Lives that preach

The cultural dimensions of telling one's "spiritual journey" among Quakers

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While certain branches of Quakerism are well known for the silence of their worship, such branches also practice highly valued speech events. In this article, I explore one such speech event, the telling of one's "spiritual journey" by members of a Quaker meeting. From an ethnography of communication perspective, drawing on cultural communication and cultural discourse theory, I examine the cultural premises that underlie this practice of narrative telling, informing both the story told and the situated narrative performance. This analysis reveals the way in which the interactional event of telling journeys among Friends serves as a model of practicing Quakerism for others and is central to the process of community formation. In addition, I suggest that the same premises that inform the telling of "spiritual journeys" also underlie engagement in silent worship and a distinctive style for conducting Quaker administrative meetings.

Keywords: cultural communication, cultural discourse theory, ethnography of communication, identity, Quakerism, spiritual journey

> *"I tend to divide my life into- into (.) um (.) the part where I didn't know I was Quaker (.) and then the (.) the part where I did and I (1) and I always (.) habitually think well the- (1) that it was harder when I didn't understand it. (1) Um (.8) and I don't know that that's true because (.) part of becoming a Quaker is becoming aware of a- a path (1.5) a narrow path (.) and um ((clears throat)) (2) um (.) and and having to be (.) mindful of uh where I am on the path."*

A member of a Quaker meeting made the above observation at the start of recounting his "spiritual journey" to fellow Quakers following silent worship one Sunday. The use of the metaphor of a "path" to describe the unfolding of his

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"spiritual journey" highlights the distinctive nature of cultural conceptions of identity among Quakers. Much scholarly work exists on communal practices of oral narrative, both in examining the actual interactional event of narrative telling, as well as the messages contained within the narratives themselves. Building on past work, this article will examine a specific event of narrative telling, that which Quakers at a meeting that I attend call telling one's "spiritual journey." I will explore here both the cultural values that inform the sharing of these journeys and the interactional role this communicative event plays in community life. Specifically, in focusing on personal stories of conversion that are told during the journey, I will argue that this communicative practice provides a model for others of how to practice Quakerism in their lives. This work is of interest to scholars of narrative because it highlights the culturally situated nature of narrative-telling practices and stresses the interactional dynamic of processes of identity and community formation.

Given that members of the community in which this research was conducted practice a silent form of worship, the sharing of "spiritual journeys" is particularly noteworthy in that it is based in verbal communication. In analyzing the telling of "spiritual journeys," we can learn more about the meaning of Quaker silence, conceptions of the relationship between silence and speaking, and the role of listening in learning within the community. As the quote above reveals, part of being a Quaker in this community is being deeply thoughtful about one's actions, and the process of becoming a Quaker involves the emergence of this pattern of awareness over time, rather than any profession of faith or adherence to a creed. In this way, becoming a Quaker is distinctive from many other religious identities, in particular those which involve a conversion experience that represents a sharp break with past practice. Being a Quaker in this community can, thus, be conceived of as deeply intertwined with action, or following a "path."

Brief overview of Quakerism

The speech community in which this research was conducted belongs to a branch of the Religious Society of Friends, or Quakers, a religious community that began in the seventeenth century in England. Although there were many influential early Quaker ministers, George Fox is commonly considered the founder. Quakers do not have any creeds or doctrines, and emphasis is placed on the individual's own experience of the divine, or what Friends call the "Light" within each person. Quakers do, however, believe strongly in certain core testimonies, such as their Peace Testimony and Testimony of Equality, which has led in present times to their being known as pacifists and social activists. Friends were also recognized

historically for their practice of a distinctive way of speaking called "plain speech," which involves a unique use of pronouns and vocabulary (Bauman, 1983; Birch, 1995). Although "plain speech" is no longer widespread among Friends, many Quakers in the community where this research was conducted continue to draw on a distinctive vocabulary and to employ relative frequent pausing and a slow tempo of speech, as was evident in the opening quote in this article (Molina-Markham, 2011). An example of a Quaker term would be the concept of "leading" used to mean that a person has discerned a call to pursue a particular activity, for example support of a social cause. Present-day members of the Religious Society of Friends in this community also have a distinctive way of speaking during their monthly administrative meetings for business, at which the community gathers to make decisions regarding the group. The distinctive Quaker process of making decisions is similar in style to consensus, although it is called finding the "sense of the meeting" or "corporate discernment" among Friends (New England Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice Revision Committee, 2009; Wick, 1998). As I have discussed in more depth elsewhere, the way of speaking practiced in this context leads to a subtle, indirect expression of disagreement that facilitates a sense of group inclusiveness and communal responsibility for a decision (Molina-Markham, 2011).

The focus of this research is on the community of a specific "monthly meeting," which is what Friends call the local worship community, since the group meets once a month for meeting for business. This monthly meeting, which I will call Glen Meeting, identifies as "liberal" and "unprogrammed." Currently, in the United States, there are groups of "unprogrammed" Friends, who are divided into those who have a wider range of beliefs and are called "liberal" versus those called "conservative." There are also "programmed" Friends, some of whom are evangelical. While the worship ceremony of "programmed" Friends has a more formal liturgy, "unprogrammed" Friends, both "liberal" and "conservative," practice a silent form of worship. During meeting for worship, only those speak who feel that they have received a message from the "Light" that is meant to be shared with others. This message does not originate within the individual, but instead is received from the "Light" and passes through the individual to be shared with those gathered.

Community and methodology

Glen Meeting began under another name in the late 1930s. According to a recent statistical report compiled in 2009, there are approximately one hundred and fifty members of the meeting, with around sixty men and ninety women. On average, around sixty-eight participants attend weekly meeting for worship. There are approximately twelve members under the age of twenty-five, and fifty-five members,

who are sixty-five or older. There are also approximately seventy-one active "attenders," who are not members of the meeting, but frequently attend meeting.

The telling of "spiritual journeys" or parts of "spiritual journeys" happens fairly frequently at Glen Meeting, especially during the adult education hour, which follows meeting for worship on several Sundays a month. The primary data for this analysis consist of six recordings of members of Glen Meeting telling their "spiritual journeys" during the adult education hour. The instances recorded here varied in length between forty-two minutes to one hour and fifty-seven minutes. On average, they lasted around an hour. They were recorded by a member of the meeting between February of 2008 and January of 2010 and made available to the community in the meeting library. Although, I was not present during the first four tellings, I participated in the last two, and I transcribed all of the recordings in full. In the transcript excerpts included below, I have kept the line numbering from each original transcript in order to give a sense of when the excerpt occurred in the telling; as a consequence, the line numbering is not chronological between excerpts. I have been an attender of Glen Meeting for approximately two years. My analysis is thus also informed by regular participation in weekly meetings for worship and monthly meetings for business during this time, as well as recorded interviews with thirteen members of the meeting.

My data analysis is divided into several parts. In the first part, I adopt an ethnography of communication perspective, drawing on elements of Hymes' (1972) model to provide an overview of the telling of "spiritual journeys" as a particular kind of speech event. I then look in more detail at the form and content of these journeys by analyzing specific personal stories about conversion to Quakerism. In the tradition of cultural communication (Philipsen, 1987, 1992, 2002) and cultural discourse theory (Carbaugh, 1988, 2007; Scollo, 2011), I formulate cultural premises that were assumed in the personal stories told and that were modeled in the telling of the "spiritual journeys." Formulating cultural premises based on instances of communicative phenomena makes explicit taken-for-granted knowledge, allowing the researcher to place the beliefs and values of a speech community in the realm of "discursive scrutability" (Carbaugh, 2007, p. 178). In my analysis here, I will formulate cultural premises active during the telling of "spiritual journeys" at Glen Meeting in order to explore how in these recountings Friends show others how to be a Quaker.

In this analysis, I draw on narrative research in order to deepen my understanding of the discursive practice engaged in. As Riessman and Quinney (2005) note, there is a wide range of definitions of the concept of narrative in different disciplines; this term can be used to refer to "an entire life story, woven from threads of interviews, observations, and documents" or "to a discrete unit of discourse: an answer to a single question, topically-centered and temporally-organized"

(p. 394). Recent work in narrative research has focused on various ways of analyzing narrative in terms of thematic, structural, and dialogic/performance analyses (Riessman, 2008) and on divisions between perspectives that focus on "big stories," or more traditional autobiographical narratives told in response to interview questions, versus "small stories," or narrative practices in interaction (Bamberg, 2004, 2011; Georgakopoulou, 2006, 2007; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008). While "spiritual journeys" can be understood as similar in form to larger autobiographical narratives, my main focus here is on the actual discursive practice of narrative telling in a particular context and how this constructs community — in other words, the communal or cultural function of communication as a process of "membering" (Philipsen, 1989; Carey, 1989; Carbaugh, 1996, 2001, 2005; Hastings, 2001; Witteborn & Sprain, 2009). I am, therefore, emphasizing the interactional constructive nature of narrative discourse, similar to the approach in "small story" research (Juzwik & Ives, 2010; Tovares, 2010). A focus on narrative in this way fits well with an understanding of cultural communication as "socially situated meaning-making" that "occurs in particular forms and yields multiple outcomes" (Carbaugh, 1990), stemming in part from Kenneth Burke's understanding of form as sequential, or "a dynamic progression" (Heath, 1979, p. 392; Burke 1931/1968).

As mentioned, my analysis is concerned with cultural assumptions of value active in the community, *both* in how these guide the unfolding of the narrative and the performance event of telling — or the narrated event and the narrative event (Hymes, 1975; Bauman, 1977, 1986; Carbaugh, 2001). Basso (1996), in his work on the meanings of stories and place names among the Western Apache in Arizona, provides a particularly insightful analysis of the cultural assumptions underlying narrative and how these inform interaction in the communication event of telling. Basso explains that a native understanding of narrative telling "holds that oral narratives have the power to establish enduring bonds between individuals and features of the natural landscape, and that as a direct consequence of such bonds, persons who have acted improperly will be moved to reflect critically on their misconduct" (p. 40). Thus, the effect of referring to a story about a particular place in a particular interaction is to lead another person to reflect on that story and to change his or her behavior. Harding (1992) also explores the cultural dimensions of narration in her analysis of a narrative-telling event in which a Baptist minister recounts for her how he accidentally killed his son. This recounting leaves an "unborn-again listener" with many unanswered questions — in his telling, the minister stresses his relationship with God and does not emphasize how his son died or his feelings at the event, as might be expected by certain listeners. The assumption that the occurrence of the death or the feelings of the killer would be the most tellable elements stems perhaps from a "popular" American way of communicating in which the "sharing" of feelings is considered central (Carbaugh,

1988). These assumptions, however, are not shared by the minister or his intended audience, and, in the particular interaction in which the minister shares this story, he does so, argues Harding (1992), as part of a process of seeking to convert her. Both Basso (1996) and Harding (1992) thus emphasize the interactional dynamic of telling a narrative in a particular cultural setting. Similarly, my drawing on the concept of narrative is as a culturally informed communicative practice of narration that serves as a means through which individuals are linked "into communities of shared identity" (Philipsen, 1989).

The narrative-telling event: Setting, participants, act sequence

The practice of sharing one's past religious and/or spiritual experiences was a common occurrence in the meeting community, and the telling of a "spiritual journey" appears to represent a more formalized version of this sharing. Participants were invited to share part or all of their "spiritual journeys" at various gatherings, in particular when new members or attenders were meeting each other for the first time. Those who told their journeys during the adult education hour, as in the examples analyzed here, were specifically asked to share by the committee in charge of organizing the session. Approximately two or three journeys are shared in this way each year. Although not everyone who attends meeting for worship is also present at the telling of the "spiritual journeys," the room is frequently very full for these tellings, containing perhaps forty or fifty people. At the beginning of my transcripts of these events, the members telling their journeys often comment about the crowd. The telling of "spiritual journeys" is held in a back room of the meetinghouse, and, for this event, chairs are arranged in concentric half-circles, with the person telling his or her journey sitting somewhere in the innermost half circle. The audio recorder is set up in the space in the middle of the half-circles.

In these examples, two of the people who told their journeys were women, and four were men. They ranged in age between fifty and eighty. According to their "spiritual journeys," five of the six have been attending Glen Meeting for at least sixteen years, often more. One had only been attending for approximately six years, but had attended another monthly meeting prior to this one. At least three of the six had attended meeting for worship at another monthly meeting in the past. All are listed in the October 2008 Meeting Directory, two as members, one as a member of another meeting, and three as attenders.

The event of telling a "spiritual journey" in this context is part of a larger act sequence that often consists of (1) an introduction, (2) a telling, (3) a question and answer period, and (4) a concluding moment of silence. The initial introduction is made by a member of the committee in charge of the adult education hour. The

member or attender of the meeting then begins to tell his or her "spiritual journey." This telling in these six cases lasted between twenty-one minutes and an hour and fifty-one minutes. Following the telling, the audience was invited by the teller, in four of the six cases, to ask questions. This questioning period lasted between five and thirty-six minutes. Friends will also sometimes interrupt the person speaking to ask for clarification while the "spiritual journey" is being told. The event is relatively informal if compared with events in other religious communities, such as a sermon given by a priest or minister, and it is also somewhat less structured than other meeting events, such as meeting for business. There are often jokes told and laughter during the gathering. The ending of the event consists of a short period of silence and applause.

Personal stories in "spiritual journeys"

After transcribing the six instances that I had collected of members taking part in this event, I attempted to identify and summarize in outline form key parts of each journey that was shared. I noticed in looking at the outlines that I made of the "spiritual journeys" that the longer journeys could be conceptualized as composed of numerous shorter episodes or stories. In order to provide a more fine-grained analysis, I have selected some examples of the telling of these shorter personal stories to present here. I am using the term "personal story" to differentiate the smaller narrative episodes within the longer sharings. Many of these stories, although they contained at least one temporal juncture and some of Labov's (1972) commonly identified components, were somewhat non-canonical in that they were heavily embedded in surrounding talk or another story (Ochs & Capps, 2001). Thus, a personal story, as conceptualized here, includes at least one temporal juncture but typically more, and many of these together form the larger narrative or journey.

One type of personal story that I identified as occurring in all six of the "spiritual journeys" was the personal story of when a teller first started attending Quaker meeting or this particular meeting. I also noticed that in the second and third recorded journeys, when the teller did not immediately share this type of a personal story, she or he was asked about it by an audience member during the question period, indicating that it was an expected element of the sharing of a "spiritual journey." My decision here to focus on the recounting of stories of conversion as significant in this community is also supported by Linde's (1993) observation that the story of a religious or ideological conversion is one type of story that frequently has "extended reportability" (p. 22). Common associations with the concept of a "conversion narrative" in an American context are the historical practices of the Puritans in New England; however, as Hobson (1999) points out, "the kind of

autobiographical writing that could be labeled 'conversion narrative' goes back far earlier than the Puritans, at least as far back as the Confessions of St. Augustine, and even further" (p. 2). Conversion narratives have been analyzed rhetorically in terms of their unique form, in that the narrator may face the problem of explaining the significant changes and seemingly uncharacteristic behaviors that may follow a conversion experience (Fisher, 1984; Griffin, 1990). Scholars have examined narrative practices that involve major life changes from a performance perspective as ways of making sense of these events and constructing a coherent identity over time; this could also be the case when dealing with traumatic events, such as an illness, for example (Langellier, 2001; Riessman, 2003).

A focus on conversion narratives facilitates cultural discourse analysis of the tellings of "spiritual journeys" because it is in telling a conversion story that those who share their journeys give evidence of the reasons informing their actions. Through a teller's explanation that as a consequence of one experience, another action took place, he or she outlines — often implicitly — certain key assumptions of the nature of linkages between events. The concept of causality can be drawn on to explain the if-then logic that is evident in or presumed for this discursive practice. Labov (1997) also discusses an element of causality in narratives, proposing the theorem that in structuring a narrative an individual draws on a theory of cause and effect. It should be noted, however, that the focus in my analysis is on shared cultural assumptions of value that support the causality of a narrative, in other words cultural premises, as they are called in cultural discourse theory (Carbaugh, 2007), rather than on a personal or structural theory of causality. In this way, the important change highlighted in the discourse of a story of conversion provides communicative data through which to make explicit communal premises.

I will now provide examples of the telling of this type of a personal story, which will form the basis for the formulation of cultural premises active in the speech community. The distinctive Quaker style in this community of speaking slowly and pausing frequently is evident in the transcripts of these stories below. In the personal stories told, two Friends described coming to the meeting because they had come to the area looking for work or they were in the process of deciding what to do next in their lives. One of these noted that while he was initially hesitant, he ultimately decided to join the meeting because of the war. He explains:

787 I'm stuck in (.) [town] (.) without (.) a uh (1.2) probably the first eight years I- six or
788 eight years I lived here I had to (.5) commute to [city] (.) to find work or [state] (1.5)
789 and uh it was a <u>struggle</u>. (.8) Uh (.5) and I (.) visited Glen Meeting (.5) a couple of
790 times .hh (.8) and I (.4) and I remember looking at you guys and thinking (1.7)
791 they're too comfortable. ((laughter)) (3) No (.) no (.) I'm not going to do this.
792 ((laughter)) (2.7) um (1.2) and then the war- the war forced me here.

Another Friend, who first came to the meeting for a memorial service for the husband and child of her friend, described being impressed with the practices of Friends. She recounts:

137 it was just an incredible service (.) and the place was mobbed. (.5) I thought (.) hmm
138 (.) this is pretty good I like this (.) you know. I think I'll come back. ((laughter))
139 (1.2) And so over thirty years ago you know (.) over the years (.) I've come and I've
140 gone and I've (.) but there was always (.) Glen Meeting.

Another teller also connects joining Friends to a response to war and to seeking a community that supported her beliefs. She relates:

105 . . I opposed the Second World War (1.5) when I was I guess about thirteen when the
106 war (1.5) was going on. (.) My parents were opposed to the war (.5) and that brought
107 me together with my parents cause we went to (.) peace meetings and (.)
108 demonstrations and all that sort of thing (.8) um (2.5) but I started going to meeting
109 (1) um (1) I really felt the need of support from a (.) adult group. (1.5) And um (.)
110 the [Pine Meeting] was within walking distance of my home. (1) So that's where I
111 started with- (.7) that's how I (.5) got to (1.5) connected to the Quakers. (1) And um
112 (3) it's been a very important part of my life.

In this way, we see both social issues and an appreciation for the worship practices of Friends leading tellers to begin attending. There is also a desire to be connected to a community. All of these ideas are present in the account of the following teller who connects his coming to Glen Meeting to the birth of his first child.

293 … we decided to have our first child (1.2) and that was a very significant decision
294 because (1.5) [name] came and things do change. (1) And that brought the issue
295 back to me about having a spiritual (real) community because I needed to (.5) raise a
296 child (.) not the way that I was raised. In terms of (1) I was (about) to give her
297 choices (.6) you know. (.8) Then I (.4) with [wife] we (.) we started doing some kind
298 of (1.5) shopping around in terms of spiritual (guidance). (2) And um (1.5) I went to
299 (1) different locations. (1.6) And I came here one day. (2) I like what I saw though
300 (.) I liked the silence. (1) And (.) I continued to come and then I- I began to learn
301 about (1.5) simplicity and social justice …

Also evident in this personal story is the wish to learn a new way of doing things and break with past practices, in particular the spiritual practices of his parents. The role of a child is also central in the next account:

173 . . Let me just go back (1.1) to me joining Glen Meeting. (.6) Um which happened
174 I started coming to Glen Meeting uh- (.5) I said- mentioned that we got married we
175 also had a daughter (.6) um (1) and our ((laughter)) daughter (.5) uh (1) when we
176 moved to this area (1) had a friend who was Quaker (.6) who um (1.5) went to (.5)
177 [name] camp (.) so our- we sent our daughter to [name] camp along with her friend.

178 (1.5) And (.8) at (.8) when she came back (.5) um (.) from one of these sessions at
179 [name] camp (.) she said (.) you know I'd really like to go to meeting. (.5) But I
180 don't want to go by myself. (1) I said well I know a little bit about Quakers I went
181 to this school (1) um (.5) but I even when I was at [school name] (.) working at
182 [school name] (.) I had never gone to meeting (.8) uh (.) although I knew a lot of
183 Friends there. (1) Um (2) so I said (.5) I'll go with you (1.5) and so I (.) went with
184 [name] to meeting here (.) uh starting in (.) eighty-s- (.) five or eighty-six (.) I can't
185 remember exactly when it was (1) and I've been coming ever since.

We see again that knowing someone who is a member of the community also influences others to join, as in the case of the memorial service above. In summary, then, factors such as holding strong beliefs about social issues, an appreciation for Friends' worship practices, a desire to belong to a supportive community — that is perhaps different from the community within which one was raised — and knowing someone who is Quaker are some of the reasons for conversion, or as Friends call it, "convincement," identified in the personal stories told during the sharing of "spiritual journeys." While these likely do not exhaust all of the reasons that one might choose to become a Quaker, there does seem to be some repetition of these ideas in the stories transcribed above. There is also doubtless overlap with some of the reasons that people decide to convert to other spiritual communities, but these reasons in this context can be shown to come together in a unique way, highlighting a particular cultural logic, as I will now discuss.

Cultural premises of communication

As Carbaugh (2007) explains, following a thorough descriptive account of a communicative phenomenon, the researcher can then engage an interpretive mode of cultural discourse analysis, asking, "What needs to be presumed, or understood, in order for this kind of communication practice to be intelligible here?" (p. 172). I have copied below some of the reasons that played a role in "convincement," and, following each reason, I have formulated possible cultural premises that seem to be assumed in this context for that reason to make sense.

1. An appreciation for Friends' worship practices
   - *Communication with God or the spirit can occur in silence.*
   - *God or the spirit continues to reveal "truth" to those who listen together.*
2. A desire to belong to a spiritual community that is different from the one that the teller was raised in or belonged to before
   - *If one did not feel satisfied with one's past religious experience, it is valued to find a new spiritual community.*

3. Strong beliefs about social issues, such as war
   – *It is valued to have strong opinions that might differ from those around us.*

The underlying assumptions active in this context can be shown to differ from those held in other cultural contexts. As already discussed, a distinctive characteristic of "unprogrammed" Quaker worship is that it is conducted in group silence, and, in their personal stories, tellers connect their joining of Friends to an appreciation for this style of worship. Various religious communities have very different understandings of how a divine being communicates and how one can communicate with it (Keane, 1997). Given the emphasis placed on speaking versus silence in certain cultures, the statement formulated above that communication with God or the spirit can occur in the silence would not seem to hold in some communities. In his work with the Bible Temple community, Bland (1990) found that "chanting, singing, speaking in tongues, or speaking in English" (p. 8) were all ways of communicating with the divine. However, he notes that, while an outsider might initially think that due to the "informality" of the group, members must be "receptive and open to all forms of prayer and worship," in fact, "upon closer observation, there are forms and elements that are definitely excluded," such as "liturgy and silence" (Bland, 1990, p. 9). Also in contrast with the premises formulated above, other religious traditions that emphasize meditation and solitude would appear to presuppose a belief that togetherness is *not* a prerequisite or even facilitative of communication with God or the spirit. While the belief that God or the spirit is "still speaking" is important to the communicative practices of this Quaker community — without this assumption listening for him/it to speak would not make sense — other faith communities hold differing beliefs about the extent to which a divine being continues to communicate. These groups vary as to how much weight they believe should be placed on continuing revelation versus scripture. Thus, the valuing of *silent group listening* as a means of communicating with a divine presence is not everywhere shared, and the assumption of this practice as leading to "convincement" appears unique in this context.

Additionally, it seems that the notion that if dissatisfied, one ought to change one's spiritual community later in life is not shared by all religions. That this change could be problematic is expressed by the teller of the third journey that I recorded, who was born in another country. In his journey, he briefly discusses how it is painful for him that his family still living in that country does not understand his religious conversion. It may be that for them religion, culture, and identity are differently connected in a way that perhaps does not recognize a later change as legitimate. Historically, change was less accepted among Quakers, and Friends who married non-Quakers were "written out" of the meeting, or disowned. There are also other religious groups which understand a religious identity

as more closely connected to an ethnic identity. In a study on Jewish ethnic identity, Altman, Inman, Fine, Ritter, and Howard (2010) examined what a group of American young adults who identify as Conservative Jews define as the "essential components of their Jewish identity" (p. 163). Participants were selected based on self-identifying as a Conservative Jew on a demographic form and having "at least one Jewish parent" (Altman et al., p. 164). The connection made to an ethnic identity as relevant to a Jewish identity suggests that the possibility for and process of conversion would most likely be understood differently among this group. The notion of a freedom to change would seem to assume that a person has agency to choose what he or she wants to do in his or her life. This idea of free will is contested by some religious beliefs and practices. For example, as Graves (2009) explains in his discussion of the presuppositions of early Quaker preachers, early Quakers did not agree with the assertions of extreme Calvinism at the time, which "saw some humans as elected by God to salvation and others to damnation" (p. 62). In this way, the assumption of a freedom to choose one's own way is not presupposed by all groups.

Building on the tension in the premises formulated above between communal and individual forces, we can also question the statement that expressing strong opinions that differ from those of a surrounding group is good; the sharing of these types of ideas would seem in some cultures to be presumed to be dangerous and inadvisable. Griefat and Katriel's (1989) analysis of the term *musayara* as used in discourse among Arabs in Israel provides an example of a way of communicating that places value on maintaining harmony in social relations and contrasts with an Israeli Sabra *dugri* style of "straight talk." What is particularly distinctive in a Quaker context is the balancing within the meeting community of the holding of strong opinions about social issues, while at the same time respecting and being open to the "Light" in all others. This seeming contradiction emphasizes the inevitable tensions within any cultural logic of communication, which get played out differently in different community contexts. As Carbaugh (1990) notes, cultural communication is a "dialectically elastic process," in which tensions operate in various ways and to varying degrees in culturally situated practices, thus "motivating, affirming, and transforming cultural identities" (p. 6–7).

Thus, we see that the underlying cultural premises outlined above enable the links between events, or the causality, of the conversion stories told by Friends to make sense. This notion of causality in this case is represented through certain assumptions about the nature of personhood, community, and communication. In this context, spiritual experiences are assumed to come through silent, communal listening, not necessarily in the control of the listeners, who cannot make the spirit speak at a given time or place, but can facilitate the process in choosing to actively listen. There is also an assumption of agency in the ability to choose to change

one's religious community if dissatisfied and to advocate for causes that may not be in accord with wider society. The understanding of how events are connected in stories of conversion thus relies on beliefs regarding how people can act and communicate, in other words, their choices and what these may or may not accomplish. I will now explore how these premises also underlie the performance of telling one's "spiritual journey."

The interactional event of telling "spiritual journeys": An enactment of the communal function of communication

I would like to present a short excerpt from the transcript of the first telling that I recorded in order to consider the interactional process of the event. As mentioned previously, audience members would laugh and ask questions while journeys were being told, but most of the time their primary action was listening until the end of the event, when they were often invited to ask questions by the teller. During the question period of this particular "spiritual journey," which began around thirty-two minutes into the event when the teller invited the audience to "ask [him] what's on their mind," an audience member responded by recalling how the teller had been a war tax resister approximately twenty-five years ago and then subsequently, after a period of time, had "laid down this concern." She notes that his telling her about this experience on a previous occasion had been "very helpful," and she wonders if he could "elucidate a little bit more about that period." The teller responds by talking about what it means to have a "leading." He states that "when I was a war tax resister the whole question of being led or not being led started to be clarified in my mind," noting that when he was "feeling led" the issues that he faced as a war tax resister "were of small consequence." He describes his experience counseling others who were also resisters, but who were "committed to protest, but no longer feeling led" and how he advised them to "move on" when the protest got "heavy and burdensome" and they were feeling "anger, frustration, worry, and disruption in [their] life." He elaborates on the difference between following a "leading" versus being "directed toward an action from ego," explaining that when following a "leading" one feels "guided and sustained." Following his response, there is a pause of about ten seconds and then another audience member observes:

213 It's striking (.) as you're talking about this I'm thinking about the (.) the couple of
214 years that [wife's name] and I (.) uh withheld our taxes (.) and (1.6) that was (.)
215 before I was much involved here (.5) and (.) it was very clearly a protest (.) a- um (.)
216 of (.) specific things that were going on. (5.4) And I don't know that it particularly
217 felt disruptive because the (.) IRS just took the money out of our bank accounts but
218 (3.5) it felt very different from what you're describing as (.4) a leading (2) and how

219 (2.2) it was much more what you're describing of (1.6) a protest. (5.5) And
220 particularly for [wife] it left her feeling like (1.5) this is a- a waste of time (1.5) and
221 a waste of (.) of energy.

In response to this account, the teller observes that he has found that what this participant describes is a common experience, and for approximately five minutes more, he continues to talk about the importance of the meeting community in helping a person to discern if they are being led to do something.

In this instance, we see an example of a relatively abstract Quaker concept, the idea of a "leading," being depicted as different from a "protest," and demonstrated through the telling of a part of a member's "spiritual journey." This lived experience of having a "leading" and counseling others who no longer have a "leading" is oriented to as significant by both the first audience member, who asks the teller to share about his experience again, and the second audience member, who then shares from his own experience of being a tax resister, which he frames as a "protest" rather than a "leading." In asking for this experience to be shared again, the first audience member describes it as having been "very helpful" to her, pointing to the meaningfulness for listeners in this context of the stories they hear. The telling of the story can be viewed as in part a joint accomplishment, in that it is this audience member who calls for this particular story at this time. The second audience member gives a direct example of how this telling is "striking" for him in understanding a personal experience that he had before he was really involved in Glen Meeting — an experience, which he now understands differently as a member of the meeting community.

I would like to suggest that these two audience members are representative of the listening dynamic during this speech event, although this orientation is not often made verbally explicit, since spoken feedback from the audience is limited. In setting aside time for these forms of tellings, the meeting community is stressing the "helpfulness" of listening to these stories and creating a space and context for them. The reportability of the stories can be attributed in part to this idea of their utility to participants in the community. The comparison highlighted in this story between a "protest" and a "leading" accomplishes the clarification of a Quaker concept and provides an example for listening Friends of how this particular Friend lived this concept, which they can then apply in their own attempts to live the Quaker testimonies. In this way, the meaningfulness of the event of telling a "spiritual journey" is jointly accomplished by the teller and listeners, as the listeners engage with the stories they hear and apply them to their own experiences, in order to interpret those experiences from the perspective of Glen Meeting. Thus, participants learn how to be a Quaker and the community is drawn together in a shared accomplishment.

According to Punshon (1984), "the Quaker approach to ministry is most clearly illustrated in the many Journals, or spiritual autobiographies that the great ministers left behind. So numerous are these works that we might almost call them a distinctive Quaker art-form" (p. 139). It is interesting from an interactional perspective that, historically, Friends have written these journals specifically to be read by others; Taber observes that "journals to be published may be unusual in the community at large, but have been the rule among Quakers, becoming the most characteristically Quaker form of writing" (as cited in Cope-Robinson, 1995, p. 170–171). Comfort (1941) observes that since the focus in Quakerism is "inward," it is difficult to "picture it," but he notes that "In the self-revealing journals and travels and in the field of biography, however, Quaker literature is very rich. It is there that the world must seek for a true portrayal of Quakerism" (p. 74). I would like to suggest that the writing of a journal to be shared with others is similar in practice to the sharing of a "spiritual journey" in the community of Glen Meeting. It seems that this sharing of journeys stems from assumptions similar to those informing the historical practice of writing about one's experiences in a journal intended to be shared with others, in that both represent the view of ministry sometimes espoused that Quakerism should be "caught and not taught."

Furthermore, the event of actually telling one's journey to an audience has the potential to draw a community together more so than the writing of a journal, in that it brings a group together to *listen*, which is emphasized among Quakers of Glen Meeting as the primary means by which one can learn and receive messages from the "Light," as noted in the discussion of cultural premises above. Communication with the divine in Quaker silent worship is based in what could be described as a listener-centered model, and, in this context, emphasis is placed on the role of the listener or interpreter in understanding a message as intended for him or her and acting upon that understanding; the speaker's burden of explanation or elaboration is de-emphasized. Friends, thus, practice listening both in the silence of meeting for worship and when taking part in the sharing of a "spiritual journey," and, in both contexts, this practice is conceived of as a communal event of the group coming together to receive messages. In this way, tellers model central principles of Quaker practice and provide guidance for the following of a "narrow path."

While the emphasis in this section is on the interactional dynamic, it seems worth noting that there is also evidence in the text of this excerpt of the cultural premises outlined above. In particular, the premise concerning the valuing of listening for God or the spirit's continuing revelation — in this case in the form of a "leading" — and the premise of valuing social beliefs, such as war tax resistance, that may differ from the beliefs of the wider society. There is also recognition of a change in spiritual community, although this is not as emphasized, in the second

audience member's observation that when he and his wife were war tax resisters, they were not yet very involved in Glen Meeting. However, increased involvement with the meeting community has seemed to help the audience member's understanding of the dissatisfaction associated with the experience of being a tax resister, since it can now be viewed as *not* a "leading." Thus, a more satisfactory interpretation is connected to a change in spiritual community.

Connections to other speech events

Expanding upon the suggested connection between interactional listening during the sharing of "spiritual journeys" and during meeting for worship, it is also significant to consider another central meeting event, that of the monthly meeting for business. In this case, links can be made between the telling of narratives as a means of sharing one's spiritual experience to the indirect manner of expressing disagreement practiced by Friends in their decision-making process, mentioned above. In the meeting for business, Friends are discouraged from addressing each other directly — instead they face and speak to the clerk, who is facilitating the meeting — and they are encouraged to use phrases such as "That Friend speaks my mind," rather than "I agree" when in agreement with another's idea. If in disagreement with another during meeting for business, a Friend will often suggest an alternative, rather than directly voice his or her disagreement. As Tracy (2002) notes, in discussing direct and indirect conversational styles, narrative telling can be an element of an indirect style. She explains that recounting a narrative "leaves it up to the listener to figure out the exact point for telling the story" (Tracy, 2002, p. 142). Along a similar line, Linde (2001) writes that stories allow "tacit social knowledge to be demonstrated and learned, without the need to propositionalize ethics" (p. 163). Thus, using narrative telling as a way of getting an idea across can be understood as an element of a wider Quaker style of speaking that indirectly points to meaningful issues or considerations.

Taking this a step further, if we consider the telling of a narrative in terms of indirectly expressed ethical messages, it seems plausible to suggest that there is a connection between this practice and the saying of group prayers in other spiritual communities, as an expression and enactment of communal expectations of right and wrong. The formulation of cultural premises of value in the examination of conversion narratives above suggests certain moral assumptions about communicative and social activity. In his examination of intercultural communication in Teamsterville, Philipsen (1992) describes "one kind of difficulty in intercultural understanding" as "the opposition of complex moral codes" (p. 57). Ochs and Capps (2001) compare personal narrative to prayer in that "personal narrative

provides a secular, interactive means of building a moral philosophy of how one ought to live" (p. 46). Greenhouse (1986) describes one of the four forms of prayer in the community of Southern Baptists with whom she works as narrative. She writes, "Narratives are highly laden with social information in the same way that public prayer is… Prayer narratives are very much a part of ordinary conversation among friends" (Greenhouse, 1986, p. 90). Drawing on this comparison, Friends, rather than together reciting a creed, could be understood to engage with moral questions through sharing stories about the following of a "narrow path." However, it is important to note that understanding events of narrative telling as expressions of morality — or as a type of prayer — in this community does not necessarily tie events to *one* specific communally accepted interpretation of these stories. Instead, in accord with Friends' avoidance of doctrines, conceptualizing of narrative telling as following a moral logic leaves the interpretation of prayer up to the listener. As Ochs and Capps (2001) observe, "For some, the search for moral meaning involves matching personal experience to traditional ethical canons. For others, narrative activity depicts moral dilemmas whose contours are obscure and whose solutions are not readily at hand" (p. 226). In this way, participation in this event during the adult education hour reinforces the value and importance of group listening that is learned and practiced during silent meeting for worship and can be understood as another element of an indirect way of speaking also practiced in other meeting contexts.

Conclusion: Lives that preach

In his analysis of narrative practices among the Blackfeet in Montana, Carbaugh (2001) considers narrative tellings as part of a cultural discourse and writes that each telling is "a situated performance related to ongoing cultural events and conversations, each rendered meaningful through culturally salient terms, motifs, and motives" (p. 122). In this way, the cultural premises underlying the logic of a narrative shape and are shaped by the interactional performance of telling narratives within a specific cultural context. The examination here of the way in which telling and listening are practiced and of how learning is accomplished in the specific context of a Quaker meeting provides an example of how narrative events function in shaping community. This study has implications for narrative analysis because it reveals aspects of the culturally situated nature of narratives, which take on different forms and functions in different contexts. It also highlights the interactional dynamic of narrative telling through a focus on the role of listeners in this particular community. Recent work on narrative emphasizes the process of the co-construction of narratives, decentralizing an individual teller or an over-arching

story-line and stressing the importance of interaction in constructing identities and communities. As Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008) write, "However well established the line of identities-in-interaction may be in the context of the analysis of conversational data, this emphasis is still in contrast to the long-standing privileging of coherence by narrative approaches" (p. 393). In the context of Glen Meeting, cultural premises regarding the importance of listening, reframe the narrative event so that the focus of narrative telling is as much on the potential uptake or actions of the audience as the recounted actions of the teller. In this way, "spiritual journeys," like silent worship and group decision making, are conceived of as accomplished together in a co-created event of listening.

In conclusion, this analysis of the communicative event of telling one's "spiritual journey" has focused on the personal stories of "convincement" within journeys in terms of how reasons for "convincement" reveal certain cultural assumptions about the communal nature of spiritual experience and how one can and should learn about Quakerism. The premises assumed in the personal stories of "convincement" inform the interactional event of the telling of the larger journey, allowing it to serve as a model of acting for listeners. When meeting members and attenders tell the story of how they became Quaker, they model for others a life guided by Quaker testimonies, responding to Fox's instruction to "let your lives preach" (as cited in Barbour & Roberts, 1973, p. 436). The communicative event of telling one's "spiritual journey" is, thus, comparable to group prayer: there is a moral stance taken in the telling that draws the listening group together and teaches those in the community how to live.

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