

# STIGMA REVISITED

IMPLICATIONS OF THE MARK

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edited by

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## Chapter Two

# Theorizing Stigma and the Politics of Resistance

### *Symbolic and Structural Stigma in Everyday Life*

Stacey Hannem

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The goal of this book is to examine the social phenomenon of stigma as a substantive, everyday experience, and to contextualize the lived realities of stigmatized and marginalized persons theoretically. We need to appreciate that stigma is both symbolically realized in individual interactions and structurally embedded in the cultural values, practices, and institutions of society. To realize this objective we need a new theoretical perspective. While the work of Erving Goffman (1963a) has justifiably been the authority on stigma for several generations of academics, his focus on understanding stigma as a function of interaction at the individual level is not conducive to exploring the institutional and societal regulation of “discredited” individuals. Building on the work of others, such as Brian Castellani (1999) and Ian Hacking (2004),<sup>1</sup> I would suggest that Michel Foucault’s broader perspective on the production of truth, knowledge, and power provides a useful conceptual point of entry for thinking about the construction of stigma and its effects on individuals and groups. At the same time, however, Foucault’s work is itself lacking in its consideration of the individual subject and agency. As Castellani (1999) states,

While [Foucault] wonderfully illustrated over and over again how practice, as an interaction, structures the rules of formation involved in the construction of subjectivity and “truth,” [he] refused to acknowledge the important role interacting

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1 While Castellani (1999) and Hacking’s (2004) work is most notably developed, others have also proposed using Foucauldian theory in combination with interactionist thought; see for example Cahill 1998, Bruckert 2000.

individuals have on this process, and was therefore unable to fully appreciate the importance of agency. (260)

In 2004, Ian Hacking identified the work of Foucault (1961) and Goffman (1961) as presenting complementary accounts of “making up people” and explored how the two theorists could contribute to his own efforts at understanding how “the actual and possible lives of individuals are constituted” (288). In his brilliant article, Hacking demonstrates how both Foucault and Goffman may be seen as grounded in the existentialist thought of Jean Paul Sartre. He argues that in his quest to comprehend how classifications of people interact with the people so classified he has come to realize that labels, like institutions, artefacts, and interaction, may both limit individuals’ possible understandings of themselves and constitute possibility. As Sartre (1959) emphasized, the boundaries of one’s knowledge and experience present limitations to how one might understand one’s self and on the consequent choices that one may make. Hacking (2004) goes on to explain that “the choices that are open to use are made possible by the intersection of the immediate social settings, target of the sociologist, [Goffman] and the history of that present, target of the archaeologist [Foucault]” (288). Hacking uses Goffman’s book, *Asylums* (1961), and Foucault’s *Folie et Déràison: Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique* (1961) (published in English as *Madness and Civilization* in 1965) to demonstrate how their studies of mental illness and the mentally ill might be used in concert to produce a more holistic understanding of how the mentally ill are “made up” as people.

Hacking insists from the outset that, as a philosopher “steeped in Foucault,” he is “not concerned with completing Goffman, but rather with filling out Foucault” (278). He states,

Foucault gave us ways in which to understand what is said, can be said, what is possible, what is meaningful—as well as how it lies apart from the unthinkable and indecipherable. He gave us no idea of how, in everyday life, one comes to incorporate those possibilities and impossibilities as part of oneself. We have to go to Goffman to begin to think about that. (300)

My goal here is the opposite of Hacking’s; as a sociologist, schooled in the traditions of the Chicago school and concerned with the everyday, lived realities of my subjects, I wish to explore what Foucault—and an understanding of the archaeology of divisive stereotypes and discriminatory institutions—might contribute to an understanding of how lived realities are constituted and shaped by the limits of social structure, and what insights that might have for a more activist political agenda. By incorporating Goffman’s work (and symbolic interactionism, more

generally) with Michel Foucault's post-structural perspective, I offer here a point of entry to articulate a more holistic picture of the phenomenon of stigma and the complex relationship between interaction, knowledge construction, and power. In short, this discussion is aimed at using Foucauldian insights to expand on Goffman's analysis of stigma. This creates a new space for sociological theory that integrates the individual experience into the larger macro-structures of power, government, and social institutions and opens up avenues for deconstructing previously taken-for-granted knowledges that are experienced as limiting and oppressive.

In this chapter, I build on Hacking by examining the complementary offerings of these two traditions and demonstrating how each can inform our understanding of stigma; first laying out the key ideas of Goffman and Foucault, respectively, and then bringing these perspectives together to explore the symbolic and structural aspects of stigma. Specifically, what is added to Hacking's analysis concerns how modern notions of risk are used by institutions to constitute structurally stigmatized populations, thereby creating and/or reinforcing symbolic, interpersonal stigma and discrimination.

### **Goffman Revisited: Situating the Structure/Agency Debate**

The work of Erving Goffman is generally presented as being based in the tradition of George Herbert Mead and is labelled as symbolic interactionist (Scheff 2005), drawing on the notion that reality is constituted through interaction and the use of symbols to define objects and roles. According to interactionists, the individual is imbued with a subjectivity and agency that allows him or her to be an active participant in the creation of social situations and in the definition of his or her identity and role in those interactions. All individuals, however, enter into an interaction with a relatively static set of characteristics that define, in whole or in part, the identity of the person and limit the identity that he or she may portray to others. Gender, age, ethnicity, sexuality, occupation, and social status are examples of some characteristics that may play a role in identity formation and in the presentation of the self to others. However, Goffman never explicitly laid out his intellectual heritage in his writing, and therefore the claims of symbolic interactionists to Goffman's work are suspect.

Randall Collins (1986; 2004) has argued that Goffman was in fact not an interactionist<sup>2</sup> but a follower of Durkheim and the British social anthropologist

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2 In fact, in his earliest writings, it would have been impossible for Goffman to identify himself as a "symbolic interactionist," as Blumer did not coin the term until the 1969 publication of his book, *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*, more than a decade after the publication of Goffman's first books and articles. However, Goffman would certainly have been aware of the work of George Herbert Mead, which forms the foundation for the perspective.



Radcliffe-Brown, particularly concerning his understanding of social ritual (or interaction ritual) as the key to maintaining the normative social order. Where Durkheim analyzed ritualized responses to sacred (religious) objects in pre-industrial societies as a means of preserving and reproducing the shared social order and beliefs (collective conscious), Goffman picks up on Durkheim's later assertion that "the individual had become the principal "sacred object" in modern secular society" (Collins 1986, 107). Collins therefore argued that "unlike Mead, Thomas and Blumer, the self in Goffman is not something that individuals negotiate out of social interactions: it is, rather, the archetypal modern myth... we are *compelled* to have an individual self not because we actually have one but because social interaction requires us to act as if we do" (Collins 1986, 107). In other words, our modern preoccupation with individuality requires that we behave *as though we were concerned with how others view our selves*, because to fail to do so would bring into question the true importance of identity and cause a breakdown in the shared social order.

Collins' analysis of Goffman's functionalist roots suggests then that Goffman's understanding of the role of self and identity was as a means of preserving the larger social order through interaction ritual and presentation of self, a position that clearly emphasizes the importance of structure as shaping possibilities for individual action. This is echoed in Hacking's (2004) links to the existentialist philosophy of Sartre, which emphasises that human choices are always made within the confines of structural limitations. This structural-functionalist position, however, does not preclude a thorough examination of the situational actions of individuals. While this may seem counterintuitive to narrow, stereotyped representations of Durkheim's functionalist theory, foregrounding structure does not prevent one from recognizing that individuals must still enact their everyday lives within the confines of those boundaries and, in some sense, construct and perpetuate that social reality—or may at least be charged with failing to challenge it.<sup>3</sup> In fact, Goffman (1983) argued in his posthumously presented presidential address to the 1982 American Sociological Association meetings that the interaction order (everyday face-to-face interactions) must be treated as useful

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3 Durkheim's own theorizing on the functional aspects of deviance suggests that individual acts of deviance are sometimes responsible for introducing change to social understandings (definitions) of deviant behaviour—altering the social order. He argued that sometimes the actions of an individual would be punished and that punishment would appear unjust to others, calling into question the definition of the law. He went on to argue that "we must not say that an action shocks the conscience collective because it is criminal, but rather that it is criminal because it shocks the conscience collective. We do not condemn it because it is a crime, but it is a crime because we condemn it" (1933, 81). In this sense, even Durkheim himself appears to have had some interactionist/constructivist leanings.

social data in its own right, and not merely as the visible effects of social structure. Even if one were to accept the functionalist supposition that face-to-face interaction ritual is enacted purely in the interests of the social order, this leads one down a slippery dialectical slope: where does social order (structure) originate? The interactionist position suggests, in fact, that social order is negotiated in interaction and cannot be assumed to have an *a priori* existence. Later adherents to Blumer's exposition of symbolic interactionism have clarified this position to emphasize the fundamental inseparability of self and structure: "Neither individual or society nor self or other are ontologically prior but exist only in relation to each other; thus one can fully understand them only through their interaction, whether actual, virtual or imagined" (Snow 2001, 369).<sup>4</sup>

While Goffman may have been theoretically concerned with issues of structure, it is embedded and is rarely substantively addressed in his writings, which, *on the surface*, paint colourful and nuanced portraits of human interaction and ritual. His book *Asylums* (1961), which examines the nature of total institutions, is the one notable exception. Perhaps Ann Branaman (1997) best described Goffman when she wrote,

Erving Goffman is the quintessential sociologist of everyday social life. The self, social interaction, social order, deviance, social inequality, calculation and morality—all are taken up in Goffman's writings. Goffman's major contribution is to portray the interdependence of these phenomena by painting them into a complex portrait (xlv).

Our project in this volume is to pick up the threads of social structure that are cleverly woven into Goffman's work and to bring them to light in the same way that he so brilliantly exposed the minutiae of everyday life; to examine laws, institutional practices and policies as the visible evidence of structure and social

4 Howard Becker's writings on labelling theory and the interactionist perspective on deviance were published in 1963, notably the same year that Goffman's *Stigma* went to press. Although Becker is an interactionist, his analyses clearly demonstrate his awareness of issues of power and structure insofar as groups in society with disparate points of view are acknowledged to have varied ability to have these concerns recognized and addressed by society as a whole. In short, those with the most power, resources, and social capital are seen as able to have their beliefs and concerns enshrined in law and social practice, while the actions and beliefs of those with less power are marginalized and defined as "deviant" or problematic. While Becker does not use the term "stigma," he does examine the experience of being an "outsider" who is labelled deviant and the implications that this label has for constraining identity and agency. Becker's analysis, however, is lacking in the detailed analysis of individual agency and interaction with "normals" in response to such labels that Goffman provides, and it does not examine personal resistance to, or negotiation of, the deviant label in any depth. His lack of attention to resistance reveals Becker's unidimensional understanding of power and suggests that a Foucauldian analysis of power has much to add to the interactionist tradition.

order just as ritual, demeanour and talk are analyzed as forms of symbol and interaction in the social world. Here we show how the importance of symbol and structure, micro and macro, social life and institution are irreversibly tied up in the phenomena of stigma in society.

### Stigma in Interaction

Erving Goffman published his seminal book, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, in 1963. In it, he identifies stigma as “an attribute that is deeply discrediting” and that reduces a person, in the minds of others, “from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one” (1963a, 3). However, stigma is more precisely defined by Goffman not as an attribute alone but as a “relationship between attribute and stereotype” (4). That is, an individual possesses a particular attribute (i.e., the quality of having a conviction for a criminal offence) defined by others, based on stereotypes, as an undesirable or negative characteristic. This attribute, then, and the perception of it, result in avoidance or discriminatory behaviour directed toward the stigmatized person.<sup>5</sup> This discriminatory behaviour is the observable evidence of stigma. Stigma is not inherent in the individual attribute but is realized in interaction with other non-stigmatized (“normal”) persons. To be present, stigma need not be realized in overtly discriminatory action, but often operates on a sub-surface level, colouring interactions and creating tension or avoidance behaviour.

Goffman (1963a) also identified that some discrediting attributes appear to have the quality of being transferrable: the stigma that accompanies it is spread from the stigmatized individual to those close to him or her (30). He referred to this type of transferred stigma as a “courtesy stigma.” For Goffman, the transferable nature of stigma is directly related to our social interpretation of the “with” relationship (47). There is an implicit assumption that the character and characteristics of an individual’s companions may be used as a source of information about the person. Those who are with discredited or stigmatized persons are then marked by association with the discredited individual and may, in turn, pass the stigma to other close connections, “twice-removed” (30). For Goffman, “the problems faced by stigmatized persons spread out in waves, but of diminishing intensity” (30).

Some characteristics carry with them a perception of discredit or stigma that can have an impact on one’s interaction with others; the marks of criminality, of “deviant” sexuality, of racial “otherness,” and of mental illness examined in

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5 See Link and Phelan (2001) for a detailed analysis of the process of stigmatization and refer to Walby (this volume) for a discussion of Link and Phelan’s model.



this book are just some examples of the types of inherent or acquired traits that may affect understanding of, or reactions to, an individual. In some cases, the stigmatic characteristic is not obvious to others—the individual, in fact, is not immediately discredited but is *discreditable*. The individual is then faced with the choice of whether to reveal this discrediting information and how and when to do so. Goffman suggests that discredibility, while enabling individuals to avoid immediate and overt discrimination, becomes particularly problematic if the discreditable individual is unwittingly accepted as “normal” by someone prejudiced against the “type of person” that he or she may be revealed to be (42). *Passing*—the concealment of discrediting information—is one means for stigmatized persons to manage their social interactions with others and to define themselves positively in the context of the interaction (Goffman 1963a). The phenomenon of passing is generally considered to be directly related to the visibility of the stigmatic attribute. For example, a physical abnormality is readily evident, and it would be very difficult for a person so afflicted to pass as “normal,” whereas a “moral” failure, such as a criminal record, is not immediately discernible and may be concealed in many circumstances.

The concept of visibility is crude, however, and Goffman cautions that we should be cognizant instead of the “evidentness” or “known-about-ness” of a stigmatic attribute. In many situations, stigma in interaction and the ability to pass are more related to the context and history of the interaction than the visibility of the attribute itself. For instance, a stigma need not be “visible” to be known about in a small town or social circle where gossip is prevalent, and the individual need not have firsthand knowledge of the stigma to “know about” it (49). There are also situational contexts in which there is an expectation or a requirement to reveal a discrediting characteristic that might otherwise remain hidden. For example, ex-convicts may be asked about a previous criminal record in the context of a job application, men who have sex with men may find themselves disclosing this information to a health professional or in the context of donating blood. Thus, even if the stigmatic attribute is not a *visible* one, it may become known about or revealed in social and professional interactions, making passing a challenge.

In other cases, situations may arise in which passing is not only possible but is the only viable option that does not presume upon the relationship a kind of forced intimacy. Particularly with a sensitive, invisible stigma,<sup>6</sup> many social situations and temporary or superficial relationships do not warrant or allow for

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6 Such as the relation to an imprisoned offender, a previous criminal conviction, infection with the AIDS virus or other STIs, etc.

disclosure of such a personal confession (Goffman 1963a, 74–75). This everyday form of passing through nondisclosure is generally unproblematic and allows surface-level interactions to occur without concern for prejudice or discriminatory behaviour. It makes sense, then, that a discreditable person is not saddled with a perpetual or static label, or subject to stigma in every interaction. Most persons who possess an invisible stigmatizing attribute also have a “normal” identity that they present in many social contexts, carefully managing the impressions that they give to others. However, the act of passing also creates a situation in which a person may be discredited if the stigmatic attribute should become known in an unforeseen or embarrassing incident (75). The potential for discredit looms large in the consciousness of the individual and may condition his or her social interactions, lest the secret be inadvertently revealed through words or mannerisms.

The presence of a stigmatic attribute can have the effect of creating a power imbalance within an interaction between the stigmatized and the “normal,” even if the “normal” in the interaction is unaware of the threat that they pose to the identity of the discreditable individual. The discreditable individual, being aware of the possibility of discredit and stigma, is placed in a position of discomfort and thus may become guarded or tense in anticipation of a negative reaction. As May (1999) suggested, an individual’s perception of stigma may also be shaped by their own sense of shame and the “suspicion of toxicity.” Because stigma is rooted in cultural understandings and definitions, individuals who carry discreditable characteristics are aware that others may react negatively to them. Indeed, being a part of the larger society, were they not themselves afflicted, they might have a similar negative perception. Therefore, discreditable persons find that the possibility of negative reactions have a profound effect on their interactions with others, colouring them with caution and constant vigilance.

In considering the potential outcome(s) of an inadvertent “outing,” it is necessary to consider the perceived focus or sphere of influence and disqualification that the particular stigmatic attribute exerts (Goffman 1963a, 49–50). In other words, what kind of discredit does the stigma create? There appear to be three types of discredit that result from stigma—social, physical, and moral discredit. Goffman initially distinguishes between three types of stigma: deformations of the physical body, “tribal stigmas” of race, nation, and religion, and weakness of character, as exemplified by mental illness or involvement in criminal activity (4). Each of these types of stigma meets with a different response and level of comfort from “normals.” A physical disfigurement, for example, may render an individual less attractive and he or she may be perceived as less capable in social situations, such as in service work, but this disfigurement would not affect perceptions of his or her morality. Other attributes, such as the stigma of a criminal conviction,

may have a broader and more general impact on perceptions of the individual's respectability, trustworthiness, and/or abilities.<sup>7</sup>

Stigma related to character and morality appears to have the greatest impact in terms of levels of discrimination and acceptance from "normals" in the larger society. Goffman (1963a) documents that physical stigmatic attributes are generally perceived as being beyond the scope of individual control and therefore elicit varying degrees of sympathy and acceptance in social contexts—not that these individuals are necessarily treated as "normals," but that they are afforded a certain deference and leniency for their deficits (114–23). A blemish of character, on the other hand, is seen as a personal failure of the will and responsibility for this failing lies squarely within the individual. A stigma attached to character, then, while perhaps easier to conceal, is potentially far more socially debilitating for those who are "outed" or who choose to disclose their discreditable attribute. The revelation of a previously hidden "character flaw," such as involvement in criminal activity, brings into question the forthrightness of the individual as well as his or her moral standing and is likely to have a negative impact on relationships with those who were previously unaware.

Goffman's focus was on uncovering the experience of stigmatization in interpersonal interaction—he documents examples of individuals' techniques and adaptive strategies for the management of a social stigma and includes a limited discussion of the impact of social stigma on the individual psyche. What is conspicuously absent (and, I would argue, lacking) in Goffman's analysis is a more profound discussion of the genesis and nature of stigma that would illuminate questions such as: Where does it come from? How and why do some attributes come to be defined as stigmatic or discrediting in certain social contexts, while perhaps not in others? Who is responsible for defining stigma and what is its relationship to power, stereotype, and discrimination? What are the roles of stereotype and stigma as organizing structures in our complex society? It is to these questions that I now turn and demonstrate how Michel Foucault's post-structural theorizing provides valuable insight into the macro-structural, cultural, and institutional aspects of this complex phenomenon.

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7 Having a parent or spouse in prison seems to bring into question the personal morality and "riskiness" of the individual. It is often assumed by educators and social workers that the children of convicted criminals are, themselves, more likely to be delinquent and involved in activities of questionable moral status. In fact, there is no concrete evidence to this effect, but the questionable moral standing of the parent is assumed to be an inherited characteristic, whether through genetics or socialization.



## Michel Foucault: Power/Knowledge and Structures of Inequality

The root of Michel Foucault's intellectual project was systematically to uncover the history of thought and the structures that shaped and constrained human understanding of our world over time—the “archaeology of knowledge.” Over the course of his career, he applied this framework to various topics of social and political concern: mental illness, sexuality, crime and punishment, and the government of populations. In considering each of these epistemologies, Foucault recognized that at any given point in history, there are substantial constraints on what and how individuals are able to *think*. Knowledge is constrained, not only by language and by terms of expression but by historical context and social structures that limit the ability to conceptualize and imagine (Gutting 2005). For Foucault, the structures that form the context for thought in a given period are, in and of themselves, a useful object of analysis and can help us to understand how social meanings and social actions evolve over time.

Foucault has been criticized for focusing on systems of thought and social contexts and in the process rendering the individual—as an active, engaged subject—invisible<sup>8</sup> (Gutting 2005, 33). Even in his examination of forms of knowledge applied at an individual level, Foucault maintains his concern with larger structural implications rather than the impact on the individual. For example, in speaking of his work on psychiatry and madness, Foucault (1994) states, “I have tried to see how the formation of psychiatry as a science, the limitation of its field and the definition of its object implicated a political structure and a moral practice...” (116). However, Foucault does not examine (as a primary source of knowledge) the personal experiences and resistances of those labelled mentally ill and thus regulated by this political structure and moral practice. Individual thought and experience is limited to the confines of what the historical and social structures of the time will allow, and was interesting to Foucault only in terms of what light it could shed on the larger structural context of the system or society in which it was created. Foucault (1977) appears to eschew phenomenological and existential conceptions of human thought and agency in favour of a positivistic conception of structure:

I would say that if now I am interested, in fact, in the way in which the subject constitutes himself in an active fashion, by the practices of self, these practices are

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8 Of course, this criticism must be understood in light of the reality that Foucault's inattention to the individual was quite deliberate, believing as he did that studying the actions of individual subjects would only obscure the wider practices and discourse that he felt were more important to an accurate understanding of power.



nevertheless not something that the individual invents by himself. They are patterns that he finds in his culture and which are proposed, suggested and imposed on him by his culture, his society and his social group. (11)

If the archaeology of knowledge is concerned with considering what structures of language and ontology impact on understanding, thought, and agency, Foucault's genealogical project worked alongside to uncover the origins of these structures and the "history of the present." Foucault argued that in order to understand and evaluate the present situation, one must unearth the past and trace discourse and policies from their origins (Gutting 2005, 50). His project was, in essence, to trace back and to render visible the implications of authoritative claims. There is a tendency to argue the functionality of current thought and policies—that is, that they evolved out of necessity to address certain deficits in our society. However, careful analysis of these policies in retrospect, and with the benefit of historical perspective, often reveals their arbitrary nature, integrally linked to the preservation of systems of power rather than to the improvement of society as a whole. Foucault's genealogy of systems of punishment and rule in *Discipline and Punish* is an excellent example of how benevolent "improvements" in a social structure (the judicial system) are directly linked to the maintenance of power and government. Foucauldian scholars demonstrate that while the neo-liberal system of "government at a distance" has the appearance of a retraction of control, in actuality it is merely a change in the form of regulation that disperses control into the structures of everyday life and the psyches of individuals, thereby enabling the state to "walk softly and carry a big stick" (Braithwaite 1995).

Equally essential to the Foucauldian project was his conception of the intimate link between power and knowledge. Structures of power are able to shape possibilities of knowledge, and those in positions of power have a certain amount of control over what is defined as "truth." In this sense, when truth or knowledge is redefined, the redefinition is not the product of thought, but of power: "When thoughts change the causes are social forces that control the behaviour of individuals... power transforms the fundamental archaeological frameworks (epistemes or discursive formations) that underlie our knowledge" (Gutting 2005, 50). In this way, power both creates and constrains knowledge within a society.

### **Linking Goffman and Foucault: Stigma in Interaction and in Structure**

Foucault's work can be greatly augmented by the grounded ethnographic and existential examination of the lived realities and agency of these social actors.

Further, an application of Foucault's genealogical framework to the concept of stigma would allow us to provide a structural analysis that Goffman does not approach—the "origin" of stigma, generally, and a historical understanding of the specific contexts in which particular attributes were defined as discrediting. In the following sections, we will examine the complementary aspects of these two traditions and explore the possibilities offered by drawing on ideas from each.

A characteristic shared by both Foucault and Goffman was the tendency to discount notions of objective truth. For Foucault, truth was necessarily relative to the structures of power that created it (Gutting 2005). That is, what is true for individuals in one space and time may not necessarily be so for individuals in a different social and historical context. In the tradition of symbolic interactionism, Goffman takes an even more relative and micro-structural approach to the concepts of knowledge and truth. For Goffman, truth is negotiated within interaction. And yet, even two individuals engaged in a social relationship need not have the same truth or experience of that interaction. While Foucault's analysis neglects the experiential aspect of truth, Goffman appears to ignore the larger implications of power differentials that exist in some interactions, while at the same time failing to address the role of power and domination in shaping one's experience and definition of a situation.

For Foucault, power is not absolute and only exists relationally—thus, where there is power there is always resistance (Foucault 1982). Somewhat surprisingly, Foucault acknowledged the potential for individuals to question knowledge and truth, and the human capacity for agency and imagination to work beyond the confines of knowledge/power, yet did not attend to resistance, the very thing for which he had created theoretical space. He placed far greater importance on institutional knowledge and looked at individual knowledge as merely reflective of larger structures rather than attending to the contested nature of truth and knowledge. A point of entry for such a reflection would be to consider the difference between "knowledge" and "truth." Individual experiences may constitute a form of truth without becoming knowledge and being integrated into the larger social structure of understanding, while power may create knowledge that is not in fact "true." A common example of this phenomenon is the stereotype. A stereotype is a collective knowledge of a particular type or group of persons that, in many cases, is not an accurate (true) reflection of particular individuals within that category. The individual experiences of marginalized persons may not be incorporated into the body of accepted knowledge, particularly if such experiences challenge existing structures of power and social policies. However, this lack of recognition does not negate the importance of individual truths for social action.

On the other hand, Goffman's near total focus on interaction in everyday life does not adequately address the aspect of power and its impact on knowledge. Although, like Blumer (1969), he acknowledges that truth is negotiated and arrived at through interaction (Goffman 1967), he fails to set out the impact of power on interaction explicitly, beyond the face-to-face experience. Goffman (1967) refers only to the "asymmetrical rule," which creates an expectation that "leads others to treat and be treated by an individual differently from the way that he treats and is treated by them" (52–53). Unlike Foucault, Goffman concerns himself only with this visible result of power differential and not with the origins of the asymmetrical rule or the knowledges attached to it. The structural origins of power become particularly relevant when one begins to consider situations not in which individuals have *gained* power or deference by virtue of merit, but in which individuals have been *disempowered* because of some stigmatic attribute. Again, we see a space where these two perspectives can inform and complement one another. This allows us not only to trace the historical genesis of stigma and marginality, but also to examine the contemporary dynamics and experiences of those who live within the confines of a stigmatized identity. In the following section, we will look at the politics of marginality and the function of stigma in the government of risky populations.

### **Stigma, Discrimination, and the Government of the Margins**

Foucault's (1978) concept of the marginal is a useful place to begin consideration of the situation of stigmatized populations. Foucault theoretically differentiates the situation of the marginalized in our society from that of the abnormal or "other." For Foucault, the marginalized are still a part of the larger society; they speak the same language and share many of the same values as mainstream society. They also often play essential social and economic roles. Yet marginalized people inhabit a liminal social space either because 1) their identity and life is significantly defined by values that are counter to the mainstream, or 2) they belong to a group whose welfare is systematically subordinated in order to further the interests of the larger, mainstream group (Gutting 2005). This description of the "marginal" speaks to the locations of many stigmatized populations, including those addressed in this volume.

The marginalized have values that can meaningfully challenge our own and needs that could be plausibly satisfied within our society ... the claims of the marginal are based on critiques of specific features of our society that can be modified without total overthrow. (Gutting 2005, 89)



The experience of individualized, symbolic stigma is a common one for many people who belong to marginalized groups. While it may be experienced as hurtful, most often individuals are able to negotiate symbolic stigma successfully.<sup>9</sup> For the most part, symbolic stigma remains primarily a psychological or emotional concern limited to the individual person; at least until such time as there is collective resistance that names the problem, generates social consciousness, and allows people to see themselves as members of a stigmatized population. The issue of symbolic stigma becomes one of sociological concern when it is symptomatic of stigma at a structural level: when stigma is systematically applied by agencies, institutions and individuals to a particular group of people or population as a whole—moving beyond stigma as a perception of an *individual* attribute, to a wider, stereotypical concept of stigma that taints an entire group and pushes them to the margins of society. Increasingly we find that these structural-level identifications of stigmatic attributes are related to the notion of risk, and interventions are justified by the rhetoric of risk-management.

Individuals whose way of being runs counter to mainstream mores and standards of behaviour are often considered to be risky or to somehow threaten the social order and thus may be subject to intervention or surveillance designed to minimize their risk to the general population. For example, the children of prisoners may be subject to interventions designed to reduce the risk of future offending,<sup>10</sup> and Afghan-Canadian men post-9/11 may be the targets of enhanced security measures at airports and border crossings. While these types of regulation, at times, may be necessary to prevent a legitimate threat, and the difficulties experienced may be necessary for the maintenance of social order and the protection of the public, the welfare of marginalized individuals is presumably sacrificed for the well-being of the majority. Although interventions and the subsequent distress they may cause individuals are not always avoidable in our society, I would argue that measures might be taken to understand and address the difficulties encountered by marginalized persons. As suggested by Foucault, a critical characteristic of marginalized populations is that they are already a part of our social order. Efforts to be more inclusive do not require an overthrow of existing structures, but merely

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9 Many studies discuss negotiations of stigma and stigma management in interactions. See for example, Bruckert 2002; Corrigan and Lundin 2001; Goffman 1963a and others.

10 Children with an incarcerated parent often exhibit acting out behaviour and difficulties in school and may find themselves involved with child welfare services, mentoring programs, and other social development programs designed to reduce the risk of future offending (see, for example, Virginia Commission on Youth 2002; Withers 2003; House of Hope 2003). While these interventions are meant to improve the child's current and future welfare, there is no doubt that there is a stigma attached to being the "problem child" in a classroom or group of children and interventions may exacerbate the acting out behaviour by causing the child to internalize a negative label.



an awareness of the problems and an adaptation of reactions to combat the effects of structural stigma.

Link and Phelan (2001) use the concept of *structural discrimination* to define a situation in which policy makers and administrators are unaware of the negative consequences that certain policies may have for a particular group of people. This lack of awareness leads to systematic discrimination and hardship for those negatively affected. *Structural stigma* is the inverse of this notion, with similar consequences. As I define it, and as it is used throughout this volume, structural stigma arises out of an *awareness* of the problematic attributes of a particular group of people and is based on an intent to manage a population that is perceived, on the basis of the stigmatic attribute, to be “risky” or morally bereft. Here the symbolic meets the structural in a way that causes an inherent disadvantage to a group of people. This stigma is *structural* because the difficulties that arise from it are not so much a product of the stigma itself, or any inherent problems that arise from the condition, but of the institutional and conceptual structures that surround it. Whether or not an individual experiences symbolic and individualized stigma in interactions, he or she is marked and may be subject to a myriad of interventions, regulations, and surveillance, not on the basis of *individual* factors, but on the recognition that he or she belongs to a statistically “risky” group. “Stigma has affected the structure around the person, leading the person to be exposed to a host of untoward circumstances” (Link and Phelan 2001, 373).

The concept of structural stigma is differentiated from discrimination and structural discrimination then by virtue of intent on the part of the intervener or “normal” in the interaction. Discrimination is the visible result of symbolic stigma and occurs without the intent to manage a particular person or population, but rather with the intent of separating that person or group from the “normal” and to impart shame or disgrace. Structural discrimination, as conceived by Link and Phelan (2001) has no aspect of intent to harm or disgrace, but results from a lack of careful forethought as to the consequences of bureaucratic policy or practice for a particular population.<sup>11</sup> Structural stigma, on the other hand, is the result of a carefully calculated decision at an institutional or bureaucratic level to manage the risk that a particular population is perceived to present, either to themselves, to

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11 For example, in the United States, the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 allows for the forced termination of parental rights after fifteen months in foster care. The average prison sentence in the United States is eighteen months, meaning that many incarcerated parents may lose their children completely while they are in custody, despite the non-voluntary nature of the situation (Travis et al. 2003; Virginia Commission on Youth 2002). Although this law was never intended to target incarcerated parents but to protect children and enable the state to find stable home environments, its unintended consequence is to unfairly disadvantage incarcerated parents who do not wish to relinquish their parental rights.

the institution, or to society. Unlike discrimination, there is no intent to *harm* the individual or the population and in fact, the stated goal of policy makers is often to help or improve the situation. However, when the need for assistance is justified by the inherently “different,” “risky” or “tainted” characteristics of the population, stigma is created in the very agencies that are supposed to be providing help.

This conception of structural stigma clearly goes beyond Goffman’s concern with individual interactions and moves toward the archaeology of stigma. Foucault’s work would suggest that there is a need to uncover the roots of the stigma in order to understand and address the problem. Drawing on Mary Douglas’ (1966) work on “pollution and taboo,” the perception of risk or danger is commonly based on cultural understandings of purity and defilement. For example, in North America, criminality (particularly predatory or violent crime and street crime) is considered one of the most taboo or immoral types of behaviour and this cultural precept has resulted in the stigma of criminality being associated with a high level of risk or danger that is subject to a myriad of reactive and proactive interventions. The “risk” to be managed may or may not be a tangible risk, calculable in an actuarial sense.<sup>12</sup> What matters is that a risk of danger or defilement is perceived and reacted to in a way calculated to reduce or eliminate the possibility of the undesired consequence. Regardless of whether the risk of criminality is “real” (actuarially calculable) or symbolic,<sup>13</sup> I would argue that defining a group of persons as a collective risk in this manner serves to increase stigma at both symbolic and structural levels as individuals negotiate interactions with government and social agencies and other persons.

While Goffman’s approach would dissect individual interactions for evidence of stigma and identity management, Foucault’s genealogic approach would suggest that we examine the origins of these policies and practices and the power/knowledge that accompanies their implementation. These knowledges of risk become a part of our corporate understanding and stereotype of marginalized persons; structural stigma is applied to individuals in interaction in the guise of risk management, whether or not there is any evidence of discrimination. The natural response of persons to whom power/knowledges are applied in the form of intrusive or distressing interventions is to resist and challenge these problematic discourses. In the remainder of this chapter, we will engage with the theoretical relationship between stigma and resistance and examine the individual and collective forms of resistance that result from imbalances of power.

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12 Ian Hacking (2003) differentiates between “real, figurative, metaphorical and symbolic” pollution. The same distinctions can be made between forms of risk.

13 See Douglas (1966).

## Resistance

For Foucault, interaction is infused with power relations and therefore also, of course, with resistance (Foucault 1982). The power/knowledge that creates inequality is challenged by the marginalized discourses and understanding of those who live with stigma. At an individual level, resistance to stigma serves to balance inequities and help the individual to maintain a sense of himself or herself as a whole, undamaged person. At a structural level, resistance may be used to debunk stereotypes and undermine existing, top-down definitions and explanations of the experiences of marginalized individuals. Resistance, then, can be found in the individual and collective voices of those who are usually silenced.

According to Miller and Kaiser (2001), resistance to stigma has been documented in two primary forms: avoidance and engagement. The first, avoidance, involves “physical and/or social withdrawal or disengagement from stigma related stressors” (79). Individuals may opt not to reveal their discreditable attribute to others, or may avoid contact with those who discover and/or are aware of it.<sup>14</sup> Marginalized individuals may also choose to minimize experiences of stigma and discrimination as a means of denying the impact of stigma on their life; essentially, denying that there is a problem at all (80). Engagement coping, on the other hand, is aimed at gaining control over an event, factor, or interaction (Miller and Kaiser, 2001). Stigmatized individuals may challenge the beliefs and stereotypes that they are subjected to and they may attribute poor outcomes to prejudice.<sup>15</sup> This challenges not only demeaning stereotypes but also stigmatizing policies and practices. Individuals may also engage in “*disidentification*,” in which the stigmatic attribute is devalued and ceases to frame the identity of the individual, protecting self-esteem and self-worth (Miller and Kaiser, 2001). Finally, acceptance is a form of engagement

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14 While Miller and Kaiser (2001) refer to this type of avoidance behaviour or passing as a form of individualized resistance, others have characterized it as a means of stigma and identity management (see Goffman 1963; Bruckert 2002; Corrigan and Lundin 2001; Kilty, this volume; Tabibi, this volume; Hannem, this volume; Bruckert, this volume). In fact, one might argue that stigma management and identity management encompass aspects of resistance as the discredited or discreditable individual endeavours to portray and protect a positive social identity and to prevent the discreditable status from becoming a master status that effectively limits their social mobility and opportunities. On the other hand, this type of individualized struggle must be differentiated from larger, political resistance movements and engagement aimed at destigmatization and the debunking of stereotypes. But certainly many forms of resistance exist on a spectrum from individual to mass political struggle.

15 For example, the child of a prisoner may argue that he/she is no more likely to become criminal than any other child and, when faced with examples of prisoners' children who became criminal, may suggest that structural discrimination and the stigma of labelling pushed those children into deviance.



in which the individual accepts the inevitability of stigma and discrimination and ceases to allow the stigma to be emotionally problematic (Miller and Kaiser, 2001). This is a less adaptive strategy because it is not conducive to movement for change. Resistance to stigma is most commonly engaged in at the individual level; a single person fights to maintain his or her personal identity in the face of social stereotypes that are seen as unjust or inaccurate representations. However, unpacking the notion of structural stigma requires that we also recognize the need for collective resistance that strikes at the root of our stigmatic assumptions about so-called risky people. Beyond Miller and Kaiser's (2001) "engagement coping," challenges to stigma must mobilize a new discourse that historically situates and debunks essentializing and limiting myths about marginal groups, replacing these ideas with an ethic that emphasizes the individuality and inherent human value of marked persons.

### **Theorizing the Politics of Stigma and Resistance**

While Goffman's analysis of face work and identity management is ideal for uncovering sites of individual resistance, a Foucauldian approach can provide an understanding of the power/knowledge that accompanies structural stigma and that needs to be challenged to make way for change and the breaking down of stereotypes. It is clear that a holistic understanding of the phenomenon of stigma in interaction requires the explanation of both the structural and experiential aspects. To concentrate on micro-level interactions is to ignore the structures of power and knowledge that create the possibility of stigma and shape our interactions; to focus exclusively on the structures and institutions that create stigma is to silence the voices and lived experiences of those affected and marginalized by stigma. Goffman's qualitative descriptions of individual struggles of identity management and shame need to be augmented not only with the experiences of "normals" who come into interaction with the stigmatized, but also with a genealogy of the social structures of normalcy and difference that create generalized stigma and attitudes of prejudice. Only by uncovering the cultural and historical structures of thought that create and maintain stigma can we begin to break down false stereotypes and barriers that lead to discriminatory policies and marginalize entire groups of citizens.

This chapter has outlined the basis of an integration of Goffman and Foucault that will be useful for further study of stigma and other interactions of power. Detailed genealogies or histories of the various forms of stigma that surround marginalized groups would also be useful tools for challenging and breaking down stereotypes and power/knowledge that create inequalities and discrimina-



tion; but it is through the lives and interactions of individual people that these struggles are played out and competing knowledges are created. Ultimately, it is individuals who are most affected by stigma and whose lives will be most improved by its destruction. In this sense, like Foucault's studies of madness and sexuality, this book (and the studies it contains) is not only a theoretical project but a political one as well.