

A QUEER GIFT

Stepping Beyond
the Mindset

offered by the

Rainbow Quakers Group

*A companion booklet to the
2024 Quaker Lecture*

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The rainbow signifies peace and the *struggle* for peace.
It is the symbol of infinite diversity, and speaks of hope and promise, of rebirth and
regeneration.

Susannah Brindle[†] (*Australia Yearly Meeting*)

INTRODUCTION

The contributions in this booklet are offered to you by a writing group of Rainbow Quakers in the Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa New Zealand, Te Hāhi Tūhauwiri. They represent the preparation for a group lecture to be offered on 25 April 2024, in the course of Yearly Meeting 2024. Because of the differing nature of oral and written media, what you read here is not designed as a reproduction of the spoken presentation. Each represents in its own way the gift we offer.

The writers of these contributions owe much gratitude to other Rainbow Quakers whose companionship and experiences have encouraged and informed us. We acknowledge that we present here very little from the younger Friends whose challenges on gender identity, on freedom from gender limitations, and on trans experience, spurred Yearly Meeting to seek for wider enlightenment. The younger Friends involved with us have, like their generation as a whole, experienced a high level of pressure and struggle. Competition for their time and energy, together with unforeseen major disruptions, have come in the way of the writing of contributions. This booklet, and the associated lecture, can only point forward to what we have to learn from younger Friends, and to their centrality in Quaker life, faith and practice.

We appreciate the collaboration we have received from the Quaker Lecture Committee and the 2024 Local Arrangements Committee, the hospitality of Wellington Monthly Meeting and of the Quaker Settlement, and the support and encouragement given by many Friends.

Working together and listening to one another, we have experienced sadness, laughter and fresh learning. We invite you to join us on the path of learning, a path of treasured convictions seen in new light. We send you our love.

Authenticity Elizabeth Duke

As we explored the shape of this lecture, a sense emerged that authenticity was at the root of our being as Rainbow Quakers, of Quakerism itself, and of the place of Rainbow Quakers in our Yearly Meeting.

How do I understand authenticity? It relates to internal integrity, and to relationship.

To be authentic is to know yourself. Who am I? What are the pointers to my identity? What are my gifts and my vulnerabilities? Where do I serve, and where can I serve? Where do I tend to go wrong, what are my tools for recovery, and where are the hands that help me? What paths open for me to be truly myself? What do I deeply believe? How am I enabled to be open to the Spirit of truth and love?

It is too easy to run away from aspects in yourself which frighten you, to deny them, to project them onto others, to alienate and to demonise, to assume the worst of a person or a group. There are too many trends in society which set groups against one another and encourage conflict of interests. Do I, as lesbian, see gays or trans people as 'them', somehow other than me, and in competition for rights, influence and social acceptance? As Rainbow people we are each learning to come to terms with our own identity, and learning that those of another identity are not 'them' but 'us'. Do I truly love my neighbour as myself?

To be authentic in relationships and personal contacts is to be open to who you are, and to be open to learn who the other person or people are. It is to relate in integrity, liberated from assumptions and stereotypes. As two Friends quoted from Rilke in 1991, "Once the realisation is accepted that

even between the closest human beings, considerable distances continue to exist, a wonderful living side by side can grow up, if they succeed in loving the distance between them which makes it possible for each to see the other whole and against a wide sky."

We invite you, if you do not identify as Rainbow, to be confident that your 'us', as people and as Quakers, includes those with differing genders and orientations. Our 'us', as Quakers and as a Yearly Meeting, includes all of us who may at times be difficult, brilliant, deprived, incomprehensible, reliable, injured, inspirational, confused, faithful, alienated, lovable, lost, ambitious, scared, saintly - just plain human. Together, we can see one another whole, we can be authentically one body.

Finding my home Jan Aubrey

I look back and know that I was always different. I was born to a fifteen-year-old girl in Britain at the tail end of the Second World War. I was taken from my large extended family and put into a children's home at a year old and from there to various foster homes which I rejected. I realise now that I was looking for my big family and they weren't it.

I was long-term fostered and eventually adopted by an older couple who became my Mum and Dad. They made me understand that I should be grateful to them for caring for me because I had ruined my mother's life and had bad blood whatever that meant. I was and still am grateful to them for giving me stability and for bringing me to New Zealand. But being tolerated rather than loved was intolerable for me and my behaviour reflected that, a fact which I am sad about now as they were good people doing their best for a volatile child they didn't understand.

This early life meant I had low self-esteem and depression that dogged my life. I look back and see the whole adoption system as on a par with racism and colonialism through being seen as lesser and therefore needing an intervention from someone who had power and made the decisions. The system was essentially damaging and those who have been through it spend a lot of their lives coming to grips with it. When I was taken out of England to New Zealand my natural mother was not informed of this as it was deemed unnecessary. It took the family nearly sixty years to find me and reunite me with my birth family.

During my teens there was some exploration with both boys and girls. Mum was asexual and didn't understand what drove me and couldn't guide me. So what I felt was disapproval and being seen as being like my birth mother and definitely no good. At seventeen, I became pregnant and got married because that's what you did. My young husband was a good man with a strong work ethic. This time was spent rearing our two sons. I had to deal with illness and deepening depression. A sense of emptiness and a feeling of 'is this all there is?' I felt worthless as a wife and mother and, after fourteen years, I left the marriage.

During this time there was a growing confusion about how I felt about a woman friend in my life. Looking back, I realise that a lot of my relationships with women had lesbian overtones and that the poetry I wrote back then was lesbian/erotic.

I entered into a second relationship with a man that brought me adventure and community living which in some ways gave me my big family, even though living in community is challenging. I value those years for the freedom they brought to examine my attitudes and they brought peace and a feeling of being loved for myself.

Quakers came into my life part way through this marriage and also a beginning understanding of feminism, a very radical concept for me. I started volunteering at Women's Centre and embraced a whole new set of ideas and thinking. Not easy at all for my husband who had to remind me

sometimes that he wasn't the enemy. I was in therapy for a lot of that time as depression was still with me.

When the 9/11 attack on New York happened I was profoundly affected and realised that life could be cut off in a blink, and what hadn't I done with my life that I needed to? This resulted in a massive re-evaluation of my life and I 'came out' which wasn't too hard as my friends and family had worked out where I was at. I left my second marriage with acceptance and love from my husband.

I entered into a lesbian relationship with a long-time friend which was a joy to me but made me realise how little I understood about being a lesbian though I had read widely. I felt I carried the conditioning of my younger years and the mindset of being heterosexual for so long. I don't think I had much idea of what an equal partnership was about. I felt very much that I wasn't good enough or loving enough or authentic enough for my partner. When she was diagnosed with dementia the relationship deteriorated over the next several years, sadly. We parted with her going into care and me going to live with my eldest son and his wife and family in the bush.

I look on this relationship as pivotal to affirming me as a person and a lesbian.

Quakerism underpinned my spirituality through all these years and was supportive though I rarely shared how deeply my lesbianism permeated my life and spirituality. Rainbow Quakers has become a place to stand and be able to share and become aware of the variations in our Rainbow world. Understanding and seeing those differences as real people being authentic and sharing their struggles has been a revelation to me. It has shown me how repressive it can be continually being among straight people, even the most loving of them, when you are fundamentally different.

I was recently asked how long it was since I'd been in a gay relationship and when I said going on eight years it was suggested that I probably wasn't lesbian anymore, as if celibacy changed who I identified as. I see this type of lack of understanding as typical of the thinking in a largely heterosexual world.

Quakers as a society have done a great deal to welcome and integrate queer people and it hasn't always been easy, but we have a real commitment through the Rainbow Statement to understand the differences in sexual orientation and the needs of our community.

Our *Advices and Queries* prompt us to honour that of God in all people. This is a calling from the Divine to see the diversity of gifts that we bring to the world through our differences in gender orientation and sexuality and sharing who we are spiritually. Quakers help us to ground that spirituality in tradition and to seek guidance where we need to.

There are still times however when heteronormative members of the Society have made decisions for us without feeling the need to consult us. This is hurtful and triggers anger from previously feeling unseen and unheard. There is work to be done there.

The Society seeks to understand the needs of all its members be they aged, disabled, LGBT+, heterosexual or racially different. This obliges us to dive deep in the spirit and seek to understand our relationships with each other through the lens of love and light and acceptance no matter how difficult that may be at times. This brings us a joyful recognition of all of creation and our place in it.

We journey on together.

A Queer Gift Alan Greenslade-Hibbert

“Our culture is messed up with its homophobia just as it is with its racism and sexism and militarism. You can be killed for being gay. Prudence says for many people to stay in the closet.”

George Lakey, a Quaker who came out as bisexual in 1973. He is a civil rights activist who has received the Paul Robeson Social Justice Award and the Martin Luther King Peace Award.

History & Politics

A part of the norm

Most people will accept that same sex attraction, romance, sexual activity and love making have been around since the year dot, not just for us who regard ourselves as the superior earthling but in the whole of the animal kingdom. Equally, non-conformity to culturally or socially prescribed gender roles goes back to the beginning of recorded history.

We can start back as far as nine millennia BCE for evidence in drawings, writings, stories and poetry of homosexual and bisexual behaviour by both men and women, cross dressing, combined sexual characteristics and men and women identifying as other than a general norm.

Prominent figures in history, such as Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Tchaikovsky, Alan Turing, Florence Nightingale, Eleanor Roosevelt, Virginia Woolf and Sally Ride are well recorded for their homosexual proclivities and activity.

It seems only after many centuries that there developed such antagonism, even violence to and suppression of, let's call it, 'queerness' i.e. non-normative sexual attraction, intercourse and gender identity. So, what is the state of play today?

Today, out of 193 United Nations member jurisdictions, in one third (64), consensual same sex acts are criminalised. Half of those are in Africa with another twenty in Asia. Twelve of those sixty-four jurisdictions invoke the death penalty: with the exception of Uganda (84% Christian, 13% Muslim) these are Muslim-majority countries.

Egregious examples of oppression include Russia, Ghana, Kenya and Iran.

In November 2023, in an already repressive anti-homosexual regime, the Russian Ministry of (would you believe) Justice applied to the Russian Supreme Court to have the "international LGBT movement" labelled as extremist, without clarifying what it meant under the term. The court quickly agreed and outlawed the "international LGBT public movement" as extremist.

In Ghana, even identifying as LGBTQ+ is now illegal, punishable with up to three years imprisonment. In addition, physical and violent homophobic attacks against LGBTQ people are common.

Last year, Kenyan law makers began considering a Family Protection Bill, which aims to ban homosexuality, same-sex unions, and LGBTQ activities and campaigns.

Currently, Iran is the only country confirmed to be executing gay people. In post-revolutionary Iran, any type of sexual activity outside a heterosexual marriage is forbidden.

Some progress

To put things into context, twenty-five years ago there were nearly double the number of countries (115) where same-sex activity was illegal.

LGBTQ rights in the USA have evolved over time and vary on a state-by-state basis. Sexual acts between persons of the same sex have been legal nationwide in the US only since 2003. Same-sex marriage is legal in every state and hate crimes based on sexual orientation or gender identity are punishable by federal law under the Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009.

In England and Wales, homosexual activity between civilian men was partially decriminalised in 1967. These changes were not introduced until 1980 for Scotland and 1982 for Northern Ireland. In 2001, legislation introduced an equal age of consent at 16 and then the Sexual Offences Act 2003 removed all of the previous sex-specific legislation introducing instead neutral offences.

Here in New Zealand, the Homosexual Law Reform Act 1986 decriminalised sexual relations between men aged 16 and over. So, only thirty-eight years ago, would men having consensual sex with each other no longer be liable to prosecution and a term of imprisonment. Sex between women had not been illegal, but many lesbians suffered the same social discrimination here as gay men and so lesbian women were staunch supporters of reform. Same-sex marriage has been legal in New Zealand since 2013. However, only from June 2023 did homosexual acts between men become legal in the Cook Islands after a vote by the Parliament there. Female homosexual acts have never been illegal. Same-sex marriage is still not allowed in the Cook Islands.

Political and religious proscription

The criminality and severity of punishment for non-heterosexual behaviour seems inextricably linked with how closely related the religion is with the state and state power. States that want strong control over their people are keen to embrace the orthodox religious views and prosecute and punish accordingly. That is about power, harnessing whatever – the church, the military, the police, ignorance and fear of other.

But what is the fear, the threat, the purpose? If a state allows alternatives to a narrow patriarchal view of family unit and gender roles, will that really undermine the power of the state itself?

And, on the subject of fear, ignorance also begets fear, fear of difference, whether it be of other, difference, race, colour, change and of course of sexuality and an expression of other gender norms.

Research indicates that homosexuality is a normal and natural variation in human sexuality. There is no justification therefore in attempts to change sexual orientation. Attempts to do so are likely to do no more than cause psychological harm and mental illness.

In February 2022, New Zealand passed by a vote of 112 to 8 a bill banning conversion therapy as a dangerous and discredited practice that sought to change or suppress a person's sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Its aims were to recognize and prevent harm caused by conversion practices and to promote respectful and open discussions around gender and sexuality.

For this we give huge thanks to Shaneel Lal, the Auckland rights activist who is non-binary and transgender, originally from Fiji. In 2019, at the age of nineteen, during the Youth Parliament, Shaneel delivered a speech that went viral demanding that conversion therapies be banned. Shaneel experienced conversion therapy themselves from the age of nine while growing up in Fiji, before they moved to New Zealand when they were fourteen. Their speech is available online.

The sun has not set yet on British colonial oppression

In the UK in 1885, homosexuality was only illegal in regard to the act of buggery, for which the punishment was to be kept in penal servitude for life. Then came the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885, the main intention and purpose of which was to protect girls and heiresses. However, a late amendment added the criminalisation of an undefined "gross indecency between males".

There was no definition of "gross indecency" provided and thus it was labelled a Blackmailer's Charter. There were numerous convictions against male homosexuals and alleged homosexuals, including famously Oscar Wilde. Many men committed suicide.

But, Friends, it is important to pay attention to the 1885 change in the law at the height of the British Empire and its vast colonisation of the world. There is a direct correlation between countries which now belong to the British Commonwealth, and thus usually were previously under British rule, and countries that still have homophobic or transphobic laws. A quarter of the world lives in a country belonging to the Commonwealth, yet they make up a disproportionate half of the countries that still criminalise homosexuality. We have already referred to Kenya and Ghana above.

In Africa, before European colonisation, there were far more relaxed attitudes towards sexual orientation and gender identity. The introduction of Christian prejudice via colonisation is the main reason for the extreme situation there today.

A contrast, in passing

Last October 2023, India's Supreme Court declined to legalise same-sex unions, disappointing the applications of LGBTQ people and their community seeking marriage equality. The court instead accepted the government's offer to set up a panel to consider granting more legal rights and benefits to same-sex couples. It is for others to discern whether that was a 'long grass' tactic, but activists there will continue their campaign.

A month later, in neighbouring Nepal, a transgender woman and her male partner had their marriage legally recognised, the first such in South Asia.

"I cannot even say how happy I am right now. We were fighting for a long time. With the support of everyone in the struggle of more than two decades, yesterday was a very auspicious day for us. Society will now accept us and it has opened the door to marriage for many like us."

Evidence

Obtaining reliable statistics on sexual orientation and gender identity is difficult mainly because most research depends on self-reporting in surveys and, more recently, in censuses, where LGBTQ questions have been included.

There are estimates that approximately about 4 - 7% are attracted mainly to their own gender, about 4% equally to both, and between one and two per cent identifying as non-binary or transgender. That totals more or less the same as people who are left-handed. I am blessed to be both left-handed and gay. My natural left-handedness isn't seen as a threat, but my natural queerness is.

Religion

The positions of religions and their theological interpretation have an awful lot to answer for. Commonly, in some older religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, even Taoism, there has been and is a range of attitudes from intolerance to tolerance, through acceptance to celebration, which of course, we argue, there should be.

Sikhism doesn't comment on sexuality, and in Sikhism marriage is seen as a 'union of souls' and the soul is seen as genderless. While ancient Hinduism sometimes does condemn homosexuality, we are well aware of the intimate homosexual and bisexual carvings on Hindu temples. There are regular references in texts too to a 'third gender', neither female nor male, which has been equated to an early idea of what we would today regard as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex identities. Buddhism, which tends to see sexuality and sex getting in the way of spiritual progress,

has the full range of what is acceptable based upon different interpretations of what might be 'sexual misconduct' which significantly includes types of heterosexual behaviour too.

Where did it all really go wrong?

Religious disapproval has been the cause of serious oppression, ostracism, condemnation and punishment including death. Autocratic regimes have been and are keen to jump on that bandwagon, using the concept of 'othering' to bolster their support from the majority. This is particularly so when we come to the Abrahamic religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

The Book of *Leviticus* in the Torah and Bible, traditionally written by Moses, gives instructions from God on how to thrive in a new way of life, including:

“If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them.”

The traditional interpretations of the Torah and Bible in Judaism and Christianity demand a patriarchal and heteronormative approach towards human sexuality, only within marriage which must be between a man and a woman. Absolutely anything other in the wide gamut of sexual activity whether with yourself or others, heterosexual or otherwise, all are severally categorized at different times as sodomy, sinful and with the penalty high, whether criminally or spiritually, i.e. hanging, or hell.

The message is in the eye of the translator.

But we should also be careful of the translations of the biblical texts, as well as the interpretations.

In *Love Lost in Translation, Homosexuality and the Bible* K. Renato Lings points out that millions of people base their views on same-sex relationships on the specific wording in the bible version they use. However, the various texts have been translated in the context of the time in history, the prevailing views of those in authority, the literacy of the reader, and the prejudices or biases, even paymaster of the translator.

Today Jewish and Christian denominations hold a wide variety of views ranging from outright condemnation to complete acceptance. Some Christian denominations will churlishly allow in rainbow people under 'love the sinner, not the sin'. Yet, Jesus says nothing about sexuality, and the Gospels do not consider his sexuality. There is reference to his disciple John as the one whom Jesus loved, but 'love' is a slippery word and says nothing necessarily about sexuality.

In Islam, the Koran also includes the Old Testament/Torah story of Lot and Sodom and Gomorrah where God destroys the cities because of homosexual behaviour. The men "solicited his guests of him" (Koran 54:37) they are accused of lusting after men instead of their women.

For the Koran anything other than heterosexual behaviour between a biological man and biological woman is to be punished under Sharia law. However, just as in ancient Greece and Rome, there was cultural allusion to same sex relationships in Islamic literature. There are heavier penalties for male offenders than for women, as there are throughout other cultures and history. Lesbianism is or has been often invisible with regard to legal proscription.

Things seem to have gone more awry for queer Muslims with the increase of Islamic fundamentalism, autocratic regimes and a general adverse Muslim perception of modern western morality. In 2008, 57 United Nations member states, most of them having a Muslim majority, co-sponsored a statement opposing LGBTQ rights at the General Assembly.

Grown up thinking

In this twenty-first century, with our knowledge and experience of human diversity, spirituality, and the depths of expression of love and sexuality that are so life affirming and creative, is it even feasible to seek for life guidance from ancient texts; those same texts that enforce the subjugation of women and the acceptance of slavery?

Modern regimes do not rely on those texts to commit their horrific oppression of the rainbow community.

Quakers

Quakers are in a mess.

So, what about Quakers? Well today, sad to say, the views of Quakers around the world towards homosexuality, and anything alternative to a heterosexual norm, span from celebration and support for same-sex marriage to sinfulness and against God. Fifty per cent of Quakers live in Africa, so, with the imposition of 19th century Victorian laws and what was considered normal, it is no surprise that Quakers there do not support homosexual relationships.

Of particular concern to New Zealand Friends will be a press statement by the Religious Society of Friends in Kenya about the Epistle to the 2012 World Conference of Friends, held in Kenya. This long document includes:

"Homosexuals are those who have deliberately deviated from what is (sic) normal sexual practices as God intended it to be, to bad behaviour of transverstism (sic), sex changes and other gender perversions. As Quakers and for that matter Christians, we are supposed to discern and have more knowledge than the gay people and therefore greater accountability will be required of us. We cannot and will not give ourselves over to sexual immorality. Instead, we urge those practicing this immorality to abandon this abomination and repent and change their ways so that the Lord can forgive them."

It quotes extensively from the Old Testament and concludes: "For this matter, Friends Church in Kenya condemns homosexuality in the strongest term possible without reservation". No way could we be Quakers in Kenya.

For Quakers in Europe, Oceania and the Americas things are somewhat better. But, in the United States, Quakers are divided on the issue of homosexuality, with a majority (mostly Friends affiliated with programmed meetings) not approving of either homosexuality or the legalization of same sex unions. Only about a fifth of all Quakers in the country are more tolerant with Meetings providing full equality for homosexuals including marriage.

Britain

In the early 1980s, at Colchester Quaker Meeting House in England, which rented out a room for meetings of the Campaign of Homosexual Equality, I came across the booklet *Towards a Quaker View of Sex*. It had been issued by Britain Yearly Meeting in 1963 (published a year later), four years before partial homosexual law reform in England and Wales.

Imagine how I felt that here was a religion looking at sexual development, eroticism, sexual relationships, puberty, masturbation, freedoms and restraints and, lo and behold, male and female homosexuality and bisexuality. It talked about their naturalness.

And the writers came down on the side of relationships, indeed about love.

"An act which expresses true affection between two individuals and gives pleasure to them both does not seem to us to be sinful by reason alone of the fact that it is homosexual."

The authors considered rather that the act should be judged by the same criteria as any heterosexual relationship. It wasn't condoning promiscuity but supporting loving relationships. This later helped to similar thinking about the bond or commitment of marriage between two people regardless of gender.

Gradual change of mindset

Over the decades since then, there has been much shifting in understanding and perceptions to the position where Meetings in Britain (since 1988), Australia (since 1994), Canada (since 2003), and some parts of the US have celebrated same-sex commitments their Meetings for Worship. There have been strong Quaker campaigns, including here in New Zealand, to support legal changes to embrace equal, that is same-sex, marriage. That must be acknowledged and celebrated.

Nevertheless, painfully, questions of sexuality and sexual morality continue to divide Quakers. Friends who look to the authority of the Bible as God's revelation to humanity and for spreading the Christian message, especially in the United States and Africa, reject liberal Quakers' attitude to homosexuality and gender.

Kenya's position has already been referred to, but in the USA, Indiana and Western Yearly Meetings have issued a statement of "core values" which include abstinence outside of marriage, where marriage is "a monogamous relationship between one man and one woman". YM Evangelical Friends Church Southwest, states in its *Faith and Practice* that homosexuality (like any other sexual activity outside of marriage) is "sinful in that it rejects God's plan."

For them, we could never be Quakers.

To other Quakers, God's plan is conceived through that direct relationship with what they see as God, the spirit or what is good, and it lies with Monthly Meetings, and Yearly Meetings, to discern a right position through holding that there is the possibility of that of God in everyone.

New Zealand

In Aotearoa our Young Friends at Yearly Meeting 2022 noted that the New Zealand Quakers' powerful '*Statement of Affirmation of Same Sex Relationships*' had not been reviewed since its adoption in 1992.

While stating that we believe that all are equally called to ministry, through our worship, our daily lives, and in the activities of our Meeting, the Statement mentioned only lesbian and gay Friends being welcomed "publicly and explicitly" to our community. It did not mention all those who come under the Rainbow flag – bisexual, transgender, queer and non-binary people.

Young Friends asked for and got an updated statement. Though there was overwhelming support for the good intention of a more embracing statement, there were anxieties, questions, objections to certain language, that it was too long, and distractions - some pedantic and some plain hurtful. Quite shockingly, there were questions as to whether the new statement embraced paedophiles, and even was it necessary because Quakers already had a testimony to equality.

What the new statement was doing was specifically reaffirming "our commitment to creating a loving and inclusive community where sexual orientation and gender identities can be expressed" whilst seeking "to ensure that all in our community can be fully who they are, and that all can feel safe and at home".

After four drafts and some tears our Yearly Meeting, last May, 2023, adopted *Walking in the light under the rainbow: A Quaker statement of commitment and inclusion*.

We are grateful to Yearly Meeting for this, and particularly grateful of the impetus from Young Friends. It has been the impetus from that Statement, which has encouraged Aotearoa Friends' Meetings to hold workshops and discussions, and this Quaker lecture.

The call to love

Here we include an eloquent extract from Trish McBride's 2014, *But is it Fair? Faith Communities and Social Justice* which refers to the journeys of members of other Christian traditions.

"Thinking changed in prayerful response to the decision to value difference of all sorts, along with actual relationships with LGBTI people. The acceptance and valuing of people of non-heterosexual orientations was another step along a continuum that had included renewal and re-visioning of the Christian call to integrate liberation theology through ecumenism, feminism, awareness of racial inequality, disabilities, interfaith relationships, peace-making, and care for the earth.

It is a continuum based on the gospel mandate to love, especially those who suffer from discrimination and marginalisation.

The Bible texts traditionally interpreted literally as condemning homosexuality and homosexual people are set aside as less imperative than the call to love, and as products of historical and cultural contexts that are no longer relevant.

What facilitated and anchored the new beliefs was hearing the stories of personal and family experiences, and the recognition of real goodness/Godness, in the 'other'."

Some such experiences are referred in our lecture. We believe that knowledge of our lives' experiences will help you to understand us. We are no threat.

Many Friends in our Quaker community have made huge strides in their understanding and that is honoured and celebrated. For others, their traditions and fears have created a closed mind that is hard to open or step beyond. It is by education and by learning from the journeys of Queer Quakers or Rainbow Quakers and others that they will recognise our commitment to creating a loving and inclusive community.

Joy Rising and Mary Rose: Two Old Women Mary Rose

Recently we were at a lunch gathering of lesbian couples. In between courses, someone suggested each couple tell the story of how they got together. What fun!

Ours seemed a modest story, as these things go, until I got to the bit where I told how, at the first Summer Gathering we attended as a couple, Friends had encouraged us in our relationship. OOOPs!

“You mean your church actually supported your relationship?”

“It seems incredible!”

Those comments came from women whose faith communities had not been at all supportive. And as I read of experiences of some women within mainstream churches, appreciation and gratitude for our experience fills my head and heart.

We met at the Quaker Settlement where Joy was living, and I attended lesbian weekends. We were both seventy years old when we went to that first Summer Gathering at Blue Skies, near Christchurch. Joy soon moved to Hamilton to share the women's house that I had lived in for several years. We both attended the Hamilton Worship Group and shared the role of co-clerks of the Waikato-Hauraki Monthly Meeting.

The time came to re-arrange the boundaries of monthly meetings. We remember meetings in Rotorua and Tauranga that included Friends from Whakatane, Hamilton, Thames and Auckland. Old loyalties and concerns that had maintained the old boundaries were laid aside and new boundaries for monthly meetings were defined. Mid-North Island Monthly Meeting would include both Hamilton and Tauranga as well as Thames, Rotorua and Whakatane. At that same time, we moved from Hamilton to Tauranga. As we were appointed to serve as co-clerks in the new monthly meeting, we were newcomers to the Tauranga Worship Group already in the role of co-clerks of the monthly meeting. We soon 'belonged'.

Early in 2013, the law allowing same gender marriage was passed. In November of that year, we married in the Welcome Bay Community Centre in the presence of family from many countries and Friends who travelled from all over this one. Ours was the first same gender marriage among Friends in Aotearoa. It was a wonderful wedding for us, and we are deeply grateful to be members of a faith community willing and able to support two old women in our desire to marry. Last November, now in our mid-eighties, long retired from co-clerking, we celebrated our tenth wedding anniversary: two old women caring for each other supported by and serving in our faith community.

Isn't that what love can do?

Why are Quakers called to honour diversity? Elizabeth Duke

We Quakers are a faith community. A faith community, to me, recognises something greater than itself or the sum of its individual members. In deciding what sort of body we are, and what we do, we look beyond ourselves to what are described in our *Advices and Queries* (A1) as "the promptings of love and truth". This is why we are 'called' to honour diversity. It is not a practical, reasonable, or even moral choice; it is a calling.

As Rainbow Quakers we find a continuing delight in coming to know and value one another, both in what we have in common and in the distinct gifts each of us has. Precious among these gifts is our identity in relation to gender, orientation and sexuality. Many different experiences, positive and negative, flow from this identity, and have contributed to shaping the people we are.

Why can we find a spiritual home in this particular religious body? Why is it the place for our gifts to be offered? I know that worldwide there are many bodies, identifying as Christian, who hold that some of the identities we recognise in our Rainbow group are morally wrong, and incompatible with the Christian faith and tradition. No - let us share the stand of the first Quakers and recognise that it's possible for a faith body to be in error. George Fox, Elizabeth Hooton, Margaret Fell, James Nayler and many others experienced the calling of the Spirit to return to the essence of the Christian message, to live according to the teaching of Jesus and his friends.

Friends describe what we stand for, and try to practise, as 'testimony'. Strong among our religious testimonies is 'continuing revelation'. This means that if we listen to our calling, if we, individually and as a body, seek to follow the guidance of the Spirit, we can learn more and more, and can recognise the limits of our past understanding. As Jesus put it: "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them yet. When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth" (*John* 16.12).

Here are a couple of passages from the *Statement of Affirmation and Reconciliation* (later renamed) made by our Yearly Meeting in 1992.

"The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Aotearoa New Zealand commits itself to be a community of reconciliation, responding to the love of God in equality of participation and service, and recognising the gifts of God in one another. A cornerstone of Quaker belief is that of God in everyone, which makes each person precious, and of value to God, to the planet, and to her or his community."

"Aotearoa/New Zealand society, in which we all participate, still assumes heterosexual models of personal and family relationships. We need to understand the part we each play in continuing to weave this single-pattern fabric, and to look at ways in which other patterns can be interwoven in order to enrich the whole. We realise that in making this present affirmation we oblige ourselves to face and deal with our own homophobia and unconscious prejudices, together with society's limitations and denials of human rights and justice."

The 'we' speaking here has, to me, the unintended implication that Friends are not yet a community including people of the full Rainbow diversity, but a community seeking to be open to these people.

Yearly Meeting's *Rainbow Statement* of 2023 is more explicitly inclusive.

"There is hurt and pain among us, and there are voices not yet heard. . . . We recognise that individuals and groups, among us as well as in society in general, have differing life experiences and understanding of sexuality, gender and identity. Conflict may arise which, when we are open to a resolution, offers further opportunity for understanding and loving connection. The process of self-creation can be lifelong, for each of us, and for Quakers together."

This I offer as an example of continuing revelation. Friends came to recognise that a Rainbow Statement needed to be offered by the Rainbow group, that our voice as a group is included in any 'we' spoken by Yearly Meeting.

I believe that the growth of our understanding of the goodness of Rainbow diversity has run parallel with the growth of our sense that we are a part of the whole natural world, all life and all that accompanies life, and that we have a calling to tend and care for it. Again, I quote Jesus:

"Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. . . . Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these." (*Matthew 6.26, 28-9*).

"Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God's sight?" (*Luke 12.6*).

Humans as a part of the whole natural world have the capacity to live harmoniously with the rest of the natural world and with one another, but also the capacity to act in self-interest, greed and destructiveness. One argument used against a generous diversity is that it offers acceptance to those whose nature seems to be to exploit and hurt others, that openness to diversity welcomes paedophiles and sadists.

What has 'nature' to do with 'the promptings of love and truth'? Once again let's consider the advice to respond to these promptings. I believe love and truth walk hand in hand. Truth leads us to recognise our innate diversity, along with our innate unity, and that, whatever our diverse nature and gifts, we can and do act sometimes rightly and sometimes wrongly. Love guides us to act with the highest respect for one another, to love our neighbour as ourself. So, in the sphere of sexuality, it is not love to engage sexually with someone who does not give authentic consent to the action, who is not mature enough to agree to it, or who is in a position of dependence which means that they cannot exercise full freedom. Not all loving relationships are necessarily sexual. People who are scared of some forms of sex, gender or orientation, have often come to focus too exclusively on particular parts of the body and particular activities, and to forget the whole person. The more we, as a Quaker body, are able to recognise authentic loving relationships in one another irrespective of sex, gender or orientation, the more we are guided by the partnership of love and truth.

We are called, not to tolerate diversity, but to honour it. I am reminded of Paul's advice to the Christian community in Corinth on the diverse gifts which contributed to their communal life.

"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit, and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

Paul uses the image of the human body.

"As it is, there are many members, yet the one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' (*1 Cor 12.4-7, 20-21*)

This reflection leads into the famous chapter on gifts which concludes, "and the greatest of these is love" (*13.13*).

However we understand or experience the Spirit, whatever words we use, our Quaker heritage points us to recognising the inward guide, the guide for each individual which flows into and merges with the guide we experience as a community. The diverse gifts of identity in each of us are gifts for the community too. It is our calling to enjoy and to honour them.

Aotearoa Rainbow Quaker History and my journey as a Lesbian Quaker

Elizabeth Thompson

I am very grateful to the brave lesbians and gays who worked so hard to get the legal acceptance we have today. Though I deeply felt the adverse reactions to my coming out, I know what I experienced was minor compared to that experienced by earlier Rainbow people who came before me, when couples were spat at or even imprisoned for holding hands in public, lost jobs or missed promotion or positions of employment. Having grown up needing to be 'a good girl', I now see that this probably held me back from identifying earlier. Legislative changes made it safe enough for me to identify.

I came into Quakerism and feminism about the same time; each supported the other.

From my feminism I became aware of my lesbian identity in 1990 but was closeted at Quakers for the next two years. After I came out in my Meeting I was asked by a Quaker if I was in a relationship. When I answered negatively, the response was that therefore it did not matter that I was lesbian. This was a double-headed barb as I was desperately longing for a loving relationship. This level of limited tolerance was what had kept me in the closet. At the same time, when people make hurtful comments showing gaps in their awareness, I am aware that there must be parallels when I innocently show ignorance on racial matters.

Just as, coming into Quakerism, there are the various unwritten rules of the community, I found a similarity in coming into the lesbian community. At the time, early 1990s, I was in regular contact with lesbians, referred to as the 'lesbian police', who had strongly expressed views on expected dress and actions. I struggled with many of the social activities being based around alcohol and smoking. Later there was a lesbian walking group, but the walks were on Sunday morning so clashed with Meeting for Worship.

On coming out I felt I was putting every relationship on the line. It was very difficult to anticipate other people's reactions to my news. Some relationships changed. I received loving encouragement from my former mother-in-law and a thoughtful supportive letter from a nephew in his early twenties. From others there were dismissive comments or 'it does not bother me' or coldness. Sometimes there was a very cold reaction to a hug (were they scared of catching the lesbian bug?); is it a negative reaction because of me or my lesbianism? Usually I will never know.

After finding out I was lesbian, my stepmother cut me off. I did not know why I was out in the cold and never received helpful responses when I asked other family members. I was precluded from most of the preparation and arrangements for my father's funeral because of her homophobia.

A newsletter for lesbian and gay Quakers was started by James Stewart in the late 1980s. Later Jan Marsh produced it for many years. This contact with other queer Quakers helped me. I coordinated Friends for Lesbian and Gay Concerns (FLGC) for a number of years, initially with John Goodey. We had informal Meetings at Yearly Meeting and Summer Gathering as well as producing the Friends for Lesbian and Gay Concerns newsletter after Jan laid down her role. Yearly Meeting paid for the photocopying and postage of the newsletter. We had a small committee.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s Methodists in some Aotearoa churches were becoming Reconciling Congregations, which was about reconciling differences so they could be supportive of gay and lesbian members. Dunedin Monthly Meeting presented a paper at Yearly Meeting which led to the *Statement of Affirmation and Reconciliation* (YM 1992 minute 13). About a year later Phyllis Short, who was the Yearly Meeting Clerk in 1992, said to me that she regretted that the Yearly Meeting had accepted the Statement without looking at what it meant to be a Reconciling Congregation.

Subsequently Wellington Monthly Meeting had a worthwhile workshop looking at the reality for those who were facing difficult reactions to their identity.

The Human Rights Act 1993, making discrimination on the basis of sex illegal, also helped me by silencing homophobic politicians, especially Norman Jones who made well publicised inflammatory statements. These had been very upsetting for me as I was coming to terms with my new identity.

Several years later, I together with the YM Clerk, Llyn Richards, and Ian McEwan, a gay Quaker, met with the Law Commission who were preparing a discussion document looking at same sex marriage. They wondered whether Quakers would want to have continued the exemption in the Marriage Act that Quakers did not require an intermediary such as a celebrant. After explaining the importance to Quakers of this historical right in the Marriage Act, we affirmed that we expected it would be accepted but that we could not make a statement without consulting Yearly Meeting. The Law Commission wanted the matter to be confidential because of the negative stance of many churches to same sex marriage. Yearly Meeting did affirm its position and we think kept the consultation confidential. Civil Unions which are available for all couples were introduced in 2004.

Quakers were the only church which nationally supported the Civil Union Act 2004 and Marriage Act 2013. This support included making oral submissions to the select committees. The decisions as a Yearly Meeting to support these changes did not come lightly. Some people struggled because they firmly believed that marriage was between man and woman. Others had strongly held homophobic stances. After one difficult discussion we were asked to hold in the light those who had found this decision difficult. This was a humbling time for me as I had not been listening to their views. I am very grateful for the support from Yearly Meeting through these legislative changes.

During the 1990s there was a Wellington Lesbian Quaker group of four to six meeting about monthly, which brought together two important parts of my life. Two members, Bev Joan and Denise Ibbettson, were very good at centring so we often experienced deep meetings. It helped me learn how to centre. For a year we took on quarterly producing material for the Friends for Lesbian and Gay newsletter. We would decide on a topic at the previous meeting. After Meeting for Worship, we would then each, in silence, write our thoughts on the topic.

In 1999 I joined Auckland Quakers in being part of the Pride March. A Quaker had expressed strongly that the normal banner used for marches should not be used. Alan and John quickly made a new one. It was lovely to march with Quakers of all ages. The colour, exuberance and flamboyancy made it a very memorable occasion. We received warm reactions from the crowds particularly Pacifica groups. John Goodey and Alan Shapley had the first Quaker civil union in 2007 followed by Elizabeth Duke and me in 2009, and Mary Rose and Joy Rising were married in 2013.

After I stood back from coordinating FLGC I was succeeded by several others including Don Smart and Mary Rose. Later there was no one who felt called to keep on the work. We felt comfortable with our acceptance within our Meetings. Rather than laying the group down we asked that it go into recess, in case we needed to revive it quickly should the political situation change. Friends for Gay and Lesbian Concerns went into recess during 2013 as agreed via the Yearly Meeting Clerks' letter by Yearly Meeting. The group, now more diverse in Rainbow identities, was revived in 2023 as Rainbow Quakers (YM 2023, minute 8). This was prompted by Young Friends who experienced the need for Quakers and Meetings to be open and supportive of the range of people with non-heterosexual identities coming to Quakers.

Subsequently a group of Rainbow Quakers worked on the Statement *Walking in the light under the Rainbow*. The statement was accepted by Yearly Meeting 2023. During the process some comments from Meetings showed a lack of awareness of the realities of our lives, or conditional acceptance.

Also, two of us became aware of how we have modified our behaviour to fit in with Quaker social group expectations. I am left wondering how much of this comes from me and how much from the group's expectations. I suspect it is some of each. At the Rainbow Quaker weekends there is a different feel. Here we have been able to share our hurts and often we identify with parts of others' stories. We know we are truly being heard. It is also exciting to see younger generations coming through, from Junior Young Friends to those in the middle life, with a variety of identities and lifestyles. However, some stories show that society in general has much learning still to do.

I am very grateful for Quakers' support for civil unions and same sex marriage. This was especially so for Elizabeth's and my Spiritual and Civil Union in the manner of Friends. This was a spirit-led delightful celebration. We were legally not allowed to call it a marriage. When the law came in allowing same sex marriage we would have had to pay again for a licence. Years later, a great niece asked me why had I married someone also called Elizabeth.

With Quakers I am aware that I unconsciously find myself fitting in with the group's expectations in a way that is not needed when I am with lesbians. This involves censoring what I choose to share but I also find that very seldom do people ask how is it for me as a lesbian – do they really not want to hear, or does it not occur to them that there may be differences? I look forward to them being able to walk cheerfully responding to our Rainbows.

Peace Ann Banks

After any trauma there will be unconscious, semi-conscious and/or pervasively conscious lasting effects. For those with post-traumatic stress disorder, life becomes a series of triggers that can sometimes make any attempt to live a 'normal' life virtually impossible. There is no peace to be found. Veterans of wars, both within families or other groups, or those encouraged to fight in international conflicts, often continue to suffer from their exposure to unspeakable atrocities which have scarred them for life. Likewise, those who have suffered sexual and other abuse in childhood are rarely at peace within themselves. Those of us finding ourselves different from our hetero families can be equally traumatised by their rejection and lack of understanding, compounded by living in societies which condemn those who do not conform to their version of a sexual norm. The outcome of these intense and often overwhelming experiences often leads to the victim seeking distractions such as drugs, alcohol or other self-harms to numb the constant pain. Any further 'othering' brings with it the real possibility of traumatising or re-traumatising those already trying to deal with the inner wars which remain long after the events which caused them. Suicide rates in these groups are high.

The basis of all the world's religions is 'do as you would be done by' or treat others as you would hope to be treated. This is the simple recipe for a compassionate, loving, peaceful and inclusive world. Sadly, many of our religious institutions themselves have been responsible for dividing the world into 'them and us'; making rules to terrify their adherents into compliance using fear to control and exert power over, rather than enabling their members to find the source of spiritual power within themselves. Some religious groups attempt to exert control over sexual behaviour by their certainty that there is a special place in hell reserved for those who deviate from the narrow confines of acceptable sexual relations. Ironically, within religions with strict rules about this, are found to be grave offenders of child sexual abuse, who are often protected, directing their powerful but misdirected sexual energy to those least able to defend themselves against it and traumatising the next generation, by all these means, with guilt and shame.

As we celebrate 400 years since the birth of George Fox, the founder of Quakerism, it is useful to reflect whether we live up to our vision of being a 'peace church'. Yes, we do tend to 'utterly deny all wars fought with outward weapons' but are we as clear about our all too human tendencies to make fear-based judgments about who is welcome in our community and who isn't? These are inward weapons that can be equally damaging. We have made strides in opening our hearts to the Rainbow community. While this initially took a long time, our 2023 statement *Walking in the Light under the Rainbow* confirms our commitment of 1992 and extends our concern for understanding and welcoming the now more openly diverse nature of the sexual and gender landscape.

In the search for belonging, there is yearning for a safe space where there is acceptance, healing, and ultimately the unique gifts of diverse experience discerned and put to use in any way they can be of value. Loving acceptance leads, ultimately, to peace. In our willingness to 'get to know one another in the things that are eternal' we create the environment for peace to be found. The value of this cannot be over-estimated. Our deeply spiritual work is to examine our prejudices and deal with the fear that underlies them. As we become conscious of these, let our next question be 'what does love require of me, here, now?'

Concept of natural Helena Erickson

Something that humans have struggled with for as long as we exist is that we can't understand ourselves from an objective point of view. We constantly evade categorisation, and it's impossible to say exactly who we are, what we do, and what things really define us without hours and hours of caveats. Through history there are many, often horrifying, attempts at defining the 'essential man'. Some were kings, some religious leaders, some dictators. A common through-line is the idea that there is a 'natural' state of being for humans, and everything that deviates from that is just pollution, and can be excluded from our understanding of ourselves.

As Quakers, we don't believe in a prescribed relationship with the divine. We believe in giving the space for each person to understand themselves and their own conception of their fundamental being, and their own relationship with god and godliness. God does not give us a mould to fill. I think this is one of the most important aspects of our faith.

Still, we are human, and we're not immune to this dichotomy of thinking. What is a trait and what is a mutation? What is behaviour and what is mental illness?

Humans evade rigidity to such a degree that we often define nature as anything that comes to be without human intervention. Yet we often look to nature to understand ourselves. For this reason, the once widespread belief that homosexuality only existed in humans led to laws against homosexual intercourse to centre on the idea that it was a crime against nature. So, in 1977, when ornithologists George and Mary Hunt happened upon an island where ten percent of seagull nests had six eggs rather than the usual three, the discovery of lesbian seagulls set in motion the toppling of anti-sodomy laws in fourteen U.S states. Homosexuality in animals had already been observed countless times, as anyone with two male dogs may note. However, the understanding of nature at the time led to it being spoken of in hushed tones, dismissed as a fluke, stricken from official scientific records or being denied publication in any serious journals. With an authority on what constitutes nature officially recognising animal homosexual behaviour, observations flooded in. Purity culture still had a hold on perceptions of homosexuality though, leading to my favourite title of a scientific publication, the 1987 article "A Note on the Apparent Lowering of Moral Standards in the Lepidoptera", detailing the same sex encounters of butterflies.

Unfortunately, this rigid understanding of what is and is not natural behaviour was paralleled in the world of medicine. It's well known that homosexuality and transgenderism were long considered mental illnesses, and still are by many professionals today who refuse to accept the modern consensus.

Changing Elizabeth Duke

In August 1991, I flew to my first international Quaker gathering, in Kenya, wondering if I would meet that nice Quaker man with whom I could spend the rest of my life. I had grown up expecting to marry, had fallen for a few men, married one, and borne two children. Our marriage had collapsed, and I had been living independently, continuing to dream of an equal female/male partnership. The World Gathering didn't offer one.

In December 1991, aged 51, I fell deeply in love with a lesbian woman, who did not feel the same, though she remained friendly. Within a couple of months, I found I had identified as lesbian, right through to my plans and my fantasies. I anticipated spending life as a lesbian virgin, until Elizabeth and I became a loving couple.

Unlike others in this group, I have not experienced outward hostility or exclusion, largely because my orientation remained mainly inward. I had no partner and would not have been attracted to explore casual lesbian dates, even if I had known how to. What I did experience was self-censorship.

At the beginning of 1997, I began work as Associate Secretary of Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC), becoming General Secretary a year later. I knew from the start that there were painful divisions among Friends worldwide on the acceptability of same-sex relationships. These led to splits in some Yearly Meetings, and to difficulties in the international representatives' meetings which FWCC organised every three years. The role of FWCC is to weave together all varieties of Quaker bodies worldwide, honouring them all.

Between two and three months each year I was travelling among Friends' Meetings in various countries, knowing that a number of Yearly Meetings held same-sex relationships to be sinful. Being profoundly committed to the mission of FWCC, to bring all Friends together, I did not engage in ethical discussions on the issue, or proclaim my own views, still less my identity. I never lied - I didn't need to, as I was never asked. Questions about my family related to my daughters and grandsons, so I suppose that by keeping quiet I left an untrue impression. I believed, and still believe, that I was making a moral decision, and honouring my loyalty to Friends who were employing me. It's fine if you disagree.

By the time Elizabeth and I came together, I was retired and back in Aotearoa, and it was acceptable to be a same-sex couple. We had the privilege of serving as Yearly Meeting Clerks at the time when the Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Bill was before Parliament and were able to inform Church Leaders meetings that our religious body had expressed unified support for the proposal, as no other church did. None of the other church leaders actually asked us whether we were a couple, and I suspect that the more fiercely evangelical ones simply could not have imagined that women over 60 might form a sexual relationship.

I give thanks that I stand on the shoulders of those who have struggled and suffered, and that my religious community has been the place of my strongest support, including the blessing of celebrating our spiritual and civil union under the care of Dunedin Monthly Meeting. I am now called to engage in the struggle for the social and human rights and loving inclusion of my friends here and of all whose authentic identity and orientation still lacks full recognition.

Fear, polarisation and mass formation Val Bone

We live in very polarised times. If you name any issue, you can find examples of polarisation. The media often exacerbate this by leaving out certain facts and using emotive language. This can and does often lead to topics becoming fraught with pejorative terms which disclose biases and prejudices of the individual speaking. Use of certain terms or names in a conversation and open dialogue is wrecked due to prejudice, judgement and fear.

So why is it important to address polarisation? Polarisation gets us focusing on the symptom rather than the underlying problem and causes inertia. The unacceptable answers on both sides of the polarisation seem to cause the unacceptableness to be transferred on to the people espousing that view. It also makes people open to manipulation and takes us away from the creative third way of collaborating over finding a solution to a seemingly intractable situation.

How do we combat polarisation? Charles Eisenstein speaks of us needing to engage with a deep healing work, a work of unlearning the psychological habits of polarisation, and of hearing and sharing the stories that disrupt polarising narratives. He goes on to say, "It is about making space for complexity and relativistic thinking. It is about noticing the hidden motivations within ourselves that polarized identification serves."

How does polarisation affect the LGBTQ+ community?

So, what has this got to do with LGBTQ+ issues? What polarisations are there? This is covered more thoroughly in another part of the lecture. If we were back in the 70s in NZ, it would be the issue of gay liberation. Here and now in NZ it is the issue of Trans rights. Even within the LGBTQ+ population there is a polarisation between more marginalised and less marginalised queers.

What is the underlying issue here for LGBTQ+ in NZ? The practice that helps to resolve polarisation is empathy with perspective. Empathy for the 'ingroup' contributes to fuelling polarisation. Empathy for the minority group, with perspective, sets up the potential creative and loving communication.

Polarisation is also fuelled by the illusory effect. The **illusory truth effect** (also known as the illusion of truth effect, validity effect, truth effect, or the reiteration effect) is the tendency to believe false information to be correct after repeated exposure. This phenomenon was first identified in a 1977 study at Villanova University and Temple University. When truth is assessed, people rely on whether the information is in line with their understanding or if it feels familiar. The first condition is logical, as people compare new information with what they already know to be true. Repetition makes statements easier to process, relative to new, unrepeated statements, leading people to believe that the repeated conclusion is more truthful. The illusory truth effect has also been linked to hindsight bias, in which the recollection of confidence is skewed after the truth has been received.

In a 2015 study, researchers discovered that familiarity can overpower rationality and that repetitively hearing that a certain statement is wrong can paradoxically cause it to feel right. Researchers attributed the illusory truth effect's impact, even on participants who knew the correct answer to begin with, but were persuaded to believe otherwise through the repetition of a falsehood, to 'processing fluency'. The illusory truth effect plays a significant role in fields such as advertising, news media and political propaganda. (Wikipedia)

There are times in our lives, when the very core of our being is threatened. When overwhelmed by fear, any information can bypass our rational minds and the filters of discernment. When this happens to a large group (and this phenomenon has been known to affect whole countries and beyond) psychology has recognised this as a state of mass formation. When this happens, trying to

change the understanding doesn't happen through logical reasoning. The only practice that has been shown to make a difference is Socratic questioning. Socratic questioning is a method of inquiry that seeks to explore complex ideas, concepts, and beliefs by asking questions that challenge assumptions, clarify meaning, and reveal underlying principles.

Signs of an inclusive accepting place

One of our Quaker testimonies concerns community:

“Community reminds us that we are called to love, for community is a product of love in action and not simple self-interest. Community can break our egos open to the experience of a God who cannot be contained by our conceptions. Community will teach us that our grip on truth is fragile and incomplete, that we need many ears to hear the fullness of God's word for our lives. And the disappointments of community life can be transformed by our discovery that the only dependable power of life lies beyond all human structures and relationships.”

Parker Palmer, 1977. *Faith and Practice*. Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, 3.28

When a minority has encountered prejudice, sensitivity is heightened in looking for signs about the safety of any place they contemplate entering. For LGBTQ+ a sign outside of a church saying 'All are Welcome' can actually read 'All are welcome except if you are LGBTQ+' if they have experienced prejudice or abuse in a previous church. What can help is the use of visible signs such as using Rainbow posters, flags or other signs of openness & acceptance.

We are “divided by a common language”. Whilst in the original quote George Bernard Shaw was referring to two countries, Britain and the United States, such divisions also exist between LGBTQ+ and heteronormative society. As a nurse, I learned to listen carefully to the language used by the people I was caring for. If they called it discomfort and I called it pain, then I diminished my credibility as someone who understood what they were saying and therefore could help. Using heteronormative language can be excluding and shut down conversations with members of the LGBTQ+ community.

As a former healthcare professional, and a lesbian, I fell into the trap of using heteronormative language on occasion. Health care documentation has been slow to develop inclusive language and I have fallen into the trap of asking if someone has a wife/husband, making a heteronormative assumption. The use of inclusive language makes a huge difference e.g. 'Do you have a partner?' Whilst the LGBTQ+ form 4.4% of NZ population according to the NZ government statistics, the percentage within Quakers appears to be higher than this. Sexuality is not a statistic that we record of our Quaker community and if we did, would not necessarily be accurate. A bisexual in a heterosexual relationship may choose not to be out due to prejudice or judgement. Some choose not to engage or identify with our Rainbow community either because despite their relationship they don't feel gay or as they are not in an intimate relationship currently. When there is a choice not to expose oneself to possible prejudice or judgement, sometimes it is easier not to do so.

When I was in my 40s, I struggled with the label 'lesbian', and the professional support I was receiving at the time suggested that he (a gay man) had encountered a number of women who did not like to think of themselves as lesbian. He called this group 'women who like women' and that term felt comfortable. Previously I was married to a man for 10 years whom I loved deeply. So you could say that I'm bisexual. I don't identify as bisexual. You might define me as being pansexual (pansexual people might refer to themselves as gender-blind, asserting that gender and sex are not determining factors in their romantic or sexual attraction to others). I don't identify as pansexual. I currently define myself as lesbian. This could possibly change in the future. I don't know.

DREAMFire!

Michael/Michaelah Ocean, he/they

Key Psycho-Social-Cultural Considerations in terms of LGBTQIA+ People - We Share the Same Ground of Being

Thank you, Quakers Aotearoa New Zealand, and those here at this lecture, for stepping forward and showing up. Whatever positions we hold, they are opportunities for greater learning and development, as we live our daily lives within proximity of a Light.

“If we are born of lesbian, gay, (bi-sexual, transgender, queer, pansexual, intersex, asexual (celibate, monastic), LGBTQIA+ Rainbow) culture, our ground of being is the same ... We are different, but we share the same ground of being.”

Thich Nhat Hanh, recently deceased, Zen Buddhist Teacher, France/Vietnam

It is our birthright, as for all human beings, including those of Rainbow Culture, for reasons of sexual orientation, as well as those of gender; race/ethnicity, (slavery/colonialism/black, indigenous, person of colour (BIPOC)/Two-Spirit, refugee/migrant); class/caste; different-ability; age, and psychology/philosophy/religion/spirituality/divinity/mysticism - god(dess)/no god(dess), faith/no faith) and for all sentient beings, including the Earth and the greater solar system, to be unconditionally recognised, nurtured, affirmed and encouraged to live the potential of their humanity, as determined by us in partnership as an individual and as a collective, together with a reciprocity of dialogue, mutual respect, and, hopefully, benefit for all.

I want to propose that our society and culture is based on racism, sexism/misogyny, heterosexism, homophobia and transphobia, and, subsequently, we have been conditioned and enculturated into perpetuating these mindsets to varying degrees. A common phrase is: 'I am not racist', and my private response is: '...not even a tiny little bit?' Even I, as a queer male, am homophobic and transphobic to varying degrees, leave alone racist, sexist/misogynistic and heterosexist - Are you, also, just a tiny little bit!?

Research suggests that some 70% of human communication is non-verbal - what is not said communicates a greater truth than when the rational brain speaks! For the purpose of this lecture, homophobia and transphobia are primarily like a particular energy that communicates its presence alongside a person's facial musculature, words and/or actions, while a more rational part of our brain will believe that we are talking without bias.

“...when you look at the ocean, we see different kinds of waves, many sizes and shapes, but all the waves have water as their foundation and substance...” Thich Nhat Hanh, 2009

Are we willing to see many different types of waves, not only of LGBTQIA+ people in terms of identity, gender and psycho-social affection/intimacy/relationship/sexuality, but, also, human beings affected by race, gender, different-ability, age, class/caste/ refugee/migrant and other philosophies/psychologies/religions etc?

Trauma

Trauma is on a continuum from being unconscious, being aware of, through to being psycho-therapeutically desensitised and/or resolved.

The degree of trauma can be described as an interruption, a distortion, a hairline fracture or fracture, a rupture, a fragmentation, a pathology, a misdiagnosis, a trauma and/or a Trauma with a capital 'T'. Current research suggests that some 70% of people are living with some degree of trauma, consciously and/or unconsciously.

Trauma is derived from within the somatic sensory and neurological system, then locates itself as individual discrete pieces of information within the individual's brain/mind system but needs to be perceived also from within a social construct, e.g. whether that be a war veteran, a baby or young adult who has experienced sexual abuse, or a person who is of a minority, but lives in a normalising majority society and culture. For the purpose of this lecture, we are talking about human beings of Rainbow culture being parented into, and then living daily life from within a normative heterosexual majority family, community, society and culture.

Around three and a half years of age my Innocence was attracted to a male chest, while out on a family picnic - why did this Innocence of a child become a conspiracy of silence and of criminality for some twenty-five years, together with developing stress/anxiety/burnout and then panic attacks?

Key psycho-socio-cultural considerations in terms of LGBTQIA+ people are - developmental, organisational and maturational differences; narratives and languaging; belonging and other.

Aspects of these considerations may also apply to other than LGBTQIA+ people but can be a key point of difference that maybe misunderstood by an organisation. They are of key importance for many people of Rainbow culture. This is in terms of an energetic invisibility from conception, not being named for reasons of the English language; hetero-normative world views and mindsets around dualism in terms of same/different, separation/segregation; belonging/other and 'spiritual bypassing' in terms of self/non-self, the relative/the ultimate realm; adhering to a particular locus of power and control around decision making by a 'belonging majority' compared to a 'minority other'; compartmentalising/dismissing/denying our sexual orientation, whether that be as Friends and other practitioner traditions, despite the fact that any given population is comprised of some 11+% who are other than heterosexual!

1. Developmental, Organisational and maturational

From the moment of conception and/or as an embryo, or infant, we are energetically exposed to the dualism of a boy/girl dichotomy from our mother/parents/community. 'Are you having a girl or a boy?'

We grow up in a family, psycho-socio-cultural system, wherein a parent may be secretive about their own sexual orientation, and/or thereby perpetuates their own heterosexism/homophobia/transphobia onto a developing child/young adult, e.g. a father lives a secretive double life.

In 2023, in my 73rd year, I now consider that a photo of my father in 1943, in the family album, before my parents got married, was more than just a party trick, but a portrayal of sophisticated cross dresser and presumably homosexual, while outwardly maintaining a family homeostasis, and adhering to a faith in the Roman Catholic Church for support and redemption.

There is an absence of specific affirmation of our infant/childhood experience, and of robust literature and research in terms of the developing sensory- psycho-social experience and needs of pre-linguistic infants and children pertaining to the energetic experience of LGBTQIA+ - affection/attraction and pre-adolescence sexuality i.e. parents are oblivious to/underestimate the pre-linguistic, direct Insight/Innocence and psycho-social knowing of infants and children. Compare the title of a book by a current trauma psychiatrist, Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, even as an embryo and intrauterine baby with a photographic memory!

1953; 2023: at 73 years of age, I had to transfer from a generic counsellor to an Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprogramming (EMDR)+ trauma counsellor because an episode of burning out could not be resolved after several weeks of generic counselling. The trauma counsellor facilitated imagery of unconscious sexual abuse from my mother as a baby/toddler, together with surrogacy,

parentification, possible disassociation and sexualised conversations of enquiry throughout my upbringing, and, in so doing, gave further credence to the retrieved imagery.

I am now needing psychotherapy to desensitise and resolve self-management/regulation, social anxiety, underdeveloped attachment etc. - needing thousands of taxpayer dollars through ACC.

As a developing child our developmental milestones in terms of attachment, identity and self are delayed, interrupted, distorted, fragmented, pathologised, traumatised and/or never fully completed i.e. some children may have never identified as a boy/girl, and/or are of an intermediary or fluid identity that is not semantically available in the English language.

A LGBTQIA+ child's adult-like neuro-psycho-social pathways are developed in the brain from a very young age so as to manage issues of dis-ease, and in order to accommodate the contradictions between the internal and external lived experience of LGBTQIA+ infants/children/young adults.

From as young as early childhood onwards, our sense of self may be confused with, perceived as and linked to paedophilia, blackmail and murder; be vulnerable to indiscriminate police harassment for wearing non-binary dress or holding hands with a person of the same gender; meet generalised discrimination e.g. employment in education.

1971: a Christian associate teacher required me to teach the whole class, instead of just a group, so that I would fail my teacher training within the School of Education, Waikato University. Do you remember the fervency of the Salvation Army during these times of homosexual law reform, and our working with children? Fortunately, I graduated and had a long career in special education and then in vision impairment, working from early childhood through to eldership in terms of guide dogs and long cane travel.

We may need to be 'under the radar' and self-monitoring; may be considered unnatural, dirty and linked to bestiality, as if we are somehow more animal than human, and may be somehow a 'girl', whether that be through the play of dressing up in early childhood education or being of psycho-socio- culturally, of high intelligence, emotionally.

1954; 1957: after somatically sensing my Innocence at around three and a half years of age, I was psycho-socially aware of my difference cum otherness by seven years of age, and thereby living two lives -a public primary school life and a private world.

1964 -1969 at an all-boys high school I was called Sally - that was also my sister's name!

Despite an UN intervention, many nations, including NZ, still allow the morphology of a young child's genitalia to be surgically normalised by heterosexist parents and surgeons, despite the fact of our knowing that a child's psycho-sexual development is systemic in nature.

There is, to varying degrees, a lifelong developmental and maturational estrangement from our biological or adopted family system, and, also, in terms of the mother/father and daughter/son relationships, and same gender sibling dyads. Some parents carry a lifelong wish to their deathbed for their son/daughter to be heterosexually married and have children. Fathers and those in male bodies were absentee and emotionally absent over many generations, especially when sons were dying during the AIDS epidemic. My deceased partner's father said that he could no longer go to the RSA because his son was gay.

There is an intergenerational pattern of extended family members disappearing, normalised into invisibility and/or silence/deleted from conversation e.g. an uncle disappeared as a young adult from my extended family, never to be seen again. Conversely, two women that live together are

referred to as 'aunties' while a single man, living with his parents for the whole of his life, is called a confirmed bachelor.

There is, to varying degrees, a lifelong psychological challenge and trauma-like re-experience, in that 'coming out' is a cyclical and changing past/present/future timeline pattern throughout our lives, e.g. coming out to ourselves as a child/young adult internally/externally; becoming a practitioner of a particular psychology/philosophy/religion/spirituality/divinity/mysticism and then experiencing being 'othered' within a lesser skilful heteronormative organisational practice (i.e. Meeting for Worship within a monocentric cultural practice); seeking a 'belonging' through segregated Friends groups and/or meeting with ally groups.

2. Narratives and Linguaging

Throughout infancy, childhood, adolescence and adulthood, there is an absence of robust LGBTQIA+ cultural narratives of gender and psycho-social attraction/affection/friendship within the content and process of play, education, lifelong learning and development and ageing. There are very few picture/story books for children to identify with and so to be acknowledged and affirmed -there are probably less than five such children's story books written in New Zealand.

There is an inherent socio-cultural dis-ease/discomfort around sexuality per se. It is deleted and/or there is an absence of healthy and robust narrative and language for all people, leave alone LGBTQIA+ affection/attraction/friendship/partnerships/relationships.

There is an absence of a socio-cultural and sanctioned tradition of practice language, teachings and re-interpretation of texts to perceive and affirm from a non-dualistic way the continuum of sexual orientation, gender, identity and psycho-social relating. Language represents the interface between a culture and its lived experience.

3. Belonging and Other

We grow up in a family, socio-cultural system, wherein our difference is perceived as a sexual aberration, instead of from within a line of familial descendants, of cultural ancestry in terms of genetics, and of a particular role and sense of purpose within a community, such as have Two-Spirit people within some First Nation American Indian tribes.

From early childhood to senior years, LGBTQIA+ people are continually re-negotiating their interactions/'outness'/sense of belonging in terms of the philo-semantic and psycho-social and religio-spiritual territory within hetero-normative majority organisations and groups. They meet theologies that can be understood and interpreted in such a way as to ignore these key socio-cultural considerations and to question the religio-spiritual integrity of LGBTQIA+ people.

LGBTQIA+ people may also experience marginalisation in multiple ways, called intersectionality, if they are also living with the systemic variables of race; class; gender; different ability; age; and psychology/philosophy/religion/spirituality. Consider a queer BIPOC person, as a descendant of slavery, vulnerable to police harassment.

There are few philosophical/psychological/religious/spiritual etc. systems in the world that honour the inherent human sexual differentness and integrity of LGBTQIA+ people as more than a mere deviation/sexual orientation, instead of and from within a cultural paradigm i.e. Rainbow Culture.

Can we all be celebrated, belong and feel loved? Let us all be bathed in an unconditional and universal Light. My divinity is of my somatic base chakra, body, heart and brain/mind, living and breathing from within a Light of innocence as a baby/child - our only prerogative is unconditional positive regard.

Seek to know one another in the things that are eternal

Advices and Queries, Britain Yearly Meeting, 18

Ann Banks

Some years ago, a group of Quakers I was with was invited to do a mystery exercise. On instruction, we closed our eyes and held out our hands to receive an unknown 'gift'. When we had all received our objects the next step was to explore how it felt, was it rough or smooth, what shape was it? How big was it, how heavy or light? How did it feel against the face, the back of the hand? Then bring this thing up to the nose, what did it smell like? What did it smell like if you broke it open? Inside, was it moist or dry? Then, being reassured that we would not be poisoned, we were invited to take a little nibble – was it crunchy or soft? Was there more than one texture on the inside? By this time most of us were aware that we had been given a runner bean to explore, and when we opened our eyes, we could use our sense of sight to see the different greens and textures of the outside and inside of the bean and the pink of the seeds. Many of us were bowled over by the experience, the mindful examination of a humble bean had helped us to really know it in ways that invited us to be curious and adventurous and expand our awareness of the wonder of the bean! Afterwards I spoke to my father-in-law, Brian, with some excitement at both the simplicity of the exercise and the more multi-sensory understanding of 'beanness' that had been the result. To my surprise he said with some scorn "Oh I didn't bother doing all that, as soon as I felt it in my hand, I knew what it was."

This was one of those moments when *knowing* took on a whole new meaning. It is not enough to be able to name something, to give it a label, and say, 'I know it'. The name is simply a shorthand for a person, a group of people or an object. Brian's response had shocked and saddened me; he had missed out on a sensory experience which may have delighted him with unexpected pleasure and insight. He'd made an assumption that knowing the name was the same as *knowing*, that it was enough.

Each of us here at this lecture or reading this booklet has a name. In the beginning of any relationship this is a first: hear and remember the name. It is important but is only a preliminary step. How do we get to know one another in the things that are eternal or open ourselves to find a new light to guide us on our way? Obviously, we don't do that in the same sensory way as we would with something inanimate, like a bean, there would likely be objections! But if we don't pursue something deeper, we rely on assumptions about others, based on our own opinions or our cultural heritage, that are likely to be entirely wrong.

If we simply rely on a label, we cut off the opportunity for deeper insight and ultimately deeper connection. In the Rainbow Community there are many labels that can be used, but just for a moment consider your gut reaction to the word 'queer', or 'bisexual'. In my own experience I could hardly speak the word 'lesbian' for many years – that label horrified me and produced an instant feeling of physical revulsion. This was because in my culture and my religion it was hell-worthy. For me it produced such fear that I had no rational capacity to examine the reality of it. I had no spiritual capacity to be able to ask questions of a churchman I knew well, or to ask the inward questions I now rely on to guide me. So, I was in a bind. There was no one I trusted enough to ask about anything sexual; but I needed someone to let me know that it's possible to explore the concept that there are women who love women, not as a lifestyle choice, not to be bloody-minded, but as an irresistible attraction, falling in love - with all the universal positive feelings that this brings in its wake. Sadly, for many in the Rainbow community, falling in love has not been able to be widely celebrated. We are fortunate in this country, and others around the world, at this time, that the validity of these relationships is increasingly recognised and honoured.

Real connection requires genuine interest, curiosity, openness, a willingness to be vulnerable by letting down our barriers to connection. For those who do not conform to the hetero-normative dominant culture this comes with some risk, maybe less than in the past, but it's still a big hill to climb. I put off 'coming out' to my parents until I was 47, after a three-year followed by a twenty-year relationship. Even then, it didn't go down at all well. They really didn't want to know me, and yet this was who I really was, the me I'd been hiding all that time and had been fearful that would be unacceptable if revealed. And their response was just as I had feared. Dad died early the following year. My, by then, ex suggested that the news had probably killed him.

My journey with an alternative sexuality is probably like most growing up with this as part of their experience in the late 50s and sixties. I had my own assumptions based mostly on my Dad's prejudice, the unspoken but implied judgment of the Anglican church and a deep existential terror that it was WRONG. There was no one I could talk to, no role models, and huge fear around the confusion of it all. Sex education at my school consisted of one biology lesson about the mating habits of rabbits. I had a cold and was away from school that day. Mother had no idea about how to broach anything of a sexual nature and told me that if I found out about it at school to let her know and then she wouldn't have to. I did find out about 'it' at school, at the top of the school playing field with a group of us 14- or 15-year-olds listening to our classmate Christina, who explained to us in graphic detail what her boyfriends did to her. Always outspoken and anarchic, she was the one who folded her beret into quarters, pinned it on her head and backcombed her beehive over the top of it so that she could tell the prefects who lurked at the local bus stop that she was indeed wearing her uniform! I went home that afternoon, rather shaken and told mum that I had found out and didn't it hurt? "Not if you love the man", is all I remember of her reply.

I had lots of boyfriends over my teenage years; that's what you did wasn't it? When I was about 16, I had a lovely boyfriend called Roger. His parents took us down to the sea one Saturday and I remember vividly walking up a couple of stone steps into a café. We ordered food. When mine arrived I simply couldn't eat it. So embarrassing – not even a mouthful. Shortly afterwards we stopped seeing each other. This was to repeat itself with another devastatingly handsome Roger some years later. We went out together for about 6 months or so and during that time I lost about 10 kilos in weight. It was a great relief when it was over. I so desperately wished I could have made it work, but I just couldn't.

In between these two Rogers there was a significant Sunday School teachers' training weekend on the south coast. I was 17. My best friend since primary school and I were at this Anglican retreat centre where there were various women from the Church Army who had come to give us some ideas about what to do with the children in our care. The first evening several of us younger ones went down to the sea front for a walk. As we went past one of those little shelters with a big bench seat, so common around the south coast, a young man whom I had just met that afternoon grabbed my hand and we ran towards a nearby shelter. To my further surprise he kissed me and said, "I've been wanting to do that ever since I first saw you!" Later that evening as my best friend and I were debriefing in her bedroom after all the excitement, I asked her if I could kiss her. She was not averse. I'd kissed loads of boys, but this was qualitatively different. Think black and white silent movie compared with a technicolour, surround sound, multi-dimensional, full body, feely experience. I was shocked and confused, terrified of my response and what did it mean? Who was I? What would people think if they knew?

I was not courageous. I wanted to fit in. It was at this point that I began my double life. Nothing much to show for it at that point. I dated the 'seaside kisser' for a few months. I wanted to explore more with my friend, but she was beginning to date the man she finally married; I ultimately became her bridesmaid. When I got to teachers' college I continued with boyfriends, a couple of whom I

took home and who whetted my parents' expectations for a son-in-law and grandchildren. In my final year I started a relationship with a woman, 'J'. We figured it was probably a phase we would grow out of and that we were almost certainly the only people in the world who could possibly be in a relationship of this sort. For me, it was both wonderful and terrifying. Wonderful to be in a relationship I could relax into but terrifying to think that we might be found out or go to hell. Whatever the outcome it was WRONG. I had internalised quite severe homophobia from my Dad. I carried a lot of shame which manifested as a significant skin problem. When 'J' and I moved into the work world together, we decided we should make an effort to find husbands. After asking around we settled on joining the Women's Royal Naval Reserve. It was fun, but there were no men we fancied, or who fancied us! Much later I discovered that all but one of the women in the group, about 15 altogether, were lesbian, which at the time was cause for immediate dismissal.

My teaching colleague at school had been off to Canada to work and had come back with a husband. Off we trotted to northern British Columbia, where I was hotly pursued by another woman, and 'J' fell into the arms of her man and has been happily married ever since. I was her bridesmaid.

This new relationship was both irresistible and horrifying. I wanted to have grown out of all this and lead a 'normal' life. When it became obvious where this new friendship was leading it was probably the closest I've ever come to wishing to 'opt out' of life if it was going to continue being this difficult.

'A' was an Aussie, determined to do the grand European tour which we did for 6 months. We went back to Britain at the end of 1972, wondering how we were going to be able to be together, and make a living. By a series of great opportunities, we were able to buy a commercial property in North Yorkshire and ran an eventually very successful business. It was during this time that I found Quakers. I had been drawn to some sort of involvement with religion but recognised early on that the Church of England didn't want 'any woman beyond the chancel step'. My sexuality would have been the final nail in that coffin!

Having completed a Bachelor's degree with the Open University, I came across an advert in *Sesame*, the OU magazine, for a free booklet, *Introducing Quakers* by George Gorman, which I sent away for. There must have been some reference in this introductory pack to the Quaker work on same sex relationships because I also got hold of a copy of *Towards a Quaker View of Sex*. The relief of reading that publication lifted some of the huge burden of shame and guilt from my shoulders. I went to Meeting for Worship and felt immediately at home. 'A' was not happy, but I persevered and went to that Meeting for 10 years. Without ever 'coming out'. During the 80s I decided that I needed to sort out a few minor ailments, most of which were emotional, though I didn't recognise that at the time. The practitioner I was working with told me that my energy was divided, as if part of me was travelling down the M6, the motorway that runs north to south down the west side of Britain, and the other half was travelling down the M1, the main route from the northeast, down to London.

After about 6 months I began to feel better and decided that I'd like to train in that therapy. The first aspect of the course was to brush up on my anatomy and physiology. The exam took place at the practitioner's home. When I'd finished, she took out a 2-litre bottle of white wine, which we drank between us. I won't say anything about having to drive myself home. The information she felt impelled to impart while I was under the influence, was that I couldn't be a lesbian and 'spiritual'. Any self-respecting person would have told her where to get off. I had not reached a point of self-respect in my journey at this point, so settled for her opinion. Six months of bringing my divided self into some kind of alignment, demolished at a stroke. Not only was this important part of myself, loving, energetic, loyal, enthusiastic and demonstrative unacceptable to my family (or it would have been if they had known about it) but now it seemed, even God wasn't too thrilled about it. When I

had calmed down a bit, I realised that if I was going to be any kind of a therapist, I had learned some profound lessons about how not to do it.

By now we had some friends who were accepting of us. Another couple of women, a couple of men and dear Jean, who met us on a trip to Italy and told us about her brother who was gay and how difficult it had been for him. Although comfortable with Quakers I was still wondering exactly what it was that had inspired them with such courage and a willingness to be (even cheerfully) imprisoned in the disgusting filth of 17th century jails for their faith. Oh! for that courage! In 1990 I moved away from the business and very reluctantly from A, who pulled out of the move at the last minute. I went to live in a group, exploring individual spiritual process and group spiritual process using kinesiology. It was there that I found what I had been looking for in terms of the inner point of contact, the inward light, though this was, if not mediated, it was certainly under the direction of the woman who was leading the group. There were others in the group who were in same sex relationships and this all seemed very well accepted. And it was not until I'd done a quite considerable amount of work on myself that I felt safe enough in my own sense of who I was to come out to my parents.

Fast forward, through another very difficult 5-year relationship to moving in with mother, now in her 90's, and coming back to Quakers in another part of the country. After a few months we did a course called 'Hearts and Minds Prepared'. To my great joy I discovered that in my 15-year absence from Quakers, Rex Ambler had done his deep dive into what I consider to be the foundation of the Quaker way. I devoured his little book *Light to Live By* and became very excited. From my work in the group, I knew exactly what I was looking for, how it felt and what it meant. Shortly after the introductory weekend at Swarthmoor Hall with Rex and his wife Catherine, when we had established a Light Group in our Meeting, I had the profound experience of knowing that, in spite of what I had always perceived as my shortcomings, maybe because of them, I am in fact much loved. It was a life-changing experience which encompassed the whole of me including my sexuality. It was the beginning of a whole new chapter in my journey towards authenticity, when I finally loved myself enough to be open to the wonderful relationship I now enjoy, where there is no fear of expressing the love we have for each other and enabling that to ripple out to all those we meet. At our Meeting for Worship for Marriage Mum welcomed Val into the family as her other daughter. It was a long journey for her, and I honour her for making it.

I am immensely grateful to Quakers for their original enlightened work on recognising the value and the spiritual validity of same sex relationships. The 1963 publication of *Towards a Quaker View of Sex* was a turning point for many who had been looking for a spiritual home and finding that, unless they hid their true identity, the Christian Community wanted nothing to do with them. It was not without its challenges within the Society either, there were casualties of those whose were unable to come to terms with the idea in any shape or form. I was privileged to be at Britain Yearly Meeting in 2009, when the concern about our endorsement of same sex marriage was before us. As the final minute was read to the 1000+ people in the room, and any further ministry was invited, there was a profound silence. No one had anything to add or change. And as I write this my eyes, even now, are filling with tears. May our journey towards acceptance of each other's authentic and vibrant selves continue, holding one another up with a tender hand and getting to know one another in the things that are eternal. There is no finer foundation for a loving and peaceful world.

Becoming real Ann Banks

George Fox's early life was beset with questions. It was 13 years before his birth when the public were finally officially allowed to read the Bible for themselves in English. King James the First had authorised its translation and printing in 1611 – George was born in 1624. Reading Jesus's teaching for himself, George was experiencing some serious cognitive dissonance! The Bible's guidance for a loving compassionate life bore little relationship to the kind of behaviour he experienced from the 'professors', or churchmen of his day. There seemed to be an innate sense in him that drinking and gambling were not in alignment with a spiritually authentic life, but none of the churchmen could help him make any sense of his dilemma. The Bible was telling him one thing and the world something completely different. This would have been both mentally and emotionally traumatic for him.

My own experience with a therapist who told me I could not be a lesbian and spiritual had, I imagine, a similar effect. Like him I was adrift for many years; even though I believed that Quakers wouldn't throw me out if my sexuality was known, I didn't have the confidence in my own sense of myself to risk saying anything. It was a teetering kind of double life, walking a perpetual tightrope of uncertainty. Like Fox, I was looking for authenticity, but it was elusive.

I returned to Quakers after several years exploring other modalities of accessing information not normally consciously available, which had gone some way towards giving me a sense of connection with Source. But it was the Experiment with Light where I finally began to find, like Francis Howgill, "a place to stand in and what to wait in". Direct guidance, knowing that I was loved and cared for, that I could truly be myself, with all my imperfections and failings; that I was on a unique journey of being human and that I could make a valid contribution to the world because of my own difficulties. I had finally awakened to the possibility of becoming real.

Diversity *Quaker Handbook* 1.4 (pp.20-21)

As a Society we recognise the diversity of one another's gifts and insights and accept that each of us may change as we become open to new light. Quaker worship and practice are based on some beliefs and understandings such as there being "that of God" in everyone. These are offered as guidance rather than as doctrine or creed, in recognition that, ultimately, we must trust in the truth of gathered experience. The Meeting offers us a home in which we each have freedom to seek and grow in community. This freedom lays on us the responsibility to respect one another's various journeys and discoveries, and to celebrate what is precious to other Friends. We come together to worship, to share the friendship of the Meeting, and to wait patiently on the Spirit.

LGBTQ+ Quaker Queeries (our spelling) Val Bone

Are you able to see differences in gender identity or sexuality as a Taonga, a treasure from which you can learn?

Do you strive in everyday life to make your language inclusive and non-judgemental?

How do you make it overt that your Quaker Meeting is open to all regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity?

RAINBOW TERMINOLOGY LIST Helena Erickson

We acknowledge that language and culture are constantly evolving. As such, the following definitions are how we understand them at this point in time (2023), in our culture here in Aotearoa. These terms may evolve, fall out of use or become taboo. We do not pretend to predict the future or expect these labels and definitions to be set in stone.

Transgender – ADJECTIVE – A person who is transgender is someone whose gender identity does not match the one they were assigned at birth. This is an umbrella-term that includes trans women, trans men and non-binary people.

Cisgender – ADJECTIVE – A person who is cisgender is someone whose gender identity matches the one they were assigned at birth.

Non-Binary [gender identity] – ADJECTIVE – An umbrella-term that includes people who have a gender outside of the binary man or woman. A non-binary person may identify with being in between a man and a woman, both, or neither.

Genderfluid [gender identity] – ADJECTIVE – A person who is genderfluid is someone who experiences their gender as changeable and not in a solid state.

Agender [gender identity] – ADJECTIVE – A person who is agender is someone who is without gender. Often used as an identification for people who do not identify with or conform to any gender. A person who is agender may also identify as non-binary as it falls under the non-binary umbrella.

Takatāpui [sexuality/gender identity] – ADJECTIVE

From takatapui.nz: Takatāpui is a traditional Māori term meaning ‘intimate companion of the same sex.’ It has been reclaimed to embrace all Māori who identify with diverse genders, sexualities and sex characteristics.

Asexual – ADJECTIVE – A person who is asexual does not feel sexual attraction towards either the same gender or different genders. They are not heterosexual or homosexual.

Intersex – ADJECTIVE – A person who is intersex may have chromosomes, genitalia, and/or secondary sexual characteristics that are inconsistent with the typical definition of a male or female body. Some intersex people identify as part of the Rainbow community as they do not fall into the neat cisgender/heterosexual boxes expected in wider society. Other intersex people do not identify as part of the rainbow community, identifying with the gender they were raised as and being attracted to people of a different gender.

Queer – ADJECTIVE – Queerness often refers to the deviation from heterosexual / cisgender societal norms within the LGBT community. It is also often used as a blanket term to describe LGBT people and identities. While the use of the term queer as an adjective is widely accepted, to refer to someone as “a queer” is still considered offensive to many due to its long history as an insult.

Genderqueer – ADJECTIVE – Genderqueer refers to gender identities which do not fit within conventional gender labels, typically nonbinary identities.

Sexuality vs gender – Sexuality refers to the gender(s) a person is attracted to, whereas gender refers to how a person identifies on the gender spectrum.

Drag Queen – NOUN – Drag queens are performers common in the LGBT nightlife scene who celebrate and perform femininity. It is common for drag queens to be gay men, however there is a long history of trans women and non-binary people performing as drag queens too. Although uncommon, cis women can be drag queens too.

Drag King – NOUN – Drag kings are performers common in LGBT nightlife who celebrate and perform masculinity. Like drag queens, people of any identities can be drag kings.

RESOURCES

offered by members of the Group

The following resources have been recommended by Rainbow or other Quakers as worth consulting. Their contents cannot be taken as representing the views of the Rainbow Quakers group as a whole. Online resources may also be available in print, and vice versa.

Online resources

<https://database.ilga.org/criminalisation-consensual-same-sex-sexual-acts>

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/in-depth/383562/being-queer-and-christian-in-2019>

www.Queeringthemap.com

www.humandignitytrust.org/lgbt-the-law

<https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/globalassets/media/documents/policy/policy-publications/hiding-who-i-am-the-reality-of-end-of-life-care-for-lgbt-people.pdf>

www.youtube.com/watch?v=3DA4oyAGhUw-g Peterson Toscano talks about conversion therapy & LGBTQ+ biblical narratives

www.youtube.com/watch?v=3DgkikBKW8vmQ Joseph and the Amazing Gender Non-Conforming Bible Story

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL4Arcxb72jUz9wEH8_ybNaQzjHaHGF-a Queer Bible Chats - Peterson Toscano

www.youtube.com/watch?v=3D4qAlY48Mmd8 Queer Object – Bubble & Squeak

<https://www.be-there.nz/> Storm Clouds and Rainbows; The journey of parenting a transgender child

<https://insideout.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Join-this-Chariot.pdf> Christian Schools Supporting Rainbow Students' Wellbeing

<https://www.rainbowmentalhealth.com/> Supporting Aotearoa's Rainbow People; a practical guide for Mental Health Professionals

<https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-support/daily-living/lgbtq-living-with-dementia>

https://insideout.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/powhiri_guide_book-NO-CROP-MARKS-1.pdf

<https://insideout.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Legal-Rights-at-School.pdf> A resource for rainbow young people in Aotearoa

<https://www.thesamorchar.com/portfolio/queer-and-trans-101/>

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Printed material

Towards a Quaker View of Sex, Britain Yearly Meeting, 1964

The Left Hand of Darkness, Ursula K. Le Guin, 1969 – powerful imaginative fiction

The History of Sexuality, 1: The Will to Knowledge, Michel Foucault, 1976, 1978 (Eng.tr.)

Hating Gays: An Overview of Scientific Studies, Gregory M. Herek 1984

This We Can Say, Talking Honestly about Sex Nine Friends Press, 1995

Putting Freud to the Test, Henry E. Adams et al, 1996

Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christianity, Alister E. McGrath, 1998

A Life of Unlearning – A preacher's struggle with his homosexuality, church and faith, Anthony Venn-Brown, 2004

Answers From the Heart, Practical Responses to Life's Burning Questions Thich Nhat Hanh, 2009

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender ageing: Biographical approaches for inclusive care and support, R Ward, I Rivers & M Sutherland, 2012

Love Lost in Translation, Homosexuality and the Bible, K. Renato Lings, 2013

But is it Fair? Faith Communities and Social Justice, and A Love Quilt, Later Faith Patches. Trish McBride, 2014, 2020

Quakers and committed relationships, Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations (Britain), 2014

Part of the Whānau: The Emergence of Takatāpui Identity - He Whāriki Takatāpui, Elizabeth Kerekere, 2015

The Body Keeps the Score van der Kolk, B, 2015
<https://www.besselvanderkolk.com/resources/the-body-keeps-the-score>

Sexual Orientation, Controversy, and Science Michael J. Bailey et al., Psychological Science in the Public Interest. 2016

Growing up Takatāpui: Whanau Journeys, Elizabeth Kerekere, 2017

LGBTQ-Inclusive Hospice and Palliative Care, Kimberley Acquaviva, 2017

Lesbianism and Feminist Legislation in 1921: The Age of Consent and 'Gross Indecency between Women'. Caroline Derry, 2018

From Ace to Ze, The Little Book of LGBT terms, Harriet Dyer, 2018

Guidelines for Gender Affirming Healthcare for Gender Diverse and Transgender Children, Young People and Adults in Aotearoa New Zealand J. Oliphant et al. Transgender Health Research Lab, University of Waikato, 2018

The Queeriodic Table; a celebration of LGBTQ+ Culture, Harriet Dyer, 2019 – good for learning about queer culture

Life Isn't Binary; On Being Both, Beyond, and In-Between, Alex Iantaffi & Meg-John Barker, 2019 – excellent on gender non binary

Beyond the Gender Binary, Alok Vaid-Menon, 2020

LGBT+ Pride Global Survey, 2021

Dancing with History: A Life for Peace and Justice, George Lakey, 2022

Walking in the light under the rainbow', A Quaker statement of commitment and inclusion. Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa New Zealand 2023

One of Them, Shaneel Lal, 2023

LGBT+ History, Penguin Random House, 2023

Overcom; Te Maha O Ngā Kōrero, a Queer literary journal from parallelaotearoa.nz

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Our worship is based on silence and listening to the spirit.

Quakers practise truth and integrity, simplicity and sustainability, and pursue paths leading to peace and equality.

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- 2022 *The Search for Truth: information, disinformation, and the algorithms of social media*
Verica Rupar, Professor of Journalism, AUT
- 2021 *Stories of Belonging: A Journey across Aotearoa*
Anjum Rahman, Project Lead of the Inclusive Aotearoa Collective Tāhono
- 2020 *Moriori: Peace at all costs*
Maui Solomon of the Hokotehi Moriori Trust
- 2019 *Crime and Punishment*
Terry Waite, British humanitarian and former hostage
- 2018 *Can Religion Speak Truth?*
Elizabeth Duke, Kiwi Quaker
- 2017 *Transcending Neoliberalism*
Jane Kelsey, Professor of Law, University of Auckland
- 2016 *A Peaceful World: How can we make it so?*
Marion Hobbs, former cabinet minister
- 2015 *What We know. What We Say. And What We Do.*
Bryan Bruce
- 2014 *Standing in this Place*
David James, Jillian Wychel, Murray Short, Linda Wilson
- 2013 *Enough! The challenge of a post-growth economy*
Jeanette Fitzsimons, former Green Party Co-Leader
- 2011 *Changing the Prison System*
Tony Taylor
- 2010 *Honouring the Other*
Kevin Clements
- 2009 *Kiwi Dragon*
Bill Willmott

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