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Some Important Terms

trans*: an umbrella term used to describe people whose experience and expression of their gender does not align with what society expects based on the sex assigned to them at birth. Examples of trans* identities include trans man, trans woman, genderqueer, Two-Spirit, gender non-conforming, bigender, MTF transsexual, FTM transsexual, and more!

cisgender: a term used to describe those whose gender identity and/or expression align with society’s expectations based on the sex that person was assigned at birth.

preferred gender pronouns (PGPs): the third person terms used to describe someone. Examples include she/her/hers, he/him/his, they/them/their, ze/hir/hirs, and many others

transphobia and cissexism: the institutional structures, political systems, and personal beliefs that exclude and harm trans and gender non-conforming people while privileging and elevating cisgender people.

Trans Friends In Their Own Words

Jed Walsh reached out to trans-identified Quakers with two questions:

1) What’s something you love about being trans or being part of the trans community?
2) What’s something you wish more Quakers understood about being trans or about transgender issues?

1) Oh, wow, let’s see. I love the perspective being trans gives me, being able to look past the gender stereotypes about things -- behaviors, interests, material goods -- and instead focus on whether I like them. I love having the experience of "both worlds" to draw on. And I love the trans community’s diversity and how much solidarity there is between trans people who have very different backgrounds and experiences.

2) I don’t know if there’s anything I wish that more Quakers understood specifically, beyond how deeply trans issues are tied to issues like homelessness, poverty, and racial injustice that Friends have been working on for so long. I wish more people, generally, understood how important the little words are, and how exhausting it
is when people talk about "men and women" or have men's events and women's events and don't think about having something like that for just people.

Phoenix Madrone, Santa Cruz Monthly Meeting

1) At its best, the trans community is exemplified by solidarity, compassion, and resilience. No two transgender persons' lives or transitions are the same, but we share common bonds from the deep pain and dissonance of being wrongly embodied for a significant portion of our lives. We’re also united by having had to endure stigma and exclusion (or worse), and too many of us continue to be subjected to discrimination and abuse – sometimes severe and debilitating. Many transgender persons have walked right up to the cliff edge of the suicidal decision, but we’ve found the strength and grace to step back, trusting that way will open toward authentic and meaningful lives. And many of us carry with us the burden – and the wisdom – of a lost girlhood or boyhood that we can never experience.

2) More than anything else, I’d wish that Quakers saw our status as transgender persons as one of many Divine gifts of human diversity and of embodied authenticity. These remarkable gifts are able to enrich and deepen our faith community's shared spiritual life. For Quakers to have their eyes opened to such an appreciation probably first requires accepting that our reality (of being transgender) is not about a "choice" (other than the choice to stay alive and sane), nor is it a "lifestyle" or some other form of social provocation. We’re simply who we are.

Finally, I wish that Quakers would come to see us not as "damaged" people or as victims, but instead as people whose unique spiritual journeys across the gender divide in pursuit of wholeness and authenticity often culminate in many weighty and wonderful spiritual blessings, available to all.

Chloe Schwenke, Adelphi Monthly Meeting

In almost every Quaker conversation, there is always that one Quaker in the room who leans forward gently and says, "But we hold to continuing revelation...." I love hearing that phrase, even when I know the speaker will argue with me. I love hearing that reminder because I love hearing Quaker theology from so many different mouths in so many different accents and timbres. That statement feels like a theological anointing of my trans experience and identity, and I love hearing it.

Continuing revelation accurately describes the unfolding narrative of being Quaker and trans. With each new unfolding, another word is learned and nestled into vocabulary. With each corner turned, another set of pronouns is practiced and becomes normal. With each introduction, another space is carved out for someone who was previously unwelcome. In my experience, the revelations continue to unfold around me and my trans siblings as much as they unfold in me and my trans siblings.
I learn how to talk about myself. It is revealed—sometimes through unlikely sources like pop culture, where I learn a word I was missing that speaks to an attribute I've only known vaguely. Then I teach others. Healthy and welcoming Quaker communities hear my words and hold them in worship with a spirit of trust and wonder. I am trusted as someone who knows where I stand right now. I am trusted as someone who is living this life. I am also encouraged—in healthy Quaker communities—to continue to refresh myself in Spirit and to dive into the Divine. I am encouraged to flesh out my identity by wrapping myself in worship. And when Spirit speaks to me, reveals in me, a healthy community holds those revelations as gifts.

Similarly, a trans-positive Quaker community is full of cis people who also worship around these gifts of continuing revelation. They worship with the intent of having hearts that hear and tongues that speak the new language they are learning. They worship with the hope that painful wounds from the world are healed in ways that allow for future growth and function. They worship with the idea of Spirit as a bold and brave mover and shaker, offering options beyond what we initially dreamt of.

I am a continuing revelation. My transness is not fixed or simple. But that is the gift of Spirit. It is a blessing to be part of a world beyond what I initially dreamt of, and I celebrate the potential for bigger, stronger, wilder, and more wonderful in every part of our lives.

Suzanne C., South Central Yearly Meeting

Growing up transgender was difficult and I have very deep scars, so for me it's nothing to be proud of. It's just trauma. I wish that Quakers would not make a Thing out of it. People need to know that for some of us, it's like surviving abuse and then talking about it publicly, and taking that risk could be part of healing, but also makes us vulnerable. Meetings don't "celebrate" people's abuse stories or refer to them casually in public, even if someone has taken the step of coming out. The same respect should be shown to people who experienced the pain of misgendering.

Anonymous

I was born into this world in a body whose external and internal anatomy matched the designation female. But my experience of self has pushed gender boundaries right from the start. I insisted on pants/t-shirts and suspenders for school in an era when all girls wore dresses. Thankfully the principal was lenient. When other children and teens asked: "Are you a boy or a girl?" I answered: "Yes" or "I haven't decided yet." At 13, my mother finally put her foot down and insisted that that summer, I must wear a shirt. By the time I was 14 I had developed a fantasy world that had no gender specific pronouns, a world in which one could not know the gender of a person until one had gotten to know the PERSON.
Often when I enter a women’s restroom, I am looked at as if I don’t belong and am occasionally directed to the men’s room. And I am almost as likely to be addressed as “sir” as I am “ma’am.” A few months ago a six-year-old in my medical practice asked me whether I was a man or a woman (a question many children have asked, including my own grandson). Before I could utter a word, her mother reminded her that I was a grandmother but I added that it’s confusing; some people aren’t all the way one way or all the way the other. Many years ago, when telling some of these stories to a trans* friend, she said “Margaret, you realize, don’t you, that you are trans yourself.” It broadened the definition for me in a helpful way even though I think of myself now as “gender non-conforming.”

So what do I, as a gender non-conforming person, love or long for in the Quaker world? I love mostly just being able to be the person I am. My experience of self is not wholly female nor is it wholly male. It is both/and. I treasure this body I inhabit and feel fine about its physical form. I am at ease in being perceived/addressed as male though this rarely happens in the Quaker world where my given name and long standing relationships push people not to question their perception of my gender.

Perhaps what I long for most is the opportunity to tell these stories, to hear the stories of others, to recognize that there are MANY of us who do not fit cleanly into the gender binary. When asked to put my preferred pronouns on my nametag, I want instead to tell people that I am a pronoun unhappy person. I would be so much happier in that fantasy world I created as a young teen, where all of us could be “per” for person. To be known in my fullness is a matter of integrity. To know others in their fullness is a great gift to me.

Margaret Sorrel, Pacific Yearly Meeting

**What Quakers Can Do To Support Trans Inclusion**

- **Give this process space and time!** Don’t expect your meeting to change overnight, and don’t begin advertising your meeting as trans-inclusive until you have done the work together to understand the unique problems facing trans communities and how to be respectful towards trans folks. This process can take years, as some of our feelings about gender have taken a lifetime to build, and they take many years to de-construct.

- **Show up at trans events.** Start advertising events to Quakers you know and go as a group. Go to listen, observe, and learn before putting on events or having an official presence, such as a booth at Pride. Some important dates to the trans community are Trans Day of Visibility on March 31st; Trans Day of Action in June; Pride in June; and Transgender Day of Remembrance on November 20th.
-Host workshops facilitated by transgender people. In order to understand the issues, it is important that your Meeting is educated by trans people. Trans people are grossly underemployed, and many people who do trans 101 workshops struggle to make ends meet. Hosting a workshop is a good way to educate your meeting while giving money to support a trans person’s livelihood.

-Use financial and cisgender privilege to support trans communities. Trans people are four times more likely to live in poverty than the general population. If you interact with trans communities, it won’t be long before you meet a trans woman who is struggling to afford food or a trans person who lives on the streets because they were fired from their job or their parents kicked them out because of their gender. In trans communities, people who are barely housed or slightly disabled are often taking care of people who aren’t housed and are more severely disabled. One suggestion is make any awareness-raising or memorial event a fundraiser, because Quakers tend to have a good amount of financial privilege. Challenging oppression goes a lot further when people are actively doing what they can to relieve suffering. The Trans Justice Funding Project, the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, and the Transgender Gender-variant Intersex Justice Project are some examples of trans-led organizations that you and your Meeting can support financially in solidarity with trans communities.

-Work towards adopting gender inclusive minute in your meeting. You can find a list of example minutes here: http://flgbtqc.quaker.org/transgenderminutes.html.