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Together in the Light: An ethnographic
exploration of the Palmerston North
Quakers' sense of community and shared
understandings

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts in Social Anthropology at Massey
University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.

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Abstract

The Religious Society of Friends is a Christian denomination whose emergence can be traced back to the teachings of George Fox in the 1640s in England. Since that time the denomination has splintered, from which four branches of Quakerism have emerged. One of these branches is liberal Quakerism, which is the only type of Quakerism found in New Zealand. Liberal Quakers do not have any centralised doctrine or authority figures, and they take the view that practice is more important than one's belief.

This research focuses on the Palmerston North Quakers and specifically answers two sets of questions. The first is whether they have a sense of community, and if so, what gives them that sense of community. The second set of questions centres on what the Quakers shared understanding are in the context of their community boundaries, and what enables these understandings.

As well as drawing on analysis from interviews with my research participants, this research also draws extensively on participant observation from Palmerston North and also from other groups in the North Island of New Zealand. All of which enables an understanding of the lived experience of being a Palmerston North Quaker.

Underpinning my research is a bricolage of theoretical work. These include community theory from John Bruhn, David Minar and Scott Greer, Patricia Felkins, Susan Love Brown as well as Victor and Edith Turner's concept of *communitas*, Randall Collin's interaction ritual theory and James Fernandez's work on consensus.

The most significant theme to emerge from analysis was the importance of the Quaker's silent meeting for worship. Whilst it may seem like an uneventful period of time to outsiders, its central importance to the community cannot be emphasised enough.

Keywords: Anthropology; Communitas; Community; Consensus;

Ethnography; Interaction ritual; Quakers; Religion; Religious Society of

Friends; Ritual; Solidarity.

Acknowledgements

This thesis is the culmination of two years of work. Whilst my name is on the cover, it is by no means an individual piece of work and it certainly would not have been possible without the help of numerous people. I would like to now acknowledge those who assisted me on this journey.

First of all I would like to thank my research participants, members of the Palmerston North Quaker community. Without your assistance and patience this research would not have got off the ground. Thank you for sharing your views, thoughts and interpretations. Personally this has been a great experience and certainly very rewarding. I hope this research will be of value to your community.

To the Quakers that I met around the country, thank you for the advice, support and knowledge that you gave me. You helped put it all in perspective.

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lunch time in the common room. Your encouragement and interest was always appreciated, and will not be forgotten.

Chapter One – Introduction

Anthropological interest in religion is as old as anthropology itself.

Crapo, 2003, p. 6

Introduction

I have always been fascinated with religion. As an atheist and occasional agnostic I have largely avoided going to religious services, but for all that I have long been intrigued by what I would refer to as ‘spiritual matters’. Concepts such as the meaning of life and our purpose during our time on earth have always made an amateur philosopher of me and made me stop and think about our journey through life. This journey saw me enrol at Massey University in a resource planning degree, yet two years later I was preparing for post graduate study in social anthropology. In partial fulfilment of my honours’ degree, I studied the concept of belonging in a non-denominational Christian Church. During that research I came across another Christian denomination¹ which I had heard of, but knew nothing of. This was the

¹ Some refer to liberal Quakerism, a term I explain further on in this chapter, as a Christian denomination because of its emergence from Christianity. Others may regard it as its own religion as it is not exclusively Christian today. I refer to it as a Christian denomination because that is how my research participants interpret it.

Religious Society of Friends, better known as the Quakers.² I read about how they did not have any centralised doctrine or authority figures and focused on practice rather than specific beliefs. It was completely different to what I was studying at the time, seemingly at the other end of a ‘spectrum’ of being Christian.

The more I read and thought about the Quakers, the more I found them fascinating and yet I wondered why no one I encountered knew much about them either.³

Some colleagues asked if they were similar to the Amish communities in America or if they “were the ones that wear hats” and at first I did not know how to respond.

However, the more I read the more I began to understand where they seemed to be coming from whilst also learning of my own connection with Quakers. Growing up in south Wales, I wore Clarks shoes to school, opened my first bank account at Lloyds Bank, and spent my pocket money on Cadburys confectionary, whilst my father worked at the Friends Provident insurance company; all originally Quaker companies.

Having read extensively about Quakerism, two questions intrigued me and I decided these would be the specific focus of my research. The first question, which contains two parts, is that with so much theological freedom do the Palmerston North Quakers⁴ still have a sense of community? And if so, *what* gives them that sense of community? My second question is also made up of two parts and focuses

² Members of the Religious Society of Friends can be called Quakers or Friends. I use both terms interchangeably.

³ One reason for this is that Quakers do not proselytise. I discuss this further in chapter three.

⁴ I chose to undertake my research in Palmerston North as it is my city of residence and therefore an example of ‘anthropology at home’, which I discuss further in chapter two.

on their shared understandings. The first is what are the shared understandings of what differentiates a Quaker from a non-Quaker? And *how* do they come to have this set of shared understandings?

There have been numerous social science studies amongst Quakers, specifically in Britain and the United States of America which I discuss further on in this chapter, yet there has been little ethnographic work done on the sense of community of liberal Quakers or their shared understandings. In addition, research on New Zealand Quakers has also been quite limited. Apart from some research detailing their history, they remain an under-researched religious group in this country.

Overview of this chapter

I begin with an outline of how Quakerism emerged, introducing its founder George Fox and then providing a brief history of Quakers in New Zealand, and Palmerston North. The types of Quakerism, their various frameworks (such as their 'Inner Light', silence, testimonies and their publications) as well as their organisational 'structure' will then be discussed. I then elaborate on some of the work within the anthropology of religion which situates this research, including the anthropological study of Christianity, and research on Quakers - abroad and in New Zealand. Understanding community is a central element of my research. Consequently I provide an outline of this concept as well as detailing my other theoretical approaches. My first question in its two parts is answered in chapter three. For these questions I draw on the community theory of John Bruhn (2005), David Minar and Scott Greer (1969), Patricia Felkins (2002) and Susan Love Brown (2002) as well

as on Victor (1994; 1995) and Edith Turner's (2012) concept of *communitas*. My second question, also comprising two parts is answered in chapter four. For these questions, in addition to using the community theory from the previous chapter, I employ Randall Collins' (2004) interaction ritual theory as well as James Fernandez's (1965) work on social, cultural and symbolic consensus.

Context for the emergence of Quakerism

To understand how Quakerism began, it is useful to look at the environment from which it emerged. In 1625 Charles I became King of England (Barbour & Frost, 1988, p. 16) and "enthusiastically embraced a belief in the divine right of kings" (Hylson-Smith, 2005, p. 1003). King Charles I was "resolutely opposed to the predestinarian Puritans" (ibid.), a religious group of "English reformers" that were "frustrated by the slow progress of the Reformation in the English church" (Hylson-Smith, 2005, p. 1002). The Puritans believed that the church (of England) "had not been purified enough and still had much corruption in it" (ibid.).

In the 1640s King Charles I tried to increase his power over parliament, intending to "rule as well as reign, [and] tax as well as spend" (Ingle, 1994, p. 26). This caused outrage and in 1642 civil war broke out, ensuring a period of "great social upheaval and religious ferment" (Abbott & Abbott, 2008, p. 231). This civil war⁵ saw the King and those loyal to him battle against Parliament and the Puritans (Barbour & Frost, 1988, p. 17). During the instability of this civil war, numerous religious sects emerged. These included the "Muggletonians, the Family of Love, the

⁵ For an in-depth analysis of the English civil war, see *The English civil war* (1974) by Young and Holmes.

Grindletonians, the Ranters, the Seekers and the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)” (Hylson-Smith, 2005, p. 1003).⁶ Barbour and Frost (1988) state that “much of Quakerism can best be understood as growing out of Puritanism” (p. 5), and it was during this period of instability that the influence of George Fox was felt.

George Fox

The Religious Society of Friends was founded in England by George Fox in the 1640s (Walvin, 1997, pp. 7-9). Walvin (1997) states that “Fox was born in 1624, the son of a devout Puritan...and an equally ‘upright woman’ in Leicestershire” (p. 8). Growing up, Fox was “serious beyond his years and never strayed from the straight and narrow” (Ingle, 1994, p. 18). He was not highly educated and at the age of 14 became a cobbler (Nevaskar, 1971, p. 65). Yet despite Fox’s lack of a formal education, he grew unsatisfied with the answers given by the priests of Church of England for the problems that England was suffering at that time. As Walvin (1997) explains “the entire nation was racked by personal and social agitations that had been whipped up by a bloody and vengeful civil war” (p. 9), what Barbour and Frost (1988) refer to as a “chaotic decade of war, famine, and depression” (p. 26). However it was one particular incident that led Fox to move away from life as a Puritan, beginning the journey that led to the formation of the Quakers. This incident occurred in the summer of 1643 at a local fair when Fox was just 19, and it changed the course of his life (Walvin, 1997, p. 8). Fox’s cousin Bradford and one of his friends were drinking (Fox, 1694/1948, p. 2) and invited Fox to join them, which

⁶ Out of these religious groups, only the Quakers continue to exist.

he did. After they had “drunk a glass apiece” (Fox, 1694/1948, p. 2) Fox’s companions decided to “drink healths, calling for more, and agreeing together that he that would not drink should pay all” (p. 2). Fox found it appalling that two professors of religion would choose to drink alcohol in such a way, causing him to leave in disgust. That night he had a sleepless night and asked the Lord for help.

Fox then spent the next four years as “a seeker” (Nevaskar, 1971, p. 66), severing ties with his family (Ingle, 1994, p. 25). He avoided contact with people whilst wandering around England “badgering clerics and divines, and seeking guidance in prayer and isolation” (Walvin, 1997, p. 8). Fox’s desire for a more personal relationship with God and his dissatisfaction with the Bible (Nevaskar, 1971, p. 67) prompted him to start a new way to lead a Christian life. Nevaskar (1971) states that “from 1647, Fox began to propagate his new beliefs” (p. 69), finding receptive audiences throughout England. His aim “was not to create a sect but to persuade his fellow men and women to worship honestly, not through the intermediary of the priesthood or any religious organisation but from within themselves” (Walvin, 1997, p. 9). Fox believed that God was “love and truth” (Nevaskar, 1971, p. 67) found within all people and that therefore there was no need for religious institutions. This meant that Quakerism was regarded as “revolutionary” (Nevaskar, 1971, p. 69) by the Church of England. Quakers were arrested for acts such as interrupting preachers during sermons, refusing to take oaths and making no distinctions between “sex or social class” (Nevaskar, 1971, p. 70). As a result thousands of Quakers were persecuted and hundreds died in prisons (ibid.). Fox himself was imprisoned “eight times for an aggregate of six years” (ibid., p. 68) and

it was during one of those periods of incarceration that the name Quaker was given to him and his followers. Ingle (1994) states that “a justice named Gervase Bennett, applied the label “Quaker” to him”, meant as “a derisive term” (p. 54), because “Fox’s followers quaked and trembled during their worship” (p. 54). Ingle (1994) further states that “Fox preferred the name “Children of the Light”” (p. 54), but also used ““People of God”, “Royal Seed of God”, or “Friends of Truth”, the latter winning favour and becoming the basis of the modern name, “Religious Society of Friends”” (p. 54). Despite the intended insult by the Judge, the Quakers embraced the term and it became the popular name for the religious group.

Fox was quite critical of the upper classes, arguing that the wealthy represented the biggest thieves in society, as their wealth came from “cheating, by lying and defrauding” (Walvin, 1997, p. 15), and his message resonated with many. With such a grassroots beginning, Quakerism grew rapidly. It soon spread to the rest of Britain, Europe and to America (Nevaskar, 1971, p. 70). By the 1650s there were around 40,000 Quakers (Walvin, 1997, p. 11), equalling the number of Catholics in Britain (ibid.). The Friends have continued to grow over the last three and a half centuries and today there are around 400,000 members (FWCC, 2014). Although it has grown, this number of Quakers is quite small in comparison to other Christian denominations, such as Catholics with 1.2 billion (BBC, 2014) and Anglicans with 80 million (Anglican Communion, 2014).

A brief history of Quakers in New Zealand

The first Quaker to set foot in New Zealand was Sydney Parkinson, who had sailed with Captain James Cook on the Endeavour in the late 1760s (Brodie & Brodie, 1993, p. 14), and had been “employed to make drawings of natural history specimens” (ibid., p. 9). However, Quakers would not return to New Zealand for another 60 years, with “the arrival of Quaker whalers from New England” (Brodie & Brodie, 1993, p. 7) and William Trusted, “the first Quaker settler in New Zealand, in 1836” (ibid.). Quakers soon began arriving from England and Ireland, and later from Australia, the United States of America and mainland Europe and in 1885 the Auckland Meeting⁷ was established (Brodie & Brodie, 1993, p. 8). In 1900, the Auckland Meeting was made a Monthly Meeting of the London Yearly Meeting (Brodie & Brodie, 1993, p. 8), and in 1964, New Zealand “achieved the level of its own self-governing Yearly Meeting” (ibid.). Such is the Quakers connection with New Zealand, that the Maori Language Commission gave the Religious Society of Friends the name “Te Hahi Tuhauwiri”,⁸ meaning “The faith community that stands shaking in the wind of the Spirit” (Religious Society of Friends, n.d. - a). Today in New Zealand, there are approximately 1400 Quakers (The Religious Society of Friends Aotearoa New Zealand, n.d. - b), out of around 400,000 worldwide.

⁷ Quaker organisational terms will be explained later in the chapter.

⁸ There is no census data on how many Quakers identify as Maori. During my fieldwork, I spent time in Auckland, Wanganui, Wellington and Palmerston North, but encountered very few Maori Quakers.

Quakers in Palmerston North

Quakers have been present in the Manawatu region since the 1880s (Brodie & Brodie, 1999, p. 51). At that time they were quite few in number, and as such held their meetings for worship at their own homes (“New meeting for Quakers”, 1967). When these early Friends moved away from the region, there was a lull in Quakerism in Palmerston North for many years (Quaker archivist, personal communication, April 24, 2014). In 1939 Bernard Elphick began hosting Quaker meetings in his home, thus reviving Quakerism in the city. Over the next decade, the meetings were held at other locations in town, including a doctor’s surgery waiting room (ibid.).

As the Palmerston North Quakers grew slowly, they moved their meetings to the Y.W.C.A. in the center of the city,⁹ as well as becoming their own Monthly Meeting in 1964 (becoming independent from Wellington) (Quaker archivist, personal communication, April 24, 2014). It was also in 1964 that the worship group decided that having their own meeting house would be a better option than the Y.W.C.A., due to the traffic noise. After finding a suitable location in a quieter part of the city, the Friends began the process of designing and constructing their own place of worship. Financed from their own contributions as well as receiving financial assistance from other Quakers around the county, the meeting house was completed in 1967 (Quaker archivist, personal communication, April 24, 2014). The result of which is the meeting house used today. It was this meeting house, which I

⁹ The meeting for worship was held here from 1960 until 1967.

describe in depth in chapter two, where I based much of my fieldwork for this project.

Quaker types, frameworks and organisational 'structure'

Quaker types

The Quakerism founded by George Fox has since split into four different types: liberal/unprogrammed, programmed, evangelical and conservative. These types are described by the Quaker Information Centre (2011a) as:

Programmed: This type has services that are led by a pastor and has a strong emphasis on Christian literature and a focus on Jesus Christ. These services could include readings from the Bible and singing hymns.

Evangelical: The Evangelical type also has programmed worship, again with a strong emphasis on the authority of the Bible. This type of Quaker generally refers to the group as a church and is actively involved in evangelical work.

Conservative: Conservative Friends have a 'quiet' meeting like the unprogrammed/liberal type do. However conservative Quakers have a much more Christo-centric perspective than liberal Quakers, basing their silent meetings on waiting to be guided by Jesus Christ.

These branches of Quakerism can be found in many countries around the world but are predominantly found in North America and Africa, with the Caribbean and Latin America also strongly represented (Quaker Information Centre, 2011b). In New

Zealand only liberal/unprogrammed Quakerism is practiced and so is the focus of my research. It is a minority type of Quakerism, as only 11% of the world's Quakers identify as such. This is in comparison to programmed and evangelical Quakerism, which constitute 49% and 40% respectively, whilst the Conservative types accounts for 0.003% (FWCC, 2013).

Liberal/unprogrammed Quakerism

As the focus of my research, this branch of Quakerism needs a more in-depth description. Liberal Quakers may or may not consider themselves Christian and therefore may not place the same importance on the Bible and the teachings of Jesus as other Quaker types do. For liberal Quakers all sources of knowledge, including the Bible, are considered important. The name unprogrammed stems from there being no programme at the weekly worship meeting,¹⁰ as the programmed and evangelical types of Quakerism do. There is no sermon or singing of hymns. Instead the meeting is held in silence which is often (but not always) broken when a Quaker feels moved to voice a thought that has emerged from their Inner Light, which is the focus of their meeting and which I explain next.

Liberal/unprogrammed Quaker frameworks

Inner Light

George Fox explained the concept of the Inner Light as “that of God in every one” (1691, as cited in Chenoweth, 2009, p. 325). Quakers believe that every person has an Inner Light and the ability to have a connection with it. This Inner Light is seen as

¹⁰ The weekly worship meeting will be discussed in depth in chapter two.

a divine spark and is the reason that “there is an emphasis on equality between all people” and a “lack of priests or ministers to lead services” (Chenoweth, 2009, p. 325). There is no need for authority figures in liberal Quakerism because all people are seen as equal in importance and spiritual knowledge. This divine Inner Light is believed in by all liberal Quakers, although in what way it is ‘divine’ varies between Friends. For some the concept of divine would be recognizable to those in a Christian Church, whilst for others it could be something that departs from traditional Christian views. During the meeting Quakers focus on connecting to their Inner Light, by what they refer to as ‘centring down’.¹¹

Silence

The silence during a meeting is connected to the idea of the Inner Light as “Quakers claim that it is inappropriate to try and verbalise religious belief” (Dandelion, 2004, p. 222). This silence “is not a sign of defeat...it is rather a rescue from futility” (Lerner, 1998, p.77, as cited in Dandelion, 2004, p. 222) because for Quakers “theology can never be finally or fully true” (Dandelion, 2004, p. 224). Quakers look to their Inner Light for knowledge of spiritual and religious concerns, remaining silent until their Inner Light connects with them. When this occurs, they may (or may not) feel moved to break the silence and share their revelation with the worship group. As I was told by my research participants, this is called giving a

¹¹ This term will be further explained in chapter four.

'ministry'. The brief period after the meeting when the Friends have a more informal discussion was explained to me as a period for 'almost ministry'.¹²

Testimonies

The Quaker testimonies are principles that Friends live by and are inspired by the concept of the Inner Light. These testimonies include peace, equality, simplicity and integrity. The Quakers (The Religious Society of Friends Aotearoa New Zealand, n.d.

- c) explain that,

A testimony is a witness to the living Truth within the human heart as it is acted out in everyday life. It is not a form of words, but a mode of life based on the realisation that there is something of God in every person, that all human beings are of equal value, and that all life is interconnected.

In the absence of centralised doctrine, practice is considered more important than belief. It is these testimonies, guided by their Inner Light, that influences a Quaker's practice¹³ and are also emphasised in the Quaker publications.

Publications

As the Quaker testimonies can be interpreted in a number of ways, the Friends have books that help guide their behaviour, or practice. These books include *Quaker Faith & Practice in Aotearoa New Zealand* (The Religious Society of Friends, 2003) and *Advices & Queries* (The Religious Society of Friends in Aotearoa/New Zealand, 2013).¹⁴ The *Quaker Faith & Practice (QFP)* is "offered as a source of

¹² I discuss the meeting and post-meeting discussion in chapter two.

¹³ Quaker practice will be explored in chapter four.

¹⁴ Throughout this research I often refer to these publications. Unless otherwise stated, I am referring to the New Zealand versions.

inspiration, information and understanding of Quaker thought and experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand” (The Religious Society of Friends Aotearoa New Zealand, n.d. - d). The *QFP* contains extracts of writing from New Zealand Friends, past and present, and a new edition is compiled and released every ten to fifteen years. These written extracts are thoughts and views which encapsulate the Quaker principles, or testimonies. Copies of the latest *QFP* were at every meeting I attended and were often mentioned by my research participants. However it is not taken as ‘gospel’ and it is still up to individual Quakers to make up their own mind regarding matters of theology and practice.

Advices & Queries (The Religious Society of Friends in Aotearoa/New Zealand, 2013) provides further guidance regarding Quaker practice. It contains advice to consider and questions to ask oneself. It is designed to encourage Quakers to think about behaviour that incorporates the Quaker testimonies. Whilst the New Zealand versions of these two books are primarily drawn on by local Quakers, the British and Australian versions are also available and valued.

Quaker organisational ‘structure’

International level

Quakerism as a whole is organised into a structured body, but not a hierarchical one where orders are passed down from a central authority. With 400,000 Quakers spread out over 75 countries, this structure simply helps maintain communication between the different types of Quakerism. At the international level of the Quaker organisational ‘structure’ is the Friends World Committee of Consultation (FWCC),

with its offices in London. The FWCC helps manage and coordinate the four regional Quaker groups. These groups consist of Africa, the Americas, Asia & the West Pacific, and Europe & the Middle East. Each regional group is responsible for maintaining contact between the countries under its jurisdiction. New Zealand is part of the Asia & the West Pacific section, which is also responsible for Australia, China, India and Japan, among others.

National level

At the national level the New Zealand Yearly Meeting is a term “used to describe the corporate body of New Zealand Quakers” (The Religious Society of Friends Aotearoa New Zealand, n.d. - e) and has two meanings: It is the name of the body of New Zealand Quakers and is also a yearly event, at which Quakers from around the country attend. The Yearly Meeting is a Business Meeting whereby issues/concerns are raised and discussed. It is held over a few days in a different location around the country each year. The Yearly Meeting has a couple of clerks¹⁵ who compile an epistle which summarises the outcome of the Meeting, as well as producing the “Yearly Meeting clerk’s letter” (Denise).¹⁶ The position is held for three years before other Quakers take over the role. It is currently being held by Quakers in Dunedin. The next level in the ‘structure’ of Quakerism in New Zealand is the regional body, the Monthly Meeting. Like the Yearly Meeting, the Monthly Meeting is both an organisational unit *and* an event, although the event is more commonly referred to as the Business Meeting. The Monthly Meeting also has its

¹⁵ This term will be discussed in chapter three.

¹⁶ This letter will be explained in chapter two. Denise is the pseudonym of one of my research participants, all of whom will be introduced in chapter two.

own clerks and is represented in Christchurch, Dunedin, Kapiti, Mid North Island, Northern (includes Auckland and Northland), Palmerston North, Wellington, Whanganui & Taranaki, and the Young Friends¹⁷ who have meetings in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch. These Monthly Meetings take care of Quaker issues within their own region and are made up of worship groups. These worship groups represent the local level of the Quaker organisational 'structure'. It is this organisational unit, the Palmerston North worship group, which my research focuses on.

Religion and anthropology

Religion has been studied by anthropologists since the birth of the discipline in the late 19th century.¹⁸ Arnal (2000) states that Edward Burnett Tylor and James Frazer were the "anthropological pioneers of religious studies" (p. 23) and who published *Primitive Culture* (1871/1903) and *The Golden Bough* (1890/1996) respectively (Bowie, 2006, p. 13). These early studies, which were influential books for later generations of anthropologists, focused on how and why religion emerged; convoluted questions that are complex to even begin to answer. This perspective changed in the 20th century, when anthropologists and sociologists began to look at the *lived experience* of religious adherents. Researching amongst the Aborigines of Australia, for example, sociologist Emile Durkheim argued for the importance of key symbols (Durkheim, 1975, p. 106) and posited that religion was "essentially social"

¹⁷ The Young Friends are a Quaker worship group for those in the 16-39 age bracket. Although someone in this age range is still welcome to be a part of a standard worship group, or even both.

¹⁸ For a general outline of the history of the study of religion in anthropology, see *Introducing Anthropology of Religion* (2007) by Jack Eller.

(Hackett, 2005, p. 145). Building on the importance attributed to symbols, anthropologists Clifford Geertz, Victor Turner and Mary Douglas (Eller, 2007, p. 24) applied a symbolic interpretive approach to the study of religion. That is, interpreting what the religious symbols mean for members of a religion. Drawing parallels with Durkheim, Geertz also saw religion as eminently social and filled with symbols that along with culture suspended persons in a “web of significance” (as cited in Eller, 2007, p. 24), a metaphysical construct which influences and regulates behaviour and worldviews (ibid.). Furthering the work of Geertz, Turner articulated that religion was a dynamic “social drama” (as cited in Bell, 1997, p. 39). This interpretive anthropological approach looked to move away from the previously favoured universalistic view of religion, to valuing the participant’s or believer’s view. The individual emphasis was again furthered by Douglas’ idea that the human body was “used as a social and religious symbol” (as cited in Bowie, 2006, p. 40), a way of transmitting experience (ibid.). The approach of valuing the emic perspective as these anthropologists did is something aimed for in my research amongst the Palmerston North Quakers.

Anthropology of Christianity

As I have stated, whilst not all liberal Quakers will identify as Christian, the Christian roots of Quakerism are still considered to be significant.¹⁹ As such, the study of Quakers must be viewed as part of the anthropology of Christianity. The anthropology of Christianity is a sub-field within the discipline whose development

¹⁹ Whilst not all Quakers might identify as Christian, the religion does have Christian origins.

has emerged during the last few decades (Bialecki, 2008, p. 1139). Bialecki (2008) notes that it is a relatively recent practice to place “Christian populations at the centre of ethnographic accounts” (p. 1140). Hann (2007) states that the fact that anthropology is a result of “post-Enlightenment Europe” (p. 383) has meant that Christianity as an area of study has been avoided for not being “exotic” enough (Hann, 2007, p. 384). Cannel has labelled it “invisible” and “repressed” (2006, as cited in Hann, 2007, p. 384) whilst Robbins (2006, as cited in Hann, 2007, p. 384) mentions a “history of neglect”. The advent of anthropology “at home” (Peirano, 1998, p. 105) has meant that ethnographic studies concerning Christian institutions are becoming more common within the discipline (Hann, 2007, p. 384). However it is still not as common for anthropologists to study Christianity as it is to study other religions (Robbins, 2003, p. 192). Christians still appear to be thought of as “too similar to anthropologists to be worthy of study and too meaningfully different to be easily made sense of by the use of standard anthropological tools” (ibid.).

Robbins (2003, p. 194) asserts that it is cultural rather than intellectual reasons that are impeding the furthering of this sub-discipline and that there is still a stigma directed towards those who identify as anthropologists of Christianity (ibid., p. 195). As Klass (1995) states, “of all the practices on which the anthropologist reports [...] religion is most likely to raise suspicion that the anthropologist has gone native” (p. 5). That is, there is an assumption that the anthropologist who studies Christianity has lost the ability to remain self-reflexive and provide a balanced argument. Once Christian denominations are seen as equally worthy of

ethnographic research as other religions, then even more advancements will be able to be made in the anthropological understanding of Christianity.

Studies among Quakers

The Quakers have been the focus of numerous studies by various social scientists, yet a focus on their sense of community and shared understandings has been limited. Research on Quakers in New Zealand has also been limited and has primarily centred on their history, rather than participants' lived experience. Most studies on Quakers have been conducted amongst liberal Quakers²⁰ and have largely taken place in Britain and the USA, and have emphasised individuality and openness. These include anthropologist Douglas Kline's (2012) study of Quakers in Scotland. Kline looked into the "relationship between the beliefs that are individually held and those beliefs that are corporately endorsed" (2012, p. 277) and how these differences were able to be balanced; that is, what "encourages unity" (Kline, 2012, p. 277) amongst Quakers. Kline discovered that it was through the discursive figure of a "journey trope" (p. 277) that enabled that particular Quaker community to maintain this unity. The "journey trope" is based on the idea that all Quakers are on their own individual journey of understanding, "seeking the truth that transcends time and space" (p. 290). The idea is that "participants will come to a point in their journey where they can appreciate or be *convinced* of the Quaker truth" (p. 290; emphasis in original). As Kline (2012) explains "Friends use

²⁰ As I previously mentioned, Christian denominations have been relatively under researched in anthropology. Perhaps liberal Quakerism has been focused on more than other types of Quakerism because it is *significantly* different from other Christian denominations, certainly more so than programmed, evangelical and conservative Quakerism.

the journey to permit free personal exploration while also providing a common source domain in the middle of diversity” (p. 290). Kline’s research focus is subtly different from my own in that it explores how unity occurs amongst liberal Quakers, rather than looking at what enables a sense of community and how they come to a set of shared understandings regarding that community. It formed an interesting basis for comparison as Kline also attended Quaker events such as the ones I attended, although in Scotland, and which I detail in chapter two.

Anthropologist Peter Collins (2005) has conducted various research projects amongst Quakers. His article “Thirteen ways of looking at a ‘ritual’” (2005) explored the numerous ways liberal British Quakers think of the ritual of weekly worship. From “embodied” (Collins, 2005, p. 328) to “playful” (ibid., p. 333) to “performative” (ibid., p. 334), Collins found that Quakers did not have a single way of relating or interpreting their weekly meetings. His research has also focussed on Quaker identity, to understand the “apparently simple question” of *what* a Quaker is (Collins, 2009, p. 205). Collins (2009) discovered that “there is no single overarching interpretation by which we can come to understand Quaker identity” (p. 216), that it is an individually and locally learned process. Collins’ research demonstrates the importance of studying Quakerism at the local level, rather than as an institutional whole; that it is more useful to study the worship group than Quakerism overall. Due to there being no centralised doctrine and personal interpretation being highly valued, diversity is to be expected. As such, attending the meetings for worship was certainly an important part of my research as it enabled me to better understand the Palmerston North Quakers. My research

therefore contributes to the literature on Quakerism as the ritual elements of a worship group's practice remain vastly underexplored in New Zealand.

Psychologists and biostatisticians Mark Cary and Anita Weber (2007, p. 135) carried out an analysis amongst a Philadelphia Quaker community in the early 2000s. They argued that that particular worship group had "two distinct patterns of religious beliefs" (ibid., p. 134). One group they named group "G" (ibid., p. 142), a group they argued was primarily focused on developing a relationship with (a) God. The other group, they labelled "S" (ibid.), as this section of this Quaker community favoured "interest...in social action" (ibid.). A similar study was carried out by Cary, and Quaker academic, Pink Dandelion (2007, p. 145) among British Quakers in 2003. They discovered that in this particular community there were three types of Quakers (ibid., p. 147). The first group they described as "the most traditionally Christian" (ibid.), holding similar beliefs to many Christian denominations. The second group they argued was the "most secular of the three" (ibid.), although only 1% identified as atheist and 16% agnostic (ibid.). The third group believed in God, but had "much lower levels of belief in traditional Christian theology" (ibid.). These studies, which both used quantitative methods to determine different kinds of Quakers, highlighted religious belief positions amongst Quaker communities. However these studies have not furthered the question of a Quaker sense of community, and how it might emerge or what Quaker shared understandings are in the context of the community boundaries and how they might come to these shared understandings.

Social worker and researcher Susan Robson (2010) has also conducted research among British Quakers. Robson's focus was on how this particular religious group dealt with conflict. She found that the method used was "don't ask, don't tell, don't even think about it" (ibid., p. 67), whereby topics that could possibly lead to conflict were avoided. Robson found that the "need for community harmony is more important than the right decision" (ibid., p. 71), that relationships are valued more than 'winning' an argument. In terms of my own research, Robson's work was both interesting and valuable. Interesting because Quaker conflict was not something I encountered during my fieldwork and valuable because the attitude of "don't ask, don't tell, don't even think about it" was present. That is, the Palmerston North Quakers used this approach with regards to each other's (and my own) religious beliefs.

Quaker research in New Zealand

As I previously stated, Quaker studies carried out in New Zealand have had a historical focus, detailing their rich history rather than documenting participants' lived experiences. Audrey and James Brodie (1999) have published on Quakers in 19th century New Zealand as well as editing a history of Quakers in this country (1993). Margaret West and Ruth Fawell have written about the history of New Zealand Quakers from the mid-19th century to the 1970s (1973), whilst Malcolm Douglass (2003) updated Frances Menefy's 1969 documentation of the Quaker School in Whanganui from 1920 to 1969, with the history from 1970 to 1997. Kevin Adams' (1986) M.A. thesis titled *The Growth and Development of the Society of Friends in New Zealand 1840-1920* shed further light on the history of Quakers in

New Zealand whilst Caitriona Cameron (1996) also contributed to the literature of knowledge on New Zealand Friends. Her research discussed New Zealand Quakers serving in an ambulance unit in China in the late 1940s and early 1950s. This research was helpful in providing a better understanding of the context of the New Zealand Quakers' beliefs and practices, but it still does not address the issues of community cohesion.

Despite a growing interest by researchers in Quakerism, there is still little analysis around what gives Quakers a sense of community and what their shared understandings are regarding their community. Kline's (2012) study does demonstrate that a "journey trope" (p. 277) can help establish some sense of commonality, but I do not believe it is sufficient as a sense of community is likely to include multiple dimensions. The underlying theme from past Quaker research seems to be that Quakerism is deeply personal. That it is not possible to comprehend the Quaker's perspective at an institutional level, as there is no *one* perspective. Rather there is a multiplicity of voices spread throughout the denomination. Therefore, to comprehend the Quaker's sense of community and their shared community understandings, one must study at the local level, the worship group. This is what I did to contribute to the body of knowledge on liberal Quakerism.

Understanding community

Underlying my research is the concept of community and it is therefore important to discuss this term. Minar and Greer (1969) state that "the concept of community

is a complex, usually unanalysed, abstraction” perhaps due to being “indivisible from human action, purposes, and values” (p. ix). Community is “a social group sharing common characteristics or interests and perceived or perceiving itself as distinct in some respect from the larger society within which it exists” (as cited in Brown, 2002, p. 2). As Sartwell (2002) states “communities are made by exclusion” (p. 48), that is, by what they are *not*. Yet communities are also made by inclusion and togetherness. Bruhn (2005) argues that community occurs when a “group shares common goals, values, and, perhaps a way of life that reinforce each other, creates positive feelings, and results in a degree of mutual commitment and responsibility” (p. 11). It is knowing that “everyone is working together toward a common goal, or participating in an activity or event that depends upon everyone’s cooperation” (Bruhn, 2005, p. 13) or as Buber (as cited in Turner, 1995) explains, “community is the being no longer side by side...but *with* one another” (p. 127; emphasis in original).

Brown (2002) describes community as “denot[ing] connection with others” (p. 3), further adding that “the key element of community...lies in how we demarcate the boundaries of the particular communities of which we speak” (ibid.). To understand a community we need to understand what makes a member of a community a member of *that* community. Felkins (2002) argues that “the core of community is in the common values that bond its members together” (p. 18). It is a “state of being held in common” (Alperson, 2002, p. 1) and a “symbol for collective identity” (Amit, 2002, p. 6). This understanding of community emphasises connection amongst the community and distinction and boundaries that distinguish it from other

communities. Therefore to comprehend the Palmerston North Quaker community, it is necessary to not only grasp what gives them a sense of community but also what their common understandings are regarding what they feel distinguishes them from other religious groups.

Quaker community elements: Ritual and silence

Ritual

Ritual is an important part of understanding religion.²¹ Durkheim argued that religion is essentially social, that “when they [religious adherents] are together, a sort of electricity is formed” (Durkheim, 1965, p. 247, as cited in Eller, 2007, p. 21). This electricity Durkheim labelled as “effervescence” (1912/2001, p. 158) whereby persons are brought “together into a closer and more active relationship” (p. 157). It is through this effervescence that Durkheim believes that religion is essentially social and that a “means of achieving group cohesion is through...ritual” (as cited in Eller, 2007, p. 21). Geertz, Turner and Douglas have advocated for the importance of interpretive anthropology, whereby understanding the symbols relevant to the participants is essential to understand their culture. An important symbol and part of the identity of many religious groups, including the Quakers, is their ritual(s).

Bell (1997) states that “human beings have been involved in ritual activities of some sort since the earliest hunting bands” (p. 1), many thousands of years ago. However it has only been since “the late nineteenth century that people began to perceive all

²¹ Even though ritual is an important area of study in anthropology, in the scope of this thesis I have not specifically focused on it. Rather my attention is on the lived experiences of my research participants, which happens to include a ritual.

such activities under the rubric of “ritual” (ibid.). From the “neo-structural functionalism” of Turner, Douglas and Geertz and the “neo-Marxism” of Bloch to the “dramaturgical and performative perspectives” of Goffman and Schechner to the recent “cognitive theory” (Collins, 2012, p. 13) of Boyer, Atran and Whitehouse, ritual in anthropology has been extensively researched. Despite this Fennell (2012) argues that “scholars [still] disagree over how to define ritual” (p. 554). Whilst there is a lack of a consensus on the meaning of ritual, Bell (1992) argues that “there is a surprising degree of consistency in the description of ritual”, which she states is “a type of critical juncture wherein some pair of opposing social or cultural forces comes together” (p. 16). Victor Turner, a significant contributor to the study of ritual and whose theory of *communitas* I draw on in chapter three, defines ritual as “prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers” (1994, p. 19).

Out of the many definitions on ritual, I feel that Turner’s definition is applicable to the Quaker’s meeting for worship. Yet Collins (2005) argues that “the attempt to define ‘ritual’ necessarily essentialises the phenomenon and is therefore an analytical dead-end” (p. 324) further stating that “the term is always and already freighted with meanings” (ibid.). Fennell (2012) states that calling the Quaker meeting for worship a ritual is “controversial” (p. 554) due to the range of definitions of the term but that “rituals are recognised for bringing people together and generating a common emotional mood” (p. 555). Whilst I am thus aware of the implications of labelling the meeting for worship as a ‘ritual’, I feel that doing so helps give the meeting some context.

Silence

Over the years I have attended numerous religious rituals. From Anglican, Catholic and Evangelical Church services to a Hare Krishna meeting, I have found that each has their own particular characteristics. The most obvious idiosyncrasy that differentiated the Quaker 'ritual' was the silence of the group worship. Giuliano (2004) states that "silence is a rare thing in our noisy lives" (p. 21) yet it is important, as Nelson (2013) states, "speaking without silence is incomprehensible" (p. 333). Whilst silence can be thought of as merely an "absence of sound" (Poyatos, 1983, p. 219), Saville-Troike (1985) explains that "silence...is more context-embedded than speech, that is, more dependent on context for its interpretation" (p. 11). Studies have shown that silence plays a part in many different social situations. Topali (2013) explored silence amongst migrant Filipina women house cleaners in Greece, finding that silence is used as "an expression of obedience" (p. 621). Bagwasi (2012) analysed the various contexts of silence in the African Setswana communities, reporting that it had both positive and negative meanings. Basso (1970) demonstrates the values attributed to silence within Western Apache culture, arguing that silence "is a response to uncertainty and unpredictability in social relations" (p. 227). Researching amongst communities of Roman Catholic nuns, Wichroski (1996) states that silence can also be used "as a mode of communication" (p. 153).

This research also demonstrates that silence *does* something. Topali (2013) argues that silence "is very much alive and stands as signification and meaning itself" (p. 622), that the absence of sound "does not mean an absence of meaning" (Bagwasi,

2012, p. 185). As silence is filled with meaning, not all silence is equal (Basso, 1970, p. 215). Even silence within a religious context, *what* people are doing in different contexts is not necessarily the same, as Fennell (2012) demonstrated in her research contrasting Quaker and Buddhist silence. It is the symbolic meaning *behind* the silence that gives it context; it is the *reason* for the silence that differentiates it.

Understanding Quakers through an anthropological 'lens'

Due to the complexity of Quakerism, I believed that drawing on a variety of theoretical work would be useful in answering my research questions. Johnson (2012) explains that Levi-Strauss' concept of bricolage has been used in the arts to mean "creation from a diverse range of materials or sources" (p. 356). I feel that this concept is particularly suitable in a study of liberal Quakers, as they also see themselves as *bricoleurs*, 'pulling' knowledge from a variety of sources.

The first set of questions that I explore is whether the Palmerston North Quakers see themselves as a community and if so, what enables that *sense* of community. These questions are addressed in chapter three and draw on both community theory and the concept of *communitas*. The concept of *communitas* was developed by Victor Turner "during his fieldwork among the Ndembu of northwestern Zambia" (Bell, 1997, p. 39). Witnessing local rituals and building on Van Gennep's "three-stage sequence of separation, transition, and reincorporation" (Bell, 1997, p. 40), Turner developed an idea that sought a "more fundamental dialectic between the

social order (structure) and a period of social disorder and liminality (antistructure)” (ibid.). This dialectic Turner referred to as *communitas* (Bell, 1997, p. 40).

Turner saw *communitas* as a “moment in and out of time” (1995, p. 96), a “relationship between concrete, historical, idiosyncratic individuals” (ibid., p. 131). *Communitas* is a “levelling process” (Kamau, 2002, p. 24) where people can feel free from social restrictions and where “strong emotional bonds” (ibid.) can be formed. It is a powerful feeling of joy, an experience that brings people together helping form egalitarian relationships. Yet “*communitas* is hard to sustain” (Kamau, 2002, p. 24) and “can seldom be maintained for very long” (Turner, 1995, p. 132), as it “soon develops a structure” (ibid.). This structure occurs because the “free relationships between individuals become converted into norm-governed relationships between social personae” (ibid.). That is, the momentary feeling becomes a structure itself (the ‘norm’), and is therefore no longer a “moment in and out of time” (1995, p. 96). While the concept of *communitas* was initially developed by Victor Turner, it has since been utilised and developed by others. In this work I primarily draw on the work of Victor’s wife Edith, who understands *communitas* “to be almost beyond strict definition” but that “it has to do with the sense felt by a group of people when their life together takes on full meaning” (2012, p. 1). *Communitas*, as Edith Turner explains, “can only be portrayed properly through stories” (2012, p. 1). And it is through the stories from my research participants that I explore their sense of community. Whilst I use the concept of *communitas* to help explain the Palmerston North Quaker’s sense of community, it is important to note that these two terms are not the same thing. A community is a

social group that often share goals, values and characteristics whereas *communitas* is a powerful but momentary feeling of joy and togetherness. A sense of community may *facilitate* the appearance and emergence of *communitas*, but it is not a given. The reality of the feeling of *communitas* is that it can, and does, appear at any moment but that when it does emerge, it can further strengthen a sense of community. In terms of my own research, it was interesting to see how these powerful moments contributed to a sense of community.

Chapter four addresses my second set of questions. These explore the Quaker shared understandings in terms of what makes their community distinct, as well as how they manage to have these understandings. For these questions I primarily draw on the work of Randall Collins and his 'interaction ritual' theory. Collins (2010) states that "observation without theoretical sensitivities is half-blind" (p. 1). That is, a theory can help one understand what is going on in a social situation. His "interaction ritual" theory is "above all a theory of situations" (Collins, 2004, p. 3). Heider and Warner (2010) state that Collins applied "the theory to cases as different as smoking tobacco and having sex" (p. 78), yet it has been used in a much wider range of social situations. These have included: Heider and Warner's (2010) analysis of Sacred Harp singing in the United States, Lewis' (2013) discussion of interaction rituals amongst the Student Volunteer Army (SVA) in the aftermath of the Christchurch earthquakes, Cottingham's (2012) exploration of community solidarity amongst fans of American football team the Pittsburgh Steelers and Walthert's (2013) research on the effects of an interaction ritual among an Evangelical Christian church in Switzerland. Their research has shown how

interaction ritual theory has been applied to communities where a feeling of solidarity has strengthened the community. Interaction ritual theory essentially explains how “group solidarity” can emerge from “bodily co-presence” (Collins, 2004, p. 48). The Oxford English Dictionary (2014) describes solidarity as “the fact or quality, on the part of communities, etc., of being perfectly united or at one in some respect”. Group solidarity can therefore be understood as a community’s shared understanding, of being united in some respect. Collins’ theory is useful in understanding how the Palmerston North Quakers come to have a set of shared understandings. An interaction ritual, Collins (2004) states, “has four main ingredients or initiating conditions” (p. 47). These are “bodily co-presence”, “barrier to outsiders”, a “mutual focus of attention” and a “shared mood” (p. 48), and it is these “ingredients” that I investigate with regard to the Quaker meeting for worship.

Collins (2004) explains that as a result of the combination of these four factors, a “collective effervescence” (p. 48) emerges. Collective effervescence was introduced in Durkheim’s *Elementary forms of religious life* (1912/2001) and described as a “common passion” (1912/2001, p. 157) whilst Collins (2004) labels it an “intensification of shared experience” and a “condition of heightened intersubjectivity” (p. 35). It is a “momentary state, but it carries over into more prolonged effects when it becomes embodied in sentiments of group solidarity” (Collins, 2004, p. 36). Collective effervescence can therefore be understood to be the same concept as *communitas*. Indeed, Olaveson (2001) has argued that they are “functionally equivalent concepts” (p. 99). According to Collins there are a

number of outcomes associated with this collective effervescence that can emerge from an interaction ritual, such as the Quakers meeting for worship. These include “group solidarity”, “emotional energy” and “standards of morality” (Collins. 2004, p. 48). My bricolage of theoretical work in comprehending the Quaker’s shared understandings also includes the research of James Fernandez.

In his research amongst a Fang Bwiti reformatory cult in northern Gabon, Fernandez (1965) analysed the community’s interpretation of an important ritual *and* its symbols. Fernandez found that there was “considerable variance in the rationale of their participations” (p. 906) as well as “considerable variation as to the key symbols involved” (p. 907). This plurality of meanings, Fernandez posited, demonstrated a *weak cultural consensus*, described as “an understanding that one holds symbolic meanings in common” (1965, p. 914). Despite this, Fernandez found that there was *strong social consensus*, which he defined as “an acceptance of the necessity for interaction” (1965, p. 913). For the Fang, there was unity in the belief that the ritual is an essential part of their culture. Fernandez argued that “the requirements of social co-existence are not the same as cultural coherence” (1965, p. 913). That despite the weak cultural consensus, the strong social consensus enabled a sense of “*nlem-mvove* (one-heartedness)” (1965, p. 904; emphasis in original). This feeling of “one-heartedness” Fernandez labelled as “symbolic consensus” (p. 904), a “common understanding...obtained by ritual means” (p. 904) and enabling the community to feel as one, thus encapsulating a sense of distinctness.

As Fernandez (1965) explains, “the state of *nlem mvore* indicates a high degree of social solidarity” (p. 904; emphasis in original), it is a “state of being held in common” (Alperson, 2002, p. 1) and thus engenders a sense of togetherness. I believe that parallels can be drawn between the Fang and the Quakers. Like the Quakers the Fang are “highly decentralized” (Fernandez, 1965, p. 903) and for both communities there is *strong social consensus* (for the Quakers, importance attributed to the weekly meeting) and a *weak cultural consensus* (for the Quakers, meaning of the community ritual). And like the Fang, a sense of “one-heartedness” emerges from an important Quaker community ‘ritual’, the meeting for worship. I argue that it is Collin’s “ritual outcomes” and a symbolic consensus that engender a set of shared understandings amongst my research participants.

Conclusion

Religion is an influential element of society and has long been studied by anthropologists. One of the world’s major religions is Christianity, based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, and which consists of numerous denominations. One such denomination is the Religious Society of Friends, better known as the Quakers. Emerging from the influence of George Fox in England in the 1600s, Quakerism now has four branches spread across the world with around 400,000 members. One of these branches is liberal Quakerism, distinct from other Quakers and Christian denominations in that they have no centralised doctrine or authority figures, and whose weekly worship meetings are (largely) held in silence. It is a liberal Quaker

worship group (the smallest organisational unit) that forms the basis of this research.

Studies on Quakerism have largely taken place in Britain and the United States of America. These studies have focused on a variety of topics yet an exploration of the Quaker sense of community and shared understandings remains under researched. In addition there has been a dearth of research on Quakerism in New Zealand with regards to the Quakers' lived experiences, with the studies that have been conducted having an historical perspective. This research thus begins filling this gap. In this project I have explored whether the Palmerston North worship group see themselves as a community and if so, how they get that sense of community. I also demonstrate what their shared community understandings are and how they engender these common understandings. Anchoring my research is the concept of community and through my fieldwork, which I describe in the following methodological chapter, I have come to understand just how complex and intricate this concept is.

Chapter Two – Methodology

We are less interested in the doctrine of a religion than in the lived practice of the religion.

Eller, 2007, p. xiv

Introduction

Anthropology “at home” (Peirano, 1998, p. 105) is a relatively recent concept within the discipline. For much of the discipline’s history “mud-hut anthropology” (Bowie, 2003, p. 50) and the study of the ‘native’ was the preferred approach. This saw anthropologists journeying around the world to study the ‘natives’, who were often indigenous people. In recent decades there has been a shift in this approach, with Levi-Strauss playing a “fundamental role in this change of perspective” (Peirano, 1998, p. 106). This shift has seen more anthropologists undertake studies within their country of residence.

Greenhouse (1985) has stated that the feelings of “familiarity” (p. 261) when conducting research domestically can be “deceptive” (ibid.) because “the familiar may conceal the extraordinary” (p. 261). That is, by conducting research in ‘our own back yard’, it can be easy to forget that we are not usually a part of the numerous

communities that exist there. While this study of the Quakers was 'at home' in Palmerston North, by attending Quaker meetings for worship I was still experiencing a culture that was foreign to me. Foreign in the sense of Goodenough's definition of culture, of "whatever it is one must know in order to behave appropriately in any of the roles assumed by any member of a society" (1957, p. 167, as cited in Dengah II, 2013, p. 347). Whilst I did possess some knowledge of Quakerism, by the time I conducted my fieldwork with them, I did not know how they carried out their practices or the small nuances that are particular to this community. That is, I did not possess enough community knowledge to be at the various meetings with the confidence of a regular community member.²²

Chapter outline

In this methodological chapter I begin by outlining the research methods utilised throughout my fieldwork. I then explain how I began my research before introducing both my research participants and my fieldwork locations. A description of the Palmerston North Quaker events that I attended will then be discussed. Following this, I provide an account of some of the ethical issues that were pertinent to my research before I conclude this chapter by detailing the methodological and analytical challenges that I faced during this research.

²² It did not take long for me to learn 'how to be' at a Quaker meeting. When I first turned up, the process was aided by being given a pamphlet explaining how the silent meeting is run.

Fieldwork methods

Participant observation

Participant observation is a central element of anthropological fieldwork (Omohundro, 2008, p. 61). It involves “gathering data” (Nanda & Warms, 2004, p. 52) through “repeated and focused” (Kirby, Greaves and Reid, 2010, p. 147) intimate contact amongst a community. Openly observing and participating with the ‘locals’ is the mainstay of this approach. Through it one attempts to understand what the members are doing and how their community functions. The idea is to “grasp the native’s point of view” (Malinowski, 1984, p. 25, as cited in Omohundro, 2008, p. 61) or as Geertz (1974) stated “to figure out what the devil *they* think they are up to” (p. 2; emphasis added). In attempting to understand what my research participants’ were “up to” (ibid.), over a twelve week period I attended some of the Quaker meetings, other Quaker events such as a Business Meeting (Monthly Meeting) and a discussion meeting as well as organising a focus group and conducting interviews. In addition I also went on a walking tour with the Quakers in Auckland.

Whilst my research was based upon the Palmerston North worship group, I believed that it would be beneficial to see if their meeting for worship was atypical of a New Zealand Quaker meeting. I therefore attended seventeen meetings in total across the North Island. These included one in Auckland, two in Wellington, two in Whanganui and twelve in Palmerston North (seven in town and five at Massey

University).²³ This participant observation gave me a sensory experience that would have been hard to replicate through conducting interviews alone. It gave context to my interviews, as well as providing a different set of data and enabling the interviews to mean more. It allowed me access to a more emic perspective of my research participants, in ways which Malinowski and Geertz advocated.

Positionality as a non-Quaker

Despite always being made to feel welcome, as a non-Quaker my position throughout this research has been that of an outsider. Despite my pre-fieldwork research, I was a ‘fish out of water’ and brought what could be described as a “beginner’s mind” (Miller, 1996, p. 116) to the project. I was not sure exactly what to expect nor did I know how everything was going to work out. This lack of knowledge was not a negative aspect. It simply meant that I was ready to absorb new experiences. If I had been a practicing member of another Christian denomination or of a different religion altogether, this research could have been more difficult from a personal perspective as I may have felt a sense of conflict. However as an agnostic and occasional atheist, this was not the case.

Interviews

Interviews in a social science fieldwork context are based on a “special form of relationship” (Kirby et al, 2010, p. 133) and are a way of understanding someone’s perspective. Interviews can vary from highly structured to quite informal (ibid., p. 134) and the choice of which style to use depends on both the topic and persons

²³ These Palmerston North meetings will be discussed later in this chapter.

involved. My interview style was semi-structured and informal. I had a prepared set of questions (see Appendix one), an element of the semi-structured interview (Kirby et al, 2010, p. 134), yet they were more of a conversation starter than a list of questions to be answered. This distanced my interviews from the feel of a structured format which can lead to “forced conversation” (Bourdieu, 2011, p. 10) and therefore potentially to superficial knowledge. As my research participants spoke, they sparked my curiosity which led me to ask spontaneous follow-up questions, an element of an unstructured interview (Kirby et al, 2010, p. 134). This helped to clarify their responses and take me a step closer to understanding their perspective.

I conducted one interview with each of my twelve research participants and all signed a copy of a ‘participant interview consent’ form prior to the interview. These interviews each lasted between forty five minutes and an hour and were taped, transcribed by myself and emailed to those who had requested a copy.²⁴ The interviews were organised with my participants, at a time and place that was convenient for both parties. Six took place at my research participants’ homes in Palmerston North, four at Massey University and two occurred at the Palmerston North meeting house.

Focus group

I felt that using a range of research methods was an effective way of understanding my research participants. To that end I decided I would also organise a focus group.

²⁴ In one instance, a paper copy was given to a research participant. This was because they did not have access to a computer.

Bryant (2002) argues that focus groups are helpful “because they generate a breadth of new information rapidly” (p. 116). It allows the researcher to see how the participants interact together and bounce ideas off each other, an ideal method for research aimed at community understanding. This focus group was aimed at understanding the Quaker community as a whole, in contrast to the interviews which were more personal. Organising this focus group was invaluable to my research as it gave me a chance to observe how community members interacted. As Bryant (2002) explains “focus group participants talk with peers in an informal setting, they use everyday vocabulary, jokes, and culturally appropriate forms of disagreeing” (p. 117).

Before the fieldwork I spoke to Denise,²⁵ a Quaker member, about how best to run the focus group. She recommended that I run it in a style that would be familiar to Quakers, explaining that when Quakers held discussions they will often have a moments silence after each person has spoken. I thought this would be a good idea; it made sense to work in a manner recognizable to my research participants. Sometime before it took place, I emailed Denise the four questions that I wanted to ask the group. This gave the group an opportunity to think about the questions. However, I did not clarify with Denise what the best way would be to go from one speaker to the next. When we began the focus group session, I started off by explaining the ‘ground rules’ (no interrupting those speaking and only one person to speak at a time) and that we would have a moments silence after each speaker, as would be the norm in a Quaker discussion meeting. After the first person had

²⁵ As I explained earlier in chapter one, Denise is the pseudonym of one of my research participants. An introduction to my research participants is included later in this chapter.

answered, I suggested that we could go around the circle with each person speaking in turn. After a whole rotation of the circle, Julie²⁶ commented “this feels really constrained, with each person just going one after another. It feels too regimented. Would it be better to just open the floor and let the voice of the meeting just flow?” Everyone nodded in agreement. So it was changed to an open floor style. After I asked a question, whoever wanted to answer could. This seemed to make the focus group run more smoothly and less awkward. This example demonstrates how plans can unravel in the field and how the researcher must be prepared to adapt to situations. Whilst I thought the way I was running the focus group was the most suitable, it turned out that it frustrated my research participants in their ability to communicate. However by listening to and acting on their suggestion, the focus group was able to be considered a successful fieldwork event.

Field notes

Field notes were also an important part of my research as they helped me stay organised and keep perspective. Bernard (2006) states that there are four types of field notes. These include “jottings, a diary, a log and field notes proper” (p 389), all of which I found useful. My jottings were used during the interviews and focus group, just informal “scratch notes” (Sanjek, 1990, p. 96) scribbled onto a notebook to remind me to follow up on an issue. Bernard (2006) explains that “every fieldworker runs into situations where it’s impossible to take notes” (p. 390). For

²⁶ Julie is the pseudonym of another research participant.

me this was during the silent meetings. I believed it would have been insensitive to have written notes during the meeting, so I memorised as much detail as possible and wrote it down as soon as I got home after a meeting. A diary has also been beneficial to keep. It has showed how my ideas and thinking has changed during the course of my research, as well as being a way to record my concerns. My log was a way of staying organised logistically, especially useful during my travelling around the North Island. My “field notes proper” (Bernard, 2006, p. 389) were in-depth notes that I invested more time in writing, about all my fieldwork experiences. I wanted to include as much detail as I could and be as accurate as possible, compiling them as soon as I was able to after a fieldwork session. These detailed field notes proved invaluable. It meant that even the most minor details which I may have forgotten about, such as the shape of a table or condition of a chair in a meeting, were able to be included in my data chapters. It is this sort of detail that encapsulates the concept of “thick description” (Geertz, 2003, p. 149) which was an aim to include in my writing. That is, I wanted to include detailed examples that helped answer my research questions and really give a sense of the Palmerston North Quakers’ lived experiences.

Quaker publications

Another source of information for my fieldwork came from the Quaker publications, the *Quaker Faith & Practice in Aotearoa New Zealand* (The Religious Society of Friends, 2003) and *Advice & Queries* (The Religious Society of Friends in Aotearoa/New Zealand, 2013). These publications were especially helpful as they are written for and used by the Religious Society of Friends. As such, they gave an

invaluable insight into what Quakers regard as of central significance, how they perceive things and how they interpret and communicate their values.

Beginning my research

As I stated in chapter one, I discovered the Quakers whilst researching another Christian denomination and became aware that a Quaker worship group existed in Palmerston North from conducting a Google search. Finding the contact number for the local worship group, I spoke to Denise and explained my proposed research.²⁷

Denise informed me that she would pass the details on to the rest of the meeting and asked if I could summarise my intentions in an email. This would allow my proposed research to be forwarded to other members of the meeting, as well as to other meetings around the country.

Denise responded to my email stating that the meeting would be happy to have me conduct my study and asked if they could read my full proposal, which I complied with. They also wanted to ensure all Quakers around New Zealand were comfortable with the study. To be accepted into the community, all New Zealand Quakers had to agree to it. This involved each Monthly Meeting discussing their thoughts on my study, and whether it should be able to proceed. Looking back, this was typical Quaker style: making decisions together. A month and a half later I was told that I was welcome to conduct my research and that no one had any objections with the study.

²⁷ By this time I had notified Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC) of my intention to carry out my research and had received their approval.

The Palmerston North Quaker worship group

The total number of people that I saw attending the Sunday morning meeting for worship was around twenty. Each of my research participants were regular attenders and on average fifteen Quakers attended each week. With the exception of two couples, everyone turned up on their own.²⁸ The ethnic make-up was predominantly Pakeha New Zealanders, with Britain, Australia and the United States of America also represented. Their ages ranged from the 40s to the 90s, although most were in their 60s. Prior to the meeting for worship commencing there was a relaxed and quiet environment, contrasting greatly from my previous ethnographic research experience. Arriving at the meeting house, people are quietly welcomed. They *were* friendly, but it was shown in a more subdued way; a smile, a slight nod of the head and a “good morning”.

An introduction to my research participants

As my initial link to the community, Denise asked the worship group who, if anyone, would be interested in participating in my study. She then gathered their contact details and passed them on to me. Fortunately, enough members were happy to participate as the list that Denise passed onto me contained 14 people. One changed their mind, however, and decided not to participate in the study whilst another was interested but due to their family obligations, and both of our busy schedules, we were not able to meet up. I now had twelve Quaker research

²⁸ By this, I mean without their partners and other family. Some Quakers did turn up together though, giving each other lifts to and from the meeting.

participants, seven females and five males. Nanda and Warms (2004) state that “respecting the privacy and dignity” (p. 64) of research participants is an essential element of conducting ethical fieldwork. As such, all my research participants were given the opportunity to provide their own pseudonyms,²⁹ which I use throughout this report and as I introduce them here:

Huckleberry

Huckleberry is a married Pakeha New Zealander and a retired professor who worked at Massey University for many years. He began his association with the Quakers in the late 1970s, becoming a member after 18 months. Prior to becoming a Friend, Huckleberry had spent some time attending a Presbyterian Church in Christchurch.³⁰

Percy

Percy is also a married retired Pakeha New Zealander. He became an attender³¹ twenty years ago, a position he holds to this day. Percy spent many years as an Exclusive Brethren in Palmerston North, before becoming a Friend.

Evelyn

Evelyn is a retired English woman, who worked as a nurse in Palmerston North for many years. She became a Quaker 38 years ago in Palmerston North, after spending

²⁹ Whilst all were given the opportunity to provide their own pseudonym, some chose not to, preferring instead that I chose. After choosing their pseudonym, I did check with them that they were happy with their ‘given’ name.

³⁰ My research participant’s reasons for becoming Quakers will be discussed in chapter three.

³¹ The differences between a member and an attender (also referred to as enquirer or seeker) will be discussed in chapter three.

a few years as an attender. She had previously attended services in a local Anglican Church.

Thomas

Thomas is a retired married Pakeha New Zealander. He attended Quaker meetings for “some time” before becoming a member in 2001. He had an evangelical upbringing and spent time with the Open Brethren and the Baptist Church before becoming a Friend.

Alan & Rose

Alan and Rose are a married Australian couple who are semi-retired and both of whom had a Christian upbringing. They became associated with Quakers together, about 32 years ago, and became members after about 5 years of attending. Their usual place of worship is in Canberra (Australia), but for the past two years they have been employed to take care of the meeting house and its accommodation in Wellington.³² They both knew the Palmerston North Quakers quite well and despite not being local, were interested in participating in my research.³³

Sarah

Sarah is a Pakeha New Zealander who works for Massey University in a non-teaching role. She is currently an attender, but had been a member about 30 years

³² It is not uncommon to meet Quakers who are employed as caretakers of a Quaker meeting house in some of the bigger meetings. In Auckland, I met an English couple who were spending a couple of years in New Zealand looking after the meeting house.

³³ I got to meet Alan and Rose during my fieldwork. They were soon to be returning to Australia. As such, they were staying in the area with other Quakers until they departed, taking time to attend the local meeting.

ago, before leaving the Quakers for a time for personal reasons. Unlike many of my other research participants, Sarah did not have a religious upbringing.

Andria

Andria is also Pakeha, and is retired. She is my only research participant who is a 'birthright' Quaker.³⁴

Michelle

Michelle is English and works at Massey University in a teaching role. She had been attending Quaker meetings for a few years, before becoming a member about 30 years ago in England. Michelle stated that she grew up in an environment that was "very friendly towards Quakers", but who were not necessarily Quaker.

Julie

Julie is North American working in the health sector in Palmerston North. She is not yet a member, as has only been attending Quaker meetings for the last 18 months. Julie explained how her upbringing had involved regular church attendance, but that she never felt particularly drawn to Christian theology. After leaving home, Julie spent many years away from religion, until finding the Friends.

Ryan & Denise

Ryan and Denise are a Pakeha New Zealand married couple, who began their association with the Quakers in the early 1970s. However, they only became

³⁴ A birthright Quaker will be discussed further in chapter three.

members about 4 years ago. Denise works for Massey University in a non-teaching role whilst Ryan works as a scientist. They are currently the clerks³⁵ of the meeting.

An introduction to my fieldwork locations

My research is focussed on the perspectives of Palmerston North Quakers, yet my fieldwork has taken me beyond the local meeting house. In addition to the primary Palmerston North meeting house in town, I also visited the Massey University meeting house, which in the last couple of years has become an addition to the local Quaker scene. I also visited meeting houses in Whanganui, Auckland and Wellington.³⁶ By experiencing different meetings and meeting houses, I was able to come to develop a more comprehensive perspective of the Palmerston North Quakers.

The Palmerston North meeting house

The Quaker meeting house is a large house of approximately 200 square metres situated on a leafy Palmerston North street, not far from the centre of town. By the entrance to the property is a small 'Quaker' sign with a contact phone number provided. The 30 metre gravel drive way leads to a car park with space for around a dozen cars. Adjacent to this car park is the meeting house. The meeting house is a plain looking building which was purpose build in the mid-1960s. As you walk up the wheelchair access ramp and towards the main door, you get a sense that you are about to enter someone's home.

³⁵ As I mentioned in chapter one, the position of clerk will be further discussed in chapter three.

³⁶ My fieldwork experiences will be discussed in more depth later in this chapter.

Whilst it may resemble a house from the outside, as you enter that feeling quickly dissipates. You immediately encounter a wooden floored lobby, with a notice board and visitors log book on a plain wooden table to your right. On this table are numerous pamphlets on Quakerism; from what to expect at a meeting to information about upcoming Quaker events. On the left hand side of the lobby is another table, which contains more of these same pamphlets. To the right of the lobby is the kitchen which is fully equipped, and has a three meter by one meter sliding window that opens to the meeting room. This slide is used when there is a shared meal. Food is placed up on the counter in the kitchen, and those in the meeting room can line up and serve themselves. Directly in front of the lobby are double wooden doors that lead to the meeting room.

The meeting room is a twelve by nine metre wooden floored room with between 15 to 20 chairs (among them a couple of more comfortably upholstered chairs for older Quakers)³⁷ in a circle on a worn carpet. In the centre of the circle of chairs is a small wooden table with a hexagonal top, upon which there is a copy of the *Quaker Faith & Practice* (2003) (New Zealand and British version) and the *Advices & Queries* (2013) (New Zealand version).³⁸ There was also a vase of flowers which someone had picked from their garden. The walls are free of religious symbols and lining the room (near the entrance and kitchen slide) are bookshelves filled with works on a wide variety of spiritual and religious topics. A couple of electric heaters flank either

³⁷ These more comfortable chairs, with arm rests do not belong to anyone in particular. However they are left to the more elderly Quakers.

³⁸ These publications were placed on the central table at all the meetings I attended. The Auckland meeting also included a copy of the Bible.

end of the room, and a selection of floral patterned foot rests are placed under the kitchen slide for those who like to use them. At the opposite end to the room's entrance is a set of wooden framed glass double doors, which leads out to a small garden. The rest of the house is comprised of a small bathroom and another meeting area, although this second one has a more informal feel to it.



The entrance to the Palmerston North meeting house.



The meeting room. To the left of the double doors is the slide that leads to the kitchen. The books on the table are the *Quaker Faith & Practice* (2003) and the *Advices & Queries* (2013).

The Massey University 'meeting house'

The Massey University 'meeting house' is a recent addition to the Palmerston North Quaker scene, only becoming a feature in the last couple of years. It is not its own worship group and is not separate from the Palmerston North Quaker meeting in any organisational sense. Rather it is an *extension* of the Palmerston North worship group, merely providing an additional opportunity to attend a meeting for worship in the city. Meetings are held on the first Tuesday of every month at 12pm, and lasts for around 35 minutes. During my fieldwork there was an average of four people attending and out of my research participants only about five ever attended this meeting. Perhaps because it is held during the week at lunch time that numbers are significantly lower than other meetings that I attended.

This meeting room is not specifically a Quaker room. It is situated in a university campus building called 'The Centre' and can be booked by any religious group. 'The Centre' is described by Massey University (2014) as a centre for "chaplaincy and religious services" on campus, offering people a place to relax, study and interact. The room is seven by seven metres, with eight to ten chairs placed in a circle in the middle.³⁹ Like the primary meeting house in town, a small table is centred between the chairs with a small vase containing a bunch of flowers sitting atop. A copy of the *Quaker Faith and Practice* (2003) and *Advices & Queries* (2013) (both being New Zealand versions) and pamphlets are also placed on the table. On a table in a corner of the room sits an open Bible on a reading stand and behind that sits a wooden

³⁹ Massey Quaker staff (whom I interviewed) arrive 10 minutes early to set up the room so as to be suitable for a Quaker meeting.

Christian cross. Before the meeting starts, a Quaker member would move the cross out of sight (placed on its side behind the Bible), returning it to its original position afterwards. By removing this religious symbol, the Friends are making this room more like a typical Quaker meeting room.

Other meeting houses visited

As I previously explained, my research also included visits to Auckland, Wellington and Whanganui. These were in many ways quite similar to the main Palmerston North meeting house, where most of my fieldwork took place. They were large, old fashioned houses on suburban streets. The layout of the meeting house, size of the meeting room and attendance⁴⁰ was all different yet their meetings were familiar to me from my time in Palmerston North. The meeting room was always a plain room with chairs arranged in a circle and a small table placed in the centre. As in Palmerston North, upon the table sat a vase of flowers, a copy of *Quaker Faith & Practice* (2003) and *Advices & Queries* (2013) and a handful of pamphlets.⁴¹ This shows that whilst each meeting house is slightly different, there are features common to New Zealand Quaker meeting houses.⁴² In Whanganui there are two meeting houses, one in town and the other at the Quaker settlement just out of town. The central Whanganui meeting house was similar to the other meeting houses that I attended. However the Quaker settlement was quite different. Instead of a house on a street, the Quaker settlement is its own community. The

⁴⁰ Auckland and Wellington had the highest attendance of the meetings for worship that I attended, with between 25 and 30. Whanganui town centre meeting had about 7 people attending.

⁴¹ These pamphlets were the same as the ones in the Palmerston North meeting house.

⁴² As my fieldwork only included meeting houses in the North Island, it is possible that South Island meeting houses are different.

purpose-built wooden meeting room, situated amongst other buildings, is a beautiful construction. It includes a central skylight, under-floor heating, and enough room to have a 'three deep' seated circle of Friends.

Palmerston North Quaker events

Meeting for worship

The meeting for worship is an important event for Palmerston North Quakers. Although I was told that it does not matter when the meeting occurs as every day is considered as important as any other, it always begins at 10:00am on a Sunday. Each meeting over the course of my fieldwork, I would arrive at around 09:50am. I would find whoever was on duty⁴³ getting things organised for the tea break, turning the heaters on and opening the curtains. A few minutes before 10:00am, more people would start turning up and make their way into the meeting room. The ambience just prior to the meeting was quiet and peaceful. People would greet each other with a nod and smile and take their place, which I noticed was in a similar position within the circle each time. At 10am, the silent meeting would start.

During the silent meeting, people did all manner of things. Some sat with their eyes closed and their hands cupped in their laps, others had their hands on their knees and eyes open and some read.⁴⁴ It was an unfamiliar experience for me to be sitting in a circle with a group of men and women in almost total silence. I say almost because when no speech is heard, the realm of the noisy body becomes apparent.

⁴³ The Quakers take it in turns to 'open up' for the day.

⁴⁴ I could not always see what people were reading, but did notice some reading the *Quaker Faith & Practice* (2003)

The rumbling of bellies, the clearing of throats, the scratching of heads and the repositioning of feet all contribute to a quietish 'orchestra' of body noise. To my surprise people would often arrive after the meeting start time, sometimes by ten to twenty minutes.⁴⁵ Yet this did not seem to bother anyone in the slightest and I never once saw anyone being talked to for arriving after 10am. Everyone just carried on doing on whatever it was that they were doing.

Usually in a meeting the silence is broken when someone feels inspired from the connection to their Inner Light to say a few words, which as I have previously explained is called a 'ministry'. In the Palmerston North meeting during my fieldwork, there would be one or two 'ministries' during each meeting for worship. The 'ministries' throughout the different meeting houses were for the most part framed as questions, rather than as statements. They were stated as possibilities, something to consider and reflect on. The Massey meeting, perhaps because it was a small gathering, would often be silent for the entire time. It was also silent in both Whanganui meetings that I attended. At the Auckland and Wellington meetings however, up to a dozen 'ministries' were spoken. When someone felt inspired to speak, they would slowly stand up (although some remained seated) and express themselves. What people actually spoke about varied, but was usually connected to ideas on religion and spirituality. As what was specifically said in a meeting is considered by the Quakers to be inspired by the divine (their Inner Light), I do not

⁴⁵ This also happened in the Auckland meeting, but not at the Massey, Wellington or either Whanganui meetings.

believe that it is appropriate to discuss exactly what was said in the meetings.⁴⁶

After finishing their 'ministry' the meeting would go back to being quiet again.

The silence would continue until another 'ministry' was given or the meeting ended, whichever came first. At 11am the meeting's clerks shake hands with each other to signify the end of the meeting and the circle then hold hands and stand up for a few moments. After the silent meeting there is five minute period designated for "almost ministry" (Andria). As Andria explained, the 'almost ministry' "gives Friends a chance if they wish, to share the thoughts or prayers that they had during worship, that they were not quite moved by the spirit to do so during worship" (personal communication, June 26, 2014). I was told that this 'almost ministry' is a way of "getting to know others in the Meeting at a deeper spiritual level" (personal communication, June 26, 2014), but is not a required event at a meeting for worship. However it did occur at every meeting I attended during my fieldwork. It starts quite informally, with the meeting clerk asking if anyone had anything that they would like to add. After about five to ten minutes conversation, everyone would head to the tea and coffee trolley.⁴⁷ This is a time of catching up on the week over a hot drink and a biscuit for around 15 minutes and after which, the Quakers start heading off home.

⁴⁶ However in chapter three, I give a sense of what the Quakers would say in their 'ministry'.

⁴⁷ After the silent meeting, someone would bring the tea and coffee trolley in from the kitchen, whilst the others were engaged in 'almost ministry'.

Post-meeting Discussion

Occasionally there is a more formal discussion held after the tea break. During my fieldwork I had the chance to attend a discussion group in Palmerston North. This discussion took place because the New Zealand Quaker newsletter⁴⁸ was planning to publish the contributions of what Quakers around the country thought about the issue of worship groups owning their own meeting house, as some of the smaller worship groups in New Zealand do not have their own. To signal the end of the tea break, one of the clerks would raise their arm and wait. Upon seeing this, others did the same, and soon enough half a dozen others also had their arm in the air. This is the sign for the end of the tea/coffee break and a way to stop people talking. With silence once again restored, everyone would return to their seats for the discussion, which lasted around 45 minutes. A lively discussion then proceeded, although each spoke in turn and no one interrupted another, as each Quaker contributed their opinion. At 12pm everyone began the process of leaving and saying their goodbyes.

Monthly/Business meeting

There are nine Monthly Meetings⁴⁹ in New Zealand which are usually held on the first Sunday of each month. Each meeting is made up of a group which acts as an 'umbrella' for the worship groups in that area. The Palmerston North Monthly Meeting, for example, also includes the worship groups of Hawkes Bay and Levin.

⁴⁸ The Quaker newsletter comes out every couple of months. It is compiled and edited by a number of Quakers around the country.

⁴⁹ As I explained in chapter one, the regional organisational unit is referred to as the Monthly Meeting. The event can be called either the Monthly Meeting or the Business Meeting, although the latter is more commonly used than the former.

During my fieldwork I attended one Business Meeting which gave me further insight into the Quaker decision-making process. The meeting took place after a meeting for worship and lasted for 45 minutes as the clerk took minutes. Any Quaker from the region or otherwise is invited to attend the Business Meeting, but as Denise stated “the reality is that only a small group normally attend”. The focus of the Business Meeting is the ‘Yearly Meeting clerk’s letter’. This letter is a few pages long and is compiled by the Yearly Meeting clerks and sent to every Monthly Meeting throughout the country in time for their Business Meeting. This letter contains notices about issues and events throughout the New Zealand Quaker community⁵⁰ as well as any concerns pertaining to the local worship group, and is discussed section by section with consensus sought for each notice. A topic will be brought up and each person will make their opinion known. There were no debates; they simply stated their opinions and what course of action could be taken.

When a consensus seems to be reached the clerk states what it is (which is called ‘getting a sense of the meeting’) and makes any adjustments to ensure that they have understood correctly before moving to the next notice. It did not occur at the meeting that I attended but I was told that if a consensus cannot be reached, then the matter is left until the next Business Meeting. They will then attempt to find the consensus at the following Business meeting and continue in this way until a

⁵⁰ An example of a type of notice was when I had asked if I could conduct research amongst the Palmerston North Quakers. This request was placed into the letter and discussed at the following Business Meeting, in Palmerston North and the rest of the country.

consensus is reached.⁵¹ After the meeting, the clerk sends the minutes to all the other Monthly Meetings as well as to the clerks of the Yearly Meeting.

Ethical issues

A few ethical issues arose during my ethnographic experience, for example, it was important that the worship group knew that I was there to conduct research and not to become a member of the Religious Society of Friends. Transparency is an ethical obligation before, during and after fieldwork. Having extensively researched Quakers before starting my fieldwork, I was aware that beliefs are not considered as important as in other Christian denominations. An individual's belief does not come up in conversation and newcomers to the group are not questioned about theirs. However I still felt that people should know my position on religion and was clear about this in my research proposal which was emailed to the worship group before I began my fieldwork. I also designed a poster (see Appendix two) which included my photo and a short paragraph about my research. With the permission of the worship group, this poster was placed on the meeting house notice board for all to see. This let them know my reason for being at the meeting. For my visits to the other Quaker meetings around the country, I emailed the clerks in advance with information about myself and my research as well as my intentions.

Another ethical issue was how I should participate in the silent worship meetings.

Sitting in silence for an hour was acceptable and unproblematic from an ethical

⁵¹ As was explained to me, consensus on a notice is usually reached at the first Business Meeting. However it does sometimes take longer. For example, when the Christchurch meeting discussed whether to move to a new meeting house or not, it took seven years to reach a consensus.

standpoint, yet the question of whether I could share a 'ministry' or 'almost ministry' was different. Whilst I am sure the Quakers would not have been offended, as they would believe that the Inner Light is also present in me, as a non-Quaker I would not have felt comfortable doing this or felt that it was ethically correct. *Being* at the meeting was enough for my participant observation. For Quakers the silent meeting is not a time where nothing happens or a period of emptiness. I saw my presence at the meetings *as* participation. I did not need to speak to *do* something. In addition, I do not believe that it would be ethically appropriate to discuss exactly what was said during a 'ministry' or 'almost ministry', a concern that Denise agreed with when I discussed the issue with her.

Challenges

All ethnographic research presents difficulties to the researcher. Working amongst a Quaker community, my main challenges were methodological and analytical. From a methodological perspective, conducting participant observation in a meeting for worship was a significant challenge because Quakerism is subtle and there is little in the way of material culture; there does not seem to be much happening. As there are no centralised doctrines or authority figures, Quakerism is unique to an individual's perspective, there is no one way to interpret it. Of the twelve Quakers that I interviewed, each had different perspective of Quakerism and their own theology. This led to the analytical challenge of how to make sense of it all. Rather than a 'Quaker perspective', there is more of a range of 'Quaker perspectives'. Framing this religious community has certainly pushed me to think

hard to find suitable explanatory frameworks, which will be discussed in depth in the chapters which follow.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined my methodological approaches to this research “at home” (Peirano, 1998, p. 105). As is often the case in anthropology, the way I have come to understand my research participants’ perspective has been through participant observation and interviews. This participant observation included visiting the Palmerston North meeting house and attending the primary Quaker ‘ritual’, their meeting for worship as well as a discussion group and a Business Meeting. Whilst my research focused on the Palmerston North Quakers, my fieldwork has taken me farther afield. Visiting meetings for worship in Auckland, Whanganui and Wellington as well as the ‘meeting house’ on the Massey University campus gave me a more in-depth perspective of the Quakers and their ‘ritual’, as well as an opportunity to spend some more time with Friends. Indeed talking to Quakers was also a critically important part of my fieldwork, in the form of semi-structured informal interviews with each of my twelve Palmerston North research participants. This one-on-one time allowed me to comprehend their personal views, which I would not have been able to learn through participant observation alone. These interviews thus enabled me to reach a deeper level of understanding and illustrate just how well the methods of participant observation and interviews complement each other. In addition to these ‘traditional’ anthropological methods, I also organised a focus group. Whilst not a specifically Quaker event, it did give me

the opportunity to witness another social situation in which they interacted as a community and was therefore also a valuable experience as understanding this community has been the focus of this research. Indeed, the first of my two sets of research questions involve answering whether the Palmerston Quakers have a sense of community, and if so, how that sense of community is engendered. As I discuss in the following chapter, the meeting for worship plays an important role in this regard.

Chapter Three – Understanding the Palmerston North Quakers

All my life, my heart has sought a thing I cannot name.

Hunter S. Thompson

Introduction

Communities come in numerous forms, as do Quakers. From the Quakers of East Africa and South East Asia to North America, there are a variety of Quaker groups around the world and each has their own characteristics. To be able to understand a community, it is necessary to understand its members as they are its foundation. Without them, there is no community. This is my focus in this chapter, learning the *'who, how and why'* of the Palmerston North Quakers.

Brown (2002) states that "the key element of community...lies in how we demarcate the boundaries of the particular communities of which we speak" (p. 3). That is, to understand a community it is necessary to understand its boundaries. I therefore begin with a discussion on how to become a Quaker before I elaborate on the meanings of the positions within the community. Having explained how to join this community, I then outline my research participants' journey to becoming

Quakers as well as discussing the shared community values that convinced them to become Friends. Finally I explain how a sense of community is engendered for the Palmerston North Quakers. Woven throughout their words and explanations is the theoretical frameworks that I draw on, specifically community theory and Victor and Edith Turner's work on *communitas*. This chapter demonstrates the diverse ways that people can have a sense of community and the joy that can emanate from being with that community.

How to become a Quaker

To become a member of the Quakers I was told by one of my research participants that a "process" must be followed. Asking if it was a rigorous process over a period of various stages, I was told "rigorous is not quite the word, but it is a definite process" (Alan). It begins after a person has been attending the meetings for worship for a period of time. No specific time is necessary but from my research participants' experience, this period can range from a couple of years to 40 years. Not only is it not compulsory to attain membership but for those that do intend to become members, there is no pressure from anyone else within the Quakers. It is up to each person to decide if and when they want to take their involvement further.

For those who do, "the process is that when you've decided that you'd like to become a member, you write a letter to the Monthly Meeting" (Alan). In this letter, you state that "I've decided that I've reached the stage where I'd like to become a member" (Alan). Whilst the individual decides when they are ready to become

members, the decision of whether they can become a member does not rest with them. As Alan explained, the letter will get sent to the Monthly Meeting and addressed at the next Business Meeting.⁵² The Monthly Meeting then “appoints two people to go and interview” (Alan) the applicant. The interview was described to me as “more of a social chat really, to make sure people are not into becoming a member without having thought about it” (Denise). Alan explains that “they write a report about the conversation, and they don’t actually recommend acceptance or not, [...] but they write up their general impression of the conversation and kind of indicate whether they think the person is ready and understands what is involved”. Alan further explained that:

Usually it turns out that the next Monthly Meeting say “fine, happy to accept them into membership”. However it does sometimes occur that the recommendation from the Monthly Meeting will say “we think it would be good to delay a bit longer. We think that with a bit more time, there’ll be things that you understand that’ll make us a bit more comfortable with you being a member”.

If the Monthly Meeting does not consider an applicant to be ready for membership, then they remain an ‘attender’ until they decide to apply for membership again. However if a person is thought to be ready for membership, a few formalities take place. Alan explained that “they are added to the membership role and usually there is some kind of recognition of that, which may be in a meeting that they are

⁵² As I previously explained, the Monthly Meeting is both an organisational unit and an event with the event more commonly referred to as the ‘Business Meeting’.

given a book.⁵³ Or it might be that someone else [from the worship group] goes and visits them and takes them one of the Quaker books”. Andria added that it is not a contractual thing, that “you don’t sign anything. You’re welcomed into membership by the meeting, the Monthly Meeting”. Thomas further added that he could remember the exact month and year that he went from attender to member, as it was “when this book was given to me, [...] I was given a complimentary copy of *Quaker Faith & Practice*”.

Birthright Quakers

Traditionally Quakers would become Quakers through birthright, being born to Quaker parents. Barbour and Frost (1988) state that “birthright membership developed naturally from the Quaker conceptions of seclusion from evil and the innocence of children” (p. 116). Whilst once a common experience within Quakerism, this is no longer the case. Out of my research participants only Andria is a birthright Quaker. Andria explained that this term is not really recognised in New Zealand and that although still used “there is no special meaning or connotation or anything”. Today in New Zealand, even if born to Quaker parents, those who desire to become Quakers must follow the process I have outlined.

⁵³ The given book varies. It could be a copy of Geoffrey Hubbard’s *Quaker by conviction* (1974), a copy of the *Quaker Faith & Practice* (The Religious Society of Friends, 2003) or *Advices & Queries* (The Religious Society of Friends in Aotearoa/New Zealand, 2013).

How to leave the Quakers

In terms of leaving the Friends, the process is just as simple. Sarah stated that she is currently an attender but “about 30 years ago” she cancelled her membership due to personal reasons.⁵⁴ As she explains,

The reason I stopped my membership was that I got very involved and ended up doing an awful lot around the meeting house. [...] I was working full time and I just got overwhelmed really, and for me I didn't feel okay at the time about staying a member and not being involved. So I guess it was my over-responsibility thing, and you know, that's what I love about the Quakers: they really honour that feeling. So they said to me “well, if you feel comfortable, we're comfortable to keep you as a member, but if you don't feel comfortable, then we can cancel your membership”.

Sarah's situation of going from a non-Quaker to an attender to a member and then back to an attender,⁵⁵ is one of the examples of the fluidity within the Quaker religion. It is a Christian denomination that is open and tolerant of individual circumstances and yet despite this fluidity, a sense of community is maintained.

Quaker positions

Members and attenders

From Sarah's explanation it seemed that there are a lot of expectations of a member. Enquiring about the responsibilities that accompany the 'member'

⁵⁴ This occurred at another worship group.

⁵⁵ Whilst Sarah is currently an attender, she did not rule out the possibility of becoming a member again.

position and whether there was an expectation to fulfil obligations, Sarah answered “no”,

I don't actually think so; I think it was more me. It was more me in the sense that for me to be a member of something meant I wanted to be completely committed and I didn't like the idea of just being a member and not 'pulling my weight'. So I didn't have that feeling from the meeting at all.

The situation seems to be that a member chooses their level of involvement and engagement with the Quakers. Yet part of becoming a Quaker involves knowing what Friends do and therefore those who do become members are likely to *want* to get involved, rather than having any external pressure on them. This also applies to attenders, as Alan explains,

There's very little difference, like status wise, between being an attender and being a member. We sometimes liken it to the difference between being married and living together, that it's really about making a declaration and saying “you know, I've decided that this is what I want to do”. Practically it makes very little difference.

Alan's comments are demonstrated through Percy, who has attended for around 20 years but has “never had membership”. Percy explained that:

There are duties that only a member could take up, that's about all. Functionally I attend all their Meetings for Business, all that sort of thing

and joined in discussions groups and all sorts of things. I'm a 'de facto' member I suppose!

Here Percy indicates that there are some "duties" that an attender would not ordinarily do. Alan explains that "there are some committees that theoretically you have to be a member to be on, but meetings can't always enforce that rule anyway, because they don't have enough people sometimes". This pragmatic flexibility was shown through Ryan and Denise's ability to fulfil a role on the Whanganui Settlement Trust while they were attenders. Rather than being obligated to become members, they decided to as *they* thought that it would be more appropriate, as Ryan explains:

We were representatives on the Whanganui Settlement Trust, which oversees the settlement in Whanganui, even though we weren't members. [...] I think if you're going to have people handle your finances and things, you expect some mark of commitment.

Again this shows the pragmatism and flexibility of Quakers. Rather than strict rules, there are guidelines which are deployed on a case-by-case basis. If the right person is interested in doing a specific job they may do it, in spite of perhaps not having membership status. Alan explained that the size of the worship group and Monthly Meeting influences who is available to do what, and therefore determines this flexibility.

Pastoral committee

According to the New Zealand Quaker website (The Religious Society of Friends Aotearoa New Zealand, n.d. - f):

The responsibilities which other churches delegate to a hierarchy, priest or minister are, in Quakers shared by all in membership and by others attending as well, if they so desire.

I was informed that other Quaker worship groups, especially the larger ones, have elders and overseers. Together these positions make up a pastoral committee which is responsible for the running of the meeting. However as the Palmerston North worship group is relatively small, there are no elders, overseers or a pastoral committee. Instead the worship group as a whole looks after the running of the worship group. This responsibility helps engender a sense of community. As Bruhn (2005) argues, community occurs when “everyone is working together towards a common goal” (p. 13) and when there is “a degree of mutual commitment and responsibility” (ibid., p. 11). The “goal” in this instance, is the successful running of the Palmerston North Quakers.

Clerks

The clerks (there are normally two) are another position within Quaker worship groups. It is the clerks that end a meeting by shaking hands, and who take minutes during a Business Meeting.⁵⁶ Essentially the clerks help keep the worship group running and maintain contact with other meetings around the country. This

⁵⁶ These minutes are then emailed to the Quakers within the Monthly Meeting and the clerks of the Yearly Meeting.

position is usually held for a period of three years, and in Palmerston North, Ryan and Denise are the current clerks.⁵⁷ However, this timeframe is merely a guideline as Evelyn and Andria were clerks for six and twelve years each. It is up to people to volunteer to become the meeting clerk or co-clerk. As Evelyn explained, “no one is pressed into doing anything”.

My research participants’ journey to becoming Quakers

Having explained how to become a part of this community, this section discusses my research participants’ journey to Quakerism. Quakers do not proselytise so would never go door knocking to find new members. Quakers believe that the desire to become a Quaker must come from an individual’s Inner Light and not from external persuasion or coercion. It is up to the individual to “discover the faith they already have” (The Religious Society of Friends Aotearoa New Zealand, n.d. - g). Huckleberry stated that “the balance [of not proselytising] is that we try to let people know that we exist”. This balance is necessary as without new members a community will eventually cease to exist. The Quakers therefore let people know that they exist through information sheets on notice boards and occasional notices in magazines.⁵⁸ In chapter two I introduced my research participants. Here I build on that and demonstrate that whilst there is no ‘normal’ way of becoming a

⁵⁷ The meeting at Massey University does not have any positions. As I explained in chapter two, it is an extension of the Palmerston North meeting.

⁵⁸ There is a Quaker flyer on the notice board of ‘The Centre’ at Massey University, which I described in chapter two. I was also informed that there used to be an advertisement in “The New Zealand Listener” magazine.

Quaker, there are themes and commonalities in the way people do. These connected themes represent some of the values of why people become Quakers and include a sense of coming 'home' and an alignment of values.

Coming 'home'

Huckleberry

Huckleberry decided to leave a South Island Presbyterian Church after a particular incident occurred which "offended my sense of the important role of Churches in making peace". As he explains,

The Church chose to have its children do a pageant, a little pageant, related to the tumbling of the walls of Jericho. As a consequence of that, pseudo-corpse were littered around the altar. I never went into a Presbyterian Church after that again.

I asked Huckleberry if he tried any other Churches or religious groups, but he answered no. In response to my question about how he ended up with the Friends, Huckleberry went into detail:

I answered an advert in the Listener, "The New Zealand Listener", which was responded to by an older Quaker, dead for some years now, by the name of [...]. I had a minor correspondence with her, and then decided to go to the meeting in [...]. When I went to the meeting, I found I knew half the people in the room! So it was something of a homecoming, and some of those people I still know.

Finding Quakerism more suited to his values, and meeting people he already knew, the sense of coming 'home' enabled Huckleberry to feel more at ease.

Percy

Percy explained: "I was thrown out of the [Exclusive Brethren] Church because I was questioning the Exclusive Brethren basis for their theology". After leaving the Exclusive Brethren, he recalls:

My next move was to go along to a charismatic church meeting in town [in Palmerston North]. So I went up there and was welcomed at the door, and everything was happening up there in the charismatic way. People dancing, people falling over, slain in the spirit. I was a bit freaked out but I thought "well okay, possibly these things are okay within Christianity". But anyway, there were elements that that I soon realised were less than honest and so I moved on from there.

After that charismatic Church experience, a friend suggested that Percy try attending a Quaker meeting for worship. Percy stated that he "sort of felt at home there" and that there "was an intellectual honesty, a spiritual honesty about them. I felt comfortable. I liked the people and the conversation".

Andria

Andria was different from my other research participants in the sense that she is a birthright Quaker. As Andria's journey to becoming a Quaker began with her first breathes upon entering this world, I asked why she has remained a Quaker. Andria explained that when she "went to university, I went to other denominations [and]

visited other churches” but that she “never quite felt at home”. She has remained a Quaker because she has always just felt that she was in “the right place [...], there’s just something right about it”.

Julie

As I explained in chapter two, Julie has not been involved with the Quakers for very long. Having only moved to New Zealand from North America in the last couple of years, the reason she came to the Friends was to meet people. After attending a Church service at another Christian denomination as well as a Buddhist class, Julie decided to attend a Quaker meeting when a Friend (colleague and Quaker) was visiting from the U.S.A. Quakerism resonated with her straight away, as she states “I was really struck at that very first meeting, by how ‘home like’ it was”.

For Huckleberry, Percy, Andria and Julie being a part of the Quakers gave them a feeling of coming ‘home’. This feeling was due to the familiarity of values that they witnessed amongst the Quakers and which they considered absent from their previous religious groups. These values enabled them to feel like they belonged and that they were with those that also shared their same values.

An alignment of values

Evelyn

Evelyn came to the Quakers after leaving the Anglican Church. She made it clear that she had had problems with the Anglican Church, stating that,

I didn’t agree with them building that [St...] Church, I didn’t agree with them not taking divorced people into ‘Mother’s Union’, there was all sorts of

things, and I could no longer say the creed anyway. I was getting up every week saying the creed, but I didn't really believe in it. The climax came over the Vietnam War, because the Anglicans didn't protest against the Vietnam War.

Enquiring how the Vietnam War was connected to her becoming a Quaker. Evelyn laughed, and said "well, it's a long story!", as she explains:

[A Samaritan friend] started telling me about the meeting house and one thing and another, and he used to talk to me about it. So when the Vietnam War came, they [the Samaritans] went on the protest marches, and I was going on about how I didn't think it was right [the Vietnam War]. So Paul⁵⁹ said "put your feet where your mouth is and come on the walk with us". So I went on the walk. I think it might have been on the Friday or Saturday, I can't remember. Anyway on the Sunday a Vicar got up [at the Church service] and he used to give a homily and the communion service. And he got up and said "did everybody that went on that march realise they were walking with Communists and fellow travellers?" So I didn't stop to hear any more. I just got up and walked out and I've never been back.

Evelyn's story has parallels with both Huckleberry and Percy, in that she left another Christian denomination due a feeling of discomfort. She wanted to be a part of a religious community where there was no preaching or doctrine; a community where she felt comfortable with their values.

⁵⁹ Pseudonym for Evelyn's friend.

Thomas

Thomas had an upbringing with the Open Brethren⁶⁰ before he “moved on and became a Baptist, for a goodly length of time”. Disillusioned with the Baptist Church for what he called the “dumbing down” of the worship, Thomas decided to leave and find an alternative source of spiritual nourishment, as he explains:

I didn't feel like visiting all the churches, dipping my toe in the water. I just didn't feel like doing that. However I did go along to the local Quaker group one Sunday morning. Thinking back, I'm not really sure why. Anyway when I got there, I found there were so many people that I already knew. [...]. I did enjoy the silence and I found that the sentiments which were being expressed, whether in ministry or whether it was the talk afterwards. These were sentiments which were already my own, you see. So you can see how I'm saying I was comfortable with that.

When Thomas started attending meetings he felt comfortable and “at ease”, explaining that he became a Quaker “because I felt I already was one”. For Thomas becoming a Quaker also meant freedom through “liberation of thought” and “liberation from dogma”.

Sarah

Sarah “didn't have a religious upbringing at all” but joined a Baptist Church in her teens “and really enjoyed aspects of that”. However Sarah added that she “always

⁶⁰ Not to be confused with the Exclusive Brethren, which Percy was a member of.

felt really uncomfortable with the teaching around ‘this is the only way’”, further explaining:

I guess I tried really hard to fit in and to accept that but my underlying feeling was of discomfort, that it wasn’t quite right for me, that I couldn’t really whole heartedly say “yeah, I believe this is the only way”. So I guess from an anthropological perspective, I dabbled a lot and was thinking “well hang on, does that mean all of those people are wrong and they’re not saved?” So I really struggled with that and then in my mid-twenties, I thought “no this isn’t okay”. And I remember it was round the time of the homosexual law reform bill and the church I was in was teaching that it was horrific and we all had to get out and campaign against it being accepted. And I thought “nah, this just doesn’t feel right for me”. So I actually made a decision to leave.

After some travelling, Sarah attended a Quaker meeting in the South Island and found it was more suited to her personality and values. She stated that “it’s the only religious group that I feel really comfortable with their acceptance of difference”.

Michelle

Like Sarah, Michelle did not have a religious upbringing. Enquiring why she decided to become a Quaker, Michelle explained:

It fitted. We had quite an interesting discussion at the meeting on Sunday, where someone talked about whether you became a Quaker, or whether it

was like being gay, you'd always been gay but then you'd come out. And I thought, my philosophical beliefs about Quakerism were established probably as a child and my father was [...] a pacifist and [had] a feeling there should be equality and also having quite a lot of concerns about religion being the 'opium of the masses'.

Michelle's answer for why she became a Quaker was simple; it worked for her. Taking part in Quaker meetings for worship and being a part of the community just felt comfortable.

Alan & Rose

Alan and Rose had both been brought up in traditional Christian households, becoming Friends over thirty years ago. As a young couple about to start a family, they decided that they did not want to bring a family up in a conservative Christian Church. As they both still valued the "spiritual dimension to life" (Alan) they tried something alternative, as Alan explains:

[We] didn't want to go back to either of the churches that we'd come from and so we said "well, let's see if we can find something". My sister and her husband had been down a similar path some years before, and they'd become Quakers. [...] So we sort of made a pact with ourselves that yes, it sounded weird but we would get involved for about three months or so, and not make a decision until the end of that time. At which point either of us would say "nah, doesn't meet what we're looking for, or it does". And we're still here.

Alan and Rose began attending meetings for worship on a trial basis, yet decades later are still content with being Quakers as it gives them a feeling of comfort. This feeling of comfort was furthered by Rose who explained that she liked that “there was no dogma, no people telling you exactly what to believe, because that’s what I’d grown up with”.

Ryan & Denise

Ryan and Denise’s journey to becoming Quakers is also entwined. Ryan explained that they both became members about five years ago.⁶¹ However they had been connected to the Quakers, sometimes attending meetings for worships and other events, for 40 years. Asking why they became members after so many years, Denise explained:

I think in the end because we’d been involved and actually got more involved. I always remember being at a Summer Gathering⁶² and somebody said to me, well actually said to both of us, “you’ve got commitment issues!” And I guess it was just a progression and it seemed the right thing to do, to actually make that step to become a member and not to be just an attender.

⁶¹ As I previously mentioned, they became Quaker members because they were involved with the Whanganui Settlement Trust.

⁶² The ‘Summer Gathering’ is an annual camp that is held at a different venue around the country each year for about a week from late December to early January. Although formal Quaker discussions are held, the purpose is really to get to know and socialise with Friends and their families from other parts of the country.

Neither mentioned a particularly spiritual reason for becoming Friends, so I enquired if this played any part in it at all, to which Denise stated,

Not necessarily. [...] It wasn't a revelation moment or anything. It was more of a gradual [joining], being more involved and thinking "this is the right thing to do, to become a member". Which is saying you're making some kind of commitment to the Religious Society of Friends. Not just to the meeting, but to the wider Religious Society of Friends, particularly in New Zealand.

Ryan and Denise had become members of Quaker community because they wanted to show their commitment considering they both had responsibility for Quaker financial matters. However, they had been part of the community for far longer as it felt comfortable for them being with Quakers.

My research participants each have their own story of how they became Quakers, yet their narratives demonstrate thematic similarities. These connected themes of coming 'home' and 'an alignment of values' clarify why my research participants became and have remained a part of this religious community.⁶³ With the exception of Andria, my research participants had all been part of other Christian denominations which had ultimately left them with a sentiment of disillusionment. Becoming a Friend has meant joining a group of like-minded people that share many of the same values and outlooks on life. As Bruhn (2005) explains, community

⁶³ Whilst some of my research participants are attenders rather than members of the Quakers, this does not exclude them from being a member of the community in the sense that they are a part of the community. Nor does it exclude them from having a sense of community.

is a “group [which] shares common goals, values, and, perhaps a way of life” (p. 11). Through these shared values, they have a “connection with others” (Brown, 2002, p. 2) in the community. For my research participants, being with people with whom they share many of the same values enables them to feel a sense of community and it is these values which I describe next.

The shared community values

My research participants made it very clear that the Quaker community values were important to them and as such they too help engender a sense of community. As I have previously explained, my research participants largely came to Quakerism via other Christian denominations, leaving because they felt those churches did not share their values. It was the shared community values that enabled my research participants to feel that they were coming ‘home’ and that they had found a religious place that aligned with their values. Shared values are important, as Felkins (2002) states: “the core of community is in the common values that bond its members together” (p. 18). Therefore understanding what these values are is an essential step in grasping how my research participants view their community. The values of tolerance, humility and openness are not only encapsulated in the Quaker publications *Quaker Faith & Practice* (2003) and *Advices & Queries* (2013) but were also themes that emerged from the analysis of my fieldwork.

Tolerance

Tolerance is integral to Quakerism as it is connected to the concept of Inner Light which Quakers believe to be a ‘divine spark’. It is a value that is embedded in the

Quaker Faith & Practice (The Religious Society of Friends, 2003), which states that “all are respected, valued and included” (p. 89) and *Advices & Queries* which prompts this attribute in the question “are you patient and considerate, even towards people you don’t like?” (The Religious Society of Friends in Aotearoa/New Zealand, 2013, p. 11). Huckleberry stated that “part of the ‘art’ of being a Quaker is accepting the validity of other people’s views on anything” whilst Ryan explained that “you are accepted right from the beginning as to who you are and are left to make your choices”. Denise offered further clarification of the importance of tolerance, explaining that:

Rather than going with your first reactions, it’s about actually standing back and stopping and saying “what’s the best way to handle this?” [...] I think that kind of not jumping in, not judging, and trying to understand where other people are coming from.

I found examples of Quaker tolerance throughout my fieldwork. During the focus group, numerous conflicting opinions emerged. Yet no one tried to convince another of their view, everyone’s perspective was tolerated. This also occurred during the discussion group that was held on the importance of the meeting house. Whilst the majority at the meeting agreed that the meeting house was an important part of the Quaker community, there were differing views on how it was important and the effect that it had on the worship group. Again all perspectives were tolerated and there was no debate or anyone trying to ‘win the argument’. Simply put, there was no argument. Instead there was an acceptance of other’s

interpretations. Whilst not exclusively a Quaker value, tolerance is thought of as an important element of the community by my research participants.

Humility

Like tolerance, the shared value of humility is connected to the concept of Inner Light. As the Inner Light is believed by Quakers to reside in all people, everyone is considered equally worthy. The Quaker publications also emphasise this shared value. For example, the *Quaker Faith & Practice* (The Religious Society of Friends, 2003) states to “not dismiss a man whose beliefs you cannot accept, but rather to find out why such sensible and admirable men think the way they do” (p. 61) whilst *Advices & Queries* (The Religious Society of Friends in Aotearoa/New Zealand, 2013) advises to “consider the words you use, and your tone of voice” (p. 12). Like the value of tolerance, there is also a practical application to this humility. Employed in a senior teaching role at Massey University, Michelle has chosen to omit her title⁶⁴ from the outside of her office door, contrary to the majority of lecturers at Massey University. This practice is because of a Quaker’s belief that titles can emphasise a hierarchy of importance, an antithesis to the value of humility. Another example of humility was the clothes that the Quakers wore. Regardless of the meeting that I attended (Auckland, Whanganui, Palmerston North, Wellington), the clothes were plain. They did not ‘dress up’ with suits and fine dresses; there was no ‘Sunday best’. As Evelyn remarked “nobody gets dressed up. [...] Nobody worries about what a person looks like or dresses like”. This humility also extended to the

⁶⁴ ‘Dr.’ in front of a name indicates that a person has completed a Doctorate of Philosophy in their chosen field. This degree is the highest awarded by a university.

transport used. There were no late model cars. Instead there was a collection of mid-range level sedans and even a few bicycles at times (depending on the weather). As Sarah noted, “I don’t think I’ve ever come across Quakers who drive flashy cars”. Overall there was certainly a modesty and lack of vanity witnessed throughout my fieldwork; hallmarks which I believe demonstrate humility.

Openness

Like tolerance and humility, openness is another shared value of the Palmerston North Friends and communicated through the Quaker publications. By openness, I mean being reflective about one’s own views and interpretations, and being open to inner change. Openness is clearly apparent in the Quaker publications. The *Quaker Faith & Practice* (The Religious Society of Friends, 2003) queries “*what are we Quakers doing?*” (p. 96; emphasis added) whilst the basis of the *Advices & Queries* (2013) is designed to encourage being open. My research participants were clear about this shared value. Rose explained that “being a Quaker makes me ask more questions about what I do”. Peter even reflected on the need for a “better word than worship” for the weekly meeting whilst Thomas explained how attending the meetings changed the way he thought about the question of God (“this whole God thing is becoming less a matter of faith and it’s becoming more of an academic question”). This value of openness which encourages constant reflection, like their other shared values, is connected to the idea of Inner Light. As the *Quaker Faith & Practice* (The Religious Society of Friends, 2003) states “this Inner Light is not frozen, it is dynamic, it is now, it is the eternal now. The Inner Light requires our

individual willing attention, our readiness to be changed” (p. 55). As their Inner Light is considered dynamic, they must therefore remain open.

How a sense of community is engendered

For the Palmerston North Quakers a sense of community is engendered through a variety of ways. Based on my fieldwork experience the sense of responsibility in helping run the worship group (as there are no elders, overseers or a pastoral committee), the publications (*Quaker Faith & Practice* and *Advices & Queries*) and testimonies or principles they emphasise (peace, equality, simplicity and integrity,) and the sharing of common values (tolerance, humility, openness) all help contribute to a sense of community for my research participants. However I believe that a sense of community is *primarily* enabled through the weekly meeting for worship, as well as the meeting house and other Quaker events. These other events include: the Yearly Meeting and the Summer Gathering⁶⁵ (where they meet Quakers from all around New Zealand); the Business Meeting (where they meet Quakers from other worship groups in the Monthly Meeting); and even, although not a Quaker event, the focus group that I organised.

The meeting for worship

From my time spent with the Palmerston North Quakers, as well as my visits to other meetings around the North Island, I got a sense of the importance of the meeting for worship. During my interviews, my research participants spoke of how

⁶⁵ Although I did not attend the Yearly Meeting or Summer Gathering, my research participants indicated that these events were also important to their sense of community.

only sickness and family commitments kept them from attending a meeting. This was reflected throughout my fieldwork where there was a high attendance rate amongst my research participants.⁶⁶ My research participants mostly stated that they did not socialise with other Quakers outside of what Dandelion (1996) refers to as “Quaker time”, that is, “the time spent as a Quaker with other Quakers” (p. xxvi). It is predominantly during the meeting for worship that they spend time with other Quakers even though being a Quaker is a part of my research participant’s identity, and not confined to a couple of hours on a Sunday morning. Andrews (2012) explains how Anglo-Indians “move temporarily out of the pattern of their ‘normal’ lives” when they attend Anglo-Indian reunions. The purpose of these reunions is to “strengthen their identity and maintain a particular sense of themselves as distinct, and as a ‘community’” (p. 2). An Anglo-Indian reunion and a Quaker meeting for worship have their differences, but the *purpose* is not so very different.

A Quaker’s sense of community is strengthened when they are with other Friends. As Buber (as cited in Turner, 1995) explains community is when people are “*with one another*” (p. 127; emphasis in original). Spending time with my research participants has taught me that there is a strong connection when they worship together and that there does not have to be conversation for the group to be brought together. The silence itself does something; it is an ‘active’ silence. As the *Quaker Faith & Practice* (The Religious Society of Friends, 2003) states “we seem to feel that unless we are doing something or saying something, nothing is happening.

⁶⁶ There were also Quakers that did not take part in my research that attended regularly.

Nothing is further from the truth” (p. 57). This active element of the meeting for worship was addressed by Evelyn, who explains that:

You’ll often find, if you were sitting in a meeting, somebody will get up and give ministry and that’s exactly what you were thinking at the time. [...] Percy got up in meeting and said about the [...],⁶⁷ well that’s very much along the lines of what I was thinking at the time.

Whilst impossible to understand these connections (Evelyn had no way of knowing what Percy was about to say), it is possible to understand the sense of community felt by the group through the framework of *communitas*. The meeting can be considered as a moment of liminality. Building on “Van Gennep’s three-stage sequence of separation, transition, and reincorporation” (Bell, 1997, p. 40), Turner stated that “liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between” (1995, p. 95). It is in this liminal stage that “liminars [those within the liminal process] are stripped of status and authority” (Turner & Turner, 1978, p. 249). As I have discussed, numerous professions can be present at a meeting for worship; from university lecturers and health care professionals to those who are retired. Yet at a meeting for worship all are considered equal. Whilst the feeling of *communitas* is momentary and never guaranteed, there are social situations such as the meeting for worship and other examples of “Quaker time” (Dandelion, 1996, p. xxvi) that can help create an atmosphere whereby it can surface. That is, the

⁶⁷ As I have previously explained, I do not believe it is appropriate to discuss exactly what was mentioned in a spoken ‘ministry’. However they are often framed as questions and connected to one of the Quaker testimonies, or principles.

meeting for worship itself is not an example of *communitas* but rather it is a social situation which can *enable* *communitas* to exist for a time. Bowie (2006) states that *communitas* “results from the social levelling and shared experience of liminality” (p. 139), whereby all are considered equal. Any hierarchy of importance set by society does not enter through the doors of the meeting house. As Eller (2007) explains, during the liminal state there is an “absence of status”, there are “no kings and commoners” (p. 127). This absence of status, Eller (2007) explains, is comparable to the Muslim pilgrimage, or *hajj*, to Mecca. In this instance, the pilgrims all “don the same white robes” (p. 127), thus symbolising that they are all, for a time, equal.

During one particular meeting at the main Palmerston North meeting house, I got a feeling for what seemed like a fleeting sense of *communitas*. As I explained in chapter two, after the silent meeting finishes and just before the period of ‘almost ministry’, the circle of Friends hold hands for a few moments. At that brief moment there was a palpable sense of communal satisfaction and joy, a spirit of togetherness and achievement. Just before we all stopped holding each other’s hands, those holding my hands gave one last squeeze, as if to say “we did it!” *Communitas* can emerge among this levelling process as it “kills the bacteria of money and power” (Turner, 2012, p. 221). Edith Turner (2012) further argues that trying to understand *communitas* “is like trying to locate and hold down an electron. It cannot be done” (p. 220). She adds that the “only way to catch these ‘electrons’ in the middle of their elusive activity, in process, is to go along with them in the very rush of their impossible energy” (p. 220). By this, Turner indicates that

the most effective way to understand *communitas* is to *experience* it. Through my participation in the meeting for worship, I was able to experience the *communitas* that emerged from the Quaker sense of community. For a very brief but intense moment, I believe I was amongst it and felt it. This sense of community though is not exclusively felt through being together; it is also felt through their place of worship.

Meeting house

Chenoweth (2009) states that Quakers believe that “meetings for worship may be held in any house, field, or street corner, because God is equally present in all places” (p. 325). This was also explained to me during my fieldwork when Andria stated that “you can worship in any place. [...] I mean, we can sit outside somewhere, we can just sit quietly be together under a tree”. Whilst the Quaker framework may be open to this, the reality is that Quakers do not just worship anywhere. When they worship together as a community it is in a specific place, a meeting house. As such, the meeting house must be considered as an element with the potential from which, Quakers may derive a sense of community.

The literature on community is clear that community and place are important in relation to each other. Minar and Greer (1969) state that “place is important to community” because “most of the social systems to which we would apply the concept are geographic entities of one sort or another” (p. 47). Keller (2003) argues that community is “rooted in place” (p. 8) whilst Buber explains that “community is where community happens” (1961, as cited in Turner, 1995, p. 127). Tramacchi

(2000) in his ethnographic work on psychedelic raves (large dance parties involving electronic music) found that the location of the parties was an important element for those involved. Researching amongst fans of “bush parties” (p. 201), the location of the raves deep in the countryside was part of the attraction for his research participants, who were opposed to raves held in urban areas, which were considered as “‘co-opted’ and ‘too commercial’” (p. 201). For these proponents of “bush parties”, the location was a feature of their community.

Like the countryside for fans of Australian “bush parties”, the meeting house for the Quakers also adds to their sense of community. For the Palmerston North Quakers the purpose built meeting house is part of their weekly worship and has been since 1967. The fact that the meetings for worship are consistently held there demonstrates the importance of the meeting house, yet during my fieldwork its importance was made even clearer. After one silent meeting and when everyone had finished their hot drinks and a catch-up, a formal discussion was held. This particular discussion was on the importance of the meeting house in terms of how it contributed to their experience as a Quaker.

The wider context of this discussion is that the New Zealand Quaker newsletter wanted to write an article about the views Quakers had with regards to their meeting house, and how it contributed to their being a Quaker. This topic had been brought up at a Business Meeting, and as such, there had been a voluminous exchange of emails amongst Palmerston North Quakers in the preceding weeks, more specifically between those who attend the meeting for worship and those

who do not (but who still identify as Quakers).⁶⁸ The Quakers who do not attend the meeting for worship had put forth the idea that maybe the meeting house was unnecessary for worship, and that it could even be sold. They suggested that perhaps a room (for example, at a library) could be rented instead. During this discussion, the reaction of those that attend meetings for worship was much different. They unanimously declared that the meeting house *was* part of their Quakerism and that it was an important part of their time as Friends, enabling them to “feel like a community” (field notes). Julie and Percy both made the point that the meeting house (with its Quaker sign visible from the road) helped tell the world that they exist and reaffirms that they *are* a community.

Community is not only made up of inclusion but is also “made by exclusion” (Sartwell, 2002, p. 48), that is, by what it is not. By having a meeting house (with an identifying sign), the Palmerston North Quakers are stating that they are Quakers, and as such, are different from other Christian denominations. They are making a statement that they are their own distinct community. The meeting house, however, is not just important because that is where the meeting for worship is held. It is where they can ‘be’ Quakers. This involves being with Quakers, not just sitting in silence during worship. It is within the meeting house that they catch up on each other’s lives over a hot drink and a biscuit, where they occasionally enjoy a shared meal or a discussion, where they have access to the Quaker library and the decision-making process (at the Business Meeting). Almost everything Quaker

⁶⁸ There are about dozen Quakers in Palmerston North who, for personal reasons, do not attend any meetings for worship.

related (including socialising with other Quakers) in their lives occurs in the meeting house. As Bruhn (2005) states “we become socially and emotionally attached to place as well as to persons” (p. 12).

Oldenberg refers to “the third place” (1997, as cited in Bruhn, 2005, p. 12), a place in between a person’s home and workplace where people can interact with each other. This place Oldenberg refers to as a “neutral ground” and as “a leveller” (1997, as cited in Bruhn, 2005, p. 12). Whilst Oldenberg is more specifically referring to community bars and cafes, I believe the meeting house can also be considered as a “third place”. In Turner’s terms it is “betwixt and between” (Turner, 1995, p. 95), between the home and the workplace. It is a liminal place where status and authority are levelled and as such can facilitate the arousing of moments of *communitas*; it assists in enabling what Myerhoff (1978) labels as an “intense camaraderie” (p. 225).

Other events

The Quaker’s sense of community is also engendered through participation in events, such as the Yearly Meeting, the Summer Gathering, the Business Meeting (Monthly Meeting) and the occasional discussion that is held after a meeting for worship. In addition, a sense of community seemed to emerge through the focus group which I organised. Whilst the focus group is not a Quaker event, as it was something that I organized specifically for my research, it was still an event that demonstrated how Friends interact with other Friends. That is, it was still a period

of time where they were together as Friends in a Quaker place (the meeting house), even if the event was held solely for the purpose of my research.

During this focus group I asked a set of four questions (see Appendix three) about the Palmerston North Quaker community. After the way of the discussion was changed,⁶⁹ the focus group came to 'life'. Each Quaker was enthusiastically joining into the discussion, commenting and building on what others had said. They were certainly engaged and eager to contribute. There seemed to be moments of a sense of "brotherly and/or sisterly love" (Kamau, 2002, p. 24) present, or "what Turner calls *communitas*" (Kamau, 2002, p. 24). Edith Turner (2012) states that "*communitas* is a group's pleasure in sharing common experience with one's fellows" (p. 2), that it is "*togetherness* itself" (p. 4). No one mentioned it but there did seem to be a sense of *togetherness* during this focus group. There seemed to be an intense sense of enjoyment and satisfaction and of a desire to *want* to contribute and be a part of proceedings. There was a palpable sense of joy and of being and working together: a sense of *communitas*. This feeling of *communitas* did not last for the entire duration of the focus group. As Turner (2012) explains, *communitas* "comes unexpectedly, like the wind" (p. 3), its "emotions are fleeting and ephemeral" (Kamau, 2002, p. 24). Indeed while it died away later in the focus group, a sense of *communitas* did seem to return after the discussion had ended, during the shared lunch.

⁶⁹ As outlined in chapter two.

Lining up to go past the kitchen slide (in the meeting room), we all helped ourselves to tomato soup, crusty rolls and homemade cheesecake. Whilst eating food can be seen as an enjoyable yet (often) mundane part of everyday life, there are moments when it can be more than simply a nourishing activity. Edith Turner (2012, p. 72) discusses how a sense of *communitas* emerged when she was stuck waiting for her connecting flight at a small regional airport in North America. Frustrated and waiting along with other travellers, the airline provided the group with pizzas until the next plane departed. As she explains,

Everyone was talking like mad. I realized that I was in the middle of a full-blown *communitas* – the *communitas* of pizza. The two sporting/business guys were practically hugging each other. The white-haired man beamed. The old lady over there was happy and I was, too.

Whilst the Quaker's behaviour during the shared lunch was more subtle, as we all began eating soup and then cheesecake and chatted about various topics, a transient sense of a *communitas* once again seemed to emerge. Again there was that palpable and very real sense of togetherness and joy. Edith Turner (2012) states that *communitas* "warms people toward their fellow human beings" (p. 3) and helps create ties between people. The moment of *communitas* during the meal seemed to strengthen the bond between the Quakers and as such augment and maintain their sense of community. As Bruhn (2005) states, community is when a "group...creates positive feelings" (p. 11) and "everyone is...participating in an activity" (p. 13).

Conclusion

This chapter which has focused on the sense of community of the Palmerston North Quakers, began by demonstrating that belonging begins through first being an attender, then becoming a member⁷⁰ of the community. By becoming a part of a social group that has its own history, customs and sense of identity, one becomes a part of something bigger. I have argued that a sense of community is enabled through a variety of ways. These include the communal sense of responsibility in running the worship group (in the absence of elders, overseers and a pastoral committee), the publications which are given to new members and are also available at the meeting for worship (*Quaker Faith & Practice* and *Advices & Queries*), the sharing of common values (tolerance, humility, openness) and meeting Quakers from other worship groups at events (Yearly Meeting, Summer Gathering, Business Meetings, post-meeting discussions). However I believe that the Palmerston North Quaker's sense of community is *primarily* engendered through the meeting for worship, and their meeting house, where the meeting is usually held.

My research participants predominantly came from other Christian denominations, which they had left for a variety of reasons, and found that Quakerism was better suited for them. Most stated that the meeting for worship *is* their experience of Quakerism. There is no 'Quaker movie' or 'Quaker Italian food' nights (although there are some shared meals) and many do not see each other outside of the

⁷⁰ I have demonstrated that a member of the Quaker community does not need to be a member; attenders and members belong equally to the community.

meeting. The primary experience of being a part of the Quaker community is through the meeting for worship, and as such it is primarily what helps enable a sense of community. Yet people are not the only important element of community, as place is also influential. Here the importance of the meeting house is demonstrated. Whilst Quakers can worship anywhere, they choose not to; since 1967 the Palmerston North Quakers have consistently held their meetings at their meeting house, and in the last couple of years also at 'The Centre' on the Massey University Campus. The main meeting house is the main *space* where they experience their sense of community. The meeting is the time when a sense of community is at its strongest, and therefore the meeting house is the location of that sense. It is the space that gives more meaning to the meeting, adding richness to their experience of Quakerism. Enabling and strengthening this sense of community are fleeting moments of *communitas*, described as a feeling of egalitarianism, of togetherness and of joy and possibility; a "relational quality of full unmediated communication, even communion" (Turner & Turner, 1978, p. 250).

Communitas enables people to "see their fellows as they are" (Turner, 2012, p. 2) and can emerge, although it is never guaranteed, when the community comes together. Moments of *communitas* enable the time spent as a community to seem enjoyable and fulfilling, and must, it seems likely, encourage them to keep coming back. As they remain a distinct community, so too they retain and build a *sense* of community. Whilst the meetings for worship and the meeting house are the primary enablers of the Quakers' sense of community, they do not have an abstract relationship with the other factors that also contribute to that sense. Publications

are part of the meeting, the shared community values are connected to the concept of Inner Light which is the central reason why the meeting for worship is held in silence and the events are almost always held at the meeting house. This sense of community however, does not quite explain how they come to a set of shared understandings of the distinguishing elements of their community. As I discuss in the next chapter, solidarity appears to be the key to understanding these common understandings.

Chapter Four – The shared understandings of the Palmerston North Quaker community

For a work of art to be successful it need not stimulate the same
emotional response in all who experience it.

Rappaport, 1999, p. 387

Introduction

My research has demonstrated that the Palmerston North Quakers see themselves as a distinct community, with a sense of community *primarily* emerging from the meeting for worship and the meeting house, as well as a variety of other sources. However in deepening my understanding of the Palmerston North Friends, I wanted to learn what some of their shared understandings are with regards to the “demarcated...boundaries” (Brown, 2002, p. 3) that make this community what it is and what it is not. That is, how my research participants comprehend the term ‘Quaker’. If chapter three was based on *how* they had a sense of community then this chapter focuses on the *what*, That is, by again drawing on a range of community theory as well as Collins’ interaction ritual theory and Fernandez’s work on consensus, *what* this community understands as being the distinguishing factors

of Quakerism and how my research participants are able to come these shared understandings.

I begin this chapter with an outline of the theory that 'anchors' this question: Randall Collins' (2004) "interaction ritual" (p. 47) theory. I then discuss the meanings my research participants attribute to the meeting for worship, which can be considered an example of an interaction ritual. Following this I proceed to explore what members of this community believe distinguishes a Quaker from a member of another Christian denomination or religion, showing that their theological freedom and practice are considered key aspects. Building on this idea of practice, I examine what the community understandings are with regards to 'Quakerly' behaviour. That is, what they consider to be the behavioural expectations of a Quaker and the expectations of behaviour to be avoided. I conclude by offering an explanation as to how, through a feeling of solidarity, this community is able to come to this set of shared understandings. Whilst the importance of the meeting has been made clear, as I demonstrate next, my research participants attribute different meanings to it.

The meeting for worship as an 'interaction ritual'

Whilst Collins "pays scant attention to religion" (Kraybill, 2004, as cited in Heider & Warner, 2010, p. 78) in his work which focuses on social interactions, the meeting for worship can be understood as an interaction ritual by his definition. As outlined in chapter one, an interaction ritual according to Collins (2004) has four "ingredients" (p. 48). These include "group assembly", "barriers to outsiders", a

“mutual focus of attention” and a “shared mood” (p. 48). “Group assembly” as Collins (2004) explains, is “two or more people [that] are physically assembled in the same place, so that they affect each other by their bodily presence” (p. 48). He goes on to state that “ritual is essentially a bodily process” (p. 53), that there is a “buzz, an excitement, or at least a wariness when human bodies are near each other” (ibid.). For the Quakers, the silent meeting is their “bodily co-presence” (Collins, 2004, p. 48) moment. By sitting together in a circle the Quakers are aware of each other. They know that they are together. “Barrier to outsiders” (Collins, 2004) are “boundaries...so that participants have a sense of who is taking part and who is excluded” (p. 48). As Draper (2014) states “barriers can take many different forms [and] can be as simple as a closed door or a turned back that keeps the focus internal” (p. 233). The meeting house contributes in this aspect as it separates Quakers from other religious groups. That is, when one is in the meeting house it becomes apparent that it is a Quaker space and cannot be confused with any other religious, or for that matter, any other type of space.

The “mutual focus of attention” is explained by Collins (2004) as “attention upon a common object or activity, and by communicating this focus to each other become mutually aware of each other’s focus of attention” (p. 48). Within this community the mutual focus of attention is the concept of Inner Light. It is this concept of “that of God in everyone” (Chenoweth, 2009, p. 321) that a Quaker focuses on whilst they attempt to ‘centre down’ at a meeting. And when the silence is broken with a ‘ministry’, the words come from a person’s Inner Light. This focus on the Inner Light is what Quakers do, and their silence is a way of connecting to that Inner Light. The

fourth “ingredient” in Collins’ interaction ritual theory is a “shared mood”, or what he explains as a shared “emotional experience” (2004, p. 48). For my research participants, this shared emotional experience comes from the sense of value they attribute to ‘centring down’ and connecting with their Inner Light. The combination of these four “ingredients” can produce a “collective effervescence” (Collins, 2004, p. 48), an “intensification of shared experience” (ibid., p. 35) and “momentary state” (ibid., p. 36) which can be understood as “functionally equivalent” (Olaveson, 2001, p. 99) to *communitas*. As a result of this collective effervescence/*communitas*, various outcomes emerge. These include “emotional energy”, “group solidarity” and “feelings of morality” (Collins, 2004, p. 49) all of which are important in interpreting the shared understandings of the Quakers, as will become clear further on in this chapter.

The *shared understandings* of the meeting for worship

Collins (2012) states that rituals “are multifaceted” (p. 22) and that “to try and reduce or compress the many meanings of Quaker worship into one would be a grave mistake” (Collins, 2005, p. 325). Here Collins (2005) argues that for Quakers there is no unique way of interpreting the meeting, that “no single interpretation is in itself sufficient to account for the form and content of Quaker worship” (p. 325). For example, when I asked Thomas “what does the worship mean to you?” during our interview, he replied “well, that too is changing”. As the meaning of the meeting for worship is unique to each Quaker, I have specifically drawn from the

knowledge that emerged during the interviews to learn their interpretation of this meeting, from which I base my own.

One occasion specifically exemplified the uniqueness of the meaning of the Quaker meeting for each Friend. After the meeting one Sunday when everyone was having a hot drink, one Friend stated “people often ask me what it is that Quakers do during a meeting. All I can say is that I have no idea! I only know what I’m doing” (field notes). It appears that this sentiment is not uncommon. Whilst working amongst Quakers in the Northeast of England, Collins (2005, p. 331) asked a Quaker what they did in a meeting, to which the Quaker replied,

This is such a vague and complex question that it is difficult to give any sort of clear and concise answer. I could say ‘all sorts’, ‘nothing’ [or] ‘I don’t know’, and each would be partially true.

Other descriptions of the meeting in Collins’ (2005) research include “thinking”, “meditating”, “dozing” and “giving voice to God” (p. 330). Collins (2005) has argued that there are a “number of ways...in which Quaker worship has been looked at” (p. 325), including looking at what it means to the participants, which I seek to elaborate on. Each of my research participants spoke of the meeting in ways that indicated that they all consider it meaningful to them. Some themes emerged from their responses during our interviews, for example, the valuing of silence, a time to ‘refresh’ and a time of possibility. I look now at each of these features based on my research participant’s responses.

The valuing of silence

One aspect of the meeting that my research participants seem to value is the silence. During our interview Denise explained that:

I really value the silence. [...] I think it's the being in the silence with the other people and I find it really difficult to put into words I think, but I really value the silence.

The importance and valuing of the silence within meetings for worship was also stressed by two other research participants:

I spend a lot of time in silence. I don't own a television. I don't usually have the radio on in here [at home]. It's just me and the cats conversing. So I like silence and I need a lot of silence and to me there is something uniquely intimate about being silent with other people. (Julie)

I really enjoy the silence. [...] I guess it's the stillness. I find it challenging, because I'm sort of a busy, not a frenetic person, but I'm action based. And I think it's very challenging for me to be still and to listen to my inner voice and to try and connect spiritually with other people and with God. (Sarah)⁷¹

As their words indicate, the silence of the meeting can be a rewarding and valuable experience. The value of the silence was clear for my research participants, but I

⁷¹ Many of the Quakers that I spoke to stated that they have a belief in God. It is the way in which God is able to be interpreted that differentiates liberal Quakerism from other Christian denominations.

wondered why it was important? What occurred during the quiet of the meeting?

Speaking with Sarah she explained her view on this:

I guess I see it as prayer, but again in a very wide sort of appreciation of the word 'prayer'. So it's stillness and a waiting. A waiting to connect, because I believe we are essentially spiritual beings but that we are so busy and so verbal that we lose opportunities to really get in touch with our spiritual being. So it's an hour set aside to do that.

Julie saw it a little differently, describing her perspective as:

I think it's similar to meditation and many people who meditate find that it's a different experience meditating in a group. So there's that aspect to it. There seems to be something from within all of us that collects and forms, an amalgam. An amalgam is, in chemistry, an amalgam is a mixture of two pure chemical substances, to create a third; a pure chemical substance. It's a very rare thing, because usually if you combine two substances, you have a mixture. But an amalgam is when two substance combine and you don't have a mixture, you have another pure substance. So you combine all of these energies and form a many sectioned amalgam. It's very special to be contributory to that.

As my research participants' words demonstrate, the silence period is used for prayer, meditation and perhaps something else again. Part of the silence's value is that it "stops the busyness" (Ryan). As Ryan further states, "without it, I think I'd

have more difficulty handling the rest of the things in my life”, thus also demonstrating that the silent meeting has a refreshing aspect to it too.

A time to ‘refresh’

Another theme that emanated from my interviews was that the meeting enabled them to feel ‘refreshed’. Huckleberry stated that “we live very busy lives. Even someone like myself, retired and in his sixties! It’s a time for peace and reflection”. This idea was echoed by Andria, who took it a bit further still,

It’s a recharging of my batteries, and you’ve probably heard that from somebody else. It gives you time to look at yourself; look at what’s happening in your life. Trying to think about things. Well, think more about things that possibly are triggering your mind during the week. A refreshing time, it’s peaceful, it’s refreshing. It’s a stimulation, it can answer questions. It might not mean anything. For one Sunday you might be quite empty. For some reason, I leave that meeting house feeling invigorated and thinking “well, I can start again”.

Whilst the silent meeting helped to ‘recharge the batteries’ for some of my research participants, it is not just the silence itself. The context (meeting for worship) in which the silence appears gives more meaning to it, as Michelle explained:

I don’t think it would happen [being ‘refreshed’] if it was just me on my own and quietness. It’s because there’s other people there as well.

Attending the silent worship helped 'refresh' my research participants, but they needed to attend to achieve that feeling, as opposed to sitting at home in silence. This demonstrates the salience of Collins' (2004) idea of the "ritual ingredient" of "group assembly" (p. 48), described as "two or more people [that] are physically assembled in the same place, so that they affect each other by their bodily presence" (Collins, 2004, p. 48). I was curious *how* attending this meeting could refresh them. Andria explained that,

If you're in stress, maybe there are questions. If somebody is inspired to or moved to speak in a meeting, maybe some little thing they say triggers off something that helps you. [...] So it can be a very healing time, it can be a joyful time.

Andria explains how a Quaker may turn up at a meeting stressed by an issue in their life. By 'centring down' in a meeting and focussing on the Inner Light as well as listening to the 'ministries', one can feel refreshed and reinvigorated, as Ryan clarified:

I quite often come out of the meeting and if I've had something I've been stewing on, having actually paused for an hour and sat through the meeting, I'll often be a bit clearer as to what I'm going to do when I come out of it than I was when I came into it.

This concept of 'centring down' and connecting to one's Inner Light are important parts of the meeting, it is the "mutual focus of attention" (Collins, 2004, p. 48) of

the 'ritual'. Wondering how exactly one 'centres down', Andria explained to me that:

You try and push away day-to-day trivialities and I find it very difficult. You sort of try and move inwardly and be open to whatever comes to you. A thought might come to you, and it's trying to find your inner self. [...] It's trying to find a centre, a somewhere. As I say, it's not that your mind goes blank. It's that you're trying to just let things flow. If something comes to you and you're thinking "oh I must do that afterwards", you're sort of trying. It comes to you and you try and let it just move on. You don't sort of not push it away or ignore it, but just let it go.

Ryan's stated that "we all have our own ways of trying to 'settle in'" ('centre down'). I queried if it was about putting things into perspective, which garnered the response of "it does, exactly. 'Does this really matter?' type stuff". As my research participants demonstrate, 'centring down' is neither a simple concept nor an exact science. Each Friend has their way of getting to that point. However what is clear is that the meeting is seen as a positive experience for all, and for some of my research participants it is important as it enables them to feel 'refreshed' after it.

A time of possibility

The weekly worship was also considered to be a time of 'possibility' for some of my research participants, in terms of not knowing what effect the meeting will have. Thomas captured this sense of possibility that seemed to be emerging from my interviews, as he explained:

So I'll go to worship as you call it, or as we call it, on a Sunday morning and on the walk there I say "what am I going to think about when I get there?", and really, "why am I going?" But it generally turns out to be better than I expect, that's something.

This sense of possibility was furthered by Rose, who explained,

Meeting for worship is more about being open to the spirit and open to the spirit moving in the group of people that I'm with, and being open to a kind of guidance for me and my life.

A Quaker can expect numerous certainties from a meeting for worship, including the meeting being held in silence and Friends sitting in a circle. However, what a Quaker will experience during the meeting and *how* they will feel after the meeting is not so certain, as it is a period of possibility. As the Quakers focus on the Inner Light, the meeting for worship is an activity from which a plethora of emotions can emerge.

Collins (2004) argues that an outcome of an interaction ritual is the "emotional energy in the individual" (p. 49). This "emotional energy" he describes as "a feeling of confidence, elation, strength, enthusiasm, and initiative in taking action" (p. 49), emotions which I encountered during my fieldwork. This "emotional energy" however, is different from the collective effervescence that produces it. The collective effervescence is the momentary spark, like *communitas*, that can provide a longer lasting positive emotion, the "emotional energy" (Collins, 2004, p. 48). Collins (2004) states that these "sentiments [of emotional energy] fade out over a

period of time if they are not resuscitated by another experience of collective effervescence” (p. 39). That is, the sensation of collective effervescence is the momentary ‘spark’ that ignites the longer lasting positive feeling of “emotional energy” (Collins, 2004, p. 48).

This energy, as my research participants indicate, is not recognised by all the same way. Heider and Warner (2010), speaking in the context of Sacred Harp singers, state that “emotional energy is an interpersonal variable, and individuals arrive at singings with varying stores of it. But everyone leaves with their stores topped up” (p. 91). And so it is with the Palmerston North Quakers who may turn up with differing thoughts about the meeting for worship, yet they are uniform in feeling that it does have a positive effect on them. The evidence for this is that my research participants keep turning up, an indication that “whoever has experienced this kind of moment wants to repeat it” (Collins, 2004, p. 39).

I have presented different interpretations regarding the meaning of this important Quaker event. Yet as Kertzer (1988) explains “ritual can promote social solidarity without implying that people share the same...interpretation of the ritual” (p. 69). This concept was developed by Fernandez (1965) and his work on consensus amongst a Fang Bwiti reformatory cult in Gabon. Defining social consensus as “an acceptance of the necessity for interaction” (p. 913) and cultural consensus as “an understanding that one holds symbolic meanings in common” (p. 914), Fernandez found that there was a strong social consensus and a weak cultural consensus regarding an important community ritual. Fernandez (1965) further argued that “cultural consensus is consensus in respect to signals and cultural consensus [is] a

consensus in respect to symbols” (p. 917), stating that “as opposed to the signal” a symbol has “a meaning involving associations beyond its significance within the social context where it customarily appears” (p. 918). So the strong social consensus meant that the community shared the belief that the ritual was important, whilst the weak cultural consensus signified that the community had numerous ways of interpreting the *meaning* of the ritual. This imbalance was managed, Fernandez (1965) asserts, through a “symbolic consensus” (p. 904), or what the Fang called “*nlem-mvore*” (p. 904; emphasis in original), or “one-heartedness” (p. 904). For the Fang, the ritual “characterized this state as one in which “*bot ba wogan*” (p. 904; emphasis in original), or where “people understand each other” (p. 904). This draws parallels with the Palmerston North Quakers. As I was told, the meeting for worship is important to all of my research participants, yet their ways of *interpreting* it differ. However these differences are irrelevant to Quakers, because they *understand each other* in terms of knowing that the meeting is important to them all; that is, they possess a symbolic consensus. Their individual interpretations are not barriers to community because an “emotional energy” (Collins, 2004, p. 48) that emerges from the meeting helps create a feeling of solidarity. It is through this sense of solidarity that Quakers are able to have a diverse set of shared understandings; including what distinguishes a Quaker from non-Quakers.

The *shared understandings* of what distinguishes a Quaker

Brown (2002) states that communities are “demarcated by boundaries” (p. 3), which are not solely based on the “use of territory” (ibid., p. 2) but can also “denote a sharing with others” and a “*community of like minds*” (Brown, 2002, p. 3; emphasis in original). These boundaries distinguish one community from another and it is therefore important to understand these differences. The question of what differentiates a Quaker is complex and one which anthropologist and Quaker academic Peter Collins (2009) has “been trying to answer for over a decade” (p. 205). When I asked my research participants what distinguished a Quaker from members of other religious groups, two themes became clear among their numerous answers. One of these themes was concerned with theological freedom and the other was with regards to their practice. This theme of practice has two elements to it, social and theological: the way they live their day-to-day lives (social) and the way they *practice* as Quakers (theological).

Theological freedom

Lindholm (2012) explains that in Quakerism “no one has the right to control another’s revelation” (p. 349). This theme of theological freedom started to become clear from my first interview, as Huckleberry explained that:

Quakerism is unusual in that it is very much a ‘do it yourself’ religion, nobody tells you what to do and we don’t have any authority figures. In a sense we are all priests. We are all clergy but in another sense we’re all lay.

Huckleberry was not alone in demonstrating the importance of theological freedom, as it arose in subsequent interviews too. Percy expressed that Quakerism involves “the freedom from any belief structure or theological dogma”. Ryan pointed out that for Quakers “‘truth’ doesn’t necessarily come out of a single book. You take inspiration from wherever you can find it”. Alan argued that “there is no formula. There are guidances and there are frameworks, but you have to figure out what your theology or wisdom or set of understandings are”, whilst Thomas simply stated that “I feel free. I just feel free to be and there are no rules [with regards to belief]”.

This concept of theological freedom is perhaps unsurprising as “George Fox, the movement’s principal founder, preached no doctrine at all” (Chenoweth, 2009, p. 325). Abbott and Abbott (2008) explain that Fox “emphasized that everyone had the ability to experience the love and leadership of God directly, through the Light of Christ in the human heart” (p. 232). This “light”, as Gillman (2005) clarifies, is “the key to the Quaker movement” (p. 1004) and why the “intermediaries of Popes, bishops, priests, or paid clergy” (Abbott & Abbott, 2008, p. 232) are seen as unnecessary. According to Denise the Inner Light is “what they call ‘that of God in everybody’, or the good things in everybody” whilst Sarah explained that “the fundamental thing [for Quakers] is that there is the belief of “that of God in everyone”. This concept of the Inner Light is behind the theological freedom, a distinguishing feature of Quaker communities.

Dandelion (2004) asserts that studies have shown that “Friends believe certainty in terms of religious truth claims is naive, misguided and inappropriate” (p. 225). As

Sarah explained “[in Quakerism] there is a sense of not knowing and it’s okay to not know. It’s okay to struggle and it’s okay to ask questions and it’s okay to be ambivalent towards things”. This acceptance that they do not have all the answers was also present in the interviews that I conducted. I noticed that my research participants were hesitant in answering and made sure to emphasise that their answers were only their own and not necessarily representative of the community.

Scully (2009) argues that “Quakerism gives primary authority to personal experience – of life in general, and more specifically to personal experience of the Light” (p. 114). Julie seemed to be in accord with this, explaining “at no point do they say “I’m right and you’re wrong”. This theological freedom is explained by Dandelion (2004), stating that “their ‘perhapsness’ about theological claims is absolute” (p. 225). This perhapsness is based on a lack of certainty towards religious matters, whereby “truth is partial, revelation is contextual and limited, spiritual life is a journey, [and] the spiritual path involves seeking rather than finding” (Scully, 2009, p. 114). As Collins and Dandelion (2014) state, “Quakers are absolutely certain (rationally) that they can never be certain (theologically)” (p. 294). Dandelion (2004) explains that for Quakers it is considered “better to journey than to arrive” (p. 225). Rather than develop theological certainties, Quakers accept the concept of the “absolute perhaps” (Robson, 2010, p. 67), explained by Robson (2010, p. 78) as the idea that:

It is more comfortable for a Quaker to construct a personal narrative which depicts him or herself as a seeker who has not yet found and who

obdurately remains open to new light, without having any firm criteria about what is light and what is darkness.

This was explored by Kline (2012) in his ethnographic research in a Quaker community in Scotland in the mid-1990s. Kline found that “Friends maintain consensus by framing diversity with the use of a discursive figure – the spiritual journey” (p. 294). This ‘journey’ trope did not manifest itself quite as clearly with the Palmerston North Quakers. Whilst they spoke of the journey of leaving other Christian denominations and becoming Quakers, they did not frame their *Quaker experience* as a journey in the same way as Kline’s research participants did. For my research participants theological freedom is one distinguishing theme of the Quaker community that acts as a boundary between the Religious Society of Friends and other Christian denominations and religious groups. I next discuss the second theme of practice.

Practice: Social and Theological

The other theme that I discuss here and which emerged from my interviews was with regards to practice, both social and theological. According to my research participants, practice as a distinguishing feature of this community comes in two different but interconnected ways. The first is in terms of how they live their everyday lives (social) and the second is in the way in they *practice* being Quakers (theological).

Social

Abbott and Abbott (2008) argue that since “their origins, Quakers placed a strong emphasis on simplicity and integrity as ‘testimonies’ or behaviour integral to everyday life and practice which served as a witness of their faith” (p. 232). That is, for Quakers simplicity is “both a theological and social concept” (Abbott and Abbott, 2008, p. 232). An important part of a Friend’s life is the Quaker testimonies, their principles of peace, integrity, simplicity and equality. It is these testimonies that help guide a Quaker’s day-to-day practice, principles which as Coleman and Collins (2000) state “provide a template for action” (p. 323). These testimonies were mentioned by all of my research participants as an important part of *their* Quakerism and are also prominent through the Quaker publications. Alan for example, stated that “the testimonies are quoted much more than the 10 commandments” thus positioning Quakers as distinct from other Christian denominations.

From my fieldwork, subtle manifestations of these testimonies emerged. These examples included not letting their children play with toy guns, turning down certain job opportunities (for example, a teaching position in the army) and not having positional titles (for example, “Dr.”) on their office door. Perhaps the most obvious manifestation of a Quaker ‘testimony’ was their simplicity. Coleman and Collins (2000) have written on how “the plain” (p. 317), or simple, is part of the Quaker discourse. They argue that “simplicity’ is a common theme in Quaker texts, in spoken ministry during worship, and during formal and informal group

discussions” (p. 322). This simplicity can be understood as a toning down, where modesty rather than extravagance is valued.

As I mentioned in chapter three the clothes worn by attendees were plain (but smart and tidy) and the cars driven were not luxurious. The houses that I conducted the interviews in were, in my opinion, cosy and comfortable rather than opulent. And as for the meeting houses; they were the epitome of plain. From muted colours on walls to non-descript carpets, chairs and tables as well as the actual buildings themselves, there seemed to be a constant presence of ‘plainness’. Abbot and Abbott (2008) explain that when the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL), a “major national religious lobbying organization in the United States” (p. 230) expanded its headquarters, simplicity and plainness was the chosen design style despite having millions of dollars available to spend. This Quaker ‘way’ “sees the mode of life as the outward evidence of the inner orientation to God...so *what Friends do* becomes a more convincing statement of faith than any words” (Scully, 2009, p. 115; emphasis in original). As Joe Volk, the executive secretary of the FCNL stated “the building is so much more than bricks and mortar. It is a manifestation of the practice of faith” (1998, as cited in Abbott & Abbott, 2008, p. 231). Out of my research participants, I feel that Julie best summarised the Quaker practical day-to-day emphasis, when she stated that:

Quakerism is about how human beings live together in harmony, in communities. So it’s a very practical thing. [...] It’s not about “I’m going to get my reward on the other side”; it’s about “how do I get along with my

neighbours?"; "How do I save the land for my children?" [and] "How do I keep my neighbours from being persecuted?"

Here Julie emphasises that for Quakers, how they live their day-to-day lives is considered more important than a particular religious belief. This sentiment is made clear in *Quaker Faith & Practice* (The Religious Society of Friends, 2003) which states that "Quakers have always seen the outer life as an expression of the inner" (p. 76) and *Advices & Queries* (The Religious Society of Friends in Aotearoa/New Zealand, 2013) which suggests to "let your life speak" (p. 4). This social practice is connected to another shared understanding of what distinguishes a Quaker, theological practice.

Theological

My research participants' day-to-day practices do not differentiate them from a member of other religious groups in any particular way. I have met plenty of peaceful Catholics, Muslims who value integrity and Buddhists who believe in a plain, or simple, life. Andria also struggled with responding to my questions about what it is that differentiates Quakers, mentioning that "I can't really say how it [Quakerism] differs from other [religious] places, because there are people who are just the same and they might have a different format". By different format, Andria infers a different way or *practice* of expressing their values, thus demonstrating the importance of theological practice in distinguishing religious communities. As Dandelion (2004) states that "it is the way which Quakers practise their religion which is definitional, not belief content" (p. 221). Alan, whilst not a local Quaker, built on this when he voiced his opinion that "a person is not a Quaker unless they

are [theologically] practicing as a Quaker”, again emphasising the importance of theological practice. As I see it, the most prominent practice that distinguishes a Quaker from other religious communities is *how* they worship. This includes sitting in a circle in silence, ‘centring down’ and connecting with their Inner Light. Yet as Block (2008) argues “community is built when we sit in circles” (p. 151) and is therefore something which numerous other communities also do rather than being exclusively Quaker. For example support groups like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) sit in circles at their meetings, whilst I remember feeling like a ‘part of the group’ (with a sense of community) sitting around the fire whilst camping with the cub scouts.⁷² Therefore it is not so much the circle and silence that distinguishes a Quaker worship group, than the context of that circle and silence (the focus on connecting with the Inner Light) that together form the distinguishing *theological practice* of this community. As the New Zealand Quaker website states, “out of the spiritual basis of our beliefs [of the Inner Light] springs our practice” (The Religious Society of Friends Aotearoa New Zealand, n.d. - h).

This was also reflected in the words of my research participants. When I asked my question of “what distinguishes a Quaker from other religions/denominations?” Michelle stated “the quiet worship, the silent worship” whilst Evelyn told me that “the silence [in meeting] is all important”. As they indicate, and as chapter three demonstrated, the meeting (as well as the meeting house) is seen by my research participants as one of the most important parts of their Quakerism. It helps them

⁷² Cub Scouts are part of the same organisation as the Scouts. The difference is that Cub Scouts are for those who are not yet old enough to be Scouts.

feel like, and identify as, a Quaker. That is, it *distinguishes* them from other religious communities and therefore demarcates them in a way. Collins and Dandelion (2014), commenting on the work by Giselle Vincent on “Quagans” (p. 297) (those who identify as Quakers *and* Pagans) argue for the “importance of practice (ritual) in sustaining identity” (p. 297). By this they mean that it is through practice that “we demarcate the boundaries of...particular communities” (Brown, 2002, p. 3).

According to Collins (2004) “group solidarity” is another outcome of an interaction ritual, a term he defines as “a feeling of membership” (p. 49). In their research on Sacred Harp singing in the United States, where they looked at their practice in terms of an interaction ritual, Heider and Warner (2010) found that the “group assembly” (Collins, 2004, p. 48) created a sense of community, whereby “singers come over time to think of themselves as “Sacred Harp singers”” (p. 93; emphasis added) with a sense of “group membership” (Collins, 2004, p. 7). For the Palmerston North Quakers the meeting for worship is a practical differentiation from members of other religious groups. It is *how* they practice being ‘Quakerly’ that they feel distinguishes their community. As the Quakers see their practice as such a demarcating feature of their community, I look next at what this practice entails.

The *shared understandings* of ‘Quakerly’ expectations

For most religions there are behavioural expectations.⁷³ These may include anything from daily prayers at specific times of the day (for example, required by Islam), not eating certain foods (for example, beef in Hinduism and pork in Judaism) and abstinence from alcohol (for example, required by Mormonism). Adopting the ‘correct’ behaviour is a key part of belonging to a community. Brown (2002) quoting *Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language* states that a definitional element of a community is of “a social group sharing common characteristics” (p. 2). Minar and Greer (1969) argue that “community is indivisible from human actions” (p. ix) whilst Felkins (2002) states that “the core of community is in the common values that bond its members” (p. 18). What Brown, Minar and Greer and Felkins are stating is that in terms of community, behaviour matters and is part of forming its boundaries. As I have argued, the Quaker values and testimonies (principles) help influence a Friend’s behaviour. Despite this, there is room for a variety of interpretations regarding what is ‘Quakerly’ behaviour. As Scully (2009) states, in terms of behaviour “there is considerable potential for diversity in the understanding of what a ‘good Quaker’ is” (p. 119); each has their own idea as to what this constitutes. I also found this to be the case during my fieldwork.

⁷³ This is not to say that all proponents of these religions always follow these rules, but that they are *expectations*.

Expectations of behaviour

The Religious Society of Friends Aotearoa New Zealand website (n.d. - i) states that “our practice...is guided by our Testimonies - peace, integrity, simplicity and equality”. Yet without practical guidelines⁷⁴ this is left to personal interpretation, so I wondered what sort of behavioural expectations they had of themselves. What did the community understand ‘appropriate’ behaviour to be? In perhaps typical Quaker fashion, the answer was not clear cut. On one level the expectation is that there is no expectation. During the focus group one Quaker stated “I don’t expect anything from other people and I don’t expect them to expect anything from me” (field notes). Others stated that “there’s nothing rigidly set down” (Percy) and that “there is no expectation that you’ll do a particular thing” (Ryan). Expectations, it would seem, could lead to disappointment as people are not perfect and often make mistakes. As Julie explained, “if I have expectations of others, I’m just going to end up with a broken heart”. On another level there seems to be an expectation of commitment. Denise explained that:

If someone wants to join the Quakers, there is no absolute set of rules, but there is an expectation that they will contribute [by attending the meetings for worship] to being a part of the Society of Friends. So that may mean being a part of the Quaker community.

Michelle also spoke of the importance of commitment, stating:

⁷⁴ The Quaker publication *Advices & Queries* (The Religious Society of Friends in Aotearoa/New Zealand, 2013) does offer guidelines, but in an abstract way. It does not explain *exactly* what a Quaker should and should not do. An example of one of its advices is “Aim to live simply. A simple lifestyle freely chosen is a source of strength” (p. 13).

I like the definition [of expectations] that we talked about. About making a commitment to that which is important and that we have different ideas and different values as to what is important. Joining the Quakers is a way of expressing my commitment.

A commitment to the Quaker community (for example, attending the meetings for worship) is therefore seen as an expectation of behaviour but there is no written list of things that a Friend must or must not do. Whilst my research participant's view is that there is no expectation of behaviour for a Quaker, based on my fieldwork I believe there are a number of unspoken expectations regarding the meeting for worship which are complied with. There is an expectation that one will sit quietly during the meeting for worship and not disturb others. There is an expectation that whoever is speaking a 'ministry' is not interrupted, and that criticising other's views would not be viewed positively. In terms of shared understandings of how a Quaker *should* behave, there is certainly room to 'manoeuvre' and individual interpretation features heavily. I feel it may be useful to recount an anecdote from my fieldwork which demonstrates and perhaps exemplifies Quaker behaviour. Whilst their words may not quite clearly demonstrate their practical expectations, their actions do.

The Mount Eden worship group in Auckland, in addition to having a silent meeting on a Sunday and a Wednesday also have a walking group on a Tuesday. As I was in Auckland for a few days to conduct some fieldwork there (attending the silent meeting on the Sunday), I thought it would be a valuable opportunity to spend some more time with Quakers. So just before 10am a local reserve was chosen as

the destination for the weekly walk and we all jumped into cars (I was given a lift) and departed from the meeting house. After walking around a scenic reserve for around 40 minutes or so,⁷⁵ we began to head back to the where the vehicles were parked. Whilst we all walked towards the cars, one of the Quakers dropped her car keys into a deep drain at the side of the road. I was just in front of her when it happened, but her reaction was quite muted, a simple “oh dear” was all that I heard. In spite of the protests that it “really was not all that important”, the Quaker group (and I) sprang into action. Together (I could not stand back and just watch) we lifted the heavy grate of the drain and dragged it to one side. Then one of the Quakers rolled up his sleeves and lay face down with his head over the drain. Myself and another Quakers grabbed hold of his legs, and lowered him down into the drain (a good 2 metres deep. Luckily there was only about 10cm of water at the bottom). Our first attempt to retrieve the keys was unsuccessful. Fortunately a local tradesman came over to help us. Using his tools he managed to retrieve the keys whilst we held onto his legs. The owner of the car keys offered many thanks and a financial reward to the tradesman.

This incident illustrates, perhaps better than what I could learn in an interview, Quaker behaviour. There is no book or set of rules that says one must obey, but Quakers are people focused people and like to help others when they can. Not that I am arguing (and nor would any Friend suggest) that only Quakers would do deeds such as this, but this is typical of a Quaker, to *want* to help someone in need of

⁷⁵ We all chatted as we walked. I did wonder whether it would be a silent walk, but this was not the case. However, on the walk, a Friend told me about Quaker weddings and funerals which he had attended in Britain, which *were* held in silence.

help. As Huckleberry states, Quakerism is a “human centred lifestyle”. Having documented the Quaker expectations of behaviour (or more accurately, their minimal expectations), I look now at what behaviours they seem to avoid.

Expectations of behaviour to avoid

Robson (2010) states that “shame occurs when one feels negatively evaluated by oneself or others” and that therefore “shame and sin do not feature in the Quaker community narrative” (p. 75). For Quakers, judgement of other Friend’s behaviour is not something that they feel is a positive attribute and as such is behaviour that is avoided. Eva Pinthus (as cited in Robson, 2010) has even stated that “what Quakers call ‘being human’ other [Christian] denominations call sin” (p. 75). Chambers (2009) argues that “the silent form of worship and the lack of sermon and institutional authority would tend against the mechanisms that are held to reinforce the normative standard in some other [Christian] denominations” (p. 96). Rather than prohibitions coming from a central source, Quakers decide for themselves what they should and should not do. During my interviews the question I specifically asked was “are there any things that you avoid doing because you are a Quaker?” The responses were almost uniform; there was nothing that they did not or could not do *because* they were Friends. Many had spoken of the ease of becoming a Quaker, comparing it to coming ‘home’, where they instantly felt their values aligned and like they belonged. Because of this feeling it was difficult for them to say what behaviour or actions they avoided because they were Quakers, as Huckleberry explained,

Many of my ways are naturally the ways of a Quaker, not necessarily a 'good' Quaker, but identifiable. It's very difficult to say "yes" or "no". As I've said, I've found myself quite naturally, once I found Quakers, I found it very natural for me. So it's very difficult for me to say the things I don't do.

This drew parallels with what some of my other research participants were saying. Sarah stated that "I don't think I avoid doing them because I am a Quaker, I think I avoid doing them because they don't fit with my values" whilst Percy reasoned that "it's a matter of what I am myself and that merges very satisfactorily with the Quaker way of doing things". As Huckleberry, Sarah and Percy elucidate it is difficult to say what they avoid doing *because* they are Friends, but they do adhere to Quaker values which also happen to be their own. They are unable to separate themselves from Quakerism. For my research participants it is a way of, and an approach, to life. Rather than Quakerism being something that they *do*, it is more of who they are. This is why they felt at 'home' and that their values aligned with the community when they became Friends. As Huckleberry joked, "if you were to perform an autopsy on me, I think you'd find a 'Q' down the centre of all my bones!"

Spending time with Quakers and speaking to my research participants led me to understand that in terms of behaviour, no one would (or have the authority to) admonish another Quaker for doing or not doing something in particular. There are no '10 Commandments' to be obeyed. What I did find is that Quakers behave in a way that is conducive to their values. That is, to their Quakerism. The majority of

my research participants spoke of enjoying a glass of wine or beer but of not drinking excessively.⁷⁶ They spoke of avoiding putting people down or fuelling arguments with others. They spoke of being aware of which consumer goods were less degrading to the environment and how that influenced their purchasing, of being pacifists and not gambling. Gambling *is* actually something that Quakers often avoid. Chambers (2009) states that “the advent of the National Lottery brought gambling into particular focus for Friends” and that a “public statement of opposition to it was issued in 1995 and reaffirmed in 2004” (p. 95). With regards to gambling, Ryan stated that it is something he would be “less inclined to do, but none of these things are black and white. [...] Quakerism is very much a context in which you make your own decisions”. I thought that Michelle’s take on this issue was interesting and it connected to what Ryan had said in terms of it not being “black and white”, as she explains:

Doing the lottery is [something that I avoid]. [...] I have occasionally bought raffle tickets, like when we were raising money here for ‘Relay for life’. But I pay the money and write someone else’s name [on the raffle]. A compromise!

Quakers conduct themselves as *they* see fit. Only they decide how they should live, it cannot come from an outside source but rather from *their* Inner Light. During my interview with Michelle she told a story which encapsulates how Quakers decide what is right and what is not,

⁷⁶ Smoking and alcohol are forbidden within the Palmerston North meeting house, although there is an ashtray outside for smokers.

There's this very famous question of if you were walking along a high street with your, I think it was asked to young men, girlfriend and someone attacked your girlfriend, would you as a conscientious objector refuse to do anything or would you just watch her be killed? The answer is, well I think it is, you might have to act but you decide what is right or wrong. You don't let anyone make that decision for you. [...] What you say is "it's my responsibility to judge what's right or wrong, my conscientious objection, I'm not going to pass that responsibility to someone else".

Michelle's story illustrates the Quaker perspective on how to confront issue of behaviour choice and how the responsibility is theirs. Ultimately it is up to each Quaker to decide what is right and what is wrong, what to do and what to avoid.

According to Collins (2004), another "ingredient" (p. 48) of an interaction ritual are "feelings of morality" (p. 49). These feelings Collins (2004) explains, are a "sense of rightness in adhering to the group" and "respecting its symbols" (p. 49). In this case the symbols are the Quaker testimonies (principles) of peace, integrity, simplicity and equality. Collins (2010) further argues that "successful rituals produce...*moral feelings* of right and wrong" (p. 2; emphasis in original). For Quakers, their ideas of right and wrong (of what they would deem 'good' and 'bad' behaviour) does not come from the 'ritual' (meeting for worship) but is reinforced by it. By this I posit that the ritual *reinforces* the idea of the validity of the behaviour that they already conform to, as the ritual does not produce this behaviour. What they choose to do (and choose not to do) is already part of who they are and part of their own values.

As I have demonstrated, becoming a Quaker has not changed them in any significant manner. In a way the meeting for worship helps *assure* Friends of their behaviour(s) and helps them feel more like a Quaker. Collins (2004) states that the “periodic assemblies...revivify this feeling” (p. 39). That is, the meeting for worship revives and reminds those present of the Quaker testimonies (principles) which in turn help influence their behaviour. As Ryan describes the meeting, “I think it reminds me of how I’d like to live”. Having outlined a series of shared understandings which explain how my research participants understand the ‘boundaries’ of Quakerism, I look now at source of these community understandings.

The source of the community’s *shared understandings*

In addition to contributing to the Palmerston North Quaker’s sense of community, the meeting for worship has another effect. It contributes towards enabling a set of shared understandings about how its boundaries differentiate it from other communities. As Brown (2002) has argued, an important part of understanding community is in recognising how it differs from other communities. Collins (2004) states that interaction ritual “ingredients” such as “mutual focus of attention” and “shared mood” “reinforce each other” (2004, p. 48), that,

As the persons become more tightly focused on their common activity, more aware of what each other is doing and feeling, and more aware of each other’s awareness, they experience their shared emotion more intensely.

That is, during the silent meeting for worship the more my research participants 'centre down' and focus on the Inner Light, the more that they become aware that that is what others in the meeting are doing, thus creating a sense of solidarity. Likewise, the stronger the feeling of solidarity, the easier they are able to 'centre down', thus ensuring a "feedback intensification" (Collins, 2004, p. 48). As Michelle explains, the "silence gets thicker [and] more intense" during a meeting. Plugh (2012) states that "the Quaker practice strips away the verbal level and puts the community in a state of collective being, where each member's physicality and biological rhythms become points of perception" (p. 213). Collins (2004) labels this "rhythmic entrainment" (p. 48), whereby "people have fallen into the same rhythm [and] into a flow of interaction" (p. 77). This "rhythmic entrainment" (p. 48) however, is only possible with the addition of Collins' first two interaction ritual "ingredients": "group assembly" and a "barrier to outsiders" (2004, p. 48).

These "ingredients" are essential as they create a sense of distinctness, a 'boundary' that separates the community from the outside world, even if for a short period of time. These "ingredients" (p. 48) Collins (2004) argues, is why a funeral or wedding could not be "conducted over the telephone" (p. 54). Without the "group assembly", there would be a "lack of feedback, of seeing the others present and being seen by them" (2004, p. 54). Together these "ingredients" combine to form a "collective effervescence" (2004, p. 48), an "intensification of shared experience" (2004, p. 35) and a "shared emotional/cognitive experience" (p. 48). This collective effervescence results in "ritual outcomes" (Collins, 2004, p. 48), which include "emotional energy" and "standards of morality" (ibid.).

However perhaps the most important outcome that emerges is the “group solidarity” (p. 49), which Collins (2004) describes as a “feeling of membership” (p. 49). Collins argues that “rhythmic synchronization is correlated with solidarity” (2004, p. 76), and it is this solidarity that enables a set of shared understandings regarding the boundaries of this community. This solidarity produces a set of common understandings, drawing parallels with the Sacred Harp singers whose own ritual “creates social solidarity [and thus makes] an unlikely assortment of individuals into a committed group” (Heider & Warner, 2010, p. 86). This solidarity is what Fernandez (1965) found the Fang Bwiti to label “*nlem-mvore* (one-heartedness)” (p. 904) and what he labelled as symbolic consensus; a “high degree of social solidarity” (ibid.). The interaction ritual and its outcomes does not signify that the members of the community will all interpret community practices and interpretations the same way, but it does produce a solidarity that enables a set of shared understandings about the distinctness of that community.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined some of the shared understandings of the Palmerston North Quakers regarding what makes this community what it is and what distinguishes it from other religious communities. Brown (2002) argues that “the key element of community...lies in how we demarcate the boundaries” (p. 2) and therefore to understand a community’s boundaries is to understand the community. This chapter has further demonstrated the importance the meeting for worship has for the Palmerston North Quakers and has shown that although there

are differing understandings of it, thematic similarities emerge. These understandings include the valuing of silence, a time to 'refresh' and a period of possibility. For my research participants there are two main distinguishing features of this community, a sense of theological freedom and their practice. This practice has two interconnected aspects to it. The first is their moral living practice, or how they live day-to-day. These expectations are open to interpretation and dependent on a Quaker's personal values. There is no set of rules stating what a Friend can and cannot do. The second practice is theological, which I argue *does* have a set of expectations. This practice centres on the meeting for worship and how it is conducted, sitting in a circle in silence whilst 'centring down' and connecting to their Inner Light. These practices are connected as the moral is influenced by the theological and it is this practice (theological) that most clearly distinguishes their community.

Yet whilst a community will always possess some shared understandings (thus making them a community in the first place), as Pyles (2014) states "their experiences and values are not always unified" (p. 9). There will always be differences in values and interpretations. This chapter has also addressed how this community's understandings are held together. That is, how they are able to come to a set of shared understandings. This is achieved through the meeting for worship, which, drawing on Collins (2004) can be seen as an "interaction ritual" (p. 48). This meeting for worship includes a number of "ingredients" (p. 48), which together produce a "collective effervescence" (Collins, 2004, p. 48) which in turn produces a series of "outcomes" (ibid.). These outcomes assist in helping hold the

community's understandings together, but it is the outcome of "group solidarity" (2004, p. 48) that is particularly important in this instance. It is the group solidarity, described as a "feeling of membership" (ibid., p. 49) that binds these shared understandings together. It is this solidarity that produces a sense of "one-heartedness" whereby "people understand each other" (Fernandez, 1965, p. 904). Essentially not only does the meeting for worship enable a set of shared understandings about the distinctness of this community, but it also helps 'bind' together the diverse opinions that are present in this community. And by binding the community together, the community becomes more distinct and its boundaries become clearer.

Chapter Five – Concluding chapter

How can you understand the infinite with a finite mind? No, it's too big
for anybody to grasp.

Evelyn

This research has focussed on understanding the Palmerston North Quaker community. More specifically I have answered two sets of questions that shed light on this Christian denomination. The first of these sets of questions was that, considering the lack of a centralised doctrine and authority figures, whether the Quakers still had a sense of community and if so, what enabled that sense. The second set of questions centred on what their shared understandings are with regards to the distinguishing elements of their community and how these common understandings are able to emerge. Crapo (2003, pp. 4-5) states that fieldwork is an essential aspect of anthropology and it was through participant observation at Quaker meetings for worship that I came to an understanding of what it means to be a part of this religious group. Despite identifying as an agnostic and occasionally as an atheist, I have long had an interest in religion, especially Christianity due to my upbringing. Over the years I have attended the occasional Church service (Anglican and Catholic), as well as spending time with a non-denominational

Christian Church as part of my honours degree. Attending twelve meetings for worship in Palmerston North (seven at the main meeting house and five at Massey University), two each in Whanganui and Wellington and one in Auckland has taught me just how different the Quakers are from other Christian denominations, and as such, the spectrum of diversity that exists within Christianity. This participant observation experience gave me a fuller perspective than if I had conducted interviews alone. It meant that I could see what was actually happening when they worshipped together - the looks on the people's faces, their body language, and I could experience the silence and the overall ambience. The interviews I conducted were also important. Speaking with ten Palmerston North Quakers and two Australian Friends who were completing a residency here allowed me to ask specific questions about the intricacies of their community. These fieldwork methods were complimented by other events that I took part in, such as the Business Meeting, the focus group which I organised, the discussion group (all in Palmerston North) and the walking tour (in Auckland). All combined to add further depth to my fieldwork and my overall understanding of New Zealand Quakerism.

From a theoretical perspective, I have employed a variety of sources. To answer my first set of questions I used the work of a number of theorists of 'community', including John Bruhn, David Minar and Scott Greer, Patricia Felkins and Susan Love Brown as well as drawing Victor and Edith Turner's concept of *communitas*. For my second set of questions, I also drew on selected community theory, as well Randall Collins' interaction ritual theory and James Fernandez's work on consensus to

frame my understanding. This bricolage of theory allowed me to understand this community in a more nuanced and complex way.

My research has shown that the Palmerston North Quakers do have a sense of community. Brown (2002) argues that “the key element of community...lies in how we demarcate the boundaries of the particular communities of which we speak” (p. 3). These boundaries became clear during my research when I learned that in order to become a Quaker, a specific process must be followed. This demonstrates that there is a boundary between the Quakers and other religious communities, those who are Friends and those who are not. Bruhn (2005) states that community occurs when “a group shares common goals, values, and, perhaps a way of life that reinforce each other” (p. 11). Almost all of my research participants came to Quakerism from other Christian denominations, leaving because they felt disillusioned with the values within those Churches. Joining the Friends, either as a member or attender, made them feel like they were coming ‘home’ and that their values aligned to the Quaker values, which mirrored their own. These values of tolerance, humility and openness allowed my research participants to feel like they shared the values and way of life as other community members. It gave them a sense of being in common with other Quakers, a feeling of being distinct.

Based on my fieldwork experience, I believe that the Quaker’s sense of community is engendered in a number of ways. These include the sense of responsibility in helping run the worship group, publications such as *Quaker Faith & Practice* (The Religious Society of Friends, 2003) and *Advices & Queries* (The Religious Society of Friends in Aotearoa/New Zealand, 2013) which encompass both the Quaker

testimonies (the principles of peace, equality, simplicity and integrity) and the shared common values (tolerance, humility and openness) which encompass those principles. This sense also emerges when meeting Friends at Quaker events such as the Yearly Meeting and the Monthly Meeting (more commonly referred to as the Business Meeting).

However I posit that the Palmerston North Quaker's sense of community is *primarily* enabled through two other interconnected features, namely their weekly meeting for worship and the meeting house. Dandelion (1996) refers to "Quaker time" as "the time spent as a Quaker with other Quakers" (p. xxvi). For the majority of my research participants their "Quaker time" (ibid.) mainly occurred during the meeting for worship, held every Sunday morning at the meeting house. That is, whilst Quakerism is clearly an indivisible part of they are, it is during the meeting for worship (always held at the meeting house) that they experience *being* part of the community. It is during this "Quaker time" (Dandelion, 1996, p. xxvi) that their sense of belonging to a distinct community is strengthened. As my research participants indicated, outside of "Quaker time" (ibid.) they do not spend much time with other Friends. Therefore their experience of being part of the Quaker community mainly occurs at the Sunday morning meeting. Critical to this sense of community is the feeling of *communitas*. *Communitas* is an intense but momentary feeling of joy, satisfaction and togetherness that frees people from the constraints of social hierarchy and status. It often emerges during liminal periods, such as the meeting for worship, and makes this Sunday morning event an enjoyable and rewarding experience for my research participants. As the feelings of *communitas*

helps make the meeting such a valuable part of their week, my research participants rarely miss an opportunity to worship. As a result their sense of belonging to a distinct community is invigorated on a weekly basis.

In terms of the shared understandings about what distinguishes the Palmerston North Quaker community, my research participants identified theological freedom as well as theological and social practice as the differentiating factors. This theological freedom includes having no centralised doctrine, authority figures or list of rules that must be followed and stems from the Quaker concept of Inner Light, explained by Friends as “that of God in everyone” (Chenoweth, 2009, p. 321). This concept shapes their theological practice, or *how* they worship as Quakers, which is also considered a distinguishing element of the community. Worshipping in silence which may or may not be broken by a ‘ministry’, whilst sat in a circle is understood as being a particularly distinguishing element of the community *by* the community. In my experience too this method is quite unique within Christian denominations.

Another practice that was cited as a demarcating element of the community was their social practice, or how they conduct themselves day-to-day. This social practice is influenced by the values that they already possess (tolerance, humility and openness) but is *reinforced* by the meeting for worship, thus demonstrating how the two distinguishing Quaker practices (theological and social) are connected. This social practice is dependent on individual Quaker’s interpretations; there is no right or wrong way to be a Quaker. Beyond obeying the ‘law of the land’, no Friend will (or can) tell another Quaker what behaviour they should or should not do. The Quaker framework thus allows for much individual interpretation, which signifies

that there is a plurality of opinions within the community. It is therefore important that there is a way of these shared understandings being held together, as there is no authority figures to maintain what Moller (2005) refers to as “cultural smoothness” (p. 37).

My research has further demonstrated that these shared understandings are held together from a sense of solidarity and a symbolic consensus that emerge from the meeting for worship, further demonstrating the importance of this ‘ritual’. The meeting for worship is an example of what Randall Collins (2004) would refer to as an “interaction ritual” (p. 48). An interaction ritual, through a combination of “ritual ingredients” (“group assembly”, “barriers to outsiders”, “mutual focus of attention” and a “shared mood”) (p. 48) produces a “collective effervescence”, described by Collins as an “intensification of shared experience” (p. 35) and an “experience of heightened mutual awareness” (p. 36). This collective effervescence subsequently produces a series of “ritual outcomes” (ibid.), such as “emotional energy”, “group solidarity” and “standards of morality” (Collins, 2004, p. 48). I posit that the most important of these outcomes is “group solidarity” (Collins, 2004, p. 49), described by Collins as a “feeling of membership” (p. 49). This solidarity enables what is essentially a diverse group of people to be able to reach a “symbolic consensus”, a sense of “one-heartedness”, whereby “people understand each other” (Fernandez, 1965, p. 904).

What has become clearly evident throughout this research is that the meeting for worship and the meeting house have significant effects on this community. It helps produce feelings of *communitas* and collective effervescence, which Olaveson

(2001) states are “functionally equivalent concepts” (p. 99). Although these feelings are short lived, they do help engender a sense of community and enable the Quakers to come to a set of shared understandings. However, whilst *communitas*/collective effervescence is a relatively brief feeling which comes and goes, the result causes effects which are far more durable. As Collins (2004) states “collective effervescence [and *communitas*] is a momentary state, but it carries over into more prolonged effects when it becomes embodied in sentiments of group solidarity” (p. 36). That is, these emotions come to reside within the feelings of solidarity that accumulate over time from being a part of a distinct community, thus ensuring a symbiotic relationship. The more the feelings of solidarity strengthen amongst the community, so the likelihood increases of collective effervescence/*communitas* emerging which subsequently enables that feeling of solidarity to further strengthen.

These research findings contribute to the existing knowledge of Quakerism, and as such the anthropology of religion, in a number of different ways. First of all, this research presents an ethnographic exploration of New Zealand Quakers and provides an in-depth insight into a critically important community ‘ritual’. Until now research amongst Quakers in New Zealand has largely taken an historical perspective, so my research has made significant progress in furthering the knowledge of the lived experience of Quakerism in this country.

There has also been limited research on what gives the Quakers a sense of community, their shared understandings and how they come to those shared understandings considering their lack of authority figures. Whilst Kline (2012) found

that the 'journey trope' contributed to Friends' maintenance of unity in the particular Quaker community in which he conducted his research, I believe my research adds another perspective to this issue of sense of community, unity, consensus and shared understandings amongst Friends. My research has demonstrated the central importance of the meeting for worship and the meeting house (as well as other community events and features) in not only engendering a sense of community but also enabling a set of shared understandings regarding the community, and thus maintaining unity. Despite spending years researching a Quaker community and attending meetings for worship, 'Business Meetings' and organising focus groups (much like I did), Kline did not mention these features as being of great importance. Instead, Kline found that the 'journey trope' was what maintained unity. As such, Kline's and my own research can be useful in a comparative sense to others who research Quaker communities. That is, to see if the 'journey trope', the primary Quaker 'ritual' (and meeting house) or perhaps some other aspect or feature influences Friends' sense of community and unity. Finally, this research provides a study whereby Randall Collins' 'interaction ritual' theory is used in the context of a religious community. As Wollschleger (2012) states, "as of yet, minimal work has been done in this area" (p. 900). This is despite Collins' theory drawing on the work of Emile Durkheim, a prominent researcher of religion.

These findings are based on my fieldwork amongst a liberal Quaker worship group and thus provide a platform for more ethnographic research amongst this Christian denomination. Other avenues for study could include other branches of Quakerism

(such as programmed, evangelical or conservative) or even those that identify as Quakers but choose not to attend the meeting for worship. In light of this research, such studies would provide an interesting comparative element.

This fieldwork has marked my second piece of ethnographic work, an endeavour that has furthered my understanding regarding the complexities of a religious community as well as having significantly developed my understanding of anthropology. At one level I have learned about the numerous ways through which a sense of community can be engendered and how there are various parts to this sense. On another level, my understanding of how members of a diverse community come to understand each other has grown considerably. The intricacies of this community are far clearer now than they were, as is my understanding of just how challenging anthropological fieldwork and analysis is. This research has also enabled me to learn a lot about both myself and Quakerism and I certainly have an appreciation of Quaker community elements. The Quaker characteristic of believing in the 'Light', that essence or spark of God/good that resides in all people, is one such element. This journey has made me re-think the importance of connecting with people, or what Quakers would refer to as being 'Together in the Light', and has challenged my being in the world.

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Appendix one

Interview questions

1. How long have you been a Quaker?
2. Why did you become a Quaker?
3. How often do you attend worship groups and where is your usual place of worship? Do you attend other Quaker events?
4. Do you see/socialise with other Quakers outside of worship?
5. How do you feel about the worship? What does it mean to you?
6. What effect does being a Quaker have on your life? Does it influence how you live?
7. What distinguishes a Quaker from other religions? What makes a Quaker *a Quaker*?
8. Is there a Quaker way of doing things? If so, is there such a thing as a 'good' Quaker? And if so, what makes a 'good' Quaker?
9. So are there things that you avoid doing because you're a Quaker?
10. Overall, what would you say are the "shared understandings" of the Quakers?

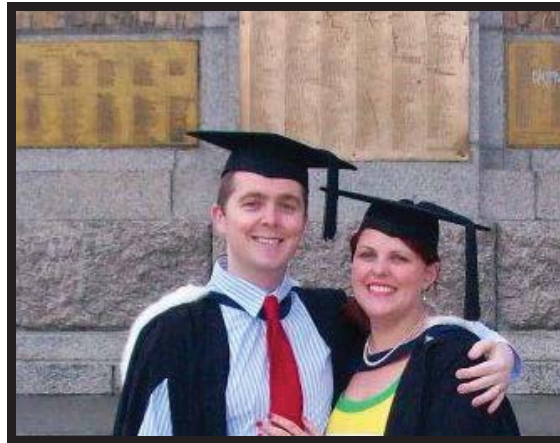
Appendix two



Massey University

Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa

Diverse beliefs, single religion: An exploration of the Palmerston North Quakers' shared understandings



My wife and I at our graduation

Greetings everyone, my name is Ian Keyes and I am and post-graduate student in social anthropology right here in Palmerston North, at Massey University. I am very grateful to be able to spend some time with this worship group and look forward to getting to know you all.

As part of my study I am exploring the shared understanding of Quakers, what it means to be a Quaker and how to act 'Quakerly'. I am excited to be working on this project and hope to learn as much as I can.

If anyone has any queries, please do not hesitate to talk to me or alternatively, contact me on [phone number] or [email]

Ethics approval

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor John O'Neill, Director (Research Ethics), telephone 06 350 5249, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz.

Appendix three

Focus group themes

1. Despite the lack of a centralised doctrine, do you still see Quakerism as a distinct community?
2. If you don't have to be religious, why do people join the Quakers?
3. How is the different belief systems dealt with? What about the different practices?
4. What are the expectations of a Quaker?