Bacon 1969, 19). Many Quakers immigrated to America to search for religious freedom, though they continued to bear persecution there as well, largely again for their anti-authoritarian practices and beliefs.

Quakers do not ascribe to a scripture, though early Quakers and many today still use the Bible as a guide. Still, the core of Quaker beliefs is that there is 'that of God' or an 'Inner Light' in every person and living thing, and that one does not need an intermediary to have access to and receive guidance from God. Historically, these beliefs and values led to Quakers 'living plainly', which is not an inherently understandable concept. Two main features of this lifestyle were Plain Dress and Plain Speech. Plain Dress is still practiced by some Quakers today, though mostly in the Conservative Friends tradition, and comes out of a strong commitment for Integrity. It is the outward sign of inward change, and as one Friend explains, they "adopt plain dress when they believe it is an obedience God has called them to and they do not have any understanding that it is something God calls everyone to do" (Jane 2007). It is a visual reminder of this devotion. Furthermore, my own understanding of Plain Dress is that it's not simply visual simplicity, but a dedication to finding ethically sourced material. In contrast, the intentions behind using Plain Speech are not so straightforward. To begin with, seventeenth century Quakers are unusual in that they devalued language. Languages and speech were considered susceptible to corruption, or "carnal talk", as Fox put it, and any communication with the spirit required a special spiritual source or condition (Bauman 1998). This method was through silence, as the core of the Quaker faith was (and still is) that there is that of God in everyone, including non-Quakers. This *That of God* in everyone is also referred to as the Inward Light, and

through silence, one could be attune to the Truth speaking to you from inside, and provide guidance. Since Quakers distrusted speech, and used the silence to hear the speech of God, they didn't speak as much as they could, hence the phrase "let your words be few" (Bauman 1998). Another phrase that resulted from this spiritual dedication is "let your lives speak", which implies a dedication to an entire lifestyle more focused on actions–though not necessarily rituals, as other religions might emphasize– more than words. Quakers are bound to only speak the Truth, and when speech is distrusted, that also translated to acting upon the leadings directed by the Inward Light. In addition, as speech was still considered a basic human faculty, what could be spoken was considered *religious speaking*, for the "edification among Friends" and to carry out God's will, as God not only spoke within but through Quakers (Bauman 1998).

Many other values come out of these foundational beliefs, which over the years have been boiled down to the easy acronym SPICES– Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality, and Stewardship. However, SPICES is in fact a rather recent invention from the late 1900s, and knowingly designed to be an oversimplified summary of Quaker values to emulate the creeds of other religions (Buckley 2012). What originally was meant to easily explain Quakerism to non-Quakers– most often at Quaker schools– ended up becoming the core of Quaker faith. Still, each Meeting has some description of each of these values on their websites as describing Quaker "testimonies", and is what is instantly brought up by many Quakers when asked what they believe. Some of these are more well known by non-Quakers, such as the commitment to non-violence coming from the Peace testimony, or the plain dress of primarily early Quakers coming from Simplicity.

Additionally, in theory everyone had the Inward Light in them, and thus potential to hear the Truth, but many were simply not attuned or ready to hear. And, as everyone possessed the same

inner spirit, the idea was that if one witnessed a Quaker speaking and acting on their leadings from the Light, that it would arouse an awareness of their own Inner Light. This belief led to the trend of rhetorical phrases in Quaker speech, such as " to that of God in you I speak" (Bauman 1998, 27).

## 1.2 Methodology

My research for this thesis primarily revolved around three interviews and a participant observation of a Meeting for Business at a Quaker Meeting in Maryland. The analysis I pull from these experiences are qualitative, and due to the varying identities of the participants, I am cautious against using them to generalize all Quakers. Two of the interlocutors are Convinced Friends, meaning they have converted to Quakerism, and between the two of them, have been Quakers for varying amounts of time. The third interlocutor is a college student like myself, who doesn't identify as Quaker, but is active in many Quaker spaces. All three of them identify as men. For each interlocutor I conducted a single, semi-structured 1-2 hour Zoom interview.

Throughout this project I am also drawing upon my own experiences in order to contextualize my research. I am considered a Birthright Quaker, which means I was born to Quaker parents; however, as of this writing, I have not yet become a member of a Quaker Meeting. That said, I grew up Quaker and feel very settled in my identity as such, and I have been active in many Quaker spaces beyond my home Meeting, such as through Quaker Camps and youth programs, engaged in Quaker scholarship through classes and work, and now live in a Quaker led intentional community.

In order to best integrate my positionality, I am drawing upon frameworks from Kirin Narayan's discussion on 'native anthropology' and positing myself as an 'insider anthropologist',

primarily for the uses of my situated knowledge as a life-long Quaker (Narayan 1993). However, my situation is further nuanced by the differences between myself and my interlocutors, since they do not have that same experience. Their approach to Quakerism may sometimes align with my own as we draw from the same base of values and sources, and yet unlike myself, they have made the conscious decision that this faith practice gives value to their lifestyles. My situated knowledge was ingrained through my parents, many years of First Day School (youth education), and growing up at my Meeting, all of which has given me an understanding and fluency in the specific Quaker practices and language of those communities. This understanding went largely uncontested until I started interacting with other Quakers outside of that sphere and learning about larger historical and contemporary contexts from Quaker traditions not of my own. Furthermore, I am white, young, queer, and primarily female identifying, which has shaped my experience of community differently from my interlocutors who have varying experiences with race, queerness, and parenthood.

## Chapter 2: Group identity

Growing up around other Quakers was a freeing experience for me, in which I found identifying as Quaker was very important to me, but it felt irrelevant to me to question or even ask if others also identified as Quaker or not. Recently, however, I've encountered people who describe themselves as a 'bad Quaker', which begs the question of what a 'good Quaker' is, and what it means to be Quaker or feel part of the Quaker community.  Historically, Quakers lived in isolated intentional communities, and their rejection of mainstream lifestyle, in combination with their values, manifested in identifiable linguistic (Plain Speech) and visual features (Plain Dress) (Zhang 1997). Quaker group membership was more strictly defined; before birthright membership in the Society of Friends was adopted in 1737, Quaker fellowship needed to be achieved, and this was usually accomplished through a religious experience that connected one to the Inward Light. The ritual of silence became a means to this end (Bauman 1998, 24). Nowadays, there is still a similar process involved when becoming an official member, but obtaining such designation is no longer as imperative.

This chapter explores how people think about being Quaker through the language they use to label themselves as such, and in communicating with others on Quaker specific topics. I examine the language used by three people who have come to Quakerism at different times and angles. One of them is R, who is a white transgender man with a wife and young daughters. He'd come in contact with Quakerism in college, but only returned to it much later in life after his wife and her mother were very badly treated by the Pastor at their Presbyterian Church. At this point in R's spiritual journey, he had been considering if he wanted to become a Presbyterian, but he didn't react well to the language used by the Pastor during the welcoming ceremony to the church. Recalling that liberal Quakerism seemed to already align with his values, they decided to

try attending a Quaker meeting. He understands being a Quaker as having a commitment to the world. He resonates with the Quaker approach to recognize and speak to 'that of God' in everyone, noting that "some people don't listen well to it at all, but saying that people don't have it is too easy".

The next interlocutor is J, a Black man, a foster father of toddlers, and a social justice activist working with the Quaker lobby organization FCNL. He was raised as a devout Catholic, but found it didn't align with his values, and learning about the wars and abuses enacted in the name of Catholicism alienated him further. J describes moments of his spiritual journey where he was agnostic, "spiritually homeless", and fervently against religion for how it divides more than connects. He found Quakerism through the Quaker social justice organizations he began working at in 2015, and felt curious and taken by the motives and supportive community he found in those work spaces. He's not sure when he started attending Quaker meetings, but became an official member in 2018. When I asked him what led to his decision to become an official member, he explained that it was several factors coming together. He was struggling between issues with his Church that wasn't living up to the values it claimed and his health problems, and his work community noticed and cared for him, and he saw the Quaker values put into practice. He believes that a Quaker is someone who values the whole of a person.

Finally, N is a fellow student at my historically Quaker college. He is multiracial and unlike my other two interlocutors, identifies most closely with the framework of Unitarian Universalist, rather than Quaker. He draws upon the spirituality of Quakerism, in particular the heavy Christian protestant influence, spiritual humanism, and the personal search for Truth and meaning in religious thinking. In this chapter I analyze the language these interlocutors use to describe their sense of Quaker identity, to argue that the two most relevant foundations of such to

be self-identification, often on the basis of resonating with Quaker values, and communal recognition on the basis of community participation.

In the most official sense, there are various ways to be a Quaker. Birthright– which is what I am– means someone is born to Quaker parents, and may be considered associate members due to their parents' membership, but aren't considered official members unless they make the decision and go through the necessary processes of official membership. Convinced Friends are those that did not initially grow up Quaker, but have since converted, though obtaining official membership is not necessary for such a distinction.

These categories, however, are not always understood in the same way by different Quakers/people. Two people I interviewed shared their own interpretations of these categories with me, as they both came into Quakerism later in life, and are Convinced Friends. J notes that

> Probably the thing that I take with me the most is I broke down in Meeting, and 15 min later…the room just sat and worshiped with me and that was incredibly calming and really beautiful and I really appreciated that. Everything that I had been learning and experiencing and seeing led up to that moment, like this is great and I want to be a Quaker.

Throughout this answer, he never specified if being a Quaker meant simply identifying as such, or becoming an official member, despite that being my specific question, which demonstrates that being a "member" is more about being Quaker than the official designation. It is a way of living, rather than an end goal, so an official designation would overall not change a person's lifestyle.

Similarly, R recalls a little more clearly his thoughts around becoming an official member, relating it to marriage, saying "like, okay, it's not that I have to reach the total level of commitment I'm hoping to get to, but this opens the way to deepening my commitment". Here, R emphasizes *commitment*, and an ongoing learning process. Though he relates it to marriage,

which most would consider to be a significant turning point in life, the manner in which he describes it assumes it to be more of a promise to continue along a similar path. Therefore, between J and R, it can be seen that while they chose to be official members, it wasn't so much a necessary ritual, but rather another natural step in their lives.

It is important to note that while I use the term "Convinced Friend", neither J nor R refer to themselves as such during our interviews. My reasoning for using such language comes more from being immersed in historical accounts and Quaker scholarship, as it is not a term that I used often before I delved into this project. Prior to learning more about Quakers in an academic setting, I grew up with the following knowledge: my parents were not born to Quakerism, but were both official members of a meeting before I was born, thus I was considered a 'birthright Quaker'. This never had much of an impact on how I interacted with the community, though I held the understanding that due to this, I potentially had a higher protection against a draft if one was called, and obtaining official membership had become harder due to the overwhelming amount of people trying to 'convert' to Quakerism to avoid the draft in the World Wars. As these were never present concerns for me, official membership and my status as birthright was never important. I believe the only reason my birthright status plays into my Quaker identity now is that it means I grew up entirely Quaker, with very little Biblical knowledge or cultural understandings of normal Church processes that most of my peers inherently knew. Therefore, I make the distinctions of Birthright and Convinced Friends for the technical definition of such, and because it implies that my interlocutors like J and R are pulling from different religious frameworks and language than I am. However, it is still clear from their lack of self designation as Convinced Friends that the terminology plays no meaningful role in identifying as Quaker or their participation and inclusion in the community.

One can be an official member of a Quaker Meeting, but 'attenders' – people who frequently attend a Meeting but aren't official members – often have the same important role in the Quaker Meeting community, in attending events, committee meetings, and assisting in Meeting business. Distinguishing someone between these categories is often unimportant for simply being part of the community, but may come into play in legal situations, like resisting draft or being married under the care of the Meeting, and even this can vary between Meetings.

 In my experience, being a member versus an attender has never made a difference, though I am aware that in some communities there are some more advantages to being official members. At my Quaker Meeting, and at the Quaker Meeting I observed for this thesis, everyone, regardless of membership status or previous experience with Quakerism or the community, is invited to join and participate in committee meetings. This extends to being able to attend Meeting for Business (discussing finances, events, approving committee meeting reports, and any other business concerning the monthly meeting), and any other events relating to the meeting, such as a book club.

Given this absence of distinction, the terms 'bad' and 'good' Quakers are interesting to consider. To me a 'bad Quaker' is someone who identifies with the faith, has maybe been an attender or member, but hasn't participated in a Meeting community in a while.  When I first heard this phrase from someone at my college, it occurred time that while this did in fact define me — born Quaker, attended a Quaker Meeting fairly faithfully for many years, as well as participated in Quaker Camps and Young Friends (high schoolers) communities, I haven't reliably gone to a particular Meeting since I've been in college. Yet, with my involvement in a variety of Quaker scholarships, living in a Quaker lead intentional community, and working with the Quaker Affairs Office, I've still felt like Quakerism was everywhere present in my life. Thus,

where some would experience their self identification as Quaker, or at the least a 'bad Quaker' in their participation and involvement with a particular Quaker Meeting community, my sense of Quaker identity has more to do with the shared language of spirituality and systems that I grew up with that differ so much from more institutional religions such as more prevalent denominations of Christianity, in addition to still being involved in a community with both vague or explicit Quaker values. Perhaps this is due to my privilege as a birthright Quaker, to be so grounded in my faith, though it has thus far given me no particular advantages on paper. Perhaps this is related to my heavy involvement with Quaker spaces filled with people who don't necessarily identify as Quaker themselves.

One of my interlocutors, J, nuanced the concept of 'bad Quaker' a bit, by noting that "it's easier to be a bad Christian than be a 'bad Quaker' as it would be harder to silence and not be actively seeking guidance". This is consistent with the understanding that being a Quaker is more about a way of living by values than by abiding by specific rituals – in this case, reliably attending Quaker Meeting and participating in events. Furthermore, how important is this specification? As a religious organization and faith community, group membership can be defined two ways: the first is the official membership to a Monthly Meeting, whereby you are formally recorded as a member after going through the process of Clearness Committees[1], and the second is membership in the Quaker group identity, which is more of personal and social acceptance into the community (Molina-Markham 2011). In her ethnographic study of Glen Meeting, Elizabeth Molina-Markham finds that being considered a Quaker prioritizes the latter definition of Quaker group membership, as there is no pressure to become an official member (2011). Rather, group membership is proven through the commitment to the community,

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[1] In which several Friends are appointed– some close to the centered member, and some not– to help a member of the meeting find clarity and a leading on an issue, such as moving to a new city, or getting married (Friends General Conference).

demonstrated by active participation and involvement in spaces such as Meeting activities, meeting for worship, meeting for business, and adult education. In our interview, J notes that there is something special about Quaker community, that is about "seeing the whole person involving yourself respectfully in other people's lives, wanted to know where they are, what's going on with them, joys and sorrows that we share at the end of meeting having space for relational activities".

Furthermore, Molina-Markham's study found that "commitment" is found on a spiritual and personal level, citing a "'commitment' to being 'open' to others and to different 'spiritual' experiences, and to having 'faith' in 'continued revelation'" (2011, 272). As further evidence for the greater import of values than official designations, when asked how they would define a Quaker, none of my interlocutors mentioned anything about official membership. Rather, J defines a Quaker as

> someone who values people, because if you're gonna speak to that of God in everyone, you have to see people first, and then there's something inside that language might not be suitable for everyone…They're worried about the this life and I think that's a big piece of that being a Quaker, is you're working to improve this life, your honor, cause there's a lot of quality here, and there's a lot of people here, and it can't just be reading a book and then hoping you get to heaven.

His description relies very little on any specific Quaker theology, which supports a claim that language is useful in describing values, in this case, ones that are rather attributed to Quakerism but not inherently so, but is not necessarily useful in defining identity, since it is a lived experience and therefore unique to each individual. The emphasis on values as opposed to defining categories is also reflected by N, who integrates aspects of Quaker spirituality into his own without identifying as such:

> Quaker values seem to inhabit a certain emphasis on egalitarianism, and like lifting other people up in ways that sort of …accounts for a fundamental presumption that everybody is entitled to certain agency over themselves. Their body, their mind, their spirit, because they have a certain inherent worth…from my perspective [that] plays out in a number of things that I sense or come to understand about Quakers and Quaker spaces, whether it's how to worship and letting everybody have their own turn and voice themselves the way they want to be heard, whether it's, how should we interpret any life, guiding, messaging, or things that guide our spirit or our values, whether it's more secular values or values that aren't limited to just religious contexts.

Earlier in our interview, he describes a very similar concept as 'spiritual humanism', and in doing so, he disconnects it from Quakerism, even as he sites Quakerism as his source. It is this quality of the Quaker belief system that makes it easy to secularize, but when it does, it loses integral parts of theology and the connections to other aspects of Quaker spirituality that make its essence particular to this religion. J and N are discussing these values in a context explicitly designated as Quaker, so this connection is understood, but the descriptions themselves are not, by themselves, capable of pointing towards Quaker identity.

In the context of a religion where group membership is not strictly defined by rituals and traditions, the discussion of group membership must consider the distinction between both self-identification and communal recognition as Quaker. Self-identification as Quaker can depend on the individuals relating to the values of the faith and community participation; for example, identifying as a 'bad Quaker' seems to mean lacking participation in the Quaker community– but this participation can be defined differently by each individual. Communal recognition as a Quaker is rather loose, and entirely dependent on participation in a Quaker Meeting community and events; distinction between 'attender' and 'official member' is not very important. Outside of Quaker spaces, communal recognition is entirely dependent on

self-identification, and reaffirmed through usage of some key system-based and

spirituality-based words.

## Chapter 3: Accessibility

One crucial component of Quaker identity and communities is the language, which is presently used to communicate spirituality and Quaker processes. This is a change from the way early Quakers used language, in what was called Quaker Plain Speech (QPS), as a way to reflect Quaker beliefs and commitment to their faith, and became an important inward and outward symbol of group identity. The main framework I use to analyze this historical usage of language is through Andrew Brown's *metadiscourse,* or "discourse about conversational discourse itself" (2020, 612). Essentially, this means that analysis is focused on discussions about the intentional language practices, thereby seeking the intents of the speakers and the societal implications and assumptions indexed by such linguistic features. This proves the most useful analytical approach for QPS, as much of what we know and have record of Quaker spoken language from the seventeenth century comes out of the non-Quaker critics of QPS, and the writings of Quakers responding and defending their language against the vitriol. Therefore, it's most prudent to analyze this discourse to determine how QPS was used and understood by Quakers, and what about it made it such a point of contention for non-Quakers, contextualized by the later, more in depth analysis of QPS of Barbara Birch (1995) and Candace Zhang (1997).

In this chapter I adapt this framework to approach my findings of how Quaker language is understood today. I pay attention to what some have called Quakerism's "jargoned" speech, and distinguish between system-based and spirituality-based terms and phrases, which I will discuss more later in this chapter. Present day, when Quaker language is mostly only used in Quaker spaces, and Quaker practice is a minority mostly known in a history textbook, the attention and discourse on language has shifted towards concern for understanding and clear communication for everyone within the community and a part of Quaker spaces. As I will

demonstrate, where system-based terms tend to alienate more newcomers, the flexibility and ambiguity of spirituality-based terms is both a strength and weakness for all speakers in forming and communicating their beliefs. For ease of understanding, QPS refers only to historical usage, and Quaker language refers to present day formations.

In our interview, J, who works at a Quaker social justice organization, very succinctly defined Quaker language as the "nomenclature that describes the scaffolding that holds up Quakerism… language that's used to describe space and how we understand the 'doing of Quakerism'." I want to focus on the second part of this definition, as it demonstrates that the 'doing of Quakerism' isn't– inherently–the language, but still plays a significant role in interpreting and forming other aspects of being Quaker, such as participating in community and integrating beliefs into everyday action. This logic follows one of the core beliefs in Quakerism, that everyone has equal and direct access to God/Light/Spirit, and that such will guide you if you listen and are ready for it. This process is understood to be through the practice of silence, and as such everyone has their own unique relationship with their faith and spirituality, hence, the 'doing of Quakerism' on the spiritual side is personal, and not capable of truly being represented in words for everyone to adhere to. However, language is still important for being able to make sense of this spirituality, and the community can play a valuable role, and as such Quakers developed terms to assist in the communicating, and it extends to how to implement their beliefs in everyday life. Therefore, QPS and Quaker language is first and foremost a bank of tools to be able to put a nonverbal experience into words we can more easily interpret, communicate, and put into action.

Early Quakers went several steps further with the purpose of QPS. Where modern Quakers tend to just integrate Quaker terms and phrases into their everyday speech, QPS was an

entire way of speech that was maintained regardless if the person being spoken to was Quaker or

not. In addition to the words, phrases, and metaphors specific to Quaker spirituality and practice,

they believed that they needed to always be prepared and ready to hear the Word of the Spirit,

and thus needed to avoid all "carnal talk", which I understand to be any non-Christian language

(Bauman 1998). For example, they refused to use the typical Day and Month names, such as

Monday-Sunday, because they were etymologically based in pagan traditions, and instead

referred to days of the week by number, such as 'First Day' (Sunday)[2]. They also refused to greet

others by "good morning" or take leave by "good night" for two reasons; first, to say these to

people engaging in immoral activity is to partake in them oneself, and second, those engaging in

immoral activity are "in the evil day", and to address them positively would be speaking falsely

(Lasersohn 2015). Finally, the most famous aspect of QPS was their unique pronominal system,

for which Quaker refused to use *you* as a singular pronoun for the following reasons:

> 1. Linguistic purity. Because it was ungrammatical to use *you,* a plural pronoun, to
> address a singular person, it was essentially a lie
> 2. Biblical authority. Early Quakers understood Jesus and his followers to have used
> forms equivalent to *thou* and *thee.*
> 3. Equality and humility. Using the plural pronoun for a single individual was flattery and
> a sign of worldly pride.
> 4. Dissension from the practice of using *you* with people and *thou* with God (Birch 1995).

This unique rhetoric was hard to learn for those who did not grow up with it, and as such was an

identifiable marker and rebellion to social order – using QPS meant attracting antagonism from

non-Quakers.

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[2] This practice is still used today, as a matter of tradition more than the original avoidance of paganism. This is sometimes a point of discourse, as it can get unnecessarily confusing when announcing committee meetings, like "we meet every third Fourth Day". Where this practice is most secure is using "First Day School" instead of "Sunday School". I personally feel that calling such "Sunday School" would be too weird and not Quaker, since it has now become a title of a Quaker practice rather than simply in line with traditional day naming conventions.

In his article about Quakers and metadiscourse, Brown notes: Church of England minister Fracis Higginson records at length how he "intreated [traveling Quaker James] Nayler to answer plainly to a few questions," but upon being asked whether he believed that the Bible was the word of God, Nayler would repeat only that "the Word and the Spirit are one." After attempting several times to engage Nayler in public debate, Higginson concludes simply, "I told him, he did not answer like a rational man" (2020, 610). In this interaction, Higginson decreed that Nayler wasn't rational because he expects Nayler to provide a clarification or another explanation, but Nayler rejects this approach. To explain it differently would be to change the interpretation, but his initial response is still not understood by Higginson. As such, we can see that one point of contention comes from the difficulty in Quakers communicating their thought and beliefs to those not brought up in the tradition, since they refused to change the language or translate them into wording that may be more understood or accessible by non-Quakers. Ironically, that ire towards QPS is that it was not seen as 'plain' by non-Quakers, which in this case means 'easily understood'. Furthermore, non-Quakers were deeply insulted at the seemingly lack of respect Quakers had for authority figures and supposed social superiors. Here Brown's metadiscourse framework allows us to observe the conflict between Higginson and Nayler surrounding the latters use of QPS to be based on Higginson's frustration at not understanding or making ground on Nayler's beliefs surrounding the Bible, and in turn, Nayler's commitment to QPS and the values of his faith in not translating to Higginson.

Nayler's resistance to adjusting his speech can be understood from the approach to Convinced Friends. Primarily, adopting QPS and using it well was seen as a commitment of the Quaker faith, or "taking up the cross" (Bauman 1998, 51). In her thesis, Zhang (1997) describes Quaker speech to be a religious jargon, invoking Burke and Porter's (1995) discussion on the

functions of jargon to focus on its use for secrecy and mystification. According to Burke, jargon was also richly developed in institutions in which inhabitants felt distinct from the rest of the world. I am hesitant to describe QPS as purely a jargon, because while there were terms and phrases used that could fall under such a category, there was more to simply adding new terms, as evidenced by the previously outlined avoidance for certain speech practices and rejection of alternative translations. There were terms created to fit the new traditions and beliefs, other words and speech practices omitted, and words made to replace mainstream words for commonplace concepts. Thus, where jargon would aptly describe the first practice of QPS, it would not explain the other two.

However, it is still a useful framework to draw upon. Zhang applies this to early Quakers and their habit of referring to themselves as *the peculiar people* in a positive way similar to the word *Quaker,* as a method for dealing with the harsh persecution against them, and when they lived in isolated communities in colonial America (303). Therefore, while QPS was originally meant to remind Friends of their commitment to speak on the Truth, it also came to be a method to affirm and signal one's identity as a member of the Religious Society of Friends – made more important as they had to spread out geographically– and their history fighting persecution still left them a rather insulated community in defiance with the rest of the population (Zhang 1997).

QPS reflected this sentiment, and as a result, was always a barrier needed to be overcome by Convinced Friends. As Birch (1995) points out, it became a linguistic boundary, soon characterized by its intentional rejection of the natural progression and change in the English language, and only served to reinforce other cultural and religious boundaries. Thus, a clear policy of inclusion and exclusion was created through these linguistic features, when it was originally just intended to be an indication of spirituality and for setting a good example to others

(Birch 1995). Additionally, Birch mentions that code-switching was rare for true Quakers at that time, since doing so would be seen as an inconsistency, and therefore not following the testimonies of simplicity and truthfulness (1995). QPS helped to define early Quaker society as a strong ethnolinguistic community, and it got stronger as immigration meant an influx of conversions, especially since taking on the speech practice was one outward method of displaying their spiritual and lifestyle change, and proving their dedication to their faith.

Birch points to a change in the activist culture among Friends as one of the main reasons for the decline of QPS. Quaker's strong rebellion against any popular trends of the time was justified by the religious persecution that drove many Quakers out of England in the first place, and caused the linguistic policy to be compelling. Their staunch pacifism and missionary work continued to put them at odds in America for the first couple of centuries, and while they remained active in American governance and politics, they started to adopt the British Quakers' trend towards quietism. During this period "American Friends also became the peculiar people, marked by characteristic lifestyle, dress, and language, which set them apart from others" (Birch 1995, 43). As their activism slowly waned, being more concerned with internal affairs, so did the spiritual reasons behind the linguistic practice, and it instead just became a policy of exclusion, and thus its usage waned as well. Birch presents a study on the 'modern'[3] uses of *thee* and *thou* in the survival of QPS. Through many interviews, she found that in addition to the decrease of QPS over time, code switching increased, and there has been a change in the reasons for the continuation. Of the participant group, the initial main reason, 'essential part of being a Friend' had become the least important reason, and 'sense of tradition' and 'special feeling of closeness/community' had become more important.

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[3] 'Modern' here refers to the 1990's; this is important because the trend Birch points out here has continued exponentially till the 2020's, and thus today's use of QPS is not fully included in the term 'modern'.

Birch's study implies that QPS has nearly died out by now. However, that is a matter of how it is defined. While it is certainly no longer a distinct and cohesive linguistic system, there still remains Quaker language, as I have mentioned throughout this chapter. Nowadays, no longer faced with fierce opposition from non-Quakers and due to the evolution of Quaker language itself, any remaining discourse has shifted on said language to be nearly internal to the Quaker community and focused on making it more accessible to everyone. This is important, because the spaces in which Quaker language is used has also dramatically changed; while present day Quakers don't tend to use Quaker language around non-Quakers if not necessary, there are now many Quaker-lead spaces open and inhabited by non-Quakers, such as Quaker schools, social justice organizations, and summer camps, wherein such Quaker language inevitably gets used.

I find it easiest to describe present day Quaker language by separating it into two main categories: system-based and spirituality-based words and phrases. System-based terms are those that point to the structures of the faith organizations, as Quakers don't have a singular center of power like the Pope. Simply by virtue of Quakerism being a minority religion, the terms used for these are one linguistic barrier to those unfamiliar with it already. Furthermore, as some of these structures are dissimilar to many structures of more culturally integrated traditions of, say, larger Christian denominations, they can sometimes be difficult to comprehend unless experienced directly. Quakers aren't often depicted in popular media, and when they are, the systems and practices are rarely included. Terms such as "Monthly Meeting" and "Yearly Meeting" denote the community gatherings of various sizes to discuss community business, at different intervals of time, once a month for the prior, and once a year for the latter. In the tradition of speaking 'plainly', these names use fairly secular terms and are as they say– they are meetings, and they say how often they occur.

Furthermore, the practice of these meetings follow Quaker beliefs of equality within the community and 'under God', as they are open for everyone in the community, where all have a voice and place in the decisions through "sense of the meeting", usually secularly understood as 'consensus', and at least current day, doesn't require official membership. However, this naming isn't fully explanatory. Monthly Meetings are another name for "Quaker Meeting" or "Friends Meeting"-- they are the weekly place of worship, but it is "Monthly" because the gathering to discuss business for that smaller worshiping community occurs once a month. This is the preferred naming convention over, say, 'Quaker Church', and presents confusion for anyone new to Quakers. For newcomers to Quakerism, system-based words can often provide an initial linguistic barrier, however, as R– the trans psychologist– points out, this is easily overcome by simply asking someone else to explain. Most Quaker Meetings have some glossary or explanation for basic Quaker terms or practices either on their website or as fliers. As Quaker meetings are open spaces, there is an understanding that not everyone will be familiar with the terminology, and as such, asking clarifying questions on such isn't stigmatized.

On the other hand, when used in Quaker-led, but predominantly non-Quaker spaces, such as the college both N and I attend, these systems are often secularized and warped out of shape so that they are no longer Quaker, and yet many students still ascribe them as Quaker. For example, the college claims to use the Quaker process of 'consensus', but as mentioned earlier, Quakers don't actually, or at least shouldn't, use 'consensus', but rather 'sense of the meeting', which is impossible to do in a secular setting. Additionally, the practice of plenary– in which the student body gathers to make decisions surrounding an academic and social honor code– may have its roots in Quaker tradition, as it allows the students to make decisions of their own rather than simply following the regulations set forth by the administration, but also now is completely

devoid of Quaker process. It now uses majority voting to make decisions, and as of recently, a student even cited Quaker values as justification to transfer power from the students to the administration, in a complete reversal of the original Quaker roots of such practice. Thus, beyond system-based terms being a linguistic barrier to those entering the Quaker community, the unfamiliarity of such provide a much bigger concern is the misunderstanding and reappropriation of Quaker process in Quaker-based, but majority non-Quaker spaces.

Spirituality-based phrases are those that refer to one's values, testimonies, and the theological core of the Quaker faith. This group would include concepts such as any variations of "the Inner Light" and the SPICES (Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality, and Stewardship). Theology is always a more difficult concept for Quakers to communicate, to non-Quakers and Quakers alike, and these two concepts are always the ones that come up most often and easily. To use a description from the Lansdowne Friends Meeting website, the "Inner Light" refers to "the power and inspiration of God or Christ coming inwardly to us to show us our true motivations, guide us, lead us, and give us strength to act on this guidance – thus bringing us into unity with the Spirit (Hilliard 2019). This concept differs from "conscience," which is a developed awareness of the merits or faults of our conduct, intentions, or character and the sense of obligation to do right. The "Inward Light" is also called the "Light Within," the "Christ Within, the "Light of Christ," the "Holy Spirit," and "The Seed." Often, the term is written "Inner Light," implying that the light comes from each of us, but that is not part of early Friends' concept" (Hilliard 2019). As this end of the definition alludes to, this concept has shifted in meaning over time, originally referring to the external, guiding voice of God or Christ, but nowadays is more often interpreted to mean that every living thing contains some of this presence within them. Despite this shift in theology and conceptualization, the overall effect on Quaker values is largely

unchanged; everyone is equal and worthy and should be treated as thus. However, while all these variations in terms refer to the same basic concept, there are minute but important differences between each one, and Quakers are often very intentional about which particular wording they use.

As mentioned earlier, the nature of Quaker practice and belief being rooted in silence and a direct access to a guiding Spirit (another variation of God/Light), Quaker spirituality is a personal experience with a unique composition. This feature is likely the reason for such a variety, as one way of naming that presence for one person may not resonate with another person. Both R and J initially grew up in a Biblical tradition, and thus feel more comfortable using the variations drawn from such, like "that of God". For R, despite bearing witness to the religious trauma in queer communities through his psychiatry work, this God-language was friendly grounding, and he expressed discomfort in using language that didn't hark back to the Christian roots of the religion, saying "let's not pretend it's not a Christocentric religion at least."

J doesn't seem to have as strong an opinion, but comfortably uses "that of God", and notes that there exists atheist Quakers, who probably wouldn't resonate with wording that refers directly to a higher power. He specifies that they are "really interesting, but still we accept them, they are no lesser than me." Following this line, in an article from the *Jolly Quaker* blog, Mark Russ mentions that some Quakers prefer to use "that of Good in everyone" to include those with a non-theistic outlook (2019). He also shares his own opinions on these wording variations, saying:

> I think the various ways that 'that of God in everyone' has been understood are important, but I do have difficulty with 'the Light' or 'that of God' being seen as something identical with my own self. I'm wary of anything that blurs the distinction between creation and God too much. I'm not God and God isn't me. I also don't like thinking of us each having a 'piece' of God. I don't think God can be broken up into pieces. If we are to be united by 'that of God in everyone' then God needs to remain whole (Russ 2019).

Here, what's important to Russ isn't so much the possible distinctions of theology coming from "Light" versus "God" but rather the implication of being part of God or that God isn't whole.

In contrast to all three of these accounts, I very purposefully use the language of "Inner Light", and tend to stay away from God-language. Like J's experience discussed in the previous chapter, the more I learn about Biblical traditions and the way Christianity–along with many other religions– has been weaponized to divide rather than connect, the more alienated I feel from such theology. Unlike J, however, I never grew up being engrained with the importance of the Bible, so it is not friendly ground, and hearing and seeing God-language almost immediately conjures feelings of discomfort and estrangement. Furthermore, I latch on to the versatility of such language as "Light", since it is enough a normalized part of Quakerism that Christocentric Quakers can associate it with God or Christ, and it is fairly theologically neutral for those who conceptualize another higher power or none at all. Finally, it also doesn't part fully with theological conceptions as "Good" or "Love" tend to, so it still feels uniquely Quaker. These are four examples of how the slight change of language can mean a significantly different shape in our shared Quaker spiritual experience. This variation is an inherent part of Quakerism, and can also be seen through how SPICES is represented and used, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

My observation of a Business Meeting provided yet another frame of reference demonstrating that Quakers are still nowadays acutely aware of how the language they use

affects the practice and communication of their beliefs, and identified the struggle to compromise the practices passed down from early Quakers with the acknowledgment of flaws in such systems. During the meeting, a Friend had brought forward a request to lobby for a forestry bill without having to come back to another Business Meeting (which occurs only once a month) to have the community approve of the approach and language of the lobbied bill. Traditionally, when a member or group of members of the community wanted to do something with the support of the Meeting, they would first ask permission to do so, then perhaps form an ad hoc committee to formulate a plan and prepare for said event, and then present it to the community to receive approval for it before executing the action. If the report is not yet approved, the committee or person would revise the plan and then present it again for approval before going forward. However, this process takes a long time, and in this case, such a time-consuming process is not possible, as the deadline for submitting and lobbying the bill was soon. The Clerk named this as a struggle with "Quaker time".

As such, the Friend asked the Meeting to fast track the approval process, by essentially supporting the Friend and trusting them to best represent the ideals of the Meeting in their lobbying. While there was a general support of this action, another Friend brought up a concern for the language of *fast tracking*, but still cited the Meeting's history of advocating governmental protections for trees and forest in addition to the past contributions of the requesting Friend, proposing that the Meeting should be agreeing that they are giving "stewardship of following this leading and handling the details of this Meeting to A with our blessing, knowing that she will act in good faith representing us". After a brief discussion, it was decided that while deliberating on the exact wording was not useful, it did point to an important dilemma on how to best accommodate the request while also staying true to the Quaker process. The Clerk then pointed

out the importance of balancing two things; "one, to make decisions to carry out the overall leading of the Meeting, and two– we're not putting it all on one person. One person can write a letter all they want, but several individuals can speak for the Meeting more clearly".

The first aspect of this discussion that stood out to me was the Friend who spoke up about having issues with the term *fast track,* while simultaneously supporting the request. Her concern demonstrated that this specific term implied a lack of community confirmation that is intrinsic to Quaker process– it supposed that the necessary care would not be put into the process. However, she also discerned that this was not the intention of the Friend who used such language, and thus there was an explicit acceptance to let go of the wording. This is the first mark of change from QPS tradition in the situation. The second change is the discussed awareness of the flawed Quaker process– they discuss the historical precedents of this sort of process, and acknowledge how this request demands something not suited to such a system: accelerated action. As such, they had to navigate a difficult concession as to what traditional practices needed to be dropped, and how to reform them in a way that still felt in line with their beliefs. Therefore, it is apparent that while Quakers still value the intentionality of language, the emphasis is more on the intention of sentiment and meaning.

Language use is always related to intentions. Early Quakers took extreme measures towards this end, with the belief that speech was the same as action, and therefore Quaker Plain Speech emphasized a strict adherence to the beliefs of the religious community. At this time, the focus of QPS was about being true to the Spirit and self-differentiation from non-Quakers. However, over time these concerns adjusted to the new social landscape, and now are shaped around being able to communicate more clearly, for the ease in inclusion of newcomers to the faith, as with the

system-based terms, and in fostering understanding within the community, with the

spirituality-based terms.

## Chapter 4: Ethical Communities

This project was partially inspired by my research into Black Quaker history in America, and as such, this chapter is about race, the silencing of diverse voices, and Quaker complicity with slavery and discrimination. It is also an analysis of how language and the changing social landscape shifted the tradition of activism to pacifism, and what that means for today's Quaker communities. For this last point, I am interested in how the practice of knowing when to speak– in Meeting or as Action– is perceived as part of the problem or is being challenged today.

The practice of silent worship does not mean there is no speech. Rather, silence is a means of listening. Sometimes, a Friend may be led by the Spirit/Light/God to share a message out of the silence. Knowing when to speak up and when not to is often difficult to discern, and as such, I was taught that it's better to wait the first time you receive a message, and only speak it out if it comes up again the next week or time of worship. R recounts that he used to speak too much and got Eldered[4] about it, and now rarely speaks at all. He also notes that listening to other messages is a discipline. There are some people who you know will have wonderful messages, but there are some whose messages are more difficult to listen to. R mentions one person in particular whose messages he finds irritating, and so he tries to listen past the delivery and "find the nugget of what she's trying to say". There are times when even this is not possible. He recalls a recent event in which someone shared a message that came off a little racist. He had trouble sitting with it and finding a way to address it. He would have said something, but someone else spoke up at the Rise of Meeting, and several other people talked to the person more directly about why it wasn't good to say. This example demonstrates that silence does not mean inaction. R made use

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[4] ELDERING - 1. nurturing and supporting a Friend to live into the fullness of his/her faith and ministry. 2. gently admonishing in love the ways, habits or thoughts of a Friend or attender after serious consideration by or consultation with respected members of the meeting (Hilliard 2019)

of the silence to actively listen and attempt to discern, and when the time for silence ended, there came power in speaking up and supporting other members of the community.

Though this preceding example demonstrates a tradition for speaking up, this has not always been the case. I want to challenge the limited popular perception of Quakers as being among the first abolitionists. While not incorrect, this pure image has led to the implication that Quakers back then and now are not racist, which is both incorrect and destructive, which I will explain later. In fact, early Quakers were slaveholders, and even among the most prominent slave traders until around 1776, when the Religious Society of Friends in the US formally banned slaveholding among their members (Huddle 1996). Even this decision came almost a century after the first protestations towards slavery among Friends, through a written protest by active members of Germantown Friends Meeting in Pennsylvania in 1688 ("1688 Petition Against Slavery") and was the gradual work of many influential Quaker abolitionists such as John Woolman, Benjamin Lay, and Sarah and Angelina Grimke.

Henry Cadbury's detailed account of the history of Black membership in the Religious Society of Friends reveals some of the blatant racism and discrimination present within American Quaker communities. During the slaveholding days, Black people were typically invited to Quaker Meetings, and in some places it was at the least heavily recommended for Quaker masters to bring their slaves to worship, in a pointed attempt at evangelism (Cadbury 1936). In Pennsylvania, William Penn– a Quaker, slave owner, and governor of the state– initiated separate Meetings for Black and Native peoples, as announced in the following quote:

> Our dear Friend and governor, having laid before this meeting a concern that hath lain upon his mind for some time concerning the negroes and Indians that Friends ought to be very careful in discharging good conscience towards them in all respects, but more especially for the good of their souls; and that they might, as frequent as may be, come to meetings upon First-days, upon consideration whereof this meeting concludes to appoint a meeting for the negroes, to be kept once a month, etc., and that their masters give notice thereof in their own Families, and be present with them at the said meetings as frequent as may be. (9) (Cadbury 1936)

Black Quakers could be married in the manner of Friends[5], and were eventually given their own separate graveyards, and once slaveholding was banned, separate Meetings on the basis of race were dissolved. However, even then, Black attenders were prevented from becoming official members, despite it being explicitly written in the 1797 Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Discipline "That said meetings are at liberty to receive such (persons) into membership, without respect to nation or color" (Cadbury 1936). Many requests for membership by Black attenders are recorded or collected by abolitionists, but none were granted. Pointing out the disparity between claim and action, Quaker abolitionist Sarah Grimke (1792-1873) asserts that "I do not think the present generation [of Quakers] have or would receive a colored member. I have heard it assigned as a reason that of course no white member would marry them and then if they infringe the Disciple they must be disowned" (Cadbury 1936). In other words, other excuses were made to cover up rejection of such requests on the basis of race.

Furthermore, Black attenders were relegated to the "Negro pew", which was the back bench of the Meeting house, as a method of segregation. At the time, white abolitionists like Grimke lent their voices against this treatment by writing and speaking their criticisms to the Quaker

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[5] Quaker weddings are unique in that they are witnessed and actualized by the whole community rather than a priest. In this time period Quakers were very particular about marrying within the faith– mixed marriages (marriages between a Quaker and a non-Quaker) would result in the expulsion of the Quaker from the community and any official membership. While Black Quakers were never official members, they often followed this tradition.

Meetings and Yearly Meeting gatherings, and by sitting on the back benches with the Black attenders. However, their efforts weren't enough to grow traction and make change to the community, as active abolitionists were often dropped from important committees, Meeting Houses were closed to abolitionist gatherings (Cadbury 1936). These exclusionary tactics and attitudes were undoubtedly a large reason for the gradual alienation of Black people from the Religious Society of Friends, and why there are very few Black American Quakers present day. If these supposedly open and welcoming spaces are majority white, it's no wonder that people of color don't feel comfortable. Despite the poignant institutional memory of the prejudice Quakers faced that led to their movement to the United States, the Quakers of the 1700-1900's did the same to people of color, and actively discouraged the practices of speaking up and acting against injustice, even silent forms of protest, that largely defined the very beginnings of the faith.

Unfortunately, silence can easily be misinterpreted as inaction, just as pacifism can be turned into passivism. The Quakers' commitment to pacifism meant they–overall– maintained political neutrality during the small wars around the continent and through the Revolutionary War, which caused them to be further ostracized by the general populace. This was one of the main reasons for the trend of Quaker communities turning more inward, "away from worldly[6] concerns and outward missionary zeal" as mentioned in the previous chapter (Birch 1995). This continued into the 1800s as they became more intolerant to internal diversity, including in the interpretation of fundamental Quaker beliefs and practices, which led to deep divisions in the community (Birch 1995 referencing Hamm 1988)[7]. Though many Quakers assisted the escaping slaves along the Underground Railroad, there were only a few Quaker individuals who advocated more active

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[6] WORLDLY - Having to do with secular values (Hilliard 2019)
[7] Some of these divisions still exist today, roughly split between the more Christian centered Friends United Meeting (typically with Programmed worship) and the more liberal Friends General Conference (typically with Unprogrammed worship) organizations that bring together most of the Yearly Meetings around the world.

approaches against the institution of slavery. Rather, the more prevalent attitude by these Quaker groups was that they would not contribute to the ethical transgression of holding slaves, and they would do as they could aid the escaping slaves, but only so much that they could do so quietly, without inviting more issues to the community. Thus, active abolitionists were seen as a potential threat to the relative peace Quakers were experiencing, and their additional efforts to push back against the discrimination and inaction of the community were not often acknowledged until many years later.

Nowadays, some of these figures have been raised to fame as 'exemplifying the best of Quakers', such as Lucretia Mott, where others have been effectively hidden in history, such as Sarah Grimke and Sarah Mapps Douglass. It is important to theorize on which names were recorded in history and others not. I have highlighted women in particular for this activity, so as the gendered aspect does not play into the dynamic, and to center women's voices where many have excluded them. Lucretia Mott (1793-1880) was a white woman, and was born into a Quaker family. She was well established in the community, and held a well connected grounding within the Arch Street Friends Meeting in Philadelphia, including having a supportive husband. She is well known for her work as a prominent feminist activist and abolitionist, and was one of the founders of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society in 1833 (Michals 2017).

Sarah Grimke and Sarah Mapps Douglass also attended Arch Street Friends Meeting, were friends with Mott, and were fierce activists in similar circles. Sarah Grimke was not born Quaker, and came from a rich slaveholding family in Charleston, South Carolina. She was drawn to Quakerism by their belief that slavery was evil and that in the equality of women, and moved to Philadelphia to become an official member in 1821 (Alexander 2018). While she remained faithful to the religion till the end of her life, she found the community's initially assumed

commitment to fight against the institution of slavery to be lacking, and advocated for more active approaches and addressing the internal discrimination. Her standing among the Quakers was further strained when her sister Angelina was expelled from the Religious Society of Friends for marrying a non-Quaker (Alexander 2018). Sarah Mapps Douglass (1806-1882) was a Black woman, and her family had been well connected with Quakers for several generations. She was greatly influenced by her mother, Grace Douglass, who was a respected educator and lifelong faithful Friend and attender of Quaker Meeting, despite never being able to become an official member and facing blatant discrimination within the community (Bacon 2003). Though Sarah Douglass felt aligned with the spirituality and practice of Quakers, her grievances over the community's treatment of her mother and herself led to her separation with the faith for many years, until she reconciled with the Meeting much later in life (Bacon 2003). Like Mott, she was very active in the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society among other activist organizations, and followed in her mothers' footsteps in being a prominent and influential educator, and eventually became well respected as such by the Quakers that had alienated her in the first place. Therefore, the important differences I want to point out are that while all three women played prominent roles in feminist and anti-slavery activism, Mott had the privilege of being well established and supported in the Religious Society of Friends, and being white, which were not available to Grimke and Douglass, respectively, and as such Mott has been established in our historical memory where the other two were ignored.

This pattern has an impact on how present day Quakers interact with and act on this history. Placing the abolition work and other positive contributions Quakers have done at the forefront of the narrative makes it far easier to absolve current Quakers of responsibility to justice work, and inhibits our ability to productively address the harms inflicted by our predecessors. Ending a

discussion about substance abuse, R notes that "people makes choices with what they do with that part of their heritage; they have the ability to try to live into their better selves, to be used or not used in spiritual channels to show up in the world in ways that are constructive or destructive". He quickly applies this to Quakers, that it is important to know that they haven't always gotten it right. He explains that "the overly rosy stories, I distrust them…they don't have enough substance". A comprehensive understanding of one's heritage is necessary to make choices over what is learned and applied to their living in the world, and therefore focusing on rosy stories, as R puts it, essentially takes away some of our agency.

J laments a similar sentiment about the absence of certain strong voices in the retelling of Quaker history. As a Black man himself, he is often confronted with the constant reminders that "though Quakers are great, they are white and white people have done a lot of hurt". His awareness of how Quaker history is addressed is further heightened by the comparisons between his Quaker led social justice work place, where it comes up a lot and is integral to the work they do, and the Quaker Meeting spaces he inhabits, where it is rarely mentioned. However, he does acknowledge that these two spaces operate very differently, saying that "Quaker organizations are actively working to disrupt systems, [and] there's a lot of want for diversification…Meetings are more difficult because they are dealing with more, like trying to foster spirituality". However, J still wishes there were more Justice seeking work in these latter spaces, and he cites the book *Black Fire: African American Quakers on Spirituality and Human Rights* by Harold D. Weaver Jr., Paul Kriese, and Steven W. Angell, as being particularly influential to his approach to Quaker history and his social justice work. He notes that the historical figures featured in this book don't rise to the top in Quaker spaces, as they probably should.

One of the editors of *Black Fire*, Hal Weaver, further discusses the need to revitalize the "Justice" testimony among Quaker communities in his Pendle Hill Pamphlet[8]. He writes that justice has always been an important aspect of Quaker faith, and it needs to be at the forefront of the conversation as a reminder, since it's often excluded and forgotten about in discussions on Quaker testimonies (Weaver 2020). Quakers in Rhode Island in the 18th century were among the first to call for reparative justice, and there have been some attempts by Friends over the years, but as Weaver notes, "there has never been a unified approach from the Society of Friends toward the legacy of slavery" (Weaver 2020). His current work towards such efforts, which I have had the pleasure in assisting, has demonstrated how the loss of such a potent reminder about such testimony has made Quaker communities more complacent and passive, and harder to reintegrate this value into the modern traditions. He cites the popularization of the acronym SPICES as our core testimonies as one reason it has fallen out of practice. My interviewees tended to prefer using SPICES as a method of discussing and communicating Quaker values, which demonstrates how central this feature has become to defining such spiritual experiences. J explains that "SPICES is really beautiful. You don't need a lot to understand what it means, and there's no shortage of explanations to come out of it. There's a lot of richness in each use, but it's also easy to grasp, and doesn't require a scripture or intermediary". R further agrees with the beauty of the flexibility of the convention, which is useful in facilitating the intrinsic flexibility of the faith.

However, Weaver's critiques are reasonable, in that such a simple outline does not necessarily invite and encourage practices of complicating or elaborating. Both J and R are aware that SPICES is a simplified method of communicating Quaker values, and requires such complicating and elaborating, but this is not a universal understanding. In his 2012 talk about the

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[8] The foremost publication about all topics relating to Quakers and Quakerism.

origins of SPICES, Paul Buckley warns against the overreliance on the acronym, saying "When "doing good things" becomes the definition of being a Friend, we make the SPICES into idols and we lose the ability to feed the souls of our members and attenders. We put ourselves on the pathway to extinction." (Buckley 2012). Therefore, what Weaver promotes makes sense; either Justice needs to be explicitly added to something like SPICES so as to not be excluded or forgotten under testimonies like Peace or Stewardship, or the whole acronym needs to be abolished. If there is no easy explanation to fall back on, every conversation or understanding of Quaker values requires complicating and a more comprehensive understanding of Quaker history, theology, and spirituality.

This thesis examines how language and practices of speaking are one important facet of cultivating Justice in Quaker communities. In particular, this chapter discusses the interplay or tensions arising from a discrepancy between interpretation of Quaker values and actual practice, and the importance of how history and testimonies are communicated in modern day implementations of such a legacy. As many of my Quaker role models and friends have expressed over the years, Quakers may advocate pacifism and silent worship, but they were never meant to be passive. Listening and learning are integral aspects of this faith, and that makes responsible history education and intentional diction all the more important.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

As an active Quaker on a historically Quaker college campus, I am often in situations that force me to confront aspects of my faith, and learn how to discuss spirituality, process, and history to people with varying familiarity with the religion. Most often I'm asked to give a brief description of Quakerism and our core beliefs, and though I usually fall back on SPICES, I always leave the conversation uncomfortable. Over the years I have become acutely aware of the prevailing image of Quakers by most people– that is, the Quaker Oats logo, and maybe as abolitionists– as well as how my brief descriptions may be misleading. In more recent times I am also much more aware of how my own spirituality, practice, and experience is specific to myself, and as such I have trouble generalizing.

In my sophomore year of college, the student body banded together to strike against the administration, in an effort to call awareness to and break down the institutional systems sustaining racial discrimination. One of the logos of the student strike asked if the college was "a Quaker or racist institution?" This phrase calls upon several complicated dynamics; the first being the assumption that Quaker means *not racist*. It's a false dichotomy, but it reveals that with the abolitionist tradition bening so highlighted among Quaker history, it is a dichotomy widely assumed by Quakers and non-Quakers alike. The phrase also called upon the fact that the college is supposedly no longer officially connected with the Religious Society of Friends, there are still many Quaker inspired processes implemented across campus, and supposed Quaker values guiding the heart of the college and student culture, both of which are highly advertised to potential students. I was deeply conflicted about everything the phrase implied, and especially how to address them at all. Primarily, I encountered a difficult balance between wanting to acknowledge the point of the phrase–yes, Quakers can be racist, and yes this college needs to

address these issues– but I also wanted to correct the misconceptions that the harmful systems that were being accused were purely Quaker, and that's why they were harmful. However, that was not the space to raise such concerns, as it would detract from the core of the strike efforts. This experience brought up several topics I discuss in this thesis; what does it mean for me to be a Quaker, both in non-Quaker spaces and Quaker spaces? How do I and others conceptualize Quaker spirituality and testimonies? How did theology interplay with action in the early days of the religion, what is the legacy current Quakers have to carry?

My interests in language influenced my approach to these questions, and raised more queries about the impact of the lack of a core scripture or creed, as well as Quakers preexisting attitudes towards language. Quakers' language use shifted with the changing social landscape, resulting in the inheritance of certain speech traditions that have varying levels of usefulness and harms. In chapter 2, I examine the central role self-identification and communal recognition play in the formation of Quaker group membership. I demonstrate the present day lack of importance on labels, and the subsequent emphasis on community participation and common ground of Quaker systems and spirituality. Therefore nowadays, language plays a more minimal role in group membership, especially in contrast to early Quakers. In chapter 3, I analyze the shift in Quakers's intentional uses of language from a faithfulness to the Spirit and practice and identity to a concern for effective communication and inclusivity. Quaker Plain Speech lost its relevance and efficacy, but aspects of it are still passed on to a make up modern Quaker language, mostly divided into system-based words and spirituality-based words. These function to assist in discussing uniquely Quaker practices, and provide the linguistic flexibility to match the manner of shared but personalized beliefs and spirituality. Finally, in chapter 4, I discuss the effects of hiding a history of slavery and discrimination, and the pitfalls of silence.

Most people aren't consciously aware of their language use, which makes it all the more prudent to explicitly examine issues through a linguistic lens. Early Quakers were unique for their intentional approach to speech, but that tradition has weakened into more individual cases of metalinguistic analysis. Thus, my intention for this thesis is to inspire more active and comprehensive approaches to the role of language in group membership, accessibility, and justice issues. Therefore, I argue that a more comprehensive and more language attuned approach is necessary in addressing these concerns. In a religion that centers silence and listening, speech and acting out of the silence become even more meaningful.

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