

HOW TRANSITIONAL CHANGES IN FAMILY AND FRIENDSHIP
PATTERNS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE TWENTY-FIRST
CENTURY INFLUENCE PARTICIPATION IN QUAKER NETWORKS

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ABSTRACT

This article describes the impact of family change at the beginning of the twenty-first century on participation in British Quaker networks. It demonstrates the importance of friendships and shows how these can be formed whenever Friends come to the Religious Society of Friends and are sustained by active and continued involvement with the Society's work. Finally it shows how friendship and participation builds the Society's social capital.

KEYWORDS

family, transition, friendship, networks, social capital.

This article draws on original research designed to reflect on the busyness of Quaker lives in Britain Yearly Meeting at the beginning of the twenty-first century as expressed in minute 13, Britain Yearly Meeting 2001:

Many Friends have been expressing concern at the fullness of our lives. Conflicting calls upon our time can result in stress and not doing anything well. We are called to 'life in all its fullness', but are our lives too full? (Proceedings, Britain Yearly Meeting 2001, minute 13)

The intention of the research was to find out what was happening in the everyday lives of British Quakers and how Friends find time for Quaker matters that interest them. This article explores how changes in family patterns impact on involvement in Quaker communities. No study was available to show how social change had influenced the time individuals had available for service with the Society. Neither was there evidence to show how Quakers approach the choices about time brought about by social change.

Family life in Britain is in transition and this article explores whether or not the new configurations of family also have their part in the generational shift away

from religious affiliation and potentially strain Friends' relationship with the Society. The research interviews illustrate that each lifestyle and different life stages carry problems and benefits for belonging to a religious group with an intrinsic demand on an individual's time. Friends' attitude to marriage is liberalised, and the Society has not held tight to the notion that marriage is for life, heterosexual and entirely economic in its function.

Family change has the potential of blame for a loss of commitment as it fosters choice and individualism unbound by obligation and duty to traditional family roles or to any religious faith or to none. By contrast, just as the relatively new concept of democratic and self-actualised love gains significance, so faith too can be accessed democratically by those who seek out faith filled-fulfilment. Thus, the concept of friendships as family emerges as a typology where family and blood ties are becoming less influential and the research findings indicate that friendships within Quaker networks contribute to commitment within the Society.

METHODOLOGY

Literature searches, including Internet searches, and reading on the themes of this research were sustained throughout the period of the study. Two types of group work were used in the early stages to help define the area of research and to decide upon and test appropriate questions for the interview research. The order was as follows:

1. A vignette study with what was then my home Meeting. For this activity I used a well-researched local history of a Quaker family in my home town (Brown and Masters 1989). The family was significant both in the Quaker Meeting and within the town, and comparisons by the group with the vignettes of the lives described in the book provided a non-threatening opportunity to establish normative judgments (Bryman 2001: 153) about the impact of social change upon personal use of time.
2. Two contrasting groups, a local Meeting and a group from Young Friends General Meeting, took part in a participatory activity used to clarify areas for future one-to-one questions. Quaker silence and sharing were used to elicit the top five identities of each participant. Time-absorbing activities were listed on prepared sheets, with opportunities to feedback in worship sharing.¹
3. Twenty four one-to-one interviews were undertaken in places convenient for the interviewee. The responses to the open ended questions on family change and community form the basis of this article. Four people completed email interviews, since face to face meetings were not practical.
4. Throughout the process transcripts were coded according to the emerging themes in order 'to build creative, grounded and dense theory' (Strauss and Corbin 1998: 88).

FAMILY AND FRIENDSHIP

FAMILY IN TRANSITION

Families today are formed in many variations from the traditional mother, father and children living in close proximity to an extended family network. Over a lifetime, a person may live alone, cohabit, marry, divorce, parent together or alone or any or all of these things (Williams 2004: 6). Families are getting smaller as women have fewer or no children, or choose to have them later (Inman 2005: 2), and a child's life may be formed by its parents, step parents, step brothers and sisters, close friends, same sex partners or ex-partners.

The diversity of living arrangements and family form or groupings has largely gained acceptance both in the wider community and within the Religious Society of Friends. Other economic, social, cultural and demographic changes have shaped family life and key personal relationships. More women are working (either full or part time), there is an increasing older population and a global society brings together people from different parts of the world, and sends others elsewhere to live.

Friends have not been immune from these changes. Unlike some Christian churches in Britain (Heelas et al. 2005: 142), the Society has not promoted the preservation of heterosexual marriage in nuclear families with defined roles for men and women, nor set itself apart as a distinct place for those who uphold those values. The view of family, well defended by some Western churches, pertains to a stage of family developed in the 1950s when few women were out at work and women could not divorce easily without stigma (Giddens 1999: 3). Marriage for love was more common in Britain than marriage as an economic contract, but change has moved much further from this picture and continues to do so. Further, 'recapturing the traditional family is a non-starter', and family continues to be democratised (Giddens 1998: 92-93).

The comments from Young Friends in the participative activity show how relationship begins to emerge as a significant feature, yet the notion of 'relationship' is recent, as thirty-five years ago this term was neither in use nor necessary. This was the case with 'intimacy' and 'commitment' (Giddens 1999: 4), as the commitment was then to the marriage. Giddens claims:

There are three main areas in which emotional communication, and therefore intimacy, are replacing the old ties that used to bind together people's personal lives—in sexual love relations, parent child relations and in friendship. (1999: 4)

Sustaining these relationships is time consuming and an additional function for family and individuals, beyond maintaining economic welfare and physical well-being. Gabb suggests that affective boundaries in familial and friendship relationships are established through time management, balancing family and work time and investing quality time with others (2008: 2). Indeed, in her research 'time was seen as the most valuable resource in many families' and children and parents alike consider that spending time together created family (2008: 11).

FAMILY AND IDENTITY

Family still forms a central part of Friends' identities (Frith 2009: 139). The variety of living circumstances that constitute family for Friends is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of the immediate family circumstances of Friends interviewed

| <i>Relationship description</i> | <i>Number</i> |
|--|---------------|
| Married to another Quaker | 7 |
| Married, but not to a Quaker | 3 |
| Widowed and alone | 1 |
| Active in Quaker networks, living with a non-Quaker partner. | 1 |
| Gay with Quaker partner resident in another city | 1 |
| Living with Quaker partner | 2 |
| Living with non-Quaker partner | 1 |
| Quaker partner living in separate accommodation | 2 |
| Single, occasional attender | 1 |
| Single or divorced, active in Quaker networks | 9 |

Seven of the married interviewees have a Quaker spouse, but the remainder, including the five who are who partnered to a Quaker, are indicative of family patterns which contrast with Quaker family life prior to the end of endogamy in 1859. During the closed quietist period, Quaker children were largely sent to Quaker schools and were later apprenticed or married to other Quakers: 'the tradition was transmitted largely within the family, by example and assumption rather than by teaching' (Punshon 1990: 40). The membership system agreed in 1737 inadvertently established a pattern of birthright membership, as wives and children were deemed members of their husband's or father's Meeting (Punshon 1984: 134):

The first and most obvious effect was that as time went by there grew up a class of birthright Quakers, distinguished by adherence rather than commitment. (Punshon 1984: 13)

Divorce, co-habitation and lone parenting were not to be considered, and a single life outside the family was financially not viable, especially for women. The practice of travelling to local and regional Meetings and of travelling in the ministry brought about a close-knit group with strong personal ties strengthened by inter-marriage (Windsor 1980: 16). Now, of the interview group, only one commented:

Everyone in my immediate family attends, including my siblings and my remaining grandparent. I think we are unusual. There are three of us (siblings) and we are all still involved with Quaker Meetings. Among my Quaker Friends it is hard for me to know who their siblings are as they are not involved in Quakers at all.

In both groups of the participative sessions, most were in straightforward family relationships, including wife, mother, daughter, son, brother or sister. In their responses, some hinted at how their relationship worked. One contribution from an elderly Friend (indicated from her or his other responses) listed 'Parent, still available for advice, but not able to give much in the way of practical help'.

Three younger Friends expanded on their responses (the underlining is the participants' own):

Fiancée—offer support, love, kindness, warmth, friendship, share in interests, being adventurous, learning and supporting a new family, showing: tenderness, commitment, loyalty, respect.

Daughter—offer support, love, generosity, time, listener

Sister—warmth, time, love

Girlfriend—my partnership is important to me and I enjoy spending time together. Want to be able to support my partner when he has a rough time.

Daughter/sister: seeker of love. Family is what really matters.

Friendship is also rated highly by Friends, even accounting for an occasional ambiguity where the word 'Friend' was used as Quaker, but not clearly identified thus. For the Friends in these groups, family and friendship are central to their identity and well ahead of their Quakerism or their work, paid or unpaid.

QUAKERISM AND COUPLES

The research findings reveal what is happening inside Quaker families now and demonstrate the complexities of marriage and partnership that influence Friends' time. The inadequacy of the argument that split households 'in which one partner is a Quaker and one is not' (Dandelion 1996: 330) contributes substantially to the difficulties of finding people to serve in the society is contextualised within the extended range of familial, kin-keeping and friendship duties people perform. The roles single people, whether lifetime single, divorced or widowed, play in the change are developed more fully and friendships are explored as a new form of family.

BEING MARRIED TO ANOTHER QUAKER

Ten of those in the interview group were married, of which six were married to Quakers. Both husband and wife of one couple were interviewed on the same day, but separately. Two people were in their mid-forties, and the remainder were all over fifty, and none of them were remarriages. By and large, it was seen to be much easier to be involved in the Society when married to a Quaker than not. It avoids the need to explain what Committee Meetings are for, or to balance time between Quaker activity and non-Quaker spouses and family. When there is provision for children, they can be included in the outing, and this was often a factor when considering what commitments to take on.

Married Friends' involvement varied according to life stages. Some, who had been involved in the arrangements for Yearly Meeting when the children were young were busy with careers in mid-life, or had turned to local and other interests. One family, where the husband had been a member for a time when the daughter was a child but resigned his membership later, had seen preparative and

Monthly Meeting as a family affair as there was an active Children's Meeting for their daughter. There were also holiday activities for her as well as for the whole family where they could enjoy the company of other Quakers. Although her husband and daughter no longer attend Meeting, there is no need for the wife of this marriage to explain where she is going as the purpose of the Meetings is understood from their now-lapsed Quaker experience. Nevertheless, she feels time needs to be balanced with family when previously their Quaker time would have been shared time.

Despite the advantages of being married to another Quaker, there are challenges as well. It can be difficult to ask for help when work and family weigh heavily, or the Meeting can unduly rely upon couples, especially when they have been involved for a long time. Further, as the demographic make-up of the Society changes, married couples, living in what was once the most ordinary of states, can be excluded. In the example below, a married female Friend, now retired, explains how the other, single women in the Meeting assume she has the companionship of her husband and do not ask her out.

We're missed when we don't go, or feel guilty. The Meeting is very heavily female. When other couples move in they can be almost marginalised. Singles think the couple are OK. Families are not moving in but single women are. It can cause problems in a lot of Meetings. You (couples) have different needs. Married people don't get rung up because they know the other half is there.

Although there were only two comments relating to difficulties for married couples in a Society where more people now worship without a husband or partner, they are indicative of the complexity and newness of the issues overseers face. As married couples become a minority in the Society they can be excluded from support or from the social activity of the singles on the assumption they each have the other. This feeling is not universal or consistent though, and later in this article it will become clear that married Friends involve themselves in networks in the same way as, and alongside, singletons.

PARTNERS AND COHABITEES IN THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

A distinction between partnership and cohabitation is made here because, of the interview group, three described themselves as having a partner with whom they did not cohabit. They included a homosexual man whose Quaker partner lives in a different city and a heterosexual partnership, each of whom was interviewed in his and her own home. The remaining four interviewees in partnerships were cohabiting. Cohabitation can be either a prelude or alternative to marriage in Britain, but it has not altogether replaced it. In the 1950s, fewer than two per cent of couples cohabited before their first marriage, but by the 1990s the figure had risen to about seventy-five per cent. Overall, fewer than ten per cent of couples in Britain are cohabiting (Inman 2005: 2). Some people still marry and remarry, but the numbers have fallen. In 1950, there were 358,490 marriages in England and Wales, and the number had fallen to 263,500 in 1999, by which time two in five were remarriages (Inman 2005: 1).

As with the married couples, there is a mix of partnerships in which both are Quaker and of Quakers living with non-Quakers. The geographic distance of the same sex couple, both of whom were Quakers, impacted on the interviewee's attendance and involvement with his Preparative Meeting but not with his interest groups or Yearly Meeting commitments. There were no comments about lack of support from Meeting from the partners and cohabitees interviewed. Most were enmeshed in Quaker networks, and are not treated as a discrete group in the remainder of this article. The distinction here is only as an indicator of family change.

LIMITATIONS OF THE SQUIF (SINGLE QUAKER IN FAMILY) TYPOLOGY

As Quakerism becomes less and less a family affair, so the number of people with a spouse or partner who is not involved increases. Gradually, the term SQUIF (Single Quakers in Families) has come into usage and has been absorbed by the Society as an indicator of family change. Defined as 'those who are the only person in households of more than one person' (*The Future of Kingston and Wandsworth Monthly Meeting* 2002: 3), the term is used in the report to explain why a substantial group is not involved in the work of the Society. The report explains that many of the SQUIFs in the Monthly Meeting are especially affected by the problem of balancing Quaker activity and family life. It implies that the conflict of demand for family time made by other people in the SQUIF's family can be more distressing than for married Friends where both are Quakers. Further, it is assumed they may be unsupported in their Quakerism by their families, who are therefore less well equipped to understand its structures. Rowlands summarises the argument by saying, 'Friends who are the only Quaker in the family have to struggle with conflicting allegiances in their allocation of time and energy' (1996: 74).

This, however, appears not to be the case, as those who are the only member of a family attending a Quaker Meeting are as varied in their involvement with the Society as any other group. The use of the acronym overlooks the issues of change that most people face and assumes a norm of marriage or partnership in a style that is no longer prevalent. Negotiation and communication about time between spouses and partners include complex balances between time together, time apart, time for immediate and intergenerational family, kin relationships, friendships, paid work and volunteering by both partners, each of whom has her or his own connections. It also takes no account of the influence of friendships in extended Quaker networks on those who remain in the Society, who live in non-traditional partnerships or who are single. Further, it assumes married couples feel wholly included when, in fact, they too can be excluded from time to time by an assumption they have each other.

Of the SQUIFs in the interview group, three were married and two did not have Quaker partners. Living with someone who is not a Quaker can present challenges:

(His) non-involvement has created some tension, but it was clear from the start how important it is for me. He doesn't engage with structures, so when I come back from PM, he says, 'Why do you go?', but for me it's about having responsibility in a community and the frustration is

part of it. He just doesn't get that. He described once telling a friend about me, that my commitment to being a Quaker was strange. I can't remember the word he used. With my non-Quaker friends, it's weird, odd, and (he) thinks that, too.

In this case, the partner was credited with giving the interviewee the ability to say 'no', and not to agree to do everything, as her Quaker parents had done, even in the weeks when she only had one night off. Despite the criticism from her partner and other peers, she regularly attends her Meeting and takes responsibility there, as can be seen in the quotation, but is also active elsewhere in the Society, as indeed were all the SQUIFs in this group.

Husbands were often supportive of their Quaker wives (there were no male SQUIFs in the interview group). One had previously been in membership himself, another supported financially and attended events, whilst a third had been to a residential Yearly Meeting. They had their own active and demanding interests, either professionally, or politically or in volunteering roles. Gidden's idealist notion seems well ascribed to:

Democratization in the context of the family implies equality, mutual respect, autonomy, and decision-making through communication and freedom from violence. (1998: 93)

Understandably, Friends wanted to spend time with their partners or spouses, whether or not they were Quaker. Staying in and being together was much valued and sometimes precious, but there was sorrow, too, from one active SQUIF. After outlining her involvement in several Quaker communities she added:

Other things pull as well, because my husband isn't in membership. He's fully supportive of what I do, but he doesn't come to Meeting and he doesn't share in these things. There is a sadness he doesn't because I'd like to share these things.

In equal relationships, however formed, negotiating time for Quakerism has become part of the communication. A faithful Quaker life is successfully prioritised by married and partnered Friends in this interview group, and non-Quaker work, paid or voluntary, is as likely to challenge family time. Friends who are convinced as adults have to absorb the nature and structure of Quakerism and explain it to their families in a secularised world and to people who increasingly have no or negative experiences of religion.

BALANCING CARE RESPONSIBILITIES AND QUAKERISM

Family and demographic change has extended the need for care provision. Inevitably, care activities take time and always have done, and the examples illustrate where the time goes and the complexity of family time for a group of people who maintain a commitment to the Society.

INTERGENERATIONAL CARE

Caring, keeping in touch and visiting family continue, but three new features complicate care. First, increased longevity means that some middle-aged Friends have care responsibilities for elderly relatives and grandchildren, and sometimes an

adult child with health problems. Secondly, the family unit is an economic one, and more mothers are working. Lastly, the greater range of family and kinship ties brings about a new mesh of relationships to be held together by 'kin-keepers' (Williams 2004: 17), usually women, who stay in touch and arrange visits between any combination of family, past partners, grandparents, step and half children.

Married couples were particularly involved in intergenerational care. Visits to and by elderly relatives were sometimes at a distance and involved time away from home and Meeting by one party or the other. Others lived nearer, and one shared a house. Care was largely practical, including shopping and cleaning, and emotional support. Often such care extended to elderly neighbours. Some of those who were visiting or caring for an older generation were also caring for younger ones. One couple, with a mother to visit two hundred miles away, had a son with unpredictable mental health problems.

Where ties are not from marriage or blood relationships they may extend across different households and link dissolved marriages, reconstituted families and non-resident partners. Friendships, former sexual partners, and present and former family all form part of a mesh of commitment in which people negotiate what they feel is the right type of commitment (Williams 2004: 55). The very full quotation which follows shows how the mother-child relationship is the most important and how the mother acts as matrifocal kin-keeper between the child's father, her present partner and his children:

My smallest definition of family is me and (her son). That's important for me to claim, because for a long time I didn't realise we were a family because we were too small. Something in me didn't count it. But that is what my family is. And now we live with (her present partner). He moved into my house as a lodger. He has two children, and it would have been quite difficult for us to move in with each other, so it was easier. His two children live with their mother in Wales and come and stay with us. (Her son) spends time with his father who has recently married and lives (in the same city). Part of the reason I stay in (name of city) is because of his father. We have an unspoken agreement, but it is very strong. (Her son) can easily go. He spends two nights a week with his dad who works weekends, so it had to be during the week, which would make it very difficult if either of us moved away. His father works every weekend and he works away, so he's always with me at weekends.

Family law has focussed on men and women as parents rather than spouses, regulating their responsibilities in relation to the child (Williams 2004: 40). Parents want what is 'fair' for the child within the boundary of an inclusive unit of ex-partners, step- and half children, with the child's needs coming first (Williams 2004: 55). Grandparents, though not actively part of the story above, are often included in the unit, sometimes providing a continued financial and emotional continuity for the child.

Clearly the maintenance of these relationships demands time and energy from those involved, but they provide opportunity too, in this case freeing the mother to work and attend Meetings while her son was with his father or visiting her partner's family. Though she was born into a Quaker family and became convinced as a Quaker in adulthood, none of the relationships described here are Quaker, except that her son takes part in activities provided for children in her

Meeting. Nonetheless, she has many Quaker friends from her time as a Young Friend and from her present Quaker life.

FRIENDSHIP NETWORKS AS THE NEW FAMILY

The democratisation of relationship has created a change in balance in the significance of friendships and family, particularly in the setting of the network of communities the Society has where friendships can be nurtured and a variety of interests can be accommodated. This section will show how Friends' diverse belonging opportunities provide for individualistic choice which can and does meet engagement needs at different life stages. It develops the theme of networks as conduits for social capital by exploring the place of friendship in democratised relationship. Although some writers have suggested friends are the new family, most people are embedded in a complex set of intergenerational familial and chosen relationships. The old is in with the new (Williams 2004: 24). Thus no distinction is made between married, partnered, widowed, divorced and single Friends, any of whom might commit time and energy to the networks.

THE VALUE OF FRIENDSHIP

Roseneil's (2004: 12) research shows that friendship matters increasingly for people, whether or not they are married or have a partner. Her research finds that people who do not live with a partner construct and are enmeshed in networks of friendship, care and support, which she calls 'networks of intimacy'. Couple relationships were de-emphasised and lives were centred around friends, and those couples who choose not to live together do not see cohabitation as a necessary next step, thus challenging the 'hegemony of the conventional family'. Williams (2004: 45) calls these 'linked relationships'. The interview groups included two such couples, one homosexual and one heterosexual. These couples comprised four Quakers, three of whom were interviewed, each carrying out domestic activity in their own homes.

Greater longevity, relationship breakdown and a longer period of delay before marriage or partnership, if it is a chosen life route, has resulted in 6.5 million people in Britain living on their own (Inman 2005: 2). It is clear from Roseneil's research and from the degree of involvement identified by single Friends in interview that living alone does not equate to being alone. Only two interviewees felt their aloneness including one who was not long widowed with a nine-year-old daughter and a demanding job and a heavy workload. The absence of supporting family leaves her with no time to develop friendships. The negative affect of loss of a partner was echoed in the independent study *Sole Responsibility? Being Single in Meeting* (1997: 10). Loneliness, insecurity and fear of illness were felt from time to time, and partners were missed when it came to making decisions or when practical problems had to be dealt with. The second Friend who felt alone has never married or partnered and works long hours as a residential carer, leaving her without time for close friendships and the 'regularity, stability and simplicity' she craves.

Young Friends in the participatory group extended some of their answers and illustrated their understanding and expectation of friendship:

Giving friendship and care where I can
 Friend—show understanding, patience, forgiveness, share interests, make an effort
 Friend—(non-Quaker role as sister and daughter fits here)—socialising and having fun with friends—doing activities together and offering support for one another
 Friend—listening to friends, making time for them

These comments echo Roseneil's findings where people in her group were creating a life for themselves, which preserved their autonomy and independence, but at the same time satisfying their need for connectedness. Still free to keep their personal boundaries, they valued the care, love and affection of their friends, realising an 'autonomous relationality'.

Interviewed Friends reinforced the value of friendships, and most had close friends within the Society, but before expanding on an analysis of their friendship networks it is worth restating that these Friends are committed to the Society and engaged in its structures and informal groups. In common with other Christian churches in Britain at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Society of Friends has its share of infrequent or irregular attenders, lapsed members and people at its periphery who are not so involved:

Regarding practice or active membership of religious organisations...such activities involve a relatively small proportion of the population (just under fifteen per cent on average). (Davie 1994: 74)

In a BBC poll of 1,019 respondents (2005: 1), more than two thirds said they were Christian, but only seventeen per cent regularly went to church. Thus, even attending Meeting is to go against the norm (Rowlands 1996: 73).

In contrast to the interviewees, none of the vignette groups had other members of the family who were part of a Quaker Meeting. Asked whether or not their main source of personal support came from within the Society, one answered 'not main, but growing' and another that it was not a main source, but an important one. They claimed their support came from:

Close friends who were not Quakers
 Fellow Samaritan volunteers
 Friends and relatives
 Long standing friends
 Parental friends
 Wife and Children
 Colleagues
 Parents
 Husband, sister, mother, sons and a few close friends with the husband providing greatest support and sounding board

Rowlands suggests that some Meetings have no sense of belonging to other Quaker bodies (1996: 76), which was largely true of this group, though they showed a high level of intervisitation with other Quaker Meetings.

HOW QUAKER FRIENDSHIP NETWORKS GROW

Beyond the everyday care and support provided by some friendships is a quality of relationship marked by closeness, confiding, sharing and equality (Williams 2004: 55). Figure 1 comprises three models based on information from the interview group which show how friendships are built within the Society by Friends. They are drawn from married, partnered, widowed, divorced and single Friends, and being the only Quaker in the household is no barrier to immersion in them. Neither is age. Two interviewees were in their seventies and still highly active in a number of networks with friendships in their local Meetings and one with particular friendships in the Quaker Women's group.

INVOLVEMENT FROM CHILDHOOD

Model one is drawn from the interviews of four friends in the sample and relates to those Friends who are brought to Meeting as children, either born into it or brought when parents are convinced. Their friendships roll from one life stage to another, some moving with them and others being left behind as new friends are made. Childhood is marked by attendance at Children's Meeting, largely in the Preparative Meeting, but for Monthly, General, Yearly and other Meetings as well. Early adolescence brought summer schools in some areas, link groups (gatherings for young people within the Monthly Meeting), Junior Yearly Meeting and Quaker camp. These were followed by what is now Young Friends General Meeting, through which two interviewees from this study had the opportunity to be part of a Swarthmore lecture and to gain experience in roles nominated from the group. An older Friend worked overseas for Quaker Peace and Service. Another, in her late seventies, had that period of her life interrupted by the war and was sent from Geneva, where her Quaker parents worked, to America to be with a Quaker family and then to go to a Quaker college. These experiences were taken through to adulthood, resulting in each of these Friends taking local, regional and national roles, and having a number of specific interests.

CONVINCED FRIENDS AND FRIENDSHIP NETWORKS

Models two and three relate to Friends who became convinced as Quakers in their adulthood. In model two, Friends value and work hard at bonding their Preparative, Monthly and sometimes General Meetings. They have close friendships from these groups and see their Quaker friends outside of Quaker time. They are involved in learning activities within the Meeting, and may go to Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre to increase their ability to do their work with the Meeting, for instance by undertaking an Equipping for Ministry course. They are not involved nationally, except by Monthly Meeting nomination, for instance to Meeting for Sufferings or to conferences at Woodbrooke.

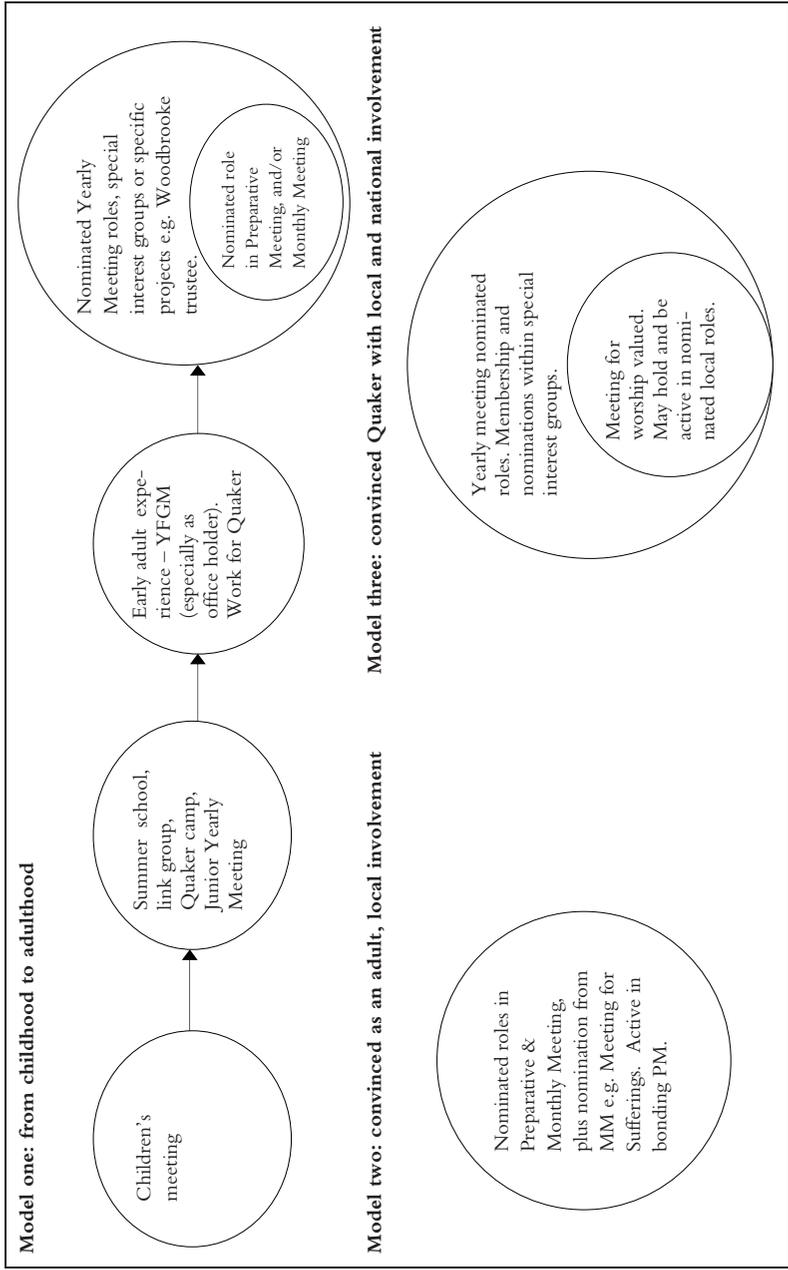


Figure 1: How Quaker Friendship Networks Grow

In model three, convinced Friends value their local Meeting for the purpose of worship, but they may or may not hold nominated roles there and they are unlikely to instigate bonding activities in the group. Instead, their main energy and interest is national, either in the Yearly Meeting or special interest groups or a selection from both. It is in these that their friendships and identities are affirmed, either as a homosexual Quaker, a woman in support of other women, a universalist Quaker or as someone actively working as a volunteer with prisoners. The pattern for this model is similar to the final circle in model one, but it is accessed in early adulthood via Young Friends General Meeting (without earlier childhood experience), or in adulthood. One Friend chanced upon one of his special interests via a secular meeting in a Quaker meeting house, became a Quaker and found a route to develop the interest within a spiritual framework. Others found a spiritual home with Quakers, then affirmed their interests and found friends in other parts of the society.

Each model yields a framework in which networks of intimacy are developed. They accommodate different aspects of Friends' interests, offer places of trust, reciprocity and understanding where the nature of Quakerism is learnt and shared in light of continuing reevaluation. Diverse and possibly diminishing, they strengthen the threads of Quaker social capital, though many Friends and some Meetings are not engaged in them.

FAMILY, FRIENDSHIP, TIME AND BELONGING

Both pessimistic and optimistic interpretations of family change emerge in academic and public debate (Williams 2004: 24). The pessimists see the changes as encouraging a selfish individualism, bringing moral decline and threatening social stability and solidarity. For the optimists, that same individualism frees people from fixed conventions and restraints leaving them able to shape their own lives and relationships. Given that family life is beyond a return to traditional family patterns, the implications for time available to support the work of the Society of Friends are considered here in a similar light. As numbers fall in the Society, and the world outside of it is increasingly secularised, even going to Meeting is going against the trend, and Friends often have to explain to family and friends where they are going and why. This becomes more difficult as fewer of those around them have neither experience of worship elsewhere nor of enduring commitment to an organisation. Belonging to any group requires explanation, but belonging to a religious group in a non-believing world probably needs more.

Pervading themes emerging from the research are choice, care and complexity. Kin-keepers have an enormous job to do and an increasingly complex one, and few families remain unaffected by new family patterns or the impact of intergenerational change. There are visits to arrange and make either for themselves or for children to family members, and beyond, too, to ex-partners and their parents, step- and half siblings and to friends. Children are free to make choices of their own, and these can take them away from Meeting, and sometimes take their parents with them.

Despite the fragmentation, family and friendship are integral to Friends' identity. A societal culture of pure relationship encourages discussion, negotiation and communication about competing activity. At best, relationships are equal and democratised, leaving people free to make their own choices. Thus, Heron found that the principal route by which new attenders learnt about the Society was from family or friends, or through a Meeting with another Quaker which they then followed up by reading about Quakers (Heron 1992: 51). Through many Quaker communities, networks of intimacy evolve, where values and thoughts can be shared, and Friends can build their own faith story. Friends can and do access the opportunities for sharing whether through their childhood, adolescence and early adulthood or through interests found and pursued in adulthood.

INDIVIDUALISM, COMMUNITARIANISM AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

Two examples of networks of belonging where friendship networks flourish illustrate how social capital is nurtured within Quaker groups regardless of their fluctuating membership. One is Young Friends General Meeting, a Quaker community with traditional structures and widespread links. The second is Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre. Situated in Birmingham, Woodbrooke offers residential courses for Quakers, rooms for conferences and other opportunities for Quakers to meet and learn. Thus, it is not a structured network, but its flexible use serves as a base for interconnected networks rather than a community in itself. Through these examples, it is argued that, although linking individualism and communitarianism together would seem to be contrary, they inevitably run together in a fragmented postmodern age. The research supports the view of Frazer and Lacey (1993: 111) that in community 'Persons are fundamentally connected, with each other and the world they inhabit'. Despite the threats from secularisation, liberalisation and social change, those committed to the Religious Society of Friends yield a high level of activity and strong statements of belonging. Through the two examples, the networks of belonging where enduring friendships are formed show that, despite decline and thinly spread numbers, communities of British Quakers continue to build the social capital of trust, co-operation, learning and information flow. This suggests that, rather than being fragile and friable, the networks are tensile and plastic.

Most, though not all, interviewees had experience of either or both of the two communities, Young Friends General Meeting and Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, but the interviews yield sufficient material for comparison. They fulfil what Bourdieu describes as the role of social capital in changing the individual and the group:

Exchange transforms the things exchanged into signs of recognition and, through mutual recognition of group membership which it implies, reproduces the group. By the same token, it reaffirms the limits of the group. (Bourdieu 1997: 52)

Here, resources which could not be built by the Society, the networks and the individuals on their own are nurtured and accrued, exchanged and passed on to

other networks, for example, to Preparative Meetings or to groups in the wider community.

Young Friends General Meeting follows the structural rules of the Religious Society of Friends and is beset with the same problems of finding people to fill nominations as Britain Yearly Meeting. Young Friends meet three times a year to conduct their business at a residential weekend and create a distinctive, if temporary, space for themselves. They have nominated roles within the group, and nominate young people to roles within the Society and to representation outside of it if required. Nominees are not required to be in formal membership, as they are elsewhere in the Society. YFGM actively promotes the use of the Quaker business method in its Meetings, encourages the right holding of Meetings and appoints elders and overseers (YFGM Documents in Advance, 12/10/03). This careful structure inducts young Friends into the rites of institution by example.

A much valued place of community by some, Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre fosters community in networks of belonging, some of which are very temporary (its weekend courses, for instance) and others that are recurring. Some interviewees illuminate ways in which a place of temporary but repeated and varied community reinforces the 'resources' or 'credit' mentioned early in this article (Bourdieu 1997: 51). They each used and supported the centre repeatedly and for a number of purposes. At Woodbrooke, they attend courses, serve as Resident Friend from time to time, or as trustees, run Woodbrooke courses elsewhere in Britain (under the remit of 'Woodbrooke on the Road'), attend conferences and special interest groups, train other trainers and undertake longer term post-graduate study. How much of the credit remains contained in the separate communities is unclear, but at least one interviewee feels 'a strong compulsion' to share her experiences with her Preparative Meeting.

These two examples are juxtaposed to show how individualism is potentially upheld and moderated in places where spirituality and social capital flourish. Both YFGM and Woodbrooke welcome and introduce newcomers to the Society, although Woodbrooke is less likely than YFGM to be the first experience of Meeting for Worship for an attender. Both YFGM and Woodbrooke nurture the spiritual journeys within the groups, of both the individuals and the groups themselves.

HOW NETWORKS OF BELONGING FOSTER SOCIAL CAPITAL

Figure 2 is drawn from the collective statements of several interviewees, some of whom have experience of both YFGM and Woodbrooke. It demonstrates how networks build durable social capital in temporary settings which is fungible throughout the Society. YFGM is represented on the left and Woodbrooke on the right. Both offer opportunities for learning about Quakerism, either in courses, or workshops, from guest speakers, in special interest groups and a range of other settings.

Woodbrooke offers specific courses as preparation for Quaker roles, and an Equipping for Ministry course for those who want to deepen their faith and Quaker education over a two-year period. It is also used as a venue for Quaker

conferences, or conferences run by other organisations, some of which Quakers attend, and for events, Meetings and Quaker special interest groups. There are, in addition, opportunities for service, either as a resident Friend or as a gardening Friend. Its use by highly networked Friends is therefore often repeated, but in circumstances that are contextually different. Thus there may be chance meetings with old friends met in other areas of service or interest, or planned meetings with current friends.

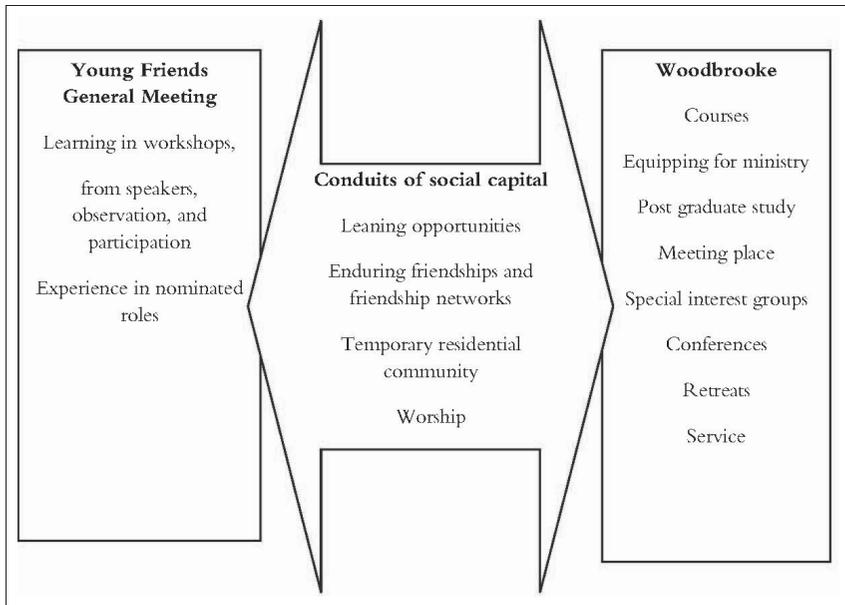


Figure 2: Two examples of networked community

The centre of the model identifies some of the conduits for social capital shared by each example, despite their very different natures:

1. each provides learning opportunities
2. friendships are built and endure
3. friendship networks develop in the intimacy of sessions at courses, meetings or conferences, or less formally in the shared necessary activities which make these things happen
4. each offers the experience of Meeting for Worship and Meetings for Business
5. each offers either experience or understanding of trusteeship

There are residential opportunities in each, including service as Friends in Residence at Woodbrooke mentioned above, a role undertaken by a few interviewees, where the experience of Quaker community can be reciprocally shared. Young Friends cater for themselves, and sleep on the meeting house floor, lending repeated opportunities for forming fellowship (Amit and Rapport 2002:

165). In each, friendships are made and renewed, and Young Friends interviewed told how these endure, often extending beyond the age at which they moved on from YFGM.

These two examples are not alone in the Society as places of temporary meeting, friendship renewal and brief but reinforcing events. Local Meetings and Monthly Meetings hold events and there are centres other than Woodbrooke holding residential weekends (for example, Charney Manor in Oxfordshire and Claridge House in Surrey). Meeting houses host events for special interest groups, such as Quaker Green Concern and Quaker Women's Group, and many committee groups meet at Friends House in London. Each of these accesses, some, if not all, of the conduits for social capital listed above.

BUILDING TRUST

Within many of the weekend activities at YFGM and Woodbrooke there are small group opportunities to develop intimacy and mutual understanding in time set aside for creative listening and worship sharing. These activities usually begin and end in silence, are confidential, and allow for space between contributions, which come from personal experience. They are not a place for discussion, but for listening with attention and without fear of comment from others in the group, though clarification might be sought (Quaker Faith and Practice 1995: 12.21). Through these, there grows:

...a group within which there is extensive trust-worthiness and extensive trust is able to accomplish much more than a comparable group without trust-worthiness and trust. (Coleman 1997: 83)

Several Friends attributed benefit to their work in their home communities and in their professional or voluntary spheres to conferences and courses at Woodbrooke, affirming Putnam's view of faith groups as a place where skills of bridging social capital accrue (Putnam 2000: 66). These include Quakers in education, mediation and a prison minister.

CONCLUSION

This article has explored the complexities of family life in the twenty-first century and has identified the demands made of a family's time. It recognises that most Quakers now are not part of Quaker families and that Friends are sometimes challenged to explain their sometimes considerable involvement to family members and to their friends, particularly in a secular world. Despite these difficulties their Quaker activities have become for most a negotiated part of family life as family relationships have become increasingly democratised. Research by Roseneil (2004), Williams (2004) and Gabb (2008) emphasises the importance of friendships beyond the family as networks of support and intimacy, and the evidence of the research used in this article demonstrates the value of Quaker friendships to Friends whatever their marital status. Such friendships are made at whatever stage of life the participant becomes involved with Quakerism and endure throughout their association with the Society.

The many Quaker networks to which Friends belong not only develop the individual's personal friendships and spiritual exploration, but in addition the acquired learning, skill and understanding contribute to the Society's social capital, as the knowledge is modelled and shared throughout the Society's networks.

NOTES

1. For a description of worship sharing, see *Quaker Faith and Practice* (2008 edn), 12.21.

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