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**Stigma and Prestige Symbols within a Stigmatised Subculture:
A Study of Practical Pistol Shooting**

by

David John Garby, B.A.

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
January 18, 2002

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Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Karen March, Supervisor

Chair, Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Carleton University
January 23, 2002

Abstract

There are few studies on the functioning of Canadian gun owning subcultures. This thesis extends that body of literature through an ethnographic examination of practical pistol shooting. Moreover, it provides both a description of the activity experienced by participants, and an exploration of how these experiences are used in the management of stigma. By combining symbolic interactionist conceptualisations of self with Goffman's theories on social stigma and frame analysis, the data findings support the existence of two frames of experience; one based on practicality and the other on sports/games. These experiences influence the creation of stigma and prestige symbols that are used within the practical shooting subculture. Moreover, these competing group strategies are used to manage the subculture's identity within the social context of a non-gun using world.

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Introduction

This research explores the lives of practical pistol shooters, specifically how they experience their activity, and react to stigma both within and outside of their community. During the course of this study, I establish that practical shooters create their reality in conjunction with frames of experience. These frames of experience impact the responses of practical shooters to external stigma, by shaping the development of internal stigma and prestige. The responses to internal and external stigma are managed within two groups of practical shooters. This thesis examines how stigma and prestige symbols are used in the management of stigma by inward and outward focused groups within practical shooting.

The History of IPSC

During the course of my research, I will observe a group of handgun owners involved in an activity called practical shooting. This form of shooting was originally developed in 1956 by American army Colonel Jeff Cooper, as a means of augmenting existing military and police training (Anonymous www.IPSC.org 2000). In Colonel Cooper's opinion, traditional training requiring shooters to stand in a stationary position and fire at stationary targets, did not prepare soldiers or police for the reality of interactive gunfights. He addressed this problem by creating a form of target shooting

where shooters would learn to fire from various positions, reload while moving, and engage visually obscured or moving targets. In 1976 this form of weapons training was formally organised into a civilian competition, when delegates at a practical shooting conference in Missouri voted in favour of forming the International Practical Shooting Confederation [IPSC]. Delegates also voted to enact the IPSC constitution, which committed the organisation to promote advanced practical shooting, safeguard the principles of civilian gun ownership, and promote the safe and efficient use of firearms. Since 1976, IPSC has grown to include membership from 58 countries, supporting a network of local, national, and international competitions. In the province where my fieldwork was conducted, IPSC had its genesis in the early nineteen eighties.

The Significance of this Study

An examination of the social lives of practical shooters contributes to a body of firearms related research lacking studies focused on the people behind the guns. While this thesis is not intended as policy research, studies on gun culture may contribute towards policy discussions concerning the current implementation of Canada's Bill C-68¹, as well as any future United Nations initiatives². Besides the direct connection

¹ The Canadian Firearms Centre, which administers Canada's gun control, has admitted that the system for licensing all gun owners by the January 1st 2001 deadline was overwhelmed through the actions of gun owners. This was due to the flood of last minute applications, which led to the creation and issuing of 800,000 temporary permits (Naumetz 2001:A1). While some of these late applications may be attributed to genuine procrastination, others may indicate hesitancy on the part of gun owners to comply with legislation. The latter explanation may also account for the estimated 300,000 gun owners whom had not applied for licences by the deadline. Organised dissent through anti-gun control groups, such as the Law-Abiding Unregistered Firearms Association, openly discourages gun owners from co-operating with the CFC. Through their own admission, the CFC did not anticipate the reaction of gun owners to the implementation of government policy on licensing gun owners.

between my thesis and the subject of firearm ownership, this study is also relevant for examining the issue of stigma in general. The study of practical shooters is an examination of how members of a stigmatised group react and adjust to their degenerated position compared with perceived accepted norms.

The Organisation of this Thesis

Following this introduction, I provide a chapter devoted to a review of related literature and an exploration of the theoretical basis of this thesis. The second chapter examines the methodological issues surrounding the collection of my data. The third and fourth chapters contain my analysis of observations from my fieldwork. I then present concluding remarks and suggestions for subsequent research.

² The collapse of the UN conference on the proliferation of small arms and light weapons may be attributed to a lack of understanding by diplomats and NGOs of American gun culture (Lauria 2001:G8). Although the UN declaration was officially blocked by the U.S. government, the influence of advocacy efforts by groups such as the National Rifle Association are believed to have contributed to the failure of the conference. Studies on Canadian gun culture may assist this country's policy makers and diplomats in anticipating and understanding domestic reaction to future initiatives. This would also help a foreign understanding of Canadian dissent should the next initiative continue to draw objections from Canada's National Firearms Association.

Chapter 1

Studies on the Relationship between Guns and People

The ownership and use of firearms provides the basis for various studies in a wide range of disciplines. Unfortunately the level of attention individual firearms issues receive from academics also varies quite noticeably depending on the issue. In the following pages, I detail the breath of firearms related writings, and identify those works which provide insight into my own analysis. While these writings address a variety of issues, they may be placed into two categories. The first category consists of those articles pertaining to violent acts, while the second includes writings on guns in non-violent contexts.

Guns and Violence

Some writings on guns and violence address topics that gun owners may view as the basis for anti-gun sentiment in society. Pro-gun policy critiques are aimed at refuting arguments that gun control is necessary for preventing guns from being used in homicides and robberies. Writings on gun use and crime reflect concern over the willingness of criminals to use guns, and the need for guns to protect citizens from such acts. Articles on guns and suicide reflect the debate whether firearms contribute to increased rates of people taking their own lives. This focus on the violent nature of gun use may be viewed by gun owners as tainting their identity with a public suspicion of the potential for violence.

Policy Related Work

During the past two decades, attempts and successes at exacting a variety of gun control legislation in Canada and the United States has fostered a policy debate among academics. Attempted bans on handgun ownership in Chicago and San Francisco during the early 1980's, acts as the catalyst for Halbrook's (1984) defence of the constitutional right to bear arms. This book examines the American Bill of Rights, with the goal of substantiating individual, rather than collective, claims to firearms access. The implementation of the Brady act, controlling the sale of handguns, elicits Wright's (1995) attempt at establishing a set of facts on gun ownership and use in America. These facts are based on two assertions, first that most gun owners are law abiding citizens, and second that criminals use illicit guns outside of the reach of gun control legislation. The latter point is also discussed in great detail by Rossi and Wright (1986). A critique of Canadian legislation is contained in Bartlett's (1988) assessment of Bill C-51. In his writing, Bartlett challenges the notion that the 1978 legislation has reduced firearm-related deaths. The studies characterise the pro-gun response in the debate over gun control, but provide few details on the various gun-owning sub-cultures.

Guns and Suicide

A further discussion of the effects of gun control is found in a number of articles concerned with the relationship between firearms and suicide. Although the issue of guns and suicide never emerged during the course of my study, this body of literature is notable as the only area to include numerous studies on Canada. A 1990 study by Rich *et*

al, assesses the impact of Canada's 1978 gun control law on the number of suicides in Ontario by comparing rates for five years before and after the legislation. This study concluded that while firearms related suicides declined in the years following gun control, no overall decline occurred due to an increase in the number of suicides by leaping (Rich *et al* 1990:342). A 1994 study by Carrington and Moyer replicates Rich *et al*, but uses rates from 1965-77 and 1979-89. Carrington and Moyer question the results of Rich *et al*, by stating that suicide rates did decline in the post legislation period (1994:607). Although the 1994 study notes decline in both firearm related suicide and the overall rate, the researches are not able to make firm conclusions due to a simultaneous unexplained drop in suicides by other methods. Besides these studies, examining suicides in the general population, there is also work on adolescence that assesses the use of firearms as a suicide method.

A study of adolescent suicide in Montreal between 1978 and 1982, appears to support some of the findings of Rich *et al* (Cheifetz *et al* 1987). Cheifetz *et al* found that in the male population, those most likely to use firearms for suicide, a decline in the use of firearms for killing one's self was offset by dramatic increases in deaths by jumping and asphyxiation (Cheifetz 1987:658). Adolescent suicide involving firearms, is also examined by Aldridge and St John (1991) using suicide rates from 1977 to 1988 in Newfoundland and Labrador. Though they do not offer a longitudinal examination of suicide rates by method, they note that firearms account for 54% of all suicides (Aldridge and St John 1991:434). As a result of this finding, Aldridge and St John recommend strict controls over firearms security in homes, as a preventative measure

against suicides (1991:435). The study also shows that suicides increase between 1979 and 1982, and until 1988 never fall below 1977-78 levels (1991:434). Although firearms and suicide never appear as an issue during my study, this material provides insight into the predominate focus of academics addressing firearms use in Canada.

Guns and Urban Crime

One firearm-related article that I discuss later in conjunction with Goffman's theory, is Wilkinson's and Fagan's 1996 study on the role of guns in criminal street gangs. This article explores how guns are tied to both individual management of identity and broader patterns that govern group behaviour (Wilkinson and Fagan 1996:55). Although the context of this article is of actual violence committed by criminals, which does not reflect the experience of my research, the theoretical perspectives work for both the sporting and simulated violence scenarios of my participants.

Guns and Self Protection

There is a sizeable amount of literature concerning the use of guns by civilians for private protection. This research addresses two courses of study, with the first concentrating on the impact of private force on crime, and the second assessing why people adopt such protective measures. Studies by Kleck (1988) and McDowall *et al* (1991), both use crime statistics for reaching opposite conclusions about the value of defensive gun ownership. According to Kleck, both statistics on the use of firearms for protection and interviews with criminals, indicate that the possession of a gun for self

defence negatively influences the likelihood of an offence being completed (1988:8,12). A longitudinal examination of crime rates does not support claims that increased defensive gun ownership translates into overall lower levels of crime (McDowall 1991:554).

Numerous other studies on the topic of self-defence explore the reasons why citizens decide to take personal responsibility for their own protection. The studies in this category attempt to explain protective gun ownership in terms of statistical comparisons between levels of ownership and fear (Bankston and Thompson 1989, Bankston *et al* 1990, Marciniak and Loftin 1991, McDowall and Loftin 1983, Sheley *et al* 1994, Williams and McGrath III 1976, Young 1986). All of the literature on self-protection concerns the United States, and is therefore problematic if applied to Canadian society. There are two reasons for this, first of all since homicide and robbery rates are much higher in the United States than Canada, levels of fear in the two countries should not be assumed equal (Ouimet 1999:399)³. Second of all, the law in Canada actively discourages the use of firearms for self-protection⁴. Due to the practical history of IPSC I can not discount the possibility of my participants operating in a context of self-protection. While I have observed behaviour exhibiting a defensive

³ According to Ouimet, 1992 statistics show a homicide rate (per 100, 000) of 2.63 in Canada and 9.34 in the United States. He also reported that the rates for robbery were 121.31 and 264.79 respectively.

⁴ These efforts include the elimination of protection of property as a reason allowing a citizen to obtain a restricted firearm (handgun or assault rifle), from the legislation enacted in 1978 (Simonds 1996:54). While discussing this issue with a firearms officer, I learned that someone attempting to procure a firearm for defence would be 'blacklisted' and thereby prevented from immediately applying again under other pretences. The defensive use of handguns is further discouraged by the strict conditions the *Firearms Act* (1998) places on the carrying of restricted firearms. Under the act, citizens may only receive a permit to carry a handgun, other than for purposes related to their work, if their lives are in immediate danger and police can not provide enough protection (1998:73). A report by the Canadian Firearms Centre states that, "very few of these authorisations are issued in Canada" (CFC 1998:34).

context, the experience of my Canadian participants should not unquestionably be likened to that of Americans.

Guns and Military/Police Socialisation

Insight into the behaviour of some of the practical shooters I observed, is found in a small portion of the writings on guns and military/police socialisation. The majority of the writing related to this topic concerns the argument of how men come to own guns. According to Lizotte and Bordua (1980 and 1980b), gun ownership is not determined predominantly by past military service. Although Lizotte and Bordua admit that gun ownership is prevalent among persons with a military background, they attribute this to the military attracting people whom are already predisposed towards gun ownership (1980:232 and 1980b:244). This effort to find the predicting factors for gun ownership is meant as an explanation for earlier studies that showed a higher incidence of gun ownership for ex-service personnel than those without a military background (Newton and Zimring 1968, Erskine 1972). Due to my study's focus on the behaviour of practical shooters, predicting factors are not as important as how the experience of military socialisation affects a shooter's current outlook towards firearm activities.

Few articles describe the current ownership and use of firearms in the context of previous military experience. The two studies that address this issue, confirm that this form of experience defines later contexts. In his study of male gun ownership, Spraggins (1995) reports that past military experiences continue to define a shooter's civilian contexts, even when this experience occurred in the distant past. This is illustrated by

Spraggins's conversation with a gun club's shooting coach, who explained the need for training in terms of the poor instruction he received upon enlisting for war decades earlier (1995:215). The transfer of such military experiences to practical shooting is noted in Gibson's (1994) examination of paramilitary culture in America.

While attending a practical shooting course offered by IPSC founder Colonel Jeff Cooper, Gibson observed that the military or police backgrounds of students and instructors influenced the definition of the activity. In this study, the combative orientation of practical pistol shooting first emerges when observing how instructors present the purpose of the course. For example, during a lecture by Colonel Cooper, students were instructed on the need to conjure forth a psychological state of aggression for combat, so they may "quickly get the drop on the bad guy [and] turn off the creeps of the world three times out of four" (Gibson 1994:182). This instruction is accompanied by an example of how a man trained by Colonel Cooper in Central America, summoned this state of mind while shooting three would-be kidnappers (Gibson 1994:183). The example holds military context, in that Colonel Cooper teaches practical shooting in Central America as his contribution in the war against communism. The emphasis of instruction in this case defines practical shooting in terms of combat training.

The combative nature of practical shooting also fosters an environment where the conversations of students revolve around tales of violence they had either experienced or had heard about. Social bonding among the participants centres on this shared experience in the military or police, as happens when two students realise that they had been in the same police force during a riot two decades earlier (Gibson 1994:181).

Gibson also finds the social atmosphere of the course receptive to conversations on a military or police topic, even when not directly linked to participants' experiences. This is evident in his participants' continuous joking about an anti-war protester who lost his legs while trying to stop a train from entering a military base (1994:181). The telling of 'war stories' of a military or police nature is viewed by Gibson as an example of how practical shooters demonstrate that they associate this activity with combat.

The association of practical shooting with combat also appears in instances when participants directly compare their actions to military or police experience. This association between personal military experience and practical shooting performance is apparent to Gibson when a United States Marine excuses his shooting a 'hostage' target by stating that, "in the Marines we're taught to clear everything in the building" (1994:185). Through these examples, Gibson asserts that during the practical pistol shooting course run by Colonel Cooper, instructors and students define themselves and their activity in terms of military and police contexts. Although Colonel Cooper is the founder of IPSC, the course Gibson observed is not formally associated with that organisation. This course lacks elements of sporting competition found at black badge courses and IPSC matches, making Gibson's observations an incomplete comparison to my own fieldwork. However, the military and police contexts noted by Gibson reflect what I have at times observed, making this study quite valuable for the comparisons it does offer.

The Non-Violent use of Guns

Hunting and Poaching

One of the very few studies of a firearm related sub-culture in Canada is Brymer's (1991) work on hunters and poachers.⁵ This work is also used as the basis for exploring some of the methodological challenges of ethnographic research, which I shall discuss in a later chapter (Brymer 1998). While members of this sub-culture are engaged in a different activity than that of practical shooters, Brymer's work provides observations I find relevant for my own project. Brymer conducts his study in the form of a longitudinal ethnography. This approach to his topic stems from a rejection of "ethnographic discussion that treat the sub-culture as essentially static and isolated from the rest of society" (Brymer 1991:178). Brymer rejects the static and isolated approach due to its failure to account for the effects of developmental processes and external influences upon sub-cultures. He therefore sets out to,

Address these problems by examining a sub-culture in the context of its history and its location in the development of human societies, ...and suggest that changes in the organisation and content of sub-cultures are a result of continued contact and negotiation with the dominant cultural world (Brymer 1991:178).

While I do not have Brymer's decades worth of field experience, I have found his desire to tackle process intriguing. The goal of exploring process has shaped my decision to use Goffman's (1974) concept of frame analysis to demonstrate shifts within the practical

shooting sub-culture. I likewise view as important the impact of the mainstream culture on the sub-culture, as I use Goffman's work on stigma (1963) to examine my participants' responses to perceived out of group norms. These theoretical perspectives are discussed later in this chapter.

The ethnographic accounts of hunters and poachers is useful for illustrating how internal adjustments are used by a group in response to perceived threats from the state and community. According to Brymer, hunters and poachers deal with what members of the group deem a threat to their activity by adjusting their tactics and equipment. For instance, laws prohibiting the use of salt or feed as bait for hunting game animals, has led to efforts by poachers to circumvent the law (Brymer 1991:186). Avoiding this law is managed through their obtaining land on which they graze a farm animal, and therefore letting that animal's feed, salt or water act as bait. In the case of technology, some of Brymer's participants use new innovations, such as rifle mounted lights with automatic switches, to avoid detection while hunting at night (Brymer 1991:187). Problematic situations also lead to adjustments as a means of preventing a negative reaction from the mainstream community. In one such instance, Brymer observed members of the hunting and poaching sub-culture distance themselves from a member of their group who, through the unlawful killing of a deer, brought a large and public state presence to their community (1991:189). Brymer's work has a place in the later

⁵ The fieldwork for Brymer (1991) was conducted in the Southern United States, Northern Mexico, and Canada. While Brymer Addresses both hunting and poaching, the legality of the former and the illegality of the latter makes them separate subcultures.

discussion of my findings, as these examples are comparable with observations I made while examining the practical shooting sub-culture.

Gun Collecting

Besides Brymer (1991), the only other study I found concerning a gun owning sub-culture in Canada is Olmsted's (1988) research on firearm collectors. This study is also noteworthy for its focus on a group, unlike Brymer's hunters and poachers, involved in an activity purely for leisure. This article is valuable due to the comparable experience of stigma exhibited by both collectors and practical shooters. For my study, the most useful part of Olmsted's work is his examination of the response by gun collectors towards what they perceive as public hostility against their activity. Although Olmsted also examines public opinion of gun collecting, I have not followed this option but instead have narrowed the scope of my research to include only the reactions of my participants to stigma. The response to stigma by Olmsted's participants provides insight into their efforts to manage impressions of this activity. I will discuss the work of Olmsted later when the issue of stigma is explored in greater detail.

Sports Shooting

Direct comparisons between my research experience and the substance of literature on competitive shooting are superficial, due to the latter's focus on sports medicine and kinetics. Among this literature is a study on cardiovascular adaptation

among IPSC shooters in Italy (Fenici *et al* 1999). This article offers little insight into practical shooting as a sub-culture, as its focus is the measurement of blood pressure and heart rate for determining cardiovascular stress (Fenici *et al* 1999:254). Although the medical oriented content of this article places it outside the scope of my study, I find the inclusion of IPSC in the context of sports medicine relevant. While I have not measured the cardiovascular stress of my participants, my study does note those instances when shooters mention issues related to sports medicine. Numerous other similar studies on cardiovascular stress and shooting (Baumgartl 1990, Gros Lambert *et al* 1999, Hoffman *et al* 1992, Niinima and McAvold 1983, Rundell and Bacharach 1995, Simoneau *et al* 1997, and Vasjucov 1973) focus on the well established sport of biathlon.

Articles on target shooting are also present in the field of sports psychology concerned with the impact of physiological arousal on performance. Kerich *et al* (2000) uses the cortical monitoring of participants to study how their level of stimulation surrounding a task effects motor skills and concentration. The work of Prapavessis and Grove (1991) and Boyce (1992 and 1994) also study performance, but use the quantitative analysis of questionnaires to establish associations between states of mind and changes in motor skills. As with the studies on sports medicine, these psychological articles do not provide insight into their participants' sub-cultures. However, as with the work on sports medicine, these articles provide indicators of behaviour that is meant to exhibit concern over the issues of mental performance in a sporting context.

Summary

The literature related to firearms addresses a wide array of issues. While some of these issues are well studied, such as defensive gun use and sports medicine and psychology, the ethnographic study of shooting sub-cultures has attracted little attention from academics. While studies of shooting sub-cultures are scarce, those that exist provide some useful insights into the social dynamics of these communities. Recognising both violent and non-violent subcultures emphasises how my study uniquely addresses both contexts within the same group activity.

Theoretical Perspective

My study of the social world of practical shooters is based on an analysis using concepts taken from symbolic interaction and the dramaturgical theory of Erving Goffman. This approach permits an examination of practical shooting based on the experiences of my participants. Using participants' social experiences is crucial for understanding how they define practical shooting in terms of sport or practicality. Given this goal, an integration of the basic tenets of the Mead-Blumer conceptualisation of self and Goffman's theories of social stigma and frame analysis offer a stronger understanding of the social world of IPSC shooters.

Mead and Blumer

The work of Mead and Blumer provides three essential assumptions that shape the approach I take towards examining practical shooting. These assumptions include the belief in social thought as process, the recognition of significant objects and symbols, and the conceptualisation of the self. According to Mead and Blumer the nature of human thought is social in that the process of the mind requires interaction. This stems from Mead's view that:

Consciousness is functional not substantive; and in either of the main senses of the term it must be located in the objective world rather than in the brain—it belongs to, or is a characteristic of, the environment in which we find ourselves.

What is located, what does take place, in the brain, however, is the physiological process whereby we lose and regain consciousness. (1934/1962:112)

Since the brain does not actually produce meaning, the mind is dependent on a person's environment. The environment does not just provide the mind with a one-time experience of socialisation, but also contains a continuous experience of interaction to engage thought (Blumer 1969:8). For Mead and Blumer, the process by which people are socialised is not simply a matter of passive absorption, but rather a dynamic process of interaction. Within this interaction, people exercise their ability to think by adapting and projecting information for their own ends.

Symbols

Although Mead and Blummer admit that not all interaction requires thought, that which does, symbolic interactionism, is important for understanding the meaningful relationship individuals have with their environment. Mead finds particular importance in the thought process within interaction, which allows for the learning of meanings and symbols. According to this view, the basis of meaning lies in interaction and not isolated mental processes, as Mead believes that:

What we term 'mental images' ... can exist in their relation to the organism without being lodged in a substantial consciousness. The mental image is a memory image. Such images that, as symbols, play so large a part in thinking, belong to the environment. The passage we read is made up from memory

images, and the people we see about us we see very largely by the help of memory images.... (1934/1962:332)

Humans' ability to think in terms of symbols allows for the adjustment and readjustment of behaviour or attitude in response to perceived symbolism. This is based on efficiency, since "the conscious or significant conversation of gestures is a much more adequate and effective mechanism of mutual adjustment within the social act ...than is the unconscious or nonsignificant conversation of gestures" (Mead 1934/1962:46). Symbolic interaction demonstrates the variety of responses parallel to the variety of different meanings objects may elicit from people, as "a tree will be a different object to a botanist, a lumberman, a poet, and a home gardener" (Blumer 1969:11). The meanings of objects are learned through the process of socialisation, a process where interaction provides the forum for personal adjustment and readjustment.

Self

Besides the process of interaction involving thought and significant symbols, the symbolic interactionist approach also hinges on the conception of the self as object. According to Blumer, the concept of the self simply means that humans may make themselves the object of their own actions (1969:12). This process occurs as individuals direct themselves in their actions as to be perceived by others in terms of the self they believe themselves to be. The projection of the self is exercised through interaction. The processes of interpretation:

Have two distinct steps. First, the actor indicates to himself the things towards which he is acting; he has to point out in himself the things that have meaning... This interaction with himself is something other than an interplay of psychological elements; it is an instance of the person engaging in a process of communication with himself... Second, by virtue of this process of communicating with himself, interpretation becomes a matter of handling meanings. The actor selects, checks, suspends, regroups, and transforms the meanings in the light of the situation in which he is placed and the direction of his action. (Blumer 1969:5)

The dynamic process of socialization contains a myriad of meaning that humans recognise, project, and identify with. This conception of the self is an important assumption for my examination into how shooters define themselves in terms of sporting or practical behaviour. These concepts provide an effective basis for the examination of IPSC shooters, and how they interact with the environment of practical shooting.

Structures

Although Mead and Blumer are successful at building a clear conception of the role of the individual in symbolic interaction, they are not as clear at addressing the relationship of these individuals to social structures. Mead recognises that individuals live with a structured community around them, “which acts towards the individual under certain circumstances in an identical way... there is an identical response on the part of the whole community under these conditions” (1934/1962:167). These responses are in

Mead's view, the formation of an institution. While Mead recognises the influence structures have in their ability to interact with individuals, this is explored as essentially a one way relationship. Structure in this sense exists as a learned behaviour by individuals from other individuals, in the form of an "organised set of attitudes of others which one himself assumes" (Mead 1934/1962:175). While Mead explores the interaction between individuals and structure, this is accomplished in terms of the development of these individuals and not in any depth for the process of structuring.

Blumer believes in the existence of collective behaviour similar to Mead's notion of organised attitudes. According to Blumer, this collective action, what he refers to as joint action, involves "individuals fitting their lines of action to one another... participants making indications to one another, not merely each to himself" (Blumer 1969:16). Although joint actions allow for collective behaviour, they fall short of explaining a structuring effect. This is the result of Blumer's focusing almost entirely on individuals and the way they constantly create and recreate a sense of joint action. The development of joint action is recognised by Blumer as following a pattern, but that "areas of unprescribed conduct are just as natural, indigenous, and recurrent in human group life as those areas covered by pre-established and faithfully followed prescriptions of joint action" (Blumer 1969:18). While Blumer recognises that generally accepted prescriptions might guide individuals, he is focused on indicating that these prescriptions do not determine how meaning is created and recreated. As a result, Blumer, like Mead, does not clearly examine the role of individuals in creating or perpetuating enduring prescriptions for behaviour.

Erving Goffman

Although he did not identify himself as a symbolic interactionist, the close similarity between the two approaches permits an effective integration of symbolic interactionist and dramaturgical concepts (Manning, 1992). Moreover, the work of Erving Goffman offers the concepts I find necessary for examining how the practitioners of practical shooting define their activity.⁶ In particular, Goffman's (1963) work on stigma provides insight into how participants manage their spoiled identity as gun shooters existing in a society that tends to denigrate gun usage. His (1974) publication of *Frame Analysis* deepens this understanding by demonstrating how identity management emerges through shifts and segmentation in the meaning of social activity. This perspective provides knowledge of how these individuals create a social world in which their gun usage gains acceptability. However, before I address the issues of stigma and frame analysis, I will first discuss the links between symbolic interactionism and Goffman's conceptualisation of the various forms of identity composing the self.

Goffman and Identity

Mead and Blumer's conception of the self corresponds with Goffman's explanation of the process of identity. As with symbolic interaction, Goffman recognises that the self is derived through adjustment and readjustment of identity according to a desired or beneficial projected image. Although Goffman's conception of the self has a

⁶ A selected glossary of Goffman's terms is found in Appendix A.

similar basis as that set forth by Mead and Blumer, works such as *Stigma* and *Frame Analysis* diverge from symbolic interaction due to his emphasis on the structural frameworks affecting the presentation of self. Goffman's theoretical innovations stem from his focus on dramaturgy, in which he conceptualises social life in terms of dramatic performances meant to produce a desirable image for the actor. This position is clearly set forth in his early work on impression management, which states that:

Regardless of the particular objective that the individual has in mind and of his motive for having this objective, it will be in his interest to control the conduct of others, especially their responsive treatment of him. This control is achieved largely by influencing the definition of the situation which others come to formulate, and he can influence this definition by expressing himself in such a way as to give them the kind of impression that will lead them to act voluntarily in accordance with his own plan (Goffman 1959:3).

According to Goffman, identity is constantly created and reaffirmed during the interactive performance existing between actor and audience. However, dramaturgy is not only concerned with individual identity, but also with the processes involved in the audience's relationship with actors that may act to disrupt a performance (Goffman 1959:252). Therefore, Goffman focuses on the creation of individual identity as well as on the control exercised over the audience to achieve that performance. This focus makes Goffman's work well suited for the examination of stigma, that is, "a trait that can obtrude itself upon attention" (Goffman, 1963: 5), disrupt smooth social interaction and threaten one's presentation of self.

Social Identity

To understand the impact of social stigma on self and the need to manage social stigma requires a more complete understanding of the distinction between virtual and social identity. Goffman further defines the concept of self, as consisting of personal and social identity. Social identity consists of signs and marks that place an individual within categories based on social relevance. The notion of social identity is divided by Goffman (1963), into virtual and actual identity. Virtual social identity contains the expectations of other members of society (Goffman 1963:2). However, Goffman maintains that a person has an actual social identity, which is what a person may be proved to be (1963:3). The virtual social identity carries socially accepted norms. If the actual identity does not conform to those norms, then a person belongs to a category outside of those occupied by normals. If not hidden by a virtual identity, this displaced category may be viewed by normals as tainted, in which case the actual identity has an attribute that is a stigma.

Prestige and Stigma Symbols

The information defining social categories may be isolated as signs, which form symbols when these signs are used frequently to convey this information. Goffman identifies two contrasting symbols that carry social information relevant for managing stigma (1963:43). The first type, which carries social information that “can establish a special claim to prestige, honour, or desirable class position”, shall be known as a

prestige symbol. This symbol is the opposite of the stigma symbol, which establishes an identifiable discrepancy between what is socially acceptable and what is debased.

Associates of the Debased: the Wise and the Own

Individuals with a stigma may discover that they are not unique in terms of a debased identity. While the stigma may cut people off from normal society, they may “find that there are sympathetic others who are ready to adopt [their] standpoint in the world and to share with [them] the feeling that [they] are human and ‘essentially’ normal in spite of appearances and in spite of [their] own self doubts” (Goffman 1963:19). There are two types of sympathetic others, the first being the ‘own’. The own are people whom share the stigma of the individual. While the stigmatised individual might expect support from their own, they might not expect this from ‘wise’ normals. Although the ‘wise’ are normals, their contact with the stigmatised grants them a status as those whom see the reality of their circumstance.

Personal Identity

Personal identity sets individual selves apart and therefore, “has to do with the assumption that the individual can be differentiated from all others and that around this means of differentiation a single continuous record of social facts can be attached... [and] to which still other biographical facts can be attached (Goffman 1963:57). This form of identity uses marks or signs to provide a sense of uniqueness based on the distinguishing features of the individual. Although personal identity defines the

individual, it is none the less a social construct, as it is based on knowledge attained through everyday life.

The knowledge base for personal identity consists of three types of attributes, identification, experience, and relations. Identification marks can be name-bound and body-bound (Goffman 1963:56). Name bound identity resides in marks attached to an individual by name, such as a police file. Body-bound identity distinguishes individuals by appearance, as physical features are bestowed with information of expected behaviour. These visible identity marks, together with the invisible marks of experience, form an individual's biography. Experience, as described by Goffman, is intangible to observers unless "pegged" by identity marks (1963:58). This identity is forged from a person's interaction with circumstances, and is therefore based on a very specific relation to a phase of social life. The biographical knowledge formed through identification and experience, is a combination that constitutes an individual's life history.

Experience, represented with marks of identification, is perceived as unique through relations with other individuals of the same group orientation. A group's members are thereby able to ascribe meaning relative to the group, based on "the notion of uniqueness of the individual is that of a 'positive mark' or 'identity peg', [which may provide] the photographic image of the individual in others' minds, or the knowledge of his special place in a particular kinship network (Goffman 1963:56). An individual's place within a social network may develop from a sense of closeness based on familiarity, trust, and sympathy. However, a 'closeness' with other members of a group

need not be developed over time, as bonds of reciprocal dependence and familiarity may stem from a “formal relationship that is automatically extended and received as soon as the individual takes a place on the team” (Goffman 1959:83). The development of personal identity is social, as the uniqueness of the individual is necessary for situating the group’s knowledge apart from that of outsiders.

While individuals possess a personal identity based on what makes them unique to all others, people are also defined by their marks within a social identity. This mark ties individuals to the symbols found within the society. For instance, the classification system within IPSC acts as a social category within the group. The Master class may be viewed as a social symbol. The score sheet denoting Bob as a Master class shooter placing first in a match, is personal identity. Personal identity informs the symbols of social categories (Goffman 1963:60).

Biography and Biographical Others

Characters associated with an individual’s personal identity include those sharing a biography, and biographical others. Individuals accumulate social facts while going about their daily lives, the collective record of which is their biography. Since the personal identity comprising the biography is socially informing, people with an intimate knowledge of a person’s biography, may associate these personal facts with a social identity (Goffman 1963:65). Therefore, through this biography an individual may

be linked to the symbols of social categories by acquaintances with direct personal knowledge.

Another character associated with an individual's personal identity is the biographical other. The biographical other does not have direct personal knowledge of the individual in question, but possesses a social recognition (Goffman 1963:68). This allows the biographical other a sense of familiarity with an individual's personal identity, without ever having had personal contact. As a result, biographical others may know individuals' social identity based on their social recognition of the personal one.

In-Group and Out-Group Alignments

Groups comprised of the sufferers of stigma may adopt one of two alignments when dealing with the stigmatisation by normals. The in-group alignment rejects the degraded status allotted to them by normals. To a member of this group, their real group is the discredited one, and therefore there is no temptation to abandon this group for a normally aligned one (Goffman 1963:113). On the other hand, the out-group alignment views their stigmatised group as deficient in comparison with normals. Unlike members of the in-group alignment who may flaunt the differentness of their stigma defiantly, members of the out-group try to deny this differentness (Goffman 1963:115). Part of this effort to deny differentness is good adjustment, where members try to keep the appearance of acceptability, while grooming those areas of their identity associated with stigma in the hope this will cleanse them in the eyes of normals (Goffman 1963:121).

Frames

According to Goffman, the organisation and definition of situations depends on how people frame those situations (Goffman 1974:10). A frame can be viewed as demonstrating how people make sense of events through their experiences (Collins 1988:58). These experiences are comprised of those objects and actions that shape peoples' lives (Burns 1992:239). The subjective interpretations of these experiences combine in frames to form situational meaning, as well as defining expectations for involvement. A shift in frames occurs once a person either consciously or unconsciously adopts experiences, which change the perceived foundation of the frame. Following Goffman's theory, the social organisation of situations from frames, is the product of perceptions of experience. Using this theory, I will examine practical shooting as a situation, defined through participants' frames.

Goffman and Subcultural Structures

Goffman's frame analysis offers another example of the links existing between his theoretical interest in the relationship between audience control and a Meadian-Blumer conceptionalisation of self. Goffman's work on frame analysis may be seen as following a structuralist tendency because he argues that individual representations may become collective representations when they understood to be part of a shared framework of experience. Although he maintains that the behaviour of individuals is guided within a framework of experience, Goffman also acknowledges that individuals play a role in the creation of social reality and social identity. According to

Perinbanayagam, Goffman's theory of frame analysis represents part of his continuing "examination of the instruments and techniques of communication that actors use" (1985:75). From this perspective, actors may create reality and a self-identity using the scaffolding of framed experience, but the frame is more a tool than a mould. As such, the actor actually retains a great deal of freedom within a framework, because an individual's experience only provides definitions when the individual chooses to contextualize it within a particular frame.

Summary

In summary, I have chosen the theories of Erving Goffman as the dominant approach for this study because it allows me to examine how practical shooters create responses to stigma based on their experiences. A main concept for this study is the **frame** of experience. These frames are used by my participants for the creation of **stigma and prestige symbols**. My participants' use of these symbols demonstrates how frames of experience also guide their choices when deciding on a response to external **stigma**, either through **in-group** resistance or **out-group good adjustment**.

Chapter 2

Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of the methodology used during this study. I will discuss why I used a qualitative approach, including an examination of the benefits of using participant observation. This discussion of methods also includes references to some of the concerns and problems that arose during my research.

Unknown Phenomenon

According to Jorgensen (1989:12), qualitative methodology is well suited for addressing research problems when little or nothing known about the phenomenon. Therefore, fieldwork is required to uncover participants for study, especially within “deviant subcultures and other smaller subcultures within the larger subculture, [since] we quite simply do not know the population from which we are to sample” (Brymer 1998:143). This situation reflects my own experience with practical shooting. When I encountered the existence of practical shooting, it was as a sub-culture of the larger sub-culture of gun owners within Canada.

How IPSC Functions

One of the challenges I experienced in this fieldwork environment was the need to quickly accumulate insider knowledge on the functioning of IPSC. I will recount some of what I learned through observations, since understanding my fieldnote entries

requires some basic familiarity with the workings of IPSC. Practical shooting involves the use of large calibre semi-automatic pistols and revolvers. The semi-automatic guns are divided into classes determined by the level to which they are modified. Production division guns are considered 'out of the box', and are allowed very few modifications. Standard division guns are allowed numerous modifications but not major changes such as the addition of optics and compensators⁷. Modified division guns may receive extensive modification, so long as the gun meets size restrictions. The most modified division for guns, Open, allows for extensive alterations such as the addition of optics and compensators. All of these guns may belong to either the Major or Minor power factors. The power factor is determined by measuring bullet weight and velocity, at match stages with a scale and chronograph. The ammunition used by a shooter must meet the standards for Minor power factor for that shooter's score to count.

An IPSC match is comprised of various courses of fire, also known as stages. These stages may be short, medium, or field courses, and correspond with a progression in the number of rounds required, and shooting positions allowed. For example, a short course requires no more than nine rounds fired from a maximum two positions (Appendix B), while a fieldcourse may require up to twenty eight rounds fired from any number of positions (Appendix C).

IPSC competitors fire at targets to receive a score. Their final score for the stage, the hit factor, is calculated by totalling the points from the targets, and dividing that score by the time taken to shoot the course. Shooters may have penalty points deducted

⁷ Compensators are attachments that fit on the end of a gun barrel for the purpose of making the gun more

from the points registered on the targets. Scoring penalties are deducted for hitting targets designated as penalty targets. During my time in the field, the name of this target was officially changed from 'no-shoot' to 'penalty target'. Procedural penalties are granted for actions that provide a competitive advantage, such as holding the gun with both hands when a one-hand hold is specified. There are two types of targets commonly encountered in courses, paper and steel. The paper targets (Appendix D) changed during my time in the field from the metric to the classic variety. The steel targets, also known as poppers (Appendix E), are considered hit once they fall back on their stand.

Shooters within the provincial region I studied are ranked according to a classification system. The system is based on the performance of shooters during specified classifier matches. Each participant is ranked according to their score, ranked as a percentage of the high score. Therefore, D class shoots 0 to 44.99% of the high score, C class 45 to 64.99%, B class 65 to 79.99%, A class 80 to 89.99%, and Master class 90 to 100%. Shooters whom do not take part in a classifier match are listed as unclassified in the listing of match results.

The final aspect of IPSC I would like to explain now is the Black Badge training program. Every person who takes part in an IPSC match must first pass this two-day course. The course teaches candidates the shooting techniques performed during IPSC matches. These skills include the ability to quickly draw the gun from the holster and fire, as well as changing ammunition magazines while moving from one position to

controllable during firing.

another. Upon completing the course, newly certified shooters receive their temporary Black Badge card, which allows participation in matches. After the shooter's first successful match, he or she may receive their permanent Black Badge, a black enamelled pin in the shape of a metric target.

Other Handgun Associations

During the course of my research I noticed several references by my participants to other types of pistol shooting. Since references to these activities were on a couple of occasions relevant to this study, I will provide brief overviews of Police Pistol Competition (PPC), and the International Defensive Pistol Association (IDPA). The IDPA may be viewed as practically reactionary to the current direction of IPSC. The IDPA is similar to IPSC in terms of both having field courses and speed shoots. However, in the IDPA all courses are grounded in a defensive reality. While IPSC is open to a variety of 'classes' of firearms, IDPA maintains a singular approval of only those guns suitable for self-defence. In a lament apparently aimed at IPSC, the IDPA states that all other types of pistol shooting are "sports that have no relevance to self-defence, [and] have become equipment races [and tests of] gamesmanship" (Anonymous www.IDPA.com 2001). The IDPA is more recent than IPSC, emerging over the last few years, and appears under cursory examination a possible reaction to the latter's perceived move towards sport.

As its name would suggest, PPC is organised principally around the needs of law enforcement. Although PPC contestants are often associated with police agencies,

civilians also compete within these matches. Unlike IPSC, PPC courses of fire do not involve running and shooting, but rather stationary firing of a specified number of rounds in a set allotment of time. The courses are designed around the service revolver, reflecting the activity's origins in police training. Semi-automatic pistols are allowed in PPC, reflecting the shift within police departments to this firearm, but these guns may not have modification like those allowed in IPSC.

Acquiring a Sample

My initial idea for this research project did not involve IPSC, since at that time I had no knowledge of practical shooting. I had originally planned to study gun owners' perspectives on gun control, but then decided to examine target shooting in comparison with various hobbies and sports. Since I wanted to study target shooters but was unsure what constituted this activity, I decided to venture out and visit a shooting range.^{*} I found the Amherst and Burktown ranges listed in the phone book. Since no one ever answered the phone at Burktown I focused on the Amherst range, which answered my call with an invitation to observe a safety course. I had e-mailed the president of Amherst with a statement of my intent, which he replied to with his consent for my study. I had gained entry to the field.

The safety course was aimed at new members of the club, and not particularly at IPSC shooters. However, during a break in the course, the instructor explained to the class that most of the members of the club were engaged in an activity called practical

^{*} Ethics approval for fieldwork in this study was granted after consideration by my thesis committee.

shooting. I was intrigued by the instructor's description of this activity. I decided to learn more about practical shooting by observing matches and black badge courses held at Amherst. After a few months in the field, I received an e-mail from Jake, a Black Badge instructor at Amherst. He invited me to participate in a Black badge course using his gun and equipment. This course signalled the start of a more participatory stage of my research.

At this point, Jake introduced me to the president of the provincial IPSC body. While I had engaged in research specifically on the shooting population of Amherst, I suddenly had permission by the provincial IPSC president to study all clubs in the region. I then began fieldwork at the clubs in Fallow, Turner and Irving, which drastically increased the number of opportunities to observe participants. This remained my fieldwork setting for the duration of my research.

Characteristics of the Sample

My sample of practical shooters contained some extremes of diversity and homogeneity. The ages of practical shooters varied from early teens to seniors (65+ years), though most participants are middle aged (35 to 64 years). For ethical reasons I decided to include only adults in this study. There were also a wide variety of occupations represented in this group, ranging from labourers to a company president. Several of my participants are either members of police agencies, or former or active members of the armed forces. Although these participants are able to shift between practical and sports/game frames, their work background enhances the practical

framework of experience within IPSC. While the majority of practical shooters have civilian employment, this does not preclude that they can not adopt practical frames. Levels of educational attainment ranged from high school to graduate degrees. All of the characteristics were similar in both the rural and urban segments of the population. The population was predominantly white, and male. For example, the typical club match would attract between 30 to 40 participants, out of which 3 or 4 females and 2 to 3 non-whites would attend. I was not entirely surprised by the under-representation of women shooters, as this is noted in other studies on gun ownership and gender (Spraggins 1995).

Insider Perspectives

Qualitative investigation is valuable for capturing an insider's view of the phenomenon. This is achievable through detailed observation, which brings the researcher into the setting and therefore closer to the perspective of the actor (Denzin and Lincoln 1994:5). Gaining the insider perspective is especially useful when it is noticeably different from that of outsiders. Since this difference of perspectives is the basis of stigma, these methods are well suited for using in conjunction with Goffman's theory on the management of spoiled identity (Prus 1996:80). This considered, a qualitative approach appears the best choice for studying the perspectives of practical shooters.

The Role of the Researcher

Within qualitative research there are various levels of observation available to the researcher. These levels are determined by the role the researcher adopts within the

group of interest. Four such roles: complete observer, peripheral member, active member, and complete member, are discussed in Adler and Adler's (1994) examination of observational techniques. The complete observer retains an overt role as a researcher completely detached from interaction with the membership of the group. In this role, the researcher does not develop friendships with any of the research subjects.

Unlike the complete observer, the other three forms of membership involve the adoption of insider identities. Peripheral membership requires the researcher not only to observe, but also to interact with the participants. Although involved in interaction with the group, the researcher refrains from actively participating in-group activities. Adler and Adler provide an example of this role using their research on upper-level drug dealers and smugglers, where the researchers established themselves "as members of the social crowd, accepted as "wise" and trustworthy individuals who refrained from participating in the actual trafficking" (1994:380). If a researcher in a peripheral role may be viewed as the 'wise', then actual participation brings the researcher into the domain of the 'own'.

As researchers become involved in the setting's activities, they move from a passive to an active membership role. An active membership role is less involved than a complete membership role, since the former engages in "activities [and] responsibilities that advance the group, but without fully committing themselves to members' values and goals" (Adler and Adler 1994:380). On the other hand, the latter role is characterised by complete immersion, to the extent where the researcher becomes the phenomenon. In the active membership role, the researcher is able to retain an overt role as observer while

engaging participants through bonds of friendship and shared membership. During my study, I occupied two roles, first as a peripheral member and then as an active member of practical shooting. The insider identity I developed through these roles was necessary for building the trust needed to fully access the research setting.

Trust: From the Wise to the Own

The stigmatised position of my participants created the challenge of having to overcome their suspicions and gain their trust. While none of my participants refused to co-operate with my study, I did find that friendly conversations during my introduction turned silent and sombre during a few occasions. Fortunately, on all occasions, the silence gave way to curiosity over the exact nature of my study. I generally described my study as an examination of the sport of practical shooting. A few participants wanted details beyond what I was prepared to share, as I was fearful that exposing the details of my research design would influence their usual behaviour. Since I was worried about having my evasiveness on this matter being misinterpreted as an attempt to disguise an ulterior motive, I chose to clearly state on such occasions that my writing was not based on an anti-gun agenda. The need for such a clear disclaimer stems from mistrust of academics by some members of this shooting community. For example, the province's official IPSC publication, *SITREP*, carried a message on how guns were not to blame for the Columbine shootings, that "needs to be heard by every parent, every teacher, every politician, every sociologist, every psychologist, and every so-called expert (Anonymous

2000:19). My approach appeared successful at dispelling any apprehension or suspicion, as well as establishing my position as a trusted outsider.

In this role as a researcher, I started to form relationships with members of the IPSC members of the club where I had initially encountered practical shooting. During this early stage of my fieldwork I occupied the role of observer at a Black Badge course and three matches. While these early observations provided information that aided the development of the overall project, they only included the details of IPSC available to a bystander.

Although I had at this point gained acceptance in my role as a researcher, I wanted to conduct fieldwork while seen as just another participant. This required a shift in my identity from a member of the wise to one of the own. My becoming a member of this group started in earnest with my introduction to Jake, who was my Black Badge instructor and primary informant. By using a gun and equipment borrowed from Jake, I was able to participate in the Black badge course and a few following matches. After attending several matches, I found other participants eager to offer me the use of their firearms as soon as they noticed I had arrived without one. This borrowing of firearms and equipment for matches was absolutely critical for my participation, since I do not own a firearm suitable for practical shooting.

By shooting at these matches, I developed my own personal identity as a practical shooter. This is demonstrated by a biographical encounter I experienced after introducing myself to an RO at a match:

[DG] You were running stage 1? [Jeff] Yeah, have you shot it yet? [DG] Yesterday. [Jeff] When I RO, I'm so focused on what the shooter is doing with the gun, I don't even remember who has shot, but I can tell you about every gun that has passed through. What were you shooting? [DG] A Browning hi-power. [Jeff] OK, I think I remember you. You're just off your Black Badge. You took your time, right? [DG] Yeah, that sounds like me. (Fieldnotes)⁹

My biography helped me improve relations with shooters with whom I was not close, for example:

I walk up to Doug. He is standing at the front of the range looking over two speed shoots and a short course. This is a local club match, so the set up of the stages is not very elaborate, constructed mainly with tables and chairs from the clubhouse and a few sheets of plywood. There are no props. [DG] Hi, what do you think of it? [Doug keeps staring out at the stages] OK I guess. Pretty plain. [DG] Yeah. Nothing quite like what I saw at the provincials. [Doug seems surprised. He turns to look at me.] You were at the provincials? [DG] Yes. [Doug seems genuinely interested] What was it like? (Fieldnotes)

These biographical encounters indicate that I had established my position as a member of the practical shooting community. As a member of this community I was able to observe practical shooting from a perspective not obtainable through my previous role as bystander.

⁹ The dates of my fieldnote entries are withheld in order to provide confidentiality for my participants. This decision is explained in greater detail later in this chapter when I discuss protecting the privacy of my participants.

My becoming an insider in the world of practical shooting was also aided by my participation in a training course for range officers. My participation in this course was arranged through Jake, and my primary gatekeeper¹⁰, the president of the Province's IPSC body. Following the RO course, club representatives who recognised me, either from the course or as an RO at another match, would allow me to participate in their matches as an RO or scorekeeper. Conducting either of these duties demonstrated that a certain level of trust was assumed of me as an insider. As with my role of shooter, a biography also emerged from my identity as range staff:

As soon as the range materials have been disassembled and stored away, those shooters and range staff who stayed to the end take seats on the picnic tables at the front of the range. Garry walks up to Ted, sitting beside me, and hands him an RO card¹¹. Ted signs it and hands it back. Ted turns to me. [Ted] Do you have your card yet? [DG] No, I don't. [Ted] I still owe you points from the last match, Don't I [I nod affirmative] well you'll have to remind me to sign for them later. [Jim] Christ, Dave! Ted owes points; I owe you points for a match, that's a year's worth of points right there. You've got to get your card. (Fieldnotes)

As with my insider role as a shooter, my participation as a member of the range staff established my personal identity as a member of IPSC. This insider status proved valuable for gaining the trust of my participants, necessary for conducting in-depth social research of a stigmatised group wary of outsiders.

¹⁰ The gatekeeper role involves managing access by outsiders to the group. Since all practical shooters in my region of study belonged to Jake's provincial body, he had control over my access to all participants.

My developing a role as a practical shooter led not only to closer relations with my participants on the range, but also to closer relations off range. The development of these close personal relations with my participants required several months of insider fieldwork. The problem of gaining the trust of group members, even when researching as an insider is also noted in Brymer's work with hunters and poachers:

It was only after a two-year period of testing that I became a member of the group (of which I have been a member for 19 years now). I am a rather good hunter and brought in my share of deer. Then, and only then, did they tell me why they refused [an offer to transport two dead deer]. Both of the deer had been poached, they did not trust me. They now trust me. Entry into a small group takes time, even though you know the subcultural argot and practices (1998:155).

My new familiarity with my participants primarily consisted of their asking me to join them for food or drinks after a match. These informal encounters provided valuable data, for they contained more personal and critical dialogue than was often heard on the range. For instance, these conversations provided a venue for participants to criticise other shooters whose transgressions had associated them with stigma symbols. In general, these off range conversations added considerable depth to the issues discussed on the range.

One challenge that emerged from this off range fieldwork concerned my ability for managing time. I found that taking lunch and dinner breaks with my participants provided such valuable opportunities for gathering data and cementing social bonds, that

¹¹ The RO card keeps track of points earned for work as range staff. Earning points is necessary for

I never dared decline an offer. As a result, I was sometimes confronted with the choice of different lunch parties.

Based on my fieldnotes here is a description of one such incident. I had just finished shooting the last stage of the match, and was putting away my gear when Robert calls over with an invitation for me to join Ned, Steve and himself for lunch. I accept, and we travel to a nearby restaurant to eat. Afterwards, they leave for their homes while I travel back to the range. As I am walking onto the range I meet Terry, Grant, and Harry. Grant tells me they have just finished for the day, and then asks me if I would like to join them for lunch. I accept their offer. They decide to eat at the restaurant from where I just came. They all order quite large meals. I do not want to seem out of place by ordering little or nothing, since I did agree on having lunch, so I order as well. When the waitress takes our order she does so quickly for the other men, but pauses with a look of confusion upon seeing me. After a couple of seconds she slowly asks if I would like to order anything. I once again arrive back at the range. Walking off the range are Ted, Todd, and Shelly. Again I am asked if I would like to go for lunch, and once again I accept. Once again I make my way to the same restaurant as before. Fortunately, this time only drinks are ordered. This example demonstrates the challenge of dividing time between individuals or small groups within a larger grouping.

Personal Politics

The personal relationships I had within my research group were dynamic, in that I had risked being drawn into group micro-politics. According to Punch (1994), field researchers may find themselves forced to choose sides due to factionalism within a group. Therefore, researchers should be aware of the potential for such occurrences, even though these “pitfalls and predicaments can rarely be anticipated, [because] they may fundamentally alter the whole nature and purpose of the research” (1994:85). To avoid the problem of factionalism, I decided to spend time with various individuals so not to become identifiable with any one person or group of persons. I believe this strategy was necessary because of some tensions I observed within the group:

I am walking off the range with Larry and Jay. [Larry] Did you notice how Josh was acting all nice to me? Saying good-bye, saying he'd call the next time he's in town so we can go for dinner. He knows damn well that's not going to happen.

We don't like each other and he has to put on a show. (Fieldnotes)

This ‘social butterfly’ approach was successful, since at no time did I feel that rivalries prevented me from interacting closely with participants on either side of a social conflict.

Coding the Data

The identification and labelling of data collected in this study involved two analytical strategies. The first strategy, as used by Damrell (1977), is based on the premise that phenomena may be disassembled into basic components. Once this is done,

the components may be judged in terms of the impact they have on the nature of the phenomenon. This strategy was extremely useful in the early stages of my research, when I was completely unfamiliar with the structure and goals of practical shooting and its members. For example, the examination of sporting and practical components alerted me to the roles they both occupied within the larger body of practical shooting.

The second analytic strategy used in this study relies on comparison and contrast. Manning (1980) utilises this strategy in his study of police narcotic investigations, to contrast the competing techniques within the department. By also using this approach, I was able to establish the differences and commonality that exist between the sporting and practical themes in IPSC. This model worked particularly well when examining the stigma and prestige symbols used within these themes.

The coding of data within this study was a continuous process conducted not only after, but also throughout the duration of my fieldwork. During the data collection portion of this research, as soon as I identified components of a larger theme, I would then re-read all of my fieldnotes recorded to that point to search for earlier references. From that point forward, the new codes were identified during collection, with re-coding occurring during the re-reading process.

Protecting the Privacy of My Participants

An important part of my effort to ensure that no harm comes to my participants, is the maintenance of the highest degree of confidentiality possible. I have obscured the identities of my participants for two reasons, first to protect their privacy as gun owners

in society, and second to protect their identities from other practical shooters. My concern for my participants' privacy within the wider community stems from recognition of their fears of being the target of thieves wishing to procure guns. An example of this fear is provided by Bert, in a conversation we had while taking a break in the club house:

Bert is sitting on the desk often used for registration during club matches. There is a book recording the membership numbers of shooters using the range and another for recording those members who have performed chores, lawn mowing etc. Bert picks up one of the books and flips the pages. [Bert] A while back the provincial police wanted us to keep a log of everyone who came to use the range, full name, full address, and phone number. All we need is for that to get stolen and the thieves have a complete guild for knowing where to get guns. They'd have your address; they could call see if no one's home then head right over. (Fieldnotes)

Similar sentiments were echoed by Ned:

I'm against it (licensing and registration) because I think it's a violation of privacy. They say it's secure but they say a lot of things. Do they think that there aren't people who could hack the system? Do they actually think that the Mafia or the bikers don't have people who could do that. (Fieldnotes)

Considering these fears, I decided to keep the identities of my participants hidden from the public.

I am also committed to my decision to obscure these identities as best as I could from the other participants. Naturally, those participants whom already have intimate knowledge of an event may recognise themselves or others they already know were involved. My goal is to avoid spreading any new knowledge of events beyond those participants whom already know about them. The events I took the most care to obscure involved those demonstrating the personal politics, such as the encounter between Larry and Josh. I take equal care to obscure those participants involved in stigmatisation within the group, which I discuss in chapter four.

To guard as much of my participants' confidentiality as possible, I have resorted to using pseudonyms, and obscuring some identifying information. All of the names in this study are pseudonyms. I have also used pseudonyms for the clubs that constituted my research setting. This was necessary as not to damage the reputation or privacy of individuals through their association to a particular club. To this end, I decided to omit all the dates from fieldnote references appearing in this report. By including dates, I would have risked identifying individuals and clubs, as the results of matches are published by IPSC. Therefore, if I provided a date with a fieldnote entry, anyone with access to IPSC records could uncover the location and participants at that match.

Preventing Harm to Participants

Throughout the preparation of this thesis, I have endeavoured to limit the potential for causing harm to my participants. While some of my efforts may seem typical for social research, such as protecting confidentiality, my fieldwork environment

presented some unique challenges. During the course of my fieldwork, I participated in practical shooting instruction and matches, as well as occasionally acting as a Range Officer. Needless to mention, accidentally shooting one of my participants would cause grief for all parties involved, and cause a severe breach of trust on this matter. This would also be the case if I failed to provide adequate supervision as a Range Officer to someone under my charge. While my previous firearms training through the military and the black badge course aided me in knowing how to safely handle a firearm, I none the less exercised extreme caution when on the range. As a result, I tended to concentrate on my gun handling at the expense of the time I spent completing a course of fire. Attending to the task at hand was also crucial when supervising as an RO, during which time, my participants depended on my fulfilling this role for their safety.

Reflexivity

Qualitative researchers have witnessed the emergence of consciousness regarding the relationship between the social scientists and their subjects. This self-consciousness stems from the belief that the researcher and participant "relation is reflexive, that research procedure constructs reality as much as it produces descriptions of it" (Gubrium and Holstein 1997:9). I believe this self-consciousness of reflexivity can be managed, thus avoiding a crisis where the research project is dismissed as nothing but an accomplishment of the reality that is the subject. Credibility of the research process is manageable by holding researchers accountable for their potential impact on the project.

Following this strategy, I have scrutinised my identity in terms of the impact this has on my setting and research.

My first concern regarding my impact on the setting centred on my appearance. As I am a white male, I did not stand out in my research setting since the vast majority of my participants held the same characteristics. Blending into this group was less automatic in terms of dress. I realised that my dress as a student may have created an outsider impression with my participants, so I left the rock concert t-shirts at home and instead opted for plain golf shirts. By wearing golf, or plain t-shirts and jeans, I blended into the group in terms of how they were dressed. To this end, once I had established myself as a participant, I took the first opportunity to buy a setting-related shirt. My purchase was a shirt indicating that I had participated in a particular shooting match. At matches, some of my participants commonly wore golf or t-shirts either depicting a previous match, or advertising particular brands of firearms used in IPSC.

Due to my background with firearms, I felt somewhat at ease within this environment, and because of this, I needed to pay particular attention to how this influenced my perspectives. This background prepared me for working with firearms in the research setting, by removing some of the fear and novelty that may exist in someone whose only exposure to guns has been through the entertainment or news media. My familiarity with some firearms did not mean that I took them for granted as objects, as I was able to distinguish the difference between 'open' and 'standard' class guns in terms of appearance and capabilities.

If my experience with firearms is taken in its proper military context, then the potential for a pro-gun bias appears not as high as it otherwise might have been¹². My lack of experience with civilian gun culture in general, and practical shooting in particular, translated into my not having an over familiarity that may have obscured my impression of the setting. For example, the issue of stigmatisation of gun ownership and use that is central to some civilian contexts (Olmsted 1988), is absent in the military setting. Overall I believe that my experience provided the basis for a balanced approach, on one hand I held no particular fear or loathing of guns, and on the other hand, I held no obligation of loyalty to civilian gun culture.

Conducting Research on a Morally Controversial Topic

I once heard someone describe the abortion debate as an issue without a middle ground. At times I feel that the issue of firearms ownership may fit in the category of topics so controversial that neutrality is impossible. I have been reminded of people's fear of guns while describing my work to fellow students. When I described my research subjects to undergraduate students I was leading in a discussion group, I was faced with fifteen expressions of pure horror. A classmate exhibited sincere concern over my having to work with gun owners, "that must be scary" she said. Another classmate felt free to use the term 'redneck' interchangeably with that of 'gun owner', while we

¹² My gun ownership stems from four and a half years of service in the army reserves, during which I purchased a couple of rifles to practise shooting on my own time. This supplementary training was never conducted on civilian ranges, which resulted in my never having contact with civilian shooters. After I left the military, my interest in these guns waned, as they held no relevance for me outside of the military context.

discussed why people own guns. Although horrific acts such as the massacres at Columbine highschool or the University of Montreal may stir within people a genuine abhorrence towards gun violence, this should not prevent a non-judgemental examination of gun use.

I have conducted this research with the view that the evidence I gather should speak for itself. While my biography presented in the earlier discussion of reflexivity may indicate the potential for a pro-gun bias, I am not against gun control, though I believe the debate should be based on rational evidence that legislation is needed and will work, as opposed to emotional arguments. However, this thesis is not about gun control. At no time have I intended this thesis to act as advocacy for either side of the gun control debate. This study is an examination of the social grouping of practical shooters and their management of spoiled identity. My efforts are simply an attempt to accurately portray the activities of practical shooters within the focus of this research.

Summary

In conclusion, the qualitative approach to fieldwork was quite suitable for this research project. Qualitative methods were responsible for introducing me to practical shooting, thereby fulfilling a reputation of being ideal for approaching unknown phenomenon. These methods also suit my research by allowing the examination of insider perspectives. Since the whole notion of stigma stems from the difference between insider and outsider perspectives, access to the views of participants was essential for examining stigma management. Access to these insider views was achieved

through my role as a peripheral member, and later as an active member, of the practical shooting subculture. Neither of these roles would have proved successful without the acceptance and trust accorded to me by my participants.

Chapter 3

Frames

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the frames of experience found within IPSC. I begin by providing an identification of the various frames, followed by examples of how participants create their reality working within these templates.

Frames of Experience

Within IPSC there are both in-group and out-group responses to stigma. The out-group response tends to be associated with the notion that IPSC is for sport. In-group responses are often related to the stance that practicality is still a relevant part of IPSC. Practicality and sports/gaming are separate experiences within IPSC, but this does not mean that these frames are exclusive to individuals. A participant may define a situation in either frame of experience depending on the circumstance. Therefore, the sports/game and practical sides of IPSC are secondary frames of experience, and are not exclusive sub-culture. The differences between the frame based responses to stigma are covered later in the next chapter, when I examine stigma and prestige symbols.

The Sports/Game Frame

Goffman (1961, 1967), offers several explanations for why people engage in sports and games, including the pursuit of fun, action, and contest. In *Encounters*, Goffman establishes that games are selected, discarded and modified by participants,

“on the basis of their ensuring euphoric interaction” (1961:67). This euphoria stems from the satisfaction of playing the game to an unpredictable conclusion. The sensation of playing an unpredictable game, with the player maintaining “a single sharp focus of awareness... at a high pitch during the full span of play,” is the thrill of action (Goffman 1967:156). The participants’ thrill within this span of play is heightened by competitiveness, as the “excitement and character display of fateful scenes, become in the case of action, the tacit purpose of the whole show” (Goffman 1967:239). These character contests are used by participants to display a self-image based on their stature as skilled and knowledgeable practitioners (Stebbins 1996:163). The sensation of fun, action, and contest are the basis for experiences that I consider the sports/game frame. The sports/game experience is a secondary frame of IPSC, as the experience of the sports/game and practical frame is shared in IPSC. For the sports/game frame to be a primary frame, all of the experiences of the participant would have to be rooted in achieving fun, action and contest for their own sakes.

The Practical Frame

The practical secondary frame includes experiences based on various forms of violence as a primary frame. Violence is also represented in the technical re-doings of IPSC as a secondary practical frame. I have divided the experience of gun violence into two types. The first type of gun practicality, illegitimate violence, includes firearm use not sanctioned by law. According to Wilkinson and Fagan (1996:64), gun violence among criminals is a frame, where violent acts occur as scripts based on situational

experience. For example, the settling of a gang conflict may involve a drive-by shooting as an accepted form for avenging a slight, and restoring the balance of power (Wilkinson and Fagan 1996:70). In instances where my participants made reference to this type of violence, criminals are presented in the role of foe and not friend.

The second type of gun violence I consider as part of practical frame is legitimate, and includes lawful self-defence, and military or police action. The experience of self, includes tales in which participants recount the failures and destruction of criminals. Virtual criminals are the targets of those participants who use IPSC as a technical re-doing of self-defence. As I discussed during my literature review of Gibson (1994), in my section on guns and military/ police socialisation, experiences grounded in these contexts may influence civilian shooting activities. A subject's participation in practical shooting may elicit a military/police context in the form of technical re-doings. The military/police frame may also be keyed through the conversations of participants. As was mentioned previously in my overview of Gibson (1994), participants on a civilian range may ground their conversations in military or police experiences they either directly or indirectly encountered. Self-defence and military/police experience provide guidance for the interactions of participants and their creation of meaning in the practical frame of IPSC.

Humour and the Practical Frame

Both Alford (1981) and Zurcher (1985), maintain that humour is a creation that conforms to framed experience. In the case of Zurcher's Navy reservists, their 'letting

off steam' after a war game was "dominated, if not exclusively oriented to humorous comments involving the organisationally expected role" (1985:195). Humour is used to relate police/military experience into the lived experience of practical shooters. The following example illustrates how such a police context is created:

I am sitting in a restaurant with Harry, Grant and Terry. We have just arrived after shooting a near-by match. [Harry] I have a story for you guys. I was over at the police station the other day, I know these guys pretty well, they're over at our range every so often to get in some practise. Anyway, so I'm talking to one of the young officers, he's not happy with his gun, so I say 'let me take a look at it.' So I'm there working on this guy's gun, and he takes off to the back room to get something. I'm left with the sergeant. Then he says he has to head to the back room for a second. In walks this officer from another detachment. So there I am standing in front of the main counter, nobody behind it, holding this guy's gun. This guy's a bit startled. Then the sergeant walks back in, as if nothing's going on. This other officer looks relieved, 'oh, this is one of your officers'. The sergeant looks at him, 'no.' (Hearty laughter from everyone at the table.)

(Fieldnotes)

While Harry is a civilian, Grant and Terry work for a police agency. Therefore, this joke brings Harry into a common context with Grant and Terry, creating an IPSC social relation based on a practical frame.

Humour and the Sports/Game Frame

I also noticed that sometimes humour was created in a way that conformed to experience related to the sports/game frame. For example, I observed some teasing conducted among participants, which revolved around the issue of performance:

Several shooters had gone to Jim's house after a match for a BBQ. Jim and Earl are at the BBQ cooking hotdogs and hamburgers. Several feet away, Lisa is standing beside a table covered with condiments, bowls of chips, and bags of hotdog and hamburger buns. [Jim] Lisa, do you mind passing over a bag of buns? (Lisa makes a 'wind-up' motion as if she is about to throw them very forcefully at Jim, but she then lowers her arm and starts to take a step towards Jim) [Jim, smiling] The way you shoot I don't think I have anything to worry about. (Lisa stops moving, she stares at Jim with a look of defiance. She then flings the bag of buns forcefully at Jim; they land at his feet.) [Jim, smiling and boisterous] Typical D class shooter! (Everyone breaks into laughter).
(Fieldnotes)

In this instance, the classification system is used as the basis for taunting. This teasing demonstrates that Jim and the other participants who laughed, grounded humour in terms of a framework where scores and classification define competitiveness. By making the joke, Jim also demonstrates an identity created in this instance through the experience of sports/game shooting.

Stage Design: Practical Training

The division within practical shooting, between proponents of the sports/game orientation and those who value the activity as practical training, is clearly evident in the views of participants who design stages. While at a provincial match I ask Pierre, one of the stage designers of this match, to explain to me if any guidelines were followed in the construction of these stages. Pierre tells me that the IPSC rulebook, which addresses a variety of issues, such as those controlling poor-sporting behaviour, governs the process of designing stages. I ask if rules in this area are meant to discourage people from designing realistic stages. Pierre disagrees with my interpretation of this rule:

Realistic is all right since people can defend themselves on the street and in their homes. (He then points to a line of text in the rulebook that states, practical competition must be realistic.) IPSC is not supposed to be offensive, only for self-defence. (Fieldnotes)

Wanting to see some examples of meaning attributed to stages, I ask him if he could show me some of the practical stages.

Pierre and I start our tour of practical stages at range 1. One of the stages involves firing from behind a piece of plywood, cut in the shape of a fire hydrant and painted red. Approximately twenty feet in front of the hydrant are two sections of wooden picket fence, separated by two targets in between them, with an additional target behind each section. According to Pierre, “This [stage] is more practical. You are on the

street, you take cover behind the fire hydrant and shoot the bad guys” (Fieldnotes). We move to the second range, where we observe a participant shooting a stage consisting of five targets placed around a basketball net. When the shooter at the firing line hears the starting signal, an electronic beep from a timer, he drops the basketball he is holding, draws his pistol and shoots all the targets. On the opposite side of the range from the basketball net, there are two grey tombstones made of plywood, which partially shield three targets. Pierre starts to explain the stages before us: “stage nine is practical, you are playing basketball and you must defend yourself. This one is practical, you are at the cemetery and you shoot the bad guys” (Fieldnotes).

In Pierre’s description of the stages he helped design, he demonstrates how these stages are used to express experience as a situation of technical redosings. His perceptions of these stages are based on the experience of belief that people may defend themselves while out on the street. The potential act of self-defence is used as the basis for constructing the potential arena, such as a street, basketball court, or cemetery, where self-defence could be necessary. Besides providing mimicry of potential action, stage designers may also pattern stages on specific actions already conducted as a primary frame. Peter, an instructor for black badge courses, provides formal training to people who wish to participate in practical shooting. During a class he mentions to the students that as part of their training, he will require them to shoot a stage known as the *El Presidente*:

The *El Presidente* is one of the original IPSC stages. It was designed by the bodyguard of some tin -pot dictator. While defending the president, he shot three attackers, but found he had to reload and shoot them again before they went down. So the stage calls for two shots, two shots, two shots, reload, two shots, two shots, two shots. It's based on a practical rationale. In IPSC we value imagination, diversity, and difference. (Fieldnotes)

The *El Presidente* stage is not only the situation, but also acts as the experience. Peter views the history of the event as an example of the skilful adaptation of a shooter to the particular situation at hand. The skill shown in the *El Presidente*, is the originator's ability to quickly reload his gun and shoot the three men a second time.

The design of a stage does not always require an expressed realism for the construction to encourage practicality. Peter tells a class of black badge candidates about proposed changes to the IPSC rulebook:

There is a debate on whether to retain scenarios, that's when the RO (range officer) introduces a stage by telling a little story. For the 14th edition we got rid of scenarios, the designer may still have a scenario in mind; he just doesn't say what it is. Those who have shot IPSC for a while can recognise the scenario. Instead of saying there is a bad guy walking a dog, two shots for the bad guy and

one for the dog, a range officer might say, two shots and one shot. You can figure out what the scenario is. (Fieldnotes)

Even stages without any obvious resemblance to reality may be practical constructions, if the designer expects that participants are combining the event with their own experiences of practical interpretation, to create technical redoings. If the construction of the stage interferes with the performance of a technical redoing, a shooter may intervene in the design process.

Cory and Steve are constructing a stage for target practice, involving five targets shot from two firing points. While Cory and Steve adjust targets, Tom moves back and forth between where the first two targets are to be engaged, and the second point for firing at the remaining three targets. When at the firing points, Tom uses his hands to simulate shooting at the targets. He finishes his simulation, and stands with Keith behind the second firing point. Cory and Steve finish placing the targets, and walk back to the firing points. Tom remarks: "Can't we have a barrier, isn't the whole point to get these guys." Keith continues the complaint: "By the time you get here (the second firing point), the guy's already down the fire escape." Cory agrees: "By that time he's running away." "Or limping away," adds Steve. (Fieldnotes)

Although the barrier is not constructed, there is no further talk of the matter once Cory and Steve have made their practical remarks about the stage. Tom and Keith require this

practical reinforcement from Cory and Steve, so the stage may conform to expectations of a technical redoing.

Sports/Game Stage Design

Unlike practical oriented participants, who design stages as technical redos, participants basing their frame on sports/game experiences create stages that need not represent reality. Part of the sports/game frame is the expectation that stages should foster competition between participants. In IPSC matches, participants are ranked according to their hit factor, which is calculated by dividing the points they receive from hitting the targets, by the time taken to complete the stage. While talking with Andrew, he eluded to what a stage for training should resemble:

We try to set up some scenarios that match small stages to practice: just to get you to do manoeuvres, transferring the gun from one hand to the other, quickly, safely, reloads, learning to very quickly shift from shooting fast at a full target, to one that's very difficult. You have to change your mindset very quickly. It's more or less variety, showing that you can do the manoeuvres very safely and quickly. In IPSC you can not break ninety degrees, you can't turn more than ninety degrees either way. You have to make sure you do these manoeuvres fast, efficiently, without endangering, uhm, going out of that safe zone, and very repeatable. So [you] have to train your mind and body so you're not thinking about it anymore, you just do it. (Fieldnotes)

According to Andrew, the stage should emphasise the mastery of shooting techniques, to reinforce the participant's desire to shoot quickly and safely. The experience of the designer is based on the experience that quick, efficient, and safe shooting results in a high hit factor. A high score and a quick time are useless for the goal of competitiveness if the participant is disqualified for violating a safety rule, thus accounting for Andrew's repeated emphasis on shooting safely.

The design of stages in the sports/game frame also draws on the expectation that practical shooting should be a fun activity. While at a match, I ask Chris what considerations he takes into account when designing stages:

The most important thing is the fun factor. Some say it should be based on a scenario. If someone asked me what is the scenario, what scenario? Here it's purely a game. There are criteria in the IPSC rulebook. You can't shoot more than nine shots from one position, or more than twenty-eight during an entire field shoot. They also say you should have three speed shoots for every field, and that's about what we have here. I like to throw in variety or it gets boring. I usually come up with a couple of really good stages per year. A stage can not be used twice. You can use stages you've seen elsewhere, or see one in a magazine and think that one is really neat, but for the same locality you can't re-use. People can't show up having already been through it. (Fieldnotes)

Chris emphasises the value of excitement in creating fun stages. Unlike the more practical stages, such as the *El Presidente*, which values the repetitive testing of skills, sports/game design requires changes to stages to prevent boredom. Design changes occur with the assumption that if the stage is boring, and therefore not fun, the activity will cease to be worthwhile for participants. Another reason for changing the design of stages involves the need to ensure that some participants will not have an unfair competitive advantage over others. This also helps guarantee that the fun experience of achievement remains within the grasp of as many competitors as possible.

Practical Recognition

Besides the willingness of participants to design practical oriented stages, there is also evidence of participants willing to recognise the activity as a technical redoing. I ask Rick to describe some of the stages he has shot in the past. In Rick's opinion:

Sometimes [the stages] are quite practical. There was one stage here at a match; you were in a cot with a blanket pulled over you. Beside the bed were your gun and a magazine on a night table. At the beep you had to get out of bed load the gun and shoot the targets. (Fieldnotes)

During a provincial match a group of participants stand before a stage they are about to shoot. In this stage, the shooter starts from a position behind a wall, then runs forward

pushing a target suspended by a wire, while firing at targets positioned behind plywood cut in the form of trees. While examining the stage, Ebert remarks: "In a tactical situation, why would I be using the no shoot (the target on the wire), as cover." Ken then makes a similar observation: "In a tactical situation, why would you be running from cover?" Fieldnotes) If participants approach the stage with experiences of tactical considerations, their interpretations will constitute a practical frame regardless of any input from the course designer. The value of a stage is therefore critiqued according to practical references framed separately from, and therefore not dependent on, the reality of a stage. This is shown through Ebert and Ken's ability to make the situation practical, by critiquing the details of the stage they view as impractical.

Sports/Games and Reactions to IPSC

The expectations of competitiveness and fun present in stage design is also evident in the behaviour of sports/game oriented participants. Some shooters may demonstrate their competitive expectations through their reaction to scores and times. Tim looks disappointed as he walks towards the score keeper after having shot a stage. Tim asks, "what was my time, I bet a shitty time" (Fieldnotes). Frank has just finished a speed shoot, and approaches the target together with the range officer and the scorekeeper. The range officer calls to the score keeper that Frank has one mike, a miss costing ten points. Frank shakes his head as he paces back and forth by the target, and finally says, "the fucking gun pulled down to the left, shit," and walks away (Fieldnotes). At another match, I listen to Martin describe how he accidentally ran into

the range officer while shooting a stage. I ask him if the range staff will allow him to re-shoot the stage. He responds that:

The range officer didn't so I appealed to the match officer. He will get back to me with a decision. I had to pay a hundred dollars American for them to consider my appeal. If I win I get it back, if I lose then the money goes to the range officers fund, to line their pockets. (I ask if this happens often.) Sometimes too often, people whine about small things. This is borderline, on the boundary. I can make a case; if I hadn't hit him there would have been no problem. Boundary of what's interference. (An official walks up to us and says that Martin will re-shoot.) (Fieldnotes)

These events demonstrate the importance participants place on the times and scores they receive. The negative reaction to a bad time or score shows how success is measured in the competition within the stage itself, as opposed to the goal of providing an indicator of possible success in the practical frame. The success or failure at shooting a single stage causes no ramifications for a possible practical event, or at least none that could not be corrected through further practice at the next stage. Risking one hundred dollars in an appeal process, would not be worthwhile for a shooter only interested in practical training, but would be an expense worth incurring by a competitive shooter concerned with an overall score.

Sports/game shooters' reaction to a stage may depend on their perception of competitive value and fairness. Shooters and designers have similar experiences defining what is fun and challenging in the set-up of a stage:

It's nice to have something that's challenging, well thought out. That there are options you can try, give you a bit of variety. I like to see if my way is better than yours. So it's nice if there is the potential for variety. Yet it's designed so I can go through and not have real problems. A bad set-up would mean it might be extremely awkward to do something, which might even be a safety issue. It might not be very interesting, and that wouldn't be fun. It's a game, so let's make it a fun game. Got to keep the safety aspect in there. It's not fun if it's too tricky, too ridiculously tricky. (Fieldnotes)

I ask Andrew to tell me about some of the stages he has shot at local matches:

You were at the provincials, saw the submarine one, that was interesting. It had some aspects to it that made you think, I've gotta do this fast, I gotta do that, how am I gonna. There were a number of them there that were quite good for that aspect. Can I do things differently? There was another one you had to lie on the ground and figure a way to reach around the wall, and if we're better at shooting one handed you might shoot around the wall, if you were faster, you might

decide to lie on the ground. Then there was a maze you had to go through, you had to remember the different things to shoot. (Fieldnotes)

These instances demonstrate how participants frame the shooting of a stage, as the means to realise competitive aspirations and connected perceptions of fun. The satisfaction of a participant is not entirely dependent on success, so long as there is the perception that the stage conforms to the expectations of what constitutes a fair challenge. As indicated by Andrew, the challenge itself can justify the activity for participants, if the degree of challenge falls within expected limits.

Practical Strategy

Even without the presence of stages, practical oriented shooters reinforce their experiences through strategizing. These plans for how the stages should be approached act as situations, which draw on and reinforce experiences of technical redoing. During a black badge course, several shooters are discussing what is the best way to position a gun holster for a quick draw. Dan enters the conversation with the advice that “the best place to conceal a gun is in a camera bag, but the pockets for film are not good for magazines, [since] they’ll fall out” (Fieldnotes). At another black badge course, Peter asks me:

Do you know what a pepper popper is? (A metal silhouette that falls over when hit) They are smaller than cardboard targets, and are supposed to represent

someone with a shotgun coming towards you from a distance. Some stages you can only shoot with your weak hand. This simulates a situation where your strong arm has been injured. For the purpose of drawing your pistol, you can use both hands, the assumption being that the shooter is wounded after drawing. You can not use your good hand to reload to be true to the simulation, so you reload by placing the gun down and sliding in the new mag. The gun is heavy enough that it will not slide while pushing the mag in. (Fieldnotes)

As part of the black badge training, Peter makes me practice drawing a toy pistol from a hip holster while facing one of the targets. Peter then takes the pistol, aims it at the ground before the target and says:

Here's a little tactical recommendation. If you were a police officer and you're approaching a suspect, you would aim low and not straight at him. Do you know why? (He hands me the gun so I can take aim) If you aim high you can't see what he's doing with his hands. He might have a pocket pistol. But aimed low, you can see clearly. That's just a little tactical recommendation. (Fieldnotes)

In these examples, the participants create a situation of preparation based on the expectation that practical shooting will provide realistic training. Whether in design, use, or strategizing, some participants in practical shooting conduct technical redos based on experiences of simulated combat.

Sports/Games Strategy

The sports/game experience is reinforced within practical shooting by participants involved in the creation of strategies, which are attempts to excel at the challenges they expect to meet while shooting a stage. Sports/game strategies involve planning as a means to create advantages for a better time or score than those of other participants. I see Karl walking around the range, pointing at targets with his hands and running to various firing positions. I ask him what this process accomplishes:

It helps you plan. With this one there are about five different ways you can do it. Some people may change mags after the forth or fifth target. I have eight round mags so I'll change after the third target. You need to have an order of what targets you want to shoot and where to reload, or you're left standing in the middle of a stage having to make up a new plan while the clock is ticking. It's also ritual. A lot of people have little things they do at the firing line. Doing that helps you relax. When you get up there you're heart's pounding and you just need to calm down. There might be people everywhere, and then at the firing line you might feel as though you're the only one here. You block it all out.

(Fieldnotes)

While at a provincial match, Shelly, Ted, and I watch as a shooter completes a stage. One participant is shooting the last group of targets, when halfway through the

procedure his gun is out of ammunition, forcing him to reload while in a firing position. Shelly turns to me and says, "this is an example of why you need a strategy, you want to change mags on the move and not while stationary, it saves time." Ted agrees, "time is the most important thing, less means more" (Fieldnotes). In these strategies, participants display a preoccupation with a quick time as a goal, and not necessarily linked to tactical practice. The interest in time as a competitive commodity acts as one experience that defines purpose for sports/game shooters, and guides their behaviour when they interact with the activity's physical trappings. Although all participants use the same stages during matches, those in the sports/game frame are further removed from the primary context than those in the technical redoings frame. As a result, sports/game experience is almost completely devoid of practical context, while technical redoings contain simulations of contexts possibly applicable in the real world.

Summary

Frames are forms of collective experience that guide individuals during their creation of meaning through symbolic interaction. While practical shooters define themselves through interaction, this generally occurs within frameworks of experience comprising the sports/game and practical secondary frames. These frameworks provide the basis for practical shooters' definitions, but do not act as simply determinants of their behaviour. In the next chapter I examine the prestige and stigma symbols created by practical shooters for managing their spoiled identity.

Chapter 4

Prestige and Stigma Symbols

In this chapter I examine how participants create **stigma and prestige symbols** that reflect their **frame of experience**. I also demonstrate how these symbols reflect **in-group and out-group alignments** in the response to perceived external stigma. This chapter starts with my establishing that practical shooters feel stigmatised by outsiders. After this, I provide examples of prestige and stigma symbols created by shooters in reference with a sports/game frame. I then conduct a similar exploration of prestige and stigma levied by participants in the practical frame.

Stigma: Shooters and Normals

Before I begin my examination of stigma within the world of practical shooting itself, I would like to establish that shooters believe they face stigmatisation from non-shooting normals. I will base the existence of my participants' stigma in the atrocity tales they recount, concerning their experiences with members of the non-shooting public and government. Vern's story illustrates one such encounter with the public:

[Vern] While in university, I showed up to one of my classes wearing a T-shirt from the gun club. It had a circle with cross hairs and our motto, 'our sights are on safety'. At first this young woman in the class thought it was a joke. So I explained to her, 'No, I shoot handguns as a hobby'. Well, she was appalled.

(Fieldnotes)

Another atrocity tale, which involved a disappointing encounter with normals, was experienced by Lloyd:

[Lloyd] At my last club we decided to have a raffle to raise money for some upgrades to the range. So I brought some tickets to work to sell to people at the office. My co-workers asked me what they were for. When I told them they treated me like I was crazy. (His tone hardens, appears frustrated) All these guys who I bought tickets from for hockey draws suddenly wouldn't give me the time of day. (Fieldnotes)

These recollections demonstrate a sentiment within the practical shooting community, that normals do not accept their activity as anything other than deviant.

While shooters may feel as though they are not accepted by normals, they also believe that this lack of acceptance translates into their being unfairly treated by the government. This lack of understanding, or actual persecution by the government includes the actions of both police and the Canadian Firearms Centre. One complaint against the former is found in another tale by Vern:

[Vern] One of the guys in the club had some troubles with the police. He lived in this apartment building. Well, the super had to do some work in this guy's apartment while he was at work. So, the super goes into this guy's apartment, sees boxes of ammunition on a shelf, and calls the police. They come and seize this guy's ammunition, and refuse to return it until he buys a locked cabinet to store it. According to C-68, the ammunition must be kept separate from the guns,

and the guns must be locked up. There is nothing in there about locking up ammunition! And yet the police would not release this guy's property until he bought the cabinet, so in the end he gave in and bought one. (Fieldnotes)

Belief in the misunderstanding of government is also demonstrated by Ned's account of a bureaucratic 'run around' at the CFC:

[Ned] I was thinking of shooting a match abroad, so I call for the paper work to get my gun back into Canada. They ask me about my point of re-entry, so I ask if they could make it valid for any point. The operator I'm taking to says 'no, you have to designate a point of entry'. I tell her that I would like the point of entry unspecified in case my flight is diverted. She says 'don't worry I'm sure customs would be understanding if that happened'. I said, 'oh yeah, tell that to my friend who was diverted into Vancouver and had her guns seized'. (Fieldnotes)

These atrocity tales reflect the views of participants who see themselves as stigmatised by normals, either by the public or government.

Prestige Symbols in the Sports/Game Frame

Skill

Within practical shooting, I noticed that prestige was allotted to those individuals exhibiting great skill. In the sports/game frame, this skill is symbolised through the

classification system. Master class shooters are revered by other shooters, either through direct biographical relations or by reputation from biographical others.

I am standing in the background area of the Turner Range. In front of me are three field courses. Barry is standing at the start position with the RO and scorekeeper. Guy is standing to my right, keenly watching Barry. He turns to me. [Guy] That's Barry, he's a Master class shooter. (The timer sounds and Barry quickly shoots the stage.) [Guy, shaking his head] He's something else, (pause) fast. (Fieldnotes)

I recorded a similar encounter at the Fallow range.

[Shep] Watch this Dave. That's Barry, a Master class. (Barry stands ready before the short course. The timer sounds and he fires.) [Shep] Did you see that! He was done before the bullet casings hit the ground. (Fieldnotes)

In another example of reverence for a Master class shooter:

I am sitting in a bar after a match, with Mark, Aaron, Karl, Al, and Jake. [Mark to Jake] Have you seen Kevin White shoot? [Jake] Yeah. He can really move. [Mark] He is one of the guys I hate to RO. The timer goes off and he's gone. I can't keep up with the guy. He's finished the stage, having a smoke, and I'm still half way back down the range. (Fieldnotes)

And another:

Jake is teaching a Black Badge course for several new practical shooters. Jake looks out the window and quickly does a double take. [Jake] I think you guys are in luck. There's one of this area's Master class shooters outside, I'll go and see if

I can get him to come say a few words. (Jake leaves, and a couple of minutes later returns with Barry.) [Jake] I would like to introduce you guys to Barry Jones. [Barry] Hi guys. (Members of the group say 'hi'.) [Jake] I was thinking that you could say a few words. [Barry] Well, I don't really know what to tell you. [Jake] Maybe give them a couple of pointers. [Barry] Ok, remember this. Learn the fundamentals first. As the saying goes, you can't shoot fast enough to miss. Take time to learn how to shoot those A's, then speed up to shave off some time. (Fieldnotes)

These examples demonstrate how the classification system acts as a social symbol of skill prestige for the sports/game frame. Individuals such as Kevin and Barry are linked to this symbol by a mark of personal identity, their Master class status.

Fun

Another symbol of prestige is associated with participants' willingness to find fun in practical shooting. The symbols associated with this type of prestige are laughter, and the use of the word fun. A conversation from my notes of Jim's BBQ demonstrates this symbolism:

A group of shooters are sitting on patio chairs, talking. Earl asks Lowell if he had been to a range in the neighbouring province. [Lowell] That's the place we took Robert, it was his first match. He's blasting away; you could hear the guy laughing if you were standing at the back of the range. So he gets to the end of

the stage and turns around, 'this is really fun guys'! (Lowell stands up to act this out, and mimics Roberts's laughter.) [Lowell, laughing] Meanwhile we're all diving out of the way of his line of fire. (Fieldnotes)

Although Robert breached safety guidelines and was disqualified for turning around while holding the gun, the emphasis of this story was on how much fun he had. This emphasis on having fun is also the central tenet of the following example:

I am shooting a stage at a match, and it is not going well. Sand from the range has become lodged in my magazines, and as a result I am having constant problems with jamming. After I finish the stage, Derrick the RO turns to me. [Derrick] That looked painful. [DG] Yeah, I'm going to see what I can do about cleaning out those mags. [Derrick] But you still had fun though, right? [DG] Yeah, sure. [Derrick] Good, in the end that's all that matters. (Fieldnotes)

Unlike skill prestige, fun prestige does not depend on ability but on the perspective that this activity is fun. Robert and I identified with the fun prestige symbols, which allowed other shooters to create this prestige as biography.

Sportsmanship

I have also discovered that prestige in the sports/game frame includes those practical shooters designated as having sportsmanship. The prestige symbol for sportsmanship consists of acts that help others. The following example of 'helping' as a

prestige symbol was retold several times during the course of my fieldwork by biographical others.

Jake is lecturing a group of Black Badge candidates. [Jake] Try and help each other out when you can, its not only good sportsmanship, but your helping someone may be reciprocated when you really need it. I'm reminded of a good story. There was a big match in Elmwood. Brent Halcome showed up, he's one of the best shooters in North America. He has with him a whole entourage, including a factory rep gunsmith with a box full of parts and tools. One of the locals shows up, just an average shooter. He ends up being a walk-on in Halcome's squad. This local guy is having a horrible time. His gun keeps jamming on every stage; he's about ready to give up. Halcome says to the guy, 'bring your gun over to the safety area, let's take a look at it'. So Halcome and his gunsmith have this guy's gun apart, they're taking out parts, chucking them, replacing them with new ones. In the end, this guy basically has a rebuilt gun. So this guy's thinking, great, what's this going to cost me? He offers Halcome a hundred bucks. Halcome refuses to accept it. He says to the guy, the next time you see a fellow shooter in need of a hand, help them out. (There are smiles and nods of approval from the candidates. The candidate sitting beside me turns and says [Lyle] Excellent. (Fieldnotes)

The repeating of this story several times by my participants seems to indicate a legendary portrayal of sportsmanship through the 'helping' prestige symbol. Halcome is exemplified by biographical others as the epitome of sportsmanship.

Stigma and the Sports/Game Frame

Gaming

In opposition to the prestige of sports/game shooters, is the stigma of being a cheater. The prestige of the sports/game frame is based on valuing experiences of fun, action and competitiveness. Cheating acts in opposition to these principles. Participants confront this threat to their enjoyment through their creation and use of stigma symbols. One type of stigma symbol is an identification of 'gaming'. This occurs when shooters try to obtain an unfair advantage through a manipulation of the way IPSC is played, but without actually breaking set rules. For example:

I'm sitting in a bar with Jake, Vern, Terry and Grant. They are discussing an upcoming match. [Jake] It would be nice to set up early, before anybody has the chance to start scoping out the stages. [Vern] I'm sure a lot of so-called helpers will be there. [DG] Yesterday I was talking with Stock, and he said he'd like to set up the targets with those guys watching, and then once they've left, move them around. [Vern] He's just as bad as any of them. (Fieldnotes)

Another perceived manipulation of the rules:

I am speaking with George, standing in front of a wall covered with the scoring results from the match. Dennis walks up behind George. [Dennis] George. Sorry

for interrupting. Do you mind if I have a quick word with you? (Dennis points with his finger to Linda's on a score sheet.) Look at this. She's a D class, and she's doing better than most B's. [George] She had a good shoot on that stage. [Dennis] It wasn't a fluke. Look here (points), and here (points), and here (emphasises word, and points). There are shooters trying their hardest to do well as D's. How do you expect them to compete with her? They're going to think that they'll never get to the top of the class. They'll get frustrated, and give up. Now, I don't mean to complain but something has to be done. (Fieldnotes)

In the first example, spending time planning how to shoot a stage, in gross excess of the time given for this during and after the walk through, is viewed as an unfair advantage. Stock's stigma within the group results from Vern's challenging Stock's group based virtual identity as a fair player. Vern challenges my acceptance of this group virtual identity by stating that Stock's actual identity within the group is that of a 'gamer'. This has implications for Stock's position within in-group and out-group dynamics. Unfair play challenges the norms of the sports/game framework based on ideals of fun and competitiveness. This framework is used by the out-group of practical shooters to manage a sport/game virtual identity palatable to outsiders. Stock's group actual identity associating him with a sports/game stigma symbol, stigmatises him within the out-group.

The second case is also an example of perceived unfairness, since shooters maintaining a class far below their actual ability are almost guaranteed to win the match in that class. As with Stock, Linda has been exposed as having a group virtual identity as

a fair competitor, while her actual identity among shooters is that of a 'gamer'. The resulting stigma, contextualized in the sports/game framework, reflects Linda's tainted identity within the out-group, as her actions threaten the management of the group's external virtual identity.

Tampering

Another form of cheating is symbolised as 'tampering', and involves the deliberate breaking of rules to gain a competitive advantage. The observations I made of the application of this stigma is primarily related to the manipulation of ammunition:

Stewart is instructing the new Range Officers on the chronograph policy.

[Stewart] When you take ammunition for the chronograph, you take rounds from competitors when they are not expecting it. That way you don't get guys switching to ammo that doesn't make the power factor. I know we don't like to think that people do it, but it happens. (Fieldnotes)

Shelly recounts her dismay at witnessing such an event:

[Shelly] I was at the World Shoot. The people from the chronograph stage came by to collect ammunition. Beside me was a group from another country, I won't say which one. I understand a bit of that language, enough to know that they were saying, 'quick, unload the mags, get rid of that bag'. Cheating definitely goes on in IPSC. (Fieldnotes)

This tampering is a symbol of the stigma associated with jeopardising the opportunity for practical shooter to derive fun, action and the challenge of competitiveness from the activity.

The stigma of Acting Out Violence

The sports/game frame also contains a stigma for those who would violate the tenets of that frame by using practical shooting to act out violence. Stigma symbols for 'acting out', include the use of practical props in stage design. The following example illustrates how props are managed as symbols by the out-group, through stigmatising the resistance of the in-group:

[George] A club that has a number of practical -minded shooters likes causing us grief by designing stages, where they place clay pigeons on the range representing land mines. We keep on rejecting their design. (George, as president of the provincial IPSC body is responsible for sanctioning matches, including stage approval.) This year once again, I get to the last page of their course design and there they are. But now instead of land mines, they say they represent pigeon shit. (Fieldnotes)

Later that year at a post match banquet:

George is addressing several dozen shooters during the presentation of awards.

[George] As most of you well know, I am a big proponent of moving practical shooting forward as a sport, and I believe that most of you agree that it's the only

route to go. (There are nods of approval from some members of the crowd)
 That's not to say that some of you haven't done your best to resist this, I'm
 looking at you guys in the back. Pigeon shit for landmines. (There is chuckling
 from the crowd, heads turn towards one of the tables, Myers raises slightly out of
 his chair and bows.) (Fieldnotes)

In this example, we see how the efforts of the shooters advocating practical oriented stage design are marginalised, though not completely demonised, by participants acting in the sports/game framework. A group actual identity built on a practical framework would not lead to stigma in its' own context, but would in contexts of a sports/game frame. Such a context is alignment of the out-group, who would view practicality as damaging to the management of an external virtual identity. This external virtual identity is based in the out-group's association with the sports/game framework as a means of good adjustment to perceived external norms that would accept peaceful play over violent practicality. The in-group is not concerned with managing an external virtual identity as practical shooters, as they intend to hide this external actual identity from outsiders. For this reason, practical behaviour does not attract stigma for members of the in-group.

Prestige and the Practical Frame

As with the skill symbol for the sports/game frame, the practical frame also associates skill with prestige. The skill components of the practical frame are acts allowing for the successful conduct of self-defence, or military/ police action.

Some shooters are standing around tables at the back of the Fallow range. I'm standing near Terry; Brenda is sitting down at the table reading a magazine. [Terry] Did you read the article last month about the grandmother in Australia? [Brenda] No. [Terry] This girl in Australia was raped; her grandmother tracked the guy down and shot him in the (pause) offending appendage. [Brenda] Was she arrested? [Terry] I don't think so, anyway what kind of jury is going to convict her? [Brenda] None, I'd expect. (Fieldnotes)

Another example, this time involving police experiences:

I am in the background area of the Turner range watching competitors shooting a local club match. Ken is watching as well, Mac walks up beside him. [Ken] So how's everything been at work? [Mac] One of our female officers shot a guy during the week. [Ken] Oh, yeah? [Mac] She responded to this call, a guy stabbed his wife and neighbours. She found the guy standing on the lawn holding a knife. He wouldn't put it down so she shot him. Now they've called in the SIU to investigate if she was warranted to use deadly force. [Ken] Did she feel threatened? [Mac] Yes. [Ken] Then good for her. (Fieldnotes)

These examples demonstrate how self-defence and police experiences are incorporated into a prestige symbol for the practical frame. By not adopting the good adjustment

stigma management of the out-group, the in-group accepts without stigma those shooters who openly celebrate the practical use of firearms.

Stigma Symbols and the Practical Frame

Practical shooters operating within the practical frame have created stigma for other members of the group. This stigma targets those shooters who in the opinion of members in a practical frame, are trying to appease normals by changing IPSC by making it as inoffensive as possible. The conflict I observed between the practical frame's in-group defiance to change, and out-group attempts at good-adjustment by attempting to make IPSC more palatable to normals, centres around the issue of stage design.

[Lenny] I don't mind stage designers taking a bit of artistic licence, but lately things are getting ridiculous. There's one club, Brentside; they've really gone off into the world of fantasy. I heard they were planning to have a match where everyone had to dress in togas, and all the stages would have this Greek theme, the acropolis. I mean, that's just silly. What's next, shootout on the bridge of the starship Enterprise, come on. (Fieldnotes)

Another example of 'changes' as stigma symbol occurred during a course to train new Range Officers. George is leading the class in correcting a test taken a short time earlier:

[George] Ok, next question. Is it permitted to use both types of poppers in the same competition? The answer is no. [Allen, abruptly] Why not? [Shelly] Peoples' perception. They might see the minis as children. [Allen, shaking his head] What does it matter what people off the range think! [George] You have to

think of what it looks like to the non-shooting public. A stage I saw had large poppers with smaller poppers in front. That's a stupid design. Think of how non-shooting people will interpret this. It's poor design to include both. [Allen, shakes his head again] Yeah, sure. (Fieldnotes)

Both of these examples convey the dismay that shooters in a practical frame feel towards other out-group practical shooters trying to sanitise stages as a form of good-adjustment. This example clearly shows how frames of experience help define the creation of responses to stigma, as individuals form in-group and out-group positions. In the second example, Shelly is following a frame of experience introduced by George. This frame is rejected by Allen, who views Shelly and George as having a group actual identity that deviates from the practical norms of his current frame. Since Allen is aligned with the in-group, he does not ascribe prestige to efforts aimed at managing a non-violent external virtual identity to placate outsiders.

Summary

In this chapter I have shown how different frames of experience influence the creation and use of stigma and prestige symbols within the practical shooting subculture. We have seen how some prestige and stigma symbols, based on participants' experiences of playing IPSC as sport and game, are completely opposed to those symbols used by someone in a practical frame. This opposition reflects not only the

different frameworks formed by varying experiences, but also the strategies for managing in-group and out-group responses to external stigma.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study has been the examination of stigma within practical shooting. This study examines how practical shooters react to perceived external stigma by creating a system of stigma and prestige symbols. The symbols correspond to the two forms of stigma response in IPSC. These responses are either in-group defiance to perceived external stigma, or out-group appeasement as a means of good adjustments towards expected external norms.

This examination starts with the confirmation that two frameworks of experience exist within practical shooting. These frameworks guide participants in the creation of their living reality. One of these frames is based on experiences associated with sport and games. A participant wishing to apply this frame, creates a shooting reality based on fun, action, and competition. The other frame of experience is based on the practicality of self-defence, and police or military work.

These frames influence the creation of stigma and prestige symbols applied within the group. The sports/game frame fosters a prestige symbolism based on skill, fun and sportsmanship, while stigmatising cheating and 'acting out' violence. The practical frame also has a prestige symbol, but it is based in the skilful use of the gun as weapon. In the practical frame, the stigma symbol actually represents the exact opposite of the sports game symbolism. While trying to abolish practical design references is a stigma for practicality, it is the use of those designs that is stigmatised through the sports/game frame. This inevitably has an impact on the association of these frames with the

responses of group members to external stigma. The stigma and prestige symbols of the sports/game frame suit the good-adjustment of an out-group response. The defiance of the in-group response is characterised by stigma and prestige rooted in practical experience.

Relevance of this Research for Practical Shooters

I believe practical shooters will welcome this research as a form of recognition for their activity. There is considerable ambition within IPSC to move the activity towards having the type of status granted to widely accepted shooting sports such as Olympic biathlon. This may become reality if the sporting side of IPSC eventually does branch off into its own sub-culture as a primary frame. However, there seems a sense of urgency for this shift to occur, as practical shooters act as though caught in a race against time with the gun control movement. As I have clearly stated earlier, I have not written this research according to a pro-gun or anti-gun agenda. However, my participants, along with anyone else, are free to interpret this research in any way their reasoning will allow.

This research may also provide a voice for those shooters who feel they are the victims of stigmatisation. Regardless of the arguments of whether gun ownership is acceptable or not, or whether IPSC is violence or sport, I shall not deny my participants' feelings of being stigmatised. These feelings include a sense of injustice, as participants whom view themselves as law abiding, hard working, and honest citizens, believe they are unfairly degraded in the opinions of others. Attempts by the out-group to reconcile

their activity to normal expectations demonstrates the strong desire to redeem their spoiled identity.

My examination of stigma, and responses to it, may also prove informative for people who do not own guns. Since the source of stigma is found among some members of the gun-less population, members of this group should understand the effects of their anti-gun beliefs. This should occur regardless of how well justified a person believes their position is. Such assessments may help with an overall reflection of how and why we demonise and degrade others.

Recommendations for further Research

As I mention in my literature review, there has been scant attention paid by researcher to topics concerning gun-owning subcultures in Canada. While any study on these subcultures would help increase an almost non-existent body of work, there are a couple of areas in particular that I wish to encourage.

I would like to see research conducted on IDPA and PPC subcultures, for the purpose of comparison with my own work. Comparisons with these other pistol activities could reveal if the practical experience found in one type of shooting is found in the others. Studies on the subcultures of established shooting sports, such as bulls-eye and biathlon, may prove useful for comparing the sports experience of these groups. With these comparative studies, researchers may establish what constitutes the frameworks in which shooters create gun subcultures.

Another area of comparative research that may provide interesting results could be the mating of examinations of sports based on martial activities with the study of gun subcultures. This would allow researchers to ask, is there the same sense of violence based stigma in archery as there is in IPSC? These already socially accepted martial sports might also provide insight into the accomplishment of their transition from primary frame violence to primary frame of sport. This could create some measure for the success of the designs by the sports frame of IPSC. A future study on IPSC may address whether there are changing attitudes towards firearms in society. Such a change may be reflected in the success of the out-group's good-adjustment. Further study may trace the role of practicality within IPSC, either as a marginalised in-group or an accepted out-group. A hardening of public anti-gun sentiment may be demonstrated by future studies, should they reveal a sense of failure to achieve good-adjustment.

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Appendix A Glossary

Actual Social Identity: Actual social identity, which is what a person may be proved to be in contrast to a virtual social identity.

Frames of Experience: Frameworks of experience integrate those elements central to a common social order. People interacting in a common frame engage their reality through shared perceptions and experiences.

In-Group: In a stigmatised group the in-group alignment rejects the degraded status allotted to them by normals. Members of this group defiantly challenge their stigmatised status, by making no attempts to abandon this group for a normally aligned one.

Out-Group: In a stigmatised group the out-group alignment views their status as deficient in comparison with normals. Members of the out-group try to improve this status through good adjustment, where members try to keep the appearance of acceptability, while grooming those areas of their identity associated with stigma.

Personal Identity: Personal identity uses marks or signs to provide a sense of uniqueness based on the distinguishing features of the individual. Although personal identity defines the individual, it is none the less a social construct, as it is based on knowledge attained through everyday life.

Situation: A situation involves the application of definitions through personal interactions utilising frameworks of experience.

Social Identity: Social identity consists of signs and marks that place an individual within categories based on social relevance. Social identity consists of virtual and actual identity.

Stigma: A stigma is an attribute that taints people by placing them in a category deemed as less desirable by society. Stigma is also evident when the actual identities of individuals contains attributes that are deficient of the normative expectations demanded by their virtual identities.

Virtual Social Identity: Virtual social identity contains the expectation of other members of society.

- Comstock Scoring:** 6 Rounds 30 points
- Start Position:** Standing behind barricade, facing downrange, hands relaxed at sides. Gun loaded on ledge, muzzle pointing downrange.
- On the signal:** Engage T1, T2 & T3 from behind barricade, strong hand only.

Comstock Scoring: 18 Rounds 90 points

Start Position: Standing at "X", facing downrange, hands relaxed at sides.

On the signal: Engage T1, to T9 freestyle.

IPSC TARGETS

All procedural penalties, misses and hits on penalty targets will be assessed at twice the maximum value of a single hit.

IPSC POPPERS

Scoring Value 5 points
Penalty Value - 10 points

Note: When used as penalty targets poppers do not need to fall to incur a penalty.

**PEPPER
POPPER**

All dimensions for the
"Classic" Popper are
the same except the
top portion is removed

**CLASSIC
POPPER**

**MINI-
POPPER**

All dimensions for the
"Classic" Mini-Popper
are the same except
the top portion is removed

**MINI-
CLASSIC**